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1844/2004/2044: The Return of Species-Being

Introduction

After a long period of neglect, the question of ‘species-being’ has resurfaced in Marxist theory, forming an important topic of discussion in recent works by David Harvey and Gayatri Spivak on capitalist globalisation, and in Jason Read’s re-examination of the mode of production.¹ This outbreak is conjunctural, not coincidental. The problem Marx addressed in 1844 under the rubric of species-being was the appropriation by a nascent industrial capitalism of humanity’s capacity to co-operatively change the conditions of its collective existence – indeed, to transform its own very nature. In 2004, this issue is hurled back onto the table by a nascent informational capitalism – the capitalism of the Human Genome Project and the World Wide Web – with redoubled force, a force which, nonetheless, promises to be only a faint, anticipatory tremor of the convulsions to come by, say, 2044. This paper therefore continues the renewed discussion of species-being, proposing that the young Marx’s concept, remodulated by encounters with contemporary

theory, clearly names the stakes in the emergence of high-technology capital and of global movements opposing it.

The major site of Marx’s account of species-being is the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (henceforward *1844 Manuscripts*) and, in particular, his famous discussion of alienation. Here, Marx analyses how private ownership of the means of production subjects humans to a fourfold deprivation: estrangement from the products of their own labour; from co-operative relations with fellow beings; from the nature that is transformed through their activity; and, from their own historical possibilities of self-development, or ‘species-being [*Gattungswesen*]’.3

Subsequently, species-being has had a chequered career within Marxism: prolonged invisibility, then brief popularity, followed by heavy criticism. Having adopted the concept from Feuerbach as a keystone in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Marx shortly thereafter abandoned it, bar a fleeting return in the *Grundrisse*. Because the *1844 Manuscripts* were unpublished until 1932, species-being did not enter the lexicon of Leninism. For this very reason, Western Marxisms, including the Frankfort school and various Freudo-Marxisms, embraced it after the Second World War, departing from Soviet orthodoxy via a critique of human ‘alienation’ from innate capacities.4

This path was, however, no sooner opened than it was challenged by Louis Althusser’s claim that the works of 1844 lay on the wrong side of a fatal break, tainted with an idealism that the mature Marx rejected.5 From this point of view, the concept of species-being was connected to an essentialist concept of human nature unfolding in a teleological fore-ordained manner. Such a notion was anathema to an anti-humanism that believed the mature Marx had incinerated all philosophical notions of ‘man’ in his analysis of modes of production that generated subjects purely out of the multilevelled machinations of their own apparatus. The concept of species-being has thus been for some time caught in stand-off between humanist Marxists – who love it for its emancipatory *élan* – and structuralist Marxists – who scorn it for residual Hegelianism.

There is, however, a more recent third position – a diagonal move out of this impasse. This might be very approximately characterised as an affirmative,

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2 Marx 1964, pp. 106–19.
3 The order of presentation here follows Ollman 1971, p. 138.
5 See Althusser 1969.
autonomist, poststructuralist Marxist version of species-being. The starting point for such an interpretation is the unusual, and largely unnoticed, re-instatement of themes from the *1844 Manuscripts* in Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s deliriously vitalist and resolutely anti-humanist Marxism. Further suggestions of such an account of species-being can be found not only in the works of Spivak and Read already mentioned, but also in a fascinating study by Joseph Margolis, and in the writings of Thomas Keenan. There are, moreover, connections to be drawn between the species-being of the *1844 Manuscripts* and the Marxian version of ‘biopolitics’ developed in Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Empire*. These connections are made explicit in Paolo Virno’s recent, brief discussion of *Gattungswesen* in relation to concepts of ‘multitude’ and ‘general intellect’. In what follows, I elaborate on these directions.

Extracting such an interpretation of species-being from the *1844 Manuscripts* is an act of retrospective reconstitution. Given Marx’s brilliant inconsistencies, such a reading must sometimes work against the grain of the text, even as elsewhere it goes with the flow. This is not an effort aimed at antiquarian purity, but, rather, an attempt to cannibalise parts for a new intellectual machine adequate to contemporary conditions of virtual and biotechnological accumulation. It is archeological futurism, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin’s seizure of historical remembrances flashing up in ‘a moment of danger’.

‘The present living species’

‘Species-being’ is neither natural reproductive collectivity, nor a set of biological requirements for food, water, shelter, and sex. As Spivak points out, Marx tends to speak of these as ‘species-life’. Species-being is the fulfillment, alteration and expansion of these life-needs through social activity, rendering ‘life activity itself an object of will and consciousness’.

This involves, according to Marx, a combination of self-consciousness, material capacity, and collective organisation. In the process of humanisation,
these elements feed into each other in a bootstrapped, self-reinforcing loop of social co-operation, technoscientific competences and conscious awareness. Social activity transforms its natural basis. Species-being modifies species-life. What might be thought of as a supplement or outgrowth of biological existence rebounds to reconfigure the ground it springs from. Species-being is an emergent attribute – ‘life engendering life’.13

‘That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature,’ Marx writes, ‘means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is part of nature’.14 Yet, the linkage he describes is anything but simple. Read closely, the 1844 Manuscripts oscillate between two propositions. The first is that humans are, by nature, conscious and co-operative fabricators. The second is that humans consciously and co-operatively fabricate their own nature.

The conjugation of these two affirmations generates a paradoxical formulation – that of a species-being whose nature is to change its nature, and whose only essence is the capacity for transformation. Since species-being incessantly modifies its own basis, its commonality can only be constantly recreated in the very acts of co-operation it appears to presuppose, founded in a shared foundationless condition: ‘The human essence of nature first exists only for social man. . . . Only here does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence.’15

Species-being is thus not a given set of attributes but a socially constitutive power, a mobile and self-augmenting potentiality – a virtuality. As Read, intentionally echoing the reflections of the postmodern theorist Giorgio Agamben on potentiality and the ‘coming community’, puts it, species-being can be see as ‘the undetermined possibility of this, that or whatever activity or the open possibility of any activity’.16

This open potentiality created by intensifications in species-being Marx refers to by ‘universality’, a term that, in the 1844 Manuscripts, acquires a rich connotative range. It suggests a geographically expanding, deterritorialising scope of social activity, involving the ever-larger, more varied and cosmopolitan communities of co-operation that are both the prerequisite and the result of enhanced species-being. But it also refers to ever-greater mutability, flexibility,

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13 Marx 1964, p. 113. 
14 Marx 1964, p. 112. 
15 Marx 1964, p. 137. Original emphasis. 
and collective options, widening amplitude of feasible actualisations for differing forms of production, play and self-fulfillment – a growth of freedom.

Expanded universality involves interplay between co-operative and co-operators, collectivity and its constituents. Marx’s account of species-being is not a paean to an organic, functionalist super-being. Beings are not Borgs. Species-being is actualised to the degree that individuals not only contribute to the growth in social powers, but also access these powers as an increase in their own autonomy – indeed, as the very grounds for their intensifying individuation.17 Species-being is neither individual nor supra-individual: it is ‘transindividual’, both the ground and compound of a multiplicity of ‘particular’ species beings.18

Thus, ‘alienation’ of species-being, the central problematic of the 1844 Manuscripts, is not an issue of estrangement from a normative, natural condition, but, rather, of who or what controls and limits the processes of ceaseless species self-development.19 Social systems that appropriate and sequester resources for particular strata or segments of species beings block or reverse the circular access of social and individual powers that enables the common growth of species-being. So, too – since species-being is a capacity for conscious social change – do forms that hand its direction to blind or out-of-control mechanisms. Hence the critique of capitalist alienation: the privatisation of species-being as property, and its direction by market exchange, forecloses wider, universal, development of species-being, and species beings.

The conventional interpretation of the 1844 Manuscripts is as a clarion call for the recovery of human powers from such appropriation. The more radical reading is, however, to see ‘the human’ as itself an historical instantiation of species-being, one bound in contradictory ways to the birth of capitalism. In this perspective, the advent of the world market generated the conditions of world-wide intercourse, the commodified equivalence of heterogeneous labours, and the techno-scientific apparatus necessary for the perception of evolutionary unity between the fragmented populations of rival feudal domains, tribes and castes. Thus Thomas Keenan argues ‘Humanity arrives only with the domination of the commodity form, which makes it possible’.20 ‘This

17 Johnston 1995, pp. 179–81, points out that one of the features that distinguishes Marx’s use of the term from Feuerbach’s is a more individualised notion of species-being.
19 For an eloquent expansion on this point, see Margolis 1992, p. 38.
20 Keenan 1997, p. 18
understanding of ‘the human’ as a historical construct is one that glimmers within passages of the 1844 Manuscripts:

"The real, active orientation of man to himself as a species being, or his manifestation as a real species being (i.e. as a human being) is . . . only possible through the cooperative action of all mankind – as the result of history."  

This human moment of species-being is, however, at once generated and refused by capitalism. The same world market which creates the human also, however, by virtue of its commodifying operations, instantaneously denies this discovery to its exploited subjects, alienating the status of human as the rights and prerogatives of their masters, condemning millions to the status of ‘beasts’ or ‘machines’. Capital is thus simultaneously a dynamically humanising force and systematically inhuman: a political economy that ‘under the semblance of recognizing man . . . carries to the conclusion the denial of man’. 

Thus, the great social struggles Marx observed, predicted and catalysed were indeed humanist – species-being struggles to become human. The central site of such ‘becoming-human’ struggles identified in the 1844 Manuscripts is, of course, that of the wage-labourer, and particularly the industrial proletarian. But the implications of its account of species-being are more extensive. Elements Marx identified as central to the unfolding of ‘the present, living species’ include not only the co-operative organisation of labour, but also the harmonious relation of humans to their natural environment (‘nature linked to itself, for man is part of nature’), the emancipation of women from masculine domination (from which one can judge ‘how much man as a species-being . . . has come to comprehend himself’), and the global interconnection of people in increasingly ‘cosmopolitan’ collectivities.

Marx’s pursuit of the full possibilities of his species-being theory was, however, stalled by often-remarked historical-personal blind-spots in regard conditions of domestic and colonial labour, and to the way capitalism at once galvanised and constrained contestation of sexism and racism. Equally, the degree to which a species-being critique of capital would involve issues not

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21 Marx 1964, p. 174. Original emphasis. For a fascinating discussion of the historical formation of the ‘human,’ see Fernández-Armesto 2004, which appeared as this paper was being composed.
22 Marx 1964, p. 129.
just of intra- but inter-species relations was – despite some tantalising remarks on animal-human interactions the 1844 Manuscripts – impeded by his oscillations between a rationalist triumphalism (mastery over nature) and what we would term an ecological perspective (metabolic interaction with nature).

Nonetheless, contra Althusser, I suggest that Marx abandoned species-being, not because the concept was flawed, but because he could not, in his era, go through with it. Early industrial capitalism allowed a prescient glimpse of the full mobilisation of planetary life as productive force. The subsumption was, however, insufficiently concretely advanced for theoretical work to engage with its full scope, so that Marx’s analysis subsequently retracted into the famous investigation of waged labour in the mechanised factory.

Adequate disclosure of species-being had to await the full commodification of human social and ecological existence via web cast and xenotransplants – and the contestation of this commodification by a range of new social subjects and combinations. This would be in accord with Marx’s own dictum that ‘the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete developments, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone’.24

To revive the issue of species-being in 2004 is, however, to return to it in a context of a planetary high-technology capitalism where the constitution of the human now figures alongside the market-driven fabrication of the posthuman, an equally market-driven regression across large parts of the globe to prehuman conditions, and neo-extermist risks of species termination. These are the issues on the agenda of counterglobalisation and antiwar movements of the beginning of the twenty-first century, to whose situation we now turn.

**Sketching in the ashes**

The last decade of the twentieth century saw the eruption, in Chiapas, Paris, Seattle, Genoa, Porto Alegre, and countless other sites, of a new cycle of struggles against global capital. But ‘9–11’ has reconfigured the context within which this cycle moves. The ‘war on terror’ draws a dark, scorched line across the horizon towards which so many radical rivulets and transformative

tributaries were flowing, as all types of dissent are delegitimated and attacked in a context of normalised mass death and social destruction.

In this new situation, it is no longer feasible (if it ever was) to think within the binary framework: Empire vs. Multitudes. The conjuncture requires an analysis that comprehends not just at the World Trade Organisation and the Zapatistas, but also Al Quaeda (not to mention all the Christian, Hindu, Judaic and other theocratic fundamentalisms).

Sketching in the ashes of a global war scenario, I propose a triangulation between three points:

a) the logic of neoliberal capitalism. I call this the logic of the world market. It interpellates a planet of market subjects: human commodities;

b) the logic of exclusionary ethno-nationalist-religious movements. I call this the logic of fundamentalist reaction. It addresses a planet lethally divided amongst chosen peoples;

c) the logic of collective creativity and welfare proposed by the counter-globalisation and antiwar movements. It speaks to a planet of commoners.

I call this the logic of species beings

A whole series of molecular energies are currently being attracted, apportioned and annihilated between these three molar aggregates.

The world market and fundamentalist reaction are apparently opposed, antagonists in the ‘war on terror’. But they are mutually dependent on and produce each other: fundamentalist reaction responds defensively against the universalising commodification of the world market. The world market, having armed and cultivated various ‘chosen peoples’ – such as the mujahadeen – as agents of destruction of state socialism, now legitimates and vindicates its military expenditures and security apparatus waging war on fundamentalist reaction. Indeed, the world market and fundamentalist reaction each contain one another (for example, fundamentalist Christianity in Bush’s USA, market dependence of radical Islamic régimes). Each relies on the other to supply the dimensions of social existence (ethico-communal cohesion or economic structure) it cannot realise through its own, inherent logic.

Neither the world market nor fundamentalist reaction is a unitary force. Both are characterised by competitive, fissiparous tendencies: the hostility of,

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26 A good basic outline of this dynamic is Barber 1995, who, however, falls down seriously when it comes to alternatives to and counter-powers against this catastrophic reciprocity.
on the one hand, contending ‘chosen peoples’ (fundamentalist Christians vs. Jews vs. Islam vs. Hindus, and so forth), and, on the other hand, trade blocs of competing capitals (North America vs. Europe vs. Asia).27

Played out over a planetary field now saturated with the weapons of mass destruction originally spawned by capital in its fight with state socialism, the conflicts of world market and fundamentalist reaction, combined and cross-cut with the conflicts internal to each of these categories, drive towards social and ecological catastrophe, either through the direct effects of war, or the indirect effects of sustained inattention to problems such as HIV/AIDS, global warming, and mass impoverishment. On the other hand, both market subjects and fundamentalist identities can be seen as attacking the logic of global commons enunciated by movements of species beings.

**Streets full of species-beings**

The eruptions of resistance to neoliberalism that burst out on the cusp of the new millennium have been variously termed ‘anti-free trade’, ‘counter-globalisation’, ‘new-internationalist’, ‘civil-society’ movements. Suggestive as these names are, they are inadequate to recognise the scope of the issues at stake in the emergence of these movements. Such mobilisations are not just, or primarily, about work, trade, and social justice – although they are certainly about all these.

They are rebellions generated within and against a capitalism that is ‘global’, both in its planetary expansion and its ubiquitous social penetration, and whose processes generate subjects able to envisage, and willing to fulfill, the universalisms the world market promises but cannot complete. This suggestion is broadly consonant with Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s account of a multitudinous insurgence of ‘biopower’ against ‘Empire’, and with John McMurtry’s analysis of an antagonism between ‘life sequences’ and ‘money sequences’.28 These new activisms are species-being movements, or, perhaps, movements of species beings. Features that support such characterisations include:

27 Failure to recognise this last point is the weakness of Hardt and Negri, whose emphasis on the cohesive logic of capital as a whole comes at the expense of neglecting the rivalrous action of individual capitals that constitute the system. This results in a Kautskyan theory of ‘super-imperialism’, which cannot comprehend the possibilities such as an antagonistic split of ‘Empire’ into ‘Rome’ (USA) and ‘Constantinople’ (China).

i) Multiplicity. The diversity of agencies involved reflects a situation of hyper-subsumption, where, while classical forms of exploitation persist – and are often intensified –, capital taps the psychophysical energies of species-life at every point on its circuit: not just as variable capital (labour), but also, as a circulatory relay (consumerist consciousness, ’mind share’), a precondition of production (the general pool of bio-values and communicative competences necessary for ’general intellect’), and even as constant capital (genetic raw materials). Species-being movements contest the ’general exploitation of communal human nature’.  

ii) Gender. These movements would be inconceivable without the emancipation of women at once initiated and contained by the world market. This is evident in the role of women as theorists and leaders, and the enunciation of a feminist critique of political economy around issues such as globalised female work, unremunerated domestic labour, the double shift, sexual exploitation, procreative rights, and degeneration of the welfare state.

iii) Ecology. The centrality of concerns such as biodiversity loss, global warming, ozone depletion, water privatisation, and felling of rain forest marks the emergence a green critique of capital’s ’universal poisoning’ of the environment. The meeting of ’sea turtles’ with steelworkers on the streets of Seattle is emblematic of this.

iv) Cosmopolitanism. ’Anti-globalisation’ is a wild misnomer for movements formed on a terrain of transnational exchanges and communications. The intensified mobility of finance, production and markets has set in motion a series of regional and international interactions amongst activists opposing various facets of global capital. Terms such as ’anti-corporate globalisation’, ’counterglobalisation’, ’new internationalism’, ’globalisation from below’, ’global justice’ attempt to capture this: Spivak’s ’globe girdling movements’ is perhaps most evocative.

To say these are movements of species beings is not to deny that the assemblies of Seattle, Genoa, Porto Alegre and Mumbai are rife with contradictions. They include nationalist protectionists, liberal market reformists, welfare-state

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30 Marx 1964, p. 85.
31 Spivak 1999, p. 311.
nostalgists and isolationist fascists. One reason for the popularity of ‘civilsociety’ terminology amongst the movements’ platform speakers may be that its vagueness covers up these tensions. But to speak of ‘species-being’ movements is to suggest that, amongst these heterogeneous elements, the genuinely new, and most dynamic, are biopolitical activistisms, characterised by cosmopolitan affinities, transnational egalitarianism, implicit or explicit feminism, a strong ecospheric awareness, a practical critique of high technology, opposed to both the world market and reactive fundamentalisms.

Cognitive capital, cyberactivism and contestational biologists
What are at stake in the emergence of species-being movements are new forces of production, communication and destruction generated by a high-technology ‘cognitive capitalism’.32 These include digitalisation and biotechnology and the new weapons potential arising from them. These are effecting what can only be described as ‘species-changing’ shifts in technosocial conditions that promise to alter collective conditions at levels that are genetic (corporeal), environmental (habitat), communicative (speech, culture) and survival (war), on a scale that is often referred to as ‘posthuman’.33

Underlying the movements of ‘species beings’ is a demand that these impending and ongoing transformations be managed from below – in the sense not only of being able to say a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ to options, but also of having the resources to reformulate options and re-conceive solutions – in a manner tending towards the equalisation of improvements and burdens.

The world market attacks species-being by appropriating and privatising the collective, co-operative forces that change species-life (through corporate control of new technologies); fundamentalist reaction attacks species-being by forbidding and repressing the changes in species-life that collective co-operation enables (through theocratic censorship and prohibition of new technologies).

In terms of issues of communication: the logic of the world market is that of the global image-empires of Murdoch and Berlusconi; that of fundamentalist reaction is filtering, censorship and death sentence for dissenting journalists and artists; that of species-being movements is peer-to-peer and open-source networks.

In terms of the life science and biorevolution: the logic of the world market is that of patented life forms; that of fundamentalist reaction is prohibition of ‘unnatural’ experimentation; and that of species-being movements is public ownership, prioritising the meeting of basic life needs, and responsible risk assessment.

Species-being movements contest the corporate trajectory of both digital and biotechnologies. In the case of new media, this contestation often, but not always, takes the form of re-appropriation. In the case of biotechnologies it often, but not always, takes the form of a refusal of high-technology life-engineering. What is common is the attempt to intervene from below in technoscientific life-alteration, and to open channels for it other than those determined by commodification.

In the field of communications networks, an explosion of ‘alternative’ or ‘indy’ media has accompanied a critique of the corporate media’s filtering of social information. This includes the radical press, community radio, tactical television experiments and video activism. Probably the most dramatic innovation, however, has been the widespread use of the internet for self-organisation, circulating news, speeding internal communication, connecting with potential allies, weaving an ‘electronic fabric of struggle’.

The picture is different in the area of biotechnologies, where refusal is more apparent. In the global South, resistance to biopiracy and bioprospecting by multinational pharmaceutical companies has been intense. So, too, is opposition to agribusiness’s coercive marketing of proprietarily controlled seed strains: in Europe and Canada, opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods and products such as bovine growth hormone have been widespread and successful.

The rejection of biotechnology may cast doubt on nomination of these new aktivisms as species-being movements, for it seems to repudiate the nature-transforming capacities about which Marx waxed enthusiastic. And there are certainly many in such resistances who reject the biotechnological in the name of natural or divine essences. Such positions tend towards green-tinged forms of fundamentalist reaction.

For other activists, however, the issue is not biotechnology per se but the corporate determination of its directions and deployment, and related issues of trustworthy research, testing, and labeling. Thus, recent proponents of ‘contestational biology’ declare that ‘the real question’ is ‘how to create models

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34 Cleaver 1994, p. 15.
of risk assessment that are accessible to those not trained in biology’ so that
people can differentiate between innovations that amount to little more than
‘pollutants for profit’ and those that have a ‘practical and desirable function’.35

Many theorists and organisations fighting corporations such as Monsanto
can envisage a benign role for biotechnologies in a context where the direction
and velocity of their development is not profit-propelled. Some say that their
stance is not a rejection of the life-sciences revolution, but the adoption of an
alternative path within it, leading not towards the engineering of discrete
genes, but to the more ecological analysis of holistic life systems.36

The stance of today’s species-being movements towards high technology
thus mixes appropriation and rejection, invention and sabotage, hacking and
neo-Luddism, web-casters and seed gatherers. It is quite possible today to
encounter activists fighting genetic patenting via computer networks. Such
an ensemble can seem incoherent, but may just be discriminating. If species-
being entails conscious social choice about human self-transformation, it must
involve the capacity to say both ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to technological options. In
Jürgen Habermas’s terms, species-being movements seem to be working on
developing a ‘species-ethics’ by saying an emphatic ‘yes’ to the possibilities
of enhancing ‘communicative reason’ through high-technology media, a nearly
equally emphatic ‘no’ to the ‘instrumental reason’ of genetic engineering, and
using the former to combat the latter.37

Global public goods and the new commons

‘Commons’ is a recurrent term in species-being activism. Its signals a focus
on access to and regulation of collective resources, around issues ranging
from digital culture to plant breeding to atmospheric pollution and the global
water supplies. This commons discourse resumes older discussions about
‘public goods’, but breaks new ground, both in the range of ecological,
biogenetic and cultural domains it addresses, and in its interest in the
possibilities of organisation of resources from below, rather than according
to the models of command economies or bureaucratic welfare states.

High technologies, in both their communicational and biological aspects,
intensify the socialisation of productive activity, both in terms of the social

36 See Rifkin 1998.
37 Habermas 2003, p. 37.
co-operation required for research and development, and by generating collective consequences that cannot be reckoned in terms of individualised market exchange.

In the case of digital networks, these consequences include new modes of product creation and circulation, such as peer-to-peer networks and open-source software, which fly out of the orbit of the commodity-form. These potentials are expressed in the ‘creative commons’ and ‘open cultures’ movements contesting the intellectual property régime of the world market.38

In the case of biotechnologies, commons aspects are most apparent in the multiplication of possible public harms from irresponsible experimentation and premature application. But public-good aspects involving defence against planet-sweeping epidemics are also visible: the transnational campaign against pharmaceutical capital to compel affordable access to anti-HIV retrovirals is a case in point.39

The more capital deploys digital and biological technologies to enclose informational, ecological and biotechnological domains within the market, the more it intensifies market ‘externalities’. Commons discourse restores these processes – creative possibilities fettered, destructive dimensions unaccounted for – to view.

The conflict between capital and species-being movements maps very approximately onto rival models of technological development: in media, open-source and peer-to-peer networks versus proprietorial code and closed systems; in life sciences, systemic biology and ecosystemic perspectives against reductive genetic engineering. The tendency of species-being movements is towards the practical realisation of what Marx termed ‘communal activity, and communal mind’.40

Alien powers

The importance of ‘commons’ movements can only be measured against the counter-tendency towards social polarisations that give a new vitality to that most exhausted of terms, ‘alienation.’

The central problem Marx raised under this heading, namely the seizure as private property of collective species-capacities, is, in the age of Monsanto,

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39 See Mayne 2002.
40 Marx 1964, p. 137.
Bristol-Meyers and Merck, more acute than ever. But alienation takes on a whole new urgency when it reaches up to the creation of ‘alien’ life forms designed specifically and solely for their functionality to capital.\(^{41}\) Such forms – onco-mice, spider-goats, and terminator seeds – already exist, very concrete expressions of the power of money to ‘a world upside-down – the confounding and compounding of all natural and human qualities’.\(^{42}\)

Biotechnologies generate not only designed animal and plants, but also alterations in the most apparently basic givens of the human condition: appearance, health, emotional and intellectual faculties, longevity, and sexuality. Germline interventions might make such changes inheritable. Futurists speak of a moment at which a technologically transformed humanity would become as ‘alien’ to its former self as humanity is today from, say, great apes: a posthuman singularity.

Marx’s account of species-being qualifies apocalyptic accounts of the posthuman, for it reminds us that humans have long been forming themselves in a technologically mediated relation with a ‘second nature’, in a series of grafts, symbioses and prosthesis with machines, buildings, altered nutrients and landscapes: in this sense, the species has always been posthuman.\(^{43}\)

But Marx’s critique also condemns the direction of this process by an ‘inhuman power’ of accumulation.\(^{44}\) His account of species-being reduced, as labour, to the status of ‘beasts’ or ‘machines’ opens to a consideration of the posthuman as catastrophe, not by reason of deviation from a supposedly essential nature but from an unequal scheduling of departure times, or because some step onto the train across the backs of others.

Every extrapolation from the present suggests that access to voluntary biotechnological transformations will be deeply income-dependent. The combination of powerful biotechnologies with vast differentials in wealth and global health-care systems shaped by neoliberal privatisation is a recipe for market eugenics very different from its ill-fated state-run predecessors. Positive and negative selection will be left to the survival instincts and pocket book of individuals in system where employment possibilities are dependent on a clean genetic profiles, or even bio-modifications, bringing into sight the jaw-dropping possibility of the transformation of classes into clades.

\(^{41}\) See the valuable discussion by Rikowski 2003.
\(^{42}\) Marx 1964, p. 169.
\(^{43}\) Hayles 1999, pp. 278–9.
\(^{44}\) Marx 1964, p. 156.
Techno-apartheids and digital divides already contribute to vast differentials in human life chances around the planet. The sovereign power of the market decrees that most of the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, are excluded from anything that the liberal citizenry of the planetary ‘North’ would consider as a properly human existence. Market-driven globalisation exacerbates ethnic envy and hatred between ‘frustrated, impoverished majorities’ and ‘market dominant minorities’. To this situation we may soon add the bio-rifts produced by a neoliberal eugenics that makes the masters of the planetary economy more and more literally ‘alien’ from those they rule.

It is the prospect of a posthuman made on the basis of the inhuman that renders species-being movements’ insistence on ‘the common’ so vital. This commonality cannot, however, be conceived as maintenance of or reversion to any primordial, natural state, but only as an egalitarian order to be achieved. The programme it demands is one of equalisation of conditions, giving a primacy to the meeting of elementary needs of species-life for everyone. Absent this, the technological modifications of species-being will follow an inhuman path towards the war of the posthuman against the not-yet-allowed-to-be-human.

**Neo-exterminism**

This situation may already be upon us. ‘9/11’ brings to a crescendo what many heard approaching: confrontation between the techno-cultural whirlwind of cognitive capitalism and an array of religious-ethno-nationalist fundamentalisms arising as a defensive response to the immiseration and disruptions of the world market: ‘McWorld versus Jihad’.

Marx identified two forms in which species-being is alienated: capital and religion. Each abstracts from, substitutes and imposes over the species’ collective, co-operative capacity for self-organisation a fetishised authority – money or divinity. Capital privatises material wealth; religious institutions sequester spiritual experience. The world market embraces the dynamic mutation of human technocultural possibilities, at the expense of all collectivity; religious fundamentalisms maintain social collectivity, but on the basis of fixed, divinely-sanctioned identities and hierarchies.

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45 Chua 2003, p. 16.
46 Barber 1995.
47 Marx 1964, p. 111.
In the ‘war on terror’, these two alienated forces turn on each other. Having colluded to annihilate the previously existing ‘socialisms’, neoliberal capital and reactionary fundamentalisms face off, fangs bared. The grimace is deceptive, since each partial, alienated antagonist actually requires and internalises the other. Bush is evangelical, relying on fundamentalist Christianity to discipline the social maelstrom of American turbo-capitalism; bin Laden is a scion of oil capital and lacks any economic programmatic alternative to the world market. But this only intensifies the animosity.

Both are hostile to the forces of Seattle and Porto Alegre, though each sees them as a manifestation of its opponent’s logic, as ‘terrorism’ or ‘decadence’. Thus, the widely felt intuition that the war on terror is somehow aimed against counterglobalisation, recently articulated by Slavoj Zizek, requires no conspiracy theory: whoever moved first, CIA or mujahadeen, 9/11 resulted from the interaction of two forces antithetical to species-being. 48

What makes this a true ‘dialectic of disaster’ is an aspect of technology that Marx undoubtedly scanted – its power not as means of production, but of destruction.49 The new technologies of ‘cognitive capitalism’ are rooted in military purposes. They arose from the nuclear confrontation with ‘state socialism’. The entire trajectory of computerisation, as well as substantial portions of the new life sciences, would by unthinkable without this deadly matrix. The spectre of mutually assured destruction can be seen as a via negativa to humanity’s practical self-recognition of its planetary unity. The mass anti-nuclear movements of 1960s and 1980s were perhaps the first species-being mobilisations, predecessors of today’s globalisation from below.

During the Reaganite Second Cold War, E.P. Thompson coined the term ‘exterminism’ to name the mutual momentum of rival military-industrial-scientific systems apparently spiralling to disaster.50 The collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to vitiate this idea. But the war on terror brings back this dynamic, in revised form.

Neo-exterminism presents itself not as the massified confrontation of Pentagon and Kremlin, but rather in flexibilised, diffuse, post-Fordist form, in the frantic attempt of advanced capital to prevent the real or imagined spread of increasingly generalised, miniaturised and handy weapons of mass destruction that might threaten it hegemony. Underlying this metastasising

48 Zizek 2002.
49 Aronson 1983.
50 Thompson et al. 1982. See also Balibar 2002.
dynamic, and the surgical strikes with which established power attempt to manage it, lies, once again, capital’s inability to control the high technology it has unleashed, overlaid on the vast global inequalities we have already discussed, and on the confrontation between world market and fundamentalist reaction.

In neo-exterminism, the most amazing techno-scientific expressions of species-being powers appropriated by capitalists and fundamentalists alike will not appear as retrovirals and open-source software, but, instead, as swarms of robotised battle-drones chattering to each other in the skies over smoky landscapes as they search for mobile, weaponised smallpox laboratories.

If the legacy of the *1844 Manuscripts* can only be recovered for contemporary use by cutting it loose from Hegelian teleology (and, here, I concur with Althusser) then it needs to be recognised that species-being may come to a sticky end; augmented universality can be actualised as universal destruction.\(^{51}\)

Neo-exterminism does not, yet, offer the ‘big bang’ conclusion to species-being of nuclear winter; but it does promise slow degradation into persistent war, economic wastage and universal fear, a dynamic that in current conditions of global interdependence may be as mortal. It is an understanding of this possibility that made the forces that in 2000 appeared on streets of Seattle reappear in 2003, as the largest peace movement the planet has ever seen opposing the invasion of Iraq.

The return of the plan

Other current manifestations of species-being logic today include: campaigns for global water access, the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the redirection of medical research towards diseases that afflict the poor, young South, rather than towards the posthuman North; movement to reduce and regulate the unevenly inflicted consequences of global warming; mobilisations against the patenting of life forms and for the proper social control of biotechnologies; and, centrally, action against the obscenity of global wealth inequalities.

Such movements against the privatising power of the world market need, however, to be more clearly linked with another, parallel, range of struggles against the obscurantist logics of fundamentalist reaction. These struggles include women’s resistance to re-impositions of patriarchal discipline and the

\(^{51}\) See Rees 2003.
defense of ethnic and religious minorities. Without a stronger link between these two wings of a species-being movement, the war on terror will successfully wrap itself in the flag of enlightened liberation even while relentlessly deepening the grip of the world market.

The task of the species beings is to disentangle themselves from and neutralise the world market and fundamentalist reaction before these two antagonists bring irreparable planetary collapse, through war and negligence. This is the contemporary inflection of the civilisational choice Marx and Luxemburg posed when they wrote that, in the absence of socialism, the options were capitalism or barbarism.

Many think the very best to hope for is a system of ‘cosmopolitan social democracy’ that hedges the world market around with a series of globalised welfare-state institutions.\(^52\) This is a decent, responsible objective for which to struggle, but not enough. The world market has summoned up powers whose consequences it cannot control or even measure. The management of a range of global eco-metabolic problems, including not only biotechnological risks but climate and atmospheric change, pandemics and water and energy supply, require institutions of oversight, testing, risk assessment, public resource management and regulation, and collective education – in short, social planning, and on a scale to make previous efforts look retiring.\(^53\)

The new information technologies created by cognitive capital makes such governmentality feasible. The networked surveillance and simulation systems deployed to wage the war on terror could be turned to monitoring and avoiding the social and biospheric ruination of the planet. Yet the possibilities of panoptic despotism are obvious. What can countervail against these risks are the equal potentialities for transparency, creativity and assemblage created by the new mesh of globally networked communication, potentialities now being vigorously explored by a host of social movements and individuals.\(^54\)

Indeed, in an era when the notion of social planning has been discredited and disparaged under the assaults of neoliberalism, one of the benefits of theoretical return to the young Marx is in re-affirming the role of collective design in the actualisation of species-being. The recent recovery of the species-being theme by David Harvey, while proceeding on very different theoretical lines from those followed here, is invaluable on this point, for his discussion,

\(^{52}\) See Held and McGrew 2002.
\(^{53}\) See the critique of Held in Smith 2003.
grounded in studies of urban geography, emphasises the ‘architectural’ components of collective deliberation, foresight and prefiguration in all projects of social emancipation.\textsuperscript{55} This brings us back to one of the very few overt allusions to the species-being in the work of the older Marx – his statement that, when the worker ‘cooperates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capacity of this species’.\textsuperscript{56}

Realising the logic of species-being movements requires more than the romanticism of spontaneous rhizomatic connections. It calls for revival of a very unfashionable idea – global collective planning, but on a basis that avoids the disastrous legacy of the Leninist command state in favour of truly participatory processes. The technological possibilities that the world market has itself excited contain the possibility of a counter-subsumption that will give commodification a declining role in a human future. It is this context that makes the young Marx germane today, for, as Read observes, the \textit{1844 Manuscripts} articulate more forcefully than any other of his works except perhaps the \textit{Grundrisse}, ‘a critique of the present from the possibility latent within it’.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{Conclusion}

More wars are impending, both within and between the halves of a planet that commodification is rapidly dividing between the posthuman and those denied humanity. In such a situation, averting new holocausts depends, as ever since 1844, on asserting against capital’s constraint and stratification of species-being the priorities of the common. It is tempting to speak of a mission to ‘save the human’. But this would be a flight departing too late. The human is a historical creature whose material and ontological grounds are already well and truly subverted. The complex articulation of biological facts and discursive formations from which it was constructed have been chiselled loose by technoscience; tremulous in 2004, they will, by 2044, under the hammer blows of molecular biology, neuroscience and nanotechnologies, be rapidly falling away into the abyss. Deprived of a naturalistic basis in ‘common-sense’ humanity, or in common human senses, the new solidarity can only be grounded in the immanent, co-operative requirements of the productive

\textsuperscript{55} Harvey 2000, pp. 206–12.
\textsuperscript{56} Marx 1977, p. 447.
\textsuperscript{57} Read 2003, p. 123.
networks that sustain biosocial existence, and make possible its further unfolding. If the human is passing, neither a regression to the atavistic divisions of the prehuman, realised today as ‘ethnic cleansings’, or a triumphalist celebration of a posthumanism whose high-technology requirements come at the expense of millions who want, not for implants and nanotechnologies, but for water, medicine, and food, are an emancipatory option. Rather, it is time to say that the prehuman, human and posthuman have all, as categories inextricably tied to the historic inequalities of the world market, had their day. The cancellation of these inequalities demands a new ‘commonism,’ a project neither of goddesses, nor of cyborgs, nor even of humans, but, instead, of species beings.

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Marcel van der Linden

On Council Communism

Rise and fall

As the society of revolutionary Russia gradually hardened into its new shape in the years after 1918 and political power was increasingly concentrated – due in part to the violence of war and economic crisis – in the hands of a bureaucratic élite, oppositional movements continually emerged, both inside Russia and abroad, that sought to turn the tide.¹ Karl Korsch in Germany, Amadeo Bordiga in Italy and Timofei Sapronov in Russia tried and failed to form a new international in 1926, for example.² From 1930 on, the ‘Bukharinite’ opposition (Heinrich Brandler, Jay Lovestone, M.N. Roy and others) made a similar attempt. Trotsky’s International Left Opposition, whose formation in 1930, eventually led to the foundation of the Fourth International in 1938, became the best known of such projects.

One very early protest against the trends in Russia was expressed in the Netherlands and Germany by former Bolshevik sympathisers who would later become known as ‘council communists’ – a term that was probably used from 1921 on.³ The most prominent

¹ Thanks to Cajo Brendel, Götz Langkau and the editors of this journal for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.
spokespeople of this protest were the German educator Otto Rühle (1874–1943) and two Dutchmen; the poet and classicist Herman Gorter (1864–1927) and the astronomer Anton(ie) Pannekoek (1873–1960). These intellectuals had initially been enthusiastic admirers of developments in Russia. Gorter, for example, dedicated his 1918 pamphlet *The World Revolution‘To Lenin’,* the revolutionary who ‘stands out above all other leaders of the Proletariat’ and for whom ‘Marx is his only peer’. A year later, Pannekoek still asserted, ‘In Russia communism has been put into practice for two years now’.4

But their mood changed quickly. The most important reason for their turnabout was the efforts of the Communist International established in 1919 to promote the Bolshevik example as an international model. In 1920, Pannekoek published his pamphlet *World Revolution and Communist Tactics,* in which he defended the proposition that revolutionaries in Western Europe should use very different tactics from their comrades in Russia. In Western Europe, the influence of an old, experienced bourgeoisie made itself felt at every level of society. In Russia and Eastern Europe, by contrast, the bourgeoisie was still young and relatively weak. For this reason, East-European workers had fewer ideological prejudices and were more receptive to Marxist ideas. Accordingly, the struggle against bourgeois institutions such as parliaments and trade unions had to be central in the West.

In his pamphlet *‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder,* Lenin refuted the Dutch and German left-wingers’ standpoints.5 He considered that Pannekoek (K. Horner) and his fellow thinkers were spreading confusion. While he acknowledged that there was an ‘enormous difference’ between ‘backward Russia’ and ‘the advanced countries of Western Europe’, he considered the *universal* significance of the Russian experience far more important: ‘it is the Russian model that reveals to all countries something – and something highly significant – of their near and inevitable future’.6 By focusing centrally on ‘the international validity’ of ‘certain fundamental features of our revolution’ in this way, Lenin accentuated the sharpening contradictions within the international Communist movement. Intense debates arose inside West-European Communist Parties.

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4 Horner 1919, p. 495.
5 Herman Gorter responded to Lenin in his *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* (Gorter 1989 [1920]). See also De Liagre Böhl 1978.
6 Lenin 1920, pp. 21–2.
Within the German Party (KPD), this conflict was exacerbated by another development. The organisation's leadership, headed by Paul Levi, a long-time associate of the recently murdered Rosa Luxemburg, pushed a decision through its October 1919 congress that all members had to take part in parliamentary elections and fight the union bureaucracy from inside the trade unions. This new line was, in practice, tantamount to declaring a split, since the left wing could never be expected to accept it. The result, in any case, was that the KPD lost about half of its hundred thousand members within a few months. In some districts, such as Greater Berlin, the Northwest (Hamburg and Bremen), Lower Saxony (Hanover) and East Saxony (Dresden), the organisation was virtually wiped out.

At first, the expelled opposition did not want to found a new party of its own. But, when the KPD leadership acted hesitantly in the early stages of the right-wing Kapp Putsch in March 1920 and seemed isolated from the militant sections of the working class, the decision was taken to establish a rival organisation. On 4–5 April 1920, the Communist Workers’ Party of Germany (KAPD) was accordingly founded. At its inception, it had 38,000 members. As early as February 1920, the General Workers’ Union (AAUD) was founded, an organisation modelled to some extent on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) of the US, which many saw as a trade-union federation linked to the KAPD. The KAPD flourished briefly. Its high point was probably in August 1920, when it had about 40,000 members. From then on, the Party was decimated by a series of splits and splinter groups. The coup de grâce came in March 1922, with the division between a ‘Berlin current’ and an ‘Essen current’. By the end of 1924, the two groups together had only 2,700 members left.

The KAPD operated initially on the assumption that the international Communist movement could still be reformed from within. But, when the KAPD delegation’s attempts during the Third Comintern Congress in Moscow (June-July 1921) to form an international left opposition failed, the decision was immediately taken to build a new Communist Workers’ International
(KAI, sometimes referred to as the Fourth International), even though a large
tendency within the Party (which would later become the ‘Berlin current’) considered this initiative premature. On a programmatic level, the KAI took Herman Gorter’s propositions in his recent *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*, which were, in fact, mainly a repetition of the arguments made by Pannekoek, as its starting point. Outside Germany, the KAI was chiefly supported by very small political groups, such as the Dutch sister organisation KAPN, a British group around Sylvia Pankhurst, and the Bulgarian Communist Workers’ Party around the journal *Rabotchnik Iskra*.

Within the council-communist movement – which gradually became more diverse as a result of the disintegration of the KAPD – criticism of Russia rapidly grew more intense. East-Saxon spokesperson Otto Rühle was perhaps the first to conclude that the Bolsheviks were not building socialism. Rühle had been a KAPD delegate to the Second Comintern Congress in mid-1920, but had left in protest even before the Congress began. Once back in Germany, he gave vent to his dismay. The Bolsheviks had tried to skip over an entire epoch by leaping directly from feudalism to socialism. The delayed world revolution had made this attempt a failure. The outcome was ‘a frightful disappointment’.

The Bolsheviks had instituted an ultra-centralism that corresponded completely to the bourgeois character of their revolution.

Centralism is the organizational principle of the bourgeois-capitalist epoch.

By this means a bourgeois state and capitalist economy can be constructed.

A proletarian state and socialist economy cannot, however. They require the system of councils.

Within a fairly short time, this opinion of Rühle’s was generally accepted in KAPD circles.

In the course of 1921, the council-communist movement thus began to demarcate itself clearly from official Communism. The movement’s starting points can be summarised simply. Firstly, capitalism is in decline and should be abolished immediately. Secondly, the only alternative to capitalism is a democracy of workers’ councils, based on an economy controlled by the working class. Thirdly, the bourgeoisie and its social-democratic allies are trying to save capitalism from its fate by means of ‘democratic’ manipulation of the working class. Fourthly, in order to hasten the establishment of a democracy of councils, this manipulation must be consistently resisted. This

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10 Rühle 1920a.
11 Rühle 1920b.
means, on the one hand, boycotting all parliamentary elections and, on the other hand, systematically fighting against the old trade unions (which are organs for joint management of capitalism). Finally, Soviet-type societies are not an alternative to capitalism but, rather, a new form of capitalism.

These five starting points are the parameters within which debates have taken place among council communists over the past eighty years. There has been considerable room for fundamental differences of opinion within these parameters, however. The differences have also been sharpened by the movement’s ongoing decline, which reduced the remaining council communists to small groups. In these groups, internal theoretical debate has often been more important than practical political work.

Organised council communism disappeared from the scene in Germany after Hitler seized power in 1933, although groups remained active in the resistance. 12 In the Netherlands, several small groups developed, one of which, the Groups of International Communists (GIC), continued to serve as a coordinating centre for international discussions until the late 1930s and, among other things, published a journal (Rätekorrespondenz, 1934–7) towards this end. Several texts appeared in the early issues of this periodical that subsequently functioned more or less as the substantive platform of the international movement. The first such text was ‘The Rise of a New Labour Movement’ by Dutch educator Henk Canne Meijer (1890–1962), who can justly be seen as the GIC’s ‘soul’. 13 Canne Meijer explained that the historical role of the whole of the old labour movement (made up of parties, trade unions and cooperatives) was exhausted and that a new labour movement was now rising up, based entirely on autonomous proletarian activity. 14

A second influential text was the German journalist and teacher Helmut Wagner’s (1904–89) ‘Theses on Bolshevism’. Wagner characterised the Soviet Union as state capitalism without a bourgeoisie, constantly zigzagging between the interests of workers and peasants. The Five Year Plans and forced collectivisation were nothing but attempts to keep the contradiction between these two classes under control by force. 15

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12 See Ihlau 1969.
14 Canne Meijer 1934.
15 Wagner 1934. In 1936–7, in exile in Switzerland, Wagner expanded his ‘Theses’ into an extensive unpublished manuscript on ‘The Foundations of Bolshevik Power Politics: A Contribution to a Sociology of Bolshevism’. He published parts of his manuscript under the pseudonym Rudolf Sprenger. See, for example, Sprenger 1940.
Wagner still assumed that the Bolsheviks had followed incorrect policies in an effort to build socialism. Anton Pannekoek came a few years later to a different conclusion, that the Bolsheviks had carried out a bourgeois revolution, so that, rather than following incorrect policies, they had followed the only possible policies. Their only ‘mistake’ had been to imagine that they were building socialism rather than capitalism.

A former KAPD member who emigrated to the United States in 1926, metalworker Paul Mattick (1904–81), began to build up an operation of his own in Chicago in the early 1930s. He was, among other things, the driving force behind the journal *International Council Correspondence*. In Australia, J.A. Dawson (1889–1958) published the *Southern Advocate of Workers’ Councils* for several years just after the Second World War, while Lain Diez published council-communist texts in Chile. From time to time, an independent Marxist thinker seemed to develop in a council-communist direction, as with the ex-Communist lawyer and philosopher Karl Korsch (1886–1961) from the early 1930s on.

Council communism enjoyed several years back a bit of the limelight while the student movement was flourishing in the 1960s, particularly in Germany, Italy and France. Classic texts were republished and ‘veterans’ such as Mattick and the Dutch journalist Cajo Brendel (born in 1915 and perhaps the last true disciple of Pannekoek) were popular speakers and writers. The ‘old’ council communism was often integrated in a more or less eclectic way into a ‘new’ theory or worldview. That was apparent early on in the case of Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit’s book, *Le gauchisme: remède à la maladie sénile du communisme*. With the decline of the ‘1968 movements’, council communism also largely disappeared from sight once more, although groups are still active in various places in Western Europe and North America.


This publication began publication in 1934, originally as chiefly an English-language version of the GIC periodical *Rätekorrespondenz*. It was renamed *Living Marxism* in 1938 and *New Essays* in 1942. It ceased publication in 1943. In 1970, Greenwood Press published a facsimile reprint.

Wright 1980.

Published in Paris by Seuil in 1968.

The Dutch council-communist veteran Cajo Brendel wrote to me (12 December 2001): ‘In the last five years I’ve witnessed the emergence of council-communist groups with journals of their own in Berlin, Lübeck, Hamburg, Freiburg, Bad Salzungen, Cologne, Duisburg and Oberhausen. . . . In addition there are also council-communist groups in France, the US and Canada. Not to mention Spain, Italy and Greece’. Moreover, I should mention the International Communist Current, a very small international tendency of French origin, which is not strictly speaking council-communist, but which has a broad affiliation.
Debates
There have been numerous internal debates among council communists since the 1920s. Here, I confine myself to a brief outline of the most important controversies.

i. Characterisation of the historical period
What exactly does the proposition that capitalism is in decline signify? In the 1920s and 1930s, many Marxists (council communists and others) thought that capitalism was very close to the end of its tether. This opinion was often backed up with references to Rosa Luxemburg’s theory that, in having conquered the whole planet, capitalism had reached its historical limit. In the late 1920s, a second theory was added to the argument, based on Henryk Grossmann’s book on the collapse of capitalism. Grossmann had used Marx’s reproduction schemes to show that the rising organic composition of capital automatically leads to the accumulation process’s grinding to a halt, and that capitalism has therefore an objective *internal* limit. Grossmann’s opinion was the subject of fierce debates among council communists in the early 1930s. Korsch and Pannekoek, among others, rejected Grossmann’s approach, while Mattick defended its key points. Pannekoek argued that socialism would come into existence, not because capitalism would collapse and thus force workers to form new organisations, but, rather, because capitalism would become more and more unbearable for the workers and thus spur them on to form new organisations that would make capitalism collapse. Mattick, by contrast, considered Pannekoek’s line of argument sophistry, because capitalist collapse and revolutionary class struggle are two sides of the same coin: ongoing concentration of capital would lead to prolonged immiseration for the workers, transforming their economic struggle into a revolutionary struggle. Saying that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable was thus exactly the same as saying that the revolution was inevitable.

Such debates naturally seemed much less urgent during the long post-Second-World-War boom. Now, the central question became how to interpret the boom. No single council communist believed that capitalism had found a way after all to keep its fundamental contradictions under control. They were all convinced, rather, that the ‘golden years’ only meant a postponement

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21 Grossman 1929.
22 Bonacchi 1977, pp. 57–64.
of the day of reckoning. The theoretical and political challenge was above all to analyse the boom as a temporary phenomenon. Paul Mattick, in particular, took this task upon himself. As early as the late 1930s, he began to develop a critique of John Maynard Keynes, culminating in his magnum opus *Marx and Keynes* in 1969. According to Mattick, Marx had not foreseen that a Keynesian period of extensive state economic intervention would occur (though Marx’s theory in no way ruled out such a possibility). Keynesianism ‘silently accepted’ Marx’s opinion about capitalism’s immanent crises, and, at the same time, offered a remedy in the form of conscious interference with the mechanism of the market.23 This remedy could not possibly solve the structural problem of capital accumulation, however, because increased state intervention led to more wasteful production (of weapons and so forth) and public works. Even if additional markets were created for capital in this way, 

... the final product of government-induced production, resulting from a long chain of intermediary production processes, does not have the form of a commodity which could profitably be sold on the market.24

Government deficit spending is therefore ‘not part of the actual aggregate demand, but a deliberate policy of producing beyond it’.25 This policy, based on a continual increase in the national debt (and, consequently, a steady depreciation of incomes and debts), was bound to reach a dead end at a certain point.

Notwithstanding the long duration of rather ‘prosperous’ conditions in the industrially-advanced countries, there is no ground for the assumption that capitalist production has overcome its inherent contradictions through state interventions in the economy.26

Mattick was also alert to some possible non-economic consequences of post-war capitalism, as shown by the attention he devoted, much earlier than many other Marxists, to ecological issues. In 1976, he devoted an essay to ‘the ongoing destruction of the environment’. He argued that threats to the human habitat were not the result of the development of the productive forces, but, rather, of capitalist relations of production and their ‘monstrous

23 Mattick 1969, p. 130.
24 Mattick 1969, p. 154; see also p. 118.
waste of human labor power and natural resources’.\textsuperscript{27} At the same time Mattick did not exclude the possibility of capitalism finding a solution to the threat on its own:

Since the way the world moves is determined by profit, capitalists concern themselves with ecological problems only inasmuch as they have an impact on profits. The capitalists have no particular interest in destroying the world; if it turns out that preserving the world can be profitable too, then protecting the world will also become a business.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{ii. Revolutionary intervention in workers' struggles}

Probably the most important difference among council communists concerned revolutionary intervention in workers’ struggles. The political parties of the ‘old’ workers’ movement had failed.

When it proved possible to better workers’ conditions within the confines of capitalism, the once radical labor movement [had] turned into an institution providing additional support for the social \textit{status quo}.\textsuperscript{29}

But did this co-optation of the ‘old’ movement also mean that the very concept of a revolutionary workers’ party had become obsolete? Was a revolutionary party useful in educating the proletariat for autonomous activity, or were \textit{all} political parties bourgeois organisations that had to be combated?

In the course of the 1920s, three different positions gradually crystallised. First, there were council communists who believed that the ‘old’ workers’ movement had only discredited a certain kind of party, but not the idea of a party as such. The new revolutionary party should not be something separate from the working class, but should dialectically fuse with it. This position was defended by, among others, Herman Gorter, who summarised the line of argument pithily in three points:

Firstly, regroupment of all workers, of the great majority of the proletariat in the [revolutionary] union; secondly, regroupment of the most conscious workers in the party; thirdly, unity of union and party.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27} Mattick 1976, pp. 232–3.
\textsuperscript{28} Mattick 1976, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{29} Mattick 1969, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{30} Gorter 1978, p. 170.
The advocates of ‘unity organisations’ had a second position. The most important theorist of this intermediate position was Otto Rühle, who had already declared in 1920 that ‘the revolution is not a party affair [Die Revolution ist keine Parteisache]’. In Rühle’s eyes, the division of labour between party and trade union was a legacy of capitalism. The unity organisation, which workers could use to defend their interests on all fronts and promote council democracy, should replace them both. The starting point of the workers’ revolutionary learning processes was where they produced surplus-value, that is, in the workplace. There they would have to organise their struggle themselves. Through economic struggle, they would educate themselves and arrive at a higher, political consciousness. These learning processes would find organisational expression in federations of workplace organisations, which would carry on economic and political struggle simultaneously. This standpoint was virtually identical to revolutionary syndicalism.31

The most radical council communists were those who flatly refused to intervene in the workers’ movement. Anton Pannekoek, while not the originator, was the most prominent representative of this standpoint. He lays out its logic in his memoirs:

[Under the influence of Henk Canne Meijer and others] new principles gradually became clearer. This one especially: the working masses must themselves make the decisions about their struggle, and themselves carry out and lead it. This seems either a commonplace or evident nonsense; but it means that there is no room for leaders as such. I remember that I once debated with myself during a great strike what the workers should do, and could not figure out which of two different attitudes should be taken up; and what if one later had to give one’s opinion or advice in an article or newspaper? In the end, thanks to an article of Henk’s, I saw the simple solution all at once: I don’t have to figure it out; the workers have to figure it out themselves and themselves take full responsibility for it.32

The council communists’ task, according to this approach, was exclusively to study and analyse capitalism and workers’ struggles. This standpoint, which is still propagated today by Cajo Brendel and a few associates, earned its supporters the sobriquet ‘cloistered friars of Marxism’.33

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31 Bock 1990.
iii. Subjective factors

The controversies over party building were linked to another debate. If, in fact, the ‘objective conditions’ in the advanced capitalist countries are ripe for revolution, what are the ‘subjective factors’ that keep the working class from establishing a new society? Rühle came to the conclusion, in roughly 1920 or so, that the deepest cause of the failure of the German Revolution of 1918–19 lay, not in the errors of one revolutionary organisation or the other, but, rather, in the mentality of the working class. Revolution would only be possible in industrialised countries when the working class had enough self-confidence and the will to take control of the real loci of power, the workplaces, and put them in the hands of unity organisations in which political and economic power were united. The fact that the working class had not done so in 1918–19 was the result of its subaltern mentality. Rühle wrote in 1925:

What is needed most today is the gradual dismantling of authority within people themselves, in their mode of psychic activity, in the general, daily practice of life in society. Dismantling authority in the organizational apparatus is important. Dismantling it in the theory and tactics of class struggle is more important. But most important of all is dismantling authority in the human soul, because without that it is impossible to abolish authority in either organization or tactics and theory. 34

While Rühle thus advocated a broad, revolutionary-pedagogical approach, most council communists considered that it was not necessary to alter the working class’s whole psychology, but only to fight against mistaken political ideas. Their underlying assumption was that the workers’ bourgeois ideology kept them from establishing a democracy of councils. As Pannekoek put it:

What hampers [the workers] is chiefly the power of the inherited and infused ideas, the formidable spiritual power of the middle-class world, enveloping their minds into a thick cloud of beliefs and ideologies, dividing them, and making them uncertain and confused. The process of enlightenment, of

34 Rühle 1975, p. 141. Partly due to the influence of his wife Alice Gerstel, Rühle saw a logical connection between the pedagogical Marxism he propagated and Alfred Adler’s *Individualpsychologie*, in which the quest for integral consciousness of the self was also central. Rühle devoted much of the rest of his life to developing this idea further. See Kutz 1991 and Schoch 1995. Many council communists had little use for Rühle’s pedagogical turn. Mattick’s judgement was: ‘This part of Rühle’s activity, whether one evaluates it positively or negatively, has little, if anything, to do with the problems that beset the German proletariat’ (Mattick 1978, pp. 110–11).
clearing up and vanquishing this world of old ideas and ideologies is the essential process of building the working-class power, is the progress of revolution.35

Marxist philosophy had a central role in explaining and combating the ‘thick cloud of beliefs and ideologies’. This is why Pannekoek, in particular, spent considerable time criticising what he regarded as bourgeois thinking inside the workers’ movement. In 1938, he published a critique of Lenin, especially of Lenin’s 1909 book *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*.36 Pannekoek tried to prove that Lenin failed in his critique of Ernst Mach and Mach’s Russian followers Bogdanov and Lunacharsky to go beyond the eighteenth-century materialism of the Enlightenment. Lenin reduced ‘matter’ to physical matter, while historical materialism has a much broader concept of matter, namely the concept of ‘objective reality’, or ‘the entire observed reality’, including ‘mind and fancies’ (Eugen Dietzgen).37 Lenin shared his tendency towards ‘middle-class materialism’, in Pannekoek’s view, with his philosophical mentor Gregorii Plekhanov. Their thinking was in both cases the product of ‘Russian social conditions’:

In Russia . . . the fight against Czarism was analogous to the former fight against absolutism in Europe. In Russia too church and religion were the strongest supports of the system of government. . . . The struggle against religion was here a prime social necessity. . . . Thus the proletarian class struggle in Russia was at the same time a struggle against Czarist absolutism, under the banner of socialism. So Marxism in Russia . . . necessarily assumed another character than in Western Europe. It was still the theory of a fighting working class; but this class had to fight first and foremost for what in Western Europe had been the function of the bourgeoisie, with the intellectuals as its associates. So the Russian intellectuals, in adapting this theory to this local task, had to find a form of Marxism in which criticism of religion stood in the forefront. They found it in an approach to earlier forms of materialism, and in the first writings of Marx . . .38

35 Pannekoek 1948, p. 77.
36 Lenin’s book had been published in 1909 in Russian. The first translation (in German) was published in 1927.
38 Pannekoek 1948, pp. 68–9.
According to Pannekoek, Lenin was waging a battle that had already been won in Western Europe. Lenin’s ideas were of no use to people living under developed capitalism, and would only make the working class’s self-emancipation more difficult.\textsuperscript{39}

\textbf{iv. The role of individual actions}

Another controversy, over the role of individual actions, was also linked to the debate on the party. Should conscious council communists carry out ‘exemplary actions’ in order to rouse the proletariat from its slumber? Or was that absolutely the wrong thing to do, because it distracted the masses from their self-emancipation? This was by no means a purely academic question. Council communists with ‘activist’ leanings tried to act in an ‘exemplary’ way several times during the 1920s and 1930s. In the tempestuous years of the German Revolution, first the surveyor Max Hölz (1899–1933) and, a bit later, the disabled moulder Karl Plättner (1893–1945) formed armed groups, which, among other things, robbed banks and plundered country houses in order to divide the loot among the poor. They hoped in this way to show the vulnerability of existing institutions and inspire other workers to similar deeds.\textsuperscript{40} Another council-communist advocate of exemplary action, the disabled Dutch construction worker Marinus van der Lubbe (1909–34), became world famous after he set fire to the Reichstag in Berlin on 27 February 1933, because, as he later told the police, ‘I saw that the workers on their own weren’t going to do anything [against National Socialism]’. Van der Lubbe had been a member in the Netherlands of Eduard Sirach’s (1895–1937) Left Workers’ Opposition, a Rotterdam-based council-communist group.\textsuperscript{41}

Council communists’ different reactions to Van der Lubbe’s act demonstrated what the debate on exemplary action was about. Anton Pannekoek (who was close to the ‘anti-activist’ GIC) forcefully criticised Van der Lubbe’s action and called it ‘completely worthless’. Eduard Sirach, by contrast, published a pamphlet that ended as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{HIMA 12,4_f3_26-50  1/25/05  4:51 PM  Page 39}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Korsch (1938) sided more or less with Pannekoek. A critical reaction (pointing among other things to the ‘mechanical link’ that Pannekoek makes between materialist philosophy and revolutionary practice) can be found in [Bourrinet] 2001, pp. 256–65.  
\textsuperscript{41} Karasek 1980, Jassies 2000.
Setting fire to the Reichstag building was the act of a proletarian revolutionary. . . . As the smoke rose from this home of democratic deception, in which the German masses were sold out to capitalism for fifteen years, the illusions in parliamentary democracy that had kept the German workers chained to capitalism also went up in smoke. *The thirst for action and spirit of self-sacrifice that inspired Van der Lubbe must also inspire the working masses if they are to put an end to criminal capitalism!! This is why we are in solidarity with him!*  

v. The postcapitalist economy

Under the impact of the events in Russia/the Soviet Union, various, mainly pro-free-market authors (Ludwig von Mises and others) had argued in the years after 1917 that a centrally planned economy was impossible in principle. Only a few radical socialists took up the challenge at the time and tried to prove the contrary. The most important positive exceptions were probably the Austro-Marxist Otto Leichter and Karl Polányi, who was inspired by the ideas of ‘Guild Socialism’.  

German metalworker Jan Appel (1890–1985), who had represented the KAPD at the Second and Third Comintern Congresses and emigrated illegally to the Netherlands in 1926, tried to develop a council-communist alternative to capitalism. His starting point was that a developed communist society would have no market, no competition, no money and no prices. There would thus be only a natural economy, in which production and distribution would be regulated democratically. Appel countered the criticism of Von Mises and his co-thinkers that a rational economy would be unthinkable in such circumstances given the lack of an accounting unit (such as value), by proposing socially necessary labour time as the basis for such an accounting unit. Appel worked this idea out in a manuscript that was discussed and developed further in the Groups of International Communists. The result was published in 1930 as a ‘collective work’ under the title *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution.* The text would remain a subject of debate and undergo a series of revisions in the following years.

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42 Sirach 1933, p. 16.
43 Leichter 1923, Polányi 1922.
45 Not all council communists were enthusiastic about the *Fundamental Principles,* Anton Pannekoek found it at first ‘rather utopian, unreal’ (Pannekoek, 1982, p. 215).
The *Fundamental Principles* contain a wealth of analyses, tackling a wide range of problems of communist economic organisation: the role of small and middle peasants, for example, and priorities for deployment of resources in different phases of development. But the focus of its analysis is the issue of distribution mechanisms. The *Principles* divide a communist economy into two sectors: on the one hand ‘productive establishments’ that provide goods and services for which they receive compensation, and on the other hand ‘establishments for general social use’ (GSU establishments), which are not compensated for their output. A shoe factory, for example, is a productive establishment, a hospital a GSU establishment. Both sectors are made up of autonomous units in which the employees have complete freedom of decision. ‘Horizontal co-ordination’ among the different units results from the stream of products between them (in the form of means of production and consumer goods).46

The principle ‘supply according to need’ is realised in the GSU sector, but not in the other sector. In other words, total consumption by the population can be divided into an individual portion (products of the productive sector) and a collective portion (products of the GSU sector). In both sectors, fixed and circulating means of production (P) are processed with labour (L) in order to produce products. All components of the production process contain specific quantities of average social production time. Producers are rewarded for their efforts with labour certificates, worth for example ‘one hour of average social production time’.47 But not all hours worked are converted into labour certificates. An example can make this clearer. Let us suppose that all productive establishments as a whole in a given country consume 700 million work hours of P and 600 million work hours of L, and produce products worth 1,300 million work hours. Then, the productive sector needs 700 million work hours (P) in order to reproduce itself, leaving 600 million work hours for the rest of society. Let us further suppose that the GSU sector consumes 58 million

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46 Appel 1990, p. 147.
47 The *Principles* allow for the possibility that ‘in the early stages of a Communist society, it may at first be necessary that various intellectual occupations be remunerated at a higher level; that, for instance, 40 hours of labour gives the right to 80 or 120 hours of product. . . . At the beginning of the Communist form of society this could indeed be a just measure, if for instance the means of higher education were not available to everyone free of charge, because society is not yet sufficiently thoroughly organised on the new basis. As soon, however, as these matters have been ordered, then there can no longer be any question of giving the intellectual professions a larger share in the social product’, Appel 1990, pp. 56–7.
hours of P and 50 million work hours of L (with an output of 108 million work hours), so that this sector needs 58 million work hours (P) to reproduce itself. This means that total input in the form of labour (L) in the society is 650 million, while 600 – 58 = 542 million work hours is left for individual consumption. The so-called ‘Remuneration Factor’ or ‘Factor of Individual Consumption’ (FIC) is then 542 / 650 = 0.83. If a worker works 40 hours a week, she thus receives only labour certificates equivalent to 0.83 x 40 = 33.2 work hours.\(^{48}\)

As the communist society becomes more highly developed, the relative size of the GSU sector increases, so that, eventually, sectors such as food supply, transport, housing, etc. are also incorporated into it.\(^{49}\) Despite this tendency towards growth, however, the GSU sector will never be able to include the whole society, and the FIC will thus never be reduced to zero:

> Only those productive establishments which supply goods satisfying general needs will be amenable for transformation into the GSU type of establishment.

> A little thought will reveal that it will hardly ever be possible to include in the system of fully socialised distribution those many and varied articles and goods which reflect the special tastes dictated by various individual human interests of a specialised kind.\(^{50}\)

The *Principles’* core idea seemed to receive powerful support when Marx’s *Grundrisse* was published in 1939, including the passage:

> Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself. . . . Thus, economy of time, along with the planned distribution of labour time among the various branches of production, remains the first economic law on the basis of communal production. It becomes law, there, to an even higher degree. However, this is essentially different from a measurement of exchange values (labour or products) by labour time.\(^{51}\)

The *Fundamental Principles* played a role in council-communist discussions up until the 1970s, but mostly as a background text, since authors used ideas from it without mentioning their source.\(^{52}\)

\(^{48}\) Appel 1990, pp. 94–5.
\(^{49}\) Appel 1990, pp. 97–8.
\(^{50}\) Appel 1990, p. 100.
\(^{52}\) See, for example, Mattick 1968, in the chapter on ‘value and socialism’, or Castoriadis 1984, p. 330: ‘[Economic calculation in an autonomous society] ought to be carried out on the basis of the time spent working’. Castoriadis defended this


Scholarly research

Study of the history, theory and practice of council communism has developed in a very uneven way. Researchers have shown interest above all in the writings and biographies of the theorists who played a role in council communism. We have at least three monographs on Anton Pannekoek, plus an unpublished doctoral thesis. Herman Gorter was the subject of first a partial and then a complete biography. No one has yet written a life of Otto Rühle, but there are a few good analyses of his political and theoretical development. Works have also been published on some less prominent council communists (such as Sylvia Pankhurst and Jim Dawson). There has still been no thorough monograph on Paul Mattick, however. Several anthologies of writings by council-communist theoreticians, particularly by Pannekoek and Gorter, but also by Rühle, Mattick and Willi Huhn, have been published since the late 1960s. Pannekoek’s extensive memoirs are also available in book form, while later council communists put their memories down on paper as well or were interviewed at length. Works by Appel, Gorter, Pannekoek and others have been republished. A complete edition of Karl Korsch’s writings and correspondence, necessarily giving considerable attention to his council-communist tendencies, has reached an advanced stage. Good bibliographical overviews have been compiled for a number of important council communists.

position as early as 1957, after he had been in contact with Dutch council communists for a number of years. See also Seifert 1983.

53 Archives of most of the important council communists are to be found at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, including, among others, the papers of Canne Meijer, Huhn, Korsch, Mattick, Pannekoek, Pannekoek, Parkhurst and Rühle. Extensive information is available at <www.iisg.nl/archives>.


57 On Dawson, see Wright 1980. Much has been written about the twists and turns in Pankhurst’s life. The most useful works for our purposes seem to be Franchini 1980, Winslow 1996.


59 Pannekoek 1976.


61 Korsch 1980ff.

By now, we are also well provided with works on the narrative history of council communism as a movement. The history of the German organisations has been studied by Hans Manfred Bock, who not only wrote a standard work on the tumultuous events of 1918–23, but also reconstructed the later development of the movement up until the early 1970s. Philippe Bourrinet has described in detail the development of the Dutch movement (and its interaction with the German movement). Mark Shipway has studied council-communist influence in Britain (Sylvia Pankhurst, Guy Aldred and others).

While a good deal is thus known by now about council communism, there is still a dearth of thorough analyses. Some attention has been paid to the council communists’ views on capitalist breakdown and the council system, but their theoretical contributions merit more serious study. The Fundamental Principles, for example, have so far barely been subject to any discussion. Second, historical-materialist analysis of the current is still in its infancy. The application of Marxist analysis to Marxism itself, once advocated by Karl Korsch, is very much underdeveloped in this respect. Even the basic building blocks for an analysis are still lacking. There is, for instance, still no good overview of the KAPD’s history from its founding to its disappearance. On this point, we must be content with fragments. Virtually nothing is known about the practical and organisational functioning of the KAPD, its sister organisations and successors. We also know little about its social implantation and the sociology of its supporters. My impression is, for example, that the unemployed were very much over-represented among council communists of the 1920s and 1930s, but there is still no way to test this hypothesis empirically. A comparative historical study explaining why council communism became influential chiefly in Germany, while Dutch intellectuals who were marginal in their own country acquired such a disproportionate political weight in the movement, is equally to be hoped for.

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63 Bock 1993.
64 Bock 1976.
69 But see Bock 1976, pp. 93–8.
Results

Strict followers of council-communist doctrines are few in number today. It is difficult to draw up a balance sheet. Council communism was briefly a mass phenomenon in the early 1920s, and really took on its own distinctive identity only when the KAPD was already in decline – one could consider it a product of the German Revolution’s defeat. The rise of National Socialism was the coup de grâce for an already much weakened movement. After the Second World War, council communism remained a very marginal current among left-wing intellectuals for many years, although it acquired some influence in the international protest movements of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Council communism’s enduring influence seems to me to be mainly indirect. On the one hand, the movement has made a real contribution from a non-anarchist perspective to systematic suspicion of all ‘bureaucrats’ in the workers’ movement. On the other hand, it has shown just as systematically how forms of autonomously organised workers’ resistance continually manifest themselves anew. Its influence was visible, for example, in the Socialisme ou Barbarie group of Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and others, and even in currents that did not have a positive evaluation of council-oriented thinking, such as the workerism [operaismo] of Sergio Bologna, Antonio Negri, Karl Heinz Roth and others.

What remain of council communism concretely are mainly texts – texts that often seem quite dogmatic and one-sided, with a definite male bias and Eurocentric focus. Yet these texts nonetheless contain insights and warnings that we should not forget.70

Translated by Peter Drucker

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70 In addition to the literature already mentioned, I would like to refer to, for example, Willi Huhn’s publications about the German workers’ movement (Huhn 1952) and Cajo Brendel’s publications on Spain from the 1930s to the 1970s and on ‘autonomous class struggles in England, 1945–1972’ (Brendel 1974a, 1977).


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Liam Campling

Editorial Introduction to the Symposium on Marxism and African Realities

I

Africa’s developmental trajectory is often negatively typecast as an exemplar of a ‘new barbarism’. The refutation of such misleading formulations acts as a useful starting point for developing more nuanced and critical analyses. But the academic and popular denigration of African development also reflects the high stakes involved in the battle of discourses and attendant analytical frameworks. African social relations, political structures, economic organisation and, even, cultural and historical heritage are all too often perceived, even by many African commentators themselves, as corrupt, violent and backward. This hegemonic discourse permeates policy and academic
assessments of Africa and, subsequently, reduces the scope for understanding historical and political-economic forces and processes, including forms of popular politics and their limitations.

An important tool in demonstrating why this discourse is flawed derives from the methodology and conceptual framework of historical materialism. In a recent essay that explicitly calls for the re-invigoration of this methodology, Branwen Gruffydd Jones lays out a challenge to African Marxists and Marxist ‘Africanists’ in the present conjuncture. Her key purpose is to demonstrate that Africa’s crisis ‘is not natural, nor local in origin’. Instead, the most effective means for understanding Africa’s current situation lies in the logic of capital’s penetration of the continent:

Marx’s historical materialist method and theory of capital explains why capital is necessarily expansionary; why the plunder of Africa was an integral part of the primitive accumulation of western capital; why the reorganisation of Africa’s human and natural resources to meet the needs of Europe’s developing industries required colonial occupation and domination. . . . [T]he social relations of capital, combined with detailed historical investigation of the actual processes of imperial expansion in Africa over hundreds of years, reveals and explains the processes which produced the systematic impoverishment of the mass of Africa’s peoples, crippling their productive forces without developing them, not changing the mode of production but sucking it dry.\textsuperscript{2}

The contributors to this issue go some way to meeting Gruffydd Jones’s central claim – they unequivocally demonstrate the strengths of historical materialism in unravelling the negative forces and processes structuring African realities.\textsuperscript{3}

Yet, intertwined with Africa’s uneven insertion into the world economy are the progressive aspects and impacts of capitalism (albeit highly differentiated both within and between countries) and the forces of change generated (often unintentionally) by colonialism, ranging from the development of a productive base and strategies of accumulation to the emergence of progressive

\textsuperscript{2} Gruffydd Jones 2003. Original emphasis.

\textsuperscript{3} A central aspect of the contemporary ‘African crisis’ that bears mention here and that does not necessarily fit a focus on capitalism and imperialism per se, but does cut across and shape all of the concerns of the featured contributions, is the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS. See, for example, Bush 2004.
sociopolitical forces (issues that are addressed in some of the contributions featured here).

While this externally orientated focus on capitalism and imperialism (both old and ‘new’) as causal factors is indispensable to any analysis, it is equally imperative to provide due recognition and critical assessment of internal social relations and questions of political agency. Analytically, this would answer the well-documented flaws of dependency theory’s tendency to rely on an outside-in frame of reference, or the often justifiable charge of economic determinism. At the same time, an internal frame of reference on ‘ideal-type’ working-class struggle will not prove fruitful in the African context. As many contributors to this volume make clear, forms of struggle in Africa are multifaceted and potent (albeit often contradictory) sources of social transformation that must be understood and engaged with. Indeed, the state (and its persistent apparatus of repression), social class, gender, the role of compradorism, local causes of violent conflict and the ‘informal’ economy must (amongst other factors) all be integrated into any meaningful account of Africa’s political economy. At this point, it should be noted that the state has been the focal point as the agent for change in much left-wing (and right-wing) scholarship on Africa, but, as this symposium demonstrates, perhaps other agents of development and change need to examined more deeply and carefully.

This set of discrete elements that might (or should?) be considered in a nuanced materialist inquiry represent a serious challenge to any student of African political economy; but they also represent a set of historic and ongoing divisions on the Left; divisions that have yet to bemeaningfully bridged.

In addition to offering a cogent analytical framework, the Marxist Left has another moral and political role – the identification of tactics and strategies to fuel politically progressive forces on the continent and to deepen and sustain genuine political alliances between those based in core capitalist countries and those living in Africa itself. It is not enough simply to assert solidarity between core and periphery (a sentiment that is all too often based upon various layers of unevenness); it is hoped that this symposium provides an impetus to African activists and academics to take the lead in determining research agendas. Similarly, it is clear that, in the present conjuncture, it is not sufficient to state simply (often in a concluding paragraph) that capitalism’s weaknesses will be born out and that progressive political forces will save the day; such an outcome does not realistically appear to be on the foreseeable
horizon. Capitalism has demonstrated a remarkable ability to reproduce itself and to overcome crises, even in regions where its benefits are far from obvious — that is, for a vast array of African countries and citizens. Therefore, it is important to stress the logical corollary of any explication of contemporary capitalism in Africa (and elsewhere) — the potential within such analyses for identifying political space(s) for socialist (re)-organisation.

These political spaces are already, in part, making themselves apparent. While the legacies of African socialism(s) and Afro-Stalinism may still be employed to undermine or discredit contemporary African left movements (whether explicitly socialist, community-orientated or broadly politically progressive), in light of the newness of the current epoch this millstone has been radically reduced in weight. For example, the conjuncture of anticapitalist and antiwar movements in part demonstrates a deepening and widening of consciousness in the advanced capitalist core countries of African (and Third-World) realities. Moreover, it exposes a longer-term potential for the analytical and practical reconnection of these movements with the political struggles and practice of the African Left. Linked to these points, it is important to stress that this symposium touches upon and informs debates and concerns beyond its African focus and contexts. For example, the contributions on South Africa have resonance with wider debates on the ‘multitude’ versus the organised labour movement and the ‘vanguardist’ Left. The various positions on Zimbabwe echo the political and strategic dilemmas of the (often small) active socialist Left on other continents, wherein political space for progressives is squeezed between labour movements hegemonised by neoliberals on the one hand and authoritarian populist nationalism on the other. Additionally, the complexities and shifting dynamics of Africa’s peasant and agrarian questions in the face of a globalising and liberalising capitalism are pertinent throughout the Third World. In sum, concerns raised in this

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4 A significant section of the organisational base and impetus of the anticapitalist (or ‘global justice’) movement stemmed from the well-publicised global movement for the cancellation of Third-World debt. This campaign had obvious positive implications for African economies and the increased popular awareness of one dimension (structural debt) of a multifaceted Third World economic crisis was a positive outcome, but (unlike the vast majority of the anti-slavery movement in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain) it also had the effect of raising levels of political consciousness amongst substantial sections of the movement which encouraged connections beyond a ‘single-issue’ campaign to address the broader dynamics of neoliberal capitalism and its negative developmental impacts.

5 For a recent collection of materialist essays devoted to the struggles of the African Left(s) see Zeilig 2002.
symposium are both African and global, and thus refract and reflect back on similar debates going on the Left worldwide.

We do not claim to overcome these difficulties or to answer all of these questions, of course. Instead, we make the more modest claim that this collection contributes to a re-evaluation of historical materialism in the African context, both as a legitimate and nuanced conceptual framework and as a politically emancipatory tool. This claim must be set in the historic context of the marginalisation of the relationship between Marxist theory and African realities; a development that is reflected over the past two decades by the almost complete absence of books that aim to overtly link and re-energise this relationship. Even within important left journals such as the Review of African Political Economy direct explication of this relationship has become less common; a recent exception to this trend is a special issue on ‘Africa’s Complex Globalisation’ edited by Sarah Bracking and Graham Harrison, which this symposium hopes to complement and engage with.

II

A key objective behind this symposium was to provide the readership of Historical Materialism with a snapshot of the variety of contemporary Marxist analysis as applied to Africa. At the same time, of course, there is no claim whatsoever to comprehensiveness. Of the lacunae of this issue, the Editors are particularly conscious of the relative absence of black African contributors; this is a concern that reflects the real sociopolitical contradictions of our world, which this journal and the Marxist tradition more generally are never immune from. But it is also a manifestation of inadequate organic political linkages between the Left in the advanced capitalist core and in Africa. Another contributing factor is the disappointing level of transmission of the Marxist tradition across generations (while, admittedly, a problem throughout the world, it seems to be particularly apparent in the African context). As one influential scholar of African studies wrote to this Editor, ‘I guess we didn’t sufficiently reproduce Marxism amongst our students’. Based upon correspondence with several Africanists and Africans, she is not wrong. But there are other determinants at work.

Many African universities and research institutes are struggling to survive in the context of austerity programmes and national balance of payments

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6 See their introduction, Bracking and Harrison 2003.
deficits, often resulting in demonstrations against cut-backs which, in turn, have been met with brutal state suppression. Radical scholars within these institutions are fighting the decades-long onslaught of neoliberal indoctrination (and its variants) propagated by the international financial institutions (IFIs), regional and sub-regional bodies, bilateral donors and a number of non-governmental organisations. Similarly, in general terms, a record of left scholarship is less likely to qualify individuals for consultancies and similar lucrative opportunities – often an essential supplement to meagre university (and other) salaries in many African countries. Finally, there is a (primarily structural) tendency for the flow of knowledge on the global South to be assessed from the outside-in, that is, African and Africanist scholars will publish in North America and Europe and intellectual ownership remains there – a form of intellectual elitism that may well contribute to a lack of confidence among African writers to carve out their own terrain of enquiry.

However, all is not entirely bleak. The African intellectual Left has demonstrated a lasting resilience and continues to express itself in a number of forms. While research institutes with a more progressive and critical output are few and far between, they do exist – some notable examples outside of South Africa are the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), based in Dakar and co-ordinated by Adebayo Olukoshi, the Southern Africa Political Economy Series (SAPES) Trust, based in Harare and headed by Ibbo Mandaza, and the nascent African Institute for Advanced Study at Porto Novo under the guidance of Paulin Hountondji. In addition, universities are beginning to actively re-evaluate their roles and re-establish themselves in a number of countries. And despite the material and ideational constraints, a relatively vibrant tradition of radical scholarship is evident in (and outside of) universities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Furthermore, while taking into account the vast digital divide between core and periphery, for those with access, the internet is developing as a key tool for progressive

7 See for example the recent series of studies published by the excellent James Currey: Cooksey et al. 2003, Mario et al. 2003, Musisi and Muwanga 2003.
8 See, for example, Abdelkader 2002.
9 The eight-volume UNESCO General History of Africa was a significant and explicit step towards re-aligning this flow, albeit of varied quality.
10 For more information see: <www.codesria.org>, <www.sapes.co.zw>. News of the recently launched African Institute for Advanced Study was received through personal correspondence with Hountondji.
11 Despite the context of economic crisis and limited state funding, Cooksey et al. 2003, Mario et al. 2003, Musisi and Muwanga 2003, all identify positive dimensions and possibilities for progressive contestation in the university systems surveyed.
forces in Africa, with web-based list servers, discussion groups and e-journals having increasing importance as sites of progressive political discussion.\textsuperscript{12}

If socialists in the North want to see the (re)circulation of Marxist ideas in Africa, they must continue to build upon these existing endeavours to support (morally, politically, logistically and operationally) their African counterparts. One partial outcome of such support will be to reverse the knowledge flow, so that Africans are \textit{leading} and \textit{defining} the intellectual terrain of contemporary Marxist African studies. Linked to this is the crucial importance of keeping alive the radical archives – documents, oral histories and video footage must be properly recorded and stored for the permanent re-evaluation and assessment of the historiography of left movements in Africa.

From the outset of this project, the editorial mandate was open-ended: contributions were invited from authors influenced by a wide array of Marxist and Marxian tendencies spanning disciplinary strictures. Linked to this was the aim for the symposium (and this journal more generally) to break down often dogmatic, mechanical and/or economistic assumptions of class analysis in the African context. These assumptions were often formed when many African and Africanist Marxists were swept along with the early current of optimism in post-independence Africa and programmes of state-led development in ‘socialist’-orientated African countries\textsuperscript{13} only to be dragged down in the whirlpool of Afro-pessimism by the late 1970s. Writing in these more sober (and sombre) times – well over a decade since the collapse of the Soviet Union, twenty-five years since the institutionalisation of the first structural adjustment programme in Africa (in Ghana in 1979) and in the wake of the postmodern turn – the need for critical materialist analysis is self-evident. This symposium clearly illustrates the ongoing relevance and application of this need; and, in spite of the fact that the contributors were

\textsuperscript{12} Some of (many) highlights in English are: a list serve, online resource centre and excellent source of book reviews H-Net Africa <http://www.h-net.org/~africa>; Z-Net Africa Watch <http://www.zmag.org/racewatch/africawatch.clm>; the civil-society online resource centre and host of a diverse range of African mailing lists (which are helpfully classified under the rubrics: Working Groups, Networks, Newsletters and Conferences) at Kabissa <http://www.kabissa.org> (including the excellent list-serve ‘Debate’); the popular Pambazuka News weekly information service <www.pambazuka.org>; the online resource centre of the advocacy and research organisation The Africa Forum and Network on Debt and Development <http://www.afrodad.org/>; and the advocacy and online resource centre of the Southern African Regional Poverty Network <http://www.sarpn.org.za>.

\textsuperscript{13} Notable exceptions, among others, were a series of essays written in the 1960s by Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, collected in Arrighi and Saul 1973.
not constrained by prescriptive editorial direction, three broad crosscutting themes can be identified.

**Challenging hegemonic discourse: (re-)evaluating Marxist analysis in the African context**

Paul Idahosa and Bob Shenton employ a sketch of African history from the precolonial to the contemporary eras to demonstrate the ‘compromised modernity’ of the post-independence African state. They argue that processes of national development and state building in the nineteenth century were compromised by European imperialism, the corresponding anti-slavery movement and the increased (and forced) insertion of African economies into the capitalist world economy. The colonisers implemented policies of ‘pacification’ (although, in many areas, this was only a ‘thin’ conquest), imposed often highly repressive direct and indirect taxation, and institutionalised ‘customary’ legal systems that drew upon false and romanticised notions of ‘tribe’ (a development that has had a powerful and lasting legacy). However, with the exception of the ‘white settler colonies’, these policies were not intended to build a modern state along the lines of that in the imperial heartlands. Of course, Africans were not mere passive recipients of these polices: diverse forms of resistance ranging from ‘weapons of the weak’ to urban strikes and riots, would feed into eventual decolonisation. But decolonisation itself became a process that was structured by the compromised modernity of colonialism, leading almost all post-independence leaders to pursue one form or another of ‘national development’, yet almost all preferred to pursue this path without class conflict. It is here that Idahosa and Shenton reach a central (and unresolved) paradox:

Regardless of professed political orientation, all such projects were, in reality, examples of state-led economic and social development for the simple reason that no other agency . . . was believed to exist. As such, these projects presumed the existence of a modern state capable of bearing the developmental burden. However, no such state existed. . . . Therefore, national development had to be as much about the building of a modern state as about development itself.

When the debt crisis emerged in force in Africa in the early 1980s, it was this last point that ‘the high priests of IFI policy’ failed to understand – by ‘setting
an axe’ to the state (albeit corrupt and inefficient), they tore up ‘the social contract of independence’, contributing to the violence of the 1990s that shattered so many African societies.

Based upon this broad assessment, Idahosa and Shenton raise a number of important questions for the African and Africanist Left: are our conceptions of modernity in the African context a pretext of a false dawn? Consequently, do ‘national development’ and development-orientated accumulation strategies hold any credence in the present conjuncture? These are urgent and difficult issues that remain to be addressed satisfactorily by the Left.

Henry Bernstein considers several approaches to ‘peasant’ farming in sub-Saharan Africa and its dynamics of commodification. These include views of why commodification is blocked (and how to free it) according to neoclassical economics and other modernisation frameworks, and the political economy of the influential American scholar of African agrarian change, Sara Berry. He then briefly reviews some important contributions of materialist analysis on Africa. From there, he provides, and illustrates, a summary account of aspects of a theoretical framework that he has been developing. This tries to embrace and explain several features of modern African history: the formation of generalised commodity production and pervasive capitalist social relations among African peasantries; why these class dynamics, and their contradictions, are not manifested in phenomenally evident classes of landed property, agrarian capital and labour; and the generally stagnating productivity of agricultural petty commodity production in the current period of Africa’s more general ‘crisis’ of development. Finally, Bernstein relates his argument to the ‘lineages’ of the agrarian question in the historical-materialist tradition, suggesting why sub-Saharan Africa appears to be the zone of the contemporary world most resistant to resolution of the (‘classic’) agrarian question in its various aspects. The strategic conclusion of his analysis is that today’s extensive ‘crisis’ is a crisis of the forms of ‘actually existing’ capitalism that have emerged in Africa’s modern history, rather than manifesting the lack of development of an (idealised) ‘fuller’ or ‘more rational’ capitalism.

Carlos Oya’s essay complements Bernstein’s theoretical argument concerning the commodification of agriculture, and its forms of ‘inter- and intra-household differentiation’ (original emphasis), by challenging empirically the popular myth of peasant homogeneity in Africa. In an analysis of his own fieldwork material from Senegal, Oya applies theoretical insights on class differentiation in agriculture, including those generated by powerful materialist debates in
India. His broader theoretical and methodological framework and sophisticated survey design demonstrate the utility of Marxism applied to complex structures and dynamics of rural class formation. He concludes that variant farm size is not a reliable indicator nor determinant of class status, especially among larger farmers, but rather carefully shows that social relations are the key determinants underlying patterns of the distribution of farm size.

The contribution by Alejandro Colás is partly complemented by that of Idahosa and Shenton with their precolonial overview of, amongst others, Mediterranean-bordering African countries and their central concern with the crisis of the postcolonial state. Colás takes up this sub-theme of state crisis and provides a useful theoretical contribution through the often-ignored category of ‘populism’ and applies it to the resurgence of political Islam since the 1970s (more on this below). He then identifies three ‘axes’ of Islamic populism – general crisis, corruption and the delegitimisation of the state, and a variety of anticolonialism; these axes, he contends, have led to cross-class (or ‘populist’) support for Islamist parties and movements. Colás concludes his analysis with some key theoretical implications, one of which is particularly pertinent for Marxism: in order to deepen analyses of ‘the politics of combined and uneven development’, Marxists must re-visit concepts such as ‘populism’, learn from them and scrutinise the causes of political allegiance other than that of social class.

Christopher Wise examines the study of Sahelian literature and its concomitant rich oral pretexts. He draws on a regional (‘geo-thematic’) methodology, maintaining that ‘geo-cultural and/or regional approaches to African literary study remain by far the least baleful among a variety of present-day theoretical alternatives’. He uses the imperial travelogue as an entry mechanism to assess and reverberate African voices and to illustrate the ‘textualist bias’ of Western (including Marxist) critiques of African writing. Wise provides a powerful critique of the work of Mary Louise Pratt (a prominent American scholar of comparative literature), and goes on to argue that while the aural-word is a sign that must be recognised especially when trying to understand West African realities, the ‘anti-literary bias’ of much postcolonial literary criticism must be treated with extreme caution. The lesson for Marxism, he argues, is to forever respect ‘the West-African context in its specificity and irreducible difference’; only then can we be rid of the shackles of Eurocentrism.
New imperialism and capitalist crisis

The ‘new’ imperialism is an old term – applied especially to the period of the ‘Scramble for Africa’ of the late nineteenth century – but it has particular resonance at the present conjuncture, as will be obvious to this journal’s readership. Contributions by Patrick Bond, Ray Bush and Alex Nunn and Sophia Price explicitly assess ‘new’ and old forms of imperialist penetration in Africa.

Drawing upon a rich legacy of Marxist debate on financial imperialism, Bond traces the historical trajectory of financial power in Africa from colonialism to the present. He argues that capitalist development in Africa is ‘bankrupt’, both from the perspectives of social and ecological well-being as well as potential capital accumulation strategies (a point that resonates with Bernstein, Idahosa and Shenton, and Moore). A primary cause of this bankruptcy is the destructive logic of the financial circuitry of global capital, which acts as an intermediary in the process of uneven development and the new imperialism. Complementing and often hosting this intermediary is (and has been) the ‘sub-imperial’ power of the South-African government, which today acts to legitimate and extend neoliberalism (in both material and ideational senses) to a host of other African countries.

As Bond points out, financial capitalism in Africa is primarily oriented to the exploitation of the continent’s vast mineral wealth, an issue that the article by Ray Bush takes up in far more detail. Bush illustrates the continued prevalence of primary commodities in African production systems and the predominant flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) to exploit rich mineral resources. However, the mining of Africa’s abundant mineral resources has rarely resulted in the broader development of the FDI recipient countries. An apolitical, asocial and deterministic tendency in many studies of the Third World argues that this is due to a ‘resource curse’, a concept that maintains ‘an inverse relationship between resource endowment and economic growth’. Bush asks us to see beyond this ‘curse’ to ‘the institutional and class basis of accumulation strategies’; this in turn, ‘helps offer an explanation for the potential links between violence and forms of resistance to the internationalisation of capital’. That is, politics not resources per se has played the central role in the failure of ‘development’ in Africa and it is politics that explains ‘the failure for wealth to be distributed widely and evenly’ leading to a range of (often violent) social and political animosities.
Focusing primarily on Africa’s external relations in the global political economy, Nunn and Price utilise the critical insights of materialist neoGramscian theory (drawing particularly on the work of Stephen Gill) to trace a history of the European Union’s (EU) policy regime with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Despite a period of brief and very partial acknowledgment of the structural inequalities of the international trading system during the tumultuous 1970s, over the last decade and more, the EU has adapted a project of ‘re-designing’ African political economies with the end-result of increasingly ‘locking-in’ their policy options to the liberalising agenda of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In light of the present process of ‘re-designing’ the ACP countries into regional groupings (Economic Partnership Agreements), deepening conformity to WTO rules appears to many African governments as the only viable ‘developmental’ option, especially if they need to maintain the influx of EU aid and preferential trade access to lucrative European markets. For Nunn and Price, the outcome, with reference to the work of Dot Keet, is the surrender of ‘important future policy options for individual governments; options that may well be required in changing national, regional or global circumstances’.

**Forms of resistance and evaluating left organisation**

Resistance to capitalism in Africa (as elsewhere) reveals itself in old familiar forms and new creative ones. And, of course, not all resistance suits the palate of the Left (for example, Islamism) – especially the ‘traditional’ Left – but it is resistance nonetheless and critical materialists must engage with its causes and manifestations. The contributors to this volume present us with several urgent lessons for moving beyond ‘traditional’ understandings of resistance and left-wing organisation in Africa.

Bond offers some substantive tactical insights in his reflections on mass Third-World social movements. Having provided an overview of classical and contemporary Marxist readings of global finance, Bond turns to a new wave of African and international activism that explicitly targets the foundations of financial power, particularly of the international financial institutions. Most importantly, he argues, these movements have identified a number of vulnerabilities of financial power and, significantly, have made direct linkages between these and the political power of US-led empire.

In his analysis of the resurgence of Islamism, Colás presents some important
perspectives as to why this movement of resistance has harnessed such political force and durability. Not the least of these is that Islamism rests on the channelling of ‘the discontents of capitalist development... into a distinctly populist form of protest’. Combined with this are extensive and sophisticated networks of mosques and their provision of welfare where the debt- and crisis-ridden postcolonial state has retreated to an often minimalist social role. While Colás maintains that the apex (to date) of the political power of Islamism passed with the 1979 Iranian Revolution, it is clear that the cross-class nature of this form of resistance to global capitalism represents a significant challenge to socialist organisation and Marxist theory.

Brian Raftopolous and Ian Phimister consider the ‘Zimbabwean crisis’ – a controversial topic for the Left which was broached in prior pages of this journal. While they are cognisant of the context of imperialism and ‘globalisation’, the focus of their analysis here is on ‘the complementary dynamics of domestic tyranny and developmental collapse’, particularly on the constraints of the postcolonial state. Raftopolous and Phimister start with an overview of the political economy of the 1990s – a decade of limited economic growth, declining wages and extensive, and unsustainable, social expenditure – which saw the re-emergence of an active labour movement that harnessed a broader alliance of anti-ZANU PF social forces on one hand, and internal dissent within ZANU PF with the rising activism of the ‘war veterans’ on the other. Set against this backdrop, they examine the land occupations from 2000 onwards, and it is here that they engage with a series of diverging interpretations on the Left. They argue that most of these interpretations do not sufficiently capture the importance (and centrality) of rising levels of state violence and repression. After presenting a broad array of statistical data to demonstrate that land reform has not resulted in a positive or sustainable strategy of accumulation, they conclude by arguing that a great deal more theoretical work is required on the nature of the postcolonial state and African (primitive) accumulation strategies in order for the Zimbabwean (and African) Left to offer a powerful democratic resistance to neoliberal capitalist hegemony.

In his ‘Note’ David Moore engages squarely with Left debates on and in Zimbabwe (including the article by Raftopolous and Phimister in this volume). He divides these debates into two broad tendencies or categories which call

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14 Yeros 2002.
attention to different ‘rights’: i) ‘patriotic agrarianists’ who emphasise the centrality of state sovereignty (and force) and its role in promoting and protecting the socio-economic rights of certain classes; and, ii) global ‘critical cosmopolitans’ who promote the right to democratic participation in material production, but who also hold dear the political and civil rights of representation and freedom. Moore then assesses these two broad categories in the light of three sub-themes pertinent to a materialist framework: the state and primitive accumulation; land tenure and productivity; and, classes and the state. He concludes by stating that contemporary Zimbabwe has created a significant dilemma for the Left, not the least yet another substantive dividing line that discourages unity and promotes infighting, and argues that ‘simple principles and light theory’ should win the day.

The contributions by Franco Barchiesi and Ashwin Desai converge on a number of points – the ascent and institutionalisation of neoliberalism in the post-apartheid South-African state, attendant problems for the Left and the rise of new forms of resistance – but, in order to summarise their individual merits and emphases, they should be considered separately. The central problématique of Barchiesi’s article is the manner in which an emancipatory project can be (re)configured by the Left in the context of shifting discourses, the collapse of much waged employment and the concomitant decline of a materially united working class. ‘Civil society’ as a site for emancipatory transformation is brought into critical question, in opposition to the hegemonic discourse of ‘empowerment’ so often voiced by ‘donor’ agencies (a concern that is also raised in Idahosa and Shenton). He traces the emergence of the ANC legitimation of neoliberalism with left-wing rhetoric – echoed by Desai when he notes the cynical use of ‘the struggle’ by ‘mystified heroes’ to disguise layers of deepening material impoverishment – and points out the impotence of much of the ‘traditional’ South-African Left in contesting this and putting forward alternatives. Barchiesi then turns to burgeoning forms of resistance to the neoliberal state in the context of deepening under- and unemployment, what he calls ‘grassroots subjectivities’. His focus is on urban social movements which, in the main, have tended to avoid alliances with traditional left-wing trade unions (which they often distrust) and represent disparate social groupings, from unemployed youths to senior citizens. His conclusion is open-ended: it is difficult to say at the present moment how far these movements can unite and co-operate to achieve common goals. What is clear is that they represent a vibrant and creative social force that materialist theory and practice must understand and support.
Desai focuses on the community movements of ‘the poors’ – a diverse range of groupings who place ‘direct action at the heart of their activities’. He argues that a ‘practical, local magic’ is at work; a magic that has not depended upon traditional left-wing party building. Like Barchiesi and Bond, he highlights the fact that the South-African state is at the service of capital and the IFIs, a neoliberal orientation that has displaced the traditional Left, either through direct and indirect co-option – by placing the Left on the defensive in the context of spiralling jobs losses and the notion of the competition state – or though the nationally hegemonic discourse of the ANC as liberator and only true leader of ‘the struggle’. Desai provides a sketch of the various community movements of ‘the poors’ that have risen, in particular, in reaction to the commodification of basic services and the subsequent enforcement of user fees. While it is not certain how these movements will be mobilised in a more formal political sense, Desai points out that a number of people’s assemblies are taking shape, potentially the first post-apartheid organic grassroots political mobilisation, and – of perhaps ‘magical’ importance for Marxists – a formation of resistance that is explicitly anticapitalist.

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This symposium appears to demonstrate a paradox: the ongoing relevance and urgency of materialist analysis of Africa combined with the vexed historical relationship between Marxist theory (and political practice) and African realities. Historical Materialism does not believe that this paradox is irresolvable; in fact, the contributors to this volume point us in a very rich and fruitful direction. In spite of this, the explicit hope and intention of this journal is that this collection acts as a spark to re-ignite a process of open debate, re-evaluation and critique amongst African/Africanist Marxists. Historical Materialism is dedicated to acting as a theoretical space and practical forum for this process, and, as such, this symposium represents an open invitation for future contributions on Africa. It is only through such genuine engagement that can we hope to resolve the tensions between, and thus reconnect, Marxist analysis and African realities.

References


The Africanist’s ‘New’ Clothes

Introduction

Perhaps nowhere has the loss of the many intellectual positions attendant upon the global rout of the Left been more evident than in attempts to understand the political catastrophes and human tragedies that have beset Africans.¹ Despite insights into instances such as Rwanda, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there is no convincing explanation for the African débâcle in general.

A much-discussed Economist article rhetorically entitled ‘Hopeless Africa?’ typifies the views of the ‘informed’ press. This and like commentaries provide no framework within which Africa’s woes become intelligible as anything more than an atavism generated by innate African barbarism, the machinations of corrupt dictatorial rulers, the incompetent misguided policies of the UN, or – for the nostalgic – the machinations of Western imperialism.²

¹ This article was submitted in 2002. We would like to thank Geoff Kay, Scott MacWilliam, and Ato Sekyi-Out for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any errors remain our own.

In academia, the hegemonic explanation is that African states lack the capacity for ‘governance’; that African states lack transparency in their operation, accountability in the formulation and results of their policies, and predictable regularity in their day-to-day workings.3 These deficiencies are understood to result from the prevalence of ‘neo-patrimonialism’, forms of state rule are personalised and thus subject to the whims and caprices of rulers who stay in power by dispensing punishments and favours in ways opaque, unaccountable, and unpredictable to both their own peoples, self-styled benefactors and would-be investors.4

One of the more influential variants of patrimonialist thought is ‘prebendalism’. Prebends, in Weber’s analysis of the transition to the modern state, were offices gifted to an inferior in feudal Europe that carried with them fixed rent payments for life arising out of some fixed resource such as land in compensation for real or notional duties. In recent theory, Weber’s analytical tool has been superimposed willy-nilly on present-day African reality because ‘the peculiar political economic conditions of the post-colonial world have contributed to the entrenchment of a form of state organisation, and of attitudes regarding the uses of state office, which are pre-modern’. Here, ‘instead of the constitutional and legal systems, as well as the stated impersonal norms, determining the form of this state organisation, such legal rational features largely serve to camouflage extensive prebendal practices’.5 Significantly, an idea set out to theorise the birth of the modern state in Western Europe becomes one which, when applied to present-day Africa, assumes the very existence of what – the state – it was originally intended to explain. Also interesting is how such a culturalist explanation comes to supplant both political economy and history, and find profound resonance within debates about Africa today.

This and like ‘theories’ of the state have filled the space vacated by the Left.6

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3 Grindle 1996, pp. 31–8. See Abrahamsen 2000 for a critique of governance’s discourse pretension, consonance with minimal procedural democracy and the regulatory and extractive aims of adjustment.
5 See Richard Joseph 1991, pp. 55–68. In the postwar and early postcolonial decades, Weber inspired and spawned the modernisation and comparative development literature on the political-cultural dimension of politics and development, of patron-clients, of ‘prismatic’ and ‘bazaar’ societies, which Joseph’s account, like much of the recent literature, is both an amendment of and a re-turn to. See Weber 1970 [1948], pp. 198–210, 295ff.
6 Despite, that is, recent valiant updated African Weberian attempts to resuscitate them. See, for example, Samatar and Samatar 2002.
Such theories have found favour in multilateral and bilateral financial and development institutions as justification for the replacement of state enterprise and regulation with ‘market-driven forces’. However, ‘deregulation’ in Africa, as elsewhere, has necessitated re-regulation. The ‘market-driven’ economy, it has been found, cannot be created without enforceable uniform rules and laws to predictably enforce contracts and this desired substantive rationality of government requires competent and committed officials and institutions.

Thus, from the early 1990s, International Financial Institution (IFI) policy shifted from a simple advocacy of ‘market reforms’ to an increasing pre-occupation with ‘building’ the ‘capacity’ of Africa’s depleted bureaucracies. In academia, the pre-occupation with ‘civil society’ as the supposed antidote to the arbitrary caprices of supposedly neo-patrimonial, prebendal, authoritarian rulers arose co-evally. Civil society, here (not to be confused with the civil society of classical political thought), meant any group or ‘community’ of people – women, trade unionists, professionals, and of course, ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs) – whose behaviour was seen as conforming to an international standard of bourgeois morality or what, in a less self-conscious age, had been termed ‘civilised’ behaviour.

Under 1980s and 1990s structural adjustment programmes, already faltering African sectors of state provision approached collapse. Derisively or completely unpaid front-line government employees turned to what in Uganda came to be referred to as the ‘magendo’ economy in which their time and whatever official resources they could command were turned toward the simple end of personal survival. Externally funded NGOs, first from abroad, then increasingly indigenous, filled some of the gaps in these sectors through the ‘placement’ of often insufficiently competent but low-cost ‘volunteers’. As the budgets of NGOs directly depended on such placements, they operated in symbiosis with the IFIs with which they remained publicly at daggers drawn. The wheel turned full-circle when indigenous NGOs, sometimes staffed by the very former employees of the government agencies whose activities they

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7 See World Bank 1997 on the watershed moment of a movement towards ‘re-statism’ and the consideration of governance as a means. For general discussions of the policy shifts, see Abrahamsen 2000, Sandbrook 2000, pp. 12–19.

had supplanted, became NGO ‘volunteers’ whose activities were routinely, if ironically, justified under the doctrine of ‘empowerment’.9

The anti-statism of IFI and NGO ideology garnered intellectual support from late 1960s radicals in the West disenchanted with the ‘oppression’ of the centralised social work, educational, and health provision systems of the welfare state.10 Their calls for greater local ‘community’ control and ‘participation’ were appropriated by the neoliberal of the 1980s who used these as partial justifications for attacks on welfare-state provision in the West.11 Co-evally, the failures of state-led development in Africa also called forth an anti-statism that also drew upon 1960s radicalism.12 Moreover, currents in postmodernist thought – that had originally been set out as part of an historical inquiry into the nature and location of political power in the movement from premodern to modern states in Western Europe and which had also sought the deconstruction of all complex social and political entities and routinely emphasised the cultural over the material – were now stylishly appropriated by radical critics of statist development in Africa.13

The prevailing anti-statism of the late 1980s and early 1990s was further reinforced on the Left by the pseudo-theoretical rhetoric of post-Marxist civil society in which, often via an ahistorical reading of Gramsci, post-Second-World-War liberal American interest-group pluralism was revived under the rubric of ‘new social movements’. These movements – environmental, feminist, consumerist, aboriginal, and communitarian – were to be substituted for a ‘racist’, ‘sexist’, and ‘ecologically unsound’ proletariat that had failed as the agent of progressive change.14 Power was seen equally resident in everything that could be ‘identified’. As neo-Stalinism in the East was supposedly overthrown by civil society, the latter was appropriated as the vehicle by which the despotisms of Africa could be similarly dispatched. Democratisation, seen by some in the early days of African independence as an impediment to ‘modernisation’, now became all the rage,15 while civil society, imbued

10 Brewer and Lait, pp. 106–16.
11 A current illustration is the G.W. Bush US administration’s ‘faith based’ social welfare policy initiative.
14 Laclau and Mouffe 1985.
15 Joseph 1991a, p. 11. See Bienen 1971, Tordoff 1997, Decalo 1998 for how much the military and one-party states were once hailed as modernisers in the first phases.
with bourgeois morality, was assigned the ‘heroic’ tasks of African revolution that had once been projected onto African workers and peasants.\textsuperscript{16}

These tasks included ‘peace-building’,\textsuperscript{17} the overthrow of corrupt dictators through ‘people power’, as well as the establishment of norms for the smooth workings of the market and prevention of neo-patrimonial practices. Moreover, civil society was, through NGO ‘volunteers’, to provide those services – health, education, and so forth – that were no longer entrusted to state provision.

As DRC, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia ceased to exist in any meaningful way, and as Angola, Burundi, Sudan and even such once estimable polities as Algeria, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe tottered on the brink of the political abyss, the latter 1990s saw the beginnings of disillusionment with civil society as Africa’s messiah. In Zambia, where much hailed ‘movements of civil society’ had forced out one long running dictator through a ‘people power’ inspired ‘transition to democracy’, it was soon realised that the new régime bore more than a little resemblance, in both persons and practices, to the old.\textsuperscript{18} One response of mainstream theorists has been to emphasise the cultural depth of African neo-patrimonialism. An older literature on ‘amoral familialism’ is invoked to explain how African family and kinship predisposes Africans to corruption – a word that increasingly appeared between culturally relativist inverted commas. Similar pseudo-anthropological explanations are advanced for the supposed lack of ‘trust’ among Africans. Such depictions imply an alien cultural modern grafted onto African ‘tradition’ producing a hybrid in which public/private distinctions have collapsed and to which accountability and transparency could be restored only through the imposed ‘discipline’ of the ‘international community’.\textsuperscript{19}

In apparent – not real – opposition are the culturalist analyses of postmodern or postcolonial writers who stand the political disfunctionality of the patrimonialist analysis on its head. These writers argue that ‘Africa works’ according to a unique continental idiom in which individuals and régimes successfully manipulate external forces to maintain their legitimacy not despite, but because, politics are personal, informal and never ‘functionally separated

\textsuperscript{16} Mamdani et al. 1993.
\textsuperscript{17} UNDP 1997, McRae and Leader 2000, pp. 2–4.
\textsuperscript{19} Banfield 1958, Bayart 1993, Chabal and Daloz 1999. See Olukoshi’s 1998 summary of these positions.
from society’ or the ‘communities’ on whose behalf they resourcefully succeed. Here, inability to accumulate because potential capital is ‘chopped and quenched’ by a distributional clientelistic ‘politics of the belly’ is seen as Africa’s problem.20

Such renditions rarely invoke Africa’s real history. Rather, reminiscent of the hypothetical histories of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ethnologists, Africa is seen as inhabited by a politically promiscuous ‘horde’ from which the political analogue of the respectably bourgeois monogamous family has yet to emerge. Such views mesh neatly with the general acceptance that it was African sexual promiscuity – rather than economic poverty – that was responsible for the continental pandemic of HIV and AIDS.21 They also allow Africa to reassume its time-honoured place as the land on to which the West projects the anxieties that arise from fears of social chaos closer to home. Hegel, but only as a caricature, re-arises to re-iterate that Africa was politically the land of perpetual ‘childhood’.

Abortive nineteenth-century national development and state building

The wave of modernity that broke upon the African continent from the outset of the nineteenth century was comprised of three interrelated forces: European empire building, the fitful suppression of the extra-African slave trade, and the expanded integration of African commodity production into a burgeoning world market. These called forth varying responses including increasingly self-conscious projects of what would later be called national development. Because the establishment of the existence and the fate of these early projects, routinely forgotten by present-day writers, is essential to our argument we recount the more trenchant examples here.22

Whether inspired by capitalism, communism or by appeals to past glories, national development, in Africa as elsewhere, became the ever more self-conscious answer to the problem of how to resist foreign domination over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over this period, a new understanding of development as the possibility that intentional action could

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20 Bayart 1993.
22 We are not subscribing to the Hegelian view of Africa being awakened from its historical slumbers by Europe; rather, that Africa’s previous historical changes were ones that had been orientated elsewhere.
be taken to redress what were understood to be chaotic shortcomings – poverty, unemployment, loss of national ‘productive force’ – of the unintentional ‘progressive development’ of the Scottish Enlightenment. Although theorised by Western thinkers such as Alexander Hamilton for the then immediately postcolonial United States, and in classic form by Friedrich List for Germany, fledgling attempts at intentional national development were undertaken simultaneously outside the West.  

All such attempts necessitated the creation of at least partially modernised states. Such states increasingly sought to forge new formal political and educational institutions, legal systems, and proprietary structures, as well as informal arrangements of partnership among officials and citizens, the employment of new opportunities for trade and profitable production, and finally, the creation of appropriate social (that is, class) relations. Africa’s Egypt was second only to the United States in attempting to create such a modern developmental state.

Not coincidentally, the historical moment of Hegel’s speculation was also that in which the highly variegated premodern polities of Africa were first spurred to attempt to become modern. This was primarily through increasingly self-conscious projects of national development as a means of resisting the wave of European imperialism that began with the short-lived Napoleonic conquest of Egypt.

In 1798, the Mameluk Beys of Egypt, autonomous within the Ottoman Empire, proved incapable of resisting invasion by Napoleon. With much English help, the Ottoman Porte attempted to re-occupy Egypt and forestall a Mameluk restoration through the use of imperial forces under Mehemet Ali. Impressed by European power, Mehemet Ali, the son of an Albanian farmer, set out to create a modern Egyptian army and fleet. The continued weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the pre-occupation of the European powers with Napoleon initially permitted him the space. He became the

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23 Cowen and Shenton 1996.
24 Bagchi 2000, Gerschenkron 1962, Mkandawire 2001 identifies the ideological and structural aspects of developmental states. The ideological stresses the normative; the structural the capacity side of institutional, technical, administrative and political development. Underscoring these are the Hegelian-Weberian notions of autonomy of the state from social forces such that it can utilise its capacities to plan durable economic policies unfettered by demands of self-serving private interests. This is part of how the notion of national, as economic, interest was created: states are invested with primary agency and trusteeship of bringing progress and development, above and separate from classes.
unchallenged ruler of an increasingly expansionist Egypt that laid claim to much of the Arabian Peninsula and present-day Sudan. Territorial expansion, centralisation of government finance, along with the nationalisation of much land and commerce were key components of Mehemet Ali’s project. His modernised military required both manning and money and was at the same time his means of acquiring both. Mameluk lands were seized and nationalised while tax farming was replaced by heavy exactions paid directly by fellahin to the state. Corvée labour was employed, state monopolies of commodity production and commerce introduced and, in the absence of the hoped-for gold of the southern Sudan, ivory and, most importantly, slaves were captured and bought to increase the manpower for the army, agriculture and nascent industry. Only threatened direct intervention by the European powers forced Mehemet Ali to restrict his territorial ambitions, limit the size of his army, and all but abolish his navy.

In 1847, the Pashalik descended briefly to Ali’s son Ibrahim and then to his grandson Abbas who, with British connivance, attempted to dismantle much of his grandfather’s work. Murdered, he was succeeded by his uncle who acknowledged the land rights of the fellahin, ineffectually attacked the slave trade, and granted important concessions to foreign business, including construction of the Suez Canal. In 1854, the Bank of Egypt was created and with it, a state debt that soon totalled over three million pounds. The ascendancy of Ismail Pasha saw a vastly enhanced role for various European advisors and an exponential increase in the Egyptian debt. This was sparked by the fear of a shortage of raw cotton on world markets caused by the American Civil War, which occasioned great speculation in Egyptian cotton, prompting European banks to lend massively to Egypt on the strength of the vastly inflated value of its revenues from the state monopoly of raw cotton sales. By 1876, Egypt became, as many African states became a century later, unable to pay even the interest on its loans. Bankrupt, Egypt’s finances were turned over to its European creditors. Ismail was deposed in 1879 and an attempted military coup aimed at restoring Egyptian sovereignty in 1881 was met by the occupation of Egypt by the British in 1882 that was, in turn, one of the pivotal moments in Africa’s partition by the European powers. With this occupation, Muhammad Ali’s project of modernity ended to be fitfully revived in the 1920s and then abortively by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s.

Although hailed as a ‘civiliser’ by a few, Muhammad Ali’s project was largely denounced by European observers in notably contemporary terms as
The threat of foreign domination that provoked Ali’s modernising project occasioned similar, if weaker, responses in the neighbouring Kingdom of Ethiopia as well as along the North-African coast. The core kingdoms of Ethiopia had evolved a nascent neo-feudalism in which a nobility and state clergy were able, if inconsistently, to extract dues in labour, kind, and sometimes money through the control of landed estates and fiefdoms. The weaknesses of the kingdom, prone to violent succession disputes, and reliant on princely levies of men and supplies to meet external threats were magnified by the expansionist policies of Egypt’s Mehemet Ali and his successors. The mid-nineteenth-century provincial governor and noble, Tewodoros, attempted to meet this threat through the replacement of hereditary noble officials with centrally-made bureaucratic appointments, by stripping the church of some of its power, and, in part, by attempting to replace neo-feudal levies with a standing army under centralised royal control. This project was brought to a partial end with the crushing defeat of Tewodoros by a British expeditionary force in which his still inadequate centralised army was abandoned by the alienated clergy and nobility. His modernising project was continued, if in a moderated form, under his successors Yohannes IV, and Menelik who was able to famously defeat an Italian force at the battle of Adowa in 1896 and thus preserve nominal Ethiopian independence until the fascist invasion of the 1930s.26

From 1837 on, Ahmed Bey, the ruler of Tunisia, quasi-independent of his Ottoman overlords, undertook a programme of modernisation whose course and fate paralleled Egypt’s. Faced with French colonial occupation in neighbouring Algeria and the attempted re-assertion of Ottoman power in Libya, Ahmed Bey sought to reorganise tax collection and state finance in order to create an army sufficient to maintain Tunisian independence. The dramatic increases in the direct taxation of agricultural producers provoked serious rebellion. Tunisia also experienced soaring indebtedness to the

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26 This account is drawn from Pankhurst 1989, Rubenson 1976.
European banks that provided, alongside of such taxation, the finance for this modernising programme. As with Egypt, massive foreign indebtedness followed, enabling European creditors to gain effective control of state finance by 1869. A final attempt to reclaim Tunisian sovereignty by Khayer ed-Din in 1873 was ended by European pressure in 1877.27

An equally abortive attempt to forestall European domination through a self-conscious project of national development that entailed state modernisation also occurred in the Merina Kingdom of Madagascar.28 By the end of the eighteenth century, King Andrianampoinimerina had been able to unify a number of separate Merina kingdoms. His son, the self styled African ‘Napoleon’, Radama I (1810-28) extended Merina control to seaports, which brought him into direct contact with the British with whom he concluded a treaty in 1820 renouncing the trade in slaves in return for compensation and assistance in developing ‘legitimate’ alternative exports. The latter were vital to Merina, in that it had been slave exports that had paid for the imports of modern weaponry vital to Merina’s continued expansion. By the mid-1820s, Radama, convinced that acceptance of the British ‘free-trade’ régime had been mistaken, adopted protectionist policies including restrictions on the residence, movement and ownership of property of Europeans. By Radama’s death in 1828, two-thirds of Madagascar was under Merina control.

Radama’s wife and successor, Ranavalona I, intensified Merianan autarchy after a failed French assault in 1829 confirmed her fears of European aggression. A mission sent to Britain that sought to bring the strategic trade in armaments and ammunition under state control and gain international recognition of Merina succeeded only in evoking lectures from Lord Palmerston on the benefits of free trade. Such reactions and an abortive Anglo-French military expedition reconfirmed the Merina desire to become self-sufficient in imported goods, especially weaponry. Ranavalona chose to rely on a small number of French and American freebooters to both maintain the minimally necessary commercial contacts with the outside world and to create an indigenous industrial capacity. The most important was the Frenchman Jean Laborde who established an industrial complex employing some twenty thousand workers producing guns and cannons as well as various other commodities. The labour force for Laborde’s and other industrial production, including

plantations, was drawn from the corvée labour of nominally free subjects under the *fanompoana* as well as from slaves who were available for domestic use in lieu of export. The latter may have comprised as many as sixty thousand by the end of the nineteenth century.

Ranavalona’s successor, Radama II, initiated ‘open-door’ policies that sought to counterbalance powerful conservative members of the court by rapidly modernising through foreign trade, investment and renewed missionary activity. Commercial concessions were granted to foreigners who were permitted to own land and, albeit briefly, become senior state officials. In response, conservative officials, preoccupied with state security assassinated Radama II and replaced him with his wife in 1862.

While the new queen’s reign saw enhanced control of foreign activities, there occurred, from the late 1860s on, a series of modernising reforms including the creation of an embryonic civil service, the consolidation of a legal code, the appointment of judges, and the abolition of some of the more notorious methods of trial by ordeal. The export of slaves continued to be illegal and some classes of domestic slaves were freed. Simultaneously, the standing army of about thirty thousand was modernised and partly equipped with locally produced munitions. The culmination of these reforms was in part provoked by the French, who, in the high tide of mid-1880s imperialism, claimed ‘historic rights’ over Madagascar and forced economic concessions that weakened the kingdom. In 1894, French forces brought the internally weakened Merina kingdom’s independence to an end.

The Napoleonic imperialism that provoked abortive policies of national development and state modernisation in Egypt was also, in part, the origin of the most lasting and successful instance of national development in Africa. From the mid-seventeenth century, the Cape of Good Hope became a tiny outpost of Dutch commercial and military power. Dutch East India Company ‘servants’ enjoyed few rights other than imposing their will on the indigenous population of Khoi herdsman and San hunter-gatherers. Chafing under company restrictions and exactions, settlers migrated inland. Geographic expansion and enhanced productivity were initially based on settler ability to extirpate or incorporate the immediately surrounding African population, whose lands they settled and livestock they stole, as slaves and other forms of servile labour. To these, slaves imported from East Africa, South and East Asia, were added.

The course of the wars against Napoleon brought the transfer of the Cape
to the British and an initially small number of British settlers. A key aim of British governmental reform was to control increasingly violent relations between indigenous Africans and settlers and to make the latter liable to routine taxation. These policies did much to drive settlers farther afield, where they established minimal polities ideologically oriented to a particular version of a premodern Biblical morality, that rejected modernity while simultaneously embodying a degree of governmental transparency and accountability, but only where white settlers themselves were concerned.

The nineteenth-century discoveries of diamonds and, more importantly, gold, along with the advent of large-scale agricultural production, heightened the imperial needs for the regularisation of governance in order to control land and, most crucially, African labour. These needs spurred conflict between Afrikaner settlers and their British overlords who, over the course of the nineteenth century, were prompted to extend their formal control by the violence attendant upon both Afrikaner and British expansion. Here, one of the earliest instances of colonisation in Africa by white settlers smothered for nearly three centuries any black African project of modern statehood. However, in so doing, it also created what has been, and for now at least remains, the most successful project of national development and modern state building on the African continent.29

The decision by some European states to outlaw the extra-African trade in slaves arose out of a mixture of humanitarian sentiment, perceived commercial advantage, and economic ideology that combined elements of the same nascent European modernity that had been articulated by Napoleon as justification for his Egyptian conquest. The forcible imposition on Africans of these ‘human rights’ and ‘economic freedoms’ was to generate, in the name of emancipation, the nineteenth-century conquest of much of the African continent.30

From the seventeenth century, the inland African polity of the Asante in what is today Ghana had expanded north to tap the commerce of the Sudan and south to extend its control over the growing trade in gold, slaves and other commodities with Europeans. Late eighteenth-century Asante was a centralised bureaucratic polity that had a regulated, though not exclusive, system of state-regulated trade. As Asante probed south to the coast, those who sought to forestall Asante overrule allied themselves with European merchants. Faced with growing European, largely British, aggression justified

29 Davenport 1991.
30 Hargreaves 1963.
in the name of putting a halt to slave exports, Asante expansion and ‘restrictions on trade’, the rulers of Asante responded with a halting attempt to modernise their state and economy.31

From the mid-eighteenth century, attempts were made by Asante authorities to send a small number of youth for education in Europe. In 1831, two youngsters of royal blood were delivered to the care and education of the British authorities as a part of a treaty temporarily halting Asante hostilities with the Europeans and their allies. Both were educated in England and converted to Anglican Christianity. By the 1840s, with the sporadic appearance of Christian missionaries in Asante, an increasing interest was being shown by some Asante officials in European spiritual and practical thought. One of the students, Owusu Ansa, who returned to the Gold Coast in 1841, was to play a key role in Asante’s abortive modernisation.

Throughout the next three decades, Owusu Ansa, although visiting Asante and repeatedly acting as its emissary, found its politics unconducive to his aims of proselytism and reform. In the early 1870s, he unsuccessfully attempted to broker peace between the British, dominant among the coastal Europeans, and Asante. The ensuing British punitive invasion, but not occupation, of Asante altered the balance of power between conservatives and modernisers. ‘Out of the anti-war agitation of the 1870s a movement [in Asante] had emerged with a greater commitment to a more radical programme of social, political, and economic reform’.32 In 1874, the reigning Asantehene Mensa Bonsu declared support for a new policy of ‘peace, trade and open roads’ and gave Owusu Ansa a mandate to ‘design a programme of modernisation and reform’.33

The complex content of this programme was played out over the remainder of the nineteenth century amidst steadily increasing British pressure. One part of the modernising programme involved the creation of a new class of freely contracted bureaucrats, a second was to modernise the Asante army, while a third was to make overtures to European concession-hunters and other European governments in an attempt to counter British power. It was this modernising thrust that prompted the final conquest of Asante and its eventual incorporation into the British Gold Coast colony.

Paradoxically, the gradual abolition of the extra-African slave trade, by

31 The following account is drawn from Wilks 1989.
32 Wilks 1989, p. 605.
33 Wilks 1989, p. 606.
prompting the growth of ‘legitimate’ agricultural export substitutes, vastly increased the internal use of slave labour not only in West but in East and Central Africa as well. In East and Central Africa, violent political turmoil was generated in the late nineteenth century by new opportunities for the accumulation of wealth and political power that were occasioned by the growing European demand for African commodities such as ivory. Commodities were exchanged for modern firearms with which, in turn, slaves could be acquired and relatively small predatory bands captained by regional warlords effectively challenged older forms of authority. Along the West-African coast, the introduction of cheap modern weaponry, in the context of the late-nineteenth-century depression in the palm produce trade and the ensuing scramble to maintain profit margins, created a militarisation of commercial competition that upset the political balance among European merchants, coastal African middlemen, and interior producers. In both regions, this instability, in the context of the increasingly competitive and territorially aggressive global aspirations of modernising states of Europe, became intolerable to European states.

Growing European intolerance of this African ‘chaos’ was couched in terms familiar to early twenty-first-century readers of commentaries on Africa’s plight. This moral indignation had two intertwined strands. The first was the violation of what would later be called the human rights of Africans by rapacious local potentates. The nineteenth-century writings of David Livingstone on the horrors of the East-African slave trade tugged at late Victorian bourgeois heartstrings in much the same way as the exposure of random slaughter by land mines or the use of child soldiers does at their counterparts today. The second strand of indignation, again echoed today, was over the violation of economic rights – the supposed right of Africans as subjective individuals to decide what and how to produce and where and to whom to sell in coercion free markets. As today, these economic rights were understood as both practically and morally inseparable from the elimination of slavery and political oppression: hence the linking of ‘commerce, Christianity and civilisation’ in the cri de cœur for European intervention at the end of the nineteenth century. It was in the name of these ideas that all African projects of modern state creation via projects of national development...
– bar South Africa – were to be ended by colonial conquest and rule. Given that successful projects of modern state building have everywhere entailed the displacement and subjugation of populations, the scant regard to liberal norms paid by would-be African modernisers is of far less moment here than the fact that these projects, both provoked by and provoking imperial conquest, were cut short. Africans entered the era of colonial rule bereft of modern states.

The compromised modernity of colonial rule

The first objective of the colonial project was ‘pacification’. The ordering of African political space was seen as prerequisite to the integration of African commodity production into an international market. The popular justification for military intervention then, as now, was to establish conditions of peace in what was, as now, portrayed as an anarchic and lawless continent. Insofar as the colonial project grew out of modern European state creation, it potentially entailed the wholesale re-organisation of African geographic, social, economic and political space. However, it was quickly understood that desired economic ends could not be achieved without such a process.

The modernity of the colonial project was compromised from its pacificatory outset. While the willingness of would-be colonial powers to expend blood and treasure was greater than their present-day counterparts, this should not be over-estimated. Conquest was brutal but often brief. Colonisers learned that, if African polities could not be defeated in short decisive engagements, accommodation with the leaders of the conquered (or their replacements) was preferable. Moreover, large areas were only lightly and intermittently pacified. Exceptions to this thin conquest were white settlements that required more thorough pacification to regulate the movement of African labour and quell ever-present paranoid settler fears of rapine and pillage. Moreover, colonisers were loathe to interfere with slavery, the institution whose evils provided not only the popular justification for conquest but abolition of which had been argued to be the sine qua non for the expansion of commodity production. Eventually abolished in name, servile labour continued to be

36 Helly 1987. See also Herbst 2000, p. 159. Political geography is not just a ‘given’, it matters.
37 Boahen 1987, Mamdani 1996.
Taxation was an essential component of the compromised modernity of colonialism. Unwilling to expend much national treasure on post-conquest administration and infrastructure building, funds for these purposes were appropriated via the indirect taxation of African imports and exports and/or the direct taxation in kind, labour and, eventually, money of existing or future African commodity producers. Import and export duties, constituted a form of appropriation largely invisible to African payers until the economic crises of the 1930s. Collection required neither an extensive administrative apparatus nor much detailed knowledge of the African population. Cheap to collect, indirect taxation was favoured wherever it had the potential of generating sufficient revenue. Such advantages were to augur ill for government accountability in the postcolonial period. The collection of direct taxes was usually brutal and coercive. Often violent African resistance to forced labour, produce and livestock requisitions, payment of hut and capitation taxes, market duties, licence fees and the like made collection uneconomic. Africans also resorted to seemingly endless ‘weapons of the weak’ – migration, subterfuge and dissimulation. Colonial officials often responded with punitive raids. The principal point of contact with the colonial officials was, for many, the soldier in the service of the tax collector. The ubiquity of such raids demonstrates the inability to impose and sustain systematic regulatory control over commodity production through direct taxation.

Given the desire to limit expenditure, tax-related schemes that would have enhanced the legibility of the colonised such as land registration were either severely limited or, as in the case of a proposed cadastral survey of land ownership in the northern Nigerian city of Kano, quickly abandoned due to cost. Population censuses remained, where carried out at all, merely educated guesses. Except in small urban enclaves or where the appropriation of land by white settlers made such formal knowledge essential, the administrative legibility of residence and land-holding – a hallmark of the modern state project in the West – remained minimal or non-existent. Direct taxation usually became regularised through the farming out of collection to chiefs, headmen,

\[38\] Lovejoy 1993.
interpreters and clerks, who routinely used their niche for private accumulation. Dependent upon such intermediaries, colonial officials usually only prosecuted the grossest abuses. What is today bemoaned as ‘corruption’ was an integral component of the compromised nature of colonial modernity.

If the creation of a state-sanctioned standardised universal commodity – money – was a key element of the various projects of modernity in Europe, it was less successfully achieved by the colonial administrations of Africa. Long before European conquest, Africans had invented or adopted currencies adequate to local, regional and limited inter-continental exchange. These were not, however, adequate to meet the needs of the administrations of colonial occupation. Neither metropolitan personnel nor the imported necessities of administration and infrastructure creation could be paid for in manilas, cowrie shells, barkcloth, Maria Theresa dollars or the myriad other monies in use. Nor, remarkably, was locally-produced and long-exported gold deemed suitable. Thus, existing media of exchange were officially demonetised. However, the successful valorisation of new colonial currencies was often achieved only after a long process of gradual acceptance, often forced by the necessity of paying taxes in such coinage. The initial physical shortage of circulating media alongside the demonetisation of existing monies sometimes prompted a temporary recourse to barter. Existing currencies sometimes continued in use for decades to facilitate local intra-African commodity exchange, for which the denomination of colonial currencies was often too large. Moreover, colonial currencies, as opposed to their imperial counterparts, posed problems of direct international or intercolonial fungibility. Skeletal banking facilities and an access to credit that was often, at best, limited to what it had been before the advent of colonial rule also placed limitations on the rapid universal adoption and use of colonial media of exchange. Colonial money may have been adequate to the facilitation of revenue collection for the minimal administrative and infrastructural expenditures of colonial rule, as well as for the expansion of African commodity production, but the creation of national currencies, fully embodying the cultural as well as economic aspirations of modern states would have to await the end of formal colonial rule.

42 Shenton 1986.
43 Mamdani 1996.
The physical infrastructure created under colonial rule is best described as skeletal. Large-scale projects were initially confined to ports and railroads designed to supplement the human porterage, animal transport and river traffic of precolonial days. Roads that were not built through local initiative were constructed through the use of ‘political’ – forced and conscripted – labour. Only those necessary for a minimally efficient administration and the conveyance of imports and exports were so built. As road replaced rail traffic in the middle decades of colonial rule, the official involvement required by railroad construction diminished proportionately.45

Colonial cities, where these were not wholly new creations, were usually created alongside, rather than through the modernisation, of existing African towns. Such was the case of the ubiquitous government residential areas in British colonies. There was little equivalent to Haussman’s renowned ploughing of roads through the heart of historic Paris. Other stand-alone new cities, such as Abidjan or Nairobi, were initially designed to keep Africans, except as necessary labour, out. Then, as now, the ‘authentic’ African was rural while the urbanised, ‘de-nationalised’ and later called ‘de-tribalised’ African was anathematised and the growth of a class of urban unemployed was universally feared.46

The refusal to countenance African proletarianisation was informed by the various currents of romanticism that had emerged in the imperial, and in particular British, metropole. These currents had arisen in the early nineteenth century as a superficially conservative but thoroughly modernist reaction to the trauma of modernity in Europe itself. This romantic stream encompassed literature, the visual arts and informed political and economic thought, especially with regard to Empire. Nowhere was this current more in evidence than in thought and actions about the necessity of preserving the supposed African ‘community’ of the ‘tribe’ and the felt necessity of preserving it from the contamination of the ‘de-tribalisation’ of an urban proletariat. One key result was the refusal to institute legal régimes of landholding conducive to African proletarianisation. Only, and then only partially, in areas of white settlement where wage-labour could not be foregone, or in such cases as mines, railroads, ports, ginneries and the like, was wage-labour tolerated by colonial administrators as an unfortunate evil. Even in these instances, fictions of

Africans as ‘target workers’ or sojourning peasants temporarily residing in their places of work were clung to well after they ceased to be tenable.47

The compromised modernity of colonialism was glaringly evident in the sphere of law. The widely adopted formula was that what came to be called African ‘customary law’ was to be permitted to continue unless deemed abhorrent to the sensitivities and public relations of the coloniser, or where it unduly interfered with commodity production. However, ‘customary law’ was often invented, modified, or improvised by its supposed African human repositories. Those African intermediaries, who by virtue of administrative parsimony were charged with the application of an uncodified ‘customary law’, often arbitrarily used their positions to personally accumulate commodities, labour, sexual access, land and political loyalty.48

The ambivalence of British colonial régimes to education is well documented. While lip service might be paid to creating ‘Black Frenchman’ or ‘Luso-Africans’, the reality on the ground was much the same in their domains. Aside from the desire to save souls through a literate comprehension of the Bible, the minimal aim of educating Africans was to avoid expensively employing large numbers of European clerks by both colonial administrations and commercial enterprises.49 Foreign missionaries or Africans themselves most often paid for and taught in schools. State provision of formal education – a component of many modernising projects elsewhere – remained minimal.50

The health concerns of tight-fisted colonial administrations were primarily to limit mortality among locally resident Europeans and to control contagious diseases that might be exported to the metropole. To the extent that medical advances limited the threat of either, even these minimal and generally ineffectual efforts lapsed. Again, it was largely private provision by religious institutions and Africans themselves that strained to fill the gap. The expansion of African commodity production required little of the apparatus of the modern medical establishment – made so infamous by its postmodernist critics – as a component of European modernity.51

Political arithmetic, the quasi-official investigation of the social, economic, political and personal lives of particular populations, has for long been a part

47 Baldwin 1966, Chapter 5.
49 See Conklin 1997 for the contradictory nature and consequences of the French mission civilisatrice, and the still unsurpassed Young 1965 for the fateful example of Congo/Zaïre.
50 Crowder 1968, Chapter 4; Ajayi et al. 1996.
of the enterprise of modern state building. In Africa, not only was such study severely limited under colonial rule but the discipline of anthropology, under which the bulk of such colonial studies took place, was particularly ill-suited to the project of modernity. As Jack Goody has convincingly argued, far from being the much-seduced handmaidens of colonialism, anthropologists were, if only to gain access and resources for study, willing but spurned or only reluctantly accepted suitors. Colonial administrators were either wary of anthropologists as likely to cause ‘problems’ or indifferent to individuals seeking to create knowledge of little practical use. In at least one respect, however, anthropologists did have a profound if problematic influence.52

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the agents of nascent European imperialism ‘negotiated’ treaties with African polities to which they routinely referred as ‘nations’. Well into the early years of the twentieth century, the term nation, as in the much-lamented ‘de-nationalisation’ of urban educated Africans, continued in use. However, over the course of the colonial era, the term ‘tribe’ gradually and with finality supplanted nation as the descriptive term for collectivities of Africans. This substitution was largely the work of anthropologists whose discipline had its ultimate origins in the hypothetically historical, speculative and quasi-evolutionary armchair anthropology of the nineteenth century. The term tribe, derived from European classicism, as in the ‘Germanic Tribes’ of Imperial Rome, made its way within speculative anthropology for collectivities of aboriginal American peoples, Australian aborigines, and then Africans. Moreover, given that a substantial part of the enterprise of British social anthropology originated in the early twentieth century with the Durkheimian problem of the basis of social cohesion and saw in the study of ‘simpler peoples’ the field in which this riddle could be unlocked, anthropologists were disproportionately drawn to a study of what they conceived to be the ‘simplest’ peoples on the African continent. In many cases, ‘simplest’ meant those about whom knowledge was the least important for colonial officials. Hence, the questions asked and those whom they were asked about were often of little official interest.

However, the powerful legacy of the language of tribe, with its primitive connotation of the near-exclusive importance of kinship in African society took hold. So did the explanation of African behaviour in terms of what were taken to be the primordial characteristics of any given ‘tribe’. Such ascribed

52 Goody 1995, especially Chapter 7.
characteristics, once pseudo-scientifically codified, were routinely used to differentially distribute employment and education on the basis of supposed tribal characteristics. In so doing, much tinder was set for the future.\(^{53}\)

Only after 1945 was a concerted effort made by some colonial powers in some areas to pursue more vigorously a less compromised version of colonial modernity. Overall, until the Second World War, the governance embodied by the compromised project of colonial modernity was constant only in its limitations, consistent only in inconsistency, and regular solely in its irregularity. It is one of the many paradoxes of this project that those powers, such as Portugal, that found it necessary to more uncompromisingly pursue the project of modernity lacked the resources to do so, while those which had greater resources, such as Britain, lacked the will to make business practice conform to a project of imperial resuscitation. Even more paradoxically, the colonial powers sought to deepen their intervention in African commodity production because they were themselves in extremis. Yet this very condition constrained their ability to do so. The ‘second colonial offensive’, spurred by colonial unrest arising out the global depression of the 1930s, was concerned in the post-1945 period with the need to regulate the growing mass of African wage-labour and mobilise potential African productivity in the cause of metropolitan reconstruction.\(^{54}\) Faced with the strikes and produce hold-ups spawned by the global crisis of the 1930s, British and French colonisers responded not only with force but with a series of measures including marketing boards, producer co-operatives and the like in order to improve conditions of and regulate markets for African commodity production. They also made limited commitments to improve the welfare of African wage-labourers that had little effect even after the War. Indeed, the War itself saw rapid inflation in necessary consumer commodities despite price controls.

While a few large-scale projects for the organisation of agricultural commodity production along modern lines such as the irrigated Geziera cotton growing scheme in Sudan had been implemented earlier, the immediate postwar era saw a rapid multiplication of such schemes to meet the desperate postwar needs of the colonisers. Nearly all failed. Most were abandoned or transformed so as to denude them of their modernising edge. Britain, the principal actor of the second colonial offensive, opposed any policy that would transform African ‘peasants’ into rural agricultural wage-labourers except in

\(^{53}\) Goody 1995.
\(^{54}\) Lonsdale 1981.
areas of white settlement. Thus, every large-scale scheme had to bear the
double burden of vastly increased production of commodities and a need to
integrate existing or resettled rural populations as ‘co-operators’ on ‘settlement
schemes’, often in a fashion that detracted from whatever potential gains in
productivity agricultural mechanisation might have held. If there were to be
African co-operators, there had to be something for such co-operators to do.55
Moreover, given the absence of pressure to labour on such schemes that might
have by then arisen in a landholding régime consonant with the creation of
capitalist production, the labour available was often inadequate, physically
unsatisfactory, and, ironically, coerced. A key exception to this dismal record
was in Kenya, where schemes focused on smallholders had from their beginning
the different intent of rapid agricultural improvement arising from acute rural
distress and where they had the different result of promoting African
accumulation.56

With the failure of the postwar large-scale schemes, colonial administrators
largely retreated back into the limited prewar policy of minimal involvement
in rural areas. This withdrawal was made possible by the boom of the early
1950s, the re-orientation of policy toward Europe itself, and expanded colonial
commodity production on the old footing of what was taken to be largely
independent smallholder production. In other words, in so far as rural Africa
is concerned, the compromised modernity of colonialism was renewed under
conditions that, once again, necessitated a minimal level of intervention
adequate merely to the limited ends required.

If the colonial compromise regarding rural African commodity production
could be temporarily renewed in the immediate postwar period, the situation
regarding African wage-labour was different. Africans themselves set the
immediate agenda through a series of strikes and urban riots. One official
response was the creation of a skeletal legal régime of labour regulation
covering the formation of and operation of trade unions. This attempt to
channel labour unrest was made vastly problematic by the irregular constitution
of the nascent African working class as well as by the lack of administrative
knowledge about it. Both were problems rooted in the compromised nature
of colonial modernity. Labour regulation was paralleled by the very limited
introduction of welfare measures notably social work and community
development. Although the latter had begun in some limited areas in the

1930s, it gained new prominence. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, plans and projects drafted along the lines of American social work, such as to get prostitutes off the street in Freetown or to comprehensively address juvenile delinquency, read today like science fiction. Plans for urban community development seem similarly utopian. Basic information about intended social work or community development clients was only slightly less pathetic than what it became in following decades.

The attempt to address the need for ‘development’ as social welfare spawned a concern with local government (as opposed to ‘indirect rule’). This was seen as that level of governance at which these policies were to be carried out and African cadres necessary to carry them out could be trained. It was believed that only local governments controlling locally generated revenue would be accountable to their local charges for their actions. However, the need to bring the new men and a very few women into a reformed local government immediately generated opposition from the chiefs, headmen, messengers and clerks who had long benefited from their pivotal positions in the compromised modernity of colonial rule. Such policies also brought the late colonial modernisers into direct conflict with the would-be leaders of the nationalist project of independence, for whom the staffing and funding of local government were resources for political party building.57

As they built these political parties, African nationalists would come to have to reckon with the cumulative outcome of the compromised nature of colonial modernity – the failure to create a modern state. The key exception was South Africa,58 where, in the Boer War, Britain gained victory over the rebellious Afrikaner republics only to, by the onset of ‘pact’ government, begin a halting process of conceding independence. Thus, at the moment when the rest of the continent was partitioned, South Africa embarked on an ultimately successful project of modern state formation through national development. By 1948 and the beginning of decolonisation elsewhere, South-

57 Hodgkin 1957; Tordoff 1997, Chapter 5.
58 We acknowledge the early nineteenth-century state building power of ShakaZulu’s militaristic absolutism, and its symbolic representation of African power amidst the encroachment of European and Boer influence. If, however, there was a regimented political system that conscripted young men from adjoining and related groups to adopt Zulu national identity, it is unclear whether the Zulu kingdoms beginning with Shaka’s (and like other nineteenth-century Southern African states) continue deep-seated political traditions more than demonstrate changes in structure. We cannot enter into this debate here; suffice it is to say that we do not believe that the Zulu kingdoms fit our model of attempted precolonial modernities. See Kuper 1993.
African Nationalists had largely completed the project of modern state building. That they did so through the brutal subordination of the African population on the basis of an exclusionary racial policy is not beside, but is rather, the point. The doctrine of race not only provided the necessity and justification of modern state construction through national development, but also permitted white South African Nationalists to ruthlessly suppress the claims of the black majority in the furtherance of that project. Only in the aftermath of the achievement of majority rule would the voicing of these long forestalled claims threaten to haul South Africa back to the mainstream of African politics.

Partial exceptions were those colonies where the political expectations and structural needs for accumulation of white settlers combined to produce an, in part, successful demand for the creation of some key elements of a modern state. Kenya and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) are the most important instances in which the currently much desired governmental accountability, transparency and predictability of state-civil society relations, put in place by and for white settlers, would be already extent and available for potential generalisation to the population at large in the postcolonial period.59

Decolonisation
The contestation over the historical narrative of African decolonisation has long focused on who – coloniser or nationalists – initiated the end of European rule and proposed a different set of practices for the transformation of African subjects into citizens. It has also been about the relative importance of local and national initiatives as opposed to global forces in creating and effecting policies for national development.60 More recently, it has been burdened with the issue of who can legitimately lay claim to, or be blamed for, the character of postcolonial governments and the coincident creation, or lack, of African ‘civil societies’ in which self-interested individual (or groups of) citizens are capable of obliging their rulers to reform and become accountable.

Nationalists inverted the self-serving narrative of imperialists about how colonial subjects were progressively guided to civilisation to argue that independence movements drew upon an authentic past of resistance to overcome colonial rule and realise a future of fulfilled citizen identity, improvement, and progress in, through and under the postcolonial nation-

state. Colonialism was an inauthentic past to be rejected and overcome. Even when, as in Sudan and Congo, doubts emerged early on about this quest, independence was imbued with enormous hope and optimism about what was called ‘nation-building’ but was, in reality, the necessity of modern state construction.

The dictum of the first leader of Ghana, Nkrumah, to ‘Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else will follow’ was quickly replaced after independence by a bitter lamentation of the systematic deficiencies of the inherited colonial kingdom. While much subsequent popular, ‘radical’, pan-Africanist and often hagiographic discourse has centred on the endurance of a neocolonial political economy, this lament was also, paradoxically, over a ‘neocolonial state’ that barely existed.

When, as for Crawford Young, the deficiencies of post-independence African governance are understood as essential continuities with its colonial predecessor, emphasis is placed on the highly authoritarian and often centralised administrative structures of a ‘colonial state’. These, it is argued, gainsaid the possibility of a political economy, an administrative ethos and a political culture grounded in an antithetical stance towards the state by a healthy oppositional civil society sufficient to secure the kind of workable postcolonial states and societies for which some nationalists had hoped. Yet, while most nationalist leaders who would become heirs to this colonial governance certainly saw much in this legacy to be rejected, most, of necessity, saw it as the insufficiently strong foundation of their attempt to normalise, discipline and domesticate colonial space and thus create a nation-state.

The narrative of nationalism peaks with the optimism of possibility at the advent of independence and troughs throughout the long moment between the late 1970s and the present when national development appears to be no longer viable. As such, the narrative of independence has become a lament about what could have been – leaders chosen, not chosen, and failed. It is a tale of the radical nationalists versus the neocolonial élites seen as having led Africa to its current state of mal-governance. It is, in short, a mourning that

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61 Young 1994, pp. 1–12. Cf. Herbst, 2000. Like Bayart 1993, Herbst stresses continuities between precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial rule. ‘Leaders confront three sets of issues when building their states: the cost of expanding the domestic power; the nature of their national boundaries; and the design of their state systems’, pp. 12–13. The problem is not that colonial boundaries are foreign to current African states; rather, African leaders have been ‘extraordinarily successful in manipulating the boundaries for their own purposes of staying in power rather than extending the power of their states’, p. 253.
maintains that, had only the right leaders emerged or survived, the governance of Africa could today be different. \(^{62}\)

The immediate post-World-War-Two years saw the advent of serious re- visioning of nationalism. As the tempo quickened and the pro-independence chords became increasingly harmonious to a significant number of Africans, nationalists became increasingly emboldened conductors of movements whose time, they believed, had finally come. The disposition of these postwar nationalists was unlike that of an earlier African intelligentsia. In most colonies, this previous generation of ‘proto-nationalists’ – the ‘city-dwelling lawyer-politicians’ – had sought cautious constitutional reform, partial political incorporation through restricted political franchise, and the granting of a limited citizenship by the ‘colonial masters’. Theirs was a reactive stance to a colonial world that saw educated Africans as foreigners in their own lands and dismissed the idea of an ‘African nation’ as absurd, not just because ‘tribes’ were not nations, but because of the habituation to power and authority and the presumptive right to rule of the imperial trustee. This right to rule embodied one contemporary understanding of conservatism that, ‘the state’s relation to the citizen, is not, and cannot be, contractual. . . . The state has the authority, the responsibility and despotism of parenthood’. \(^{63}\)

The generation of nationalists who came onto the scene in the 1940s and 1950s rejected such paternalism. They were strident in their demand for entitlements and rights to political participation and power. The simmering and never quelled resentment and resistance to colonial occupation voiced in peasant uprisings, labour strikes, and the myriad forms of opposition that found cultural expression in religion and popular song were catalysed into nationalist demands by resentments accumulated during the Depression and War years.

If colonial administrations had need of increased coercive control over African workers and commodity producers to offset declining terms of trade in the 1930s and to later pursue the War effort, this was the period of the flowering of a vibrant African associational culture. These associations ranged from co-operatives, trade unions and ex-combatant associations, to urban religious groups, benefit clubs, ‘old boys’, tribal and women’s organisations. Key breeding grounds for radical nationalism were formed with an international associational network of expatriate student associations, an international

\(^{62}\) Irele 2001.

solidarity network of pan-Africanists and international trade-union organisations. It was within this associational matrix that a conception of the long-denied rights of citizenship transcending earlier reformism and assimilationism was formulated.

The course and outcome of the War greatly increased the seriousness with which these demands had to be attended. The white supremacy and great-power pretensions of Britain and France were mortally weakened by defeat in Asia. The Atlantic Charter, the hostility of both of the new great powers to formal colonialism, the founding of the UN, the beginning of the end of colonial rule in India, armed revolt against colonial rule in South-East Asia and Africa itself, as well as the threatening promise of an alternative Communist road to modernity all enhanced nationalist demands. So, too, did the beginnings of the re-orientation of European economic hopes to Europe itself in the precursors of the EU.

At the War’s end, Britain had a Labour government under a Prime Minister who, in 1941, grandiosely had told West-African students that his party had always stood for the extension of the freedoms they desired and promised an ever increasing degree of self-government. Similarly, De Gaulle’s Free-French commitments to Africans, if falling short of a commitment to complete independence, had promised more self-government, wider political freedoms and greater material well being within la République une et indivisible, or – as it would subsequently become – la communauté francophone. Freedom and development, built into a mutualist couplet of sovereignty and interdependence or ‘partnership’, became central components of postwar imperial consensus. Nationalists, materially enabled by the postwar boom in commodity prices and relative social and economic improvement, took this language of freedom and development to heart. They rejected slow change and calls for a continuing trusteeship in which the supposed interests of the inarticulate would be protected from their more loquacious countrymen.

In the last decade of French and British colonial administrations, at least outside of settler colonies such as in Kenya and Algeria which saw brutal repression, a degree of autonomy was afforded some educated Africans at the lower ends of the civil service. Some increased freedom was also given commodity producers to pursue profitable initiatives. Limited recognition was even accorded to the manifold associational groups that dotted the

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political landscapes of many parts of the continent. Yet, even then, most policy-making remained within the ‘exclusive hegemony’ of colonial administration. Even if most Africans barely saw glimpses of the white men, nationalists saw in colonial administration an otherness of foreign rule they claimed was shared by the masses whom they purported to represent. Late-colonial administrations were neither now, nor really ever had been, the ‘crushing, relentless force’ depicted by one historian of colonialism, but they nevertheless constituted for the nationalists an alien, illegitimate and coercive entity to be dismantled.

Nationalist leaders had to concern themselves with the claims and aspirations of the commodity producers and workers who they presumed to lead to overcome their ‘traditionalist’ adversaries in the pursuit of independence. Thus, social justice was inextricably fused to political freedom in a nationalist discourse that, drawing on a host of intellectual inspirations, would later travel under the name ‘development’. Nationalists also had to make common cause with the assortment of associational groups who stood in opposition to, or apart from, the colonial administration if these groups, including those tribally-based, were to be brought under the umbrella of nationalist movements. However, they also had to confront or buy-off those local organisations or indigenous institutions that, by claiming pre-eminence of identity in the nation-to-be, gave the lie to national cohesiveness and thus weakened the demand for independence and the promise of common betterment.

In Tanganyika, Nyerere challenged everything from unjust marketing regulations to increased European land expropriation. In Côte d’Ivoire, the organic modernist Houphouët Boigny spoke out fervently as a member of the National Assembly against colons and the hated exactions of the indigénat. At the far end of radical secularism – at least by African and even North-African standards – Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia claimed that, in order to win independence from France, the Neo-Destour had to both confront and confiscate power from the twin Tunis-based traditional authorities of the Beylical ruling class and the higher reaches of the ‘ulama’. Nkrumah negatively portrayed the Asante-centred National Liberation Movement as sectarian tribalists and regionalists thus deliberately assaulting the claim of Asante to be the principal and authentic representative of Gold Coast nationhood. Perhaps most brilliantly, Jomo Kenyatta, under the guise of his ethnographic tract, *Facing Mount Kenya*,

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66 Young 1994.
67 Hargreaves 1967.
rationalised the appropriation of individualised landed property, a foundation for a modern capitalist development, as an ‘indigenous’ practice. 68

Paradoxically, these nationalist modernists were only able to pursue their goals of freedom and development by becoming so-called ‘charismatic’ leaders often identified with premodern prebendal or neo-patrimonialist personal rule. A glimpse of why this was so was disclosed by the Tunisian nationalist leader Habib Bourguiba, who, it is alleged, responded to a question about the Tunisian political system by answering: ‘The system? What system? I am the system’. 69

Although to different ends, both colonialists and a few African radicals questioned whether the nationalists could go beyond the role of brokers or clients mediating fragmented communities that had been constrained within colonial rule. Preparedness for independence was considered a problem, not only because of the shortage of trained personnel, but because the ability of African civil servants to evince the Weberian virtues of competence, credibility, probity and impartiality amidst great social and cultural heterogeneity was questioned. Presaging later analyses, some claimed that, rather than constructing egalitarian and equitable dispensations, nationalists were more likely to use ‘traditional’ communities, or tribes, for reactionary purposes, sectarian politics or corrupt ends. In a context in which bureaucrats could not operate in settings immune from familial ties and personal commitments, there was always the suspicion that independence would mean special treatment for kith and kin and friends alike. We might add that, in light of a whole host of associational pressures of tribe, region and other affiliation, such fears were prescient. That the pressures of associational life (misnamed as civil society by today’s analysts), unconstrained by a modern state, might be at the heart of the ills they decry seems to have escaped much notice.

Despite these doubts and professed ideological differences, nearly all nationalist leaders shared the one essential intent of national development. National meant sovereign, which, in turn, implied the right to control over a recognised defined nation-space. It was argued, if initially only rarely set out in such stark terms, that the modernity of Western states as well as the Soviet Union, China and Japan had itself been achieved by way of self-conscious, intentional projects of national development. In the twentieth century, and

69 Cited in Moore 1982, p. 41.
especially in the context of the end of formal European empires from mid-century on, national development came to be understood everywhere outside of the West, as the means by which modernity could be achieved. The high-water mark of this near hegemonic view occurred at the mid-twentieth-century moment of African independence when, by a reversal of terms, ‘modernisation theory’ became, for a time, the predominant theory of national development. Nearly all African nationalists and parties preferred the achievement of national development without class conflict. Some, under the guise of African socialism and forms of Afro-Marxism, wanted freedom through an ‘egalitarian’, peasant-based socialism from above under a one-party state or the military. These often received support from an uncritical Western Left. Retrospectively, ideological hue or institutional form seems to have mattered less than the imperative of national development itself, under which nationalists faced an enervating tension between moral commitment and practical reason, between independence as the freedom from colonial oppression and independence as the freedom to realise the modern potential. Practical reason would require institutional embodiments and an operational field, a development state, that modernisation theorists and Marxists alike would demand of Africa as they did of all of the ‘developing world’. The resources available to this developmental state, of necessity, would largely be the same as the hated exactions of colonialism. Freedom was contingent on modernity but the pursuit of modernity through intentional development demanded limitations on freedom.

That modernisation theory was subjected to scathing critiques by those who held themselves Marxists or ‘radicals’, did not mean the latter were any freer from the ambitions of national development as the means to modernity than those that they criticised. Marx himself was venomously critical of the writings of theorist of ‘national development’ par excellence – Friedrich List. However, non-West-European Marxists, confronted with the problematic application of Marx’s thinking to their own situations, burdened Marx’s theories with the problem of national development and, by so doing, embarked on the oxymoronic project of creating a ‘Marxist theory of intentional national development’.

The pursuit of national development necessitated the construction of a modern state on the shaky foundations of hand-me-down colonial administration. The worst case was the Belgian Congo in which a wildly misnamed ‘strong state’ supposedly characterised colonial rule. Here, a purportedly
'remarkable architecture of domination'\textsuperscript{70} embodied in the much-vaunted extensive reach of white administrative rule and allied religious hegemony of church and missionary networks crumbled in the face of late-colonial rioting and precipitated a panicked timetable of independence. Neither the degree nor intensity of capitalist endeavour in the southern mining provinces proved a bulwark.\textsuperscript{71} Patrice Lumumba’s understanding of the cruel absences that colonialism and imperial interests had left for the possibility of realising Congolese nation-space cost him his life and, with his assassination, the Congolese project of national development ended before it began. The Congolese/Zaïrian administration of Lumumba’s successor, Mobutu Sese Seko, was only strong in its ability to sustain coercive authority over those protectorate-like highly industrialised enclaves that became the source of Mobutu family finance and where, not coincidentally, the Cold-War stake of international capital was to be defended by foreign mercenaries.\textsuperscript{72} The absence of a modern state would be made clearer with the decline in revenue attendant on the fall of commodity prices and/or non-smuggled output in the mid-1970s, the reconfiguring of debt, the imposed conditionality of the USAID régime, and policies of structural adjustment. To invert Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe,\textsuperscript{73} in most of Africa it was not the nation that appropriated political institutions and endowed itself with a state. Rather, it was nationalists, attempting to normalise, discipline and domesticate the nation and the people that created the \textit{illusion of continuity} of the administrative agencies that supervised the people through the medium of national development. Once national development came into question, so did the ‘state’. As a project of modern state formation through national development, the ‘authenticité’ of Mobutu was only a bad, if tragic, joke. Although it could not then be known, the barely controlled anarchy of Mobutu’s Congo was a foretaste of what was to come when other more serious projects of national development had run their course.

Given the compromised modernity of colonialism, post-independence projects of national development contained an unresolved paradox. Regardless

\textsuperscript{70} Young 1994, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{71} The argument that an all-powerful postcolonial state had somehow crowded out a nascent Congolese civil society is ludicrous for the simple reason that, given the collapse of Belgian rule and the negligible numbers of educated Africans available to staff a post-independence administration, a state only barely, if at all, existed.

\textsuperscript{72} Young 1998, p. 99; Young 1994, pp. 1–12, 77–140.

\textsuperscript{73} Jewsiewicki and Mudimbe 1995.
of professed political orientation, all such projects were, in reality, examples of state-led economic and social development for the simple reason that no other agency capable of carrying out the developmental task was believed to exist. As such, these projects presumed the existence of a modern state capable of bearing the developmental burden. However, no such state existed. Of necessity, therefore, national development had to be as much about the building of a modern state as about development itself.

Modernist intent was rooted in the very justification for national development, which, as all modernist projects, legitimated itself by arguing that a break with the past was a necessary precondition for improvement. This was true even where nationalist leaders made rhetorical recourse to some supposed authentic precolonial cultural basis for particular variants of national development through ethno-philosophical invocations of authenticité, négritude and Africamité. Rather than evidence of premodern intent, the African cultural critic Manthia Diawara argues these were culturalist modalities working to achieve a national, even regional or continental cultural modernity. As Partha Chatterjee has argued for India, invocations of the past do not always signal resistance to change; an affection for and connection to the past is what gives rise to the feeling that the present needs to be changed.

The modernist inspiration and intent for postcolonial African projects of national development was evident from Nkrumah’s wager with the Ivory Coast’s Houphouët Boigny over the success of African socialism versus African capitalism, through Nyerere’s Tanzanian Ujaama villagisation and the Harambee’s pro-capitalist self-help of Kenyatta to the ‘high’ modernism of Mozambique’s FRELIMO’s authoritarian collectivism. It ran the gamut from Cabral’s vision of a radical democracy made possible by petty-bourgeois class suicide, to Boumedienne’s real socialism, to Nigeria’s Awolowo’s never implemented elaborate and systematic strategic plan for Nigerian social-democratic transformation, modernisation and social welfarism.

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74 Négritude’s attraction for Diawara’s generation (1950s–1960s) derived from its promise to bring equality with ‘White people, to lift [Africans] above the tribe and the clan, and to provide us with our own nations’. Disregarded by colonialism, Africans ‘had gone to school and learned to read and write only because of Négritude and independence. . . . Négritude invented us, taught us how to think in a particular modern way, and put us inside history to read and write’. Diawara 1998, pp. 8–9. Diawara recalls Césaire’s expression that colonialism was a ‘controlled gift system’, educating Africans selectively, and Christianising them only partially, Césaire 1972 p. 9.

75 Chatterjee 1997.
Sekou Touré boasted that Guineans would rather live under poverty in freedom than riches in oppression. Guineans were to taste both poverty and oppression under the despotic populism that arose during the attempted mobilisation of resources and labour for human investments after the near catastrophic French withdrawal. Such withdrawals, often vindictively executed, whether in Algeria, or in Angola and Mozambique, would, once again, identify the fragility of the ‘state’ that postcolonial polities would inherit. Indeed, each of these practices imagined at its centre a state as the vehicle of development and rational intent. Each pursued the modernist aims of a more cohesive national identity, an attendant reduction of the social and economic breach that separated rural and urban areas, and, if not an end to inequality, a decrease in poverty and an increase in general welfare.

In setting out the colonial past as one in which improvement was not possible, proponents of national development were following the well-trodden modernist path of legitimating their projects through critique. The epoch of colonialism was not a heritage to be drawn upon, but rather an obstacle to be overcome. The dawning epoch of independence was to be one of sustained progress, the conditions and sources for which lay in the present. However, the social, institutional and economic terrain upon which this project had necessarily to be carried out was, in large measure, that which had been created by the compromised modernity of colonialism. This inheritance, especially the absence of a modern state, could not be wished away.

The centrality of the critique of colonialism in legitimating the modernist project of national development notwithstanding, it would now be Africans who would have to allocate resources for and between education, social welfare and defence. No longer absent from these decisions, it would be African leaders who would confront directly the vagaries of international markets. However much they might be advised by legions of expatriate experts and supported by foreign ‘donors’ of development assistance, African leaders would be both identified with and held responsible for the execution and results of such policies by that fractious coalition of associational interests that had been cobbled together to confront the former colonial ruler.

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In this sense, nationalism was a social contract of sorts between ‘the people’ and those who led them to independence. The desire for freedom itself constituted both a resource for and a constraint on the actions of the new political leaders. It was a resource in that the discontent they drew upon in confronting their colonial masters was, in part, a resentment against the inability to labour or produce commodities freely, to be compensated equitably and, most crucially, to accumulate. It was also a complaint against the lack of educational opportunity, the limited access to public health care and social welfare provision that characterised colonial rule.

Aside from external aid and some savings, the principal resources available to make good the deficiencies of the past were the direct and indirect taxes, the forced labour and the artificially low wages and commodity prices of their colonial predecessors. The pursuit of a less compromised modernity than that of colonialism would find the new leaders facing the possibility of direct confrontations with those who had suffered most under colonial rule. As Nkrumah for one came to understand, freedom from colonialist exactions constrained choices of policy for the pursuit of the freedom to develop. Those who, by their resistance to colonial exactions, in part necessitated the compromised modernity of colonialism might also resist exactions made in the name of national development.

Trade unions and the voluntary associations so greatly championed by present-day advocates of civil society provide two illustrations of these tensions. Trade unions had often to confront a coercively exacting colonial state as employer or as regulator of wages and conditions of employment. Unions soon found themselves confronting the leaders of independence within the same structured set of relations. Demands for higher wages could only be accommodated by way of a deduction from the funds available to pursue the modernising project of the new rulers. Exhortations for wage-labourers to make sacrifices in the name of the nation became commonplace but wore increasingly thin. A common response was to end the de jure or de facto independence of trade unions. The inability of the leaders of independence or their immediate successors to honour the social contract of development was generally inverse to the stridency of their demands for fewer strikes, greater output, lower prices for produce and lower wages.77

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Indigenous African capitalists whose ability to accumulate was constrained under colonialism provide another example of these tensions. For them, freedom meant the freedom to invest in trade and production for profit. This aim might or might not be coincident with the project of national development. There was little reason for established or aspirant African capitalists, any more than their imperial predecessors, to act to the supposed benefit of the nation as opposed to themselves. When, as in the case of rhetorical attacks on the ‘neocolonialism’ of European enterprise, or real attacks on Asian, Levantine, or non-national African business, indigenous business men and women might find one strain of national development conducive to their own ends. However, they felt oppressed when pilloried or their activities constrained for betraying ‘the nation’ by operating according to the criteria of profitability rather than the ‘national interest’. When attacked or their activities curtailed in the name of some variant of ‘African socialism’, they felt betrayed. Moreover, specific strategies of accumulation, such as the phenomenon of individuals ‘straddling’ official government and private business occupations, are often today mistaken as prebendal or neo-patrimonial corruption. Here, again, a normative, moralistic notion of national ‘good’, if not development, is taken to be a criterion by which strategies are to be judged. Such judgements, however, have a similarly idealised and ahistorical view of the means and ends of accumulation, which is about expanding and reproducing production and about sustaining profits rather than the interests of the nation.78

Those who now plead for civil society’s renewal in Africa should take note that, if civil society is (erroneously) taken to be synonymous with voluntary associations, then, to re-iterate, these were ubiquitously thick on the ground during late colonialism and the early of years of independence. Such associations constituted both a resource and a constraint for the marshals of national development too, in that, like trade unions, they formed part of the mass agitation for independence. However, and as unpalatable as it may appear to present-day proponents of civil society, the dominant form these associations took was as societies arising from or created to represent sectional communal interests. These interests often expected that independence would bring benefits to particular regions or tribes in return for political support, a quid pro quo, the possibility of which had been disclosed by the very rigidification and amplification of tribal identity under colonialism’s

compromised modernity. The fissiparous tendencies of compromised modernity were further amplified within modernity’s project under independent rule with disastrous results, as in the extraordinarily bloody Nigerian and Sudanese civil wars.

The brutal transition from the heady optimism of national liberation to near universal Afro-pessimism was only a few decades long. Evidence of Africa’s ‘false start’ began to accumulate in the first decade and a half of independence during which the visionary leaders of independence were either overthrown or transformed themselves into despot. Routine self-serving self-justifications of both were the need to focus energy on the task of development, forestall tribalist-regionalist anarchy, protect the integrity of national space and end corruption. Most accomplished few, if any, of these. Military rulers and one-party states now began to appear as if they would become, with the impunity that they often displayed, permanent fixtures of Africa’s political landscape. That the conspicuous displays of wealth by many new potentates perversely mirrored the increasing privation of those they ruled scandalised only a few. From the East, much rhetorical and some limited real support was provided to court various reprehensible régimes. In the official and mainstream academic circles of the West, such despot were not just tolerated but actively supported if they espoused anti-Communism. In Western radical political circles, gripped by Third Worldism, much was ignored or tolerated in the name of Realpolitik, sovereignty and radical nationalism. Amidst the then ongoing Lusophone and Southern-African liberation struggles, raising too vociferously the shortcomings of Africa’s other rulers was often looked on at best as ‘detracting from the struggle’, at worst outright ideological treason. There was little audience for the view that black African leaders or radical North-African nationalists should be held to the same standards of behaviour demanded from their settler or Western counterparts.79 This legacy of Third Worldism continues to this day in the double standard relativism that informs defences of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. The latter is held up as a black-nationalist bulwark against white rule and neocolonialism80 because he opportunistically invokes redistributive principles as a cover to stay in power, and thuggishly sustain local party fiefdoms of accumulation.

79 Mamdani et al. 1993, Legum 1999. Ayittey 1998, has seen this as intellectual betrayal. For a more nuanced view of the dilemmas of development faced by postcolonial nationalisms, see Mkandawire 1999. 
80 See the Mugabe apologist Ankomah 2003.
In much of the continent until the early 1970s, a varying combination of rising income levels, statist development policies, still relatively good terms of trade, Cold-War-inspired external aid, relatively low rates of interest on international borrowing, and the rents extracted from control over minerals permitted the continuation of the fiction of the social contract of independence through a combination of propaganda and the buying-off or coercion of opponents. However, the accumulated effects of the global economic reconfiguring of capitalism that began in the early 1970s and the end of, except in an ideological sense, unconditional Cold-War-inspired aid ripped apart the last shreds of this social contract.81

Of particular importance here was a profound misunderstanding by the high priests of IFI policy, who, from the late 1970s on, joined in what would become an accelerating attack on state service and commodity provision whether in the crumbling East, the social-democratic West, or the ‘developing’ South. Taking them at their word, such international policy-makers and advisors believed they were attacking Africa’s economic evils of the state led or inspired development. That these evils and inefficiencies were in most cases real is beyond doubt. However, what the gurus of the IFIs failed to understand was that, amidst the corruption, the central original end of such statist development had been at independence, although usually unarticulated as such, the construction of the modern state itself. By setting an axe to the rotting props of statist development, those who attacked it undermined the last weak and shabby supports of the social contract of independence and thus modern state construction. The inability of those who ruled to continue to popularly legitimate themselves in the name of ‘development’ undercut the basis of a continued allegiance of their peoples – not just to a particular régime but to the project of the state itself. In this world of shrinking resources, the temptation of élites to mobilise sections of the population to protect or expand their field of accumulation or spoils intensified. However, as resources diminished, the ability to control the intensified fractional discontent, nascent since independence, sharply diminished. In the 1990s, economic, political, and most frighteningly, social ‘things’ fell apart in Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia and elsewhere. While each instance of disintegration tended to reflect specific features of the legacy of compromised modernity, the failure of modern state creation, both a primary cause for and

a result of the failure of the interdependent project of national development, was common to all.  

It was not just in Africa that national development faltered. Rooted in the Listian-inspired project of national development of the Tsarist Count Witte, the Soviet Union was perhaps the most ambitious and, for a time, the most successful of the twentieth-century projects of national development in quest of modernity. With the collapse of ‘socialism in one country’ all such projects stood in disarray as did the host of theorists, non-Marxist and Marxist alike, who had cleaved to the modernising prospects of national development. The Western Cold-War ideological offensive that began as an attack on communism or socialism was generalised into an attack on state involvement in the economy in the name of national development in all of its forms. The moment of national development as the means to achieve modernity seemed to have passed.

The possibility of this moment passing had been disclosed, partly if obliquely, by Marx himself. Marx had argued that the world historical significance of industrialisation in England, political revolution in France and the achievements of German philosophy, was that, though made by Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans, they had been made for humanity in general and would need no replication. Whatever conceits Marx harboured about the achievements of the West, his optimistic view was that those achievements – achievements that only had been made possible through the exactions of the working class at home and the enslavement, extirpation, and looting of those abroad – were moments in the historical development of all humanity.

The same, by implication, might be true of the creation of the modern state via projects of national development. But there was a twist. Each partially successful instance of national development worked against its own intentionality as a step toward what is now routinely described as a ‘globalised’ international economy. By so doing, each foreclosed a bit more of the historical space in which any further projects of national development might be historically possible until the moment, in which we now live, when even long-

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82 Ayittey 1998, like the World Bank, holds an internalist view, attributing Africa’s development problems to domestic factors: African leaders and intellectuals and their devotion to modernist, state-led projects, rather than a commitment to indigenous solutions.

83 Indeed, even the US was increasingly caught in the contradiction between the demands of its own national development and its position as the centre of globalisation, that is, between ‘national interest’ and the demands for profitability.

84 Marx 1976 [1867], p. 915.
successful projects of national development find themselves, as an ironic consequence of their own earlier success, besieged. In this sense, the fall of the Soviet Union punctuated the end of a long historical moment of possibility. It marked not just the failure of one experiment in socialism in one country but the discrediting of state intervention in the cause of national development as the path to modernity in general.

The potential closing of the historical moment of national development as a path to modernity has given rise to broad currents of intellectual reaction. Most Western postmodernist theorists have had little to say about the mass poverty and social devastation of those for whom national development has failed as a road to modernity. While ‘postcolonial’ authors have largely confined their efforts to literary and cultural considerations that translate badly into considerations of the failure of national development. A few postmodernist inspired writers have seen in the closing off of the possibilities of national development a post-factum justification for a rejection of modernity itself. These, in harmony with long-held conservative ideas about cultural ‘authenticity’, argue for the rehabilitation of the old rather than the creation of the new and for the turning away from development itself as the means of improving the human condition. Such views work to morally and politically justify the advocacy and practice of development as a palliative measure where policies such as ‘food security’ – the bare maintenance of a population above the level of hunger – have replaced earlier dreams of abundance as the cause for development. When aligned with the rhetoric of ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainable livelihoods’, policies of ‘rural development’ are now intended less to produce commodities for either national or international markets, than to secure impoverished subsistence. Unsurprisingly, much of this thought has become consonant with the World Bank’s ‘dev-speak’ of ‘participation’ and ‘people’s’ or ‘indigenous’ cultures of development. Under the rhetoric of ‘human security’, not only have largely benign, if ineffectual, schemes of ‘democratic’ and ‘local’ governance been promoted through the sustenance of ‘civil society’, but through potentially more sinister support of juridico-legal apparatus of the courts and the police. The African poor do need protection and justice, but a palliative developmental régime

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85 An interesting exception is Latouche 1994, pp. 33ff. See Karp 1997, Manzo 1991, Parpart 1996 for other examples. See also the postcolonial essays in Webner and Ranger 1996.

86 Abrahamsen 2000.

87 See the various contributions to Wohlgemuth et al. 1999.
needs a capacity to discipline and punish the poor domestically, as much as international, even more.

Stripped of modernist national constructivism, the intent of development – now as a mere palliative – has been less to ease the pain of the long-suffering peoples of the continent than to ensure that the inhabitants of ‘Hopeless Africa’ do not disturb their global neighbours. Yet, as events have now shown, even here, palliative development has failed. This failure, which is of a specific moment of non-development, has now led, as do all such development failures, to a search for a re(new)ed source of development agency. Several candidates have emerged. The (re-)discovery by policy-makers and advisors of the 1950s and 1960s as a period of rising income levels across much of Africa spawned talk of a possible revival of state-led or sponsored development. The palliative, humanitarian-technicist discourses of poverty reduction, ameliorating illness, sustaining livelihoods, etc., and governance and capacity-building discourses, should be viewed in part as attempts to increase local labour-power’s physical capacity (socially necessary consumption required for socially necessary labour) to further accumulation on a global scale. In tandem, accumulation by indigenous capitalists, the subject of important past debates on both Left and Right, has become a subject of revived interest in official and quasi-official circles. In the meantime, while various African, even pan-Africanist, schemes conceived as alternatives to the ‘Washington Consensus’ have been rejected out of hand, one recent initiative, the much vaunted but still-born New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) ineptly sought to renew development via an amalgam of proposed agents and imbued with contradictory intent. Claimed to have been formulated ‘indigenously’ and supported by leaders from countries as diverse as Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa, such is its conformity to the injunctions of economic neoliberalism and for procedural democratic governance that it could have been, and almost certainly was, drafted in Washington, Paris or London. It

89 McWilliams 2002.
91 One such scheme was the Lagos Plan of Action, dating back to the 1980s. Scornfully disregarded by the IFIs, it was a response to the early draconian adjustment prescriptions, and looked at structurally ‘conjunctural processes of the global economy’ associated with the character of ‘national wealth, welfare and distributional power’. Arrighi 2002, pp. 33–5, pp. 8–9. See also Mkandawire and Soludo 1999, ‘Introduction’.
92 UNECA 2002.
is overstuffed with discursive good governance, participation, democracy, rule of law, gender balance, human rights, sustainable development and ubiquitous ‘inputs’ from an empowered civil society, the purported members of which were only consulted after the fact. While affirming Africa’s ‘comparative advantage’ – its minerals, ecology, archaeology, history and culture – it eschews historical understanding or responsibility as irrelevant, save only that of Africans taking responsibility for their contributions to the continent’s malaise. In the event, it was made irrelevant by the G8 before the ink was dry on the applications by academics and NGOs to get at some of the hoped for NEPAD dosh.

If not by NEPAD, the issues we have addressed in the pages above will still have to be confronted. The first is the question of whether national development continues to be historically possible. The second is what we have depicted as the at best compromised modernity of the state in much of Africa. The third, given the first and the second, is whether accumulation, by state functionaries, indigenous capitalists, straddlers or small-holders can be made congruent with any renewed source of development intent. Analytically naked once again, the Africanist expert will have to find another set of new clothes.

Postscript, July 2004

No less a figure than the IFI courtier Francis Fukuyama in his State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century has now called for a renewed project of ‘state-building’ to directly address the post 9/11 problems of ‘security’ and to do so indirectly through ‘development’. His analysis is deeply ahistorical in general and in particular in its failure to comprehend the centrality of ‘national development’ for African attempts to construct modern states. It is destined to a predictably brief efflorescence to which not a few desperate anti-globalisation ‘progressives’ will be drawn. Yet, it too will soon be remaindered to the imported used clothes markets of African policy prescription.

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Of all the world’s regions today, sub-Saharan Africa is seen as most emblematic of ‘crisis’, ‘disaster’, and ‘tragedy’.¹ All that can go wrong in the human condition seems to be concentrated with particular bleakness in this region: the mutually reinforcing dynamics of poverty and insecurity, of endemic and vicious (‘tribal’) warfare with its displacements and other brutalisations of whole populations, of extreme climatic uncertainty and environmental destruction, of the ravages of HIV/AIDS. These appear to combine the effects of the worst of nature and the worst of society; the only beneficiaries of comprehensive economic, social and political ‘breakdown’ are politicians and warlords predatory on an anonymous mass of victims.

Such perceptions build on a long history of narratives of Africa with their more or less explicit racism, and give international bureaucrats, academics and journalists carte blanche² to promote their

¹ ‘Africa’ in the scope of this article refers only to sub-Saharan Africa. Here, I partly draw on, and seek to connect and develop, ideas presented in Bernstein, 1996 and 2000, and Bernstein and Woodhouse, 2001. This article was submitted to Historical Materialism and accepted for publication in 2002. I have not updated it for its eventual publication in this special issue, but in several subsequent papers have addressed issues of the politics of land in Africa, both more generally and with special reference to events in Zimbabwe. Bernstein 2003a, 2004, forthcoming.

² The pun is intended.
diagnoses of, and prescriptions for, this ‘darkest’ of continents. If, historically, imperialism ‘acted on Africa with an overt contempt even more marked than its record in other regions of the “non-white” world’, Africa today represents a kind of ideological free-fire zone in which discursive insult is piled upon, and helps to reproduce, the injuries of material existence. Africa is also the region of the South most vulnerable – as laboratory or playground – to the latest fashions in neoliberal experiment with structural adjustment and state reform. If the agendas of the World Bank and others to ‘develop’ and ‘democratise’ Africa on liberal-capitalist lines manifest an ideological fantasy, the responses to them of nationalism and populism – with their own fantasies in defence of African states and peasantries respectively – are hardly adequate.

What sort of alternative analysis can historical materialism provide? This article considers elements of an answer to this question, which requires alertness to assumptions and procedures that idealise – or ‘stereotype’, in Lenin’s term – the mechanisms and forms of capitalist development. This is a common charge by Marxists against bourgeois theories of capitalism and its development, but a charge from which Marxism has no guarantee of immunity. It is all the more salient because different notions of capitalism are ubiquitously deployed, explicitly or implicitly, to explain Africa’s failures of development, and specifically of agrarian development, as the effects of a lack of ‘enough’, ‘full’ or ‘proper’ capitalism. In this paper, this is illustrated first through other approaches to Africa’s agrarian questions before proceeding to some contributions of materialist analysis. The discussion assumes a schematic periodisation of four phases of modern African history: colonial conquest and consolidation, 1880s–1930s; late colonialism (and its

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3 Bernstein 1990, p. 28.
4 And resistant as well as vulnerable to the interventions of those who would transform it in the image of liberal peace, development, ‘good governance’ and so forth, which its social realities persist in offending.
5 Albeit fantasy with material, and often deadly, consequences. Cooper observed of the Vichy government’s ten year ‘metropolitan-directed and financed development plan’ for its African colonies that ‘What was visionary about Vichy was pure fantasy, and what wasn’t fantasy was brutal’ (Cooper 1997, p. 68).
6 Moreover, such notions of capitalism (at its ‘fullest’, hence best) point to that terrain shared by certain Marxist (for example, Second-International) and bourgeois conceptions of development, modernisation, and the like. Inter alia, this is a particular problem in understanding more generally the place(s) of ‘peasants’ (agricultural petty commodity producers) in modern capitalism. Bernstein 2000.
‘developmental’ initiatives), 1940s–50s; independence and developmental states, 1960s-70s; and the current era of structural adjustment from the 1980s.  

**Commodification blocked (and how to free it)**

*Homo economicus* provides a convenient reference to the familiar concept of utility maximisation at the core of conventional (neoclassical) economics, conceived as a universal paradigm of rational calculation and behaviour. The applications of notions of (individual) rationality to Africa posit variants of several basic positions.

The most simple is that Africans are not rational maximisers, hence the motivational engine of economic growth is missing. This is manifest, for example, in the view that African farmers (and others) work only to meet limited needs and expectations, a characteristic frustration of colonial governments and employers expressed in the notorious backward-sloping supply curve of labour and (peasant-produced) commodities. The shortcomings of *homo economicus* in Africa easily combine, of course, with pejorative culturalist constructions of risk aversion (and worse), expressed as ‘traditional’ mentalities that prevent entrepreneurial behaviour. There are also potent counter-arguments: in the high-risk environments that many African farmers inhabit, *homo economicus* seeks to maximise security, notably of food supply, rather than (monetary) income and accumulation through (often equally risky) market exchange – and displays much admirable knowledge and ingenuity in doing so. In short, prioritising ‘subsistence’ through risk-spreading farming strategies is the rational course.

In his thesis of the prevalence of an ‘economy of affection’ or ‘peasant mode of production’, Hyden suggested that most African farmers were ‘captured’ by neither the market (commodity production and exchange) nor the state (which sought to promote agricultural commodity production) in the colonial period or since, but remain embedded in social relations of kinship, ethnicity and patronage. The objectives of the economy of affection are geared to ‘basic

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7 This periodisation is sketched and applied in Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001.
8 For example, Richards 1985; although this also suggests an issue as neglected as it is important: whether this priority conditions (and constrains) degrees and forms of commodification, or whether the dynamics of commodification and their pressures shape (and constrain) the economic spaces and social forms of ‘subsistence’ production, which is suggested below.
survival’ in typically risky environments (as above) and to ‘social maintenance’ of the primordial relations of kin and ethnicity. The latter generate ‘social’ accumulation of prestige and power, of the resources needed to build, maintain and expand followings through patronage, rather than the ‘economic’ accumulation (and class formation) required for productive investment and (capitalist) development.

This has two important effects for economic development, and the social change and political conditions (of governance) it requires. The first is that African farmers (peasants) have a mostly ‘discretionary’ relation to commodity production and exchange: they move in and out of markets according to the imperatives and calculations of ‘basic survival’ and ‘social maintenance’. This is not an index of irrationality but certainly of a different rationality to the maximisation of utility through market behaviour of *homo economicus*, the conditions (and necessity) of which are absent.

The second effect, of principal interest to Hyden, is that the patronage politics characteristic of the economy of affection and ‘social’ accumulation permeate state formation and functioning. Government is a key site of this politics of patronage, which mobilises followings on an ethnic and/or regional basis (generating inter-ethnic competition and conflict), hence it can not provide the universalising and impersonal instrumentalism required to undertake a national project of economic accumulation. And, because the state is hostage to its social base in the economy of affection, it is unable to ‘capture’ (or dispossess) African farmers for commodity production as a condition of any such project of accumulation/development.

This is a potent motif, with many resonances of colonial discourses, which continues to be recycled. For example, it provides the central argument of Chabal and Daloz concerning the predatory state and ‘disorder as political instrument’. Their argument rests explicitly on the primordial nature of social relations, political processes and (anti-)governance in sub-Saharan Africa, all of which express a particular rationality (‘Africa works’) and indeed a peculiar form of ‘modernisation’ – but for reasons, and in ways, antithetical to the Weberian institutional norms (of both market and governance) necessary for economic development.\footnote{Chabal and Daloz 1999.}

\footnote{There is a potent counter to the line of Chabal and Daloz in the provocative recent book by Duffield 2001. Duffield argues that underlying the ‘new wars’ and other ‘state collapse’ anathematised by neoliberalism (and its construction of ‘liberal peace’) there are processes of ‘actual development’ embedded within ‘the growth of transborder shadow economies’ and ‘non-territorial networks of governance’. Duffield’s examples}
A different position is that African farmers are as capable of rational market behaviour as farmers anywhere else but, like their counterparts, need the right conditions to demonstrate this – or demonstrate it once more as they have in the past. Such conditions can include both provision – of infrastructure, effective marketing and credit systems, adequate price information, appropriate land and labour-enhancing technologies – and the removal of obstacles that depress incentives to innovation and productivity growth.

The impulse to provision was characteristic of late-colonial and independence developmentalism, manifested in an array of settlement schemes and agricultural development projects designed to stimulate the energies of ‘progressive’ farmers at least. Over time, such interventions were increasingly seen as part of the problems of agricultural productivity growth and rural livelihoods/welfare, rather than solutions to them. Criticism of their specific technical blueprints, management practices, and effects (including environmental effects), and \textit{a fortiori} of their general commandist inspiration, was assimilated to the gathering onslaught on state-led development from the late 1970s. What African states (and their donors) provided farmers with one hand (in however erroneous or ineffectual a fashion) was, it seems, more than outweighed by what states took away with the other hand through monopolistic marketing and administered prices. The latter could be explained variously, or in combination, by (i) the bias of policies hostage to urban constituencies (the ‘urban bias’ thesis), (ii) commitment to a development path of (public sector) industrial accumulation, and (iii) the intrinsically predatory nature of African states, feeding off the ‘social’ accumulation of whatever resources they can appropriate (as above).\footnote{The principal application of the ‘urban bias’ thesis to sub-Saharan Africa was Bates 1981 published, along with Hyden 1980, 1983, in that crucial initial conjuncture of the introduction of structural adjustment programmes. Bates drew on the seminal statement of ‘urban bias’ – the programmatic formulation of contemporary agrarian neo-populism – by Lipton 1977. Byres 1979 was an early rebuttal of Lipton, and Karshenas 1996 a similarly detailed and powerful critique of World Bank policy research and prescription inspired by the notion of ‘urban bias’.}

From the 1980s, as the developmental state in Africa unravelled materially and ideologically (and encouraging its demise), the rationale of structural adjustment moved the policy agenda from state-financed and managed
provision (and marketing), and all such manifestations of misconceived state (hyper-)activism, to encourage market incentives to (re)dynamise agricultural production: the space of the African farmer as homo economicus re-established. Recognition that ‘getting the prices right’ is a necessary if not sufficient condition of restoring agricultural productivity growth generated subsequent complementary ambitions to build good governance, civil society and social capital. This acknowledgement of collective action, the necessity of basic public goods, and desirability of certain merit goods is informed by the ‘new institutional economics’, an extension of the neoclassical paradigm. With such (re-)inventions of homo civicus, the objective remains to support, rather than substitute for, the efforts of the African farmer as homo economicus to pursue efficiently those private gains from which social benefit derives.

The imposition of structural adjustment on Africa, announced in the landmark Berg Report, contained, among its other strategic elements, a strident emphasis on ‘getting the prices right’, noted above. This, it can be suggested, represented an aspiration by the World Bank to a ‘market fix’ for continuing problems of agricultural production and productivity, which the standard ‘technical fix’ of modernisation policies had failed to deliver. The poor (supply) response to the ‘market fix’ in turn generated much discussion of an ‘institutional fix’, not least concerning property rights in land. On the one hand, for conventional economics, the status of land as alienable commodity is theoretically necessary to the functioning of homo economicus: without its real costs established through markets for land, the private efficiency of different uses of land cannot be calculated properly (nor can their social efficiency on a market-derived calculus of environmental externalities). On the other hand, whether establishing de jure property rights in land in African countries is advisable, given its legal and institutional complexities and likely political sensitivity, or whether the same end might result from spontaneous

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13 For the neoliberal version of ‘bringing the state back in’ see World Bank 1997 and the incisive discussion by Moore 1999; cf. also Harriss et al. 1995 on the new institutional economics applied to development, Fine 2001 and Harriss 2002 on notions of social capital, and Fine et al. 2001 on the theoretical and policy framework of the ‘post-Washington consensus’.

14 World Bank 1981.

15 The exemplar of the ‘technical fix’ was the success of the Green Revolution, above all in India.

16 The complex histories of colonial and postcolonial land law and tenure practices are as contested by scholars as they are in many African countrysides; Peters 2002a provides an excellent review.
The evolution of de facto property rights, has exercised the World Bank and new institutional economists from the 1990s.\textsuperscript{17}

To summarise, in relation to views of capitalism: the elementary equation of neoliberalism – that \textit{homo economicus} driven by maximisation \textit{and} able to achieve it in the proper institutional conditions (of assured property rights and allocatively efficient markets) = capitalism = economic growth – has long been applied, and still is, in diagnoses of African ‘peasant’ farming and its (mis)fortunes. Its less ‘pure’ ideological forms take on additional (culturalist) ideological baggage, to assert that African farmers fall short of the demands and disciplines of \textit{homo economicus} because they are (in some or other essentialist construction) ‘Africans’.

Alternative applications of \textit{homo economicus} represent, as it were, ideologically ‘purer’ versions of its base analytical model with its presumption to universalism. One example is the view that farmers in Africa are rational agents in especially precarious physical and economic environments who therefore maximise the security of subsistence (rather than monetary income), and minimise risk (and perhaps drudgery) – much like small farmers everywhere who confront similar constraints.\textsuperscript{18} Another example is the view that African farmers are as capable of rational market behaviour as \textit{homo economicus} anywhere else; what has held them back are the market distortions generic to state-led development and/or social and political accumulation (both of which are manifested in ‘urban bias’) and perhaps market imperfections of indigenous provenance, such as ostensibly ‘communal’ or ‘customary’ land tenure which are, however, similarly susceptible to ‘reform’.

Also noted were several expressions – exemplified by Hyden and Chabal and Daloz – of a somewhat different, and more sociological, version of what can be termed the ‘primordial’ thesis: Africans are rational actors but their rationalities, rooted in the social relations and values of kin and ethnicity, are inimical to those impersonal (and individualised?) instrumental practices that underlie the successful development of capitalism. In effect, the specificities

\textsuperscript{17} For example, Bruce and Migot-Adholla 1994, Platteau 1996.

\textsuperscript{18} The policy implication of this stance is that interventions to enhance security (‘subsistence’) provide the condition for greater (and more efficient) production for the market by ‘the rural poor’; this is the programme set out in the IFAD Rural Poverty Report 2001, of which the intellectual architect is Michael Lipton (see note 12). The IFAD Report acclaims ‘new wave’ land reform which is ‘market-friendly’ vs. previous land reform which was ‘unduly contiscatory, statist or top-down’, 2001, p. 75; see also Bernstein 2002.
of Africa are (again) constructed as its *exceptionalism*: the root problem of Africa remains its African-ness.

I turn, next, to a very different approach, and one much closer to political economy, that seeks to explain the trajectories of agrarian change in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of some of the specificities of its modern history.

**Commodification without class**

The key reference here is the work of Sara Berry, the *doyenne* of African agrarian studies in the USA. In a highly influential book, *No Condition is Permanent*, Berry’s purpose was to analyse the effects of commercialisation and state formation (what she calls ‘state centralization’) – the key processes of ‘structural’ change in modern African history – on the conditions of farmers’ access to resources, above all land and labour. Conditions of access centre on claims to land and the labour of others negotiated and exercised through social relations and cultural practices that are ‘fluid, dynamic and ambiguous’, and that mediate (and can deflect) the allocative effects of market processes and state actions. Berry’s investigation of ‘different local configurations of power, production and culture’, and how and why they change, is pursued through case studies of four areas from the inception of colonial rule to the 1980s: the cocoa growing zones of south-central Ghana and southwestern Nigeria, the Central Province of Kenya, and northeastern Zambia (all high rainfall areas in former British colonies).

Berry’s analytical approach and conclusions are explicitly counterposed to what she sees as the inadequacies of both conventional economics (*homo economicus*) and historical materialism, which she interprets as, and limits to, the ‘Lenin model’ of concentration/dispossession of the means of production and formation of an agrarian bourgeoisie and proletariat. The distinctive feature of her argument is the imperative for African farmers to invest in social status and identity via membership(s) of ‘networks’ that provide the basis for claims on resources. These networks are above all those of descent (sometimes designated more loosely by Berry as ‘family’ and ‘community’) and patron-client relations, but can include religious, political and other association and affiliation. Because they are not corporate entities clearly

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19 This section follows Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001, pp. 298–300.
demarcated by ascriptive criteria (despite the idioms of their ideological representations) but ‘fluid, dynamic and ambiguous’, such social networks allow scope for individual mobility through skill in negotiating their rules. Investment in them typically entails monetary payments to establish or boost status, with the return to investment the capacity to claim access to land and the services of clients and followers, and the incentive to so invest intensified in periods of rapid economic growth.

It is clear that, for Berry, ‘customary’ social relations and the commodification of peasant farming are not intrinsically opposed (as in the primordialism thesis), but rather that their mutual effectivity is what accounts for many of the historical specificities of patterns of commodification in sub-Saharan Africa, including their limits to the growth of agricultural production and productivity. The colonial state could influence (if hardly determine or control) this dynamic through its practice of ‘hegemony on a shoestring’, Berry’s formulation of the contradictions and constraints of indirect rule; although she does recognise the generally harsher expressions (and deeper effects?) of those contradictions in Kenya and Zambia than in West Africa. The commitment to ‘planned development’ of independent states manifested a more intrusive and disruptive presence in the countryside without achieving the control of rural production it aspired to. This generated a series of ‘inconclusive encounters’ that tended to multiply the risks for both farmers and bureaucrats, as each sought advantage from ‘the proliferation of state institutions’ as potential channels of claims to resources.

Berry’s principal conclusions relevant to this discussion can be summarised in two contrasts, or divergent outcomes, she presents. The first is that, while accessing land through the social mechanisms outlined persists, commanding labour does not. On the former ‘most people in rural areas have access to land, and are therefore able to cultivate on their own account’. Moreover, the continuing salience of social and cultural claims to land obstructs tendencies to its commodification and effective privatisation, even when de jure property rights exist. By contrast, ‘the open-endedness and negotiability of labor arrangements based on social relationships helped to make them as risky as taking part in an impersonal labor market’; or, what (still) works to access
land no longer works to access labour. Another reason, complementary to that quoted, seems to be a reduction in farmers’ material and cultural resources to command kin and non-kin labour in the face of more attractive opportunities to earn income in periods of economic buoyancy, and the necessity to diversify income sources (including for farmers) in periods of generalised economic depression, as from the 1980s: ‘despite widespread poverty and underemployment, the agrarian question in Africa turns on scarcity of labor rather than land’.

The second contrast is between the cocoa zones of West Africa (especially during the long period of their expansion to the 1960s) and the other two areas with their very different historical trajectories: settler colonialism and land alienation in Kenya, and labour migration to the mines of the Copperbelt and beyond from northeastern Zambia, with the growth of peasant commodity production in both areas after independence concentrated on food crops.

In Ghana and Nigeria, the growth of cocoa production gave rise to widespread use of hired farm labor and to a high incidence of modest upward mobility among both farmers and farm workers. In the predominantly food-crop producing economies of central Kenya and northeastern Zambia, agricultural employment has been less commercialized and more differentiated along lines of gender and class. In West Africa, commercialization of farm labor occurred without agricultural class formation; in central Kenya and northeastern Zambia, where the commercialization of agricultural employment has been more limited, rural differentiation has been more pronounced.

This illustrates Berry’s polemical stance concerning the ‘Lenin model’, and her conclusion that social differentiation primarily disadvantages women and ‘strangers’ (migrants) as social categories within the functioning of networks, rather than generating class formation. However, and as suggested below, materialist analysis of the commodification of agrarian social relations in sub-Saharan Africa has sought to develop more nuanced versions of the theoretical logic of Lenin’s approach, expanding its explanatory apparatus and range of applications, rather than to ‘verify’ its stereotypical outcome of the formation of a phenomenally evident agrarian bourgeoisie and proletariat. Indeed, the absence of, or limits to, such formation is the initial problematic of most

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26 Berry 1993, p. 143.
materialist analyses of Africa’s agrarian questions. Perhaps symptomatically, two of the authors Berry cites extensively in her account of Central Province – Michael Cowen and Gavin Kitching – were important innovators of such analysis, but then she draws on their empirical findings and entirely disregards their theoretical arguments.29

More generally, and despite all the instances she gives of how commodity relations and practices permeate the functioning of social networks, Berry’s understanding of commercialisation sometimes seems closer to that of conventional economics. Thus ‘African farmers gain access to productive resources through social relations as well as market transactions’,30 as if ‘market transactions’ in capitalism (or, for that matter, any other mode of production exhibiting commodity production and exchange) do not require specific conditions of existence: particular types of social relations and social divisions of labour. Is it perhaps also symptomatic that she translates her proposition of the continuing salience of social networks to access land into the (dubious) generalisation that ‘most [sic] people in rural areas (still) have access to land, and are therefore able to farm on their own account’ (cited earlier, and see further below)? This seems to run counter to the divergent outcomes we would expect ‘different local configurations of power, production and culture’ – and different ‘local’ patterns of commodification – to reveal.

The primordial thesis, in its various expressions, is unable to grasp the internalisation of commodity relations in the social conditions of existence in African countrysides, exemplified by Hyden’s view of the discretionary participation of African farmers in markets. By contrast, Berry’s work contains a sharp awareness of the centrality of processes of commodification to agrarian change in modern Africa but, as has been suggested, an incomplete – and, in some ways, misconceived – analysis of them, in which class relations (and differentiation) appear, at most, as a contingent effect rather than a necessary dynamic. Theorising both that necessity and the highly variable empirical forms that manifest it – the investigation of historical specificities – is the challenge faced by analysis of Africa’s agrarian questions grounded in a materialist political economy.

29 Cowen 1981a, 1981b, provided pioneering accounts of the conditions of existence, and historical trajectories, of ‘middle-peasant’ production and reproduction; Kitching’s major historical study was subtitled ‘the making of an African petite-bourgeoisie’, 1980.
30 Berry 1993, p. 179, emphasis added.
Commodification blocked or generalised?

The theoretical content of commodification in historical materialism is the formation and functioning of systems of production and reproduction based in the essential social relation of capitalism between capital and (wage-)labour. That relation is essential in the sense that it is theoretically definitive but not exclusive: capitalist divisions of property, labour and income, and the social dynamics of the reproduction and accumulation of capital, incorporate and generate other social differences/divisions – social relations of gender, generation, ethnicity, mental and manual labour, countryside and town. These theoretical elements represent ‘very general themes’ of commodification from which specific histories create ‘complex variations’. Materialist investigation and interpretation of the complex variations – and contradictions – created by the specific histories of commodification in colonial and independent Africa have generated a number of theses and points of debate.

A first overarching thesis concerns the timing of colonialism and its effects. This occurred in sub-Saharan Africa when industrial capitalism was already dominant internationally and during the initial phase of imperialism in Lenin’s sense: the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism. Thus the ‘gap’ in productive power between the colonising countries and the societies they incorporated (with all its military, political and ideological consequences) was relatively greater in sub-Saharan Africa than in earlier phases and regions of colonialism during the formation of capitalism on a global scale.

A second (somewhat related) thesis is that aspects of the diverse African societies incorporated by colonialism were reproduced by the dynamics and contradictions of colonial economy and government, suggesting a specific dialectic of change and continuity that is explained in different ways. The formulation of the ‘dissolution/conservation’ of indigenous social forms, or ‘articulation of modes of production’, proposes a primarily economic logic: the social conditions of ‘subsistence’ production by family (and especially female) labour ‘subsidise’ the costs to capital of peasant-produced export commodities and the wages of cyclical (male) labour migrants to plantations and mines. A different, also primarily economic, explanation of the dialectic of ‘dissolution/conservation’ derives from Marx’s analysis of merchant capital.

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31 To adapt, from another context, the formulation of Gilsenan 1982, p. 51.
32 As the late Julius Nyerere put it, in a speech at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s attended by the author: ‘For Lenin imperialism was the last stage of capitalism, for we Africans it was the first’.
33 Meillassoux 1975, Rey 1976.
It argues that agricultural export production in colonial Africa was organised principally by merchant rather than productive capital, imposing commodity production on existing social forms rather than transforming them, and that this remains the principal obstacle to fuller (capitalist) development.34

The motif of continuity and change is given a novel twist in the thesis of Mamdani that colonial rule in Africa generated a distinctive form of ‘bifurcated’ state.35 This state form manifested the specifically political imperative of the ‘native question’ (control of subject populations), and provided a specifically political legacy to independent Africa, neither of which are reducible to the ‘labour question’ (economic class formation). Bifurcation follows the institutional contours of indirect rule, and reproduces and reinforces the division of town and countryside. The town is the space of citizenship and civil society (racialised during colonialism and deracialised with independence), while the countryside is ruled through a ‘decentralized despotism’ based in ethnicity and that constitutes rural people as subjects of customary or tribal law and authority, including ‘communal’ land tenure. The latter, together with the labour and money tributes exacted by ‘traditional leaders’, and/or their state cadre successors to local despotism, presumably inhibits the deeper development of agrarian commodity production, just as it blocks the exercise of political rights.36

Another contribution to explaining the specificities of commodification in sub-Saharan Africa, that combines economic and political (and ideological) determinants, is the ‘Fabian colonialism’ thesis of Cowen and Shenton: that the basic contradiction of the colonial project in Africa was how to promote commodity production and capitalist enterprise while preventing the formation of the dangerous classes generated by (industrial) capitalist development in Europe.37 This included prohibiting private property rights in land and the access of African farmers and entrepreneurs to commercial credit from colonial
banks and merchant houses, and the desire to preserve African ‘community’ and its presumed mechanisms of social control in the face of labour migration and new channels of social differentiation and accumulation generated by commodification. Once again, this contradiction rooted in the colonial order is reproduced in the period of independence by the continuing dominance of ‘doctrines of development’ and their aspiration to the social engineering of ‘harmonious’ development under state ‘trusteeship’.

In effect, all these are various explanations of why colonialism did not dispossess African farmers of their means of production, above all land (with the partial exception of the settler colonies of East and Southern Africa), seen as a condition for the development of large-scale capitalist production. Consequently, this inhibited, without preventing, the commodification of land and labour-power (conditions of the development of the productive forces in agriculture). For some of the interpretations noted, this dialectic of change and continuity, or continuity in change, is theorised as the reproduction of prior forms of social relations and organisation within circuits of commodity production in ways that transform but do not extinguish them (‘dissolution/conservation’). Alternatively, Cowen and Shenton distinguish between ‘immanent’ capitalist development and those ubiquitous doctrines and practices of ‘harmonious’ development under state trusteeship that seek to pre-empt or contain the contradictions of capitalism. For them, presumably, it is the latter that inhibit the forces of immanent capitalist development, rather than the resilience of (non-capitalist) indigenous social relations.

In a somewhat different way, which is followed here, Gibbon and Neocosmos argue that African economies are fully capitalist, that is, characterised by generalised commodity production, even if it does not take the (often stereotyped) forms of ‘advanced’ capitalist economy and its phenomenal class correlates: ostensibly clearly demarcated classes of capital and labour, bourgeoisie and proletariat. In this understanding of peripheral capitalism, and defining its peripheral character, the economies of sub-Saharan Africa exhibit the prevalence of petty commodity production – peasant and artisanal ‘household’ forms of production – over large-scale capitalist production (generally restricted to extractive sectors) in their social divisions of labour.
Petty commodity production in capitalism is a form of small-scale enterprise constituted by its distinctive combination of the class places of the essential social relation between capital and wage-labour. Petty commodity producers are capitalists and workers at the same time: capitalists because they own or have access to means of production, workers because they use their own labour. In short, they are capitalists who employ (hence exploit) themselves. Peasants become petty commodity producers in this sense when they are unable to reproduce themselves outside the relations and processes of capitalist commodity production, when the latter come to constitute the conditions of existence of peasant farming and are internalised in its organisation and activity. This historical moment is satisfied when ‘forcible commercialization’ gives way to commodification under ‘the dull compulsion of economic forces’, as Marx put it, in order to acquire the necessities of life – a condition that was satisfied by the end of the colonial period in Africa (as in Asia).

There are a number of important aspects of this theoretical approach which can be noted, and their implications for considering Africa’s agrarian questions illustrated briefly. First is its insistence on the internalisation of commodity relations within the relations, circuits and practices of peasant economy and social existence more generally (just noted). This affects linkages between commodity and ‘subsistence’ production (signalled earlier), with the patterns of the former (that manifest ‘the dull compulsion of economic forces’) shaping the economic spaces and social forms of the latter. Evidently, this approach contrasts sharply with both ‘primordialist’ and neoliberal accounts of the problems of agricultural production and productivity in Africa that attribute them, respectively, to the persisting strength of ‘indigenous’ (precapitalist) social relations and cultural practices and to still substantially incomplete markets (and ‘missing’ market institutions).
conflation of market and state (as doubly ‘external’ to rural existence) is not to deny the importance of colonial (and successor) states in securing some of the conditions of commodification through both ‘forcible commercialization’ and the provision of infrastructure, nor indeed of some of the contradictions and limits of the ways they did so, sketched above and investigated by Kitching 1980, Phillips 1989, Cowen and Shenton 1996, among others.

46 Sub-Saharan Africa was famously epitomised as the zone of female-centred farming systems in Ester Boserup’s seminal *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth*, 1965. Since then, feminist scholars have been central to advancing the analysis of agrarian change in modern Africa, including its specific trajectories of commodification. They include Jane Guyer, Maureen Mackintosh, Marjorie Mbilinyi, Bridget O’Laughlin, Pauline Peters, Megan Vaughan and Anne Whitehead, some of whose work has addressed explicitly how processes of rural class formation are gendered, for example, Mackintosh 1989, O’Laughlin 1996, 1998.

47 For example, those who attributed the failure of Tanzania’s rural ‘socialism’ [*ujamaa vijijini*] in the 1960s and 1970s to the power of an ostensibly kulak class, in an unfortunate echo of the discourse of Stalinist collectivisation of agriculture in the USSR.

48 Although proletarianisation of the rural landless and poor peasantry may proceed without the formation, let alone expanded reproduction, of classes of landed property and agrarian capital.

49 And, moreover, investigation freed of the presumption that there is a ‘normal’ path/pattern/model of agrarian class differentiation in capitalism (‘the Lenin model’) so that only deviations from that ‘normality’ require explanation.

Second, commodification generates *inter- and intra-household differentiation* in various ways – not least in (changing) forms of gendered relations/divisions of property, labour and income – without necessarily eventuating in phenomenally evident classes of agrarian capital and labour. The latter, as noted earlier, is the fundamental problem for ‘stereotypical’ understandings of ‘the Lenin model’, whether by those who polemicise against it (such as Sara Berry) or by those of its proponents who apply it in mechanical fashion.

In the theoretical framework used here, and sketched above, commodification (as process) and petty commodity production (as a specific social form within capitalism) are based in, and only explicable by, a class relation and its dynamics. This is not to say that the process necessarily generates, nor that the form necessarily dissolves into, distinct and evident sociological classes of landed property and agrarian capital on one hand, and proletarian labour on the other. Whether class differentiation produces this outcome, as well as why and how, and with what effects, are always questions for investigation.

Several fruitful lines of investigation of conditions and outcomes of commodification in relation to rural class formation in Africa can be noted, by way of illustration. One was indicated above in various theses about articulation of modes of production, the dominance of merchant capital, and the effects of ‘Fabian colonialism’ and subsequent doctrines – and practices of market and state (as doubly ‘external’ to rural existence) is not to deny the importance of colonial (and successor) states in securing some of the conditions of commodification through both ‘forcible commercialization’ and the provision of infrastructure, nor indeed of some of the contradictions and limits of the ways they did so, sketched above and investigated by Kitching 1980, Phillips 1989, Cowen and Shenton 1996, among others.

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– of development through state ‘trusteeship’ that seek to limit (or otherwise ‘manage’) rural class formation.\(^5\) Another was indicated in an earlier essay by Sara Berry when she seemed less inhibited from engaging with class analysis.\(^5\) Berry suggested that the very precarious conditions – both ecological and social – of farming in much of Africa stimulate practices of diversification of the sources of both simple reproduction and expanded reproduction. Such diversification follows lines of class differentiation: simple reproduction is exemplified by the combination of (household) farming with wage-labour, expanded reproduction by investment in circulation (trade, transport) rather than in increasing the scale of farming enterprises (accumulation of agrarian capital). In short, investigation of the effects/outcomes of rural class differentiation can not be restricted to the growth of agrarian capital and agricultural wage-labour, nor indeed to the countryside, but has to explore the linkages of spatially and socially wider terrains of commodification. This may seem obvious, but is often neglected in much debate of Africa’s agrarian questions, and is touched on further below.\(^5\)

Third, processes of differentiation are expressed in *competition* between peasants as petty commodity producers: for land, labour, credit, market access and for connections to politically allocated resources. Such competition is both individualised (again within, as well as between, farming households) and collective, for example, in the pursuit of claims made on some corporate basis (for example, village or clan membership) to arable or grazing land or water sources.

Fourth, one kind of outcome – that is widespread in practice – of such competition and differentiation is the *consolidation* of a ‘middle’ peasantry and *marginalisation* of poor peasants unable to reproduce themselves as capital, because of their diminishing command of the means of production (the ‘entry’ and reproduction costs of petty commodity production).\(^3\) In other words,
even where access to land is not a barrier, the availability of land is not a sufficient condition of ‘own account’ farming; marginalised farmers in Africa might not correspond to the ‘landless peasantry’ so central to accounts of rural class structure in South Asia and South America, for example, but are otherwise ‘too poor to farm’ – or to farm on a significant scale. This links to the preceding point about the class patterning of diversified economic activity as well as to the point that follows.

Fifth, then, are the multiple links between farming and other arenas and practices of economic activity constituted by commodity relations such as wage employment, and non-agricultural self-employment in other branches of petty commodity production (handicrafts, trade). The demarcation of certain rural areas as ‘labour reserves’ for agricultural estates, plantations and mines, including the great mining complexes of Southern Africa, has, of course, long been observed, and provided the principal object of much of the theorisation of ‘articulation of modes of production’. However, from the early colonial period, the combination of ‘wage and hoe’ was central to the reproduction of many African ‘peasannies’ beyond the most evident zones of labour reserves, and never more so than today.

Finally is the particular instability of petty commodity production and its tendencies to dissolution. At a general theoretical level, there are two reasons for this. One is its distinctive contradictory combination of the class places of capital and labour within ‘household’ enterprise, which discloses tendencies to dissolution through differentiation: at one extreme, the failure of petty producers to reproduce themselves as capital (proletarianisation) and, at the other, accumulation of means of production beyond the capacity of ‘household’ labour, hence transition to capitalist (wage-labour-hiring) enterprise. As emphasised above, the former can occur without the latter. The second reason is that changes in social divisions of labour in capitalism destroy the spaces of petty producers in particular branches of production (typically, but not

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54 Which it is increasingly in some farming areas in Africa, pace Berry, manifested in intense land disputes and migration, see Peters 2002b, 2004.
55 The central thrust of which was anticipated by a South-African Communist, D.I. Jones, in 1921: ‘This, then is the function of the native territories, to serve as cheap breeding grounds for black labour – the repositories of the reserve army of native labour – sucking it in or letting it out according to the demands of industry. By means of those territories capital is relieved of the obligation of paying wages to cover the cost to the labourer of reproducing his kind’, as quoted by Legassick and Wolpe 1976, p. 87.
56 In the title of Cordell et al. 1996.
exclusively, because of the superior productive power of large-scale production), but also create new spaces for petty commodity production in new or existing branches of production, as Lenin observed.

More concretely, in striving to reproduce themselves as both capital and labour, African farmers/petty commodity producers confront various sources and types of risk and opportunity with respect to:

(i) conditions of access to means of production and markets, and relations with other class elements and social categories (merchant capital, agrarian and industrial capitals, state officials);

(ii) the appropriation of nature/productive forces (climatic uncertainty, ecological degradation on one hand; intensification of resource use, availability of land and labour-enhancing technologies on the other hand);

(iii) markets: the relative prices, or terms of trade, of what they sell and need to buy as means of production and means of consumption;

(iv) combining farming with other income-earning activities (diversification strategies for ‘survival’/simple reproduction or investment/expanded reproduction);

(v) how all the above are affected by state policies and practices (provision of infrastructure and credit/subsidy, access to public goods such as health care, clean water, education, which affect the reproduction of labour; taxation of agriculture).

These are characteristics and effects of petty commodity production that confront (‘family’) farmers generally within contemporary capitalism, and that also manifest specific forms and outcomes of social (class and gender) differentiation as so many ‘complex variations’ of the general dialectic of commodification. The sources of such variation necessarily include specific conditions of existence, some of which have been sketched on the plane of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole and which, of course, require further investigation/specification of particular historical trajectories. While the latter make empirical generalisation about sub-Saharan Africa problematic,

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as ever, certain tendencies of the current conjuncture (that of structural adjustment, liberalisation and globalisation, with all their unevenness) in Africa’s countrysides can be suggested briefly.

First, the pressures on the reproduction of ‘family’ farming as petty commodity enterprise have been compounded. Stagnant (or declining) productivity, together with adverse changes in other conditions of production and exchange (terms of trade, domestic inflation and so forth), translates into declining real incomes from farming and its capacity for social reproduction.\textsuperscript{59} The sources of stagnant/declining productivity include the declining use of inputs, notably fertilizer, in part an outcome of the widespread reduction of state provision of inputs and credit and of state maintenance of the transport infrastructure that connects farmers with the markets for their commodities. The effect of declining incomes (means of ‘subsistence’/reproduction) is to intensify longstanding tendencies to ‘footloose labour’ from the countryside, and to generate new patterns of such movement in the search for other (and any) means of livelihood.\textsuperscript{60} In this respect, Africa exhibits, if in an especially acute manner, the problems of survival faced by vast numbers of the dispossessed in the South; and, as in other zones of the South, ‘footloose labour’ of rural provenance crosses and intermixes with movements to the countryside of retrenched miners and industrial workers seeking some means of (at least seasonal) agricultural employment and (at least marginal) self-employment.\textsuperscript{61}

Second, these tendencies are not experienced equally, of course, but follow the contours of class and gender differentiation: in conditions of generalised commodity relations, pressures on some present opportunities to others. Thus, in certain circumstances and areas, there is intensified commodification of farming, with the formation and consolidation of more specialised ‘middle-peasant’/petty capitalist production and the development of local labour

\textsuperscript{59} Friis-Hansen 2000.

\textsuperscript{60} The term ‘footloose labour’ is taken from the title of Breman’s 1996 exceptional ethnography of similar processes of labour migration and ‘informal’ labour markets in southern India; on India, see also Harriss-White and Gooptu 2001. The destinations of such African ‘footloose labour’ today include particular zones of ‘transborder shadow economies’ (note 11 above) in Central and West Africa, and areas of intensive horticultural production in Southern Europe.

\textsuperscript{61} For example, Petras 1997, 1998, on Latin America; for specific African instances of the rural consequences of the loss of more stable waged employment, see Murray 1995 on South Africa; O’Laughlin 1998 on Botswana; Ferguson 1999 on Zambia; Nyambara 2001 on Zimbabwe.

\textsuperscript{62} For example, the suggestive work of Gibbon 2001 and Ponte 2000, 2002 on
markets. This is sometimes stimulated by, and otherwise combined with, changes in the organisation and regulation of agricultural commodity chains, driven globally by technical and strategic shifts by food corporations (and shifts in regulatory régimes, with which those corporations are intimately connected), and adapting locally, with greater and lesser success, to the divestment and privatisation of agricultural marketing (and its associated functions) by African governments. In other cases, there is a growing tendency to leasing of large areas of land to productive and speculative capital (including of extra-national provenance, as in Mozambique), often taking advantage of changing practices of land tenure in de facto if not necessarily de jure terms.

What are the implications of these observations? Is there a plausible case to be made that the intensification of commodification of Africa’s countrysides in the current period of structural adjustment and liberalisation will generate more profound and sustained paths of capitalist accumulation and development (including industrialisation)? And can claims for accumulation/development be invested in, and supported by, tendencies to private property rights in land, social differentiation, and the formation of ever larger (as well as ever desperate) ‘reserve armies’ of labour? Pursuing these questions would entail a much more detailed consideration of processes of change in Africa today, of the place of African economies within (changing) international divisions of labour and markets, and of the connections between them, than is possible here. It might be useful, however, to conclude by relating the view of commodification proposed and illustrated in this essay to inherited Marxist positions on the agrarian question.

**Capitalism and Africa’s agrarian questions**

Drawing on the seminal comparative work on ‘agrarian transition’ of T.J. Byres, one can distinguish three lineages of the agrarian question (AQ) in Tanzania; on intensified patterns of commodification in historically pastoralist zones in East Africa of Anderson and Broch-Due 1999, and Woodhouse et al. 2000, Chapter 3. Raikes and Gibbon 2000, Ponte 2001, Daviron and Gibbon 2002. Woodhouse et al. 2000 argue the tendency to enclosure of land and (highly valued) water resources; see also Peters 2002a, 2004. Current legislative reform concerning property rights in land in a number of African countries follows often complex processes of de facto enclosure, and often in politically convoluted ways. An example that says a lot about the kinds of ‘opportunities’ in Africa presented by globalisation is the expropriation of large ‘wilderness’ tracts for hunting and eco-tourism safaris: ‘wilderness’ that is occupied or otherwise used by arable and livestock farmers; Hughes 2001 is an especially pointed Zimbabwean case study.

See Arrighi 2002.
historical materialism, summarised by their problematics of politics, production and accumulation.\textsuperscript{66} AQ1 centres on issues of alliances between classes of urban and rural labour, both agricultural labour and the poor peasantry, in struggles for democracy and socialism (for example, Engels, Lenin, Bukharin); AQ2 on the development of the productive forces in agriculture (for example, Marx, Lenin, Kautsky); and AQ3 on the contributions of agriculture to primary accumulation for industrialisation (for example, and notably, Preobrazhensky, arguably the key influence on Byres’s formulation and investigation of ‘agrarian transition’).\textsuperscript{67}

Applications and explorations of these problematics – and their interconnections – were premised on the recognition, whether explicit or implicit, of the uniqueness of the ‘English path’ of agrarian transition to (industrial) capitalism, characterised by its exceptionally early and comprehensive disappearance of the peasantry.\textsuperscript{68} Thereafter, the ‘agrarian question’ was permeated – indeed often constituted – by the need to confront the balance of forces in social formations where ‘the peasant is a very essential factor of the population, production and power’.\textsuperscript{69} Those formations included France and Germany in Europe’s late nineteenth-century industrialising heartlands (addressed by Engels), and, \textit{a fortiori}, the ‘backward’ peripheries of Europe: Ireland, Russia, and most of Southern, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe where agrarian agitation remained key to social turbulence and political change in the first half of the twentieth century. The same held, of course, in the extension of such agrarian questions to the vast colonial or quasi-colonial peripheries of Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Of these, Africa seems most resistant to any resolution of the agrarian question, in all three senses noted. Why this should be so entails consideration of the trajectories of modern African history, their specificities and contradictions (elements of which have been sketched in this essay), but also advises

\textsuperscript{66} Byres 1991, 1996.
\textsuperscript{67} Bernstein 1996.
\textsuperscript{68} Recent appreciation of the unique circumstances of the emergence of agrarian capitalism in England has followed the pioneering work of Robert Brenner 1976, which provides an alternative to both teleological notions of capitalism as contained in ‘the womb’ of feudalism and ‘born’ from the contradiction between feudal relations and forces of production, and notions of the growth of trade and towns as sufficient conditions of the genesis of capitalist social relations. A useful review of the issues is provided by Wood 1999; Brenner 2001 is a recent restatement of his argument extended to the transition to capitalism of the Low Countries, and discussed by Wood 2002 and Post 2002.
\textsuperscript{69} Engels 1970 [1894], p. 457.
interrogation of the objects, preoccupations and expectations of the ‘classical’ agrarian question and their historical contexts and assumptions. The ‘classical’ agrarian question, as suggested, was concerned above all with the transition to capitalism in agriculture (in primarily agrarian societies). This entailed the development of both (i) capitalist social relations and forms of production in farming (that would deliver development of the productive forces), and (ii) means of ensuring that the profits from such expanded production/productivity would be channelled into primary accumulation for industrialisation. The course of each aspect of this double progression is shaped by class struggles and their outcomes: the former by the relations between landed property and agrarian capital and between both and agrarian labour, the latter by relations between landed property and agrarian capital on one side and emergent manufacturing capital (and urban labour) on the other.70 This problematic was formulated with specific (if sometimes implicit) reference to a transition from feudalism, and to dynamics of change (class struggle) largely internal to given social formations dominated or otherwise held back by régimes of more-or-less predatory landed property, whether of original ‘feudal’ provenance or shaped by particular colonial experiences.71

It follows that this construction of the agrarian question (as ‘agrarian transition’) is hardly adequate to those social formations constituted by colonial imperialism, and the variant forms of commodification of agriculture it bequeathed. This fundamental difference in the historical conditions – and prospects – of ‘agrarian transition’/industrialisation in the South is only reinforced by successive mutations of forms of organisation of capital, of divisions of labour and markets, in agricultural production and exchange on a world scale, not least those multiple (and inevitably uneven) changes since

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70 See the illuminating comparative analysis, in similar terms, of the structural bases of agrarian politics and agricultural policies in the USA, India, Colombia and Egypt by de Janvry 1983.

71 Exemplified, albeit in contested ways, by most of Europe and Japan on one hand, most of South America on the other, with a third category of candidates for indigenous (quasi-) ‘feudalisms’ reshaped by colonial incursion and rule, for example in parts of North Africa and Western Asia, the Indian sub-continent, and Southeast and East Asia (including the once Japanese colonies of Korea and Taiwan). In this, as in other respects, the USA (more precisely its North and West) was the (symptomatic?) exception in its agrarian path to capitalism, see Post 1982, 1995, Friedmann and McMichael 1989, Byres 1996, Chapter 8. Ironically, in relation to the ‘internalist’ problematic noted, the recognition by Preobrazhensky of the contributions of colonial plunder to primary accumulation/industrialisation of ‘the world-trading countries’ emphasised the unavoidably autarchic character of ‘socialist primitive accumulation’ in the early USSR which was denied such external sources, Preobrazhensky 1965, p. 85.
the 1970s characterised by some as instances of ‘globalisation’.72 It also bears with particular force on the key link of the double aspect of ‘agrarian transition’ noted: that between the production of an (expanded) agricultural ‘surplus’ and its mobilisation for industrial accumulation. The latter, in effect, was the historic function of what came to be seen as a ‘national’ bourgeoisie and/or (developmental) state, notions now regarded with a great deal of scepticism in an era of ‘globalisation’, and rightly so.73 In Africa, as in other regions of the South, the same moment since the 1970s has seen the incremental demise of nationalist (and popular) hope and its embodiment in states that claimed their legitimacy from the project of ‘national development’.74 That claim was ubiquitous in rhetoric and often pursued in practice, if with chequered results. With greatest vigour in the 1960s, continuing through much of the 1970s, and sometimes limping on into the 1980s, African states sought both to promote agricultural productivity through ‘modernisation’ (commonly to designs drawn up and managed by the World Bank and other donors, as well as by international capital in some instances) and to tax agriculture (notably export commodities) to invest in public sector infrastructure, utilities and manufacturing. If there was any ‘plan’ for ‘national’ development it was then, and is no longer.

If the conditions of life in African countrysides (and towns and cities) are generally commodified, as this paper argues, hence fully within capitalist social relations from the dynamics of household reproduction to international divisions of labour, what are the prospects for more productive and sustained (or ‘immanent’) capitalist development? Here, it seems to me, it is as inadvisable to write off the prospects of bursts, and maybe longer-term patterns, of the

72 The object of a rapidly proliferating literature on agro-food corporations and markets, the implications for their restructuring of genetic engineering of plant and animal species, the role of the WTO, and so on. Friedmann 1993 provides an original and powerful interpretation of the (global) ‘political economy of food’; see also Banaji 1996 and the references in note 63.

73 With a qualification: the thesis that ‘globalisation’ erodes the sovereignty and efficacy of national states in general evidently betrays an alarming innocence of the realities of international power. While debate about the USA as undisputed, if not omnipotent, hegemon, for example Gowan 1999, or about the continuing ‘national’ or otherwise regional characteristics of capital and the state in North America, Europe and East Asia, for example Hirst and Thompson 1996, Weiss 1998, is both plausible and necessary, the same does not apply to the states of sub-Saharan Africa (and most other zones of the South) as promoters/guardians of some or other ‘national’ project.

74 As Partha Chatterjee put it: ‘Self-government . . . was legitimate because it represented the historically necessary form of national development. . . . A developmental ideology then was a constituent part of the self-definition of the post-colonial state’, 1998, p. 86.
growth of commodity production (and productivity) in particular rural areas and branches of production, as it is to expect a more robust capitalism, and, a fortiori, one with much capacity for industrialisation, to emerge from the ‘spontaneous’ aggregation of such instances of growth without the instrumentality of strong states, effective plans, or powerful blocs of indigenous productive capital.

In his *Age of Extremes*, Eric Hobsbawm proclaimed the ‘death of the peasantry’, locating this world-historical event at mid-century: ‘For 80 percent of humanity, the Middle Ages ended suddenly in the 1950s’. This observation rests on a notion that is simultaneously essentialist and teleological: any view of ‘peasants’ in the world of mature capitalism that considers them relics of a precapitalist past (the ‘persistence’ thesis) must anticipate their demise, even if regretting its protracted character as Hobsbawm does. Beyond this and other objections (including some bizarre demographic accounting), there is an important idea implicit in his pronouncements, which however definitive about ‘the death of the peasantry’ do not attribute it to the advance of large-scale capitalist agriculture in those ‘peasant’ countries. This implicit idea also underlies the concerns of this essay: it is that the forms and stages of the continuing internationalisation/globalisation of capital signal the end of the agrarian question of classical Marxism (that of ‘agrarian transition’) without its resolution in contemporary poor countries, perhaps those of Africa above all. African farmers’ pursuit of their reproduction as both capital and labour, of the essentials of survival and any chances of accumulation, expose them to the same fundamental forces of capitalist class relations and differentiation as their counterparts in Europe or North America, if in very different historical circumstances and in often ‘invisible and unarticulated ways’.

**References**


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76 Bernstein 2003b.
77 Peters 1994, p. 210, 2002b, pp. 159–61; see also the important paper by Peters (2004) which contains, inter alia, a critical engagement with the approaches to commodification and rural class relations of both Sara Berry and the present author.
Berry, Sara 1993, No Condition is Permanent: Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.


Mamdani, Mahmood 1996, Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism, Cape Town: David Philip.


Rey, Pierre-Philippe 1976, Capitalisme négrier. La marche des paysans vers le prolétariat, Paris: Maspero.
I. Introduction

Branwen Gruffwyd Jones argues: ‘Marx’s historical materialist method and theory of capital explains why capital is necessarily expansionary; why the plunder of Africa was an integral part of the primitive accumulation of western capital; why the reorganisation of Africa’s human and natural resources to meet the needs of Europe’s developing industries required colonial occupation and domination’. Calling forth such explanatory power...
is a tall order, but the argument makes most sense, perhaps, if we take a central aspect of these claims: namely, the financial component of capital’s uneven historical and contemporary expansion into Africa during periods of capitalist ‘crisis’; the role of financiers in the process of primitive accumulation, not just in the slave and colonial eras but as a permanent aspect of global capitalism; and the importance of financial power to the extraction of surpluses in both historical and contemporary times.

The specific South-African financial role in Africa was made clear in mid-2002, when Pretoria’s finance minister Trevor Manuel promised the Commonwealth Business Council he would ‘fast-track financial market integration through the establishment of an internationally competitive legislative and regulatory framework’ for the continent. But, without any Africa-wide progress to report two years later, Manuel’s director-general Lesetja Kganyago announced a new ‘Financial Centre for Africa’ project to amplify the financialisation tendencies already evident in Johannesburg’s exclusive new Sandton central business district: ‘Over the five years to 2002, the financial sector grew at a real rate of 7.7% per year, more than twice as fast as the economy as a whole’. Responsible for a full quarter of post-apartheid South African GDP growth, the sector required further room to expand. According to Kganyago:

What is needed is a financial hub especially focused on the needs and circumstances of the region, much in the same way that Singapore and Hong Kong cater for the capital needs of the Asian continent. . . . International financial centres tend to have a foundation in common. Elements include political stability, free markets, and what is best described as the rule of commercial law.

Pretoria’s specific aims included ‘opening South Africa’s markets to African and global issuers; global lowest trading costs and trading risk; global leadership in investor protection; and a global hub for financial business process outsourcing’. Concluded Kganyago,

Africa’s economies cannot wait the slow maturing of national financial markets to provide the necessary channel for large-scale foreign capital flows
for development. Only a regional financial centre will be in a position to provide these services in the foreseeable future. 3

The point of identifying the financial lever in the subordination of Africa is, ultimately, to remove the pressure, which is the subject of the conclusion to this article. Before that, I review theoretical considerations and historical evidence of the financial basis of imperialism, especially as applied to South-African sub-imperialism, dating to the 1870s (Section II); and consider the current international context for financial surplus extraction from Africa (Section III); including Pretoria’s collaboration (Section IV).

II. Theories and histories of financial imperialism and sub-imperialism

In his recent studies of the ‘new’ imperialism, David Harvey turns to the financial sphere:

The credit system and finance capital have, as Lenin, Hilferding and Luxemburg all remarked, been major levers of predation, fraud and thievery. Stock promotions Ponzi schemes, structured asset destruction through inflation, asset stripping through mergers and acquisitions, the promotion of levels of debt encumbrancy that reduce whole populations, even in the advanced capitalist countries, to debt peonage, to say nothing of corporate fraud, dispossession of assets (the raiding of pension funds and their decimation by stock and corporate collapses) by credit and stock manipulations – all of these are central features of what contemporary capitalism is about. 4

In this context, international and domestic financial markets in Africa amplify traditional forms of primitive accumulation, establish new kinds of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (as Harvey puts it), and maintain other features of underdevelopment, particularly in recent years as commodification has spread more rapidly under neoliberalism. This process is co-ordinated by financial agencies, whose influence derives from Africa’s crippling debt, capital flight, import dependence and the compradorisation process. To establish how this happens requires a detour into debates over financial power...

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4 Harvey 2003a, pp. 75–6. See also Harvey 2003b.
and vulnerability that can be traced back a century, and that are reflected in
durable questions of both an analytical and political nature still on the agenda
today. In particular, definitions of ‘finance capital’ are revealing, as they
identified the ‘unification’ and ‘merger’ of various fractions of capital, with
banking capital hegemonic.\(^5\) Hilferding, Bukharin and Lenin thus emphasised
the institutional power-bloc characteristics of finance, at the expense of drawing
insufficient attention to the vulnerability implicit in financial relations and
their relationship to capitalist crisis.

After all, from around 1870 to 1920, it appeared that financiers had arranged
the concentration and centralisation of key industries, and were the motor
behind imperial tendencies. According to Lenin, the typical bank had ‘fuller
and more detailed information about the economic position of its clients’.
Specialisations within banks increased to accommodate the new control
functions, and financiers utilised interlocking directorates with firms and also
influenced crucial state decisions. Moreover, the new capitalism had a profound
geopolitical sensibility, for ‘Finance capital spreads its net over all countries
of the world. An important role in that is played by banks founded in the
colonies and by their branches’. Ultimately and most importantly, for Lenin,
finance was increasingly ‘separated’ from production:

> Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of
capitalism at which this separation reaches vast proportions. The supremacy
of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance
of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy; it means the singling out of a
small number of financially ‘powerful’ states from among all the rest.\(^6\)

This was also the period of Africa’s carve-up, with national borders decided
at an 1884–5 Berlin conference. In Southern and Central Africa, the consolidation
of settler colonialism was feasible in large part thanks to the 1880–90s
entrepreneurship and geopolitical leadership of Cecil Rhodes, a financier who
graduated from diamond merchant cartelisation in Kimberley, where the
DeBeers monopoly was born, to become governor of the Cape Colony. Rhodes
received permission from Queen Victoria to plunder what is now called
Gauteng Province (greater Johannesburg), once gold was discovered in 1886,
and then Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. His ambition was to paint the map
British imperial red, stretching along the route from the Cape to Cairo. Rhodes’s

\(^5\) See discussions in Brewer 1980, pp. 103–9, Howard and King 1989, Chapter Five.
\(^6\) Lenin 1986, pp. 41–63.
two main vehicles were the British army – which invented the concentration camp and, in the process, killed 25,000 Afrikaner women and children and 14,000 black people during the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer South-African War – and the British South Africa Company (BSAC), a for-profit firm which, in 1890, began its drive from Cape Town north of the Limpopo River by sponsoring the ‘Pioneer Column’. That settler initiative soon founded present-day Harare while massacring thousands of Shona and Ndebele people who had established pockets of resistance from 1893–6. London imperialists assumed that competition would continue beyond Berlin’s ‘Scramble for Africa’, and that only BSAC-style expansion, at relatively little cost to Britain’s taxpayers, would ensure geographical dominance over the interior of the continent in the face of hostile German, Portuguese, French, Belgian and Boer forces. Such a strategy was critical, they posited, to the protection of even the Nile Valley, which, in turn, represented the lifeline to the prize of India.7

As is the case today, however, a crucial economic dynamic was playing out in Europe, above and beyond the never-ending search for gold, which helped explain the resource flows behind Rhodes’s conquests: chronic over-accumulation of capital, especially in the London and Paris financial markets. Moreover, the push of capital was joined by the pull of white settlers from the colonising powers, as a result of growing social, ethnic and nascent class unrest across Southern Africa, itself a logical consequence of the establishment of systemic migrant labour systems. This dynamic fit the general thesis concerning financial control, capital-export, sub-imperial settler sites and the advanced capitalist countries’ ‘labour aristocracy’ advanced by, among others, Hobson, Hilferding and Lenin.8 Likewise, the easy availability of foreign portfolio funding for nascent Southern-African stock markets in Johannesburg and Bulawayo stemmed from a lengthy international economic depression, chronic excess financial liquidity (a symptom of general overaccumulation), and the global hegemony enjoyed by City of London financiers. Surplus capital was still concentrated in the London stock market in the early 1890s, and flowed easily not only to other European countries and the New World,

7 Loney 1975, pp. 31–2.
8 Lenin 1986, p. 87, illustrated Imperialism with a quote Rhodes uttered in 1895: ‘In order to save the 40,000,000 inhabitants of the United Kingdom from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialists’.
but also to the high-profile, well-tested initiatives of Rhodes, supported by the likes of the then journalist, Winston Churchill.

In sum, it was a period, Ian Phimister contends, of increasing geopolitical turbulence across Africa emanating from ‘capitalism’s uneven development during the last third of the nineteenth century, particularly the City of London’s crucial role in mediating the development of a world economic system’. As Britain faced industrial decline during the 1870s in both absolute and relative terms, manufacturers unable to compete in European markets joined ascendant London financial and commercial interests in promoting free-trade philosophy, in contrast to the protectionism of other Europeans and the United States.\(^9\)

A central function of Rhodes’s role in the region was, in the course of searching for gold, to ameliorate the contradictions of global capitalism by channelling financial surpluses into new infrastructural investments, such as the telegraph, railroad and surveying that tamed and commodified the lands immediately north of South Africa. Even if these did not immediately pay off for the BSAC, they did succeed in extracting resources and assuring political allegiance to South-African corporate power, a power that was generally in harmonious unity with the evolving British-run states of the region. We return to this point shortly, because regional economic domination – through liberalism backed by the forces of colonial power then, and today, through neoliberalism with military capabilities not yet fully tested – has also become the objective of the contemporary South-African ruling class.

Before long, however, in both Southern Africa and the metropole, financial institutions suffered tremendous bankruptcies, culminating in system-wide crashes that left international payments in tatters from 1929–33.\(^10\) Marxist theories of imperialism based on finance capital were never fully reconciled to this development, and those who had established arguments over the prior quarter century and witnessed the Great Depression remained divided over the capacities of capital for reproduction under stress. Hilferding, for example, contended that the problem of rising overaccumulation in highly-concentrated branches and sectors of production could be perpetually displaced, thanks to the co-ordination functions of finance capital, into the more competitive, non-cartelised sectors of the economy. As a result, intensified uneven sectoral


\(^10\) The excesses of financial speculation were more frequent and disruptive in Southern Africa, especially during the early 1920s. The South-African history of finance and uneven development is told in Bond 2003, Chapter 12; the Zimbabwean story is found in Bond 1998, Bond and Manyanya 2003, Phimister 1988.
development during crisis would not generate further destabilisation of the economy, but, rather, stabilisation through deepening cartelisation. The subsequent shake-out of the smaller producers would permit the finance capital cartel to increase the level of industrial concentration and survive the broader downturn.

Hilferding even expressed faith that the centralisation and concentration process would result in an ‘increasingly dense network of relations between the banks and industry . . . [which] would finally result in a single bank or a group of banks establishing control over the entire money capital. Such a “central bank” would then exercise control over social production as a whole’. Politically, this was extremely important, for it justified seeking a route to socialism that entailed the socialisation of capitalist relations via finance. As Hilferding concluded, ‘taking possession of six large Berlin banks would mean taking possession of the most important spheres of large scale industry, and would greatly facilitate the initial phases of socialist policy during the transition period, when capitalist accounting might still prove useful’.11 Frankfurt-school economist Henryk Grossmann offered scathing comment: ‘Hilferding needed this construction of a “central bank” to ensure some painless, peaceful road to socialism, to his “regulated” economy’.12 As German Finance Minister under difficult circumstances in the late 1920s, Hilferding failed in any such mission, yet, as late as 1931, maintained the validity of his thesis.13

Where did Hilferding go wrong in miscalculating the durability of finance capital power, and what are the implications for contemporary Africa? According to Suzanne de Brunhoff, Hilferding made a critical mistake that led him to dissociate money and the credit system, for ‘money as an instrument of hoarding’ was ignored, she complained: ‘This dissociation has probably

11 Hilferding 1981, pp. 180, 298, 368. Hilferding posited that several factors ‘militating against a banking crisis’ would combine with finance capital’s increasing range to ensure that conditions of crisis could be ameliorated. Those factors included: first, the ability of finance capital to manage and share risk effectively; second, the belief that a strong gold reserve and other state regulatory policies could shore up the creditworthiness of the system; third, a decline in the volume and importance of speculative activity (at the powerful urging of key institutions of finance capital); and fourth, the ability of production by joint-stock companies during a downturn to continue since such production need not realise an immediate return. Hilferding concluded that it was ‘sheer dogmatism to oppose the banks’ penetration of industry . . . as a danger to the banks’, 1981, p. 291.
13 Sweezy 1968, p. 298.
been one of the reasons for the overestimation of the role of finance capital’.14

That overestimation was based on at least five other causes, which Hilferding should have recognised within the logic of his argument. First, uneven sectoral development (disproportionalities) between capital goods and consumer goods, upon which Hilferding grounded his crisis theory, heightened with the rise of finance, notwithstanding short-run amelioration provided by credit. Second, the same problems in the productive sector that led to falling profit rates also forced banks to look further afield, geographically and sectorally, in order to maintain lending and a healthy deposit base, which brings added risk. Third, rather than declining in importance, financial speculation tended to increase dramatically prior to the climax of a crisis. Fourth, Hilferding’s argument that joint-stock companies were relatively immune from downturns was contradicted by his analysis of how vital credit was to the smooth operation of stock exchanges. Fifth, the combination of industry, commerce and banking increased temptations for insider lending and thus generated higher risk.

In sum, nearly all of Hilferding’s previous analysis led to the logical conclusion that, contrary to finance-capital hegemony during a crisis, banks do indeed lose self-control, as well as control of outside entities and processes. Paul Sweezy observed, ‘Hilferding mistakes a transitional phase of capitalist development for a lasting trend’. The transitional phase was one of recovery from the 1870s–90s financial crises; but the crises would emerge again during the early 1930s and from the 1970s until the present.15 As Grossmann concluded his 1929 book The Law of Accumulation: ‘The historical tendency of capital is not the creation of a central bank which dominates the whole economy through a general cartel, but industrial concentration and growing accumulation of capital leading to the final breakdown due to overaccumulation’.16

Why is this important today, especially in considering African underdevelopment? If classical theories of imperialism were based on the finance-capital thesis – adopted by Lenin, Kautsky, Bauer and Bukharin – and hence did not focus sufficiently on the vulnerability of financial circuits of capital, then they missed the intrinsic opportunities to combine these weaknesses of capital with the illegitimacy of the political form, colonialism. The anticolonial struggle was insufficiently linked to analysis of the dynamics of accumulation, particularly in Third-International politics. But there is an

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additional problem with earlier theories, namely that they lined up imperial processes behind the metropole-colonial relationship, which missed what Harvey stresses are the features of primitive accumulation that were continually reproduced through the North-South relationship.

Rosa Luxemburg had a different approach. Notwithstanding flaws in her analysis, Luxemburg observed in her book *Accumulation of Capital* the core contradiction of capitalism, namely ‘the deep and fundamental antagonism between the capacity to consume and the capacity to produce in a capitalist society, a conflict resulting from the very accumulation of capital which periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension of the market’.17 Her thesis regarding the power relationships responsible for global uneven development was straightforward. ‘Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organizations, nor, on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organizations makes accumulation of capital possible,’ she argued:

> The relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system – a policy of spheres of interest – and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process.18

This description immediately alerts us to similarities between early twentieth- and early twenty-first-century global unevenness. Today, the international stage offers views of a new colonial policy: ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’ in the form of the World Bank/IMF’s Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative and allegedly ‘participatory’ *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers*; the homegrown neoliberalism of Thabo Mbeki’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development; the World Trade Organisation’s extraordinary reach of private property rights into traditional sites of state sovereignty and biopower; innovations in donor aid that link ‘good governance’ (better termed ‘low-intensity democracy’) with liberalisation; and all the other means Washington and its allies deploy.

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to maintain control, including military might. Today, we can witness an international loan system that corresponds to spheres of interest writ large (not merely through banking relations along colonial-geographical lines, as before). Today, there are persistent, periodic wars, in Africa and around the world, that reflect the tensions associated with capitalist crisis, interimperialist rivalry, territorial defence against the devalorisation of capital, and various resulting forms of barbarism.

Drawing upon Luxemburg’s insights into the interactions between capitalism and non-capitalist aspects of production and social reproduction, Harvey provides a description of how the permanent process of primitive accumulation evolves into the system of accumulation by dispossession, that is, looting:

- commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations;
- conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights;
- suppression of rights to the commons;
- commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption;
- colonial, neocolonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources);
- monetization of exchange and taxation (particularly of land);
- slave trade; and usury, the national debt and ultimately the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation.

We need continual reminding of earlier debates in the same spirit, prior to reviewing opportunities for resistance at the local, national, continental and global scales. For Luxemburg, as for many contemporary critics, capitalist crisis tendencies were translated into an aggressive, systematic geopolitical process, characterised by ‘oppressive taxation, war, or squandering and monopolization of the nation’s land, and thus belongs to the spheres of political power and criminal law no less than with economics’. But the laws of economics still unfold, according to the Marxist argument, as witnessed by historical evidence of financial ascendance during the accumulation cycle.

The existence of long waves of capital accumulation is securely established, with global ‘crises’ – defined, in Coxian terms, as problems in a system’s

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20 Harvey 2003a, p. 74.
21 Luxemburg 1968, p. 370. Updates of the theme that capitalism requires precapitalist ‘articulations’ are found in Seddon 1976 and Wolpe 1980; however, as Smith argues, these are best considered a symptom of uneven development, not the cause, Smith 1990, p. 156.
reproduction which cannot be self-corrected using the internal logic of the system, but, instead, require an external intervention—occuring roughly from 1825–45, 1872–92, 1929–48, and 1973–present, during which time large-scale devalorisation (shakeouts of economic deadwood) transpired. To be sure, precise measurement of these cycles of accumulation is difficult. But at least one variable stands out, for our purposes: national financial overextension. In the 1820s, the 1870s and the 1930s, the periodic build-up of foreign sovereign debt ultimately required mass defaults, typically involving a third of all borrowing countries. Christian Suter explains the ‘global debt cycle’ by way of stages in the long wave, beginning with technological innovation and utilising international product cycle theory. At the global scale, a three-stage process unfolds comparable to Hyman Minsky’s financial instability hypothesis, through which credit moves over time from largely ‘hedging’ functions, to ‘speculative’ activities, to a ‘Ponzi’-type (reverse pyramid) desperation stage in which borrowers contract new loans in order to cover repayment of interest on the old. At the global scale, this entails, as Suter puts it, ‘first, intense core capital exports and corresponding booms in credit raising activity of peripheries; second, the occurrence of debt service incapacity among peripheral countries; and third, the negotiation of debt settlement agreements between debtors and creditors’. Those settlements, even in the forms of default, are crucial to clearing away the deadwood so

22 Cox argues that ‘the economy must undergo some structural change in order to emerge from a crisis; in a cyclical downturn, the same structure contains the seeds of its own revival’, Cox 1987, p. 269.
24 Variables such as price series, profitability and production estimates are central to most studies, whereas, ideally, measures such as capital intensity (and the organic composition of capital), surplus-value rates, the velocity of circulation of capital, the geographical expansion of capitalist relations, capacity utilisation and inventory build-up would be preferable for Marxist analysis.
25 See, for example, Ferri and Minsky 1992.
26 Suter 1992, p. 41. At the upswing of a Kondratieff cycle, as basic technological innovations are introduced in a labour-intensive and unstandardised manner, both the demand for and supply of external financing are typically low, and, in any case, the residue of financial crisis in the previous long cycle does not permit rapid expansion of credit or other financial assets into high-risk investments. As innovations gradually spread, however, peripheral geographical areas become more tightly integrated into the world economy, supported by international financial networks. As the power of innovation-led growth subsides, and as the consumer markets of the advanced capitalist countries become saturated, profit rates decline in the core. This pushes waves of financial capital into peripheral areas, where instead of achieving balanced accumulation and growth, low returns on investment plus a variety of other political and economic constraints inexorably lead to sovereign default.
that accumulation can resume. As we see in Figure I, below, the cycle has repeated itself four times since the 1830s, but with divergent results in the contemporary experience.

This is not merely a problem of national accounts; the entire financial system becomes the basis for managing overaccumulation. Most important in the process of displacing (not resolving) overaccumulation crisis is a set of countervailing tendencies that, according to Harvey, transcend Marx’s absolute and relative surplus-value: ‘Absorption of capital (and labour) surpluses through temporal and geographic displacement played key roles in the history of crisis resolution’. For Harvey, credit serves a temporal displacement function – a so-called ‘temporal fix’ to overaccumulation – since finance not only speeds the turnover time of capital, as Marx observed, but also sends surplus capital into ‘the production of goods that have long term future uses in production or consumption’. This helps to displace crisis in the short-term, but exacerbates the overaccumulation problem down the road.27

There is also a ‘spatial fix’ to overaccumulation: in serving a geographical displacement function in the form of foreign lending, finance can send ‘surplus money to another country to buy up surplus commodities’. This amounts to a short-term solution to overaccumulation which comes back to haunt lenders in advanced capitalist countries: in order to pay off the debt, the borrower must cut imports from, and increase exports to, those very countries. In sum, the tensions and contradictions in value production and realisation can only be resolved, says Harvey, ‘at the price of internalizing the contradictions within itself. Massive concentration of financial power, accompanied by the machinations of finance capital, can as easily destabilize as stabilize capitalism’. Harvey thus highlights the constraints on the power of finance imposed by the full logic of the accumulation process, and finance capital is therefore seen not as a ‘merger’ of banking and other fractions of capital, but far more usefully in terms of ‘the countervailing forces that simultaneously create and undermine the formation of coherent power blocs within the bourgeoisie’.28

How have those power blocs formed in response to capitalist crisis in the contemporary world, and how do they affect Africa?

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28 Harvey 1982, pp. vi, 283.
III. Contemporary imperial financial relations

In sometimes contested, but broadly consistent, surveys of global political economy, a half-dozen leading Marxist political economists have provided conceptual underpinnings and updated empirical accounts of sustained crisis tendencies in global capitalism’s core regions.\(^{29}\) In spite of the Bush régime’s hubris over an apparent economic recovery (and profitability surge), Robert Brenner, for example, warned in early 2004:

> Should the dollar continue to fall, US equity and bond values will come directly under stress and inflation will increase . . . . Indeed, given that the rest of the world owns $7.61 trillion worth of US assets – 40% of the US government’s tradeable debt, 26% of US corporate bonds, and 13% of US equities – a significant decline of the dollar has the potential to set off a rush to offload these, unleashing a violent downward spiral of currency and asset prices. Can an economy move forward by way of the expansion of service and financial sectors catering to consumption, when key goods-producing sectors remain weighed down by over-capacity and reduced profitability, when overseas producers are grabbing ever-greater shares of the US goods market, when exports are falling ever further behind imports with no hope of closing the gap at current exchange rates, and when the US depends upon the largesse of East Asian governments to cover its international obligations?\(^{30}\)

This balancing act is not just a mid-2000s conjuncture, but follows logically from three decades of lower GDP growth (indeed, negative per capita GDP if we factor in pollution and exhaustion of non-renewable resources), untenable financialisation and periodic financial collapses, frantic outsourcing of production across the world and hyperactive trade, the emergence of system-threatening ecological problems, soaring inequality, and the near-universal lowering of both labour’s remuneration and the social wage, all associated with the neoliberal project during a period of persistent capitalist overaccumulation.

What have been the implications of global overaccumulation crisis for Africa? Much of the damage since the 1980s can be traced to the liberalisation


of trade and finance that, in turn, cheapened the continent’s products for northern consumption. Giovanni Arrighi criticises African élites’ self-destructive hedonism:

[N]ot just in fostering conspicuous consumption but also, and especially, in assuming levels of foreign indebtedness that magnified the region’s vulnerability to the change of systemic weather. In this respect, the [1980] Lagos Plan of Action’s call for collective self-reliance was right on target. Unfortunately it came too late and, worse still, led to no action at all . . . it would probably have been less damaging to default on the foreign debt than to reschedule it under the conditions dictated by the World Bank. In the short-run, the collapse would have been more severe; but the negative long-term effects of the ‘good policies’ imposed by the agencies of the Washington Consensus would have been avoided.31

The negative effects of neoliberal policies such as trade liberalisation were indeed debilitating. John Saul and Colin Leys show how Africa’s ‘takeoff into manufacturing for internal consumption is blocked by an inability to compete with imports and by tiny domestic markets; meanwhile collapsing infrastructures, political risk, and poorly trained workforces tend to make manufacturing for export uncompetitive, even at very low wages’.32 Sub-Saharan African manufactured products fell steadily from 18 per cent of GDP in 1970 to 15 per cent by 2000, while gross capital formation crashed from a peak of 25 per cent of GDP in 1980 to just 15–18 per cent during the subsequent two decades (compared to China’s steady 35–40 per cent over the same period). Michael Barrett Brown identifies several structural factors that hamper African exporters: ‘The value added in making up manufactured goods has been greatly increased compared with the raw material required; synthetics continue to replace natural products in textiles, shoes and rubber goods; and the elasticity of demand for agricultural products (the proportion of extra incomes spent on food and beverages) has been steadily falling’. While some prices have risen in recent years – oil, rubber and copper, thanks to Chinese demand – exports that many countries rely upon continue to stagnate or fall. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) confirms that, from 1980 to 2000, cotton prices fell by 47 per cent, coffee by 64 per cent, cocoa by 71 per cent and sugar by 77 per cent. Africa’s agricultural

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exports were down from US$15 billion in 1987 to US$13 billion in 2000, although oil exports rose from US$18 billion to US$28 billion over the same period (benefiting only the mainly corrupt élites of Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon and Nigeria). In historical terms, the prices of primary commodities (other than fuels) have risen and fallen according to the deeper long-wave rhythm identified above. Exporters of primary commodities have fared particularly badly when financiers have been most powerful. The cycle typically includes falling commodity prices, rising foreign debt, dramatic increases in interest rates, a desperate intensification of exports which lowers prices yet further, and bankruptcy. From around 1973, this process impoverished the non-industrialised Third World, especially Africa, albeit with occasional, erratic exceptions in oil-producing regions.

Finally, the other source of financial account outflows from Africa that must be reversed is illegitimate capital flight, ranging from liquid flows to transfer pricing. James Boyce and Léonce Ndikumana argue that a core group of sub-Saharan African countries whose foreign debt was US$178 billion lost more than US$285 billion (including imputed interest earnings) because of élite repatriation of assets. By 2004, an estimated 37 per cent of African citizen’s investments (cash and assets) were located offshore, according to the World Bank. Outflows via multinational corporate investment also remain a major problem, though statistics are hard to come by. Foreign direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa during the neoliberal era has mainly been channelled into extractive minerals and oil, with Nigeria and Angola predominating (thus unveiling the negative relationship between ‘good government’ and foreign investors, contrary to neoliberal rhetoric). Transfer pricing via these investments occurs when companies cheat Third-World countries on tax revenues, by artificially inflating their imported input prices so as to claim lower net income. It is only possible to guess the vast scale of the problem on the basis of case studies. For instance, the Oxford Institute of Energy

34 Boyce and Ndikumana 2000.
36 The only other substantive foreign investment flows were to South Africa for the partial privatisation of telecommunications in 1997, and for the 1994–2001 expansion of automotive-sector branch plant activity within global assembly lines (capital-intensive investments which led to substantial auto sector job losses). Even these marginal foreign stakes were by far offset by South Africa’s own outflows of direct investment, in the forms of relocation of the largest corporations’ financial headquarters to London, not to mention the repatriation of dividends/profits and payments of patent/royalty fees to multinational corporations.
Studies estimated that, in 1994, fourteen per cent of the total value of exported oil 'was not accounted for in national trade figures as a result of various forms of transfer pricing and smuggling'.

And, in a 1999 UNCTAD survey, 84 per cent of Third-World countries 'estimated that the affiliates they hosted shifted income to their parent companies to avoid tax liabilities and 61 per cent thought that their own TNCs were engaging in income shifting'.

Probably the most persistent African applied intellectual critic of these processes of corporate accumulation by dispossession, Yash Tandon of the Southern and Eastern African Trade, Information and Networking Initiative in Harare, provides a longer list of surplus extraction processes that are not well understood by UNCTAD and other mainstream researchers. They include patent and copyright fees on technology agreements which are, according to Tandon:

> [O]ften arbitrarily determined in terms of intra-enterprise agreements between affiliates of TNCs operating in developing countries ... management and consultancy fees [through ‘aid’ contracts]; ... loss of export revenue on account of protectionism in industrialized countries amounting to $35 billion for the developing countries annually ($24 billion due to the Multifibre Agreement, $5 billion due to primary goods and $6 billion due to other goods) ... loss of revenue on account of blockage on the free movement of people [which Tandon and the UNDP estimate at $25 billion annually during the 1980s] ... and loss of capital through biopiracy. ... According to Vandana Shiva, wild seed varieties have contributed some $66 billion annually to the US economy.

How is this system reproduced? A tight web of interrelated, overlapping economic, political, cultural and even military forces exists to permit and promote such high levels of accumulation by dispossession from Africa. I will focus on only two elements: neoconservative Washington’s attempt to establish military capabilities in the main hot-spots where risk-based profitability is of concern; and neoliberal Washington’s use of contemporary compradorism, especially through South African élites who play a sub-imperial role, to lubricate the commodification of life, particularly through the financial markets.
For guidance, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin have conducted rigorous studies of the power and centrality of Washington to contemporary neoliberal imperialism, in the form of either/both the neoconservative military-industrial complex in the Bush White House and Pentagon, or/and the Washington Consensus nexus of the US Treasury, Bretton Woods Institutions and Wall Street.\textsuperscript{40} Panitch and Gindin simultaneously reject crisis-based theorisations of imperialism (as well as those that hark back to early twentieth-century debates), leading Greg Albo to observe a fundamental `opposition between these alternative interpretations . . . The persistent underlying contradictions of the world capitalist economy, and the US role in these contradictions, continue to be taken as signs of either the terminal decline of US power, or its opposite'.\textsuperscript{41} It appears very much an update of the Hilferding/Grossmann dichotomy.

What do conditions in Africa tell us about this debate, particularly looking from the vantage-point of sub-imperial South Africa? Nelson Mandela offered one justification for our contemplation of the imperial trajectory of yesteryear, during an August 2003 talk to business and social élites at Rhodes House in Cape Town, where he launched the Mandela-Rhodes Trust: `I am sure that Cecil John Rhodes would have given his approval to this effort to make the South African economy of the early 21st century appropriate and fit for its time'.\textsuperscript{42} Rhodes’s approval would have recognised the explicitly financial stranglehold that Northern governments, multilateral agencies, international banks and corporations maintain on Africa, during a period which combined global financial volatility and geopolitical arrogance, both emanating from London. However, there are also hints of resistance here, which add a dimension to the debate over financial power and vulnerability not often considered in political economy.

\textbf{IV. African challenges to financial imperialism and sub-imperialism}

The most important recent challenge to a classical-Marxist reading of finance, imperialism and sub-imperialism – as I have sought to provide above – comes

\textsuperscript{40} Panitch and Gindin 2003.
\textsuperscript{41} Albo 2003, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{42} Sowetan, 26 August.
from Panitch and Gindin, who argue that the current conjuncture cannot be compared to the earlier period:

Although traditional Marxist theories of crises provide some valid insights into the nature of these discontinuities, they are ultimately limited in what they explain. Their inadequacy stems from a tendency to fetishize crises in the sense of abstracting them from history, seeing markets and market-related institutions in static terms, and ignoring or inadequately integrating the role of classes and states into their analysis. The particular salience of crises cannot be understood apart from their historical specificity.43

Certainly, the present conjuncture is different from earlier epochs of imperial expansion insofar as the hegemon is not presently exporting its overaccumulated capital, but, on the contrary, is drawing in US$2 billion per day of global savings in order to cover balance of payments and state budget deficits. However, this does not appear tenable over the medium term, as the imminent threat of a run on the dollar begins to force interest rates higher (possibly bursting the real-estate bubble) and makes ever more difficult the unprecedented debt servicing obligations of the US state, firms and consumers. Still, Panitch and Gindin insist that Washington now boasts highly capable managers of financial panics who can control ‘the depth, duration and contagion’ of crises within national boundaries, hence reconciling the ‘combination of capitalist volatility and capitalist durability’:

The global spread of capitalism could not be sustained without new mechanisms to manage risk. The development of markets that commodify risk was a response to this. It is clear enough that such markets include morally-repulsive speculation, appalling waste, and conspicuous inequalities, and that they have also added new risks, but that doesn’t erase their importance to capitalist development (their very necessity within capitalism is a reason to question the rationality of capitalism as a social system). The development of financial structures increases volatility while it contributes to capitalist dynamism (which often works its way through crises) and supports the durability of the system…. The deepening of financial markets plays a directly imperial role. It has made it possible for the American economy to attract global savings that would otherwise be inaccessible without global markets.44

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It is worth stressing, however, that as in the earlier epoch described by theorists of imperialism, the West’s imperial capacity is reproduced through sub-imperial processes, including the New Partnership for Africa’s Development and a variety of other mechanisms that promote accumulation by dispossession, not least through financial surplus extraction. Mbeki’s finance minister Trevor Manuel, for example, has been a stalwart of Washington in legitimating the most important mechanism for risk abatement under renewed financial imperialism: the redefinition of the Bretton Woods institutions’ functions. It is here too that we can identify important moments of resistance.

Most importantly, the taxpayer-financed Bretton Woods institutions socialised commercial bank losses and privatised profits through an unending series of bank bailouts beginning with Mexico in 1982, following the Volcker 1979–80 interest rate shock that catalysed the Third-World debt crisis. Instead of merely providing balance of payments support (the IMF) or longer-term project investments (the World Bank), as was the case from the late 1940s to the late 1970s, both institutions converged in their lending strategies in order to simultaneously restructure unmanageable debt loads and restructure socio-economic relations through the imposition of Washington Consensus policies. As noted above, these institutions’ financial and ideological grips are crucial to the ‘directly imperial role’ that the West plays in Africa, in a manner that did not exist in the earlier period, which was characterised by financial loosening during crisis, including defaults by a third of the debtor countries (Figure 1).

African elite legitimation of the Bretton Woods institutions continues today, even where countries as diverse as Nigeria and Zimbabwe (not to mention numerous ‘failed states’) have recently defaulted on major debt repayment obligations. Keeping these countries ‘in line’ on debt is important within the context of Mbeki’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development, which promises to ‘support existing poverty reduction initiatives at the multilateral level, such as the Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) approach linked to the HIPC debt relief

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45 Other ‘risk management mechanisms’ such as securitisation systems and hedge funds, as Panitch and Gindin refer to, came later, were themselves in periodic need of bailout (most spectacularly, Long Term Capital Management in 1998), and contributed to the sense that imperialist financial-crisis displacement is merely a system of legalised ‘moral hazard’.
initiative’. (Not for nothing was the Partnership document labelled ‘philosophically spot on’ by the Bush régime’s leading Africa official in 2003.)

In contrast, African chapters of the Jubilee debt-cancellation movement have unequivocally opposed these. Jubilee South’s May 2001 ‘Pan-African Declaration on Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes’ criticised ‘structural adjustment programmes in their various guises, particularly as based on the feminisation of adjustment to the further detriment of women and children’. Given that ‘the World Bank and IMF are facing a deepening crisis of legitimacy’, the two institutions ‘introduced PRSPs mainly as a public relations exercise to demonstrate a supposedly new-found concern for the poverty in the poorest countries of the South, and to prove that they have a genuine desire to see the people of these countries “participating” in finding solutions to their poverty’.

A telling incident in mid-2002 illustrated the responsibility that the South-African government has taken on, via the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, to police the financial mechanisms of imperialism. A Cabinet meeting in Pretoria concluded with this statement: ‘The meeting noted the provision by South Africa of a bridge loan to the Democratic Republic of the

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48 <http://www.jubileesouth.net>.
Congo of Special Drawing Rights (SDR) 75 million. This will help clear the DRC’s overdue obligations with the IMF and allow that country to draw resources under the IMF Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility. Consistent with imperialism’s need to renew accumulation by dispossession, Pretoria thus codified the earlier generation of IMF loans made to Mobuto Sese Seko, riven with corruption and capital flight to European banks. Continuities with an earlier sub-imperial project were obvious, for the people of the DRC were previously victims of South Africa’s apartheid-era allegiance with Mobuto, an arrangement that especially suited the ecology-destroying mineral extraction corporations headquartered in Johannesburg. The people’s struggle against oppression had initially spawned another ruler in 1996, Laurent Kabila, who unfortunately refused democracy and later fell to an assassin’s bullet. Thanks to his unelected son Joseph’s connections in Pretoria’s Union Buildings and finance ministry, the old ‘odious’ Mobuto loans would not be repudiated but instead be honoured, and serviced with the new credits. In addition, IMF staff would be allowed back into Kinshasa with their own new loans, and with neoliberal conditionalities again applied to the old victims of Mobuto’s fierce rule. These elite linkages, the protective Washington gear and Mbeki’s capacity for reproducing neoliberalism in such hostile conditions were, together, at least temporarily effective.

Similarly, South Africa’s black victims of apartheid were repeatedly attacked by Pretoria during their ongoing pursuit of reparations for an earlier generation of odious bank loans and corporate investments. The call for reparations harks back to the campaign for financial sanctions against apartheid-era South Africa, spearheaded by the African National Congress but promoted strongly in the US during the mid-1960s by Martin Luther King and Students for a Democratic Society, the 1970s by community activists, and early 1980s by Ralph Nader and a new generation of anti-apartheid campaigners. In 1966, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution against loans destined for the minority rulers of South Africa. The World Bank replied that

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50 The same day’s Cabinet announcement from Pretoria also revealed that South Africans would generously fund the World Bank’s main lending subsidiary for impoverished African countries, on behalf of a special constituency: ‘Cabinet approved South Africa’s contribution to the replenishment of the resources of the [Bank-subsidiary] International Development Association, to the tune of R83 million. This amount, which would be drawn down over a nine-year period, would benefit our private sector, which would be eligible to bid for contracts financed from these resources’. South African Government Communications and Information Service 2002, p. 1.
'the Bank’s articles provide that the Bank and its officers shall not interfere in the political affairs of any member and that they shall not be influenced in their decisions by the political character of the member or members concerned'. The following apolitical activity was observed during apartheid:

- the Bank’s US$100 million in loans to the parastatal electricity company Eskom from 1951–67 that gave only white people electric power, but for which all South Africans paid the bill, as well as US$100 million more for railways;
- IMF apartheid-supporting loans of more than US$2 billion between the Soweto uprising in 1976 and 1983, when the US Congress finally prohibited lending to Pretoria;
- a Bank loan for Lesotho dams which were widely acknowledged to ‘sanctions-bust’ apartheid South Africa in 1986, via a secret London trust fund; and
- IMF advice to Pretoria in 1991 to impose the regressive Value Added Tax, in opposition to which 3.5 million people went on a two-day stayaway.

Reparations from apartheid’s financiers were surely in order. Activists from Jubilee South Africa and other church and apartheid-victims groups were frustrated by the failure of the September 2001 World Conference Against Racism – the single most appropriate international forum – to advance their agenda. The conference was so tightly controlled by Mbeki that a reparations endorsement, supported by the rulers of Nigeria and Zambia, amongst others, was simply not permitted in the final resolution. The activists turned to the US and Swiss courts, following the model set against Swiss and German bankers and corporations which violated human (and property) rights during the Nazi era. Civil cases for billions of dollars in damages were filed on behalf of apartheid victims against large multinational corporations which profited from South-African investments and loans. The fear engendered was so great that the Bush régime and corporate lobbies pleaded with US courts, initially unsuccessfully, to nullify an interpretation of the Alien Tort Claims Act that made the apartheid-reparations suits possible."
Mbeki had first responded to the reparations campaign with ‘neither support nor condemnation’. However, in April 2003, in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report, recommending a reparations payment by businesses which benefited from apartheid, he changed tack. It was suddenly ‘completely unacceptable that matters that are central to the future of our country should be adjudicated in foreign courts which bear no responsibility for the well-being of our country and the observance of the perspective contained in our constitution of the promotion of national reconciliation’. The President expressed ‘the desire to involve all South Africans, including corporate citizens, in a cooperative and voluntary partnership’ – simply ignoring the numerous attempts by Jubilee SA, the Apartheid Reparations Task Force and Cape Town’s Anglican archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane for several years prior to filing the lawsuits.\footnote{For coverage, see Financial Times, 19 May 2003.} In July 2003, Mbeki and Justice Minister Penuell Maduna then explicitly defended international lenders and corporations against two major reparations proceedings in the US courts, arguing in a nine-page brief that by ‘permitting the litigation’, the New York judge would discourage ‘much-needed foreign investment and delay the achievement of the government’s goals. Indeed, the litigation could have a destabilising effect on the South-African economy as investment is not only a driver of growth, but also of unemployment’.\footnote{Sunday Independent, 25 July 2003.} Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Columbia University economist Joseph Stiglitz filed friend of the court briefs with the activists, but Mandela also took the opportunity provided by the Mandela-Rhodes Trust launch in August 2003 to publicly criticise the reparations struggle.\footnote{Sowetan, 26 August.}

The lesson from the experience was simple: it would be impossible to seek allies in the fight for global justice amongst the nationalist leadership of South Africa, no matter the Pretoria politicians’ occasional anti-imperialist rhetoric. Instead, alliances against financial power would have to be forged amongst Third-World social movements themselves, unhindered by distractions from those Northern-hemisphere (especially Washington/London) NGOs and labour movements which typically sought mere reform, not abolition, of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). In April 2004, a new network of
impressive mass-based social movements\textsuperscript{57} and radical NGOs\textsuperscript{58} called ‘IFIs Out!’ emerged, with exemplary ‘unifying principles’ that included the following:

We believe in dismantling the IFIs, since we believe them to be fundamentally incapable of transforming into just institutions.

We believe in decommodification, in opposition to the neoliberal trend of privatising all common property.

We believe that IFIs reinforce patriarchy and the oppression of women.

We believe that IFIs reinforce a racist system of global apartheid, including the oppression of indigenous communities.

We believe in the free global movement of people.

We believe in the deglobalisation of capital.

We believe in cross-territorial work, crossing national, regional, and continental boundaries, and boundaries between issues (such as women, agriculture, indigenous peoples, public health, etc.).

We believe in global South leadership.

We believe in strengthening popular social movements.

We believe in linking global struggles against IFIs with local struggles around land, food, water, etc. (‘global-local linkage’).

Are there concrete ways to take these principles into battle against the IFIs?

One anti-imperialist financial tactic based on the strategy of defunding the World Bank was introduced four years earlier: the World Bank Bonds Boycott. Catalysed by Jubilee South Africa, Brazil’s Movement of Landless Workers, and numerous other Third-World activist groups, Bonds Boycott activists posed this simple question that harked back to anti-apartheid disinvestment campaigning: is it ethical for socially conscious people to invest in the Bank by buying its bonds, responsible for eighty per cent of the institution’s resources, hence drawing out dividends which represent the fruits of enormous suffering?

\textsuperscript{57} Social-movement attendees at the founding conference (25–6 April 2004) included Association of Communities Organizing for Reform Now, US; CEIBA, Guatemala; Citizens Network for Essential Services, US; CODDEFFAGOLF, Honduras; COPINH, Honduras; Council of Canadians; Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippines; Jubilee South, Philippines; Jubilee South Africa; MPNKP, Haiti; Narmada Bachao Andolan, India; Halifax Initiative Coalition, Canada; and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, South Africa.

\textsuperscript{58} These included Center for Economic and Policy Research, US; Center for Economic Justice, US; CEJ Southern Africa, South Africa; CIEPAC, Mexico; Development Gap/SAPRIN, US; Focus on the Global South, Thailand/India; Institute for Global Networking, Information and Studies, Norway; Public Citizen, US; and Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, US.
Within a few years, the world’s largest pension fund, TIAA-CREF, had sold its bonds under activist pressure, and an impressive array of investment funds committed never to buy another Bank bond again.59 In addition, IFIs Out! committed to campaigning against the recapitalisation of the IFIs. Another front was neoliberal knowledge reproduction via the IFIs, especially the World Bank’s ‘Knowledge Bank’ role, which IFIs Out! began to address in 2004 through intellectual de-legitimation.

In these and many other ways, African activists are contributing to resistance against financial imperialism, South-African sub-imperialism, and the compradorisation process. Their simultaneous, overlapping, interlinking efforts are bringing together some of the most advanced leftist mass movements across the world. What I believe they are doing, through praxis, is updating the classical theories of imperialism, but not based upon the finance-capital thesis of overwhelming power. They have, instead, begun to focus systematically upon the vulnerability of financial circuits of capital, and are taking advantage of opportunities to combine their attacks against these weaknesses of capital with critiques of the illegitimacy of the political form, US-led empire.

How far they go in part depends upon how far comrades in the advanced capitalist financial centres recognise the merits of their analysis, strategy and tactics – and offer the solidarity that African and other Third-World activists can repay many times over, once the financial boot is lifted from their countries’ necks and they gain the space to win their lasting, emancipatory objectives.

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59 <http://www.worldbankboycott.org>. Organisations that have endorsed the boycott included major religious orders (the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Pax Christi USA, the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, and dozens of others); the most important social responsibility funds (Calvert Group, Global Greengrants Fund, Ben and Jerry’s Foundation, and Trillium Assets Management); the University of New Mexico endowment fund; US cities (including San Francisco, Milwaukee, Boulder and Cambridge); and major trade-union pension/investment funds (e.g. Teamsters, Postal Workers, Service Employees Int’l, American Federation of Government Employees, Longshoremen, Communication Workers of America, United Electrical Workers).


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Ray Bush

Undermining Africa

Introduction
This article traces the experiences that much of Africa has had with mineral dependency.\footnote{1} It does so in the context of the waves of optimism and pessimism for poverty reduction and economic development for the continent since World War Two. One theme in the post-1945 period has been the idea that many countries in Africa have experienced the ‘curse of resources’. This refers to the notion that states wedded to mineral-led growth have performed badly compared with countries labelled resource-poor. This characterisation tends to simplify a complex set of issues. It fails, for example, to grasp the reasons why African élites have been unable to moderate the negative impact of trade régimes.\footnote{2} They are régimes that penalise producers of raw materials by allocating to them only a small share of the final value added of their production. The resource-curse thesis also seems to exonerate African élites from blame for...
political authoritarianism associated with countries dependent upon raw materials.

I focus on raw materials rather than resources in general, like skills, knowledge and other expertise. I concentrate mainly on hard-rock mining and oil production. And I sketch the argument that rentier politics has generated policies that have tied governments into the idea that rents from mining would continue and would promote development. Yet rents have seldom continued at projected levels or produced sustainable development. Rentier politics has generated state structures that embodied vested interests linked to mining and resource extraction. These interests became obstacles to policies for development that might more effectively have lessened mineral dependency. But state elites have not been unchallenged in their attempt to monopolise national control of resources.

Despite the radical development rhetoric of many régimes in the 1970s where mineral exports formed a crucial part of government revenue, a politics of development complacency emerged in Africa. This complacency was brought into sharp relief by shifts in terms of trade for minerals and the decline in world commodity prices. But this does not alone explain why African states failed to diversify, neglected rural development or were unable to more efficiently control rents for national growth. The 1980s put paid to any realistic possibility for an alternative development strategy in the mineral economies as it did to any sustained rates of economic growth in Africa. The combination of structural adjustment, the lost development decade, recession in the developed world and the end of the Cold War, ensured that many régimes based on ‘spoils politics’ entered the 1990s developing ‘terminal spoils’ where violence and the idea of state collapse became a frequent characterisation of Africa.

I set the account of the main themes linked to Africa’s involvement with mineral-led growth in the context of recent calls for an African renewal that have mining at its heart. I examine recent experiences of African mining and some of the consequences, not the least of these has been the persistence of

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3 Resource-poor countries such as Japan, UK, Germany and Taiwan have performed much better with these resources than with an abundance of minerals and oil although their access to resources of any kind, of course, does not solely account for why they have been so economically dominant since 1945.

4 For an examination of Africa’s decline in the context of transformation in a world-historical perspective see Arrighi 2002.

5 Allen 1999.
armed conflict and complex political emergencies. In so doing, I provide an overview of debates on the idea that Africa has suffered from a resource curse. I argue that concern with Africa’s economic decline and trade relations remains important for most commentators on African development. Yet this obscures the role that politics within Africa has played in retaining development strategies that failed to deliver growth, development and equity. Understanding the character of that politics, where resource dependence has been significant, helps see beyond a ‘resource curse’ to the institutional and class basis of accumulation strategies. It also helps offer an explanation for the potential links between violence and forms of resistance to the internationalisation of capital by, for example, miners in small-scale operations who access mineral wealth and trade it beyond the limits of established official markets and state control. In sum, I offer a class-based analysis that provides a preliminary attempt to de-link poor economic performance from resource dependency.

The political economy of resources in Africa helps explain contemporary imperialism on the continent. Resource wealth has promoted local strategies of capital accumulation or more accurately primitive accumulation, that has created and sustained African élites and it has also generated opposition to those élites and authoritarian politics. But Africa has also, despite what seems to have been its neglect from international capitalism, continued to be incorporated albeit differentially, into the inexorable expansion of capitalism on a world scale. Contemporary imperialism bears out three processes. The first is the continuous and uneven export of capital from the developed capitalist heartland, where mining company decisions are strategically located to parts of the underdeveloped world. The second is the impoverishing consequences of international business activity in the postcolonial world that is dominated by unequal trade and technological dominance of multinational corporations (MNCs). The third dimension of contemporary imperialism locates the importance of the rule of capital within the context of the new military dominance of the US. A more open and aggressive US quest for global power explains why the Pentagon is keen to dominate not only the Middle East and Central Asia’s petroleum but also reserves in West Africa, from Angola to Senegal, and to promote military bases throughout the continent. US economic links with Africa are dominated by investment in oil. It accounts for 73 per cent of all US foreign direct investment (FDI) on
the continent. Africa accounts for 15 per cent by volume and 18 per cent by value of all crude oil imports into the US. Of sub-Saharan African imports into the US in 2001, energy products, notably oil, totalled US$14.3bn and accounted for 67.8 per cent of imports from sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, US imports from Africa are dominated by Nigeria (27%) Angola (14%) Algeria (11%) and Gabon (8%) – South Africa is the only non oil exporter of significance to the US accounting for 18 per cent.8

Unfulfilled optimism

Africa’s development history since World War Two has been dogged by swings of pessimism and optimism for growth and progress. African support for defeating fascism and Western capitalism’s fastest ever expansion in the 1950s led to a promise for independence. It also led to the possibility that African nationalist leaders could benefit from the new global prosperity if their countries’ modernisation continued the historical pattern of remaining suppliers of primary commodities for Western capitalism.9 While there were notable exceptions – South Africa and, to an extent, Kenya and Nigeria – where economic development managed more than simply an unreconstructed export-oriented dynamic, most of the continent, as indicated in Table I, remained dependent upon raising export revenue from primary commodities. As a consequence, the continent has been subject to fluctuating price changes over which states and producers have had little control. They have also had little influence in the finished product markets where raw-material-based commodities accrue the highest value.

If the first wave of optimism for Africa’s development prospects emerged after World War Two, and the second briefly in the early 1970s, with the Group of 77 developing countries, call for a New International Economic Order, the contemporary trumpeting for Africa’s renaissance has its roots in the end of the Cold War. As the Berlin Wall fell, commentators first considered the possibility that expenditures previously invested by the West in weapons of mass destruction would be directed towards the production of ‘ploughshares’. This idea was short-lived. The first call for a ‘Marshall Plan

8 Richard Knight 2003, p. 335.
9 Primary commodities are raw or partially processed materials that will be transformed into finished goods, World Bank 2000.
Table I: African Export Concentration Ratios in the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries where one commodity accounts for over 70% of export earnings</th>
<th>Angola (petroleum)</th>
<th>Burundi (coffee)</th>
<th>Congo (crude petroleum)</th>
<th>Gabon (crude petroleum)</th>
<th>Guinea-Bissau (cashew nuts)</th>
<th>Libya (crude petroleum)</th>
<th>Nigeria (crude petroleum)</th>
<th>Sao Tome and Principe (cocoa)</th>
<th>Zambia (copper)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries where two commodities account for over 70% of export earnings</td>
<td>Botswana (diamonds and matte copper, nickel)</td>
<td>DR Congo (coffee and diamonds)</td>
<td>Equatorial Guinea (petroleum and wood)</td>
<td>Ghana (gold and timber)</td>
<td>Liberia (iron ore and rubber)</td>
<td>Mauritania (fish and iron ore)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries where three commodities account for over 70% of export earnings</td>
<td>Guinea (bauxite and aluminium, gold and coffee)</td>
<td>Malawi (tobacco, tea and sugar)</td>
<td>Mali (cotton products, live animals and gold)</td>
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Sources: African Development Bank 1997, Table 3.2; UNCTAD 1999, Table 19 pp. 87–89.

for Africa’ (repeated by UK Chancellor Gordon Brown in December 2001 and again by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair in February and July 2002) failed to materialise. Africa once more became a sink for promises unfulfilled.

The dominant paradigm promoting the optimism of Africa’s development prospects has always had at its heart the view that increasing the continent’s incorporation into the world economy will provide the platform for growth. Central to this has been the view that Africa’s mineral and agricultural produce can generate access to scarce foreign exchange, improve employment opportunity and raise standards of living. This has received increased currency from three key sources: the UK Government, international agencies and academic commentators.

The British contribution was initially driven by Prime Minister Blair. His ‘Africa Partnership Initiative’ and subsequent British government documents argued for the need to help ‘developing countries build the effective government systems needed to reform their economic management, make markets work
better for poor people and meet the challenges of globalization’. Effective government is necessary to carry out basic functions and to be more responsive and democratic. The mechanism regarded by the British government as enabling effective government to develop in Africa relies on globalisation working for the poor rather than the reality of the poor working for globalisation. This is also the message in recent publications by international agencies. The World Bank has argued that Africa can ‘claim’ the new century if crucial progress is made on four fronts: improving governance and resolving conflict; investing in people; increasing competitiveness and diversifying economies; and reducing aid dependency and strengthening partnerships. This optimism is set against the recognition that ‘average income per capita is lower than [it was] at the end of the 1960s’. Excluding South Africa, average income in 1997 was US$315 – making Africa the poorest part of the world. As the World Bank admits, the combined total GDP of all forty-eight countries on the continent comes to little more than the income of Belgium, while the average GDP for countries in sub-Sahara Africa (excluding South Africa) is, at about US$2 billion, no more than the output of a town of 60,000 people in a rich country.

Among other things, trade relations that protect Northern markets but insist on liberalisation in Africa makes it impossible for international donor concerns with helping Africa’s poor to be realised. Moreover, the World Bank’s commodity price index shows a decline from the 1990 index of 100 for non-fuel commodities to an index of 85 in 1999. Other indices have all fallen from the 1990 index of 100 to 90 in 1999 for agriculture, 85 for raw materials, 71 for metals and minerals and 85 for food. In the World Bank’s own assessment of development possibilities for Africa, there is the need for annual growth rates of at least seven per cent to meet international targets of reducing world poverty by 2015 – a level of growth that is nowhere to be found.

Resource-led growth remains a major plank in IFI policy to reduce Africa’s economic crisis. Meanwhile, the systemic character of the crisis is denied. Globalisation is to be secured by economic and market security. Yet, the resource-led growth central to many of the models on offer seems only possible

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10 See HMG 2000, p. 23.
14 World Bank 2000b, p. 324.
if secured by military protection in countries where ‘state collapse’ is crudely seen to be the continent’s answer to problems of governance.\textsuperscript{15} While the World Bank has noted that export diversification is possible, if governments improve efficiency by reducing high transaction costs, devaluing exchange rates and promoting labour-intensive industries, they note ominously that ‘Africa’s industrialization is likely to be closely linked to natural resource endowments’.\textsuperscript{16}

This argument has been spelt out in the IMF ‘in-house’ journal.\textsuperscript{17} Although it is conceded that projects in extractive industries can have serious environmental impacts and be socially disruptive, if people are resettled, for instance, it is also noted that they can ‘make a significant contribution to the economic development of host countries’ by ensuring that careful planning takes place. The confidence placed in natural resource projects is captured by the claim that ‘they generate sizeable revenues, create jobs and business opportunities, and often bring new roads and access to water and power to the isolated rural areas in which they are typically located, they have the potential to stimulate economic growth, reduce poverty, and raise living standards’. Additionally, it is argued that resource extraction projects bring best international practice in project planning and implementation to build administrative and institutional capacity in the host state.\textsuperscript{18}

There is nothing new in this list of declared positive attributes that might accompany mineral-led growth. They mirror the broader themes linked to the perceived advantages of FDI encouraged by IFIs as an essential part of development possibilities in Africa. Mining capital is meant to foster market expansion and employment growth, cheapen the cost of local exploration and be generally economically progressive. It is meant to encourage local capital formation and a culture of market activity. Yet the counter to this is that mines still tend to be self contained ‘enclaves’. Because mines are located beside mineral deposits, there is a problem in generalising the proposed benefits of mineral exploration and production. Moreover, mines remain capital-intensive, with wages forming only a small part of overall costs. And, while workers

\textsuperscript{15} See Duffield 2000 for a discussion of the consequences of ‘protracted internal and regionalized forms of conflict in the South’. This includes the debate that ‘emerging political complexes’ in Africa and elsewhere, are often linked to the phenomenon of war economies, that have promoted the privatisation of state services and the mushrooming of extra legal transborder networks and trade.

\textsuperscript{16} World Bank 2000b, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{17} Kathryn McPhail 2000.

\textsuperscript{18} Kathryn McPhail 2000, pp. 45–6.
in mines may be relatively highly paid compared with other local workers, much of the higher wages are spent on imported consumer durables rather than adding to local savings. Trade-union organisation is generally discouraged.

Mining companies (excluding oil) are not the largest in the world. One estimate is that the ten largest companies have a combined value less than half of Microsoft.\textsuperscript{19} They are, nevertheless, powerful global actors. More than US$18 billion was spent on mergers and acquisitions in the metals mining and refining industry world-wide in 1997 – a fifty per cent increase over 1996. And, during the first quarter of 1998, deals worth more than US$15 billion had been made. While mergers and acquisitions increased, the expenditure on exploration declined.\textsuperscript{20} Mining companies wield enormous influence in Africa where reliance upon minerals as a source of revenue is high and where the assets of the mining companies can be greater than the GNP of the country where they operate. Fifty per cent of world nickel production is controlled by three companies and sixty-five per cent of tin output is controlled by just three corporations. The ten largest companies control around seventy per cent of the production of bauxite, copper and tin.

Mining MNCs often argue that the concessions they require from host states in order to enable them to operate are necessary because of the uncertainty of mineral exploration. Their costs are estimated against an unknown future such as the time to get resources out of the ground, the quality of the deposit, probability of future discovery and future price levels as well as future demand for the resource they are mining. But, because the mining houses are international companies, they are also concerned with a \textit{global} strategy rather than the local concerns of the country where they may be \textit{temporarily} based.

Mining companies thus make decisions to maximise their international strategic concerns and have a view of the \textit{world} as well as that of any particular African state. Of the twenty-five largest companies, nineteen are based in the industrialised world and just six in developing countries – none are headquartered in sub-Saharan Africa (two are held by the state of Morocco). The international reach of companies and the way in which decisions about national investments are shaped by global strategy is well illustrated by way the aluminium industry is organised.

The refining of bauxite into aluminium might be viewed as an African success story. Unlike the decline in African production of refined copper, the

\textsuperscript{19} Danielson and Lagos 2001.
\textsuperscript{20} Ericsson and Tegen 1998.
production of aluminium has steadily increased since 1975. Most of this increased production, however, is based in South Africa. In 1996, it represented three per cent of Africa’s total five per cent of world production. But this increase in South African aluminium is sourced by imported Australian rather than African bauxite. Gencor’s smelter in Natal is used as part of the company’s global strategy that relies on Natal’s cheap energy and South Africa’s proximity to markets in Japan, Europe and the US. Gencor’s strategy is not decided on the basis of South-African, local or regional development needs.

It is not only the British Government and the IFIs that have been optimistic about a mining revival. Academic commentators too have offered a favourable view regarding Africa’s development prospects for the twenty-first century. The optimism of the contemporary period has been created, it seems, by the adaptability of African communities to global change, famine and civil strife. African states have apparently created conditions for ‘renaissance’ by competing with each other for inward investment, market opportunity and the development of regional organisations.

But what has Africa’s recent primary commodity experience been? And does the optimism of commentators make any sense in a world where economies with high levels of resource-wealth do less well economically than those that are resource-poor? In other words, while commentators may talk about the possibility of resource-based and labour-intensive industrialisation, the benefits of the global market and political liberalisation, Africa’s experience with resource dependency is not a good one. A ‘resource curse’, an inverse relationship between resource endowment and economic growth seems to summarise Africa’s history of reliance on primary commodities for economic growth and poverty reduction. But this characterisation of the impact of minerals and mining cannot be viewed as the inevitable outcome of resource abundance. Instead, a resource curse is better understood as the consequence of the way in which class and social forces have been shaped and, in turn, shape state development policy. That policy has often become structured by

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22 See Shaw and Nyang’oro 2000 and compare this upbeat view of renaissance with Shaw and Inegbedion 1994. While Shaw and Nyang’oro recognise, it seems, the unevenness of Africa’s recovery, and the expression of the continent’s renaissance promoted by Africa’s post-insurgent states, Uganda, South Africa and Eritrea, they also note that it is a renaissance that is not immune from hijacking by the IFIs or justification for intervention by African states in the internal affairs of others, namely in Rwanda and Congo. See also Cliffe 2002, Saul 2003.
the politics of spoils, corruption, war and ethnic conflict but it is not, in any \textit{a priori} way, causally linked to resource endowment.

One level of analytical entry into this complex relationship between domestic interests and international actors, and the way this relationship is mediated by struggles around access to the state, is recent work on sectoral analysis. Shafer has argued that ‘a state’s capacity to get ahead depends on the attributes of the leading sector through which it is tied to the international economy: light manufacturing, mineral extraction, peasant cash crop production, or industrial plantation crop production’.\textsuperscript{23} He has argued that the shape of different sectors determines international market structures and these then provide different opportunities and challenges, as well as rewards to state actors. The role of different sectors also shapes the ability of states to be restructured. This approach goes some way to help explain why and how resource export dependency can shape and is shaped by rentier politics. It may be that ‘sectoral characteristics shape like minded individuals’ capacity for collective action’.\textsuperscript{24} This should not, however, be an excuse for either a pre-occupation with the efficiency of African institutions or a deterministic explanation that particular types of politics follow \textit{ipso facto} from resource availability. Instead, political struggles are fashioned around concerns of dominant economic classes, strategies for accumulation that will ensure the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of political domination that satisfies those sometimes competing economic interests. We can now glimpse at how some of those economic and political conflicts have worked out in Africa by tracing the continent’s recent experience with mining and, later, by examining the possible links between resources and conflict.

\textbf{African mining}

Much of Africa has had a long history of mining and it remains a continent with some of the richest world reserves with obvious potential for economic growth. In the late 1990s, the continent could boast 13 per cent of the world’s production of bauxite, 4 per cent of its copper and 27 per cent of gold production. Yet, in all cases, this is less than Africa’s world share of production in 1985 when the continent accounted for 15 per cent of bauxite production,

\textsuperscript{23} Shafer 1994, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{24} Shafer 1994, p. 9.
16 per cent of copper and 67 per cent of gold production. By the late 1990s, production increases for minerals were taking place less in Africa and more in Latin America and Asia. As Ericsson and Tegen have noted:

In general, African absolute production figures are going down and the relative figures are going down even more dramatically, due to an increase of total global production. The decline started in the decade between 1975 and 1985 but has accelerated since 1985. Copper production in Africa fell from almost 1,500kt in 1975 to a little more than 600Mt in 1996; of this, iron ore fell from 64Mt to 44Mt and gold from 746Mt to 622Mt. This decline in production is all the more significant if we take South Africa out of the equation. If we do that, copper production in 1996 was just a third of its level in 1975 and iron ore a quarter.

Despite the decline in African mineral production and the price fluctuations for minerals more generally, business commentators suggest that African governments should no longer ‘sit on their natural mineral wealth, like rather inefficient dragons, confident that their riches will be there tomorrow’. Much advice to African governments in the twenty-first century has been to help facilitate the extraction of minerals and petroleum as quickly as possible to boost economic growth. One recent review suggested that:

Mining in sub-Saharan Africa is entering a new era. It is mining rather than other business sectors that currently has most to offer most African countries. This is because Africa has a greater potential comparative advantage in the mining of metals and minerals than it does in probably any other sector.

Yet realising that potential is fraught with difficulties. Among these one can mention armed conflict and difficulties related to the impact of HIV/AIDS. In parts of southern Africa, for example, more than twenty-five per cent of the active work-force is infected with HIV/AIDS; in Botswana, thirty nine per cent of adults are reported to have HIV. This has an effect of deterring long-term private investment, as investors are fearful of the consequences of...
a dwindling labour force and the potential that costs of welfare may well be
borne by mining companies.

Perceptions of a continent in crisis have deterred the spurt of investment
that many mining surveys of Africa suggest is now important. But the
hesitancy to invest in Africa is uneven and so too is the distribution of mining
resources and interest in particular raw materials. Strategic minerals such as
cobalt, vanadium and manganese and also zirconium and titanium are
dominated by South Africa and Zimbabwe, although coltan (columbite-
tantalite) has become part of the booty for warring parties in the Democratic
Republic of Congo. These resources are used in lucrative aerospace and
military programmes, microchips and telecommunications. While South Africa
dominaates Africa’s share of gold production, it is being chased by Ghana,
where gold production increased by 300 per cent between 1975–96. In global
terms, South-African dominance as the leading world producer of gold is
under threat, for while it accounted for about 75 per cent of world production
in 1975, by 1996, it only accounted for 25 per cent. The South-African De
Beers company mines half of the world’s diamonds in Namibia, Botswana
and South Africa itself, and may face increased competition if peace is sustained
in Angola and Sierra Leone. De Beers controlled almost 80 per cent of the
global diamond market, worth more than US$50 billion dollars at the end of
the 1990s. It is now being challenged by Russia, which is the world’s largest
producer of rough diamonds and is also involved in prospecting in Namibia
and the exploration for undersea diamonds.

Despite the decline in African production as a proportion of global
production, there remains optimism about the potential for the mining sector
as a driver for economic development on the continent. But this growth, if
and when it happens, is likely to enrich Western investors and MNCs and
leave host economies limited revenue to reduce local poverty and promote
national economic growth. A country’s incorporation into the world economy
will be on the terms of corporate finance rather than local needs. A process

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33 Namibia’s economy is heavily dependent upon mining. It contributed between
1991–5 an average annually of 21.5% of GDP. In 1997, income from the export of
metals was $793 million equivalent to 56.9% of total export earnings of which diamonds
represented $552 million, or 40.6%. Namibia is the world’s fifth largest producer of
that will continue the negative trajectory of the continent’s uneven integration into the world economy.

After World War Two and until the mid-1960s, the continent’s largely foreign-owned mines provided minerals for the booming world economy. As it became increasingly clear in the 1970s that the benefits from that boom were not accruing to Africa, nationalist régimes tried to control and expropriate foreign MNCs. The mining sector was seen by nationalist politicians in Zambia and Zaïre, for instance, as a vehicle for promoting economic growth (and personal wealth) and the strategy of taxing foreign companies served to enhance régime legitimacy.34 Yet, by the early 1980s, it was apparent that, not only had this strategy for economic growth failed to deliver its promise, but, internationally, the sector was in crisis. Reflecting on this downturn in 1984, the US magazine Business Week ran the headline ‘Death of Mining’.

Crisis in the sector was only partly levelled at the door of developing-country strategies of nationalisation. US companies felt mounting competitive pressure from European and Japanese companies, old plant and technology in the US needed replacing and many of the early rich mineral deposits neared the end of their life. Additionally, global recession and the fall in demand for minerals led companies such as RTZ, Phelps Dodge and Anglo American to diversify, rationalise internal structures, force wage cuts on workers and modernise plant.

Nationalisations in Africa pushed mining companies to find alternative sources of minerals in Latin America and boost exploration in the US and Australia. Collapse of mineral prices, neglect of plant and machinery and poor management and technical skills left many African mineral producers unable to generate crucial sources of foreign exchange – a situation hampered further by the lack of access to final product markets for African producers. The contradiction was that the mining sector, as the principal means to generate foreign exchange, required a rapid injection of foreign exchange to help its renewal and to ensure new investment in exploration and production. This was not forthcoming. And, because African governments had taken responsibility for the mining sector through policies of nationalisation, they had levelled at them the responsibility for lay-offs, redundancies and falls in living standards when this perceived milch cow for development buckled.35

Africa’s mining sector collapsed in the 1980s. Nationalised companies, apart

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34 For the Zambian case study see Shafer 1994, Chapter 3.
35 For the period of nationalisations, see Lanning 1979, Shafer 1994.
from those in South Africa, failed to invest in exploration and development. The sector’s collapse was made worse by the inflation of African public sectors that accompanied, and was driven by, the promise of growth in rents from mining. The growth in the public sector generated conditions for corruption, particularly the use of public office for private gain. One response to this crisis was the emergence and increased importance of small-scale mining not always directly linked to the state, for while, on the one hand, the state in Africa tried in the early 1990s to re-engage with mining MNCs that had begun to employ smaller-scale exploration and production companies, on the other hand, poor Africans increased or began mining activity as a coping strategy and a means to carve out a new livelihood.

The crisis of African mining accelerated IFI pressure to privatise the resource sectors. The 1990s witnessed privatisation of gold mines in Ghana and the break-up of the big state-owned copper companies of ZCCM in Zambia and Gecamines in Congo. Nationalisation may not have been managed well and the constraints on Zambia, for example, were great. Among these was the domestic management of nationalisation and attempts to try to harness collective strategies internationally to control MNCs in the 1960s and 1970s. But the assumption that privatisation would guarantee profitability and improve performance was disingenuous. In early 2002, Zambian mining seemed to have all but completely collapsed as the company Anglo American announced its intention to leave the copperbelt (the average copper price of eighty-eight US cents a pound in September 2000 had fallen to less than sixty US cents in November 2001 – a fifteen-year low). By leaving the copperbelt, Anglo American jeopardised two thirds of national copper production, constituting half of the country’s foreign exchange earnings and at least 11,000 jobs. Zambia’s state copper company, Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines

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36 Szeftel 2000.
37 See, inter alia, Drillbits and Tailings, 7 September 1998 and the attempts by a private tourmaline Gem mine Indigo Sky Gems to evict 1,000 ‘small’ miners south of Karibib in Namibia in the summer of 1998. Indigo was a subsidiary of Branch Energy, owned by Tony Buckingham, a former British Special Air Services officer. Branch Energy shared offices and investments with Sandline, linked to the South-African mercenary company Executive Outcomes. Indigo complained that local miners were smuggling tourmaline ‘left, right and centre’ and that the company was within its rights to expel the miners, despite the Government of Namibia’s support for the miners.
Ltd (ZCCM), was privatised in March 2000 – it had accounted for ten per cent of GDP and seventy-five per cent of all foreign exchange earnings. The government had not only lost control of its most valuable source of revenue and strategic asset, but was engaged in a challenging process of privatisation. It was a process, moreover, that did not reduce opportunities for corruption by state officials, but instead enhanced them.39

In a more positive vein, the regeneration of Ghana’s gold-mining sector has been hailed a major success story.40 In the mid-1990s, at a time of increased interest in Ghana’s mining sector by international agencies and after the institutionalisation of President Rawling’s final acceptance of a structural adjustment programme in 1983, many concessions were offered to mining sector investors. In 2000, gold accounted for ninety-five per cent of Ghana’s mineral exports and the thirteen companies that mined it were predominantly South-African, including Anglo American and Goldfields. Other companies were headquartered in Australia, Canada and China.

The dominance of gold production has tended to mask the continued importance of agriculture to the Ghanaian economy; accounting in 2000 for thirty-five per cent of GDP.41 Gold in Ghana is located in the west of the country, notably around Obuasi, Tarkwa and Wass West district of Western Region. This area has one of the continent’s greatest concentrations of mining operations. A consequence of this has been to dramatically degrade the local environment and local livelihoods, including Ghana’s closed forest area of 4,633 square miles wherein government allocated mining rights.

The average area for a surface mine operating in Ghana is about fifty-eight square miles. Companies have been given thirty-year leases to operate. In the 1990s, Ghana dramatically reformed investment laws, relaxed regulations related to mining exploration and production, company taxation and allocation of concessions.42 But the expansion of gold mining has led to the displacement of local communities and destruction of local agriculture with particularly dire consequences for women whose loss of livelihoods has been difficult to replace. According to one source, ‘Mining-related diseases and environmental

39 Craig 2000.
40 Addy 1999. And it is not only in Ghana that there has been an increased interest in African gold mining, it has extended to Tanzania and Mali. See Engineering and Mining Journal, September 2000.
42 Ghana introduced a new mining act in 1998 replacing that of 1979 which had been less sympathetic to granting mining company concessions.
degradation are rampant. As traditional sources of livelihoods are eroded, people, particularly women and children, are falling into extreme poverty.  

A recent study has indicated a range of poor health and social impacts resulting from gold mining in Ghana. Blasting has increased air- and water-borne pollution and processing has produced toxic chemicals, including cyanide, arsenic and sulphur dioxide. The mining area of Western Region has the highest level of vector-born disease such as malaria, schistosomiasis and onchocerciasis. The area has an above national average incidence of TB and acute conjunctivitis. Skin disease is caused by people’s exposure to toxic chemicals and arsenic dermatitis causes mental disorders. Sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and syphilis have a high incidence related to high levels of migration and transition populations. Social impacts, in addition to population growth, displacements and prostitution, include high levels of violence and increased drug use.

The Ghanaian case highlights the regeneration of gold mining and its social consequences. Another important assessment of just how successful African mining recovery has been, or where the potential for using the sector to harness economic growth lies, can be found in the area of refining or beneficiation. It is here that important value added from the mineral sector is based. Beneficiation refers to at least one stage of refining raw materials or ores towards a finished metal. And, while there seems to have been some progress in this regard, the figures are misleading as it seems that a lot of the resources that are refined on the continent are, in fact, imported rather than produced locally. In 1975, 66 per cent of African-produced copper underwent beneficiation, a figure that rose to 79 per cent in 1996. For bauxite/aluminium, the figures were 12 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. Yet a lot of West Africa’s bauxite was not smelted in the region but exported, sometimes as aluminium oxide (partly smelted bauxite), and as we noted above, much of South Africa’s bauxite was imported from another continent. Although there may have been an increase in the smelting of copper, for example, this has occurred at a time of falling production.

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41 Drillbits & Tailings 2000. See also Coakley 1998.
42 Drillbits & Tailings 2000.
The curse of resources?

Politicians in the global South have frequently noted a curse that accompanies resource wealth. The founder of OPEC, Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso described oil as ‘the devil’s excrement’ and Zambia’s erstwhile President, Kenneth Kaunda noted the ‘curse of being born with a copper spoon in our mouths’. And, while the proportion of developing country exports accounted for by primary commodities has fallen since 1970 from 80.4 per cent to 34.2 per cent in 1993, in part due to the boom of manufacturing sited there, three quarters of states in sub-Sahara Africa still accrue half their export revenue from primary commodities (see Table I).

The idea of a resource curse relates to the relative economic, political and social underachievement of countries with resource wealth compared with those that do not have natural resource endowment. Where resources account for a high proportion of export revenue, there tend to be poorer rates of growth and higher levels of poverty. The only African country that has sustained relatively high levels of growth, and is therefore the exception to the rule, is Botswana. There are at least five main reasons why countries with resource dependency seem to do less well than those without resources.

They are: a fall in the terms of trade for primary commodities; the instability of international commodity markets; weak or non-existent linkage between resource and non-resource areas (both spatial and sectoral); impoverishment of rural livelihoods, and; ‘Dutch Disease’.

Each of these factors contributes to the failure of high levels of revenue to be generated from raw-material exports. Yet they must be set alongside the balance of class and social forces within a particular country. It is only then...
that it becomes possible to get a sense of two crucial common tendencies. The first is the failure of the state to promote a diversified development strategy that is not dependent upon external rents rather than local productive activity. The second is to apply nuanced and historically grounded theoretical frameworks to understand the way in which so called ‘state collapse’, warlordism and tyranny has been linked with Africa’s resource-rich countries.

Rentier politics

The concept of the rentier state has been used to characterise states in the Middle East that are dependent upon oil revenue for government expenditure. It has also been used in the African context to understand the political consequences of oil-rent dependency in Gabon and it might be applied to countries such as Nigeria, Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A rentier state is one that receives regular and substantial amounts of external rent. The requirement to raise revenue from local productive activity and taxation becomes less important in those circumstances and so too can the demand for political representation from the bourgeoisie. The middle class may forego the trappings of liberal democracy and representation when it can acquire wealth more directly through access to the state and the distribution of the benefits of mining, mineral sales, contracts, exploration rights and so on.

The idea of a rentier state has been analytically important. It has helped characterise authoritarian politics and spread of corruption. Spoils politics in the circumstances of underdevelopment becomes explicable not as the affirmation of primordial loyalty but because the opportunity for accumulation of productive capital is slim. Instead, it is far easier to secure access to ready-made wealth in the form of rent. One of the difficulties of the term ‘rentier state’, however, is that it has tended to mask social relationships that constitute the state. It might be more accurate, instead, to talk about ‘rentier politics’. There has been a recent increase in attempts to theorise economies dependent upon external rent and to try to understand why economic growth and poverty reduction have not followed booms in resource prices or mineral production.

Shafer has preferred to talk about ‘funnel states’ that distribute rent and in so doing create (sustain) a rentier-politics mentality. Where states benefit

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52 Yates 1996.
54 Shafer 1994.
from access to resources, they do so not because of any productive activity that the bourgeoisie has generated through a strategy of capital accumulation but because of a country’s natural endowment. A consequence of this, evident in the 1970s optimism expressed by African élites who instigated nationalisation and expropriation of mining companies, is that political leaders became deluded. Many assumed an endless stream of rent from mineral development. Ineffectual government and planning became a character of régimes where access to rent was easy and a substitute for productive activity. It also became an avenue for the allocation of state contracts to reflect personal interests and spoils politics rather than merit or economic efficiency.

This is not an argument for the inevitability that resource-based industrialisation is flawed and that access to rents from mining MNCs will automatically create corrupt political régimes. Neither is it an argument, evident, it seems, among some authors, that spoils politics, corruption and graft is an automatic feature of politics on the continent because Africans cannot manage their public affairs.\(^{55}\) It is, instead, to stress that rentier politics can emerge where the balance of class forces shaping state policy pursues the ‘easy’ route of revenue generation from resource rents, where institutional barriers to corruption and political processes to inhibit it are weak and where opportunity for capital accumulation is structured primarily through membership or connection with the state élite and linkages with foreign capital. Nigeria’s military régimes, particularly Abacha’s, are classic examples of where the complex mix of local politics and the country’s insertion in the world economy generated conditions for military rule, authoritarian politics and constrained opportunity for capital accumulation that was not linked to membership of state élites.

Rentier politics goes some way to explain why it is that régimes are unable to take corrective action in the face of the consequences of rent dependency.\(^ {56}\) As a ‘high-absorbing’ oil exporter, with a big population in relation to its proven reserves, Nigeria has been under more pressure than low-absorbing oil exporters, or capital-surplus exporters such as Saudi and Libya, to invest and consume its oil revenue quickly. After its civil war and before the 1973 oil price hike, Nigeria’s economy grew at about eight per cent a year. Thirty-nine per cent of its GDP was accounted for by agriculture and it was self-sufficient in food, exporting groundnuts and palm products. Manufacturing

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\(^{56}\) Ross 1999.
only accounted for six per cent of GDP. With the fourfold price increase in petroleum in 1973 and 1979, Nigeria initially invested overseas, but that savings strategy did not last long. Nigeria accumulated debts of US$30 billion between 1979–81, investments in infrastructure swallowed the windfall from oil-price rises. Road building and education accounted for some of the country’s investment. After 1979, the country began a resource-based industrialisation programme that included the building of a new capital in Abuja. It also involved attempts to develop a capital goods sector, but it was regionally distributed on the basis of meeting the interests of local elites rather than on a coherent development strategy.57

Nigeria’s economic growth plummeted towards the end of the second oil boom in the late 1970s. The country’s industrial structure failed to meet its development needs. The Abacha régime was characterised by political authoritarianism, wasteful expenditures, corruption, persistent subsidies to inefficient loss-making public companies in the interests of local patrons, oil-price subsidies, the execution in 1995 of MOSOP\textsuperscript{58} leader Ken Sara-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists, and the persistent harassment of communities in the Niger Delta oil-producing areas. While real GDP growth was about 2.6 per cent 1996–2000 (petroleum accounted for about 90 per cent of export earnings), this was offset by a population growth of 2.4 per cent and inflation of 20 per cent.59 By 2000, the majority of Nigerians were less well off than they were in 1970. Per capita income was less than US$300 and very high levels of skewed income distribution were apparent where the top 20 per cent of Nigerians owned more than 50 per cent of national income and the bottom 20 per cent owned just 5 per cent.60 External debt remained large, accounting in 2002 for 64 per cent of GDP. Nigeria’s dire economic condition led the Financial Times in its special country supplement in 2004 to note that ‘No country provides a more graphic illustration of the curse of oil’.61

Yet, if Nigeria illustrates the implications of what might be caricatured as a resource curse, there was no inevitability about the country’s decline.

\begin{itemize}
\item Auty 1995, p. 193; Forrest 1993.
\item The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People founded in 1990 to confront the ravages of oil production in the Niger Delta, to establish an Ogoni Bill of Rights and to ensure greater representation of Ogoni interests in local and federal politics, including publicising the environmental destruction, by Shell and other oil companies of the Delta. See Ken Sara-Wiwa 1992.
\item Amuzegar 2001, p. 233.
\item Ibid.
\item White and Peel 2004, p. 1.
\end{itemize}
Nigeria’s economic crisis represents the failure to manage resource booms, the inflation of a grossly inefficient public sector wherein rentier politics shaped the decisions about the allocation of resources, and the failure to sustain the reproduction of capital. It also reflects the undermining of non-resource economic sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. The failure to manage the distribution of resources accruing from the oil booms of the 1970s set in motion a political dynamic that confirmed the political domination of the state apparatus as the vehicle for distributing the largesse from oil rent. The strength of the military, and its role in both confirming its own corporate interests and being the defender of ascendant Nigerian capitalist interests linked to oil, ensured that there were no savings available for the time when the oil boom passed. Instead, there was simply too much pressure by the ruling élites for immediate consumption and for this consumption to keep the military and its backers in power. And, here, the fact that Nigeria was a strategic ally of the US in Africa, and a major supplier of its petroleum, (38 per cent of Nigeria’s total exports in 2002 went to the US) made sure that, despite occasional handwringing in Washington, the excesses of different military régimes were not allowed to interfere in the oil business. When the autonomy of the state, however, threatened the capitalist interests that relied on the military, international collusion with Abuja became more problematic.

All three oil majors that operate in Nigeria, Shell, Mobil and Chevron have been implicated in allegations of repression and impoverishment of the oil-producing areas. Although many inhabitants of the Niger Delta supported the process of political liberalisation, with the election in 1999 there has been little improvement in their livelihoods – at least for those who have not been co-opted by the new federal government. The Niger Delta has one of the highest levels of youth unemployment in Nigeria, despite being a major source of the country’s petroleum. Seventy per cent of the region’s inhabitants still have no safe potable water or access to electricity. And while the national average for access to a doctor is 1:40,000, it is 1:82,000 in the Delta and in some locations only 1:132,000. It is not surprising that the Niger Delta is a major source of political opposition to the impact that oil production has had on those people who live in oil producing areas. Following Mobil’s oil spill of 40,000 barrels in January 1998 (roughly equivalent to one-sixth of the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska) and the resulting destruction of the local fishing

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industry, which led to thousands of claims for compensation, a fisher noted: ‘Mobil is the only visible entity. They are making a lot of money here, and we’ve been left like monkey’s out here in the swamp’.\textsuperscript{64}

The failure to ensure a broader distribution of the rents that have accrued to the Nigerian state is an important element in the politics of rentierism. Another has been the failure to ensure that reserves have been saved to compensate for resource depletion or shifts in market demand. In the 1970s, when the price of copper fell, there were attempts to establish international stabilisation funds and a cartel of copper producers. Neither was long-lasting or effective. The sums of money required, and the international support for such a venture were not forthcoming. Part of the reason that states did not make provision for future expenditure that was not dependent upon resource rents is because of rentier politics. The stream of revenue from resources is finite, depending on the quality, quantity and international demand for a resource. These are issues over which African states have little control, but they can make strategic decisions about the pace of depletion and the allocation of revenue that accrues from mining.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{Fuelling conflict}

If poor economic performance and rentier politics are linked with reliance upon primary commodities, the most immediate contemporary concern for raw material producers has been a prevalence of war and civil conflict. Put simply, resource endowment in Africa has been linked with war. Struggles over access to resources have often been seen as the cause of conflict over diamonds, rutile and bauxite in Sierra Leone; diamonds and oil in Angola; diamonds, coltan in DRC; iron, diamonds, timber, rubber, in Liberia; bananas and camels in Somalia.\textsuperscript{66} Although it is too simplistic to reduce conflicts to a ‘single motivation’, resource wars have been often characterised as resulting from resource scarcity (grievance) or resource abundance (greed).\textsuperscript{67}

Scarce-resource wars are noted to have taken place where resource-poor economies are challenged by élites seeking to capture resource rents. An example here may be struggles over grazing in Sudan that resulted in poorer pastoralists being displaced. A major theme in this characterisation is the idea

\textsuperscript{64} Drillbits & Tailings 1998.
\textsuperscript{65} Auty 1995, p. 200; Shafer 1994.
\textsuperscript{66} For a more detailed international listing, see Le Billon 2000, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{67} Le Billon 2000, p. 22.
that the powerless may have a grievance as governments are unwilling or unable to placate the needs of the poor. ‘From this perspective’ Le Billon notes, ‘a resource war is the violent expression of a distributional conflict associated with the paucity of resources’, yet, as he also notes, this explanation of conflict has many problems. For instance, resource scarcity and population pressure might promote socio-economic innovation and the evidence for resource conflict suggests a greater preponderance among resource-rich, rather than resource-poor countries.68

An alternative explanation for resource wars has thus been the idea that conflict emerges when ‘wealth depends on state or territorial control, competing groups will resort to non-co-operation or violence to control revenues’.69 Access to resource rents are seen as a vehicle for keeping élites in power and challenges to those rents will thus be a cause for conflict. An example of this type of conflict might be the bloody civil war in Liberia, where Taylor attempted to seize power in 1989 but, after he failed to do so, accessed and controlled the timber and mining sectors outside the capital Monrovia. In the early 1990s, Charles Taylor in fact supplied one third of France’s tropical hardwood requirements via French companies.70

A key feature of Angola’s long-running, and recently concluded, civil war has been the heavy reliance of the MPLA government upon oil rents from US oil majors, while the late Savimbi’s UNITA rebels used diamond wealth in its captured territory to fund their continuation of military conflict. This is not to argue that mineral wealth necessarily destroys a country. Rather, it is the failure for wealth to be distributed widely and evenly that has generated grievances.71 In the case of Angola, it is incontrovertible that loans to develop the oil industry were used by the Angolan government to purchase arms to continue waging its war against Savimbi. In the case of UNITA, the control of diamond exports valued at US$300 million in 1999 helped sustain rebel access to arms leading to, among other things, the establishment of a highly developed parallel market in diamonds and other commodities. Before the 2002 ceasefire, Angolan government military gains in 2000 dramatically cut UNITA’s access to the diamond trade down to US$100 million, but that was still sufficient to fund a military operation.72

68 Le Billon 2000, p. 23.
70 Cited in Duffield 2000, p. 84. See also Le Billon 2000, Reno 2000.
Sudan is another case where oil has fuelled militarisation and conflict. The discovery of oil in the Western Upper Nile has been directly linked with government atrocities against local inhabitants, forced population movements and mass displacements, and reported collusion between operating oil companies and the Islamist Khartoum-based régime. According to Christian Aid, the government of Sudan has doubled its military budget spending since 1998 to ‘virtually what it receives in oil revenues – around $1m a day’. One general boasted that Sudan could boost its domestic arms industry because of the ‘unprecedented economic boom’ that oil revenue had caused. Deepened US involvement in trying to broker a peace agreement in Sudan has become more animated as more oil is discovered and fighting parties undermine ease of access for MNCs.

War in Sudan, even predating the discovery of oil, was not an irrational act, it was used to secure political ends. Violence has been used as an end in itself to continue access to the spoils of war and to secure followers of military brutality. In contrast to the view that resource wars simply relate to struggles of greed or grievance, or, in a more reductionist vein, that economic factors are the primary cause of war – such as the demand to access mineral wealth –, it is more useful to look behind issues of conflict, to what has recently been called ‘complex political emergencies’. It is necessary, for example, to look at the interaction of both greed and grievance and to the characterisation of political forces that shape the way in which political and economic power is exercised in countries beset with violence. This way of examining conflict has a number of advantages. Most important of these is that it does not reduce causes of conflict to resource endowment, and it goes further by not prioritising an immediate need to understand the cause of conflict. Understanding conflict is not reducible to struggles over resources but depends on recognising factors that shape the ways in which states and politics have been constructed. Central to these factors is an assessment of the competing interests of local classes and the consequences of the specific incorporation of different African countries in the world economy. It may also offer the advantage of looking at the possibly transformative features of

76 Collier 2000b.
78 Cliffe and Luckham 2000, p. 295.
conflict that effectively reduces the role of the state as a central actor. War and violence may be the mechanisms by which new relations of legitimacy are forged between and within warring parties and new networks of power, politics and economy emerge.79 This more nuanced attempt to understand the way in which violence and conflict have emerged, and what links it may or may not have with resource endowments, will also provide an insight into the proliferation of small-scale mining in Africa. The expansion of small-scale mining is often seen solely as a state or business initiative to adapt to changes in market demands. Yet it might actually instead be the manifestation of resistance by miners and others to the global economy. Clearly, here, as revealed in the case of Angola, there is a difference between what a state can do with a sector such as petroleum, where transborder activities are limited, compared with the activities that emerge around alluvial diamond or gold mining. Pursuing this agenda leads from viewing conflict as a means to gain access to resources to seeing resource access as providing a mechanism to help resist liberalisation and provide a means to take control of local assets by the producers themselves.

**Sustainable mining?**

I began by indicating that governments, international agencies and academics have persisted with the view that resource-led growth in Africa offers an effective strategy for economic development on the continent. A major recent enquiry into the global mining industry by an international environmental advocacy group, has argued that there are important areas of potential convergence for an agenda for change.80 Recognising the continuing importance of the mining industry and that any enquiry into its impact and future is controversial, it is possible to chart a course of action linking the mineral sector with sustainable development. The report notes that ‘The challenge of the sustainable development framework is to see that the minerals sector as a whole contributes to the welfare and well-being of the current generation, without reducing the potential for future generations to do the same’.81 I have indicated here, however, that such optimism is misplaced.

The development of a strategy around even limited mechanisms of control

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79 This draws on the work of Duffield 2002.
80 IIED 2002.
81 IIED 2002, p. 4.
and development with the industry itself, so that mining companies can, amongst other things, review end-of-life plans at existing operations, ensure companies invest in sustainable development community plans, promote integrated materials management and product stewardship and so on² is laudable but it is also flawed. The notion of a “sustainable” mining based development is an oxymoron³. There is only negligible space for state flexibility in benefiting from value added in finished product markets. And it is also improbable that African states will be able to construct a development strategy that can guarantee streams of revenue from raw materials; African states are simply too limited in their control over the international pricing of commodities. Some commentators may still call for a commodities fund that would allow producer countries to access liquidity at a time of a fall in commodity prices, but there is little donor enthusiasm, financing or political will for this. Mineral exports will continue to be a major part of Africa’s (under)development even though, at different times, the continent may benefit, unevenly, from such a link. It is also mistaken to assume that all sub-Saharan Africa’s responses to the global mining industry will be the same and that the constraints on a country such as South Africa or Nigeria will be the same as they are for Ghana or Burkina Faso. How well African people benefit from local resource endowments is dependent upon the outcome of both the prices paid to producing countries for primary commodities and the robustness of local social and class forces to ensure that mineral dependency does not lead to rentier politics. But both these processes of establishing pricing mechanisms that are shaped locally, rather than internationally, and the creation of local class politics that is not driven by primitive accumulation, remain subject to the vagaries of the global capitalist system and not just the capture or improved efficiency of the state in Africa.

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Alex Nunn and Sophia Price

Managing Development: EU and African Relations through the Evolution of the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements

Introduction

The relationship between the European Union1 and Africa has been formalised since the beginning of the European integration project in the evolving Yaoundé, Lomé and now Cotonou Agreements. The relationship has shifted in line with the emerging global framework for neoliberal accumulation. This shift has involved the ‘re-designing’ of developmental strategies and their ‘locking-in’ in the long term. Theoretically, this global shift in the organisation of both production and social relations (including popular understandings) has been well documented and the changing dominant patterns of production in advanced industrial economies has been highlighted at length. However, this article aims to develop further the idea of ‘locking-in’, outlined in the work of Stephen Gill, and to place an increased emphasis on the phenomena of both re-designing and locking-in as they apply to the alteration of developmental strategies in Less Developed Countries.

1 The European Community (EC) is used when referring exclusively to the period before the creation of the European Union (EU) in November 1993.
(LDCs), among which those in Africa have suffered from extreme marginalisation and exploitation. This article reveals the often ignored role of the EU in this process. It argues that the EU, through its institutionalised link with Africa, has played a key role in re-designing developmental strategies to complement the global shift to neoliberal accumulation which, in its latest phase, is aimed particularly at the complex, multifaceted and increasingly integrated project to ‘lock-in’ the gains of capital over labour on a global scale. The article begins with a brief introduction to the complementary projects of ‘re-designing’ and ‘locking-in’ before considering these against the historical evolution of the Lomé and Cotonou relationship.

Re-designing and locking in

This article uses an analytical model of locking-in developed from the work of Stephen Gill to understand the evolution of the Lomé, then Cotonou trade and aid relationship between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of developing states. As applied here, this model is developed to be explicitly multi-dimensional, reflecting the pursuit of this project across the different aspects (or pillars) of capitalist hegemony, different spatial levels and the differences between elements which are related to the dominance of capital over labour per se and those that seek to manage that relationship at any point in time and in the context of the balance of class power. Before elaborating this analytical model, it is necessary to briefly introduce some of the key concepts that underpin it.

Gill’s use of ‘locking-in’ is heavily influenced by the analysis of the structural power of capital over the institutional framework of the state developed in Charles Lindblom’s seminal 1977 work Politics and Markets. This concept explains how the needs of capital are prioritised in public policy and the management of the economy, especially over the long term, even in states with all the formal trappings of democracy and the separation of powers. Concrete examples of this structural power lie in the ability of capital to withhold investment, either in the economy as a whole, thereby inducing slower growth or recession, or from a specific government by withdrawing support through government bonds and other short- and long-term government financing mechanisms. The result, argues Gill, is that governments increasingly

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3 Gill and Law 1993, p. 100.
have to prove the credibility and consistency of their policies to secure the confidence of capital markets.\textsuperscript{4}

Gill takes this analysis further, abstracting it to the global level and arguing that, in an era of disciplinary neoliberalism, this structural power is increasingly being written into legal and quasi-constitutional arrangements that extend between states and multilateral institutions and more nebulous rules-based frameworks, creating what he refers to as a ‘new constitutionalism’. For Gill, the new constitutionalism is not only reflective of the hegemony of capital over labour, but of a specific form of hegemony, influenced by the policy dictates of neoliberalism and crucially offering a privileged position to specific classes and class factions:

\begin{quote}
\ldots new constitutionalism operates in practice to confer privileged rights of citizenship and representation to corporate capital and large investors. What is being attempted is the creation of a political economy and social order where public policy is premised upon the dominance of the investor, and reinforcing the protection of his/her property rights. The mobile investor becomes the sovereign political subject.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{quote}

Gill draws heavily on Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, as being self-reflexive, actively constructed and incorporating both consensual and coercive features. Neoliberal hegemony, Gill argues, is characterised by the pursuit of measures to ‘reconfigure’ state apparatuses, and construct markets and measures to deal with the dislocations created by the circulation of fictitious commodities. This last category of characteristics of neoliberal hegemony draws significantly upon Polanyi’s idea of the ‘double movement’ to both extend commodification and socialise the core elements of capitalist production, and can be broken down into three sub-categories. These are: measures to protect against the contradictions generated by the commodification of capital, to contain the contradictions created by the commodification of land (that is, sustainable development and other aspects of environmental protection), and measures to contain the effects of the commodification of labour.\textsuperscript{6}

Clearly, however, if the ‘locking-in’ of the policy prescriptions of neoliberal hegemony is to take this form, then the structural power of capital over the state must be significantly modified to allow the state to secure the necessary

\textsuperscript{4} Gill 1998.
\textsuperscript{5} Gill 1998, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{6} Gill 1998, p. 4.
conditions for the reproduction of accumulation. Conceptually, this can be accounted for via an understanding of the concept of the relative autonomy of the state. This autonomy is possible, first, because various factions of capital themselves do not share a singular and unified set of interests beyond the structural dominance of capital over labour, and, second, by the reality of class struggle in which the state becomes a mediating institution between capital and labour:

This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between workers themselves. But it ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier. It compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself. Thus the ten hours bill in England was carried.

At any one time, then, the state has varying degrees of freedom from individual fractions of capital and can broker alliances to intervene in the structural base of the economy.

The state is able to play this role in organising and unifying the bourgeoisie and the power of the bloc in so far as it enjoys relative autonomy of given fractions and components, and of various political interests. Such autonomy is indeed constitutive of the capitalist state: it refers to the state’s materiality as an apparatus relatively separated from the relations of production, and to the specificity of classes and class struggle under capitalism that is implicit in that separation.

Paul Cammack has recently applied this concept to the governance of global capitalism, in which organisations and networks of organisations embody the political autonomy conferred upon the state at the domestic level and explains the conceptual underpinnings of the new constitutionalism. At this level, relatively autonomous political authority takes shape in organisations and institutions, more nebulous régimes of rules, dominant ideas and in the form of multilateral treaties and agreements. Each of these operates at a variety of spatial levels. This is the first dimension of locking-in and focuses

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7 Cammack 2003, pp. 41–2.
8 Marx and Engels 1985, p. 90.
9 Poulantzas 2000, p. 127.
10 Cammack 2003.
analytical attention on the role of the management of global capitalism at various spatial abstractions such as the global, macro-regional (that is, Europe, East Asia, and so forth), national and sub-national levels, down to communities, families and individuals.

The second dimension of ‘locking-in’ is demonstrated by giving more explicit recognition to what is often implicit in Gill’s work: that locking-in extends beyond the process of the formal constitutionalism that he identifies, encompassing the requirements of neoliberal accumulation across a range of ‘pillars’ of hegemony. These include a technical/legal pillar, a social/socio-psychological pillar and a political/institutional pillar.

In a technical-legal sense, locking-in involves the reconstruction of legal frameworks which protect the rights of capital over a long and often defined period. This is manifest for instance, in contract and property law (including intellectual property) designed to guard against the expropriations that had marked dependency and Keynesian-inspired development policies. This technical-legal aspect is explicitly linked to change in the political and institutional pillar. The result is to promote and build the interests of investors into the rules of the system itself and therefore remove them from the everyday political agenda. Crucially, such political change is intended to prevent an easy (re)turn to alternatives to neoliberalism. This pillar is also the site of reform of welfare systems and other institutions designed to mediate the negative effects of accumulation and contain elements of the class compromise that might otherwise drop out of the formal capitalist economy. The reform of social systems in this way has been critical in the transition between the early phase of neoliberal reform, focusing on austerity-based deconstruction of prior structures of more developmental and Keynesian political economy, and more recent reforms designed to expand the available pool of labour and, more crucially, shift the focus of intervention to relative surplus-value generation.

Social/socio-psychological locking-in refers to the management of social practices, norms and expectations. For instance, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank often remarked on the importance of downgrading the expectations of subordinate social groups and classes for redistribution of the social surplus of production. Again, this example demonstrates how locking-in within each of the pillars of hegemony combines and relate to one another. Socio/psychological locking-in clearly relates to measures to undermine redistribution, either privately
through measures to lower wages relative to surpluses, or publicly through measures to cut taxation and public spending. Both in the core and periphery, this initially involved ‘austerity’ measures, including ‘cold bath’ reductions in employment and public spending. As the World Bank and European Commission have remarked illustratively of the transition economies of Eastern Europe, the socio-psychological ‘shock’ of crisis is an important part of this process:

Rapid action can improve the political sustainability of reform if it prevents a joint assault by special interest groups. . . . Bold changes are especially necessary if a government lacks credibility. . . . A conclusive reform can help to reshape expectations about the government’s commitment and so contribute to its success. Governments do well to capitalize on the broad, potentially short lived mandate for reform that crisis confers by front loading the reform program.11

Protracted and endemic shortages, inflation and hyperinflation are a great problem but also mollify the population and reduce popular resistance to shock therapy . . . unpopular measures should not be spread over time but taken as quickly as possible.12

Again, austerity-based adjustments to social expectations form part of the early phase of constructing neoliberal hegemony, with the major part of the focus on deconstruction of earlier manifestations of an alternative developmental hegemony. More recently, locking-in has developed a more sophisticated approach, mediated through the ideology of the Third Way, promoted by strategically important politicians and states. In terms of social practices and expectations, this phase has not merely focused on coercive aspects of locking-in but has sought also to mobilise consensual strategies. Shaped against the backdrop of fear of resistance to structural adjustment and the rise of ‘dropping out’ of the formal economy,13 these strategies have become a major element in the drive to expand and lock-in commodification, particularly with regard to expanding the pool of available,

13 While the informal economy may be capitalist too, it is difficult for political authority to manage and regulate and as such exists on the margins of hegemony outside of the direct scope of measures to increase commodification and to contain its contradictions.
flexible and competitive labour – Marx’s reserve army of labour – in strategies designed to increase the rate of absolute surplus-value. These have been combined with measures to raise expectations in relation to education and health care – so called pro-poor policies – to boost the quality of labour inputs (and potential inputs) in measures designed to raise the rate of relative surplus-value.14

As a result, development policies in the 1990s have increasingly been presented as participatory, with a social dimension and owned by the domestic population, and this has been reflected in the evolution of the Lomé and Cotonou relationship. This has involved various strategies including involving NGO partners in designing and implementing development programmes, engendering entrepreneurship at an ever more grassroots level and manipulating ideologies such as postmodernism and feminism to present neoliberal re-designing and locking-in programmes as individually empowering, in a process which is captured by Gramsci’s concept of *trasformismo*.15

This leads to a consideration of the third dimension of locking-in. This is that hegemony consists of ‘layers’, in which the most foundational and deeply entrenched layer incorporates key elements of capitalist hegemony over labour, such as individual property rights, practices of wage-labour and the acceptance of contract law. Overlaid on this layer are more superficial elements of policy design which capture the active strategies to support, extend and defend accumulation in the particular context of the balance of class power. This understanding helps to illuminate how it is that capitalist hegemony is reconstructed in different formats but the central elements of exploitation and unequal power remain.

This article argues that the Lomé/Cotonou relationship has embodied just such a shift in hegemony, which has taken the form of a transition away from the social-democratic compromise of the welfare and developmental state. It is argued here that the active deconstruction of this compromise has been characteristic of the evolution of the Lomé/Cotonou relationship as it has

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14 Critical to these measures are understandings developed in bourgeois scholarship around the interaction of labour with capital and the ability to generalise and take up new production techniques and technologies. For more work on ‘endogenous growth theory’, particularly on innovation and learning by doing, see Kaldor and Mirlees 1962, Arrow 1962.

been shifted away from preferential trade and aid cooperation with a heavy focus on developmentalism. This destructive element has taken the form of structural adjustment and ‘re-designing’ of the state-society relationship in the ACP. In its place, an alternative form of hegemony has been increasingly reflected in the focus of the treaty, including measures to embed neoliberal flexible accumulation and to offset its contradictions largely through the adoption of the policy mantra of ‘poverty reduction’. The success of this strategy has been determined by the ability of the EU and ACP to construct supportive class alliances. Thus, the Lomé/Cotonou relationship has increasingly incorporated measures designed to co-opt managerial and bureaucratic élites in the ACP through formal training programmes and institution building to facilitate ‘partnership’.

A further important element in the shift in hegemony more broadly, and specifically in the Lomé/Cotonou agreements themselves, has been how the interests of blocs of capital have been mediated by those of relatively autonomous political authority at the level of the state, macro-region and globally. A key feature of the early Lomé framework was the inclusion of policies and measures which were clearly the product of demands from individual EU states to protect the interests of nationally embedded blocs of capital. It was this that led the agreements to be characterised in this early period as neocolonial, reflecting the continuation of dependence and uneven development without the formal trappings of imperialism. However, reflecting Gill’s argument regarding the specific composition of neoliberal hegemony as being increasingly dominated by the interests of finance capital, the Lomé/Cotonou framework has taken a more generalised perspective of capitalist interests.

In advancing re-designing of the ACP state-society relationship and locking-in the policy prescriptions of neoliberalism, the EU-ACP relationship has taken its place within the broader institutional project that Gill describes and includes other important ‘partners’ such as the World Bank and IMF. Indeed, careful examination of the provisions of evolving Lomé and Cotonou agreements reveals that this relationship has often led the efforts of these institutions, incorporating important policy innovations prior to their appearance in the broader global development framework.
EU-African relations

The relationship between the EU and Africa dates back to the creation of the EC, with Part IV of the 1957 Treaty of Rome outlining the framework for ‘association’ between the two regions, based on reciprocal preferential trade and aid provisions. This framework was modified by the two successive Yaoundé Conventions (1963–9 and 1969–74) in light of the move to independence by many of the associated states. The relationship provided the EC with a framework for the protection of economic and geopolitical interests. This was particularly true for France, as the Association and Yaoundé agreements represented devices to off-load French colonial mercantilism on to the Community as a whole in return for receiving access to markets and sources of supply. The relationship between the EC and this selective group of Southern states was tainted by the criticism of neocolonialism, as decision-making was unequal, colonial patterns of trade were little altered, per capita incomes were not significantly raised, and the newly independent states were kept in a position of economic and political dependence. Despite such critiques, the relationship endured, as the newly independent states and their ruling élites remained largely orientated to accepting neocolonial dependent development.

The framework of relations between the EC and Africa was expanded and modified with the replacement of Yaoundé by the first Lomé Convention in 1975. UK accession to the EC necessitated the accommodation of links with a wider group of ACP states and this phase of the institutionalisation of the EU-ACP relationship was contextualised by the dominant conditions in the global political economy at a time of commodity price booms, oil price hikes and growing political instability in the core, as the postwar accumulation régime faltered. Combined with rising Third-World militancy, this context

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16 Association applied to French West Africa (Dahomey, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sudan and Upper Volta), French Equatorial Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Middle Congo, Gabon and Ubangi-Chari), other French territories of the Autonomous Republic of Togo, Madagascar, Comoros, French Polynesia, French Southern and Antarctic Territories, Algeria, Réunion, Guyanne, Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Pierre and Miquelon, French Somaliland, New Caledonia and Dependencies, Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi, Italian Somaliland and New Guinea.

17 These linked the EC to eighteen Associated African States and Madagascar (AAMS) (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, People’s Republic of Congo (formerly Brazzaville), Dahomey, Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Upper Volta and Zaire (formerly Congo-Kinshasa, Congo Leopoldville).


19 Green 1976, p. 5.
motivated the EC to pursue a strategy to secure relations with valued overseas markets, exporters of raw materials (especially oil-producing states), and investment sites. As such, the new convention aimed to manage trade and investment environments and to provide a response to the dependency debate and calls for collective self-reliance and delinking. Hailed as an example of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), it focused on the practical issues surrounding North-South co-operation such as market access, compensatory finance and the disbursement of aid. However, the EC refused ACP demands for the inclusion of the specific elements of the NIEO agenda such as ACP national sovereignty over natural resources, adjustment of EU economies and a code of conduct for transnational enterprises.

The first Lomé Convention reflected the dominance of dependency and Keynesian-inspired demands for national developmental autonomy through attempting to decommodify certain aspects of North-South relations. Price stabilisation, grant aid, technology transfer and preferential market access were all hailed as promoting Third-World interests and tessellated with nationalised industrialisation. Aid was predominantly in grant form, without the usual ‘strings attached’, while the trade régime provided preferential, non-reciprocal access for certain ACP exports to the European market. This interventionist approach to trade was supplemented by a system for the stabilisation of exports (STABEX) and separate protocols guaranteeing prices and quotas for certain commodities. While recognising the dependency of

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20 African states controlled significant energy resources. Nigeria was the world’s eighth largest oil producer, whilst the Congo, Gabon, Zaire, and Trinidad controlled 1,300 million tons of proven oil resources. Oil companies were exploring the Cameroon, Dahomey, Ghana, Senegal and Ethiopia. In light of increased European reliance on nuclear energy, uranium supplies were of growing importance and were present throughout Central Africa, with Gabon, Niger, the Central African Republic and Zaire all actually producing uranium. Gruhn 1976, p. 259. Furthermore ACP states were important hosts for European investment, particularly from the former metropoles whose corporations often enjoyed monopolies in the exploitation of mineral wealth. For example, the French government owned seventy per cent of the capital of the Equatorial Africa Oil Company (SPAFE) which exploited deposits in the Congo and Gabon, and the French Atomic Energy Commission had a one-third interest in the Air Mines Company (SOMAIR) created in 1967 to exploit Niger’s uranium deposits. The French government was also involved in mining bauxite in the Cameroon, manganese in Gabon and potash in the Congo. Ravenhill 1985, p. 37.

21 In reflection of the UN General Assembly’s 1974 Programme of Action for a New International Economic Order.

22 Ravenhill 1985, p. 338.
many ACP states on a few primary commodities, these régimes supported European MNCs heavily involved in the production of ACP exports.23

Re-designing and locking-in in the evolution of Lomé

Over the lifespan of the Convention, the EU-ACP partnership has grown to include twenty-five European member states and seventy-nine ACP states.24 It has been renegotiated every five years, with the latest negotiation in 2000, seeing the relationship renamed the Cotonou Agreement. Within its evolution there has been an emphasis, first, on re-designing the state-society relationship and, later, locking-in development strategies in accordance with the policy prescriptions of neoliberalism. The overarching framework for the EU-ACP relationship has gradually been redefined, moving the agreement from a redistributive, interventionist approach to one founded on the principles of free trade and neoliberal orthodoxy. In large part, this has been due to the dominance of the EU in the relationship and the embracing of the logic of ‘re-designing’ within both groups. This redefinition is evident in a number of areas. The development discourse contained within the Convention changed rapidly from one of interdependence, equality and redistribution to that of participation in the global economy. By Lomé III (1983), the focus was explicitly shifted from state, to private-sector-led development, with a central role attributed to the individual, and was described as a ‘minimally interventionist, catalytic form of assistance’.25 This approach was augmented under Lomé IV (1989), which further embraced re-designing, decentralised co-operation based

23 These included German MNCs such as Saarbergwerkt, Belgian Petrofina and Royal Dutch Shell in the ACP mineral sector; Tate and Lyle, Booker McConnell and Unilever in the agricultural sector, particularly the Caribbean and African plantations, and many conglomerates operating across sectors like Brook Leibig’s involvement in tea, coffee and cattle rearing in Africa. Long 1980.

24 This includes forty-eight African states (Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Djibouti, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambie and Zimbabwe), sixteen Caribbean states (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago), and fifteen Pacific States (Cook Islands, East Timor, Federated State of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).

on civil-society participation, and individualised human rights. New provisions sought to redefine the role of the state as ‘enabling’ private-sector development in a number of ways. These included guaranteeing an open, transparent and stable regulatory and political environment and the provision of appropriate infrastructure, low labour and energy costs and supportive technical industries.26 Crucial to this was the demonstration of a ‘locked-in’ commitment to market-based development.

Most recently, through the Cotonou Agreement, the EU-ACP relationship has formally become part of a Third-Way-inspired global poverty reduction strategy, embracing social and economic reform in partnership with the institutions of global economic governance. The EU and its member states are major creditors and donors to the IMF and World Bank-led Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, and the accompanying poverty reduction strategies.27 The inclusion within Cotonou of an EU-ACP agreement to cooperate on debt relief issues follows Council guidelines in 1996 which outlined dominant themes in European development policy:

The policy in this area is a decisive factor in ensuring, in the context of tight and efficient public finance management, a fair distribution of the fruits of growth and access to basic social services such as education and health, and in encouraging the emergence of an investment-friendly environment. Macro-economic reforms can have sustainable effects only if they fully embrace the objectives of social, human development.28

Furthermore, the Cotonou Agreement embodies perhaps the most radical element of reform in the re-designing of the Lomé development framework, namely WTO compliance through the liberalisation of the non-reciprocal preferential trade régime. This marks the latest stage in the ongoing reconfiguration of the EU-ACP relationship and its coherence with the wider global development framework, enshrining the principles of rules-based multilateral liberalisation. Over time, the value of ACP preferential access has been downgraded as the number of states covered by the agreement has increased, while the EU has also extended its range of development co-operation agreements outside the Lomé/Cotonou framework and has been at the forefront of multilateral trade liberalisation. Furthermore, the Lomé

The creation of EPAs is to follow an eight year (from the signing of the agreement) preparatory period. The all EU-ACP negotiations began in 2000 with the second phase of EPA negotiations beginning in 2003. It is expected that the new arrangements will enter into force by 1 January 2008, with a 12–15 year transition period before becoming fully operational.

The trade régime has done little but reinforce ACP dependence on the EU. Combined with pressure for WTO compliance, as witnessed by the ‘banana wars’, these factors provided the rationale for the replacement of the Lomé régime by Cotonou’s Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and sub-regional groupings within the ACP. The basis of the new régime is the subdivision of the ACP geographically and developmentally, through the categorisation of a group of ‘least developed countries’ (LDCs) and a group of richer middle-income countries (non-LDCs). EPAs based on free-trade agreements are being established between the EU and the groups of ACP non-LDCs considered in a position to do so.29 The EU ‘Everything But Arms’ (EBA) initiative formally provides LDCs non-reciprocal duty-free access to the EU market. However, in practice, the existence of regional groupings within the ACP containing both LDCs and non-LDCs makes this differentiation of treatment difficult.

Increased access to the EU market has been a principle that the ACP have continually demanded since the original Lomé Convention, when it became clear that the EC would protect its most sensitive sectors, such as agriculture and textiles. However, in pursuing increased access to the EU market, the ACP were unwilling to undergo reciprocal liberalisation. This proved irreconcilable with the EU’s vision of trade reform, based on full GATT/WTO compliance. Gradually, the Lomé relationship has become fully integrated into a global development framework based on a neoliberal accumulation model.

**Locking-in**

Central to the neoliberal re-designing project have been locking-in strategies, which are essential to secure such policy orientations over the long term. The most obvious evidence of locking-in has been the creation and maintenance of the Lomé/Cotonou relationship itself, by which ACP states have committed themselves to a particular development framework under the management of the EU. Locking-in has also been pursued through the increasing conditionality attached to the provisions of the Conventions. This is an effective

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29 The creation of EPAs is to follow an eight year (from the signing of the agreement) preparatory period. The all EU-ACP negotiations began in 2000 with the second phase of EPA negotiations beginning in 2003. It is expected that the new arrangements will enter into force by 1 January 2008, with a 12–15 year transition period before becoming fully operational.
strategy, given the level of reliance of ACP states on the Lomé relationship. The conditional nature of the Convention built on the ongoing reforms of Lomé’s financial protocol. The EC initiated such reforms when it engineered the adaptation of the financial protocol’s dispersal mechanisms, particularly with the introduction of sectoral programming under Lomé III (1983), institutionalising a larger, more orthodox donor role for the EC, congruent with the IMF and World Bank’s collective management of the debt crisis.30 Veiled in terms of increased efficiency, flexibility and co-ordination, the Commission’s remit was extended to the allocation of funds to individual states, the identification of sectors and programmes and policy implementation.31 The shift from the project-oriented approach to support for priority sectors or development ‘themes’ allowed the EC to expand its decision-making role and re-design those parts of the ACP economies it wished to promote. Historically, the EC had been extremely selective in terms of recipient sectors and states. Little aid was given to support the production of goods that might compete with European products, consequently, industrial funding focused on energy supplies. Under Lomé I, over forty per cent of rural funds were allocated to large agro-industrial projects, concentrating heavily on primary export crops, with only a tiny sum allocated to value-added agricultural and food processing.32 However, as the Convention matured, increasing focus was given to facilitating local processing, enabling the management of integrated production chains and the development of supportive class alliances.

Building on the sectoral approach, a specific structural adjustment support facility was included in Lomé IV (1989) which was described as the first ‘North-South Agreement on the philosophy underlying structural adjustment’.33 This facility, prompted by the EC’s participation in the 1987 World Bank-led Special Programme for Assistance to Africa, introduced an element of conditionality to the financial protocol. This was a marked change but did not undermine the attraction of EC grants, even with strings attached, in

30 See IMF 1983.
31 In contrast to the previous system, whereby the ACP state exchanged views with the EC on development objectives and priorities, under Lomé III the European Commission became involved in the preparatory stage. The Commission and main providers of aid assess the ACP states’ economic and social situation, and identify focal sectors. The programming mission, led by the Commission and the European Investment Bank then creates an indicative programme with the national authorities, setting out the sectors chosen, aid guidelines and the means of implementation. European Commission 1986, p. 71.
32 Rubin 1978, p. 11.
comparison to the loans offered by other donors. In 1991, structural adjustment funds were withheld from fifteen states due to failure to adopt a satisfactory economic reform programme, demonstrating that conditionality was underpinned by effective disciplinary sanctions.\textsuperscript{34} Conditionality was formally extended in 1995 to the observance of human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles, using the twin tools of a suspension mechanism and special allocations to bring Lomé further in line with the wider global development framework and demonstrating both a consensual and coercive aspect to the process.\textsuperscript{35} The inclusion of ‘political conditionality’ into the Convention demonstrates mechanisms of technical/legal and political/institutional locking-in. This was carried forward to the Cotonou Agreement along with a greater emphasis on efficiency and hence an enhanced role for the European Commission in project preparation and appraisal, particularly through the introduction of performance-related tranching of disbursements.

Various measures within the Lomé/Cotonou relationship demonstrate the technical/legal elements of locking-in, in order to protect the position of capital over the long term and ensure a secure investment environment. The Lomé Convention developed an investment framework which was hailed as ‘unprecedented in similar multilateral agreements’,\textsuperscript{36} and aimed to encourage fair and equitable treatment for investors, clear, stable and predictable investment conditions including insurance and guarantee systems. To complement the framework, the EC accorded itself a facilitating role in extending investment. In the late 1970s, such a role had been demanded by a consortium of mining companies in response to the rapid decline of European investment in Third-World mining, due in part to increased state control.\textsuperscript{37} The request to provide investment stabilisation and protection frameworks in turn prompted the Commission to urge other institutions, such as the

\textsuperscript{34} European Commission 1996, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{35} Suspension mechanisms related to violations of a ‘democracy clause’ were a standard part of European agreements with Latin-American and Central and Eastern-European states. The EU had already resorted to the unilateral suspension of Lomé benefits because of alleged violations of human rights or democratic principles in ACP countries. In 1994 Community aid to eight ACP states was suspended or restricted because of the security situation, failure to move towards democracy or poor observance of human rights (European Commission 1996, p. 3).
\textsuperscript{36} European Commission 1985a, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{37} Between 1961 and 1973 the proportion spent on mining exploration by European companies fell from 57 per cent of their total expenditure to 13.5 per cent. This drop was particularly marked in Africa. European Commission 1979b, p. 31.
World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, to widen their stabilisation efforts. The EC’s investment facilitating role was explicitly outlined as helping ACP states to re-design their domestic economies to facilitate access to capital markets and encourage direct private European investment particularly through sub- and joint-contracting. With the promotion and facilitation of private foreign investment to the ACP, European development policy was explicitly presented as a vehicle for the extension of European capital in an increasingly competitive global economy while assuring secure and diverse supplies of raw materials, particularly energy. The desire to stimulate European economic growth converged with the needs of capital to secure the most profitable locations in terms of market access, production costs, raw materials and labour. Augmenting the contractual mechanisms that ensured the technical/legal elements of locking-in to secure favourable investment conditions was the inclusion of human rights as a fundamental principle explicitly linked to development, particularly the rights of the individual in comparison to notions of group and socio-economic rights.

The Lomé/Cotonou relationship has also featured socio-psychological elements of locking-in. Early neoliberal conditionalities attached to structural adjustment policies have not only ensured the political and institutional aspect of locking-in, but have also had a psychological effect on society. Austerity has shaped citizens’ expectations of the state and is crucial to the project to dismantle prior forms of political economy. Under Lomé III, the move to a framework promoting re-designing, the privileging of private enterprise and the restoration of credit worthiness through export production included the imposition of such austerity measures. However, the locking-in of neoliberal hegemony has not merely been coercive. The realisation that the hard medicine of structural adjustment could engender social unrest, prompted the EU to develop a role under Lomé IV as supporter of Bretton-Woods-designed policies of reform. As such, it sought to mitigate the effects of enforced public spending cuts and liberalisation to ensure ‘that the social repercussions are tolerable believing as it does that social development is an integral part of economic

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40 The Commission estimated that an energy gap would emerge in the 1980s due to scarcity of uranium and oil, threatening the survival of European industry. European Commission 1979a, p. xxv. A central concern was that mineral supply would shift from Africa to the USA, Canada and Australia, which were much stronger bargaining partners, or to third countries where other industrialised mineral users represented more powerful competition.
progress and the promotion of civil society and democracy in Africa’. 41 This role, described as that of ‘social fire-brigade’ by Hewitt,42 included increased support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-projects, and directing adjustment funds to public services, especially health and education. Political and social sustainability was to be ensured through decentralised co-operation and participation reflecting the increasingly Third-Way developmental approach.43

In sum, the reconfiguration of the EU-ACP relationship has fitted with the evolution of the global development framework which has, in turn, been shaped by the changing needs of capital accumulation. Enforcing and embedding the transition from nationalised production to providing conditions favourable to securing private investment has been a key element of the relationship, in compliance with the wider framework embodied in the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank. Favourable investment conditions were further promoted as the EU developed a partner role to encourage European capital to invest in the ACP. Conditionalities were added at the same time as entrenching the new orthodoxy for social and political stability by incorporating a requirement to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However, despite EC attempts to lock-in political and economic re-designing and the promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI), there have been ongoing difficulties in attracting capital to the ACP, with only a handful of the more advanced and viable economies being successful in this regard. While internal and external European policies have worked to downgrade the value of ACP preferential access to the European market, the pursuit of trade liberalisation embodied by the replacement of the Lomé Convention by the Cotonou Agreement ensures WTO compliance. This has significance beyond the agreement itself, as the Cotonou framework is, in turn, important in ensuring the wider compliance of the developing world with multilateral liberalisation.

**Locking-in as a multi-levelled project**

Locking-in is a complex and multi-levelled project that encompasses a host of co-ordinated institutions and agreements at and between the global, macro-

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41 European Commission 1996, p. 3.
42 Hewitt 1989, p. 308.
regional, national and sub-state levels. The latest phase of the EU-ACP relationship has demonstrated coherence with the global development framework by becoming an explicit facet of that strategy. This reflects the ongoing expansion of the partnership, not only through the accession of member states to each group, but also through the inclusion of other institutions. Since the late 1970s, the EU has sought to include private investors and financial institutions in the Lomé relationship in order to fund joint projects, supplement stabilisation efforts and help spread risk. Contributors to these ‘triangular financing’ schemes were individual member states and the World Bank, as well as OPEC investors in the late 1970s who were eager to recycle petro-dollars. Despite ACP rejection of closer co-operation with the Bretton Woods institutions, European policy has increasingly been made in co-ordination with them ‘in the interests of policy effectiveness and of Western co-ordination and solidarity’. This was particularly evident in the 1989 and 1995 Lomé Conventions, which clearly reflected World Bank structural adjustment programmes, a set of policies that have long been a tool to enforce re-designing, and institutionalised the inclusion of a social dimension to reforms. Through this process, the EU, in conjunction with the Bretton Woods institutions, sought to play two complementary roles, as both supporter and enforcer of structural adjustment policies.

**Regionalism and the new constitutionalism**

The correlation between European and global development frameworks as displayed through the Cotonou Agreement is further demonstrated in the shared strategy to achieve WTO compliance, namely the creation of EPAs. As such, it is a clear indication of the inter-linkages between global and regional frameworks, through cross-cutting ties of a political, economic and bureaucratic nature, and the complementary nature of locking-in strategies pursued at global, regional, state and sub-state levels.

Regionalisation has been a continual focus of the evolving relationship between the EU and the ACP, being presented as a strategy to maximise ACP production and markets and facilitate joint ventures. Aspects of the latest sub-regionalisation initiative embodied in the Cotonou Agreement have already been manifest in the reform efforts of several African leaders, notably Thabo

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44 See Gill 1999.
45 Hewitt 1989, p. 308.
Mbeki of South Africa. ACP support for increased regionalisation based on neoliberal orthodoxy is evident in the form of the existing regional organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The objectives of these organisations include the free movement of labour, goods, services, capital and technology, macro-economic co-ordination and convergence, liberalisation of external payments and convertibility, regional currency zones, promotion of cross border investments, regional financial/capital stock exchanges, export credit guarantee schemes and infrastructural development. As such, the organisation of these regional groupings is characteristic of a new type of open, outward-orientated regionalism designed to promote competitiveness and integration within the global economy.

This ‘new regionalism’ represents a substantial ‘locking-in’ of the dominant neoliberal paradigm and surrenders important future policy options for individual governments; options that may well be required in changing national, regional or global circumstances. As with other aspects of the locking-in project, the new regionalism has been promoted from within Africa as well as imposed from outside. It is one of the central principles of the African-authored New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) sponsored by South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria and Senegal, and promoted extensively by the New Labour government in the UK. The ‘new regionalism’ provides a mechanism to lock-in the neoliberal development model into both the state and civil society, providing the necessary political anchorage to institutionalise the dominance of capital over the long term.

SADC exemplifies this new regionalism and specifically seeks to adjust developmental needs to the challenges of the liberalised global economy through a regional framework for development, diversification, productivity and export capacity. Central to this strategy is to increase the ability of the region to attract capital by displaying opportunities for trade and investment. However, in practice, regional integration under the leadership of South Africa, has meant the penetration of the region by South-African and international capital, under the leadership of the South-African government.

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47 Stubbs 2000, p. 231.
50 Taylor 1999, p. 3.
and rhetorical guise of an ‘African Renaissance’.\(^{51}\) As regional integration has worked heavily towards the advantage of the South-African economy, persistent concerns over South-African dominance and uneven gains in its’ favour have become enhanced.\(^{52}\)

The strategy to attract capital dovetails with Cotonou’s EPA agenda. This is demonstrated by the initiation of negotiations between the EU and SADC in July 2004,\(^{53}\) although engagement with this project has both promoted and detracted from the coherence of Southern-African regionalism. The six SADC member states that were also members of the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) have chosen to pursue an EPA as part of an Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) grouping.\(^{54}\) The remaining SADC states have chosen to form a separate stand-alone EPA with the EU, with South Africa adopting observer status to the negotiations. However, taking into account the existing bilateral Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement (TDCA) between South Africa and the EU, applied \textit{de facto} to Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland (BNLS) via the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), a free trade area is already in place. The complication arises with the inclusion of Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania in the EPA as these states are LDCs and as such are granted non-reciprocal preferential access to the EU market via the EBA initiative.\(^{55}\)

The complexity of membership between the burgeoning African regional organisations displays their cross-cutting character. This is intensified by the multiplicity of relations created with outside actors. For example, the open nature of Southern-African regionalism has been further demonstrated by proposals to create a free-trade agreement between the US and SACU under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).\(^{56}\) Mbeki has been proactive in building links throughout the world, establishing strong relations with Washington via the US-South Africa Bilateral Commission, being a regular participant at gatherings of the G8, transnational meetings such as the World Economic Forum and the Partnership Africa Conferences, and,

\(^{51}\) Taylor 1999, p. 4.
\(^{52}\) Keet 1999, p. 1; Chazan et al. 1999, p. 315.
\(^{54}\) Negotiations have been initiated across Africa for the creation of EPAs. Talks between the EU and the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) plus Mauritania began in October 2003 as did talks between the EU and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) plus Sao Tomé and Principe.
\(^{55}\) Davis and Goodison 2004.
\(^{56}\) Action for Southern Africa 2002.
more recently, the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in South Africa. This reflects a desire to attract international capital to the region with Pretoria presenting itself as a bridge between the developed world and the South.

Through SADC, the deepening penetration of the region by the alliance of domestic and transnational capital has gone hand in hand with the promotion of transparency, good governance, security and democracy.\(^57\) This is further reflected in South-African calls for the redefinition of the Organisation of African Unity, now the African Union, and SADC as disciplinary organisations to safeguard regional ‘security’. For example, through the creation in 1996 of the SADC Organ for Politics, Defence and Security: ‘The aim seemingly promoted by Pretoria is to establish mechanisms to interfere in the internal affairs of member states in the event of a breakdown in governance’.\(^58\) This focus on security, peacebuilding and conflict prevention was integrated in the Cotonou Agreement, further expanding the remit of EU-ACP relations and ensuring a system of peer surveillance and discipline.

The heavy promotion of regional projects via Cotonou is an important part of the multi-levelled locking-in project. The creation of cross-cutting and intertwined institutions facilitates the extension of capital, exemplified by burgeoning EU and US relations with SADC. While the formation of such institutions will be problematic, the potential gains for capital are highly significant.

**Brokering class alliances: completing the world market for capital, services and labour**

Central to the multi-levelled analysis of re-designing and locking-in has been the fostering of supportive class alliances across the core and periphery. Such class alliances have been vital for the construction of globally integrated flexible production chains, and in mitigating reactions to the establishment of a global neoliberal accumulation model. Within the Lomé/Cotonou relationship, European policy has emphasised the importance of ACP private-sector development, aimed at engendering an entrepreneurial class and a culture of enterprise. The EU looked to develop strategies to encourage capital alliances and create supportive networks of foreign and local capital, officials

\(^{57}\) Taylor 1999, pp. 3–9.
The new chapter regarding micro-projects under Lomé II was aimed at small rural projects and was funded by a tripartite structure in which EDF funding was matched by the ACP states and the recipient group. Therefore, such projects were dependent on close local capital/state interaction, and limited to relatively integrated social groups.

This approach correlated with that of the leading international organisations. Jean-Jacques Oeschlin, chairman of the International Organisation of Employers and vice-chairman of the ILO board, described the role of the SMEs as threefold: first, as an element of control in the national economy, operating as employers and operators in regions that large organised firms sometimes cannot reach due to cost; second, a channel for adaptable technology; and, third, a transmission shaft between highly organised MNCs and the informal sector, working in tandem with large enterprise through sub-contracting. This followed the example of Japan, where large MNCs partnered a constellation of small sub-contracting firms. Oeschlin identified Africa as a region where MNCs did not, but could with encouragement, sub-contract and form partnerships with local enterprise. European Commission 1984, p. 32.
Organisation, to facilitate co-operation, aided by institutions created to meet this aim.\textsuperscript{61} Primary amongst these has been the Centre for Industrial Development (CDI), established with the explicit aims of promoting joint ventures, sub-contracting, the export of expertise and technology and co-operation between ACP and European states and business interests.\textsuperscript{62} The aim of creating ‘durable partnerships’, especially joint ventures, was that:

\ldots the ACP firm gains access to the European partner’s industrial and managerial expertise, his technical and financial know-how and even access to his partner’s markets. The advantage for the EU company is his partner’s knowledge of local markets, access to local raw materials and a stake in an existing business and workforce.\textsuperscript{63}

The CDI-assisted ACP companies to choose appropriate European partners and to locate sources of finance (development financial institutions, export credit facilities, share capital). This was based upon the assumption that prospects for other sources of private lending would be enhanced by such partnerships.

The CDI was expanded under Cotonou to become the Centre for the Development of Enterprise (CDE), reflecting the increased importance of the service sector. Trade promotion and the development of services, particularly tourism, information technology and communications, have been increasingly highlighted as areas of growth potential and interest to European capital, with the Convention including provisions to liberalise these sectors. Investment guarantees and re-insurance schemes for FDI were designed to reduce risk and induce private capital flows by boosting investor confidence, with specific investment protection and promotion agreements concluded between EU and ACP member states. The objectives of the newly expanded CDE are to bring together ACP and EU capital, promote partnerships between ACP and EU contractors, inform EU capital of investment and business opportunities and support regional integration. Sectors eligible for such support are industry and agricultural processing, construction, tourism, telecommunications, transport, the private management of infrastructure and support services.

The emphasis on building alliances between Europe and the ACP has been reflected in the ongoing focus on decentralised co-operation and building

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\textsuperscript{61} European Commission 1984, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{62} European Commission 1997, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
links between social and economic partners. There is also a continuation of
the desire to prevent and mitigate the social conflict that might arise from
re-designing and locking-in. The expectation is that such a strategy would
produce the supportive political coalitions and stability necessary for the
continued expansion and reproduction of capital. Additionally, supportive
measures included the targeting of adjustment funds to social services,
especially health and education. This strategy has been augmented under
the Cotonou Agreement to include provisions related to peace building and
conflict prevention which aim to secure conditions for investment and
accumulation. Again, this fits with the broader global development agenda
and in respect to the liberalisation of public services (under the General
Agreement on Trade in Services in the WTO) is noticeably similar to UK
government attempts to make its domestic markets a home for a newly
emerging band of service companies. In this context, provisions globally and
within the Cotonou relationship to link liberalisation and institutional re-
designing of the state around the enabling model may appear to be an attempt
to make the world safe for European capital. As Cammack has argued,
with reference to the title of an influential UK Department for International
Development White Paper, other measures to secure investment conditions
at the same time as the adoption of pro-poor policies and poverty reduction
look rather like an attempt to make ‘the poor work for globalisation’.

Poverty reduction, or, in the case of the UK, ‘elimination’, is a crucial element
of class politics not only within the EU-ACP relationship but between the
developed and developing world more generally. It has become the dominant
theme of World Bank development programmes, as contained within the
World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework, the Poverty Reduction
and Growth Strategy approach and NEPAD, and is focused particularly on
completing the world market for labour. The vehicle for poverty reduction
is portrayed as increased integration in the global economy through trade
and capital liberalisation and attracting inward investment through an enabling
state capable of providing an attractive, compliant and skilled workforce.

The result, globally, is to guarantee an excess supply of labour in the interests

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64 Cheru and Gill 1997, p. 151.
65 Hewitt 1989, p. 308.
of maintaining an adequate and sufficiently pliant global workforce for integrated transnational production with an internally competitive, and thus fragmentary, dynamic designed to boost and secure absolute surplus-value. Measures to improve the quality of labour inputs aim to complement this by raising the rate of relative surplus-value.

Conclusion
The evolution of the Lomé and Cotonou Agreements has complemented the global shift to neoliberal accumulation. Through these agreements, the EU has played a lead role in re-designing the development strategies of African states and has been central to the ‘locking-in’ project that enshrines those re-designed strategies into technical-legal, political-institutional, socio-psychological frameworks at a host of levels, including domestic political economies and inter-regional agreements. The way in which these levels overlap and fit together is central to a nascent global constitution for neoliberal accumulation, where policy alternatives are restricted to those beneficial to accumulation. Over time, the aims of this global constitutionalism, including the Lomé and Cotonou agreements, have centralised not only the expansion of the world market in primary commodities and finished goods, but now also the completion of a world market for services, capital and labour as well. This represents the expansion of commodification to new and unprecedented levels.

Neoliberal global constitutionalism is not an unproblematic project and has resulted in widespread unease, as witnessed by global mass protests, located at meetings of world leaders and the key global institutions (including the EU). However, this article has demonstrated that the construction of capitalist hegemony is highly self-reflexive. At key junctures, interventions have sought to defend and shore up the dominance of capital. The early phase of neoliberal ascendancy was marked by strategies to deconstruct the class basis of opposition through structural adjustment and austerity. More recently, the increased focus on poverty reduction and pro-poor policies has demonstrated a fear of ‘dropping-out’ of the capitalist economy and more inclusive and participatory forms of development strategies witness a desire to build supportive alliances behind this project. Ironically, however, the inherent rigidity represented in the institutionalised structures of ‘locking-in’ may well undermine the ability of neoliberal hegemony to respond in the future to the pressures of instability and change.
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Alejandro Colás

The Re-Invention of Populism: Islamist Responses to Capitalist Development in the Contemporary Maghreb

Like many other parts of the erstwhile Third World, the Maghreb region of northwest Africa has lived under a general socio-economic and political crisis since the early 1980s. The three major states of the western-most reaches of the Arab world – Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia – have witnessed profound socio-economic and political upheavals (in Algeria amounting to a civil war in all but name), which have tested the resolve of both state and society for over a generation. One of the most powerful responses to this general crisis has come in the guise of Islamism. As will be indicated below, the notion of ‘Islamism’ is an abbreviated and generic term covering a variegated phenomenon, which nonetheless encapsulates the appropriation of the precepts and civilisational markers of Islam for the purposes of political action and mobilisation.

The resurgence of Islamism as a sociopolitical force in the Maghreb poses a number of conceptual and practical challenges to any analysis of the phenomenon, ranging from the validity of existing social-scientific categories to the perils of empirical fieldwork. But it places a particular strain on Marxist
categories of analysis and communist politics. For the resurgence of political Islam in the Maghreb cannot easily be read off as the expression of class antagonism, nor as the result of crises of underconsumption, nor, indeed, as a simple conservative reaction to such a predicament. As I shall argue below, an explanation of Islamic revivalism certainly includes some of these causal factors, but it also requires an emphasis on the role of various mediating structures, most notably the postcolonial state and the international capitalist system, in the crystallisation of this phenomenon. Maghrebi Islamism re-emerged as a significant sociopolitical force in the 1980s and 1990s chiefly as a result of the internationally-mediated crisis of the postcolonial régimes, and their accompanying re-alignment within the global capitalist economy. Whilst there are clearly very complex local dynamics in the unfolding of this crisis, and the sociopolitical responses it has elicited, this contribution will focus particularly on the international sources of the Islamist ascendancy, associating it to the particular – and differentiated – development of capitalism in the region before and after political independence.

This emphasis on the international context of Islamic revivalism in the Maghreb is warranted for two basic reasons. First, because it feeds into the contemporary debates surrounding transnational Islamism and the ‘war on terror’. As we shall see below, the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa experienced the ravages of Islamist violence (and the accompanying backlash of the state security forces) long before the 11 September 2001 attacks on mainland USA. The contours of the current global confrontation between liberal states and the global jihadists can be traced back to the antagonism between postcolonial states and Islamist insurgents since the late 1970s in the ‘arc of crisis’ stretching from Central and Western Asia to the Maghreb. Historical materialists can make a significant contribution to these debates by underlining both the particular historical trajectory of such a confrontation and by analysing the dynamics of concrete social formations which often engender these transnational antagonisms. What follows in this article is an attempt to do just that.

But there is a second and perhaps less obvious reason for underscoring the international dimensions of Islamist responses to capitalist crisis in the Maghreb. And that is to re-introduce into Marxist vocabulary the disused concept of ‘populism’ as a means of analysing in comparative perspective very specific forms of sociopolitical response to capitalist crisis. These responses, like that of Islamism in the Maghreb, are specific in that they invoke an undifferentiated
political subject – ‘the people’ (al-sha’ab in Arabic) – in the context of an internationally-mediated collapse of state legitimacy and social cohesion. Whilst by no means absent in the advanced capitalist world, such responses are also peculiar in that they emerge within social formations which experienced subordinate insertion into the world capitalist market – in Africa, through forceful imperialist penetration – and have, since then, suffered the structural consequences of this specific articulation with global capitalism. The sociopolitical struggles which accompanied this history have – as various articles in this issue point out – also engendered specific forms of mass mobilisation which (re)combined long-standing ‘vertical’ allegiances to kin, trade, ethnicity or creed with budding ‘horizontal’ allegiances of class.¹ In the course of this history, class-based political movements have, with a few notable exceptions, fared less well than rival organisations built around specific conceptions of ‘the people’. The Islamist programme in particular draws on (and thus ‘re-invents’) a long-standing populist tradition of anti-imperialism in the region in ways that are radically antithetical to communist alternatives.² It therefore seems imperative for Marxists to identify the sources of populist appeal in the Maghreb and elsewhere, if only to offer competing routes – both local and international – out of the current crisis in this and other parts of Africa.

I shall make a case below for the relationship between capitalist crisis, Islamism and populism as socio-economic, political and ideological expressions respectively of the contemporary Maghreb in four main steps. The initial section offers a synoptic overview of postwar capitalist development in the Maghreb with special attention to the attempts at neoliberal ‘structural adjustment’ during the 1980s and 1990s. The second part of the essay examines the diverse forms of Islamist responses to the political economy of neoliberal reform, pointing in particular to the social bases of this phenomenon and the changing nature of its objectives, modes of mobilisation and strategies in the face of opposition from both state and society. The third section shifts to a more conceptual level, by broaching the category of ‘populism’ from a Marxist perspective, after which I offer a cursory illustration of how this concept applies to Islamism in the Maghreb. The concluding part of the essay delivers a tentative prospectus for analysing Islamism and other forms of populism

¹ This is a distinction adapted from Thompson 1974.
² For a good overview see Black 1991, Part V.
in the world today, one hopes, thereby, also pointing to the political strategies available to communists if we are to present a viable alternative to this most powerful expression of contemporary anti-imperialism.

**Sources of the contemporary Maghrebi crisis**

The three Maghrebi countries to be considered below adopted markedly different socio-economic development strategies in the wake of decolonisation in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Whilst Algeria’s revolutionary war of national liberation led to a twenty-year experiment in state-planned development, Morocco and Tunisia adopted the formula of a ‘mixed economy’ with different degrees of state intervention in the market, organised around monarchical patronage in the case of Morocco, and a form of social corporatism in that of Tunisia. Despite this, in all three countries, postcolonial economic development continued to be tightly linked to the former metropolitan centres: GDP growth was strongly dependent on exports throughout these years, while European partners to this day account for over two-thirds of the Maghreb’s foreign trade (France being the largest single partner). The nationalisation in the 1970s of strategic sectors such as hydrocarbon and phosphate extraction and processing, did little to undermine the disproportionate reliance on international markets as a source of national income – most notably the energy markets, but also through the sizeable income generated by foreign tourism and remittances from Maghrebi workers living abroad. In Algeria, for example, oil and gas today constitute ninety per cent of the value of the country’s exports. So long as the international price of energy products remained high, such external dependence was able to fuel some degree of domestic industrialisation. Once these prices plummeted in the 1980s and 1990s, however, Maghrebi countries and Algeria in particular were forced to borrow from international financial institutions, raising the debt ratio to GDP and debt servicing to crippling levels by the mid-1980s.

It is in this all-too-familiar context of external economic dependence and internal crisis that successive ‘structural adjustment’ programmes were implemented in the region under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Morocco was the pioneering state in this respect. In September 1983, the Alaouite kingdom secured special drawing

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3 A good regional overview can be found in Amin 1970.
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4 The figures cited in this section of the paper are all drawn from multilateral agencies – IMF, World Bank and the Institute of International Finance – which are clearly partial to neoliberal adjustment. As such, they often both distort real growth rates and mask deeper structural inequalities in the distribution of wealth. In this regard, an indispensable analysis is Henry 1996. See also Martín 2003.

5 Denouex and Maghraoui 1998, p. 58.


rights worth US$200 million from the IMF and US$600 million in sectoral adjustment loans from the World Bank, on condition that it radically restructure its economy.4 Specifically, the process of structural adjustment was to hinge on two basic principles: ‘[a] rapid disengagement of the state from the economy (privatization and progressive removal of price controls) and a forceful integration of Morocco in the global economy (import liberalization and adoption of an export-oriented growth strategy)’.5 Whilst Morocco had in the past been obliged to implement similar belt-tightening policies, the structural reforms of the 1980s were unique both in depth and scale, and certainly more portentous than their previous incarnations. As the Moroccan state retreated from its productive and welfare obligations toward civil society, the most disadvantaged sectors suffered accordingly. A youthful, increasingly educated and fast-growing urban population sought entry into the job market to no avail, key public sector workers saw their real wages decline, while those dependent on subsidised commodities experienced the harsh effects of markets without price controls.

The more spectacular political consequence of such measures was the eruption of riots in the major Moroccan cities in 1981, 1984 and 1990. On a more mundane but no less subversive scale, the 1990s witnessed the mushrooming of associations of ‘unemployed graduates [chômeurs diplômés]’ who, through their uncompromising sit-ins, occupations and demonstrations, showed up a state incapable of catering for the needs of even those Moroccans with the privilege of higher education: ‘In the eyes of Morocco’s unemployed college graduates, the state has yet to fulfil its part in the social and political contract.’6 Whilst it would be wrong to neglect the macro-economic achievements of Moroccan structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s – GDP growth coupled with drastic reduction of public debt and debt-servicing, amongst others – the fact of the matter is that such a recovery has been undemocratic in its consequences, that is, it has benefited above all the ruling classes (both those traditionally linked to the Alaoui dynasty and the aspiring bourgeois operating outside the circuits controlled by the Makhzen or ‘palace’) rather than the mass of the population. The sluggish process of privatisation
and the trickling of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Morocco has not substantially altered the macro-economic indicators that matter to the Moroccan working classes: unemployment remained at the official figure of twenty per cent in 1995 (closer to thirty per cent for the ‘urban young’), while the terms and conditions of employment offered by foreign capital or export-oriented industry did not generally improve on those previously procured by state enterprises, or by firms under some form of state regulation.7

Algeria and Tunisia adopted neoliberal policies almost a decade after their Moroccan neighbour, and under circumstances more heavily conditioned by internal political developments. For the experiments in socio-economic restructuring in these two countries coincided with personnel changes at the helm of the state: Houari Boumediene’s untimely death in 1978 led to his replacement by Chedli Benjedid as Algerian president, whilst, in Tunisia, the ageing (and allegedly senile) ‘supreme commander’ Habib Bourguiba was deposed by his Interior Minister Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali in the ‘quiet revolution’ of 1987. Both of the new leaders took it upon themselves to introduce their respective countries to the process of infitah (or ‘opening’) by the late 1980s. In Ben Ali’s case, this strategy formed part of a legitimisation rhetoric which instrumentalised a short-lived period of political liberalisation after 1987 to justify what was essentially a coup d’état. It soon transpired, however, that the only durable element of the infitah was to be the economic dimension. Thus, Ben Ali, has for the past two decades, achieved the mean feat of governing Tunisia as a police state whilst simultaneously opening the country’s economy to foreign markets. On the one hand, the macro-economic indicators, as in the case of Morocco, portray a neoliberal ‘success story’, where state expenditures have been hemmed in, debt to GDP and debt-service ratios have been substantially reduced and economic growth during the 1990s has been the highest in the region. On the other hand, the high levels of under- and unemployment (officially fifteen per cent) are somehow deemed to be acceptable as they are generally screened out of this picture of success.

The Algerian case is somewhat more complicated as Chadli initially attempted to combine elements of change and continuity with regard to the Boumediene years, in the socio-economic sphere as in others. Yet the outbreak of riots across the country in October 1988 precipitated the liberalising tendencies among Benjedid and his associates,8 and, by the early 1990s, the

7 See Pfeifer 1999.
8 In a region where conspiracy theories seem to be especially rife, many interpreters
The Re-Invention of Populism: Islamist Responses in the Maghreb

of the October 1988 events claim that the government itself orchestrated the riots so as to pave the way for reforms. For a highly informed argument of how factions of the state manipulated these events, and indeed encouraged Islamist responses, see Roberts 2003, especially Chapter 4.

As described in Stora 2001, p. 186.

9 As described in Stora 2001, p. 186.
young urban men who prop up walls – *hitte* – listlessly watching life passing them by).\(^{10}\)

**The Islamist response**

Such was, in synthesis, the context within which Islamist movements in their current incarnation first made significant headway across the Maghreb. This process was, as we shall shortly see, uneven in space and protracted in time: specific political dynamics gave Islamism a correspondingly unique imprint in each of the three major Maghrebi states, and conditioned the pace and extent of its growth across the region. Moreover, the historically specific legacies of Islamist agitation during previous decades gave this phenomenon its own inflection in each state. In all three countries, however, Islamist organisations had by the late 1980s established themselves as the principal alternative to traditional nationalist, socialist and liberal organisations, thereby also effectively re-ordering the parameters of political discourse and action in the Maghreb.

Perhaps the most spectacular instance of this was that of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS), formally established in the wake of the 1989 constitution authorising the formation of ‘associations of a political character’. As its name suggests, this broad front brought together Arab and Algerian nationalists, Islamic reformists, erstwhile trade unionists and former leftists, as well as a good smattering of more radical fundamentalists, in what was originally a straightforward anti-régime movement. Paradoxically, however, the FIS was also, as the French play on words would have it ‘le fils du FLN [the son of the former single party – FLN]’ in more than one way. It drew on former cadres of the single party and its front organisations, and, crucially, also appropriated the nationalist discourse of anti-imperialism, self-sufficiency and Algerian particularism once championed by the FLN. These organisational and ideological assets, coupled with the enormous mobilising power of an informal network of close to 9,000 mosques, plus welfare, recreational and educational institutions, allowed the FIS to sweep the local

\(^{10}\) This sociopolitical landscape has been well captured in Yasmina Khadra’s uncompromising detective novels, *Morituri, Double blanc* and *L’automne des chimères* (Khadra 1996, 1997 and 1998). The first of these has now been published in English translation by Toby Press. See also the detailed accounts of ‘Chadlism and the Rentier-Real Estate State’ in Rouadjia 1994, and the powerful political-economic reading of the civil strife in Algeria by Martínez 2000.
and provincial elections of 1990 – just over a year after its official creation – with close to 54 per cent of the votes cast, thus controlling over half of Algeria’s 1,500 municipal councils and thirty-two of the forty-eight provincial governorates.\footnote{Ruedy 1992, p. 253.} The FIS went on to gain 47.55 per cent of the votes cast in the first round of the legislative elections of December 1991. As is well known, fear of an Islamist triumph at the second round due in January 1992 led to the suspension of the electoral process by the incumbent government, the disbanding of the FIS and the transfer of authority to a military Higher Committee of State early that year.

In Tunisia, the Islamist opposition initially crystallised around Rachid Ghannoushi’s Islamic Tendency Movement (Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique, MTI) in the early 1980s, and later re-emerged after 1987 in its legalised form as the Renaissance Party (Hizb al Nahda). Here, the former ruling party – the Socialist Destour (socialist-constitutionalist) Party – was able to stem the tide of delegitimation visited upon its Algerian counterpart by virtue of three peculiarly Tunisian factors. The first was the element of continuity between the new Ben Ali régime and that of the historic ‘father’ of independent Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba. Ben Ali presented his coup d’état as a necessary relay in the leadership of a country which would nonetheless stay true to the principles represented by the ‘supreme commander’: there would be Bourguibism without Bourguiba. Secondly, Ben Ali could (and has continued to) legitimate his autocratic rule on the back of a fairly successful redistributive state. As in Algeria, \textit{infitah} in Tunisia has combined privatisation and liberalisation of certain economic sectors with the continued role of a state as regulator and redistributor of patronage. Unlike Algeria, this conjuring trick has worked: the precarious balance between selective marketisation of the economy and the persistence of a providential state has been sustained through the increasing prosperity of an urban middle class and attention – however minimal – to the basic needs of the poorest sectors of society. Finally, and by no means least important, the carrot of Bourguibism and economic growth has been complemented by the implacable stick of the security services. Ben Ali’s Tunisia is a police state where any semblance of real opposition is immediately and ruthlessly snuffed out. The descent into civil war in neighbouring Algeria has reinforced this ‘zero tolerance’ towards Islamist and other radical oppositions and so, despite achieving close to fifteen per
cent of the national vote in the 1989 elections, the Hizb al-Nahda, is today, for all intents and purposes, a clandestine organisation with most of its leadership in exile.\footnote{12}

The Moroccan monarch’s spiritual prerogative as ‘commander of the faithful [emir el-muminin]’ initially forced political Islam to develop in a much more surreptitious style in the Alaouite kingdom, essentially as an underground brotherhood called Justice and Charity (al-Adl w’al-Ihasan) which has coalesced around the charismatic figure of Adessalam Yacine. The death of King Hassan II in 1999 spurred on constitutional reforms under his son and successor, Mohammed VI, which have allowed Islamists to operate more openly in the guise of the Party for Justice and Development or PJD (al-Tawhid w’al-Islah). In the most recent parliamentary elections of September 2002, this new formation agreed to field candidates in two-thirds of the country’s constituencies by way of placating opponent’s fear of an ‘Algerian scenario’ should it achieve overall electoral victory. This strategy paid off as, despite its self-limitation, the PJD obtained 43 of the lower chamber’s 325 seats, thereby becoming the country’s third-largest electoral force, behind the left-wing Union of Popular and Socialist Forces (UPFS) and the nationalist Istiqlal (Independence) Party.\footnote{13}

This spectacular irruption of Islamism into the electoral politics of the region is, as will be argued below, highly conjunctural. Despite the long and rich history of Islamism in the Maghreb, the FIS, the MTI and Justice and Charity have flourished in the context of a very specific crisis affecting the political, economic social legitimacy of the postcolonial order in the region. These movements have occupied the socio-economic and political spaces from which the state has deliberately retreated under ‘structural adjustment’, and drawn support from social groups – most notably (peri)urban underemployed youth – disenfranchised by the postcolonial state.\footnote{14} Crucially, Islamists have reaped the grim benefits of a wider, international legitimacy crisis of progressive politics in the Arab world after 1967, both at the state and societal levels. Indeed, aware of the virulent antagonism between Islamism and the secular – mainly Marxist – opposition, most Arab nationalist régimes had, by the 1970s, already sought to encourage the former’s social base in traditionally

\footnote{12} Some have indeed argued that both Tunisia and Morocco have exported their respective militants to Algeria, in much the same way that the quintessential pan-Arab secularist Gamal Abdel Nasser did during the late 1960s in response to Algeria’s call for Arabic teachers.  
\footnote{13} See Sater 2003, p. 138.  
\footnote{14} For the social and geographical spread of Islamist support, see Tessler 1997.
left-wing sectors such as the trade unions, universities or higher education. In turn, the ready availability of a well-organised and ideologically coherent international alternative in the shape of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikwan al-Muslimin) allowed a whole generation of Maghrebi intellectuals, trade unionists and political activists – many of them former militants of secular nationalist movements – to find a new political home in Islamism. Through the traditional mechanisms of political propaganda (be they printed materials or recorded cassettes), international exchange of cadres, and a generally internationalist disposition to find commonalities in the experience of Muslims across states, the Muslim Brotherhood in particular – originally a Mashreqi organisation – managed to extend its influence across the Maghreb during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, the critical influence of this brand of pan-Islamism was, as is often the case, best captured in the North-African colloquial denomination of Islamist militants simply as _Khwanjiya_ or ‘Muslim Brothers’.\(^{15}\)

In addition to this, international events such as the Iranian Revolution of 1978–9, the Islamist-led anti-Communist war in Afghanistan during the 1980s and the second Gulf War of 1990–1, gave further impetus to North-African political Islam. Maghrebi Islamists stoked-up the anti-Western, anti-modern rhetoric which, as we shall later see, represented one of their ideological pillars in an explicit attempt to draw parallels between the fate of the Maghrebi ‘masses’ and that of the oppressed Iranians under the corrupt Pahlavi régime, or that of the Muslim Afghans under a foreign atheist and Communist rule. If the multitudinous anti-war demonstrations across North Africa in 1990–1 are anything to go by, it is clear that the Islamists had tapped into a generalised rejection of the ‘new world order’ as it was being constructed at the time. Whether or not such a rejection emerged from a genuine commitment to ‘Islamic internationalism’ or simply represented the projection of domestic injustices and inequalities onto a more distant, and ultimately more comfortable, international plane is a moot point. As has been suggested thus far, the interaction between the domestic and international determinants has produced political responses which, in turn, combine very particular, local idioms with more general, universally recognised modes of sociopolitical mobilisation. I shall argue in the following section that the category of ‘populism’ offers the best way of analysing and engaging with such powerful yet contradictory political agitation.

\(^{15}\) Cited in Waltz 1986, p. 656.
Marxism and populism: a question of category

At once a derivative and self-sustaining category; a social movement and an expression of state authority; a revolutionary and conservative form of politics; at times marginal, on other occasions a determining historical phenomenon, the term ‘populism’ can mean different things to different people in different contexts. Like their bourgeois counterparts, Marxist theorists of populism (particularly those of the Americas) have grappled with the expansive and elusive nature of the term and its concrete sociopolitical expressions from the beginning. Three key aspects of historical-materialist approaches to populism were first broached in Marx’s own *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. There, Marx emphasised firstly, the contingency associated to modern politics and its relative autonomy from class relations; secondly, the centrality of conflicting historical temporalities and the accompanying sense of socio-economic and political crisis in fostering populism; and thirdly, the role of ‘residual’, precapitalist classes such as peasants, farmers, aristocrats, lumperproletarians or the petty bourgeoisie in the unfolding of modern history, especially in the context of sharp urban-rural divides. To this we must add a fourth concern of Marxist theories of populism which only emerged after World War II, namely the ‘overdeveloped’ nature of the postcolonial state.16

Each of these areas corresponds roughly to four conceptions of populism in Marxist (and indeed in some non-Marxist) engagements with the subject. Firstly, the notion of the relative autonomy of the state and politics can be associated with an understanding of populism as ‘Bonapartism’; that is, a situation where a single charismatic leader (for instance, the Argentinean Juan Domingo Perón or the Brazilian Getulio Vargas) claims to rise above class divisions and to rule a specific country in the interests of ‘the people’ as a whole, through the apparatus of the state and corresponding mass political organisations.17 A second Marxist conception of populism refers to an ideological programme like that espoused by the late nineteenth-century Russian Narodniki.18 Here, a romantic rejection of capitalism as a purely destructive

16 As theorised by Hamza Alavi in his pioneering 1972 article.
17 This was the focus of Ernesto Laclau’s early theorisation of populism in Laclau 1977. See the response in Mouzelis 1978.
18 Lenin considered the implications of this movement in various writings on Narodnism, and, according to Simon Clarke, was himself subject to the influence of populism. See Clarke 1998.
and instrumentally materialist social system is coupled with the celebration of the countryside and its dwellers (peasants, farmers, sharecroppers) as the main agents of a putative socialist society, thereby producing a distinctively anticapitalist, rural-based project for human development. The third Marxist understanding of populism shifts its focus to the urban masses, presenting underemployed shanty-town dwellers, petty-bourgeois shopkeepers and underpaid, lower-ranking state employees as the mainstay of populist politics. Finally, Marxist theorists of postwar, Third-World politics and society have used ‘populism’ as a term referring to rural-based, but state-led strategies of economic development, which have often entailed the militarisation of political rule through a single-party system.

Populism, then, can be seen variously as a form of rule, as a political movement, an ideology and a strategy for socio-economic development. Critics of the concept point to such capaciousness as a demonstration of its analytical vacuity. But such versatility can also be interpreted as a virtue, for it allows us to engage with a form of politics which, as one observer has noted, is chameleon-like: constantly adapting its political hue to specific environments. Thus, invocations of ‘the people’ by a charismatic leader of a mass party can adopt both right- and left-wing programmes, mobilise subordinate classes against dominant ones, town against country, pit one region against the other, or vice-versa, and veer toward opposing extremes of fascism and communism. It is this inherent flexibility and opportunism which distinguishes populism from other modern social movements and ideologies: unlike fascism, populism is not ideologically committed to subjecting local and foreign populations to rule by a militarised state; in contrast to communism, it does not aim to politically mobilise the working class in the transcendence of capitalist social relations. Rather, populism deliberately limits its message to a named ‘people’, claims to empower this generic political subject (not subordinate it) and is studiously evasive about socio-economic cleavages among ‘the people’, preferring, instead, to target an elusive and equally malleable ‘power élite’ or ‘political class’.

All of this poses great conceptual (and political) difficulties for Marxist explanations. For populism appears, so we have seen, as an eminently residual

19 This, for instance, is the claim in Halliday 1988.
20 See Kitching 1982.
21 Taggart 2000.
category: it encompasses all those socio-economic and political phenomena – charismatic authority, cross-class allegiances, rural-urban divides – ‘left over’ from previous historical epochs and modes of production which capitalist development is meant to undermine and eventually eradicate. It places at the forefront classes and social forces – the peasantry and communalism, lumpenproletarians and religious revivalism – which do not fit neatly in the logic of expanded capitalist reproduction. The bourgeois response to this predicament is, of course, to suggest that Marxist categories cannot account for these particular expressions of politics and society; that historical materialism is mechanically trying to foist its own dogmas onto a world which does not readily distinguish bourgeois and proletarians, free and unfree labour, state and civil society. Moreover, so mainstream critics of historical materialism contend, populism in its various guises demonstrates the autonomy of politics from economics, the potential separation of the state from the mooring of civil society. But what if populism is not so exceptional as a political response to the global reproduction of capitalism? What if it describes, not a marginal phenomenon, but one central to the political lives of many societies across the world? Such facile mainstream critiques, and their vulgar-Marxist counterparts not only caricature historical materialism as a theory of modernisation but, more seriously, confuse empirical referents with abstract categories.

Let us consider the question of modernisation first. There is, to be sure, much of the Marxist tradition which could be read as being consonant with crude modernisation theory. The Communist Manifesto, the famous 1859 ‘Preface’ to the Critique of Political Economy, and most of Second-International Marxism present dogmatic, ‘stageist’ view of historical evolution. But there is also a strong legacy of both theoretical and concrete Marxist analysis which highlights the uneven and contradictory patterns of historical evolution, especially when transferred onto a world scale. Marx’s famous correspondence with Vera Zasulich in many respects serves as a reference point for a whole range of Marxist engagements with the ‘simultaneity of the unsimultaneous’ – from Lenin’s Development of Capitalism in Russia to Eric Wolf’s world history; Trotsky’s history of the Russian revolution to Arno Mayer’s explanation of the Judeocide. It is therefore, perfectly possible to reconcile an evolutionary (though not ‘stageist’) view of history which recognises structural turning-

22 See Shanin 1983.
points in the historical evolution of modes of social reproduction, with the recognition that history often unfolds ‘against the grain’: to combine, in other words, the diachronic identification of structural change with the recognition of synchronic constraints on, and particularities of, such change.

This dialectical, dynamic understanding of historical change also applies to the second of the bourgeois objections: namely, the ossification of categories such as ‘class’, ‘value’ or ‘labour’ in the Marxist analysis of living societies. By insisting that, say, an ideal-typical, homogenous proletariat cannot readily be identified empirically in many parts of Africa, such critics miss the crucial distinction between the structural logic of capital and its accompanying abstractions, with their concrete expression in actual societies. Once we respect the distinction between abstractions such as class, value or free labour, which are all structural properties of the capitalist mode of production, from their concrete manifestation as specific social movements, forms of property or modes of exploitation within particular social formations, it is perfectly feasible to accommodate conflicting sociopolitical phenomena such as those which fall under the rubric of ‘populism’. In such instances, it is not the abstractions of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*, with their emphasis on the structural anatomy of capitalism that are of greatest value, but, rather, the more incisive, local explorations of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, or *The Civil War in France* which serve as principal inspiration. For it is in the latter that we find how the abstract logic of capitalist society and politics unfolds in concrete social formations through contingent political antagonisms, contradictory historical temporalities and the persistence of precapitalist forms of social oppression.

On this reading, for instance, the process of African proletarianisation, is identified as an inescapable, structural property of capitalist development in that part of the world, which nonetheless manifests itself in diverse concrete forms – underemployment, petty commodity production, the ‘informal’ economy. These latter phenomena cannot be reduced to some ideal-typical proletarianisation which everywhere and always creates an industrial, salaried ‘free’ worker (although its certainly does do this too); but neither can such realities be explained without reference to the dynamics of capitalist reproduction. Something similar happens with populism – although it cannot be read off as mechanically corresponding to the political representation of a particular class, it cannot equally be read without reference to specific class antagonisms generated through capitalist development. Here, populism appears not to be of capitalism, but it certainly is in capitalism, and, as such,
must be explained with reference to forms of crisis, sociopolitical mobilisation and socio-economic cleavages which are unique to this mode of social reproduction.

In the particular case of the Maghreb, a key factor in explaining the rise and persistence of populism is the experience of capitalist imperialism. What has marked the modern history of this region (admittedly in an uneven fashion) is the perverse unity of ‘free’ capitalist exploitation and coercive, precapitalist forms of oppression in the single colonial moment. Whilst private property, the commodification of labour and the extension of market dependence all accompanied the European colonial penetration of the Maghreb, this process was also executed through the racialised, militarised and often arbitrary power of the colonial state. The attempt by French (and, to a much lesser extent, Spanish) imperialism to reproduce consensual, rule-based capitalist social relations in the area was compromised by indigenous resistance and the racist ideology of the European colonisers. This combination produced not a pristine capitalist civil society of free markets and the corresponding form of modern sovereignty, but, rather, a racialised, coercive market for labour and a colonial state which accommodated pre-existing forms of political rule premised on kinship, religious authority or ethnic affiliation. It is precisely this contradictory and uneven reproduction of capitalism in the region that delivered a correspondingly amorphous and chameleon-like populist politics which thrives in moments of crisis by eschewing mediated, representative politics and instead mobilising ‘the people’ through a direct, unmediated identification with a single, charismatic leader representing a given ‘communal heartland’.

The contemporary revival of populism in the Maghreb, I have thus far argued, is an expression of exactly this kind of contingency, contradiction and uneven historical fissure. It is, however, a populism inflected with a particular religious discourse – we are therefore speaking of Islamist populism rather than simply populism, and one among various other expressions of populism in the region. This underlines the synchronic dimensions of any historical change mentioned earlier and indeed emphasises how ‘[t]radition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of...”

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23 Good country-specific accounts of this history can be found in Bennoune 1986, Sammut 1983, Stewart 1964.
24 This is the argument presented with reference to other parts of Africa in Mamdani 1996. See also Penvenne 1995.
25 These are some of the characteristics ascribed to populism by Taggart 2000.
the living’. Before delving into the actual detail of political Islam in the
contemporary Maghreb, a few words are therefore in order about the specifically
Islamist nature of this form of populism, and how it relates to other historical
manifestations of this political style.

‘Islamism’ or ‘political Islam’ should first of all be differentiated from the
precepts of the religion followed by Muslims. It is a political phenomenon
which expressly seeks to secularise these precepts, that is to bring them into
the realm of human sociopolitical agency and voluntarism, charge them with
political meaning and power, and thereby distance them from mere scholastic
or theological interpretation aimed simply at injecting morality and spirituality
into people’s everyday lives. Contemporary Maghrebi Islamism, like its salafi
precursors of the early twentieth century or the Islamic reformers such as
Ben Badis’s Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, has sought to re-appropriate
and adjust the major sources of Islamic authority (sunna, hadith, shari’a and
the Koran itself) so that they respond to contemporary socio-economic and
political challenges. It has done so by way of applying age-old concepts
and practices drawn from Islamic history to the contemporary world, thus
attempting to replace ‘foreign’ imports such as the state, secularism, democracy
or progress with their more ‘authentic’ counterparts such as umma (community
of believers), jahiliyya (pagan ignorance), majlis al-shura (consultative council),
jihad (struggle). To this extent, contemporary Maghrebi Islamism encompasses
sociopolitical movements and ideologies plainly inspired by Islam, but
developed in secular political contexts and, significantly, generally deployed
by men with very little, if any, formal religious training. As one close observer
of the phenomenon has put it:

[Islamists] are secular . . . [they] are all by-products of European thought.
They have broken completely with Islam with respect to . . . many questions,
which range from politics to the possibility of men judging the legitimacy
of representations of God, and in that they are in complete opposition with
the Ulema of Islam.

Islamism, then, is not a purely atavistic phenomenon which wishes to recreate
a seventh-century Arabian utopia in the twenty-first century, but, rather, a
thoroughly modern political tendency fuelled, as Erevand Abrahamian has

27 Three excellent introductions to modern Islamist thinking can be found in Al-
28 Cited in Burgat and Dowell 1993, p. 68.
so convincingly demonstrated in the case of Iran, by all the mechanisms of modern political agitation (political rallies, marches, strikes, local party branches or cells) and much of the political idiom of other modern ideologies. In order to maintain this perception of Islamism as a modern ideological movement, and, crucially, in an attempt to retain the comparative dimension of this phenomenon, I shall be insisting below that Islamism is a specific, religiously-inspired brand of populism.

It is, however, also important to note that the Islamist movements discussed in this article form part of a broader tradition of populism in the Maghreb. Indeed, with the possible exception of Morocco, populism has been the dominant political style in the region since at least independence, chiefly as a result of the imperialist nature of capitalist penetration in the region. For this subordinated and violent insertion into the world capitalist market created a variety of disarticulated political subjectivities in the Maghreb, none of which became hegemonic until after independence.

Initially, anti-imperialist resistance was mediated through premodern forms of tribal or messianic mobilisation, in very much the same shape that previous Ottoman (and indeed Arab) invasions had encountered. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of liberal and religious-reformist politics among the urban élite, which was accompanied by the emergence of nationalist, populist and socialist politics articulated around mass political organisations during the interwar and postwar years. In all three major Maghrebi countries, but especially in Morocco and Tunisia, where imperial occupation was less comprehensive and pre-existing sources of political authority survived intact, networks of sufi brotherhoods [turuq], tribal confederations and aristocratic élites also served to crystallise both urban and rural resistance. Overlap and competition among these various movements created a variegated and dynamic political landscape, but it could not deliver what, by the end of World War II, had become the most strident and unanimous popular demand: national liberation. The specific combination of capitalist exploitation and national oppression, which had for decades blocked such an objective, now required a political force that might unify the ‘social question’ and ‘national question’ in a single mass movement. That force was to become populism. Only in Morocco did the struggle for national liberation deliver a fractured polity

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29 Abrahamian 1990.
where royal authority, and the two rival populisms of Allal al-Fasis’s conservative Istiqlal and Mehdi Ben Barka’s progressive UNFP competed to represent the ‘people’s will’. In Tunisia, and even more forcefully in Algeria, cross-class, formally secular (though not anti-religious) mass movements – the Neo-Destour in the first case, the FLN in the second – emerged from the wars of liberation as single, unified depositories of popular sovereignty. Populism thus became the dominant expression of national politics in Tunisia and Algeria because it simultaneously created the modern, sovereign subject of ‘the people’ and realised their liberation from imperialism through national independence.

The three axes of Islamist populism: crisis, corruption and anti-imperialism

It is against this backdrop that we should then understand the Islamist resurgence of the last three decades as a ‘re-invention’ of populism. For the Islamists have, as we shall see in more detail shortly, drawn extensively from the imagery, language, programme, idiom, organisation and indeed cadres of the national-liberation movements. The one crucial ingredient they have added to the populist legacy is the seeming incorruptibility and authenticity of ‘Islam’. Whilst the populism of the national-liberation movements was transformed into state power, in the process acquiring all the secular, this-worldly trappings of such forms of political rule, Islamist populism allowed itself, in the main, to resist the world of ‘le pouvoir’ and instead built (and billed) itself as an opposition, grassroots movement guided by other-worldly virtue. As the legitimacy of postcolonial states collapsed in tandem with that of secular Arab ideologies, the social base of populism remained relatively unaltered. But its ideological axis was re-aligned toward the only worldview which remained seemingly un tarnished: that of political Islam. Three broad political issues in particular have sustained this re-alignment.

‘Islam is the solution’: general crisis and reactionary populism

The first of these was a sense of crisis. Contemporary Islamism has succeeded above all as conjunctural protest movement capable of channelling multiple sources of popular discontent through a generic and therefore broadly appealing idiom of ‘corruption’, ‘power’, ‘degradation’, ‘the people’ and so forth. In the specific case of North-African Islamism, because the sources of social malaise
are generally associated with ‘modernity’ and ‘modernism’ (secularism, materialism, rationalism, humanism), it is also accurate to speak of a reactionary (that is, anti-modern) form of populism. In short, Islamism emerged in the region initially as a political form that was against the existing order. Insofar as Islamist organisations presented alternatives, they were, once again, generic ones: the application of shari’a law, the shift towards a ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ society, the jihad against corruption, all of which were neatly summarised in one of the preferred slogans of the Algerian FIS: ‘Islam Is the Solution’.

One reason for the use of such highly generic rhetoric is, of course, the calculation that everyone is ‘against corruption’ or ‘against oppression’: the broader the category, the more likely it is to capture the allegiance of an otherwise highly differentiated constituency – that is, ‘the people’. A more profound reason, however, lies in the genuinely contradictory nature of Maghrebi Islamist populism, or what Angus Stewart once called the ‘Janus quality’ of populism:

> It is their character as responses to development ‘crises’ which gives populist movements [this quality]. . . . At the time of the emergence of the populist movement the traditional culture will frequently have been exposed to considerable disruption and the framers of the populistic ideology will often be arbitrary and opportunistic in their selection of this ‘traditional’ culture. It is the fact that the synthesis seeks to integrate around traditional values as society exposed but not necessarily part of social change . . .

If we replace (however problematically) ‘traditional’ with ‘Islamic’ in the above passage, Stewart’s description readily fits the Maghrebi expressions of populism. Thus, the use of generic rhetoric is explained not by the absence of political sophistication, but quite the opposite, namely the calculated use of the most common of political denominators – an attack on those in power with recourse to a politically undefined but commonly shared idiom: in the Maghrebi case, ‘Islam’ – for the purpose of crystallising a highly diversified, often incompatible set of classes into a single constituency. More importantly, Stewart’s emphasis on the ‘combined and uneven’ (‘exposed/not part of’) context responsible for the rise of populism resonates with the recent general crisis of the Maghreb outlined above. For, as most studies on the social origins of Maghrebi Islamism have concluded, it is those groups most affected by the crisis – students, state employees (particularly teachers) and petty-bourgeois

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merchants – which constitute a disproportionate part of Islamist cadres. North-African Islamist movements cut across the social cleavages of class, gender, ethnicity and geographical location precisely because they have been able to capture a generalised sense of social crisis; that is, a widespread breakdown of the everyday parameters of legitimacy, be these economic, political, social or cultural.

It is, therefore, in the wake of the postcolonial, ‘developmental’ state’s failure to deliver on the promises of national liberation that Islamists build their alternative constituency of ‘the people’. To be sure, the incidence of ‘general crisis’ has been unequal across the region and, consequently, the success of the populist response offered by the Islamists has varied across time and place – in Morocco, it is still growing; in Algeria it has been co-opted by the state; and, in Tunisia, it has been snuffed out by the security services. This notwithstanding, the reactionary and populist character of the Islamist response to capitalist development in the Maghreb can be illustrated with reference to two phenomena which pervade all expressions of this form of politics across the region.

The first of these is the focus on women as the major source of ‘moral regeneration’ of the ‘Islamic community’. Islamist militants – both men and women – place a great emphasis upon the degradation that women are subjected to by ‘modernity’. For one Islamist woman,

> The emancipation of women has unquestionably proved to be the most efficient weapon in this open war against the family. No effort is spared in turning women away from housekeeping. . . . Housewives are always painted in the most unflattering terms possible. The mass media contribute an insidious propaganda in this arena, undervaluing the role of the traditional family mother by showering with praise those women who compete with men on their [the men’s] home ground.33

Thus, Islamists associate the modern assault on the ‘role of the traditional family mother’ with the violation of an ‘authentic’ identity.34 Like other forms of populism, mothers and housewives are presented as depositories of that ‘communal heartland’ which existed prior to the externally imposed forms of modernity: the equilibrium sustained by the traditional sexual division of

34 See Lazreg 1994, Lloyd 1999 and the relevant sections of Moghadam 2004 for good overviews of this position and its alternatives.
labour is upset, according to most Islamist thinking, by the insistence on the public equality between men and women. To this ‘culturalist’ rendition of the function of women in Islamist populism, however, one should also add the very materialist reading of Mohammed Harbi: ‘If one is to understand the development of a misogynistic “racism” among Islamists, it’s unnecessary to refer to the Koran and [one should] focus rather on the new phenomenon that is the employment of women’.35

The second illustration relates to the critical role that agents of ‘civil society’ play in the reconstruction of that elusive constituency that is ‘the people’. The political success of Islamism must be judged not so much on its capacity or otherwise to acquire state power, but, rather, in its conquest of those expanding arenas of ‘civil society’ – education, social security, health, culture – from where the state has retreated. Like other expressions of populism, North-African Islamism takes over where the legitimate authority of the state has collapsed, thereby reconstituting ‘the people’ in its own image. By mobilising and providing for those social sectors most affected by the state’s retreat from its welfare obligations, Islamist organisations have effectively established parallel forms of popular sovereignty through their work in charitable foundations, mosques, professional and recreational associations, or collective health and welfare institutions.

_Hizb França: the ‘political financial mafia’ and the delegitimation of the state_

The Islamist colonisation of civil society examined above is undeniably linked to the process of ‘state restructuring’ occasioned by international economic and political pressures. Islamists have, wherever possible, replaced the state’s role as provider of social goods during the period of state retreat of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet it is equally important to highlight the self-destructive role state officials in the Maghreb have played in the delegitimation of the postcolonial state during the past two decades. Rampant corruption, ostentatious display of wealth, cynical manipulation and naked oppression have characterised much of the ruling classes’ political behaviour in the region during this period. Particularly in Algeria, the military régime’s obstinate monopoly of economic and political power, and its opaque campaign against armed Islamist insurgency after 1991 have severely dented any faith in representative politics as an expression of democracy. Indeed, on several

35 Harbi 1991, p. 3.
occasions since the country’s first multi-party elections in December 1989, the Algerian people have eagerly participated in democratic consultations only to see their collective will – however fractured it may be – squandered by a ruling élite intent only on proverbially ‘changing things so that things stay the same’.

It is in this generally repressive and unrepresentative context – replicated with some important qualifications in Tunisia and Morocco – that Islamist forces have developed their successful critique of ‘representative democracy’ as a Western sham:

[If] a FIS member tells you that the invocation of the notion of ‘democracy’ only produces indifference, because he feels it is alien to his heart and that he fully understands that the single term ‘shura’ covers freedom, dignity and sensibility? Democracy for him means ‘imported’ things, law and distant powers. *Shura* means what you would call ‘democracy’, but lived in ways that are socially and culturally profound, with all the accompanying possibilities of immediate political action. Each member of the *umma* exercises their rights directly, unveiled and without subterfuge, because each of his acts is sacred.36

The rejection of democracy as a concept ‘imported’ by ‘distant powers’, and its replacement by a ‘socially and culturally profound’ notion of *shura* which is ‘immediate’ and ‘direct’, is all the more powerful when Islamists reduce secular postcolonial régimes to mere puppets of the former metropole. Thus, the political distance generated by a secretive, manipulative yet literally absent state (or present only in its repressive capacity), is easily turned into a geographical distance, where generalised crisis and the specific events that concretise it, are blamed on the nebulous ‘Party of France’ or *Hizb França*. This ‘transnationalisation’ of political responsibility allows Islamists to at once denounce the ‘neocolonial’ character of existing régimes in the Maghreb, and to further undermine the legitimacy of any mediated or representative politics. On this view, the Western oppression of the North-African masses is mediated through corrupt, secular and Francophile dictators in the region; the way forward for Islamists is, therefore, to break this link by returning to the direct, immediate and authentic politics offered by Islam: *shura, sharia* and *umma*.

‘La sharqui, la gharbi’: re-inventing anticolonialism

As we have just seen, the delegitimation of the postcolonial state and the rejection of its accompanying forms of politics has, for North-African Islamists, been tightly connected to the region’s peculiar insertion into the international system. Islamists therefore present and respond to a world-view which is not unlike that offered by the North-African nationalists during the last period of colonial rule: one where the region’s past – its civilisational achievements and cultural heritage – is actively being destroyed by foreign influences, and where an imaginary, authentic ‘golden age’ prior to European conquest serves as a model to combat the region’s contemporary general crisis. One of the more thoughtful and cosmopolitan North-African Islamists put the point thus in 1990:

Our problem is that we had to deal with the West from both a position of psychological and material weakness. Excessively admiring it and paralyzed by our inferiority complex, we tried even harder to ape it and take whatever it had to offer in every domain. . . . But I maintain that this unequal and perverse relationship with the West is not fatal. Japan piously conserves its traditions and culture and participates nevertheless in the universal development of modernity. . . . To tell the truth, the only way to accede to modernity is by our own path, that which has been traced for us by our religion, our history and our civilization.  

The dual emphasis on the inferiority and humiliation of the Maghreb on the one hand, and the possible alternative in the ‘path’ of Islamic civilisation on the other, echoes forms of Third-World anti-imperialism which have characterised the international relations of other Islamist movements across the world. North-African Islamists have readily adopted the Iranian revolution’s slogan ‘Neither East nor West [la sharqui, la gharbi]’ as a rallying point for their more internationally-minded sympathisers. Even the reclusive and fairly parochial Moroccan Islamist Adelsalam Yasine gave considerable importance to what he perceived to be division of the world into two jahili (‘godless’ or ‘ignorant’) camps during the Cold War:

Our small countries are divided by belonging to one or the other of the two camps of al-jahiliyya. And they align themselves seeking protection for their interests and because of the compulsion of political and economic constraints

and the attractiveness of deceptive lures. In this manner, the dominant power – one of the two superpowers – takes control. And thus it is that our little countries act, to various degrees, according to the wishes of their jahili patron...  

This ideological commitment to an international ‘third way’, often informed by more classical anti-imperialist language, was not simply rhetorical. North-African Islamists have developed an extensive transnational support network with other like-minded Islamists, to form what may loosely be termed an ‘Islamist international’. Rachid Ghannouchi’s (founder of the MTI) close relationship with the then spiritual leader of Sudan, Hassan al-Turabi during the early 1990s provided his party, al-Nahda (Renaissance), a considerable measure of international standing and no small amount of logistical support. More sinister relationships were established between elements of the Algerian Islamist insurgents and Afghani mujahedin, so that, by the mid-1990s, many of the former were simply referred to as ‘Afghanis’. These anecdotal illustrations clearly cannot replace a systematic and nuanced analysis of ‘Islamist internationalism’; yet they do, at least, point to the impact of ‘the international’ on North-African Islamism on both ideological and operational levels.

Conclusions: some theoretical implications

Islamist politics have demonstrated different degrees of endurance in the contemporary Maghreb. Whilst, in Algeria, the armed struggle between the state and insurgent Islamic militants continues into its twelfth year (thereby far surpassing the bloody eight-year war of national liberation), Tunisia and Morocco have thus far proved successful in reining in Islamist protest through a combination of fierce repression and selective improvements in the standard of living for certain sectors of the population. The historical conditions which generated the initial Islamist resurgence of the 1980s, however, has not substantially altered and as one recent observer has suggested it is therefore premature to announce the ‘defeat of political Islam’, in North Africa or elsewhere. Islamist activists, it is true, have been largely unsuccessful in

39 For an analysis of the ‘Arab Afghani’ contribution to the latest phase of the Algerian civil war see Martínez 2000.
40 Ismail 2001.
seizing and maintaining state power since the Iranian Revolution of 1978–9, but their social and political power within ‘civil societies’ across the Middle East and beyond should not be underestimated. Indeed, it has been the claim of this paper that the force of political Islam in North Africa rests largely in the capacity of its representative organisations to channel the discontents of capitalist development in the region into a distinctly populist form of protest. There are at least three theoretical implications that arise from such a conclusion, two more general for social analysis, and the last one more specific to Marxism.

Firstly, whilst it is essential, as this paper has sought to indicate, to situate the history and development of contemporary Islamism in an international context, it is important not to do so in a purely ‘culturalist’ fashion that pits the ‘West’ against ‘the Rest’ or ‘McWorld vs. Jihad’. As I have tried to show, Islamism is certainly an expression of political protest that places great emphasis on the power of local, cultural or civilisational traditions such as ‘Islam’ in combating the negative consequences of a seemingly alien capitalist globalisation. But this form of political protest is both comparable to other forms of populist opposition to globalisation and, more importantly, can, in its ideological content and social base, be traced to the very specific conjuncture of neoliberal reform of the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, it has been argued, recent waves of Islamist politics are best understood as the historically specific expression of the contradictions inherent in the combined and uneven reproduction of global capitalism. Such an understanding of the international dimensions of social movement activity can, in turn, offer a more dynamic account of the changes in the nature of inter-state relations, so that for example, a deeper explanation of contemporary Euro-Maghrebi relations might incorporate the reality and potential of Islamist protest in the Maghreb and its populist counterparts in the northern Mediterranean.

These considerations lead onto a second general theoretical conclusion, namely that such incorporation of the dynamics of ‘international civil society’ into our understanding of international relations must also be keenly aware of the particular mediating structures of political or social authority in the reproduction of the international system. In other words, it is essential to continually probe the interaction between ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ structures and processes, and indeed to constantly re-chart and re-analyse the new forms that arise out of such an interaction. In the specific case of

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41 For a recent study of populist responses to capitalist re-structuring in Turkey, see Gülalp 2001.
North Africa, what this means is that the international dynamics of the region should not be reduced to an endless struggle between ‘collapsed states’ and their Islamic-populist alternatives. Not only is this no longer the empirical case in a country such as Tunisia, but, more importantly, such an attitude would overlook the reshaping of both state and society, and the political challenges that are constantly emerging from the social contradictions inherent in these two spheres. What the future forms of political contestation in the Maghreb might look like is, of course, an open question; that they are likely to be shaped by the conflicting interaction between the dynamics of international capitalism and the apparently local political responses, is not.

Accepting some degree of contingency in political outcomes should not, however, be tantamount to foregoing a structural analysis of the current crisis in the Maghreb and elsewhere across the world. And so the third and final implication of the reflections expressed in this paper is the urgent need for Marxists to extend and strengthen our analyses of what Michael Löwy in a different context once labelled ‘the politics of combined and uneven development’:42 to examine the sociopolitical responses to the concrete articulation of global capitalism in different social formations. I have suggested here that it is worthwhile for Marxists to retrieve certain disused categories such as ‘populism’ in this endeavour, not as a descriptors of accidental, residual forms of mass political mobilisation, but, rather, as structural features of societies – like those in Africa – far more powerfully subject to the vagaries of combined and uneven capitalist development. This, in turn, involves revisiting classical debates over the relationship between communist and other expressions of democratic politics, and, indeed, the sources of political allegiance other than class. This is something which, of course, has been the mainstay of leftist movements across the global South for decades, but which their Northern counterparts have been recently inattentive to. The tallest order for contemporary Marxist analyses of global politics therefore seems to involve identifying how the particularities of regional crises and their accompanying sociopolitical responses can be harnessed to world-wide struggles for democracy and socialism.

42 Löwy 1981.
References


Christopher Wise  

**Marxism, Geo-Thematics and Orality-Literacy  
Studies in the Sahel**

**Introduction**

The study of African literature in the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and elsewhere in the Anglophone West has tended to subordinate cultural production from Africa to Western literary paradigms that routinely measure African literature by Western standards and invariably find it wanting. Saul Bellow’s notoriously racist question: ‘Where is the African Tolstoy?’ is emblematic of this tendency. Deeply embedded and largely unconscious biases about literacy, especially as a good that precedes dialogue, often disable Western readers of African texts, which are commonly dismissed by them as mediocre, plagiarised or uninspired. At present, the lamentable state of affairs in African literary publishing in the United States (and elsewhere) is perhaps one of the most obvious signposts of this tendency. As a US-based teacher of African literature, I have often been appalled by the arrogance of my university colleagues and students, especially ostensibly ‘radical’ or ‘Marxist’ ones, regarding the presumed inferiority and ‘underdeveloped’ character
of contemporary African literature. Unexamined attitudes about Africa’s lack of cultural and literary sophistication, or its failure to modernise according to First-World standards, create enormous practical difficulties for scholars working in this field, especially during periodic times of funding crises when the competition for resources is most acute. Political struggle in issues of African literary study often revolves around the fight to change historically racist and ignorant attitudes about it. Literary scholars who are trained in exclusively European and North-American traditions commonly bring with them the evangelical impulse to convert African writing into their own narrow ideas about what constitutes ‘true’ literature, presumably for the African writer’s benefit. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson has argued that all literary texts necessarily come to us as ‘always-already-read’, agreeing with Hans-Georg Gadamer that we never really understand any cultural artefact unless it is first mediated for us by the sedimented layers of the pre-existing interpretative traditions that we inherit. In the following essay, I take quite seriously Jameson’s suggestion that the real ideological struggle in literary study takes place at the level of hermeneutic attitudes and biases that inform our understandings of any written text. I also seek to clarify key differences in Western and African reading prejudices by adumbrating a few of the oral and historical factors that inform these distinct literary traditions. Given the wide diversity of African societies, histories, and cultures (not to mention literatures), the impossibly broad rubric of ‘African literature’ necessitates a manageable reduction in the scope of any relevant critical analysis of this subject, which is why I have adopted here a regionally specific approach.

This strategy is preferable not only because of my idiosyncratic familiarity with a particular African region – in my case, the Islamic Sahel or ‘Western Sudan’, but in someone else’s case, perhaps, coastal West Africa, Southern Africa, and so forth – but also because I agree with the Burkinabè scholar Joseph Paré that geocultural or regional approaches to African literary study remain by far the least baleful among a variety of present-day theoretical alternatives, including national, comparative and postcolonial paradigms of literary study that prevail in the West.2

In passing, it should be noted that literature will be defined in this essay as a term that encompasses any chirographic, typographic or electronic text;

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that is, any spatial artefact with transcribed characters that are produced upon a flattened surface and that can be reproduced for an absent readership. I also set aside here the complicated question of pre-Islamic African literacy in the form of amulet writing, tribal scarring, circumcision and other inscription practices that are linked to the caste known as the nyamakala, and which reveal the influence of Egyptian civilisation in the Western Sudan.3 Though enormously significant, mark-making of this nature raises issues that unnecessarily complicate the relatively simple theses explored here, also distracting attention from the contemporary reception of African literature in the West. Besides emphasising the culturally relative nature of literary value judgments themselves, this approach offers the additional benefit of implying a far broader definition of ‘African’ literature than normally allowed by more formalist or non-Marxist scholars, in part because it suggests that the Sahelian travelogue of Euro-American authors may be construed as a variety of African (rather than Euro-American) literature, whatever its cultural and ideological limitations. From an African perspective, the autobiography of Olandau Equiano might be classified as a ‘travel narrative’ rather than a slave narrative, though Equiano’s book is considered in the US to be a founding text in the African-American literary tradition.

In a similar vein, there is no reason why the travelogues of Mungo Park, René Caillié, Heinrich Barth, Marcel Griaule, and so on cannot be construed as authentically ‘African’ texts rather than European ethnographies or travelogues albeit ideologically and culturally limited ones. This distinction is crucial with reference to the manner in which this essay operates within a Marxist interpretative tradition, for I will insist here that, despite its previous shortcomings, especially in its tendency towards a reductive, logocentric and universalising humanism, Marxist criticism of African literature supersedes its methodological rivals insofar as it has insisted upon addressing the very real historical crises that continue to confront African and Western peoples alike. I devote a considerable amount of space in this essay to the imperialist travelogue not only because it reveals the ideological prejudices of Euro-American peoples but also because I accept Theodor W. Adorno’s notion that all modern writing – a category that, for him, no written work has been able

to dodge for the last two hundred years – possesses a certain ‘truth value’ (or ‘truth content’), which he characterises in terms of its ‘unconscious historiography’, or the ‘crystallization of history’ that occurs within it.4

By carefully analysing and interpreting the imperialist travelogue, it may be possible to ‘listen’ once again to long-vanquished African voices, rendering them ‘audible’ for those who have ‘ears’ to hear. It goes without saying that such an effort should not exclude the careful study of indigenous forms of African cultural production, including those that defy conventional or Western notions of the literary (mask-making, rug-weaving, mud sculpture, scarification, smith-work, and so on), as well as those which evade reification in the dimension of space (the griot epic, the language of the masks, dance, talking drums, and so forth).

The pitfalls of geo-thematic criticism

In recent years, criticism of imperialist travel writing has proven one of the most significant developments in Marxist literary studies, mostly due to the pioneering work of Edward W. Said. To name only a few, scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt, Abdul R. JanMohammed, Parama Roy and Kaja Silverman have also contributed detailed analyses of colonialist literature, re-orienting the very grounds of historical inquiry in post-imperial studies. This new arena of study, what Georg M. Gugelberger has called ‘geo-thematics’,5 has performed a greatly needed service for Third-World and First-World peoples alike,6 a levelling of the playing field, and thus a step towards real dialogue. The geo-thematic study of literary texts seeks to examine how the other is constructed within a culturally distinct tradition, that is, the Arab or ‘Oriental’ in European literature, the Native American in literature of the US West, the Turk in German literature, and so forth. It might also involve the study of representations of whites in Native-American literature, whites in African-American literature, and so on. Gugelberger has also called geo-thematic criticism an ‘Othering discourse’, drawing from Wellekian paradigms of comparative literary study.

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6 I note in passing that ‘Third-World literature’ and ‘postcolonial studies’ are not synonymous terms but are better construed as wholly separate, even antagonistic, developments in contemporary literary studies. In fact, the displacement of the earlier term ‘Third-World literature’ by the term ‘postcolonial studies’ signals for many the increasing depoliticisation of these areas of critical inquiry. See, for instance, Shohat 1992.
such as thematology.\textsuperscript{7} Our debt to Saïd in revitalising thematological literary study is enormous. Nevertheless, increased interest in the geo-thematic study of travel writing (not to be confused with Saïd’s ‘traveling theory’\textsuperscript{8}) has created new contradictions and difficulties and left many old problems unresolved. Extensive reliance upon anti-humanist and semiotic theories of literature in geo-thematic criticism has introduced almost as many problems as it has solved. The least imaginative examples of this genre have promoted a concept of colonialist ‘discourse’ as a Nietzschean and/or Foucauldian ‘network’ of tropes, aphorisms, metaphors and ‘rhetorical devices’, leaving far behind the ‘white mythology’ of historical context.\textsuperscript{9}

In fact, there is a disturbing sense in which such studies may be said to write themselves, after being properly programmed with the \textit{idées reçues} that unify colonialist discourse. During this process, the ambiguities, complexities and contradictions of the authors studied are often effectively silenced: individuality itself dwindles to little more than a rearguard, bourgeois and ‘Western’ convention, presumably a loss of small consequence. The West-African ‘subject’ is not reducible to Kantian man, but it is certain that a metaphysical orientation to the word enters the Sahel with the coming of Islam approximately one thousand years ago, one that exists in an uneasy relation with a more ancient thinking of the word as \textit{nyama}, or dangerous bodily substance.\textsuperscript{10} The extraordinary complexity of the Sahelian context and its history is erased just as surely by facile poststructuralist readings of West-African literature as by naively logocentric ones.

‘Orientalism failed to identify with human experience’, Saïd concludes, ‘failed to see itself as human experience’.\textsuperscript{11} But, of course, this same criticism can be applied to the ‘anti-humanist’ methodology that Saïd deploys, the proto-linguistic determinism of Michel Foucault, the philosopher who famously proclaimed the ‘death of man’.\textsuperscript{12} Many who have followed Saïd’s example, but without his subtlety or eloquence, have brought this contradiction into even more striking relief. Saïd’s ethical appeals to ‘human freedom’ and ‘human community’ are profoundly undermined by the suffocating concept of ‘discourse’ his book validates.\textsuperscript{13} As a Palestinian-American who knew very

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} See Clements 1978, pp. 165–79.
\item \textsuperscript{8} See Saïd 1982, 1994.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Young 1990.
\item \textsuperscript{10} See Wise forthcoming.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Saïd 1979, p. 328.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Foucault 1973, p. 387.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Saïd 1979, pp. 327–8.
\end{itemize}
well that the case for Palestinian rights hinges on respect for a traditional concept of the human, embedded in documents such as the UN Charter, specifically Article 13 (or the ‘right of return’).\textsuperscript{14} Said could not afford to liquidate this figure in any Derridean or deconstructive sense, but he was also sensitive to the fact that Christian and Islamic concepts of the individual are inextricable from an arguably logocentric metaphysics that is a non-negotiable aspect of Arab and Palestinian identity. In all of these instances, a Marxian hermeneutics that is faithful to what Jameson has called a ‘semantic’ or even ‘prelinguistic’ form of consciousness\textsuperscript{15} offers a more flexible alternative in theorising non-Western Islamic contexts. It also has the advantage of drawing attention to repressed political questions that often supersede the sometimes arcane concerns of theory, such as US military involvement in the Sahel since 9/11; French support of corrupt West-African dictators; economic crises caused by deforestation, desertification, and drought; structural adjustment policies in the Sahel, and so forth.

Beyond these factors, the poststructuralist bias of much Western-based criticism of African writing most obviously elides the alphabetic reduction of the time-bound, spoken utterance into the ulterior, space-bound word-in-print. In fact, the scope of the historical disparity between speaking and writing is often difficult for Westerners to conceptualise, as Walter Ong suggests. ‘\textit{Homo sapiens} has been in existence for between 30,000 and 50,000 years’, Ong has pointed out. ‘The earliest script dates from only 6,000 years ago’.\textsuperscript{16} Eric Havelock also reminds us that ‘[f]rom the standpoint of human evolution, a perspective on the ‘orality’... of the human animal requires us to recognise that oral language is fundamental to our species, whereas reading and writing wear the appearance of a recent accident’.\textsuperscript{17} Havelock’s description of literacy as an ‘accident’ or aberration, a relatively contemporary and even \textit{perverse} wrinkle in human history, effectively estranges previous notions of exactly what occurred in the ‘contact zone’, to quote Mary Louise Pratt, the site of interaction between European and African peoples.\textsuperscript{18} This is not to say that spatialised textuality may be reduced to a weaker Platonic copy of the

\textsuperscript{16} Ong 1982, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{17} Havelock 1976, p. 6. Havelock nonetheless overstates the importance of the Greek transcription of the vowel thereby exaggerating the significance of Greece’s role in the development of alphabetic literacy in a broader sense. Havelock’s gesture tends to reinforce the Aryan model of Greece’s historical origin. See Drucker 1995, pp. 54–5.
\textsuperscript{18} Pratt 1994, pp. 6–7.
oral word, since the world of the written text enjoys an independent existence, or functions according to its own logic; it is merely to insist that we have a great deal to gain by bringing the work of Ong, Havelock and other theorists of orality-literacy contrasts into Marxist criticism of West-African society, including a deeper appreciation of the limitations of Western text-bound consciousness, both in the colonial period and now. The book-man of Europe, the adventurer-traveller who packs a portable library on his donkey’s back, may appear, in this light, a wholly bizarre apparition, even ridiculous in the eyes of the West African. This gesture is useful, even if it initially seems to ignore deeper and more profound differences between Sahelian and Western orientations to speaking and writing, because it may alert Western readers to their hyper-literate and Platonic biases, especially their inability to free themselves from hegemonic concepts of the book as spatial object, or reified spectacle for the eyes.

It is urgent and necessary to clarify the limitations of Western belief systems. Barbara Harlow rightly suggests that this is the primary task of the committed, ‘First-World’ scholar and critic.19 But if strictly textualist or dogmatically semiotic theorists of African literature generate unhelpful and even ‘psychedelic’ distortions of their objects, specifically though the conflation of oral-aural words and visual signs,20 academic theorists of orality-literacy contrasts in the West have remained disappointingly apolitical or ‘neutral’ in their approaches, cosmically detached from the practical implications of their findings.21 Though he asserts that writing is ‘a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity’, Ong will criticise deliberately politicised studies in his field as regretfully encumbered by ‘matters other than the immediate consequences of literacy’.22 In the case of the Soviet theorist Aleksandr Luria,23 for instance, Ong suggests that one must look beyond ‘the elaborate Marxist scaffolding’ in his writings to get at the essential ‘truth’ of orality-literacy differences.24 Similarly, Ong adopts the Lukácsian theory of reification as it

19 Harlow 1987, p. 65.
20 See Ong’s discussion of Derrida 1982, pp. 75–7. Ong nonetheless fails to appreciate the extent to which Derrida’s position indeed affirms a non-Platonic concept of orality or word as liquid pharmakon for the ears.
21 A notable exception to this tendency is Stuckey 1991, a study that was not coincidentally impacted by Stuckey’s experiences living in West Africa.
22 Ong 1982, p. 12.
23 The Soviet scholar Luria authored a valuable study of orality-literacy differences in rural Uzbekistan and Kirghizia in the early 1930s, Luria 1976.
24 Ong 1982, p. 50.
suits his purposes, demonstrating how ‘it was print, not [chirographic] writing that effectively reified the word’, but he declines to explore the fuller implications of his discoveries. Taken by itself, much of the scholarship in orality-literacy contrasts is a dead-end. For Ong, who is a Jesuit priest, greater awareness of the attributes of the Word Incarnate may be a sufficient end-in-itself. Understandably, this will not be the case for those who do not share his religious views.

Beyond the obvious ideological limitations of such approaches, Ong’s appeal to ‘primary’ or ‘pristine’ orality is further complicated by his admission that ‘[t]oday, primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists’. The deconstructive rejoinder to such a claim, first articulated by Derrida in Of Grammatology, has been that speaking too partakes of différance, which implies that the very idea of a culture ‘without writing’ is meaningless. Ong’s nostalgia for a ‘pristine’ or utopian orality (literally ‘no place’) would seem to echo the logocentrism of figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Claude Lévi-Strauss, whom Derrida has famously criticised on this basis. If Derrida is right in his assertion that speaking is yet another form of ‘writing’, there has never been a primary oral culture, as Ong implies. But Derrida himself admits that the technology of alphabetical writing is a relatively recent innovation which profoundly affected the lives of ancient peoples. ‘It is true, and one cannot ignore it’, Derrida states, ‘that the appearance of certain systems of writing three or four thousand years ago was an extraordinary leap in the history of life’. Derrida nonetheless does not explore the sociological consequences of this ‘extraordinary leap’ after the introduction of alphabetic writing. If Derrida’s thesis that there never really was a state of ‘pristine’ orality is difficult to dispute, Ong is surely justified in drawing our attention to the cultural upheavals inaugurated by the introduction of writing technologies, especially alphabetic writing. Despite the shortcomings in the hypothesis that Ong calls ‘primary orality’, most commonly attributed to the Homerian scholar Milman Parry, it is useful and reasonable to underscore differences between cultures that are predominately ‘oral-aural’ and those

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26 Ong 1982, p. 11.  
29 Parry’s major work, 1971, was edited by his son Adam Parry. Although Parry’s study was originally published in French in 1928.
that are heavily affected by advanced writing technologies, that is chirographic, typographic and electronic media.

The term ‘primary orality’, as I am employing it, does not then exclude pre-literate writing technologies such as circumcision, scarification, mud architecture, smith-work, and so on, nor does it pretend that there ever existed a speaking that could not also be construed as ‘writing’ in the deconstructive sense, in other words, the essential structure of all language; it merely signifies a culture that has not undergone the historical forgetting of orality-aurality due to the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated writing technologies, especially following the introduction of alphabetic literacy. Evidence from Sahelian culture in particular tends to affirm rather than undercut this hypothesis. At the very least, we can say that a hyper-literate or even poststructuralist reading of a West African ‘text’ erases important differences and thereby serves a neo-colonising function. Even the colonialist travelogues of Mungo Park, René Caillié, Hugh Clapperton and others necessarily exist in relation to specific historical situations, involving real peoples in real struggles. The point is then not to merely reject ‘an Africa That Never Was’, to quote one well-known book on travel literature, for committed criticism of African society should involve far more than the deconstruction of the rhetorical nodal points that unify colonialist discourse. It should also involve the hermeneutic recovery of the historical traces embedded within such texts. The oral-aural word is also a trace of the real, like its written counterpart, but its material is invisible and temporal rather than spectral, or a sight-for-the-eyes in the dimension of space. There is often no access to this absent trace except through its visual double. For this reason, even imperialist travelogues may be described as ‘damaged vehicles of historical truth’, to quote Adorno, crippled monads that are sedimented by the real. Whatever the subjective and cultural distortions of these texts, they remain invaluable to us today.

30 An important, though complicated, example of this is Pacéré’s Le langage des tam-tams et des masques en afrique. See Wise (ed.) 2001.
31 For instance, see Christopher Miller’s reading of Yambo Ouologuem’s Bound To Violence in Blank Darkness. Miller 1985.
32 See Hammond and Jablow 1970, a book that is particularly irritating because of its sweeping oversimplifications. It should be noted, however, that this work is to some extent a product of its time, the late 1960s, and should no doubt be read as a needed polemical intervention or corrective.
33 Adorno 1973, p. 274.
But, rather than promote theoretical debates about ‘European planetary consciousness’, to quote Pratt, or a pre-ordained or autonomous ‘discourse’ that manufactures colonised subjectivity, we might work harder to historicise a particular African context. In much Marxist criticism of African society, Frantz Fanon’s thesis that contact with European society ‘destroyed the basic structures’ of indigenous African cultures has often been adopted with little critical reflection. Fanon advances this hasty and unsubstantiated argument, specifically in relation to Madagascar, a country he never visited. In the case of the Sahel, however, such a thesis is untenable. Most scholars of the Sahel maintain that ‘[t]he French came, conquered, and then transferred political power a few generations later, leaving the traditional social structure largely intact and, in some cases, considerably strengthened’. To combat this harmful, modernising thesis, the Burkinabè poet Titinga Pacéré has held up the rather earthy Mossi proverb, ‘If a woman tumbles to the ground, it doesn’t mean her vagina falls out too...’. In his preface to ‘Saglego: Or, Drum Poem (For The Sahel)’, Pacéré also cites the drum zabyouré (or performed phrase in Mossi drum-language) that ‘The tamarind tree may fall upon the earth, but its good taste will remain forever’. Pacéré interprets this drum-aphorism as follows: ‘In contemporary culture, this phrase refers to African culture in the aftermath of colonization. Despite subjugation and “defeat,” its profundity and integrity remain unaffected’. Among Muslims, the arrival of Europeans tended even to strengthened cultural traditions, either through indirect means; that is, by precipitating social crises that paved the way for jihad or a ‘return to The Book’ (in the case of Dan Fodio, El Hadj Tal Umar, and so on); or, by deliberately stabilising domestic and Islamic-based infrastructures to insure economic growth. Hale cites the Songhay proverb, ‘The white man comes and goes like the morning mist on the Niger River’. Such a folk aphorism no doubt responds to Mungo Park’s final bizarre trip down the Niger, rifles strapped to his boat’s sides. Park’s exploration, of course, ended in disaster, his own death upon the shoals of the Niger-Djoliba, ‘the River of the Griots’.

35 Fanon 1982, p. 97.
38 Pacéré 2001, p. 47.
In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt defines her coinage ‘the contact zone’ as ‘the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’. She borrows the term ‘contact’ from the linguistics term ‘contact language’ or those ‘improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in the context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own’. While useful, Pratt’s concept must nonetheless be adjusted to account for orality-literacy differences, especially insofar as an exclusive textualism disables it; that is, in the Sahel, the European book-man such as Mungo Park encounters an ‘Other’ whose linguistic orientation cannot be conceptualised in strictly literary terms. Literature itself (in Latin, *literatura*), with its etymological relation to the Latin *litera* (or ‘alphabetic letter’), implies the reduction of sound to spatialised, flattened surfaces. Much of Pratt’s analysis is centred on Mungo Park’s *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, the first eyewitness account by a European who saw the Niger River. But, in borrowing the term ‘contact language’ from linguistics, Pratt subordinates speaking practices to writing practices, or a strictly literary model of human communication; that is, Pratt conflates the spoken word and written word as semiotic sign, a spatial object or standard to follow with the eyes.

For this reason, Pratt is unable to address ways in which spoken dialects, pidgins and creoles radically differ from languages affected by advanced writing technologies. As a starting point, it may be helpful to establish certain definitional features of English and French especially as technological tools enabling imperial ventures, insofar as they differ from West-African languages. In the first place, both English and French were not only spoken languages in the late eighteenth century, as was true of the majority of indigenous Sahelian languages, but they were also typographic languages possessing hundreds of thousands of written books, including extensive word lists, dictionaries, thesauruses, encyclopaedias, and so forth. To be more precise, European languages at this time may be defined as ‘grapholects’, containing recorded vocabularies of over a million words. However complicated the

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41 Pratt 1994, p. 6.
42 Ibid.
43 Park 1799.
syntax, the unwritten languages of the Sahel, by necessity, could not have included more than a few thousand words, the majority of which had no known etymologies. A grapholect may be defined as ‘a transdialectical language formed by deep commitment to writing. Writing gives a grapholect a power far exceeding that of any purely oral dialect’.\textsuperscript{44} Thus, if it is true, as Pratt suggests in \textit{Imperial Eyes}, that the contact zone normally involves ‘conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’,\textsuperscript{45} this dynamic may be due to the inherently imperialistic nature of the grapholect as an advanced human technology.

Not unlike any other weapons technology, grapholects can perform wide-ranging destructive services for those who possess them. Pratt’s concept of ‘the contact zone’ does not then fully account for the unequal technological resources inherent within the colonial encounter in the Sahel. If we may speak so broadly, the primary linguistic difference between Sahelian and European peoples consists not in the possession of chirographic and alphabetical writing, but in the impact of moveable-type print, developed more than four hundred years before Mungo Park’s arrival in West Africa. The main psychological effect of this development is the word’s increasing reification in the dimension of space, the illusory transformation of the word as visual spectacle, or an object which, like any other object, may be allegorically recoded as commodity fetish. It is not, then, a question of celebrating the technological superiority of the bookman, nor castigating him for his moral failures, but of appreciating the power of print technologies to transform human consciousness. A more helpful question might be as follows: Why did European peoples lack appropriate defence mechanisms against this delirium?

**The Sahelian travelogue in context**

The globalising thrust of much geo-thematic criticism not only elides the specificity of pretexts such as the Sahel, it also re-inforces the neo-colonisation of indigenous peoples through re-inscribing the hegemony of textualist ideology. Such approaches ostensibly offer an ‘ethical’ critique of Western imperialism, precisely at the moment that they assume the Eurocentric doctrine of the Irreducible Text, which is said to interpolate African peoples into its

\textsuperscript{44} Ong 1982, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{45} Pratt 1993, p. 6.
Pratt suggests that interaction between industrialised European peoples and indigenous African peoples inevitably led to a profound restructuration – if not wholesale liquidation – of traditional African identity. She states that ‘[her book’s] predominant theme is how travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the “domestic subject” of Euro-imperialism’, Pratt, 1994, p. 4. Pratt states, ‘The finite totality of these representations or categories [in travel-writing] constituted a “mapping” not just of coastlines and rivers, but of every visible square, or even cubic, inch of the earth’s surface’, Pratt 1994, p. 3.

In opposition to narrowly textualist language ideologies, it must be emphasised that Sahelian peoples worked out a distinct relationship with writing, long before the arrival of Park, Laing, Caillié and others. Literacy was not particularly startling or new to West Africans in the early nineteenth century, although European print technologies did cause some surprise and consternation. According to the Kano Chronicle, however, Islam is diffused throughout Western Africa from Timbuktu, Mali around 1150 AD, and, with Islam, came alphabetical writing technologies. It may also be possible that alphabetical writing predates the coming of Islam, given the extensive influence of Egypt upon the Sahel zone and the fact that Egyptian hieroglyphs also contained alphabetical signs albeit in phonogramic form; that is, through the use of logograms as aids in writing words unrelated in meaning to the object they depict. It is difficult in this sense to gauge the extent to which Sahelian peoples may have already been acquainted with alphabetical writing by the time of Islam’s arrival upon the scene. The fact that Islam is diffused not far from a northern Sahelian region called Duat (the Egyptian word for the underworld ruled by Osiris) should give some indication of the historical complexities that such enquiries pose. Following Marcel Jousse, the Sahel may be described as a verbomoteur or ‘verbomotor’ society, a culture that has known alphabetical writing for many years, but has never fully internalised it. Among other reasons, alphabetical literacy was never fully internalised by Sahelian peoples because its development was supervised by Arab Muslims, who brought with them specific textual biases and reading strategies, ever cautioning against idolising the merely written sign.

There is a superficial sense in which it is not really necessary to differentiate between Islamic and pre-Islamic and/or indigenous Sahelian beliefs about orality’s priority over textuality, for Islam has always cautioned against textuality by assigning the written word its proper, marginalised place within a clearly defined, and even logocentric, hierarchy. In other words, Islam did

46 Pratt suggests that interaction between industrialised European peoples and indigenous African peoples inevitably led to a profound restructuration – if not wholesale liquidation – of traditional African identity. She states that ‘[her book’s] predominant theme is how travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the “domestic subject” of Euro-imperialism’, Pratt, 1994, p. 4. Pratt states, ‘The finite totality of these representations or categories [in travel-writing] constituted a “mapping” not just of coastlines and rivers, but of every visible square, or even cubic, inch of the earth’s surface’, Pratt 1994, p. 3.
47 See Jousse 1925.
not escape a certain Greek philosophical heritage, particularly with reference to the concept of the psyche (or ‘soul’) as indwelling and metaphysical ground of human consciousness. In the Islamic religion, however, the psyche is said to be inscribed with a Word that is imagined as a Book rather than an anthropomorphic god-image. Arguably, Judaism evades or at least predates Greco-Roman metaphysics and may be more indebted to an Egyptian thinking of the word as groundless ‘magic’ or heka (magic’s etymological precursor).

In fact, the Holy Qur’an is a book that has no material existence as written text (or mus-haf); or, as Kristina Nelson puts it, ‘it’s not the Qur’an unless it’s heard’. Today, most Sahelian Muslims memorise large portions of the Qur’an, and it is commonly felt that the cash purchase of the Qur’an as written text is distasteful, making it difficult to find printed copies outside of major urban centres such as Ouagadougou, Niamey and Bamako. From its earliest inception, Islam has rejected Jewish hermeneutics for ‘fetishising’ the Law (or Mosaic Code), implicitly endorsing the Pauline critique of Judaism (II Corinthians 3:3), which is said to promote worship of the ‘dead letter’ of the Law, thereby violating its true ‘Spirit’ or intent. However, Islam equally rejects Christian hermeneutics for ‘fetishising’ the historical personage of Jesus Christ as an ‘archetype’ [ta’wil] of the Incarnate Word. On the one hand, Muslims insist that Jews worship God’s Writing at the expense of God himself. On the other hand, most Muslims believe that Christians worship a mere man as an incarnated intermediary of God, thereby forestalling necessary and healthy

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48 The great Muslim theologian Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) and professor of Islamic law in Baghdad interpreted the opening verses of the Gospel of John as follows: ‘“The Word” can be employed to connote the essence as defined by knowledge or speech, without any implication of the essence having the attribute of corporeality.... I should like to know what grounds there are for taking this [Word or ‘Logos’] to refer to Jesus, upon whom be peace, in the face of the clear statement occurring at the beginning of the chapter, describing God: “and without Him was not anything that was made”’, Peters 1990, p. 162.
51 Among the Tidjaniya, for instance, it is obligatory to memorise at least seven ‘versets’ ['chapters'] of the Qur’an, which is to say, seven distinct groupings or thematic clusters of surahs. The Qur’an itself has 114 surahs (separate revelations), but they are organised into such ‘versets’ according to their content. In total, there are sixty ‘versets’ or thematic groupings, but only the most exceptional students will memorise all sixty, thus memorising the entire Qur’an.
52 After much searching, at the Grand Marchée in Bamako, Mali, I was once able to purchase an ornate and expensive Arabic-French version of the Qur’an for only 2,000 CFA (or US$4), whereas a cheap and abridged version of the Hadith cost me 10,000 CFA (or US$20).
interpreted processes. Islam is often described as a ‘middle way’ between the two extremes of Judaism and Christianity. In addition to the pre-Islamic orality of Sahelian culture, Islam in West Africa may have erected strong bulwarks against Western textual biases, safeguarding against the erosion of primary orality. In such a context, Sahelian peoples may have avoided the forgetting of orality which is common to post-Christian Europe. Book-men of the Sahelian travelogue, such as Park, Caillié, Barth, and so on, are at once handicapped, in that they lack certain faculties for human interaction in this context, specifically necessary skills that enable meaningful response to aural stimuli. Within such a setting, it is no exaggeration to describe such men as ‘under-developed’ in Walter Rodney’s sense of this term.

Western literary scholars have only recently begun to account for the influence of Islam upon African writing and culture. As I have argued elsewhere, ignorance about Islamic hermeneutics has, on occasion, led to profound misunderstandings in the Western academy, promoting often facile appropriations of African literature. For over one thousand years, Islam has fostered radically different attitudes about writing in West Africa. Both Muslim and non-Muslim Sahelian peoples prioritise the temporal, aural word over the spatialised written word, according to their own highly evolved language ideologies. I deliberately write ‘aural’ because, in at least one important instance, the fact that the word is heard or physiologically experienced may be more important than the fact that it is spoken by a human mouth. I refer here to Titinga Pacéré’s theory of bendrology, wherein he criticises the Latinate term ‘oral’, referring to the oris or human mouth. In the case of Mossi culture, Pacéré astutely points out that the drum-word, in concert with tonal African languages, is not spoken at all but performed upon the drum or bendré (the Moré word for a drum made from a calabash). However, whether or not the drum-word is actually prior to the spoken word, in both instances the word

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53 Without reference to Islam, Ong himself makes this point in his discussion of St. John of the Cross: ‘As St. John of the Cross long ago noted (see his Ascent of Mount Carmel), once you have Jesus Christ, you have all of revelation. There is nothing more to say, nothing further to add to the Word. All you have to do, once the Father has given his Word, is to learn better and better what a Person Incarnate “means”’, Ong 1977, p. 263.
55 See Harrow 1991. In the introduction to this study, Harrow laments the way in which Islam is nearly always ignored in Western-based criticism of African literature. Harrow 1991 p. 19.
56 See Wise 1999.
remains a temporal event, without leaving any visual residue or ‘trace’, in the physical world.

Such a word is first and foremost experienced as a powerful force, ‘a dimension of experience in and of itself’.\textsuperscript{58} Both the bendré\textsuperscript{59} and the griot are ‘masters of the Word’, to borrow from Camara Laye, though not in any Kantian sense or as artistic ‘geniuses’.\textsuperscript{60} As J.T. Irvine puts it, in West Africa, ‘words do not just have meaning’.\textsuperscript{61} The sound of the word as ‘meaningless’ aural force exceeds its semantic content: it goes without saying that such a word cannot be seen outside of its physical effects upon the hearer. Among the Wolof, Irvine states, ‘[words] are breath and vibrations of air, constituted and shaped by the body and motives of the speaker, physically contacting and influencing the addressee. So informants liken the effect of a griot’s praise-song to the effects of wind upon fire (both metaphorically and literally, since air and fire are supposed to be basic constituents of the body)’.\textsuperscript{62} The word in this sense must penetrate the very body of the addressee. On occasion, the griot’s words may even result in trance possession, setting free bodily fluids and releasing muscular tensions.\textsuperscript{63} Drawing from his research among the Songhay of Southern Niger, Paul Stoller describes the word in this context as ‘an energy which should be apprehended in and of itself rather than only as a representation of something’.\textsuperscript{64} Stoller’s remarks uncannily parallel Ong’s insistence that the aural-word is not a sign, that it lacks entirely in thing-like or visible attributes.

**Major Denham’s reading lesson: a case study**

The genre of the Timbukutu narrative encodes the tale of a European’s quest to reach the Sahel’s ‘El Dorado’, the fabled West-African city that comes to serve a metonymic function in white African travel literature; that is, as a ‘bulls-eye’ for the entire continent.\textsuperscript{65} Despite the relative insignificance of this town from an African perspective, Europeans imagine that possession of

\textsuperscript{58} Stoller 1989, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{59} In Moré, the bendré is both the drum and the drummer.

\textsuperscript{60} See Laye 1978.

\textsuperscript{61} Irvine’s unpublished paper is cited in Stoller 1989, p. 111.

\textsuperscript{62} Stoller 1989.

\textsuperscript{63} Perhaps the best known ethnological account of this phenomenon is Jean Rouch’s classic film on the Songhay, *Les maîtres fous* (1957). Westerners who have viewed this film are often most disturbed at images of African faces smeared with saliva, flowing from the chins of Houka initiates.

\textsuperscript{64} Stoller 1989, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{65} Welch 1939, p. 18.
Timbuktu will lead to the eventual ownership or colonisation of sub-Saharan Africa. A few of the defining features of this genre are as follows: first, the traveller who ‘discovers’ Timbuktu must be a white man; second, the traveller must be literate but not excessively academic, a factor that might interfere with his ability to represent the people and places he sees in a ‘truthful’ fashion; third, it follows that the language of this narrative must be absolutely transparent, so that it may deliver ‘occular truths’ to the reading public; that is, objectified words that are construed as ‘scientific’ artefacts for the eyes of men who bear a white essence. Key contributors to this genre include Mungo Park, Alexander Gordon Laing, René Caillié, Heinrich Barth, Felix DuBois and many others. Nearly every contribution to this influential genre of African travel writing reveals a great deal about contrasting orientations to the word of European and Sahelian peoples, but we will focus here on the writings of Major Dixon Denham as a particularly revealing case-study. Denham is often slighted in historical literature on West Africa because he had the bad taste to publicly accuse his travelling companion Hugh Clapperton of a homosexual liaison with an African man. Clapperton is far better known than Denham today as the Englishman who negotiated a settlement with the Kano ruler Muhammad Bello that eventually brought an end to the West-African slave trade. Like many other European travellers of his era, Denham dreamed of being the first white man to visit Timbuktu, but his mission with Clapperton led to other regions in the Sahel when Alexander Gordon Laing was awarded...
the ‘Timbuktu mission’.\textsuperscript{70} While lacking the seriousness of purpose in the prose of Clapperton, Denham’s competing narrative of discovery takes note of many important details that Clapperton’s ignores.

As Denham, Clapperton, and other British travelling companions venture deeper into the Sahel from North Africa, they encounter indigenous peoples whom have already come in contact with Europeans, namely Captain George Francis Lyon, the British author of a travelogue entitled \textit{A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa in the Years 1818, 1819, 1820}.\textsuperscript{71} Like most Sahelian travellers, Denham carries with him the books of previous voyagers and, in this instance, produces Lyon’s book for perusal by a Berber slave-trader and travel-guide, who is astounded to discover mimetic images of people he knows in Lyon’s volume. Denham’s description of this exchange is worth quoting at length:

\begin{quote}
I now for the first time, produced Captain Lyon’s book in Boo-Khaloom’s tent, and on turning over the prints of the natives he [Boo-Khaloom] swore, and exclaimed, and insisted upon it, that he knew every face: – ‘This was such a one’s slave – that was his own – he was right – he knew it. Praised be God for the talents he gave the English! They were shalter, clever; wolla shalter, very clever!’ Of a landscape; however, I found that he had not the least idea; nor could I make him at all understand the intention of the print of the sand-wind in the desert, which is really so well described by Captain Lyon’s drawing; he would look at it upside down; and when I twice reversed it for him, he exclaimed, ‘Why! Why! It is the same.’ A camel or a human figure was all I could make him understand, and at these he was all agitation and delight – ‘Gieb! Gieb! Wonderful! Wonderful!’ The eyes first took his attention, then the other features: at the sight of the sword, he exclaimed, ‘Allah! Allah!’ and on discovering the guns instantly exclaimed, ‘Where is the powder?’: This want of perception, as I imagined, in so intelligent a man, excited at first my surprise; but perhaps just the same would an European have felt under similar circumstances. Were an European to attain manhood without ever casting his eye upon the representation of a landscape on paper, would he immediately feel the particular beauties of the picture, the perspective, and the distinct objects? Certainly not: it is from our opportunities of contemplating works of art, even in common walks of life, as well as to cultivation of mind, and associations of finer feelings by an
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70} Bovill 1964, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{71} See Lyon 1966.
intercourse with the enlightened and accomplished, that we derive our quick perception in matters of this kind rather than from nature.\textsuperscript{72}

Denham makes a number of important discoveries about his own hermeneutic prejudices in this encounter. First, he learns that, while some images may be more recognisable than others to his foreign interlocutor, representational images themselves may not be ‘natural’ or \textit{a priori} copies of the real but a matter of arbitrary cultural convention. Denham discovers his own belief that the mimetic or ‘realistic’ sign has a privileged, even supernatural relation to the real object it signifies. Denham is now forced to re-evaluate his assumption that the mimetic sign functions much like a proper name and is magically linked to its referent. Denham’s initial surprise turns to fear when, upon journeying deeper into the Sahara, news of Lyon’s book spreads among the people of Marzuq (a town that is now in Southern Libya) and causes a near panic. ‘It [Lyon’s book] produced very different effects [compared to Boo-Khaloom’s reading], but in all astonishment and suspicion…. I repeatedly assured [my interlocutors] that [the drawings] in the book were not mine, that the person who wrote them was far away’, Denham states.\textsuperscript{73}

[But] it would not do; they shook their heads, and said I was cunning, and would not show them [my own ability to draw]. Then they changed their tone, and very seriously begged that I would not write them, that is, draw their portraits; that they did not like it; that the sheikh did not like it, that it was a sin; and I am quite sure, from the impression, that we had much better never have produced the book at all.\textsuperscript{74}

All people everywhere, Denham had formerly assumed, have the innate ability to perceive the ‘natural’ relation between word and thing because the mimetic sign, which is a prosthetic copy of the referent, exactly mirrors its more real referent in the world of appearance.

Denham’s vision of the world is reflexively Platonic, and this Platonic way of seeing is imagined by him to be universal. In other words, Denham assumes that the representational image mirrors the real object but is itself a ‘dead ringer’; that is, the mimetic sign in his book is not alive but a lifeless and reified object extending into space. The mimetic image can copy the ‘real’ person, but it cannot harm the person it represents since it is not really alive but is an inert artefact. Denham need not worry about the mimetic sign in

\textsuperscript{72} Denham 1828, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{73} Denham 1828, p. 239.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
the way his interlocutors do because he believes that signs of this order are
death letters in the Pauline sense (Romans 7:6). Before these reading lessons,
Denham had assumed there are three orders of signs: first, there is the ‘natural’
(or mimetic) sign depicting the real, which is dead but nonetheless enjoys a
privileged relation to the living sign, that is the thing it signifies; second,
there is the living or ontological sign, which remains a false duplicate of the
real and which thrives in the domain of the five senses; third, there is the
real, unchanging, or ideal ground of these doubles, which exists in the realm
of the transcendent and must therefore be taken wholly on faith. It is nonetheless
remarkable, at least in comparison with other Sahelian travelogues, that
Denham is able to recognize that his personal orientation to signs is arbitrary
rather than natural. The insight that his own way of thinking about language
is a matter of social construction does not lead him to adopt the views of his
interlocutors, but he grasps that he is not in possession of the ‘truth’ as he
once imagined, that there may be other ways of conceptualizing one’s relation
to the real.

In the Sahelian context, ‘the real’ circulates in discourse that is already
present in the world of senses without necessarily replicating an extra-sensory
double.75 The ‘real’ is a dangerous liquid that is ejaculated from the mouth
into the ear of the other, but it may also coagulate as dried ink on the flattened
surface of paper. Amulet writing in the Sahel often involves the transcription
of a Quranic surah, which is written on a sheet of paper or parchment, but
then later washed into a vial that is drunk like a medicine. The liquid words
enter the body as a powerful force, and it is irrelevant if those who drink
these words are alphabetically literate. Practices of this nature echo those of
the ancient Egyptians, whose culture deeply influenced the Sahel, and who
buried their ‘illiterate’ dead with scrolls containing spells that would aid them
on their journey to Duat, or the underworld, in their quest to become
transfigured in the afterlife. In Egypt, the illiterate dead also consumed their
personalised ‘books (or scrolls) of the dead’ as liquid elixirs, which implies
that the capacity to read the papyrus manuscript with one’s eyes was a kind
of scholarly luxury (in fact, only a small portion of the ancient Egyptians
could read).76

75 It is important to underscore here that the Islamic parataxis of the Book does not
cancel belief in the autonomous power of discourse in the external world. This is
especially true in the Sahelian context, where pre-Islamic belief systems continue to
eject a profound influence upon contemporary West-African peoples.
Denham’s Sahelian interlocutors have good reason to fear that he is a sorcerer who, in copying their mimetic double, will gain a certain power over them. They do not perceive Denham as a disinterested ‘scientific’ observer, but a dangerous magician who can do them real damage. Although Denham fails to appreciate the irony, the views of his Sahelian interlocutors are probably closer to the truth than his own, not only because he is a representative of a powerful nation that is seeking to colonise the entire region, but also because his assumptions about images are also grounded in a magical, theological and metaphorical orientation to the Sign that is neither more nor less truthful than that of his interlocutors. Certainly, Denham’s own theory of language cannot be scientifically proven but only hypothesised, since it implies the existence of an absent metaphysical ground that is by definition unavailable to critical analysis. By way of contrast, the Sahelian view affirms that the sign is a living-dead double that circulates in the external world in powerful, autonomous, and sometimes deadly ways. This word can do great harm as a material force, vital power, or liquid substance that is not rendered any less dangerous because it has undergone reification in the dimension of space. The mimetic image possesses a spectral density for Denham’s Sahelian interlocutors, and they are understandably apprehensive about its ability to harm them. In truth, Denham is lucky to escape with his life after he reveals himself to be a British ‘sorcerer’, unlike his colleague Alexander Gordon Laing who was murdered not far from Timbuktu, but not before his writing hand had been brutally and repeatedly maimed in a previous attack.77

Contemporary critics such as Foucault, Derrida and others have criticised Marxist theory because of its presumed logocentrism, its assumption of a nineteenth-century epistemology which mirrors the attitudes of Sahelian travellers such as Dixon Denham.78 Marxist theory is sometimes dismissed because of its historical commitments to representational discourse, allegedly betraying the ethnocentrism of Marxism, or its basis in what Derrida has famously described as the ‘white mythology’ of Platonic logocentrism.79 The true story is far more complicated: sometimes Marxist criticism is guilty as charged, but it is an exaggeration to claim that Marxist theory has never succeeded in eschewing a logocentric bias, or that the most skilled Marxist

77 See Wise 2001?, p. 197.
78 Foucault states: ‘Marxism exists in 19th Century thought like a fish in water: that is, it is unable to breathe anywhere else’, Foucault 1973, p. 262.
critics have not made great strides in this direction. Recent critical exchanges between Derrida and Pierre Macherey, Antonio Negri, and others nonetheless show that many Marxist critics remain unwilling to accept the proposition that radically different and anti-metaphysical concepts of the real may be possible, or that theory can ever truly escape the ontological; that is, the assumption that the realm of appearance is underwritten by some invisible ground.\(^80\)

Geo-thematic research and orality-literacy studies in the Sahelian context lend credence to Derrida’s claims that logocentric configurations of the real often elide important cultural differences, failing to respect the radical alterity of non-Western contexts. The Hegelian-Marxian dialectic is too often imagined as a phenomenon that occurs only upon the lens of the human eye, where the spectral image enters the human body, especially the visual image that is the alphabetically transcribed word. The dialectic is too seldom construed as a process involving multiple and non-visual forms of sensory perception, that is the aspirated or oral-aural word that enters the body through the portals of the ears, the tasteful word that enters the body through the mouth, the stinking word that enters the body through the nose, and so on. Literary scholars in particular, Derrida points out, have a penchant for overestimating the significance of the written word, for exclusively performing ‘the work of mourning’ and ignoring these other historical material signs on the horizon.\(^81\)

In the Sahelian context, the American anthropologist Paul Stoller speaks of ‘the taste of ethnographic things’, which he gleans from his years of fieldwork among the Songhay of Niger. Stoller rightly points out that a foul-smelling and vile-tasting bowl of \textit{cous-cous} may send a powerful message to an insensitive husband, especially when prepared by a disgruntled wife.\(^82\) It is not, then, an exaggeration to suggest that, in many unexpected ways, Sahelian peoples have long been more ‘materialist’ in their orientation to language than European peoples, who can only with great difficulty escape the Platonic ‘error’ (or parataxis) of Truth.

\(^{80}\) See Sprinker 1999, Macherey 1999, Negri 1999. With some exasperation, Derrida responds to Negri in particular, who charges that deconstruction is a disguised form of ontology, stating ‘Negri will perhaps allow me to say that it is his concern to rehabilitate ontology . . .’, Derrida, 1999, p. 261.

\(^{81}\) Derrida 1994, p. 11.

\(^{82}\) Stoller 1989, pp. 22–34.
Conclusion

As Ong, Havelock, and numerous others have shown, writing unavoidably signals the death of the living word: its reification in the dimension of space. Adorno also states that the newly dead human corpse, when it is ‘frozen in its unpurified shape’, may serve as a paradigm of writing and art in general: this is what Adorno calls ‘the reification of the living at the moment of death’.\(^\text{83}\)

To chirographically or typographically affix a spoken word upon paper is to perform an act of violence against it,\(^\text{84}\) for, as Ong insists, oral-aural words are not signs but sounds in the dimension of time: ‘Chirographic and typographic folk find it convincing to think of the word, essentially a sound, as a “sign” because “sign” refers primarily to something visually apprehended’.\(^\text{85}\) Ong states: ‘Signum, which furnished us with the word “sign”, meant the standard that a unit of the Roman army carried aloft for visual identification, etymologically, the “object one follows” (Proto-Indo-European root, sekw-, to follow).’\(^\text{86}\) The colonisation of the world of sound by the world of typographic writing in West Africa is at one with the coming of armed troops, cavalry and cannons from the European continent. For this reason, Colonel Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre’s \textit{My March To Timbuktu}, documenting how he violently overthrew city leaders in 1894, may be described as the culmination of the Sahelian travelogue.\(^\text{87}\) Still, it would be a mistake to conclude that writing’s complicity with colonisation renders it invalid as a technology in charting a better future.

Even while documenting literature’s complicity with colonisation, we must not succumb to the anti-historical urge to stigmatise the literary altogether, as some \textit{a priori} or categorical evil. As Adorno puts it, the writer must ‘submit to reification’;\(^\text{88}\) or, in Fredric Jameson’s parallel formulation, reification is not only a negative concept, but it also ‘change[s] its valences as it passes from the social to the aesthetic’.\(^\text{89}\) The anti-literary bias in much recent postcolonial criticism is often as problematic as the textualist hegemony it seeks to combat.

\(^{83}\) Adorno 1973, p. 393.
\(^{84}\) The etymological relation between the words \textit{affix} and \textit{crucifix} coincides. According to the \textit{OED}, the verb to \textit{affix} comes from the Latin word \textit{affigere}, meaning ‘to fasten’, whereas the verb to crucify means ‘to put to death by nailing or binding to a cross’, but also ‘to mortify the living flesh’.
\(^{85}\) Ong 1982, p. 75.
\(^{86}\) Ong 1982, pp. 75–6.
\(^{87}\) See Joffre 1915.
If the text-obsessed character of some Western-based studies of African literature has tended to distort its objects in often unhelpful and misleading ways, we must nevertheless reject facile denigrations of writing, reacting against the subordination of speaking to merely textualist definitions of Writing. To cite but one case in point, in an otherwise compelling essay on the relations of writing and colonisation, John Beverley argues that ‘writing practices are themselves complicit with maintaining relations of domination and subalternity’. If Beverley’s ressentiment against writing is understandable, his wholesale negation of it is nonetheless regrettable, for he ignores how his own book is, of course, a written document, not a spoken utterance. However, Beverley’s discomfort with the ideology of the literary, with the too-easy alliance between poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, sounds an appropriately cautionary note. In the specific case of West Africa, the European travelogue offers one particularly rich example of why any easy rejection of imperialist literature itself is unadvisable: such texts may be said to secrete living history, offering readers today a wealth of information about silenced African voices and visions of the past. Similarly, the written texts of contemporary African writers cannot be fully appreciated without reference to the complex and profoundly oral traditions from which they emerge. It is therefore incumbent upon readers of African literature, especially in the West, to reconstruct the historical and oral pretexts from which such written artefacts originate, however daunting that task may at first appear. Furthermore, the insights generated by the work of Western philosophers such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and others must be more carefully negotiated in light of traditional African beliefs about language and writing. In practical terms, this may mean that the Left’s stigmatisation of metaphysicians such as Placide Tempels, Léopold Sedar Senghor, and even Leo Frobenius must be rethought as an ethnocentric reaction against indigenous African thought systems. This is the price Marxist criticism must pay, forever
respecting the West-African context in its dizzying complexity and irreducible difference, if it is to eschew the Eurocentrism of previous scholarship on this region, and to gain the respect of future generation of literary scholars.

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Carlos Oya

The Empirical Investigation of Rural Class Formation: Methodological Issues in a Study of Large- and Mid-Scale Farmers in Senegal

The agrarian question and the myth of homogenous peasantries

Rural class formation has been a longstanding theme in studies of the agrarian question and its place in transitions to capitalism. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address complex theoretical debates on the ‘agrarian question’ in general or review the wide range of historical experiences across Africa. Rather, the objective is to focus on some important methodological considerations concerning the challenges posed by empirical investigations of rural class formations in contemporary Africa, using the example of a survey of large- and mid-scale farmers, which I carried out in Senegal in 1998–9.

The literature on rural class formation in Africa and elsewhere suggests that a sensible treatment of the agrarian question and processes of rural class formation should dwell on three basic principles, consistent with a historically materialist approach:

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1 Some significant improvements to earlier drafts of this paper were possible thanks to the constructive comments and suggestions by Henry Bernstein, Liam Campling, Nouria Brikci and especially two anonymous referees. However, I am solely responsible for any errors and omissions contained in the final paper.
i.) The importance of history and initial conditions, which are reflected in the features and the mechanisms of reproduction of hierarchical patterns in local social structures, established within the prevailing mode of production under which they are organised.

ii.) The importance of context, both in terms of time and space, which means that theory and concepts should be confined to their historical and social limits.

iii.) The importance of social change within a framework of materialist dialectics, which, in this case, renders the concept of social differentiation critical to understand concrete phenomena, such as the changes in social structures, production patterns and the organisation of the rural household.

These methodological principles are crucial for an adequate understanding of processes of accumulation, production and social reproduction, and for explaining differences and relations between classes of rural people, including the material basis for such differences, that is, command of land, labour and capital. In this sense, these principles should bear strong resonance among historical materialists genuinely committed to empirical investigation. This is one of the motifs behind our research in Senegal. Rural social differentiation is one of the essential elements of the agrarian question, which, as Byres clearly explains, can be considered in three different facets: first, whether socialist revolution can draw on the forces of the peasantry in an alliance with the industrial proletariat, or whether the disappearance of the ‘peasantry’ including the landlord classes is instrumental to a transition towards socialism; second, the extent and necessity of the development of capitalism in agriculture of the capitalist periphery, the specific forms it takes and the barriers hindering it, that is, the Kautsky-Lenin version of the agrarian question; third, the role of agriculture as a source of surplus necessary for the industrialisation process concomitant to full-scale capitalist development (the Preobrazhensky notion).

The main concern of our paper lies in themes within the second facet of the agrarian question, in other words, the tendencies towards and concrete forms of capitalist relations of production in agriculture and the methodology for a detection of capitalist tendencies among farmers in rural Africa.

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3 Engels writes: ‘In the conquest of political power this party must first go from the towns to the countryside . . . may this party calmly leave the doomed peasant in the hands of his false protectors [big landlords] until he has been transformed from a passive into an active opponent of the industrial workers?’ Engels 1894, p. 6.
The development of capitalist agriculture and the evolution of social formations arising in rural areas of the capitalist periphery are uneven and long processes that require a very careful investigation of their substantive diversity. Agrarian differentiation does not follow any ‘ideal’ abstract model but is manifested in concrete and context-specific forms of change, as has already been suggested by two of the pioneers of the ‘agrarian question’: Kautsky and Lenin.

History, context, differentiation as a dynamic process and the diversity of social change across regions of the developing world entail that universal notions of the ‘peasantry’ in Africa, and, therefore, generalisations with respect to the role of the ‘peasantry’ in long-term accumulation processes and modernisation, are misleading. The nature, composition and social location of the ‘peasantry’ have evolved dramatically towards the era of global capitalism. ‘Peasants’, if the concept is valid at all, encompass today a varied range of different classes of farmers with different objectives, constraints and reproduction mechanisms, depending, among other factors, on the particular articulation of concrete African forms of production with global and national capital. In other words, peasants can hardly be considered a ‘class’ in any sense in contemporary rural Africa.

The empirical investigation of rural class formation in Africa remains more complex than abstract theoretical models suggest, as they fail to grasp important specificities and relevant nuances. As Wiggins notes,

> Much of the 1970s debates on differentiation, along Marxian lines, offered clear and cogent hypotheses of how capitalism might create classes amongst the peasantry, but were weaker on providing detailed evidence of the processes and degree of differentiation.

Many historically and spatially specific factors come into play, which may make theoretically derived hypotheses difficult to test and interpret. Cousins et al. point out that:

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4 Bernstein and Byres 2001, p. 20.
5 Nevertheless, Kautsky and especially Lenin have been interpreted by many followers and critics as providing almost universal models of capitalist development in agriculture and differentiation as linear processes. One example for Africa is Berry 1993, who is criticised by Bernstein 2004 for her tendentious reading of Lenin. Note that Kautsky argued that small-scale household production could persist for longer than expected and that the bulk of peasant farmers, rather than becoming ‘petty-bourgeois’ could be potential allies of the industrial proletariat. See Cliffe 1987, p. 631.
6 Bernstein 2000.
The intersection of lineage structures, gender relations, and generational cycles, with processes of capitalist development are critically important for assessing the extent to which ... social differentiation is developing into an identifiable structure of classes with distinct and conflicting interests.8

The historiography of the agrarian question and how peasants are to be conceived in Africa, to which Wiggins referred in the previous quote, is richer than often assumed, but, by the mid-1980s, many contributors seemed to have run out of steam. Prior to this, two debates between the 1970s and mid-1980s provided fertile conceptual and empirical material for discussions of rural class formation and the agrarian question in Africa. First, the ‘Dar-es-Salaam debate’, initiated by the work by Shivji on Tanzania in the 1970s, focused mainly on the nature of rural classes (and prospects for emancipatory class alliances), the nature of the state and political processes in postcolonial Tanzania, and in Africa more generally.9 Second, the ‘Kenya debate’, had as its particular focus the possibilities of industrial-capitalist development in Africa and the characterisation of an African mode of production. This debate illustrated the clash between dependentista and classical-Marxist positions in the African context.10 Subsequently, it is worth mentioning the debate around the characterisation of the ‘African peasantry’ and the ‘economy of affection’, provoked by the work of Hyden on Tanzania, which resulted in very useful contributions.11 However, as noted above, these thriving debates seemed exhausted by the mid-1980s. Indeed, there has been a period of silence on these important issues since then.12 Cliffe concludes his review of the Tanzania debate by saying:

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8 Cousins et al. 1992, p. 12.
9 The contributions to this debate were numerous. For key contributions and appraisals of the debate see Shivji 1975, 2003, Tandon 1982.
10 The ‘Kenya debate’ provoked significant contributions to the study of capitalism and modes of production in Africa. An excellent ‘insider’ overview is provided by Leys 1996, pp. 143–63. See also the special issue in the Canadian Journal of African Studies in 1985, especially the lucid methodological discussion by Kitching 1985 that calls for humbler and more disaggregated categories of analysis. For a defence of the ‘mode of production’ concept in the debate in the same issue, see Klein 1985. Another useful reappraisal is Orvis 1993.
11 See Cliffe 1987, Kasfir 1986, Hyden 1986 for a reply. See also contributions by Bernstein 1979, Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985. In the latter, emphasis is given on the prevalence of ‘petty commodity production’ (PCP), which combines class locations of capital and labour and within which concrete processes of differentiation occur in Africa.
12 In this special issue, Bernstein writes a concise up-to-date overview of competing perspectives on the African agrarian questions.
The answer lies... in recognizing again the multiplicity of peasantries in Africa... The theoretical debate needs to continue but should be seen as a means of clarifying issues and categories of analysis rather than a source of general laws of motion of the African peasants.\footnote{Cliffe 1987, p. 634.}

Besides these ‘African’ debates, the important challenges faced by the empirical counterparts of abstract theoretical debates on rural social formations have been clearly revealed in a large number of contributions to the *Journal of Peasant Studies (JPS)* between 1973 and 2000 and, subsequently, in the *Journal of Agrarian Change* from 2001 onwards.\footnote{See Bernstein and Byres 2001, pp. 20–36.} These conceptually rich, but sometimes convoluted, debates raised many methodological issues on the empirics of the agrarian question in Africa. The complexity surrounding the empirical investigation of heterogeneity and rural class formation in Africa is the main motif of this paper, which also draws on the fascinating contributions to the ‘India debate’ in the 1970s on the development of capitalist agriculture and several other writings published in *JPS*.\footnote{The India debate has been wrapped up in two excellent compendia: Patnaik et al. 1978, Patnaik (ed.) 1990. Significant contributions in the methodological domain of empirically ascertaining agrarian classes and rural class formation, by way of a critique of Chayanovian ideas, are Patnaik 1988, Bardhan 1982, Athreya et al. 1987, Krishnaji 1995, all in *JPS*, Deere and de Janvry 1981.} Moreover, the fact that contemporary mainstream literature on rural Africa has been inexplicably silent on inequality, stratification and differentiation, combined with the unreliability and incompleteness of current survey evidence and agricultural statistics in Africa, provided further impulse to this research.

Particularly since the dying away of the ‘Kenya’ and ‘Tanzania’ debates, the analysis of peasants as a monolithic class, often opposed to a ‘predatory’ and ‘exploitative’ state, has characterised a wide array of contributions from neoclassical economists and neo-populist writers that have dominated studies on rural Africa and on Senegal. However, for most historical materialists and non-orthodox social scientists, rural heterogeneity, inequality and dynamic social change are essential features of agrarian structures that need to be at the centre of analysis, as Polly Hill stressed persistently from the 1970s onwards. Hill emphasised the existence and analytical necessity of inequality and indebtedness in monetised village economies, the importance of farm labour markets, the existence of several forms of differentiation and warned about the dangerous implications of treating the notion of the ‘household’ as...
universal and unproblematic. More recently, a gloomy light at the end of the tunnel seems to appear even within mainstream circles, as a larger number of studies bring heterogeneity, especially in the form of landholding inequality, back into the analysis. For instance, Barrett et al. clearly point out that ‘interhousehold heterogeneity in constraints and incentives must factor prominently in any sensible explanation of observed diversification behaviours’. Jayne et al. observe significant and growing inequalities in landholding among smallholders, casting doubts on the supposed homogeneity of the smallholding population. Landholding inequality can be broken down into two main sources: first, inequality between the tails of the social distribution, that is between a class of relatively large cultivators and a class of landless or quasi-landless, sub-economic farming units; second, within the mass of so-called ‘smallholders’ for whom the range of acreage is wide enough to encompass significant differences in terms of food self-sufficiency, production efficiency, crop patterns and labour use.

In this context, the classification of farmers into groups should be context-specific and tailored to analytical purposes. Hence, farmers’ taxonomies should be seen as heuristic devices to organise the analysis of processes, structures and agency in the context of rural Africa. Indeed, this was the intention in our case study of large- and mid-scale farmers in Senegal. The construction of a typology of farmers and households from survey data is intended to be a mid-point in the analysis of rural class formation and specific trajectories of accumulation – it is not the end point.

As illustrated in the diagram below, the research process in the empirical investigation of rural classes and forms of production may follow three distinct stages. This paper is concerned with one of these stages, arguably a critical one. It is common to start from size categories, which help to establish preliminary distinctions between allegedly different forms of production. Categories on the basis of farm size are the most typical way of classifying farmers, in taxonomies similar to the one shown in the diagram: a continuum

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16 Indeed, in the West-African context, different types of households and forms of social organisation coexist so any notion of an ‘average’ household would be deeply misleading. See Hill 1986, p. 82. See also O’Laughlin 1995.


19 In a review article of several village studies in Africa, Wiggins points out that farmers’ differentiation, seldom investigated in depth, is more closely associated with access to capital, labour, liquidity or any institutional arrangements to bear risk than with land or other natural resources. Wiggins 2000, pp. 638–9.
Figure 1. Research process in the empirical study of classes of farmers in Senegal

Starting from a farm-size or production scale criterion → sampling

NB: We focus on this range

Quasi-landless (labourers) → Smallholders – small petty commodity producers → Mid-scale (peasant) farmers → Large farmers

Conventional dichotomy

‘Traditional’ accumulators → ‘Modern’ accumulators

Empirical debates on agrarian capitalism → sets of specific criteria

Quantitative analysis of empirical criteria:
Methods: Descriptive, ANOVA and factor analysis → iterative classifications

‘Tendencies’

Non-capitalist → Semi-capitalist → Capitalist

Qualitative analysis: observation and life histories → triangulation with previous quantitative exercises. Immediate objectives:
1) Exploring differences between and within identified classes;
2) Identifying concrete and stereotypical historically contingent accumulation paths and ‘narratives’

Marabouts: Religious dignitaries

Other ‘traditional’ landlords

Capitalists from below I: the ‘educated’ farmer → Capitalists from above I: Bureaucrat-farmer from rural elite

Semi-capitalist mid-scale petty commodity producers → Capitalists from below and above II: trader-farmers
between (quasi-)landless workers and large-scale farmers. In this study, I deliberately focused on a category that is seldom analysed in the African literature because of the standard assumption that they only constitute a ‘distinct minority’. Moving from standard size-scale classifications to conceptually and empirically more appropriate categories is the aim of the second stage of the research process. It consists of breaking down the overall class of large- and mid-scale farmers into categories that incorporate different features of the concrete form of production to which these farmers may belong within their sociohistorical context. It is like a snapshot of much higher resolution than the one given by farm size. For this purpose, the identification and application of meaningful criteria based on a historical-materialist conceptualisation of the agrarian classes become important tasks in this process. The scope of this paper lies in the second stage, that is, in the quantitative exercise of creating classifications (a synchronic analysis) and as heuristic devices to inform a subsequent richer and more definite diachronic study of phenomena. The latter task is illustrated in the third stage: here, a qualitative analysis based on repeat surveys, long-term fieldwork, life histories and/or other ethnographic methods is carried out in order to explore differences between and within identified classes in more depth, so as to recognise concrete and stereotypical historically contingent accumulation paths.

The findings and methodological discussion offered in this paper should be considered within the context of a field study undertaken by the author in 1998–9 in the Groundnut Basin of Senegal. This field research consisted of a survey of sixty-four large and mid-scale groundnut farmers [gros producteurs], their households and a sample of forty seasonal workers. The purposes were to investigate agrarian structures, the features of different classes of gros producteurs and their implications for an understanding of social change, and farmers’ responses to the context of neoliberal reforms and state disengagement from agriculture during the 1980s and 1990s. The study had to face the
additional challenges that analyses of agrarian questions in Africa generally needed to tackle over the last two decades. First, the generalised economic and agricultural crisis and stagnation that has characterised many countries from the mid-1970s and exacerbated during the 1980s and early 1990s by the widespread application of structural adjustment packages. These reforms entailed the minimisation of the role of the state in development and various forms of market liberalisation and deregulation. Second, the lack of reliable and disaggregated socio-economic statistics that would permit a powerful empirical challenge to conventional approaches based on the myth of the average representative smallholder farmer. Third, the diversity of production conditions and its social forms and processes in different parts of rural Africa. Fourth, the relative scarcity of studies on rural class formation, large/rich farmers/peasants and rural labour markets on which to draw.

The concrete period of fieldwork (1996–8) and the period analysed (1980–99) witnessed the crisis of the groundnut sector as a whole and the progressive implementation of agricultural liberalisation, privatisation and withdrawal of the state from key credit and input-distribution roles. The focus of our study was the crisis of the groundnut sector, once the cornerstone of the Senegalese economy and the key livelihood source for the majority of rural people. This sector was particularly affected by the structural adjustment and liberalisation process, manifested in decreasing levels of output, acreage, productivity and exports. The lack of sufficiently disaggregated analyses of the agricultural sector and the relative neglect of large- and mid-scale farmers [gros producteurs] from official statistics and surveys, despite their control of significant shares of marketed output and their direct and indirect influence...
on government policies for the groundnut sector, underpinned my decision to focus on this group.26

In the following section, we introduce the existence of markedly different production conditions within a sample of large- and mid-scale farmers, and discuss the relevance of a class analysis in this context and for this sample of farmers in Senegal. Subsequently, the core of the paper will revive the ‘Indian debate’ focusing on the methodological issues concerning the application of criteria to obtain meaningful taxonomies of large- and mid-scale farmers to identify capitalist and non-capitalist forms of production. The resulting classification, its statistical strength and usefulness provide support to the main arguments in this paper: a) that undifferentiated analyses of agricultural production at the household level and b) simplistic clustering on the basis of farm size conceal significant dynamics, which should be examined in more depth. A section with concluding remarks and practical lessons will follow at the end of the paper.

Towards a class analysis of Senegalese agriculture: a focus on large- and mid-scale farmers

The empirical identification of classes is a complex exercise. One should avoid oversimplified class analyses, inspired by a relatively abstract notion of the opposition between capitalists and proletarians, defined in terms of their relationship to means of production. In advanced capitalist contexts, forms of social stratification have been shown to be diverse and complex, so that the identification of particular class positions and power relations remains a challenging empirical exercise.27 The theoretical and empirical challenges inherent to the study of class formation, relations and conflict cannot be resolved, as Bottomore notes, using Marx’s words, by the ‘passe-partout of a historical philosophical theory but by an analysis in each separate case of the empirically given circumstances’.28

In a rural context, distinguishing between landless peasants (farm workers), smallholder peasants (or small petty commodity producers), middle peasants

26 See Oya 2001 for an estimate of existing land/production concentration and a justification of a focus on large- and mid-scale farmers in the Senegalese context.
27 Wright 1997.
28 Bottomore 1991, p. 87.
(richer petty commodity producers), rich large landlord-farmers, and capitalist farmers may be straightforward. However, class boundaries are not always unambiguous between these common categories and heterogeneity also exists within them. Overlaps and a complexity of class locations, particularly among smallholder and middle peasants, may be very common indeed.

The notion of ‘class’ itself, as applied to rural Africa, is often found objectionable. In fact, many authors working on West Africa have stressed the fact that it was ‘strangerhood’, not class, which constituted the basis for differentiation, especially in Ghana and Nigeria. Berry also talks about ‘commoditization without dispossession’ with reference to Anglophone West Africa and focuses on social networks and kin groups as the most relevant units of analysis. Nonetheless, these West African particularities do not preclude the necessity of devising ‘classes’ of farmers beyond idealistic or abstract notions of ‘class’ in societies that are well integrated in the world capitalist system of relations of production and exchange.

In studies on Senegal, the main rural categories are summarised only in two or three groups: (i) average poor/small farmers; (ii) middle farmers; (iii) large farmers (or ‘prosperous peasants’), mainly marabouts. Yung goes further and classifies paysans aisés into two sub-classes, according to the origins of their primitive accumulation: peasant-traders, who base their accumulation on farming; and agricultural entrepreneurs, usually from urban and merchant capital origins. Initially, our research did not aim at describing Senegalese social structures in general. One of the themes of our extensive field research was the extent to which the crisis of the groundnut sector, protracted since

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30 Particularly elucidating in this respect is the chapter on classes and exploitation in Kitching 1980 pp. 438–55. See also Bernstein 2000, p. 30.
31 The concept of ‘strangerhood’ stems from the fact that more obvious processes of differentiation occurred in areas where migrant labour from other countries looked for work and land, thereby creating at the same time subordinate semi-proletarian classes and new entrepreneurs. Hill 1986, p. 161; Copans 1980.
32 Berry 1993. She also rightly emphasises the significance of ‘vertical differentiation’ within kin groups and social networks, one of the reasons why sometimes inequalities and ‘classes’ cannot easily be discerned at first glance. See Berry 1993, pp. 148–58. In the Senegalese context, these forms of concealed differentiation are common.
33 This term comes from the widely used French phrase ‘paysans aisés’, also often translated as ‘rich peasants’.
35 See Diop 1985, Boone 1992, Thioub et al. 1998 for attempts to describe social structures at a general level, without much disaggregation.
the late 1970s, was felt by different classes of farmers, and what distinguished some farmers from others in terms of performance and economic-political responses.

The concept of large- and mid-scale is relative and varies from country to country. We tried to make this concept meaningful for different areas of the Groundnut Basin, by adapting the existing notion of ‘gros producteurs’ (large producers of groundnuts and cereals) – in other words, the question of ‘how big is big?’ – to local circumstances. Unsurprisingly, it turned out that ‘big’ farmers in more fertile and densely populated areas of the Groundnut Basin were significantly smaller than ‘big’ farmers in more arid zones of the centre and north of the Groundnut Basin. Furthermore, in order to make sure that we constructed a reliable sampling frame, we combined information from the villages, about the identity of the ‘large’ farmers, together with (allegedly) confidential information from marketing agencies about the deliveries of groundnut output in the previous season by farmers and their purchase of seed.

The resulting sample displayed interesting general characteristics of which we stress the following. First, most large- and mid-scale farmers live in extended families – close to the Wolof concept of *keur*, that is, the large family compound – with an average number of twenty people. However, at the two extremes, we find a small sub-group of mid-scale farmers with households closer to the Western definition of a nuclear household unit, but still polygynous, and another sub-group of religious notables, who draw on a very large number of non-kin-related dependants to make up the farming unit (up to 150 people). Thus, the definition of the household is deemed to vary across large- and mid-scale farmers according to different forms of social organisation of production and consumption. As shown in Appendix A, most households are polygynous, even many of the ones we later identify as ‘capitalist’ or...
‘semi-capitalist’.\textsuperscript{39} This is not surprising in the rural Senegalese context, where there is a strong association between wealth and polygyny.\textsuperscript{40}

Second, the range of farm sizes and production scales is also wide: from mid-scale farms of 10–40 hectares to farmers with more than 100 hectares and output levels of 5–10 and 70–100 tons of groundnuts respectively.\textsuperscript{41} This variety of cases should make us wary of gross generalisations about the \textit{gros producteurs} of Senegal. More significantly, \textit{gros producteurs} are not only heterogeneous in terms of social organisation of production, size and scale but also in terms of production performance, measured as land productivity. This measure of performance is just an initial step and by no means a precise indicator of differentiation, because land productivity, in physical yields, is an outcome of combinations of many factors, some of which are not associated with the type of farmer, rather with ‘external’ environmental conditions and temporary contingencies that are often out of the control of the producer. In any case, there is a stark contrast between low-productivity farms – in the range of 430–600kg/hectare – and high-productivity farms, with an average of nearly 1,200kg/ha. After controlling for significant agro-ecological differences, our results show that the features that appear more prominently in a distinction between \textit{good} and \textit{average} performers are:\textsuperscript{42} scale of production, reliance on hired labour (particularly seasonal wage-labour), fertiliser application rates, and proportion of marketed surplus, both for groundnuts and cereals.\textsuperscript{43}

Therefore, amid heterogeneity, a proto-capitalist class can still be discerned in the Senegalese context. Higher physical yields are also manifested in higher gross cash margins per hectare, net of input purchases. The fact that the scale of production, measured in metric tons produced rather than in farm size, and the proportion of marketed production are very significant correlates of

\textsuperscript{39} Only one of the sixty-four farmers was monogamous. Indeed, polygyny is very common among richer rural people, so it is not surprising that different types of large and mid-scale farmers share this feature. As we will argue later, it is the relative reliance on family (unpaid) labour that differentiates between these polygynous households.

\textsuperscript{40} See Venema 1978 and Diop 1981.

\textsuperscript{41} See final row in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. In my sample, there are nearly sixty per cent of farmers in a mid-scale range of 10–50 hectares. The rest are individual large-scale farmers, not corporate agri-business, who farm over 50 hectares. Guyer 1997, in her study of Nigeria, presents a sample of mid-scale farmers in the range of 8–40 hectares as well. In her study, the majority of the largest farms (over 50 ha.) were corporate agribusiness.

\textsuperscript{42} See Appendix A.3 for definitions.

\textsuperscript{43} See Table A.3 in Appendix.
better productivity performance, indicates a virtuous circle between expanded accumulation and efficiency, which runs against myths of inverse relationship between farm size and productivity.\footnote{We will not enter this debate in this article. See Dyer 2004 for a recent reappraisal of the inverse relationship hypothesis and its bearings on land reform advocacy.} It also suggests that, within a sample of large- and mid-scale farmers, those who are more efficient share the characteristics of typically (proto-)capitalist farmers. It is not clear what comes first, either the change in production relations, reflected in more reliance on wage-labour, or the actual performance associated with expanded accumulation, which increases the demand for wage-labour and frees family labour for other activities and purposes.

In spite of the relative stagnation of production among the sampled large-middle farmers (LMF) for the reference period (late 1990s) – consistent with national economic trends – the LMF sample showed consistently higher yields, somewhat different cropping patterns, more systematic area expansion (in the medium term), capital accumulation and superior access to inputs such as fertilisers, seed and fungicides if compared with the majority of ‘small’ farmers (defined as those producing on less than 2–3 hectares).\footnote{The basis of comparison is a combination of national statistical sources which draw on samples of small farmers, and other micro-studies that took place in the same period. See Freud et al. 1997, Gaye 1998.} In other words, on average, large- and mid-scale farmers seem to have suffered less from current unfavourable trends in comparison with a class of smallholders. This may suggest two, not-so-obvious points: (i) large-middle farmers differ significantly from small poorer farmers in their scale, organisation and performance, and; (ii) large-middle producers are more dynamic and efficient \emph{on average}.\footnote{It is worth stressing again that the \textit{average} may not be so meaningful, unless it is acknowledged that a sub-group of large and middle farmers attain productivity levels typical of very poor and less viable farmers.}

The point is that, even if grouping by size is sensible, one should not stop here. The first statistical snapshot shows that, within large- and mid-scale farmers, we can identify examples of ‘traditional accumulators’ and (proto-) ‘capitalist’ farmers.\footnote{Byres 2003, p. 55. See also Sender and Smith 1990, Cheater 1984.} Further distinctions can be based on a large number of criteria, as will be argued in the following section. However, in the context of heterogeneous relations of production in the countryside, ‘the patterns of surplus extraction are the most revealing indicators of the elements of class’.\footnote{Deere and de Janvry 1979, p. 610.}

In other words, the way different large farmers and rich peasants extract
surplus and accumulate provide indications about their particular class locations within the peasantry and their tendencies toward a specific form of production. These patterns are associated with forms of labour mobilisation, land acquisition and capital accumulation via re-investment or other means. We will come back to this crucial point in the following section. Finally, the classification of farmers into classes and sub-classes that emerges in this paper has a mainly instrumental value, insofar as it provides the statistical basis for more in-depth analysis of qualitative evidence, leading to a more informative political-economic analysis of the changes that occurred since the beginning of agricultural adjustment and liberalisation in Senegal, and for possible answers to the questions mentioned above.49

On the criteria for classifying farmers

In this section, the main aim is to cover the key parameters of the debate on the appropriate criteria to classify farmers in general, and to characterise capitalist tendencies in particular among large- and mid-scale farmers of the sort presented in the previous section. There are five main points to make. First, the debate about the criteria to classify farmers focuses on the instruments available to address two questions: how to create theoretically and empirically meaningful farmer taxonomies; and how to characterise and define ‘capitalist’ farmers in different agrarian structures. Second, there is a trade-off between opting for one or a few straightforward classificatory criteria versus preferring combinations of several criteria. Third, we have a choice between dichotomous or continuous criteria. For example, one can use the criterion of wage-labour use, as a ‘yes’/‘no’ dichotomy or as a percentage of total labour use (a continuous variable). Fourth, there is a need to adapt generally acceptable criteria to local specificities as well as to adopt new, less usual, criteria if they are particularly relevant for the area or sample studied. Fifth, the final outcome is expected to be a mode of classifying farming households or farmers, that is, a heuristic device that needs to be assessed with respect to its usefulness in addressing other outcomes (such as performance, price responsiveness, speed of accumulation, and so on), processes, relations and structures, that can only be addressed with qualitative narratives of stereotypical experiences.

Most researchers tend to classify farmers using the criteria of farm size, wealth, capital ownership or integration in the market.50 Farm size is probably

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49 Some results of this analysis are published in Oya 2001.
50 A simple classification in the African context is given by UNCTAD 1999. UNCTAD
rightly considers agricultural production relations and institutions as very diverse, but farmers are divided into only three distinct ‘forms of production’: first, smallholder production, second, large-scale capitalist farming (including agribusiness), and third, large-scale state farms, a category that is fast disappearing with the consolidation of the neoliberal agenda in government policy across the sub-continent. See also Christiansen 1999.

(i) the nature of labour appropriation, that is, forms of labour mobilisation and labour surplus appropriation, and (ii) the degree of reliance on their own means of production (including land) as opposed to labour-power. Property and production relations usually depend on a range of factors, of which labour mobilisation, farm size, access to physical and financial capital and marketable surplus constitute the core aspects. On the basis of these factors, a broad stratification may not be too difficult for the entire population distribution. Nevertheless, it is a different (and more difficult) exercise to attempt a classification of farmers within one of the allegedly homogeneous ‘categories’ (rich/middle/small poor farmers, large/middle/smallholders). Indeed, choosing the right criteria to classify large- and mid-scale farmers as capitalist, non-capitalist, successful accumulators, technologically dynamic, and so forth, is a hazardous process. In fact, as Sender and Smith note:

[U]nlike the distinction between poor proletarian and poor non proletarian households, based simply upon the presence or absence of a manual agricultural wage worker, no such straightforward criterion can be devised to separate capitalists from non-capitalists, because the effects of inheritance and utilization of assets are inextricably intertwined.

The criteria to be used to distinguish, for instance, a rich capitalist farmer (or ‘successful accumulator’) from a ‘traditional’ rich landlord and/or from a middle-peasant farmer will have to be properly put into context, in other words, they will require an understanding of the typical patterns of accumulation in a particular social formation. Once a preliminary list of

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51 Especially the exponents of the ‘India debate’ cited below.
52 Sender and Smith 1990, p. 78.
53 Sender and Smith 1990, p. 78. Kitching also notes that: ‘Marx’s “working class” or “proletariat”, just like his “capitalist class” is an analytical abstraction’, and detailed empirical analyses with ‘real’ categories is harder when ‘the socially necessary labour time is extremely heterogeneous’, Kitching 1980, pp. 441, 448.
potential criteria is selected, an iterative process follows, in which different sets of criteria are considered until an appropriate classification is achieved.\textsuperscript{54}

For any sample or relevant sub-strata, it is problematic to rely on a single criterion. The ‘India debate’ tackled directly the question of the criteria and conditions under which the capitalist farmer can be identified.\textsuperscript{55} In the debate swirling around the appropriate (combination of) criteria, particularly enlightening is the discussion in Patnaik, which results in a call for caution against the use of unduly rigid criteria and hypotheses.\textsuperscript{56} Rudra et al. prefer a combination of criteria and test the existence of a ‘capitalist farmer’ by examining correlations in pairs between the five different criteria.\textsuperscript{57} Patnaik and especially Rao criticise the rigid and static approach of Rudra et al. on the grounds that, within a non-capitalist system, forms of capitalist development, in terms of tendencies, may emerge; and argue that their criteria ‘would make sense only in an unreal idealized world in which different classes existed only in their purest form’.\textsuperscript{58} An ‘ideal-type’ capitalist farmer would be defined, according to Rao, as a ‘farmer who uses hired labour for the process of producing commodities and utilizes a substantial part of his surplus for his business either to deepen the capital or to widen it’.\textsuperscript{59}

For a large sample of a differentiated population and not just a sub-stratum of, for example, big farmers, Patnaik’s labour-hiring criterion appears as one of the most convincing criteria to distinguish between classes of farmers.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{54} In the sense that differences between groups are much larger than differences within groups. Technically, different statistical techniques such as ANOVA, factor and principal component analysis, can be used to ascertain statistically meaningful groups.

\textsuperscript{55} See the collection of essays in Patnaik 1990, and Thorner 1982, Bharadwaj 1985, Sender and Smith 1986. Marx treats the ‘genesis’ of the capitalist farmers in a very short and clear chapter in Capital: see Marx 1887, Vol. I, Chapter 29, p. 364. Marx’s account refers to the English path in which the capitalist tenant farmer grows rich at the expense of his labourers and landlords, through a context-specific combination of factors over centuries. For the purposes of this analysis, we draw on the ‘India debate’ because it showed generally more clarity and greater focus on issues of empirical operationality for the discussion of ‘ideal’ and ‘real’ typologies than, for example, the ‘Kenya debate’.

\textsuperscript{56} Patnaik 1990.

\textsuperscript{57} Rudra et al. 1990, p. 28. The selected criteria are: a higher rate of cash expenditure on wages; greater intensity in the use of modern farm machinery/tools (per acre); greater market orientation, that is, marketed output as a percentage of total produce; greater cash margins (profits) per acre. Rudra et al. find that correlations between these variables are weak in their sample of big farmers and therefore conclude that capitalist farmers cannot be found in the sample studied.

\textsuperscript{58} Patnaik 1990, p. 47. See also, Rao 1990.

\textsuperscript{59} Rao 1990, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{60} The advantages of this method have been shown in other works on India, such as Srivastava 1989, Athreya et al. 1987, Olsen 1999. However, it is always necessary
The labour-hiring criterion refers to the extent to which farmers are mainly exploiters of others’ labour-power, or exploited by others, or self-employed. For this purpose, the labour time hired in and out (paid in cash or kind) and the relative amounts of land leased in or out (translated into terms of labour use), provide the statistical support to the classification.\(^61\) Nevertheless, as Patnaik and others have often pointed out, this criterion is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition to identify a capitalist farmer among middle- and large-scale producers. There are other possible combinations of criteria, depending on the focus, the sample and the country. Starting from a classification based on the labour exploitation index, Patnaik applies statistical discriminant analysis that compares classes by pairs with respect to a set of relevant criteria, of which the most important are: (i) capital resource endowment, in terms of access to means of production (value of modern powered equipment and assets), which, in our research, we call a ‘means of production index’; (ii) land productivity in value (profitability); and, (iii) proportion of marketed output.\(^62\) Alternatively, Bharadwaj, while acknowledging the importance of region- and period-specific considerations, restricts the criteria to access to resources (land) and degree of integration into the markets (level of marketed surplus).\(^63\) For a sample of large farmers, Sender and Smith started with a single criterion – purchased cultivated land as a feature of capitalist farmers – which resulted in an unacceptable grouping, because some farmers displayed clearly non-capitalist features (hiring out labour and no education). A combination of this criterion with another ‘soft’ indicator of education (having at least one literate person) and a proxy for the labour exploitation index produced much more sound results.\(^64\) In the conceptual framework for the empirical analysis of peasants proposed by Deere and de Janvry, the focus is on the precise forms of surplus appropriation, which operate as criteria to distinguish between and within non-producing classes and direct producers, that is, between and within dominant and...

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\(^62\) Patnaik 1988, p. 309.
\(^63\) Bharadwaj 1985, p. 11.
\(^64\) Sender and Smith 1990, p. 79.
subordinate classes. Thus, surplus extraction can appear as rent in labour services, rent in kind (sharecropping), rent in cash, derived from the control over land, extraction of surplus-value (if wage-labour is used), and extraction via terms of trade (exereted by merchant capital and other rich farmers).65

From the discussion above it seems clear that one of the critical choices is between: (i) one or few simple criteria, and (ii) combinations of several criteria, both complemented by a narrative of long-term processes. One or few criteria to classify large-middle farmers may have the advantage of presenting classifications or dichotomies (in the case of one criterion) that are easier to interpret and apply in practice. However, when differences between farmers are only in degree and differentiation takes very specific and historically contingent forms, a limited number of criteria may be inappropriate. In our survey sample, it seemed appropriate to combine the labour-hiring criterion, adapted to the region- and sample-specific conditions, with other criteria that have been suggested earlier, for example, technological dynamism/capital intensification (means of production index), scale of production (rather than farm size), patterns of land appropriation and use, farmers’ education, ratios of marketed output, wealth, and the ‘nature’ of marketed surplus, whether truly commercial or ‘distress’ in character.66 With all these considerations in mind, the final selection of criteria for this study was the following:

i) **Nature of labour relations:** defined in terms of the percentage of labour done by wage-labourers, in particular, but also by contract (paid/hired) labourers in general (including labour tenants), in comparison with family or ‘unpaid’ labour.67 In other words, the degree of reliance on wage-/hired labour as opposed to family or other forms of unpaid labour. It is important to note here that this is not the same as Patnaik’s labour exploitation criterion, which was designed to stratify a whole village population from the poorest to the richest. As our sample contains relatively better-off farmers – that is, some ‘middle’ and mostly ‘rich’ peasants according to conventional taxonomies – the labour criterion must be modified and adapted. In the West-African context, as well as in Senegal, wealthier, large-middle households rarely, if ever, have members working for wages in agriculture.68 What allows us to make distinctions among these farmers

66 Patnaik 1990; Cheater 1984; Dyer 1997, p. 50; Sender and Smith 1990, p. 56.
67 This criterion refers to the classical condition for capitalist relations, that is, _free_ labour as a commodity in a context of exchange.
68 Obviously, skilled, higher-wage employment categories are more common among
is the pattern of labour mobilisation, particularly the extent to which they depend on hired (wage- and tenant labourers) or family (and other unpaid) labour. In other words, this criterion alone can offer hints as to whether a particular large-middle farmer is closer to a petty commodity producer (PCP) or to a ‘peasant capitalist’. \(^\text{69}\)

ii) **Patterns of land use/ownership**: land purchases and percentage of ‘capitalist’ leased-in plots (cash-leasing) out of total operated land (as opposed to inherited land or land acquired under customary law). In other words, investments in land accumulation.

iii) **Degree of capitalisation** or ‘means of production index’, including light and heavy machinery, transport and draught animals (the latter are useful as a proxy for reinvestment of surplus and accumulation).

iv) **Education**: personal achievement and investment in children’s education.

v) **Surplus use patterns**: defined as the balance between consumer (luxury) durable goods and means of production.

These criteria were combined, taking into account the sample characteristics, in other words, the distribution of the selected variables across the sample. Instead of creating dichotomies for each criterion, a measure of ‘extent’ or ‘degree’ was preferred, in order to preserve relevant empirical information about the particular position of farmers in each criterion. Moreover, since the boundaries between the resulting classes cannot be clear-cut in a context of dynamic differentiation, using dichotomies would be empirically inappropriate as it would create excessively rigid and artificial divides. Consequently, a set of minimum cut-off points was estimated for each criterion, by considering the moments of the sample distribution. Thus, a respondent might qualify as ‘capitalist’ because of his relative position, compared to the cut-off point (for example, minimum means of production score, minimum reliance on hired labour, minimum degree of capitalisation, and so on). The combination of the five criteria noted above placed respondents in different clusters for analytical purposes. This heuristic device allowed drawing preliminary

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\(^\text{69}\) We prefer this term to ‘large-scale capitalist agricultural enterprises’. During fieldwork, it became obvious that large-middle farmers in Senegal rarely resemble the ‘ideal’ modern large-scale agricultural enterprise we find in industrial countries or in South Africa. Similar farmers are found among the mid-scale farmers studied by Guyer 1997. See also Bernstein and Byres 2001, pp. 20–1.
classifications, which could be corrected and qualified once the overall results were scrutinised. The techniques to combine different criteria in order to identify classes may be more or less sophisticated. We used a mixture of statistical techniques to create composite indexes for the selected indicators and guide the estimate of cut-off points (principal components and discriminant analysis) but we applied more intuitive and easier-to-interpret rules in order to fine-tune the classification in three different categories along a continuum of tendencies from non-capitalist to (proto-)capitalist. A consideration of each of these criteria and a discussion of their relevance to this particular rural context follows.

Labour relations

The pattern of surplus appropriation through labour relations is a very good indicator of the type of large or rich farmer. In Senegal, labour arrangements are varied. Although the literature usually ignores or downplays the existence of labour markets – that is, of different forms of labour hiring – the purposive collection of quantitative and qualitative evidence with a focus on social and political relations showed that the existence of village labour markets is well established. Arguably, conventional surveys do not ask the right questions to a large number of small-middle peasants on labour arrangements, so the image of farming done on the basis of family or unpaid labour is pervasive. Moreover, the largest farmers, as was found in our fieldwork, are systematically missed out from most large-scale official and micro-household surveys. We identified several forms of labour hiring and we used the features of these arrangements to classify farmers according to their tendency towards capitalist labour hiring.

There were forms of casual wage-labour performed by individuals from the same village, usually smaller farmers, sometimes including their own farm implements and draught animals. If they were hired with equipment, wages were significantly higher per day of work. This form of labour hiring was more common among incipient capitalist or semi-capitalist farmers who had not yet accumulated enough means of production but had access to significant tracts of land. A more common form of casual wage-labour is manual labour performed for weeding and harvesting, individually or in

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70 Oya 2001, p. 129.
groups (sas for land preparation and firdou for harvesting). More established and richer dynamic farmers had a greater proportion of labour carried out by seasonal wage-labour [mbindane], resident in their farms during the agricultural season, usually lasting 5–8 months. Historically, labour tenants [navetanes] have been one of the most common forms of hired labour, albeit progressively losing out to seasonal wage-labourers. Their recruitment varies from farmer to farmer, often depending on the availability of land and seed to pay these workers. In fact, rich peasants, controlling very large tracts of land but less resourceful in cash and tools, were more keen to rely on labour tenants. Broadly speaking, these forms of labour use pertain to ‘capitalist’ forms of accumulation, while the labour appropriation described below is more typical of ‘traditional’ idioms of surplus appropriation in the Senegalese context.

Forms of labour use typical of ‘traditional’ idioms of accumulation are based on social networks, such as collective labour exchanges [santaane] or on other forms of unpaid labour. Santaane seemed more common among smallholders who could not afford to pay for hired labour, but were rarely used by large- or mid-scale farmers, especially those displaying capitalist tendencies. Still, some wealthy farmers organised working parties, offering a meal and a social gathering, on the basis of their power in the village as rural notables. Obviously these wealthy farmers never participated in working parties for others in sign of reciprocity. A particular, and very common, form of unpaid labour is the arrangement that is usually applied by marabouts in their fields, either with their own talibe (religious disciples and Koranic students) from the same village or different parts of the country, or through the Koranic schools [daara], which usually rely on unpaid child labour. In theory, this is a form of surplus appropriation based on ideological (religious) exploitation, but it is also worth noting that the talibe obtain land and some form of ‘risk insurance’ from their marabouts apart from ‘blessing and prayers’. In this sense, labour services to the marabout can be partly seen as a land-related rent.

For the purposes of our synchronic analysis, a cut-off point in terms of percentage of labour done by hired labour (forms of wage-labour and labour

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71 Often, these remunerated work groups, especially the firdou at the end of the season, are formed by seasonal migrants from neighbouring regions and countries (particularly Casamance, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia and Guinea-Conakry).

72 On power relations in labour exchange and working parties in Senegal, see Venema 1978.
tenancy) as opposed to unpaid or family labour was estimated. This criterion proved extremely useful in differentiating between (proto-)capitalist and non-capitalist tendencies and, although it was not considered in isolation, it became a good predictor of successful capitalist accumulation.

Patterns of land use and land acquisition

Consideration of how relevant the farm-size criterion is for a sample of large- and mid-scale farmers hinges upon specific socio-ecological circumstances. Pressure on land in Senegal is generally circumscribed to particular locations, notably some areas around the irrigated schemes in the Senegal River and the heartland of the Groundnut Basin between the Dakar-Kaolack axis and the border with Gambia. The quality of land is indeed a problem, especially in the centre-north, where rainfall patterns have deteriorated over the last four decades. Low land fertility combined with scarce application of biochemical yield-enhancing inputs lead to two different kinds of processes, depending on the class of farmer. On the one hand, unfavourable environment conditions may force poor farmers to an exodus to towns and some rich peasants to concentrate on other activities. On the other hand, the same process may push some richer farmers to look for alternative, more fertile, plots in different areas, by investing cash, either in leasing or in purchase. In our sample, within similar farm-size ranges, different patterns of land acquisition were found. These patterns of land appropriation would also suggest elements intrinsic to different class locations among large-middle farmers, independently from landholding size. Land appropriation methods are important aspects of any accumulation pattern but they do not necessarily determine a particular typology. Sender and Smith note that a farmer with a large inherited acreage may not invest in new land or improve the land available with new techniques, but he may well use resources to accumulate other assets and become a ‘successful accumulator’. In the Senegalese context, we may hypothesise that ‘traditional’ landlords or marabouts, usually the
largest farmers in size, whose economic power is not initially based on entrepreneurship and capitalist accumulation, are not forced or willing to invest extra cash in acquiring more land or plots in more fertile areas. Therefore, they lack capitalist traits. However, it may well be the case that some of these farmers become dynamic accumulators with time and change patterns of labour mobilisation. Thus the land-use criterion may be problematic in isolation.

In the context of the areas surveyed, farmers who were either willing or forced by circumstances to invest cash in land acquisition (through purchase or annual lease) were usually regarded as farmer-entrepreneurs, that is, farmers who based their accumulation on economic power and the drive to compete for land. However, a majority of farmers in the sample, and indeed the least dynamic ones, inherited the land they used or were given concessions by the local councils. Marabouts had also inherited or obtained rights to large tracts of land on the basis of their role as representatives of large Islamic brotherhoods in the countryside. Relying on this criterion alone would not have resulted in appropriate classifications, but combined with the other criteria, the differences between groups become very clear.

Capital accumulation: a means of production index

Another way of distinguishing between dynamic capitalist accumulators and less dynamic ‘conservative’ farmers is to look at the efforts shown in using a larger number of and more sophisticated means of production, which could result in higher and less volatile yields per hectare. A ‘means of production index’, constructed with a list of farm tools, other farm equipment, cattle, means of transport and stock, was used to differentiate between large-middle farmers. Some items (cars, tractors, trucks, very large numbers of cattle) received higher weight to reflect the economic value of these means of production, their scarcity in the Senegalese context as well as their intrinsic value as long-term investment assets. The means of production index resulted in rankings from higher to lower capitalisation that matched other criteria well. Together with labour-hiring practices, this index turned out to be the most reasonable and effective classificatory tool.

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76 This is also because some of these farmers come from urban origins, are educated bureaucrats or are dynamic peasants who can afford to expand their acreage towards more fertile areas. Some of these dynamic farmers may represent a form of ‘merchant road’ in the transition to capitalist agriculture. See Byres 2003, p. 76.

77 The age of these assets and the frequency of their renewal were taken into account in the calculation of the index.
Education

Although, *a priori*, the education of the farmer is not necessarily an unambiguous proxy for entrepreneurship and capitalist tendencies in the Senegalese context, a composite index of different education indicators (education score) was very useful to differentiate the sample and distinguish more ‘successful and capitalist accumulators’ from ‘traditional wealthy farmers’ and mid-scale petty commodity producers. Indeed, there were differences in education scores, reflected in access to public education by the farmers themselves and their decisions to invest in the education of their children, including daughters. The correlation between these indicators and other measures of success in accumulation (means of production index and yields per hectare) was very significant, suggesting that there was a cluster of better educated farmers who tended to exhibit other significant capitalist tendencies and signs of dynamic accumulation.

Conspicuous consumption versus re-investment

Most farmers in our sample were wealthy by the standards of the area and villages visited, and, still, there were important differences amongst them. Some were very wealthy and others only moderately rich. A possessions score ranging from 0 to 32 points was established on the basis of different types of assets: (i) consumer durables; (ii) house conditions; and, (iii) high-value means of production and productive assets. The sampled farmers displayed different surplus use patterns, controlling for wealth; some tended to accumulate luxury consumption goods, while others preferred to invest more in productive assets for their farming and trade. Some rich local dignitaries and marabouts often rely on the ‘demonstration effect’ of luxury goods to attract more followers, who form the base of their accumulation strategies. The proportion of means of production score in the total composite wealth index (resulting from the sum of the three categories) was used to proxy a more dynamic pattern of surplus use, more geared towards capital accumulation and farm investment.78

78 The ‘means of production score’ factored in the age of productive assets and whether they were acquired new or used. More frequent renewal of means of production increased the score, other things being equal.
Combining criteria to create ‘classes’

Once all the cut-off points were established, the final stage consisted of clustering sampled farmers according to a matrix of combinations of criteria. Essentially, once criteria are chosen, we could have let the data speak for themselves and apply factor analysis in order to identify statistical clusters. Instead, we opted for a use of criteria driven by theory and concepts, that is, giving more importance (but not absolute prominence) to labour-use patterns, capitalisation and re-investment of surplus.

Along a continuum of ‘tendencies’, we highlighted three classes: non-capitalist, containing farmers who met none or only one of the core criteria overall; semi-capitalist, including producers who displayed combinations of two or three of the criteria, above all labour hiring; capitalist, consisting of farmers who met all the core criteria and all or almost all the rest.\(^7\)\(^9\) The core criteria, that is, labour hiring, capitalisation and surplus-use patterns, were used as key discriminating factors because they were most strongly correlated with other signs of dynamic accumulation and entrepreneurship in the sample and in the Senegalese context. The land acquisition criterion was very useful but it was also sensitive to regional specificities – in other words, in some areas, the practice of land purchase or ‘capitalist leasing’ was simply non-existent even among capitalist farmers, since access to land was not constrained. Surplus-use patterns – a greater tendency to reinvest in productive assets – were generally useful as a discriminating factor, although there were a few exceptions among non-capitalist farmers, the marabouts and some traditional landlords, who also scored well in this indicator. It is essential to note here that, although the initial process of clustering farmers that is described here was quantitative, the statistical evidence was qualified by information from semi-structured and open interviews with farmers and researchers, as well as field observations.

As a result, we were able to work with a classification (capitalist, semi-capitalist and non-capitalist) that was sufficiently useful from a statistical point of view,\(^8\) but also empirically meaningful. In fact, the farmers in each

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\(^7\) For an illustration see Figure 1. For a cross comparison with farm size groups, see Appendix A.4. The results show that there is a high proportion of capitalist and semi-capitalist farmers in the mid-scale ranges, but also that capitalist farmers in general tend to be of larger scale. In any case, Table A.4 shows some variation across classes in terms of scale.

\(^8\) Most variables included to characterise capitalist tendencies were correlated with one another, a result that Rudra et al. 1990 could not obtain with their 1969 dataset, for which they inferred that large farmers were rarely strictly ‘capitalist’ in India. See Rao 1990 for a critique of their approach and strong conclusions.
class differed substantially from producers in other classes in terms of technological dynamism, speed and patterns of accumulation, responses to the crisis and to market liberalisation, degree and forms of participation in agrarian politics and specific discourses on policy reforms. The contrast was particularly stark between the ‘capitalist’ and ‘non-capitalist’ classes, since ‘semi-capitalist’ farmers constituted a transitional class towards one of the two extremes.

In sum, the point of this discussion of classificatory criteria and methods is to provide one example of the methodological considerations and challenges that can shape one of the stages in the empirical analysis of rural class formation. In this sense, it is important to be aware that the use of terms ‘capitalist’, ‘semi-capitalist’, ‘non-capitalist’ has to be understood in context and not taken as rigid, ‘ideal’ or universal characterisations of producers. This is a central lesson drawn from the India debate that can, and should, be taken into account in other contexts.

Concluding remarks
We have argued that ‘peasants’ are not a homogeneous class in itself in rural Africa, particularly in rural Senegal. Although this seems rather obvious, the fact is that most mainstream studies, which have dominated the academic and policy debate in Africa over the last twenty years, tend to ignore the importance of heterogeneity, under the assumption that the mass of peasant smallholders constitutes such an overwhelming majority of the rural population that differences are not statistically significant. It has been argued that, in order to improve our analytical understanding of processes of capitalist development in agriculture, agrarian differentiation and rural class formation, it is essential to create genuinely sensitive indexes to classify farmers, to be used as heuristic devices to analyse processes, structures and agency in specific contexts of rural Africa.

In this paper, we have illustrated an important methodological stage in the empirical work on the development of capitalism in agriculture and processes of agrarian differentiation by focusing on a particular group of large- and mid-scale farmers, who are seldom studied in mainstream and ‘neo-populist’ research. From within the classes identified mostly with quantitative methods, a subsequent empirical step, consisting of constructing context-specific

81 For more details see Oya 2001, pp. 144–56.
stereotypical narratives of patterns of accumulation and labour mobilisation, may be undertaken on the basis of in-depth qualitative information. The results of the latter research phase, that is, the concrete forms of accumulation and differentiation in the Groundnut Basin, and the interplay of social relations and state formation, on the basis of life histories, observation and in-depth interviews will have to be shown in future papers, due to limited space.

From our findings, it seems clear that for a sample of large-middle-scale farmers in Senegal, different production conditions and, therefore, mechanisms of accumulation arise. An examination of various sample characteristics, from household size/composition to farming scale, as well as an initial assessment of differentiating factors distinguishing high-yield from average-yield farmers allowed us to introduce some of the critical elements underlying differentiation among large farmers, of which labour-hiring patterns turned out to be very significant. Classifying farmers along their capitalist or non-capitalist tendencies proved to be a useful method to account for heterogeneity and processes of change.

In this vein, the core of the paper aimed to revive an old debate in the Indian context concerning the appropriate criteria to identify the ‘capitalist farmer’ or ‘successful accumulators’ in poor countries. The debate was rich in theoretical and methodological considerations and mostly based on approaches that were driven by a materialist conception of history. The lessons from the Indian debate could be valid for the African context, in spite of the significant differences with the Indian context and the strong heterogeneity that characterises African farming systems. The focus was on methodological considerations, particularly in light of the difficulties of finding concrete class locations in the context of rural Africa. Thus, a discussion of the appropriate combination of criteria for a sample of large- and mid-scale farmers in Senegal followed, including considerations for each selected criterion, their particularities and the problems in capturing differences in degree. From this discussion, it can be concluded, in tune with several contributors to the Indian debate, that: (a) any single measure, such as land/farm size, is neither adequate nor sufficient as an index of farming stratification; (b) it is possible to apply more
relevant classifications by using more criteria, adequate to the context of analysis, and more careful empirical methods to assess regularities and variation across sub-groups of farmers; (c) the careful empirical investigation presented here was not simply a methodological exercise, but was instrumental to an ensuing deeper understanding of rural class formation, inter-class links and the role of the state in these processes, particularly with respect to the obstacles and impulses to dynamic (capitalist) agrarian change.

A focus on a particular set of farmers (large-middle scale) permitted to uncover very significant differences and the existence of both capitalist and non-capitalist elements and mechanisms, resulting in varied paths of accumulation and response to policy changes and crisis. This analysis can be done through more rigorous combinations of quantitative/survey techniques (discussed in this paper) and qualitative methods, especially life histories and open interviews, the results of which are left to future papers.

Although a good understanding of the theory underlying the development of capitalist agriculture is a necessary condition for studies of this nature, it is also true that, from a purely empirical and methodological point of view, a reasonable degree of creativity is necessary to adapt criteria and classifications of farmers to particular historical and social contexts. An appropriate statistical stratification of rural people, large farmers, the poor, and so on, can prove extremely useful as a starting or mid-point of the research process if one is interested in processes of agrarian change.

Figure 2: Map of Survey Area in Senegal
Appendix A

A.1 General characteristics of sampled households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n=64</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of household head-farm manager</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household size (permanent residents in farming unit)</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of adult equivalent residents (a)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village size (number of inhabitants)</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>12,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of wives</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children resident (including talibe (b))</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnic composition (percent)

- Wolof (78%)
- Manding/Soce (9%)
- Serer (8%)
- Peuhl/Fulani (5%)
- Mouride (38%)

Declared affiliation to religious brotherhoods

- Tidiane (12%)

Literacy (French &/or Arabic) and numeracy (percent of principal respondents)

- Literate (48%)

French schooling years

- 2.5
- 0
- 0
- 16

Koranic schooling years

- 11.4
- 11.5
- 0
- 25

Percent of school-age children in formal French schools

- 36.2
- 25
- 0
- 100

Percent of school-age children in Koranic/Arab schools

- 60
- 71
- 0
- 100

Economic activities (c)

- Agriculture (70–80%)
- Trade (10–15%)
- Public sector employee (5%)
- Transport (3–8%)
- Other (5%)

Sample distribution by scale (total household farm size in hectares)

- Less than 20 hectares = 7.8%
- 20–50 hectares = 51.6%
- 50–100 hectares = 21.9%
- More than 100 hectares = 18.7%

Notes/definitions:

(a) Adult equivalent = more than 14 years old; (b) talibe, as resident young students/workers in a Koran school/farm (daara); (c) Percentage numbers in parenthesis are approximations, in orders of magnitude, of the proportion of total annual income derived from different activities.

Source: Author’s calculations from author survey
A.2. Land and Production Summary Statistics: LMF Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operated land (total household) in hectares (average 1995–97) – all crops</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land directly under HH* control in hectares (average 1995–97) – all crops</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundnut fields of HH (avg. 1995–97) in hectares</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundnut area (total household/farm) in hectares</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal area in hectares</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundnut HH production in tons</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal production (under HH control) in tons</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundnut HH yields in kg/ha</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>1445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal HH yields in kg/ha</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>1054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note *: HH = Household Head or farm manager (principal respondent). When HH is specified, data refer to the fields under direct control of the household head/farm manager.

Source: Author’s calculations from author survey
A.3. Differences Between the Characteristics of ‘High-Groundnut-Yield’ Farmers and ‘Other’ Farmers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High-Yield farmers (1)</th>
<th>Rest of farmers</th>
<th>Significance in level of differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean values</td>
<td>Mean values</td>
<td>ANOVA or Mann-Whitney test for equal means (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield per ha (kg of unshelled groundnuts) average 1995–97</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>.00 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed multiplication rate (kg of unshelled groundnuts per kg of shelled seed) in 1997</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>.00 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertiliser application on groundnuts (kg/ha)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm size (total ha, including dependent household members)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total production scale (household head – tons)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.05 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groundnut production scale (household head – tons)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.01 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer’s age</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross margins per ha (CFAF in 1997)</td>
<td>80,667</td>
<td>44,082</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hired labour (% of total work on farmer fields)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>.02 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total marketed surplus (% share of total production)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal marketed surplus (% of cereal production)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: (1) High-yield farmers defined as the top tercile of the sample for groundnut yields per hectare during the period 1995–97. This group of more ‘efficient’ farmers obtained an average yield above 1000 kg/ha. (2) Differences are usually considered significant below 10 percent, but also below 20 percent depending on the sample size; two * indicate high significance of differences between groups.

Source: Author estimates from author survey
A.4. Scale (Farm Size) and (Proto) Capitalist Tendencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of Farmer</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
<th>Non-Capitalist</th>
<th>Semicapitalist</th>
<th>Capitalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Large (&gt;70ha)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within operated land</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within class of farmer</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Large (38–70ha)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within operated land</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within class of farmer</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle (21–38ha)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within operated land</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within class of farmer</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Middle (&lt;21ha)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within operated land</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within class of farmer</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within operated land</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within class of farmer</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These size groups only refer to the fields directly under control of the respondent (household head), which usually accounts for about 70 percent of the total household farm size.

Source: Author survey
Appendix B

B.1 Description of the Author Survey in Senegal (Groundnut Basin)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical area of coverage</th>
<th>District / Region (Kaolack &amp; Fatick regions) see map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The historical nucleus of the Groundnut Basin, a dispersed area stretching from the border with Gambia (more fertile) to Touba in the Centre Groundnut Basin. The logistical base for the research was the town of Kaolack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>129 respondents (total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 ‘principal respondents’ – large and mid-scale farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 seasonal wage-labourers – mbindane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19 women (wives of principal respondents) with farming responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Location | More than 40 villages in the heart of the Groundnut Basin. In most villages I interviewed the one/two largest farmers |

| Subjects of study | Multiple integrated: political and economic features of production and marketing processes and performance, demographic characteristics, education, means of production, supply constraints and responses, relations of production – land and labour use |

| Frequency of enumeration | 2–4 visits per principal respondent over a period of 12 months of interviewing. Each visit took on average one day. All interviews (questionnaire, open-ended, life histories) were carried out personally by the author with the assistance of a professional fieldworker (attached to a national research institute – ISRA). Life histories were collected at the end of the survey. |

| Data collection procedures | Interview (semi-structured interviews + questionnaire + 5 life histories) → 90%; measurement (observation) → 10% |
References


Franco Barchiesi

Class, Social Movements and the Transformation of the South-African Left in the Crisis of ‘National Liberation’

Introduction

The aim of this article is to discuss the shifting ways in which left discourses in post-apartheid South Africa have related to the social processes and movements taking place in the context of transition to post-apartheid democracy. As such, my argument is not primarily focused on the policy performance of left organisations during the first seven years of democratic government led by the African National Congress (ANC), or on the ways in which left orientations have tried to contest developments inside the ANC. Therefore, rather than assuming the state or the ruling party as central sites of contestation, I will critically assess the extent to which the social and economic dynamics set in motion by the collapse of the racist régime have affected the Left’s potential to advance an emancipatory project and the possible lines of contestation on the form such a project should take.

The main hypothesis advanced in these pages is that the concept of the ‘Left’ in South Africa is being...
questioned and problematised by an increasing diversification of social subjects, forms of identity and organisational patterns. These processes are severely questioning the strength and stability of categories (such as the primacy of waged working-class politics, the national-liberation discourse, progressive forms of state-driven development) that, in the past, have been powerful elements on which a general left project was based. This ‘explosion’ of the political and discursive field of the Left, in which traditional working-class organisations have been most negatively affected, is the result of two concomitant processes. First, the ideological and policy field of ‘national liberation’ hegemonised by the ANC has undergone important changes due to the re-insertion of the country in the circuits of globalised capitalism and to policies functional to this process. This dynamic has caused a demand for a re-alignment of left forces historically linked to the ANC, a dynamic that has determined important contradictions. Second, the rise of new social movements mainly at the level of urban and working-class communities has accompanied and shaped the ANC-led process of socio-economic restructuring, while advancing agendas, organisational forms and patterns of social subjectivity that challenged and questioned established traditions of ANC-aligned left organisations.

The combination and intersection of these two processes ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ is, on the one hand, responsible for the decline of established paradigms of the ‘Left’ in South Africa. On the other hand, however, new areas of social contestation and forms of political practice, probably in need of further conceptual clarification, are emerging in tune with developments that have characterised anticapitalist resistance on a global scale in what is often referred to as the ‘post-Seattle’ age. Finally, a further cautionary note seems important. While this paper discusses various ‘left’ movements, providing a complete repertoire is a task that requires a much larger space and deeper research. Therefore my attention is primarily focused on movements related to urban working-class constituencies.

The neoliberalisation of the South-African national liberation and the changing location of its social subjectivity

After twenty years of renewed militancy against the apartheid régime, which followed a decade of intensified repression of opposition movements, the South-African national-liberation struggle culminated in 1994 with the electoral
victory of the ANC and the establishment of the first democratic-representative government. These developments took place at an economic and geopolitical juncture that combined complex and potentially contradictory interactions of long waves of historical change and contingent ideological and policy shifts. The South-African case can be regarded as the last example of successful anticolonial national-liberation struggle on the African continent and one of the first instances of postcolonial democracy being established in a globalised economy where neoliberal ideological and policy orientations are fully triumphant.

The peculiarity of this context underpins the rapid changes affecting the main social and political actors of the post-apartheid transition, the rapid and often thorough re-orientation of programmes and priorities, and the pressures and contestation confronting the new state form. South-African democratisation has been characterised by the gradual hollowing out of options of state-led developmentalism that once sustained anticolonial resistance movements in the pre-1989 bipolar world – and the ANC itself for most of its history. At the same time, South-African society remains characterised by extremely high levels of racial and class inequality, exclusion from basic social necessities for the great majority of the black population, and a deepening crisis in formal employment. At the end of the 1990s, while the rate of unemployment was standing at above thirty per cent of the active population, half of all South Africans survived with approximately ten per cent of the national income. It can be estimated that a fifth of urban households have no electricity and a quarter have no running water – and these are nearly entirely concentrated in black townships – while four fifths of rural households have none of them. Ben Cashdan estimates that the cost of providing extremely basic household services like an outdoor tap, a flush toilet and electricity would be twice the amount currently allocated by the government.

The new government has tried to respond to this situation, while maintaining its consensus basis, in an ‘indirect’ way, by boosting the competitiveness of South-African capitalism in global markets and promoting business confidence and foreign investment in an increasingly deregulated environment. As a result, according to the Director-General of the Department of Finance, Maria

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1 Many analyses of these processes have been published from a left perspective by South-African scholars. The most comprehensive are Bond 1999, Marais 2001.
2 May 1999.
3 Cashdan 2000. See also McDonald and Pape 2002.
Ramos, forty per cent of all companies currently listed in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange are foreign-owned. The reduction of public intervention in policies of social integration has accompanied the emphasis on the promotion of market forces as the main vehicle for employment creation, which has led to a generalised downsizing of redistributive efforts by state actors. This heightened the disparities between economic sectors that are relatively export-oriented, which are usually dependent on corporate transnational capital, and those for which intensified international competition on the domestic market has produced a deepening employment crisis. Conversely, the capacity of the government to bridge these gaps at a sectoral and local level is constrained by the tight limitations to public spending established by the official economic policy contained in the 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. These take the form of rigid limitations in public deficit, which is subordinated to ambitious, and so far unattained, projected levels of economic growth. Meanwhile, the corporate tax rate has been reduced from 48 per cent in 1994 to 30 per cent in 1999, and the projected increase in social services expenditures of 39.9 per cent between 1996/97 and 2002/03 was outnumbered by the 56.1 per cent increase for security-related expenses over the same period. Therefore, social spending has stagnated or has actually been reduced in the face of dramatic new demands emerging out of crises like the spiralling HIV-AIDS epidemic.

Through a gradual process that had started before the ANC’s own legalisation in 1990, these policy shifts concluded the abandonment of deeply entrenched orientations on which the identity of this party had been built after its historic 1955 ‘Freedom Charter’. In line with a state-centred view of development, this advocated direct government control over strategic economic assets and extensive nationalisations. Such a programme was more in line with an African-nationalist view of ‘nation building’, rather than with socialist ambitions, which were, however, emphasised to some extent due to the ANC’s alignment with the Soviet Bloc and the influence exercised upon it by the South-African Communist Party (SACP). While maintaining an aversion towards class antagonisms, the shift towards macro-economic orthodoxy reflected a change in the ANC’s class referents, in particular the rising importance of a new

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4 Quoted in the Financial Mail, 10 January 2002.
6 Department of Finance 2000.
7 See Barchiesi 2000.
8 See McKinley 1997.
African bourgeoisie and corporate élite in its non-class-based view of the ‘nation’. The new economic policy openly advocates the promotion of the African bourgeoisie both to ‘deracialise’ the structure of South-African capitalism and to empower a black entrepreneurship able to open spaces of ‘popular’ capitalism through the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In particular, the government of President Thabo Mbeki, inaugurated in 1999, has been quite vociferous in supporting a notion of ‘black economic empowerment’ to designate the re-equilibrium of power relations in corporate proprietary assets. In this instance, ‘race’ is remobilised as a crucial legitimating argument by the present régime. This allows the ANC to portray itself as continuously committed to fight historically entrenched social inequalities inherited from the past. At the same time, it conveniently obscures the continuity in the social forces that determine inequality, via a renewed loyalty to global market forces and emphasis on the equalisation of market opportunities (to which ‘empowerment’ is largely reduced).

The change from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ ANC’s nationalist discourse is strikingly apparent in statements of its own protagonists. In a 1978 speech as an ANC representative at a congress in Ottawa, Mbeki proclaimed:

> Consider the circumstances in which we might position black capitalism as the antithesis of white capitalism. . . . In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the west. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth. This black capitalism instead of being the antithesis is rather confirmation of parasitism with no redeeming features whatsoever, without any extenuating circumstances to excuse its existence.9

Mbeki’s early and straightforward rejection notwithstanding, the ‘redeeming features’ he alluded to were materialised for him by the ANC’s accession to power, in a radically different global and domestic scenario. Therefore Mbeki himself could argue in 1999, a few months after his election:

> As part of the realization of the aim to eradicate racism in our country, we must strive to create and strengthen a black capitalist class. Because we come from among the black oppressed, many among us feel embarrassed

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9 Mbeki 1978, p. 15.
to state this goal as nakedly as we should... I would like to urge, very strongly, that we abandon our embarrassment about the possibility of the emergence of successful and therefore prosperous black owners of productive property and think and act in a manner consistent with a realistic response to the real world. As part of our continuing struggle to wipe out the legacy of racism, we must work to ensure that there emerges a black bourgeoisie, whose presence within our economy and society will be part of the process of the deracialization of the economy and society. Accordingly, indeed, the government must come to the aid of those among the black people who might require such aid in order to become entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{10}

This total argumentative overturn shows the extreme and peculiar flexibility of the ANC’s discourse – in this, very different from the nationalist rhetoric that has fallen into disrepute elsewhere in the continent – and its remarkable capacity to adapt to changing global scenarios.\textsuperscript{11} In fact, in both cases, the ANC’s definition of what the ‘real world’ makes viable (postcolonial developmentalism first, globalised neoliberalism after) is what ultimately defines ‘the nation’ and the policies needed to build it. This allows the party to retain a progressive flavour to its endeavours, regardless to the fact that, under the current circumstances, this substantially privileges the needs of an elite while leaving uncertain and vague prospects of ‘trickle-down’ benefits for the masses. The continuous and unchallenged capacity of the ANC to legitimate right-wing policies with a left-wing discourse confers it an unquestionable advantage over left critics. Hein Marais has captured this with his concept of the ‘gravity field’ of the national-liberation ideology:

The strategies of the ANC-in-power represent a fascinating mix of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’... Striking are the ways in which it applies principles and practices associated with traditional national liberation movements in service of a modernizing agenda. [During the 1980s] the ANC had become adept at a key aspect of any hegemonic project: it managed to deploy an array of ideological precepts and symbols, and assert their pertinence to the lived realities of millions of South Africans. The Freedom Charter was resurrected and popularized as the programme; the liberation struggle was personified in the form of Nelson Mandela; the colours, flags, songs and slogans of the ANC became ubiquitous features of resistance activities. The idea of ‘the
people’ was ‘turned into a formalism whose singular consciousness was homogenized by the movement which spoke in its name’. Overall, the ideological field through which millions of citizens experienced reality was dramatically altered.\textsuperscript{12}

Many left voices have been blaming the ANC’s right-wing turn and the abandonment of its developmentalist promises as the reasons for its inability to ‘deliver’ on popular expectations.\textsuperscript{13} But this argument reveals the inability of most traditional and institutionalised organisations of the Left itself to either advance an alternative discourse to challenge the ANC’s legitimising myths or to relate symbolically to people’s desires. As the following sections will clarify, it is precisely on these terrains that new social movements are crucially challenging established left discourses. Ideology becomes, here, a decisive and autonomous terrain of contestation. As John Saul puts it:

\textit{There is also the legitimacy, slow to dissolve, that accrues to the ANC as the historical agent of black liberation/African nationalism – as well as the legitimacy that springs from the movement’s continuing evocation of a project of racial redress. Moreover, despite its ambiguities in class terms, this latter project does have real resonance: after all, there continue to be cadres within party and state who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of conditions of their fellow South Africans and availed themselves of the fresh opportunities opened up by deracialization and democratization to work for positive improvements in the lives of their fellow citizens.\textsuperscript{14}}

It is important to notice in this regard the role played by the SACP in legitimating the ANC’s rhetoric among left constituencies. A numerically limited party with uneven local penetration and no parliamentary caucus, the SACP – whose MPs and local representatives are elected in ANC lists – owes its political existence entirely to its participation in the ANC-led Alliance. As Simon Adams convincingly argues, the Party, after being weakened by more than forty years of underground activity, managed to gain a political space inside the ANC-led alliance during the 1990s by becoming the political and ideological vehicle of a shift from grassroots rhetoric based on insurrectionism and seizure of power, towards an acceptance of negotiated

\textsuperscript{12} Marais 2001, pp. 261–2, original emphasis.
\textsuperscript{13} Exemplifying this line of argument is Lehulere 1999.
\textsuperscript{14} Saul 2001.
compromises in the name of ‘structural reform’. The political outcomes of this trajectory range from the entrenchment of ‘sunset clauses’ advocated by former General Secretary Joe Slovo, which allowed old apartheid bureaucrats to stay in office, to the appointment of Communist ministers in portfolios (trade and industry, public enterprises, public service and administration) directly in charge of market-based economic restructuring and privatisation. In this way the Party has used its traditional radical and revolutionary imagery to sell to working-class constituencies a new discourse of socio-economic ‘realism’ and ‘pragmatism’, with the decisive help of a cadre deployed in policy-making positions where the capacity to mediate with worker resentment is particularly valued.

Albeit at the centre of some debates at the beginning of the democratic transition, the continuous SACP alliance with the ANC has so far confirmed its revised version of classical two-stage theory. According to this view, the reinforcement of the ‘elements of socialism’ inside the ‘national democratic revolution’ (intended as the abolishment of state racism and the establishment of a ‘bourgeois’ democracy) is preliminary to the construction of socialism. This approach has proven to be an extremely flexible ideological device in adapting the SACP to the changing requirements of its main alliance partner. On one hand, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the adoption by the ANC of a negotiated approach towards the establishment of a democratic government (which implied important compromises with the previously ruling National Party) substantially displaced the SACP’s anticapitalism as a meaningful voice for change inside the Alliance. Parallel to this, relations between SACP and the Congress of South-African Trade Unions (COSATU) have often been difficult due to the former’s criticism of the latter’s ‘economistic’ tendencies and its alleged pragmatism towards capital. On the other hand, vocal SACP opposition to GEAR has failed to create an alternative platform, even in conjunction with the opposition of COSATU. Rather, the Party’s pre-occupation with the unity of the Alliance made it vulnerable to an overtly repressive and intimidating intervention by President Mbeki at the SACP’s 1998 Congress. Mbeki’s allusion that no space existed for other Alliance partners to redefine their position in relation to government policies independently from the ANC produced the desired result of re-aligning the SACP leadership under the

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15 Adams 1997.
16 Eidelberg 2000.
hegemony of the Mbeki circle.\textsuperscript{17} Further evidence of this re-alignment is provided by the recent SACP support for the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), a programme of economic development sponsored by Mbeki and criticised by civil-society organisations, social movements and even COSATU itself for its undemocratic character and advocacy for pro-market solutions.

The downscaling of redistributive state options implied in the ANC’s policies, however, still contrasts with deep-seated expectations for social change and access to rights. These come from a plurality of social subjects – with a substantial working-class presence – in the previously oppressed black population, which are structured in an articulated organisational and associational life. Politically, this social composition has so far expressed a strong electoral support for the ANC as the leading organisation in the anti-apartheid struggle. Therefore, the capacity to sustain the deferral and containment of popular expectations at the level of ‘realism’ defined by the government’s macro-economic priorities has become a decisive issue of legitimacy for the ANC. Its task can be understood as an attempt to balance the ideological advocacy of increasing equality for the majority and the substantial delegation of these tasks to global market forces, with all the uncertainties this implies. At the same time, however, the latent contradiction between the nature of the ANC’s political support and its governance strategy is shaped by, and influences in a very problematic way, radical expectations for social change in its own grassroots. These contradictions reflect the problems inherent to ‘national-liberation’ ideologies as expressions of what Frederick Cooper defines as ‘decolonization from above’.\textsuperscript{18} This tends to be functional to reproducing the institutional power of new élites, incorporating and devaluing conflictual dynamics of subjectivity formation under unproblematic, totalising images of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’.

The nature of the grassroots support for the ANC government, however, gives a particularly practical urgency to the problem of responding to left perspectives for transformation, far from confining this issue at the level of merely ideological debates. The importance of the problem can be summarised in terms of managing the formation of grassroots subjectivities in a situation where diversified popular needs and demands contrast with dynamics of globalisation that modify the range of options available to the democratic

\textsuperscript{17} McKinley 2001.
\textsuperscript{18} Cooper 1996.
state to represent and organise such needs and demands. This linkage between social subjectivities, popular ideas of change and state attempts to balance these with the requirements of capitalist development are well captured in Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’. This concept refers to the ability of power to ‘structure’ the citizen’s field of possible actions.\textsuperscript{19} The process of construction of subjectivities on the part of the state is expressed by macro-economic policy language in terms of objective ‘constraints’, ‘limits’ to redistribution and social spending, and thus the ‘viability’ of grassroots demands. This is required, in Procacci’s view, by a capitalist-liberal society to solve the otherwise intractable contradiction between a notion of the individual as the centre of ‘egoistic’ economic activity and that of the ‘citizen’ as the subject of rights and obligations derived from the political community.\textsuperscript{20}

The concept of ‘civil society’, therefore, far from being an unproblematic counterweight to the action of the state, defines a technique of government where a discourse of ‘rights’ – and their limitations – is established to balance the economic sovereignty of the individual with obligations towards areas of ‘poverty’ that could otherwise become antagonistic to the capitalist system. The very notion of ‘poverty’ lies at the centre of the ‘social question’ in bourgeois states as premised on the monitoring and observation of the living conditions of the ‘excluded’, and on the design of apparatuses of regulation of their everyday life (welfare state, health and population policies, etc.). While this reduction of the social question to the technologies of control over life – captured within the term ‘biopolitics’\textsuperscript{21} – insulates the issue from any fundamental critique of the capitalist social structure, it also confers a specific meaning to the question of ‘social rights’ and their extension. These elements introduce a field of conflictual relations between state views of the ‘feasibility’ of popular demands, the consent or demobilisation that state strategies manage to create among ‘left’ supporters and their organisations, and the rise of new radical demands or subjectivities.

In the South-African case, the ANC has been faced with the decisive problem of defining new appellations to enforce social cohesion, particularly among its left constituencies, once its previous state interventionist orientation was abandoned to adopt a pro-market approach to its own ‘social question’. In the twenty-five years that preceded the collapse of apartheid, the most relevant

\textsuperscript{20} See Procacci 1993.
\textsuperscript{21} A path-breaking systematic exposition of this topic is in Hardt and Negri 2000.
dynamic in the development of left grassroots organisations has undoubtedly been provided by the growth of militant trade unions of the black working class. The impact exercised by these social forces on other sectors of the opposition to the racist state has been far-reaching in terms of demands, programmes and emancipatory visions. According to most observers, the role played by organised labour in the South-African transition constitutes a peculiar aspect in the broader context of African processes of decolonisation and democratisation. As a result, with more than three million members and a unionisation rate not far from that of industrialised countries with high union density levels, organised labour is recognised as a crucial political actor in post-apartheid South Africa. The main union federation, COSATU, with approximately two million members, is formally allied – alongside the SACP – to the ANC. COSATU takes part in formal bargaining institutions together with representatives of capital and the state, and enjoys a considerable degree of protection in terms of the country’s industrial relations legislation.

However, the institutionalisation of labour’s oppositional role under the changed conditions of political democracy has coincided with a gradual decline in unions ability to contest the decisive, and in many aspects detrimental, shifts in economic and social policies that have taken place under the ANC government. The GEAR strategy, for example, was built on the basis of a conservative redefinition of priorities and approaches contained in a previous document, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), started by COSATU and adopted by the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance as the 1994 electoral platform of the ANC. The RDP was largely a mix of Keynesian demand-management recommendations, a broad list of redistributive tasks for the state and a market-orientated approach to export-led industrialisation and attracting investors’ confidence. While GEAR stressed continuity with the general principles contained in the RDP (primarily job creation, social services targeted to ‘basic needs’, efficiency in the allocation of resources), its stringent growth and public deficit requirements were introduced by the Department of Finance (that in this way gained a substantial power over

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23 See Buhlungu 1997.
24 A brilliant analysis of the shift from the RDP to more conservative macro-economic orientations is in Goetz 2000, where it is emphasised how this trajectory expresses a failure of COSATU, and of left critics in the ANC itself, to contest the rise inside the government of a logic of technocratic ‘governmentality’ responsive to big business interests. See also Adelzadeh 1996.
other cabinet ministries) as a ‘non-negotiable’ matter and as merely ‘technical’ measures. This process allowed government to avoid debates both inside the Alliance and in Parliament. While this is the most apparent case of loss of union power over decisive policy issues, regardless of COSATU’s own position within state institutions, it is by no means an isolated case. Similar processes of marginalisation of labour have been noticeable in policies over trade liberalisation (which has heavily affected industrial sectors that in the past had enjoyed apartheid state protectionism), the restructuring of the public sector and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (where unions had to face massive layoffs and legal impediments to industrial action), and the reform of the social security system (where an extremely minimal version of ‘developmental social welfare’ has been introduced against the unions’ advice). Finally, COSATU has recursively, but powerlessly, complained about fiscal and monetary policies that have favoured the interests of financial capital through high interest rates and the liberalisation of capital movements, to the detriment of job-creating investment.

A frank assessment by COSATU itself of the difficulties encountered in these areas of engagement, concludes on a very sobering note:

Economic policy has arguably been the area of greatest contestation during the first term. It would be fair to say that the economic policy debate currently stands at an impasse both in terms of process and in content. Although COSATU has made more interventions on economic questions than in any other area, it is also the area in which its submissions, with significant exceptions, have resulted in the fewest policy or legislative changes. Policies pursued during the first term have undermined productive economic activity and made the economy vulnerable to speculators. The federation has argued for a fundamental review of the restrictive monetary policy pursued by the SA Reserve Bank, on the basis that it is incompatible with the country’s developmental challenges. . . . The workings of the Alliance itself have been uneven and problematic over the past period, and the Alliance has not been given the space to drive governance in any meaningful way. . . . The extent to which the Alliance begins functioning effectively will be one of the major determinants of COSATU’s success in engaging with governance during the second term.25

25 COSATU 2000a.
Many reasons have been mentioned for this marginalisation of trade unions as the most important left constituency inside the ruling Alliance and the most organised left force in South-African society. Many analysts emphasise labour’s lack of preparation, sophistication and skills required by a changed scenario where socio-economic ‘reconstruction’ has replaced ‘resistance’ against an illegitimate régime.\(^26\) While the relevance of the issue cannot be easily discounted, this explanation is however extremely reductive. This is due to an ideological and normative functionality that is based on a binary opposition between ‘resistance’ and ‘reconstruction’. In fact, this view tends to advocate as the main role for South-African labour under the new democracy that of co-operating in the rebuilding of an internationally competitive capitalist economy within a liberalised environment.\(^27\) Working-class advances and gains are therefore subordinated in this framework to the necessity to achieve ‘class compromises’ between labour and capital that ensure the compatibility between class conflict and the maintenance of the present socio-economic system. This argument, however, is not convincing and fails to explain why labour’s inability to shape government policies is the result of its lack of pragmatism and restraint, rather than, say, of abdication from a more radical and militant course of action. What matters, however, for the argument of this paper is that this view of labour’s marginalisation as deriving from a lack of pragmatism and co-operation with capital and the state fundamentally obscures other probably much more relevant – and less researched – dynamics underpinning the decline of union power.

The next section will look at how the processes here under examination have coincided with a dramatic loss of representative capacity of grassroots constituencies on the part of organised labour. This change signals an important crisis in the relevance of formal waged employment in social subjectivity and forms of identification of subordinate classes in South Africa, and it carries important implications for left organisation and the emergence of new social movements.

\(^{26}\) See Von Holdt 2000.

\(^{27}\) This view, which has become very influential in South-African labour circles, has been advanced and systematised by a purportedly ‘social-democratic’ current of analysis and research on the South-African transition whose most notable exponents are Glenn Adler and Eddie Webster. See Adler and Webster 1999, 2000.
The decline of wage-labour and the reconfiguration of grassroots subjectivities

The changes in the macro-economic strategy of the ANC government have reflected and seconded important developments in the composition of the South-African working class; developments that have contributed to a loss of representation on the part of organised labour in relation to the world of employment. Apart from a persistently high rate of unemployment, the past ten years have seen a steady increase in forms of ‘flexible’, ‘atypical’ and casual labour, and the proliferation of a relatively unstable, unprotected and non-unionised workforce. Short-term contract labour is a central part of the history of the black proletariat in South Africa, particularly under the oppressive migrant labour system and ‘influx control’ legislation of the apartheid régime. However, the expansion of non-permanent employment in democratic South Africa is a response to specific and more recent economic pressures, constituting a stark departure from labour’s demands for job security and state-driven employment creation. Recent statistics indicate that full-time occupations employ little more than forty per cent of the economically active population, in relation to the African population this decreases to approximately one third. One explanation for these data is the high capital intensity that has historically characterised South-African capitalism. Defined by some authors as the predominance of the ‘mineral-energy complex’, this economic structure is based on ‘upstream’ raw material beneficiation and on the production of consumer durables for a limited, formerly ‘white’ demand downstream. This hampered the development of a significant intermediate goods sector capable of absorbing a relatively skilled and mobile African proletariat. Therefore, while cheap energy and minerals have enabled high capital intensity, the limited size of the consumer market facilitated a bloated financial sector as an alternative to productive investment and as a source of shareholder pressure for short-term returns based on cutting labour costs. This encouraged casualisation, outsourcing, externalisation of phases of production and layoffs. The rapid pace of globalisation of the financial sector,

Kenny and Webster 1999.
See Bond 1999, Fine and Rustomjee 1996.
A report by the Standard Bank of South Africa (1999) calculates the size of the South-African financial sector (finance, insurance and real estate) to 25 per cent of the GDP. From government statistics, this figure is slightly less than 20 per cent of the GDP.
associated capital flight and increased international competition are some of the factors that explain the loss of approximately 500,000 formal jobs in the first five years of GEAR’s implementation.

These figures indicate a gradual disappearance of permanent employment from the experiences of an increasing number of members of the South-African working class. For many others, waged labour becomes associated with deepening insecurity and instability. For the trade unions, these are dramatic changes, which cannot be confined to the numerical impact of de-unionisation and the much more difficult task of organising an increasingly volatile workforce.\textsuperscript{33} In fact, although job insecurity is not a new feature in the subjectivity of South-African workers, the struggle against apartheid had found in the workplace a decisive site of organisation and solidarity. As a result, the idea that democracy and political freedom should have been complemented by dignified conditions of work as the basis for increasing social rights and citizenship was deeply entrenched in working-class expectations. These are now conversely faced with a new sense of fragility no longer due to an identifiable oppressive régime against which to mobilise, but to what the democratic government elected by the unions’ grassroots present as ‘inevitable’ policies to ‘adjust’ to new global realities and impersonal market forces.

A substantial amount of literature has analysed the ways in which the loss of centrality of waged employment in the subjective experiences and forms of identification of the working class leads to the disintegration of forms of solidarity and views of emancipation, while promoting an individualised approach to social problems.\textsuperscript{34} The impact of these processes in the South-African case is particularly devastating when related to the importance assumed by the world of work as the main repository of collective power in the struggle against state racism. When black working-class organisations were resurrected in the country during the 1970s, the process presented features that were highly peculiar with regard to both other African countries and previous stages of South-African working-class history.\textsuperscript{35} Previous waves of organisation affected partially proletarianised workers, mainly in the rural and mining areas. Conversely, the 1970s mark the eruption in opposition politics of a

\begin{itemize}
\item[$^33$] There is no reliable estimate on the impact of these changes on trade unions nationally, but, for a case study of metalworkers’ union membership decline in the East Rand, the industrial core of South Africa, see Barchiesi and Kenny 2001.
\item[$^34$] See Sennett 1988, Beck 1999, Bauman 1999.
\item[$^35$] See Friedman 1987.
\end{itemize}
black semi-skilled, urbanised proletariat located in manufacturing industry, for whom the prospect of waged employment is the main source of social integration for themselves and their families. While these emerging union organisations remained largely confined to shop-floor issues and similar forms of organisation throughout the 1970s, the following decade saw their increasing and strategic involvement in popular struggles in the context of insurgency in black townships. This shift often took the form of overt grassroots rebellion against union leaders that were criticised for their ‘productivist’ orientation to the workplace and their privileging of the terrain of wage bargaining and union recognition. The struggle against apartheid came instead to be identified by many younger workers with the rejection of obligations imposed at the point of production and with the demand for access to social services and a higher quality of life as a necessary complement to democratisation. Regardless of its partial reforms and recognition of collective bargaining rights, the racist régime was generally unable to keep worker organisations confined to the level of workplace industrial relations.

The politicisation of the unions expressed the deep-seated illegitimacy of the régime and of its coercive forms of labour control. Despite the specificities of the South-African case, this dynamic reflects a factor that Yann Moulier-Boutang has observed in many other colonial contexts. In his view, the imposition of coercive forms of employment on the working class tends to produce forms of escape from, and refusal of, wage-labour, which, in the South-African case, were translated into exporting worker militancy from the factory to the community. If the story of South Africa’s black working-class struggles can be regarded, therefore, as a process of building up power inside the wage relation to express then a generalised refusal of waged work, the policy and ideological shifts that took place after the ANC’s advent to power can be seen under a different light. Those shifts, in fact, heralded a new era of ‘free labour’, where wage relations are supposed to be regulated by contracts and subject to the ‘objective’ laws of the market. The 1995 Labour Relations Act supported for the first time the principle of collective bargaining and statutory protection for trade-union rights, and new legislation to guarantee basic conditions of employment was also adopted. The establishment of a fully-fledged capitalist labour market came to coincide with a new phase of market regulation of employment conditions. Under this perspective, it can

be argued that the turn in ANC macro-economic thinking was not simply passive adaptation to global neoliberalism, but it was decisively shaped by the forms previously taken by the development and organisation of working-class struggles.38

The macro-economic policies that have contributed to the political marginalisation of organised labour under the new democracy are, to some extent, the result of labour’s own success in igniting the contradictions of the past authoritarian régime. In this sense, as Eidelberg argues,39 the institutionalisation of labour’s power and rights in the context of ANC alignment with global capitalism has made the agenda of the Left much more limited and constrained than what it was when labour was exercising a mainly resistant role against authoritarianism. Moreover, the political marginalisation of labour reflects a social marginalisation of work as a source of stability, identity and emancipatory visions for an expanding section of the working class. On the flip side, the everyday lives of working-class communities are continuously affected by the detrimental impact of neoliberal economic policies on social reproduction. Faced with these uncomfortable realities, popular responses to neoliberalism are forced to experiment with innovative methods of resistance, as the final section of this article will explain.

The rise of the ‘poors’: the return of community-based urban social movements40

The past few years have seen a resumption of social-movement politics and activism which, behind a common rejection of the ANC conservative turn in macro-economic policy, display important differences from mainstream left organisations (especially COSATU and SACP). These movements have, to a significant extent, originated at the level of urban localities in response to government restructuring of local government and municipal service provision.

38 For a view of the South-African government’s adoption of neoliberalism that is not confined to structural factors but emphasises agency and strategy, see Bond 1999.
40 The discussion presented in this section is by no means exhaustive of the theme of new social movements in South Africa and it mainly represents a specific case to exemplify my general point on new forms of left politics. Therefore, other important expressions of social-movement politics are left out of this section. This is mainly the case for movements that are not predominantly urban-based, such as the rapidly growing Landless People’s Movement (LPM), or thematic movements operating on a national scale, such as the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in the case of access to treatment for HIV/AIDS.
As part of the GEAR general macro-economic framework, direct transfers from central to municipal government have been severely reduced. Given the importance of this source of revenue for the development and maintenance of basic infrastructure (water, electricity, sanitation, and so on), municipalities were generally required to become increasingly self-sufficient in this respect.\footnote{A good overview of the issue is in Bond, Dor and Ruiters 1999.}

The government maintains, following a 1998 agreement with the trade unions, that the public sector is the ‘preferred method’ for the delivery of services and the enforcement of equitable conditions. However, it also advocates and facilitates the involvement of private capital, through public-private partnership schemes known as Municipal Services Partnerships, in the actual supply of the service, which leaves the public actor in the role of regulator of tariffs and standards. The extremely precarious financial situation of many municipalities, coupled with the enormous backlog in service delivery and the creation of markets for services, has made it possible for private companies (including powerful multinationals) to obtain contracts that provide them with ample discretion and authority in deciding conditions of access for communities to services that become \textit{de facto} privatised. Moreover, in their bid to become reliable sites for potential investors and to generate capital funding, municipalities have embarked upon ‘cost recovery’ schemes aimed at enforcing regular payments from residents.\footnote{McDonald and Pape 2002.} This has led, in many cases, to escalating costs for services that, combined with the accumulation of arrears from past boycotts of payments against apartheid local councils, has placed many of the poorest sections of the population in a situation of inability to pay. The response by municipal councils has often been repressive, including disconnections of services and evictions of defaulters, which has ignited and heightened levels of conflict.

Conflicts over access to municipal social services are reflecting not only the impact of neoliberal policies on everyday life of communities but also the precariousness of the sources of income in areas of high unemployment or insecure employment. Therefore, mobilisation against privatisation and for a decommodified enjoyment of services (delinked from the market) is a response to the crisis of the waged working class, described above.\footnote{See also Desai 2002b.} These movements present many innovative characteristics when compared to established left organisations. First, at an ideological level, they overtly reject...
or are indifferent towards the motifs of the ‘national-liberation’ discourse. While sometimes antagonistic towards the ANC (although they have generally failed when they tried to challenge it in local government elections), the target of these social subjects is generally constituted by the government and the local authorities. Second, these experiences remain anchored to a predominantly local dimension. Often suspicious towards centralised forms of co-ordination, they tend to eschew the tradition of ‘vanguardist’ organising and full-time cadreship ‘proper’ of SACP and trade-union tradition. When forms of co-ordination emerge, they are usually loose ‘umbrella bodies’ where the constituent groups retain their autonomy.

In general, these movements do not mobilise in alliance with mainstream unions, especially within COSATU, whose attitude towards social movements seen as ‘anti-ANC’ is generally suspicious when not overly hostile. Union activists that are supportive of new social movements explain this situation by reference to the fact that social movements tend to organise constituencies that are not, or are hardly, unionisable (unemployed youth, casuals, old-age pensioners). These groups rather tend to express their grievances around platforms demanding the satisfaction of basic social needs, and build community support in ways that are antagonistic towards ANC government policies. Nonetheless, in a few cases, episodes of co-operation have emerged between local groups and radical breakaway unions. The most important example of such co-operation is the support provided by the South-African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), one of COSATU’s largest unions, to these local struggles. This can be explained by the double vulnerability, as municipal employees and community residents, of SAMWU members when confronted by the privatisation of local services. Otherwise, the substantial distance existing between the unions and community movements reflects the absence among the latter of a predominantly working-class language of opposition and the lack of comprehensive ideological referents. In the Durban township of Chatsworth, for example, the main source of collective identification and self-definition is based on shared conditions of poverty and social suffering for what have become known simply as ‘the poors’. In the nearby area of Mpumalanga, activists in the struggle to introduce a merely symbolic payment for water (the ‘Ten Rand Campaign’) have come to relate to each other with

44 See Appolis and Sikwebu 2003.
45 Many examples are provided in the website of the Anti-Privatisation Forum <www.apf.org.za>.
the term ‘Makhelwane’ (neighbour), which replaces the more conventional ‘comrade’. In this sense, while the question of which organisational synthesis these movements will take in future is quite open, their current state challenges a unitary concept of the ‘Left’ that, in its mainstream expressions, has been thrown into disarray by the ANC’s right-wing turn.

At the same time, elements of mainstream left parlance sometimes resurface behind attempts to build ‘connections’ and ‘co-ordination’ among these movements. For example, the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), an umbrella body started in July 2000 and primarily organising in the Johannesburg area, still identifies the state as the central focus of contestation to reverse the ANC government’s privatisation policies; and, to that extent, it advocates a rather conventional nationalisation agenda to complement its demand for free basic services. These elements of analysis raise questions concerning the organisational directions that such co-ordinations might take in future. From this point of view, the APF seems to reveal the most centralising tendency. Initially born as a vehicle to ‘build connections’ across different and autonomous struggles bridging the workplace-community divide, in late 2001 the APF adopted a formal, party-like structure (which includes full-time officials) where ‘representatives’ of communities are sent to a ‘council’ that meets monthly, while a weekly more restricted ‘co-ordinating committee’ ‘provides strategic direction’. In March 2002, an APF workshop concluded that to transcend the limitations of ‘specific issues’ represented by its organisations, the APF needed a ‘national co-ordinating structure’ to organise its campaigns. To this end, regional coordinators have been put in place in the APF’s three regions (Johannesburg, East Rand and Vaal) and a regional co-ordination position is active in the APF’s national office. These developments probably testify to the role played by mainstream left activists in the APF, which was born as a coalition between unionists opposed to the privatisation of Johannesburg’s municipal infrastructures and students opposed to the corporatisation of the University of the Witwatersrand, and only at a later stage defined itself as a trait d’union for community struggles. In any case, this also emphasises issues of internal diversity in organisational methods.

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46 Heinrich Bohmke, personal communication.
47 Anti-Privatisation Forum 2000.
49 Anti-Privatisation Forum 2002.
among movements and open up questions concerning the extent of the rupture with established left traditions.50

New community movements can now be found in most major urban areas of the country.51 In Durban, resistance against evictions in Chatsworth has led to an imitation effect which saw civic groups being established in other townships and the formation of a co-ordinating body, the Concerned Citizens’ Forum (CCF) in July 2001. The most important organisation affiliated to the APF is the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC). In this case, informal skill networks (under the name ‘Operation Khanyisa’, meaning ‘switch-on’) have been developed to clandestinely reconnect electricity installations disconnected by municipal technicians. In the Cape Town township of Tafelsig, the local Anti-Eviction Campaign (which has recently grown into a Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, or AEC, with the participation of other communities) has been opposing the forced relocation of residents in rent arrears for council housing in a community with seventy per cent recorded unemployment. The AEC and the CCF are more directly linked in their origins to the township struggles that have often remained at the extreme margins of working-class politics, and they organise among ‘coloured’ and Indian constituencies that are historically relatively less identified with ANC nationalist discourse. They are also more attached, compared to the APF, to a vision of themselves as ‘umbrella bodies’, rather than proto-parties, and place specific emphasis on direct action as a strategy of confrontation vis-à-vis the ANC and municipalities.52

Even if a relationship of reciprocal distrust exists between these social movements and ANC-aligned union organisations, significant (albeit isolated) moments of labour-community alliances have characterised these developments. This was the case in a protracted strike in 2001 by a local non-COSATU union at the Engen oil refinery in Wentworth (Durban). While the strike was ignited by a straightforward union issue (the use of casual workers through employment agencies in unsafe working conditions to cut costs at peak times), the workers were able to usher in remarkable innovations compared with

50 At the 2002 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, the most popular leader of the APF, Trevor Ngwane, delivered a speech advocating the need of building a new working-class party outside the Alliance.
51 The following information is largely drawn from Desai 2002a, which is the only general study of these new community movements appeared so far.
52 A good illustration of dynamics of interaction in community movements in Durban is in Pithouse 2001. See also Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign 2001.
mainstream union mobilisation. Engen was, in fact, targeted with moral outrage for contributing to the decline of the community’s income, which jeopardised the survival of households, and for using production methods responsible for heavy pollution in the area. This internalisation of reproductive and environmental issues proved decisive to mobilise the support of the whole community (with a strong CCF presence) in a protracted and eventually successful strike. Moreover, it constituted a visible change compared with the much more productivist orientations of established trade-union demands. As Ashwin Desai notes:

The executive of [the union] did not simply dictate the pace and nature of the struggle but devolved their organization into a loose and very broad grouping of activists and community and religious leaders. The unemployed (some would say ‘gangsters’) were represented at the discussions and their inclusion played a crucial role in cutting off Engen’s ability to recruit scabs. All the time the workers tried to ensure Engen was totally isolated from reaching potential allies in the community, by . . . ‘getting there first’ in the information battle and creating space for various interest groups to become part of the strike committee. For much of the time the union and community structures appeared as one.53

On August 2001, the APF, CCF and other similar organisations staged a 20,000-strong march in overt opposition to the ANC and its economic policies at the occasion of the UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban. The organisations that took part in the demonstrations gathered under the banner of the Durban Social Forum (DSF), an explicit reference to the Genoa Social Forum that only a few months earlier had ignited the most important anticapitalist demonstration in Western Europe since 1968. In this way, the new wave of social-movement mobilisation in South Africa was starting to develop explicit relations with the global movement against corporate globalisation that had been spreading after the 1999 Seattle riots. One signal in this direction was the opening of a South-African version of Indymedia, the independent global network of media activists, which played a decisive connecting role in the Durban demonstrations. Many methodological elements were shared by the two movements, mainly a rejection of bureaucratic structures and traditional top-down forms of left organising, the recognition of being composed of a ‘multitude’ of autonomous social subjects and the preference

53 Desai 2002a.
for horizontal, ad-hoc forms of co-ordination. The events of August 2001 were replicated on a larger scale with the 31 August 2002 demonstration at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. On that occasion, 30,000 people – representing social movements from all over the country gathered in the Social Movement Indaba, which was joined by the rapidly growing Landless People’s Movement (LPM) – marched on the venue of the Summit, in the exclusive neighbourhood of Sandton. The numerical size of these mobilisations and their sustained nature seem to indicate the birth of a mass opposition that, for the first time, is confronting the ANC government, questioning its hegemony of the ‘left’ discursive field and its ability to articulate grassroots subjectivities and allegiances.

While some local SACP branches initially entertained a dialogue or even joint actions (as in Johannesburg) with these movements, the reaction of the ANC and SACP leaderships has generally been hostile, when not overtly repressive. For example, the ANC Minister of Public Enterprises, Jeff Radebe, who is also a member of the SACP Central Committee, has defined the SECC a ‘criminal organisation’, threatening a police crackdown on anyone involved in its activities such as tariff boycotts. While some COSATU affiliates (such as the South-African Municipal Workers’ Union) have provided support and facilities to these local movements, COSATU has assumed a similarly dismissive attitude to them as it did toward the 1999 Seattle demonstrations; although it recognised progressive elements in the protests against international economic institutions, it defined such movements as a ‘motley crew’ with no common agenda or centralised co-ordination, arguing that this exposes them to the danger of being co-opted or of descending into a mere ‘side show’.54

In any event, many features of the new social movements seem to constitute obstacles to possible openings on the part of established trade unions. These movements have, in fact, appropriated and updated methods of direct action stemming from the tradition of civic associations’ opposition to apartheid. ‘Illegal’ reconnections and boycotts belong to this repertoire. However, these methods are now put at the service of a resistance against the commodification of public goods where the formation of subjectivity and solidarity is largely responsive to specific and highly differentiated local conditions, experiences and biographies, rather than to the unanimist mythology of nationalist narrations. Supporters of these movements come from a multitude of

54 COSATU 2000b.
'unemployed, single motherhood, community defender, abandoned, neighbour, factory worker, popular criminal and rap artist',\textsuperscript{55} which are hardly identifiable on the basis of the appellations that had sustained the anti-apartheid struggle. At the same time, the collapse of waged employment in these communities makes the unitary nature of the ‘working class’ a highly problematic concept, both as a vehicle of emancipatory visions and as an organisational model.\textsuperscript{56} While waged employment declines as a vehicle for citizenship and social insertion in the imagery of social movements, the role of the state remains debated. The widespread refusal of the ANC model of state-based developmentalism as functional to a free-market discourse is here combined with a plurality of options that go from the advocacy of public ownership of social services, as in the case of the APF, to more sceptical attitudes towards the state as witnessed in the AEC’s total rejection of electoral politics. Rather than delegating their notion of citizenship to institutionalised dispensations and codifications, they tend to experience this notion as a permanently fluid field of contestation. Many on the official Left, as in the case of COSATU, dismiss these dynamics as ‘single-issue’, ‘particularistic’ and ‘confused’. It is however unquestionable that the rise of new social movements in democratic South Africa interpellates the established Left in one decisive respect: the capacity that the Left has to redefine the field of what is ‘possible’ and ‘feasible’. Under the present circumstances of marginalisation and powerlessness, the answer to this interrogation is one that the traditional South-African Left owes to itself.

\textbf{References}


\textsuperscript{55} Desai 2002a.

\textsuperscript{56} See Hart 2002 for a study based on two specific local realities.


Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, ‘What is the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign?’: <http://www.antieviction.org.za/hmt/02whatisAEC.htm>.
Introduction

The period in Zimbabwean history beginning in 1996 and culminating in the current conjuncture will loom large as a decisive phase in Zimbabwe’s political economy. During these years, the political and economic terrain was substantively restructured, setting out the contours of the current crisis in Zimbabwe. This is not to argue that the problems in Zimbabwe can be understood only by reference to these years, for such an analysis clearly requires a longer historical understanding. For the purposes of this paper, however, the compressed period between 1996 and mid-2004 can be taken as representing an important distillation of a series of problems that have come to be referred to as the ‘Zimbabwean crisis’.

Broadly speaking, the crisis has three overlapping dimensions: that of pan-African and Third-World solidarity in the face of renewed imperialist aggression; the breakdown of the liberation struggle

1 Raftopoulos 2003.
consensus; and the limitations of postcolonial development in the context of globalisation. The first of these questions has recently been examined elsewhere; and the details are not repeated here beyond noting both their international significance and the marked success enjoyed by Mugabe in presenting the Zimbabwe crisis as externally generated and driven. Instead, this paper will focus on what might be termed the complementary dynamics of domestic tyranny and developmental collapse.

There can be little doubt that this period has seen the complete breakdown of the liberation consensus. Of course, this consensus was never unproblematic and was frequently contested, but the nationalism of the 1950s, and, in particular, during the years of the liberation struggle, was nonetheless represented as providing a unifying ideological vision that promised a broad vision of liberation and development. Whenever internal cleavages and fissures threatened to appear, dissident groupings and individuals were ruthlessly marginalised, ideologically policed and programmatically deferred. Moreover, such differences were repeatedly ‘placed’ within a certain normative rendering of the dominant nationalist view of history and liberation.

Nor was this nationalist consensus immediately disturbed by the post-independence slaughter, which occurred in Matabeleland between 1982 and 1987. Indeed, the fact that the full extent of the catastrophe visited by Mugabe on the region’s Ndebele inhabitants has only emerged in recent years is itself an important indication of the collapse of nationalist hegemony. The ideological significance, then, of the period under discussion has been the implosion of the assumed unifying vision of the pre- and post-1980 period. In this respect, as in others, Zimbabwe was no different from other postcolonial societies. As trade unionists, public-sector workers and a broad range of civic actors all demanded economic and political changes of one kind or another, the corset of national unity as defined by the ruling party, proved unable to contain the expanding pressures. Moreover, within the ruling party itself, a decisive critique emerged from an important section of Zanu PF structures, namely the war veterans and, in a broader sense, the indigenisation movement. The ways in which the ruling party has sought both to reconfigure consensus while eliminating dissent, provide the key to understanding the increasingly authoritarian politics of the past six years or so.

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2 Phimister and Raftopoulos forthcoming.
3 Raftopoulos 1999.
Additionally, this political crisis needs to be viewed in the context of the constraints of the developmentalist project of the postcolonial state. For many independent African states, the period 1960–73 represented the years of the developmentalist state, often attempting to build on the modernising imperatives of late-colonial policies.\footnote{Cooper 2002. Tomlinson 2003.} From 1973–90, including the devastating years of structural adjustment, most African countries entered a period of enduring economic crisis.\footnote{Mkandawire and Soludo 1999.} Thus, when Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 and embarked on its developmentalist phase in the first ten years of independence, the broader African scene was already unpropitious. The limitations of a welfarist programme unaccompanied by sustained economic growth soon became apparent, and, by the end of the decade, Zimbabwe was drawn in by the global imperatives of the structural adjustment programme.\footnote{Mlambo 1997, Jenkins and Knight 2002, Bond and Manyanya 2003.} By the end of the 1990s, the problems of economic neoliberalism as well as the serious democratic deficit of Zanu PF, created the conditions for a general crisis of legitimacy, and to the jettisoning of the structural adjustment programme. Without a road map of the way forward, the parlous state of economic policy in Zimbabwe is everywhere apparent.\footnote{Kanyenze 2003.}

In the three sections of this paper which follow, each of these issues is discussed in detail. This is necessary not only to establish the reasons for the particular form they have taken in the Zimbabwean case, but also because of their resonance for other countries in the region. In this context, Zimbabwe provides an important case study of broader economic and political questions in the sub-continent, not least with regard to the relationship between liberation struggles and postcolonial development.

I. The political economy of the 1990s

By the end of the 1980s, it was clear that, after a decade of expansive social expenditure, slow market-driven land reform and limited economic growth, the envisaged trickle-down effect of ‘growth with equity’ had proved elusive. Given the dramatic de-legitimation of socialism as an alternative after 1989, the mounting clamour by sections of the domestic bourgeoisie for an end to foreign exchange controls, and strong international pressures for movement
towards neoliberal economic policies, Zimbabwe adopted its own structural
target adjustment programme in 1990. However, by the late 1990s, the effects of this
programme were widely perceived to be disastrous for the majority of the
population. The indicators included: a decline in real wages from an index
of 122 in 1982 to 88 in 1997; a drop in the share of real wages in the gross
national income from 54 per cent in 1987 to 39 per cent in 1997; the figure of
households living in poverty increased from 61 per cent in 1995 to 75 per
cent in 2000; and employment growth decreased from an average of 2.4 per
cent between 1985–90 to 1.55 per cent between the years 1991–7.

These escalating difficulties provided the context in which ‘national unity’
around a broad developmentalist agenda began to unravel. The inability of
the state to maintain high levels of social expenditure, a noticeable economic
contraction, and increasing levels of concern about corruption and the
democratic credentials of the state, all contributed to open criticism of the
ruling party. The decline of workers’ incomes resulted in intensified strike
action that was characterised by the involvement of increasing numbers of
workers from more sectors in more frequent national actions. The period also
witnessed the growing militancy of public-sector workers.

The national public-sector strike in 1996 dealt a particularly hard blow to
the confidence of the state. Between 1980 and 1985, the racial complexion of
the civil service had been transformed as Zanu PF speedily Africanised the
public sector. It was also through the public sector that the ruling party had
been able to extend the reach of the state, and the tentacles of patronage. The
national strike thus served as a warning that party loyalties could no longer
be taken for granted. During this period, too, links were strengthened between
the public-sector workers and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
(ZCTU). The labour movement as a whole had grown in organisational
capacity and mobilisational skills since the mid-1980s, and, by the late 1990s,
used its autonomous national base to present a direct challenge to the ruling
party’s economic and political policies. The general strike of 1997 and the
mass stay-aways of 1998, announced the arrival of a major social force on
the political scene, an organisation with countrywide structures and an
alternative national perspective. This was not a force that could be dismissed
as a peripheral, or representing minority interests. Throughout the period of
anticolonial struggles, the relationship between trade unions and the nationalist

9 Raftopoulos 1986.
movement had been uncomfortable and ambiguous. The re-emergence of tensions in the postcolonial period was therefore not surprising.\(^{11}\)

However, it was the capacity of the labour movement to develop a broad social alliance against the state, which revealed the unprecedented changes that had taken place on the terrain of politics. As the economic crisis deepened and the state remained largely unresponsive, the labour movement skilfully articulated the linkages between this crisis and the broader problems of democratisation. The consummation of this linkage was the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly in 1998, which had as its major objective the reform of the national constitution. Through this process, the ZCTU established an alliance with a wide range of civic groups around the problems of democratisation and human rights, areas in which Zanu PF abuses had become blatant. The campaign around the constitution dominated Zimbabwean politics in the late 1990s, with discussions about the state’s accountability involving rural as much as urban areas. This open debate, around the modalities of democratisation, was the first such national discussion since 1980, and it rapidly assumed the form of a general stocktaking of the performance of the postcolonial state.

Between the activities of the NCA and the Government’s Constitutional Commission, itself the product of NCA pressure, a vibrant exchange of views ensued. The debate also provided a country-wide platform from which women’s groups could place issues such as gender violence, inheritance law and reproduction rights on the national agenda. From this confluence of civic activities, a consensus emerged on the need for the formation of a new opposition party, facilitated by the labour movement, but inclusive of a broad class alliance. The establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change in 1999 marked a watershed in the postcolonial period, as issues around democracy and civic rights, once part of the liberation agenda but subsequently sidelined, were returned to the centre of political debate. This fundamental contribution by the MDC to the revitalisation of Zimbabwean political discourse was very largely ignored by Zanu PF as it lashed out against its foes. Successive attempts to demonise the MDC have all implied that only the party of the liberation movement has the authority and legitimacy to advocate democratic issues, an argument that unfortunately resonates all too readily with other former liberation movements in Southern Africa.

\(^{11}\) Raftopoulos and Phimister 1997.
In much the same period, Zanu PF was confronted with a quite different challenge, this time from within its own ranks. The war veterans, through a lobbying organisation formed in 1992, presented a direct challenge to the ruling party and the president himself in 1997 over the neglect of status and welfare of war veterans. Indeed, the veterans have been a key factor in Zanu PF politics, playing a significant mobilising role for the party. In the words of one scholar:

> Since Independence the dynamics between war veterans and the ruling party have been remarkably consistent. Their relationship has been characterized by collaboration, conflict and accommodation. Veterans and the party have used each other to pursue their different, though often overlapping, objectives. It has sanctioned and encouraged veteran’s violence against its opponents and rewarded them for work well done. It has invoked its role in the liberation struggle to justify its use of veterans and its objectives. Veterans have used their allegedly superior contribution to the liberation struggle to justify their claims for preferential access to state resources – jobs, promotions, pensions and land. In trying to enforce their demands, they have often used violence and intimidation against competitors for resources, as well as part leaders and bureaucrats whom they believed were blocking their progress.\(^\text{12}\)

Mugabe’s abrupt decision to grant the war veterans their new demands for financial compensation of Z$50,000 each per month, signalled a decisive shift by the President towards greater reliance on the coercive capacity of this stratum. This was to become increasingly apparent in the period after 2000, as land occupations escalated. In addition to the demands of the war veterans, the ruling party also faced growing pressures from the indigenisation groups, such as the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC) and the Affirmative Action Group (AAG). These groups were formed in the early 1990s, when private capital accumulation under the structural adjustment programme was actively encouraged. Before then, such accumulative activities had been discouraged under socialist programmes, pursued in theory if rarely in practice by the state. The key demand of these groups was for more direct state intervention to assist emergent black entrepreneurs, largely through the provision of cheap credit and access to land. As these groups developed their programmes and demands, their relationship with the ruling party became...
intertwined, and membership of either organisation became an important launching pad for aspiring ruling-party politicians. With the growing prominence of both groups, intra-party ethnic struggles were sometimes fought through the structures of these lobbying bodies. As will be observed below, after the convulsions of the period 2000 and beyond, these organisations became redundant, with the state taking the indigenisation issue as its central political and economic project.\footnote{Raftopoulos and Compagnon 2003, Dashwood 2000.}

This largely élite-based indigenisation process has deep roots in the nationalist movement, and is one of the central characteristics of nationalist politics in Zimbabwe. From the formative stages of the development of nationalism in Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s, the constraints placed on the development of an African middle class were at the centre of the grievances that drove this emerging class into a broader mass nationalism. Because of the strong settler alliance that led the UDI configuration, the peaceful transfer of power to a black indigenous élite, as had been the practice in other emerging independent African states, was not a viable option in the Zimbabwean context. The stamp of this rejection of the African élite by the settler colonial state thus marked the growth of nationalist politics from its inception. According to one historian:

> In the period up to the late 1950s, the principal political and social objective of the emerging African middle class, the members of which generally sought to distance themselves from the African masses, was to obtain equal citizenship rights with the colony’s white settlers. For the most part, however, these rights were not granted. Consequently, the members of the African middle class turned to nationalism to realise their ambitions.\footnote{West 1990, p. 4. See, also, Mandaza 1986.}

The brief moment of radical nationalism during 1970s, in which the language of liberation took on an orthodox-socialist intonation, never became a hegemonic part of the liberation struggle.\footnote{Moore 1991, Sachikonye 1995.} Mugabe himself later acknowledged the ambiguities of socialist rhetoric within the liberation movement. In a statement that characterised the limited functionalism of the use of socialist ideology by the nationalist parties, he admitted that:

> Our former parties, ZANU-PF and ZAPU were established and developed in an environment which, on the one hand, was national and on the other, was international. But as the parties established themselves externally and
began relating to socialist countries, the Soviet Union and China, being the largest and most influential of them, they not only derived the many thousands of tons of weaponry for the national struggle but their political ideology as well.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, in the broader mobilisation that characterised the mass nationalist movement from the 1950s, while popular demands were incorporated into the nationalist agenda, the central organising force behind it all remained the emerging elite with their demands for sovereignty, equal citizenship and economic advancement. Yet, even as the moral legitimacy of this elite has been eroded, so its core economic ambitions have come to dominate the state’s political imperatives. And there is the further point, often overlooked, which is the fact that, where the state has attempted to realise these ambitions by authoritarian means, their roots are to be found not only in the commandist politics of the liberation struggle, but in precisely this earlier era when successive nationalist parties vilified and marginalised alternative anticolonial voices.

There were also signs of growing pressures on the land. For much of the 1990s, the pace of the resettlement programme slowed down discernibly. By 1997, only some 71,000 families had been resettled, a far cry from the ambitious figure of 162,000 families set in the early 1980s. The official reasons given for the reduced pace of resettlement were the limitations of the market-driven ‘willing-buyer-willing-seller’ approach, the lack of funds and the escalation of land prices.

Additionally, while the structural adjustment programme benefited existing white commercial farmers and a small black elite, rural poverty increased during this period. Attempts to address some of these problems through the Land Acquisition Act (1992) and the 14th Amendment to the constitution, had little political backing. The largely spontaneous land occupations in Svosve, Mashonaland East in 1998, brought to the fore the growing pressures of rural poverty.\textsuperscript{17}

In the context of these developments, an international donor conference on the land question was called in 1998. The conference concluded that the implementation of any future land reform programme should be ‘transparent fair and sustainable’, with due respect for the law. It should also include a

\textsuperscript{16} Mugabe 1991.
\textsuperscript{17} Moyo 2000.
broad range of stakeholders and be affordable, cost-effective and consistent with economic and financial reforms. Last but not least, the conference also stressed that the programme should be fundamentally concerned with poverty reduction, a view strongly supported by the British government who were particularly concerned about the abuse of land allocation amongst the élite. The emphasis of the donors on ‘good governance’ angered the Zimbabwean government, especially after an ill-considered statement in 1997 by the then British Development Minister who denied that Britain had a special responsibility for meeting the cost of land purchases in Zimbabwe. By the end of the 1990s, then, serious differences were emerging over the form of land reform and the conditions of funding. In particular, a growing black élite with close ties to the government, as noted above, sought greater access to land, with a view towards restructuring ownership in its own interests. After independence in 1980, members of the state élite, including ministers, judges, senior army officers, parliamentarians and senior civil servants, had all quietly enriched themselves by leasing state land on favourable terms, but, in the changed context of the structural adjustment programme’s market-driven approach, circumspection was thrown to the wind. Class formation no longer needed to proceed behind closed doors.

As the century drew to a close, the Zimbabwean state was confronted by a host of problems. It was faced with intolerable pressure in the form of widespread poverty, hugely exacerbated by a neoliberal economic policy framework which had fallen far short of its own optimistic projections of growth and investment. Moreover, in the limited political space that had opened up in the 1990s, a major social movement had given birth to a strong opposition party that threatened to end the rule of the party of liberation. Zanu PF’s crisis of legitimacy was pervasive, combining as it did criticisms of both the development path chosen, and the mode of rule being deployed. At the same time, Mugabe’s opportunistic intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from 1998 onwards, for all that it provided new ways for sections of the élite to feather their nests, created additional problems for the Zimbabwean economy. While it may be that the Zimbabwean government’s initial decision to enter the DRC conflict was motivated largely by the need to shore up SADC collective security structures, the government was quick to push Zimbabwean entrepreneurs into looking at the Congo

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market as something of an alternative to declining economic opportunities at home. In addition, the Congo offered openings for the Zimbabwe Defence Force to establish ‘low cost, commercially useful, networks’.

II. 2000 and its aftermath

In February 2000, the government lost a referendum over its proposed new constitution. This document and the process leading to its creation had been effectively opposed by the alliance around the NCA, and the loss of the referendum signalled, not only a deep sense of dissatisfaction with Zanu PF, but the capacity to mobilise this discontent into an effective opposition. From the ruling party’s perspective, it was a defeat which not only registered the birth of mass political opposition, but also opposition which was backed by white farmers and supported by the West, and which was determined to roll back the gains of liberation. Against this background, the land occupations began. The ruling party, and, in particular, members of the war veterans’ movement, chose to interpret the referendum result as a vote against the provision in the government’s proposed constitution that the British government should pay for compensation for land appropriated by the state. This narrow and self-serving reading of the defeat informed the subsequent ruling party strategy of locating the Zimbabwean crisis squarely in the land question. By doing so, Zanu PF could focus its anti-MDC campaign around the land legacy of the liberation movement, assimilate the MDC into the category of ‘agent of imperialism’, and divert debate from the wider issue of its own increasingly authoritarian rule. Stripped of any complexity, the land question came to symbolise a simplistic political binary in which the ruling party represented the honest ‘sons of the soil’ against the evil puppets of imperialism.

Not surprisingly, there are alternative interpretations about the motivation and content of the land occupations. Differences have emerged, in particular, around the extent of violence, the role of the state in supporting such violence, and the political importance of the occupations. Moyo argues that the occupations of 2000 and beyond represented an essential continuity with earlier land occupations, notably in the 1980s and 1990s, with the less public dispersed struggles of the latter period being exacerbated by the neoliberal economic reforms.

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19 Nest 2001, p. 69.
As to the ‘instrumentalisation of violence’, Moyo views criticisms of such violence as ‘exaggerated’ and ‘wrongly made the focus of the whole land reform issue’.21 His analysis instead stresses the continuity of the occupations, and the limited extent of the violence. By contrast, other writers have emphasised the specificity of the 2000 occupations. Alexander, for example, suggests that the differences between developments in 2000 and earlier occupations were twofold – the ideology behind them, and their implications for the state and citizenry:

Grass roots nationalism in the early 1980s had encompassed both a desire for the return of the land, and for an accountable, responsive state. Zanu PF in 2000 promised the land, but at the price of an extreme and violent political intolerance that severely undermined the long-standing aspirations of a ‘good’ state, and labelled as enemies a range of social groups that had once been included in the nationalist constituency. It was not a revived pre-independence nationalism that lay behind the wave of occupation in 2000, but a far narrower one.22

Similarly, Marongwe observes two differences between the earlier and later periods of occupation. First of all, the most recent occupations were precipitated more by ‘politically motivated intentions than by social/moral and economic considerations’, while in the second place, they were led by ‘war veterans’, unlike earlier peasant-initiated demonstrations.23 Arguably, though, neither position adequately captures the complexity and fluidity of the present situation. There would appear to be some similarity with the nationalism of the liberation struggle now recognised as more problematic than was once conceptualised.24 And it would also seem to be obvious enough that there is both a degree of continuity with the first decades of independence and a new degree of state-sanctioned, if not always government-sponsored, violence.

Indeed, a particularly worrying dimension of the occupations from 2000 onwards has been the violent role of state supported institutions and organisations. A number of national and international reports have detailed the use of government and quasi-government violence during the political campaigns and land seizures of the last few years. Beginning with the forcible occupation of white-owned farms, the state militia has subsequently devoted
its murderous attentions to intimidating MDC supporters whenever necessary. The myopia of regional observers notwithstanding, this was certainly the case in the 2000 general elections and the 2002 presidential elections, as well as in every by-election since then. A recent summary of the data on the role of the militia concludes that the evidence suggests a well-thought out strategy by the state, involving the use of both the militia and the state security agencies.25 If it is true that one of the major issues in the Zimbabwean crisis revolves around the unresolved processes of primitive accumulation,26 due to the blockages created by settler colonialism, then violence, to some degree, was bound to accompany the land occupations. The main question, however, revolves around the major actors involved in this violence, and, in particular, the role of the state. From the evidence at hand, it is clear that the central role of state organs in the violence had the greatest impact on farm workers and other ordinary citizens, leading to a closure of democratic spaces and the reconfigured authoritarianism of the ruling élite.

There can be little doubt that violence and intimidation in one form or another, including political murders, have played a vital role in the broad political strategy pursued by Zanu PF since the shock of the referendum defeat. The centrality of this violence, moreover, needs to be understood as a key part of the strategy to drive the opposition out of the rural areas and to re-assert proprietary political claims over these spaces. In a broader context, the violence formed part of a more far-reaching re-organisation of the state. This has assumed several notable features. Firstly, the judiciary was reshaped to ensure greater compliance with ruling-party dictates, in particular where the land question was concerned. In the process, as Feltoe writes, ‘the integrity of the legal system has been compromised in various ways’. These include intolerable pressure exerted on independent judges to resign from the High Court and the Supreme Court; threats against judges and magistrates who have given rulings contrary to ruling-party interests; repeated refusals by government officials to comply with court judgements; the purging of the police and the civil service of opposition sympathisers; and the issuing of amnesties and pardons to persons who have perpetrated acts of violence on behalf of the ruling party.27

26 Moore 2001a.
27 Feltoe 2003.
Secondly, much the same forces have been at work at the local district level in the rural areas. Structures and personnel have been politicised along narrow ruling-party lines. Teachers, in particular, considered to be the backbone of opposition support in the countryside, have been consistently targeted by the ruling party. Hundreds have been beaten up, and many removed from their posts. Thirdly, legislation with widely repressive powers, such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), has been introduced to contain dissent. The major opposition party, civic groups, priests and NGOs have been the major targets of POSA, while the AIPPA has reduced the public broadcasting authority to the bluntest of propaganda tools. Together, these measures have pushed Zimbabwe into a decidedly authoritarian political framework. They have effectively circumscribed the independent capacity of the main opposition groups; that is to say, the MDC, the labour movement and civic groups.

The MDC leadership and ordinary members have repeatedly been subjected to judicial intimidation, as well as to harassment and torture by the militia and police. Every election in the past three years has been disfigured by ruling-party violence. Most recently, the stay-away called to register popular dissatisfaction with Mugabe’s régime was greeted by an unprecedented display of armed force. Morgan Tsvangirai, already facing trumped-up charges of treason, was arrested and charged with a second count of the same offence. Other leading members of the MDC have been similarly harassed. In this same period, civic leaders and members of the NCA, the Combined Harare Residents’ Association and the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition, the Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference and Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), have variously been arrested, tortured, beaten and charged under the POSA. Nor have NGOs escaped the state’s wrath. A recent study of this sector shows that most organisations have been affected by the ‘restricted operating environment’ imposed by POSA and other restrictive acts. In the words of the report:

The majority, if not all NGOs are acutely aware of tensions with Government, and admit that this has impacted their activities in some way. While a slight majority described their relations with government as complementary, there were plenty of indications that serious compromises are being made to maintain cordial relations. These compromises reflect a powerlessness voiced

by many NGOs, and inappropriate use of power by certain government officials and agencies of the state to curtail democratic rights of Zimbabwean citizens.29

As the central social movement that gave birth to opposition politics in the country, organised labour has been singled out for state oppression. A rival union centre, the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU), set up in the 1990s by the ruling party, was mobilised after 2000 to undermine the organisational autonomy of the ZCTU. The ZFTU organised a series of factory invasions, with the intention of demonstrating their capacity to quickly resolve long-standing labour disputes. Under the benevolent gaze of the state, this splinter union was allowed to contravene the existing Labour Relations Act and by-pass established labour relations dispute mechanisms, in order to deliver quick fixes. Moreover, the ZFTU has used forced mobilisation strategies to expand its membership. As the Secretary General of the ZCTU described this process:

What happens is that the ZFTU are able to mobilise the ‘youth’ to visit companies, they give a membership form to the employees to sign, and if any refuse to sign, they are seen as being sympathetic to the opposition. Workers are told if they do not join the ZFTU, they are opposing the government.30

What all of this clearly demonstrates is that the ruling party has ruthlessly mobilised its members to attack state structures, mechanisms and legal procedures of its own creation, in a bid to reconfigure its hold on power. In such a context, it was only to be expected that both the general election of 2000 and the 2002 presidential election were highly disputed events. The legitimacy of the latter is presently before the courts.

III. ‘The Land Is the Economy, the Economy Is the Land’

The above slogan has formed the centrepiece of Zanu PF’s political strategy for the last three years. Quite apart from the political objective of the slogan, discussed above, the economic logic of the claim was that land reform was central to any transformation of the economy. From the onset, however, this linkage was absent in terms of broad economic strategies. Short-term political
imperatives were always more apparent in the modality through which ‘fast-track’ land reform was carried out. The immediate impact, and for local white capital and international capital, the most important result of the land occupations has been the eviction of white commercial farmers as a significant force from the Zimbabwean farming sector. About 10.5 million hectares of land have been seized by the state from white farmers. This comprises 90 per cent of the land formerly held by this latter group. According to one estimate, new ‘petty-commodity’ producing establishments account for 93.7 per cent of total new farming establishments, with 5.3 per cent going to aspirant capitalist farmers.\footnote{Moyo and Yeros 2004.} Such figures are still provisional and still require detailed analysis and disaggregation. The long-term implications of the occupations will take years to assess. Even so, interim reports have already begun to outline the extent of the problems that have been created by the process. A UNDP mission in early 2002 outlined a number of problem areas. These included the impracticality of the higher targets for resettlement, the confusion created by the de-listing process, the unwieldy, cumbersome and non-transparent nature of the process of applying for land, and the minimalist planning targets of the Fast Track Programme.

By way of damning conclusion, the report insisted that the Fast Track Programme could not be implemented on a sustainable basis unless the resettlement timetable was substantially adjusted. At the very least, there would have to be a considerable infusion of resources to finance the necessary infrastructure and support services.\footnote{UNDP 2002.}

More specifically, the major losers in the land reform programme would seem to have been black farm workers. A report carried out in 2002 on the effect of the land reform programme on this group sketched the outlines of their plight. In a national study covering some 997 farm worker households, several indicators were observed:

- Between 80–90 per cent of the farms surveyed had experienced either a halt or a drastic decline in production.
- In line with the decline in production, there has been a huge drop in employment levels. By November 2002, it was estimated that employment levels had declined by 70 per cent in the Midlands province, and by 65 per cent in the two Matabeleland provinces. In addition, 90 per cent of farm workers in Mashonaland West had lost their permanent status and
become contract workers, while in Mashonaland East 80 per cent of workers interviewed had left permanent employment.

- The loss of employment because of the decline in commercial farming has led to the loss of regular incomes, ‘which is perhaps the largest single factor which affects their present capacity to sustain their livelihoods’.
- By mid-2002, an estimated 900,000 people had been affected by the evictions.
- Less than 5 per cent of farm workers have been granted land.
- The loss of incomes and access to housing and safe water has affected the capacity of households to care for the sick, in particular those with HIV/AIDS.  

Farm workers have also been amongst the most affected by the ruling-party violence. Considered allies of commercial farmers and regarded as foreigners, farm workers have been singled out for brutal treatment by ruling-party militias.

Besides the marginalisation of farm workers, a recent government land audit leaked to Africa Confidential indicates widespread corruption and violence by senior politicians and military personnel to remove vulnerable settlers from the land. The audit notes a series of irregularities in the land redistribution exercise. These include: the displacement of resettled people by the party élite; élite struggles over prime land particularly in Mashonaland West and Mashonaland Central provinces; the use of ‘hired thugs’ by sections of the Zanu PF leadership to press their demands; and the problem of multiple ownership amongst prominent members of the ruling élite.

As a result of both the land occupations and the broader problems associated with the drought in the region, problems of access to food have reached critical proportions. It is estimated that the number of Zimbabweans in need of food aid until March 2003 has risen from 6.7 million to 7.2 million. A mission report by two UN envoys in February 2003 noted that the increasing problem of food availability in Zimbabwe was related to the poor functioning of the private sector, and the absence of a more productive environment for programming due to political interference in Grain Marketing Board (GMB) food distributions. The mission concluded that there was concern over the capacity and willingness of the Government to address the deepening crisis.

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33 Sachikonye 2002, pp. 37–8, 54.
The FOSNET Report for January 2003 provided more detailed evidence of the food crisis. It noted the following trends: Food security declined across all major districts due to noticeable reductions in GMB deliveries and commercial supplies, not adequately compensated by production, relief or other supplies; vulnerability was attributed to poor harvests, poverty, inability to afford inflated food costs, bias in access (political/procedural) and scarcity of food supplies; an increase in profits from the sale of controlled price maize on the black market, registering a greater flow of public funds into private hands.37

The general problem of food insecurity and growing vulnerability has worsened the HIV/AIDS crisis. At present, it is estimated that, out of 2.2 million Zimbabweans infected with the virus, 600,000 have developed full-blown AIDS.38 The combination of food shortage, malnutrition, severely depleted health services and HIV/AIDS have produced a lethal cocktail for disaster, in which households are likely to be pushed into deeper structural poverty by survival strategies that place too heavy a cost or opportunity cost burden on them.39 The problems that have been catalogued above relating to the land-reform programme and food insecurity have a much broader impact on the problem of reproduction of labour generally in the economy. While the reproduction of labour in the colonial economy was based on a cheap food/low wage combination,40 this relationship changed to one characterised by rising food prices and decreasing real wage levels from the late 1980s through the 1990s.41 At present, this dynamic can be described as one turning on a combination of increased food scarcity, rising food prices and rapidly eroding wage levels. In short, labour in both the rural and urban areas is more vulnerable now than at any time since independence.

As with the land occupations, the debate over the content of the state’s ‘fast track’ reform has only just begun. Some analysts, such as Moyo and Mandaza, view it as the painful beginning of a longer-term democratisation process. Moyo, for example, argues that:

Much of the negative fallout from the occupations movement, including its use for short term political gain, has to be weighed more seriously against

37 Fosnet 2003.
the longer term gains to the broader democratization process, of creating space for awareness and participation in the basic social struggles hitherto dominated by formal state structures and urban civil society organizations.\footnote{Moyo 2001, p. 330. See also, Yeros 2002.}

Similarly, Mandaza asserts that the current struggle in the countryside not only constitutes ‘a land reform process of no small proportion; but it will have largely resolved and democratized the land in Zimbabwe’.\footnote{Mandaza 2002.} Other observers have attempted to locate Zimbabwe’s problems within the wider context of the three-fold crisis facing the African continent, namely the impasse of primitive accumulation, the dilemma of nation-state formation and the dialectic of democratisation.\footnote{Moore 2001b.} While certain of these lines of approach are likely to be more fruitful than others, there can be little argument that issues of redistribution and democratisation lie at the very heart of the Zimbabwe question. For all that these processes are far from complete, even at this early stage there are certain pointers to probable outcomes. Thus it might be asserted that, for the ruling élite, control of land in general and commercial farm land in particular, is the central platform of a longer-term project to control other sectors of the economy, given the dependence of these sectors on agriculture. There is some evidence that this process has already begun. Presently, blacks hold majority shareholding in forty-five of the seventy-seven companies listed on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange, with takeovers relating in particular to companies with exposure to agriculture.\footnote{Financial Gazette 2003.} However, it is not yet clear which particular policies will bring this about, as we argue below. Such impetus as there is appears to be derived from older modernisation models, albeit under a new national bourgeoisie. Notwithstanding the retrograde political language of the régime, the central thrust of its obsession continues to be modernisation. This demand is central to most nationalist positions in developing countries where emerging élites seek a modernising path on ‘less disadvantageous terms than those offered by the existing development-controllers’.\footnote{Nairn 1997, p. 50.} This project relates to the agenda of élite advancement, which has been one of the central pillars of Zimbabwe’s nationalist ideology. The difficulties of advancing such a project, given the current dynamics of globalisation, have played a significant role in establishing the contours of the ruling élite’s vitriolic response. It is
no less clear, however, that pressure from below for land reform has played a part in the ruling party’s strategy to revive its legitimacy through the land question.47

In addition to the crisis in agriculture and food security discussed above, the broader economic trends are equally disturbing. As the following indicators make clear, the economy is imploding: GDP has declined by 38 per cent between 1998 and 2003; agricultural output plummeted from -12 per cent in 2001 to -20 per cent in 2002, with agricultural production at its lowest since the late 1980s at the end of 2003; industrial production has fallen 44 per cent since the mid 1990s, with industry’s share of GDP half its early 1990s’ value; inflation rose from 199 per cent at the end of 2002 to 526 per cent by October 2003; workers savings have been seriously eroded due to the serious lack of transparency in the handling of national pension funds by the ruling party; there is an acute shortage of foreign currency, with official foreign exchange inflows having declined from US$ 18.5 million in September 2002 to US$ 500,000 in December of the same year. There is, however, a huge black market in foreign currency, with linkages to the state itself. The external debt stands at US$6.6 billion which amounts to about 179 per cent of GDP, while foreign direct investment has declined from US$440 million in 1997 to US$15 million in 2002.48

Since the breakdown of the structural adjustment programme in the mid-1990s, the state has failed to put an alternative economic strategy into place. In 1998, the government announced the short-lived Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), and, when this failed to materialise, the state launched its Millennium Economic Recovery Programme in 2000. Both programmes sought to refine the sequencing of adjustment policies, rather than rework the fundamental design of the structural adjustment policy itself. In the event, the Millennium Programme quickly followed the ZIMPREST document on to the shelf. In 2001, Mugabe announced a ten-point plan that was supposed to tie the land occupations into a broader economic framework. This plan was based on agriculture-led economic growth and indigenous capital accumulation. To date, though, there is little indication of how such plans are to be linked to comprehensive budgetary and policy decisions. Instead, there have been a series of ad hoc decisions facilitating the growth of businesses close to the ruling party. These decisions have

themselves been taken in the context of stopgap measures dealing with immediate economic problems.

Indeed, one of the notable features of the Zimbabwean crisis has been the emergence of a significant black elite, tied to patronage structures within the ruling party. This elite has expanded on the back of the current state offensive, not only through the restructuring of ownership on the land, but an assault on ownership structures throughout the economy. For example, in industry, where there has been a foreign investor bail-out, consortia of indigenous business groups have sought bank loans to take over companies, many of whose assets have been devalued by the current crisis. Additionally, in a situation of foreign currency shortages and tight controls, the ruling party has granted Zanu PF business people privileged access to foreign exchange, thereby tightening their stranglehold on the economy.

But, while crony capitalists have benefited hugely, other constituencies have not been entirely neglected. In November 2002, the government published Statutory Instrument 302, a Control of Goods (Price Freeze) order, in order to be seen to be dealing with hyperinflationary price increases of essential goods. At the same time, the state also revived the Tripartite National Forum (TNF), established after the stay-aways in 1998 as an attempt to build a social contract with the labour movement and business groups. A ‘Draft Prices and Incomes Stabilisation Protocol’ was discussed. Its objectives include the management of prices and incomes in the context of an unstable macro-economic environment, the provision of an environment conducive to the restoration of macro-economic stability, the promotion of economic recovery and sustainable socio-economic development, and a sharing of the burden of economic stabilisation among social partners with the specific obligations of each partner clearly spelt out. Some months later, this was followed by the Confederation of Zimbabwean Industries with its own draft recovery paper. It too set out a series of measures designed to increase state-private sector co-operation.

Zanu PF’s strategy of engaging other social partners in seeking a way out of the country’s economic malaise takes place at a time when the ruling party feels that it has largely contained the MDC and civic bodies such as the ZCTU and the NCA. But these and other attempts to incorporate previously reviled groups into a process of ‘normalising politics’ in Zimbabwe face serious

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50 MDC 2002.
obstacles. In the first place, the labour movement has publicly declared that it will only enter a social contract if questions of the rule of law and governance are addressed by the state. Given the continued reliance by the ruling party on repressive laws and extra-judicial violence, Zanu PF is highly likely to ignore such demands. Secondly, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the status of the memorandum of understanding with white farmers. Contrary to official claims, the entire issue of compensation remains unresolved. There are also serious conflicts within the state over policy issues. Senior civil servants are at odds with the current political process. The Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, has expressed his serious concerns about the attitude of such individuals:

Those in the leadership of the bureaucracy who do not want to implement the President’s policy manifesto that was endorsed by the electorate have no ethical or professional reason to be where they are unless they have been compromised to sabotage our system on behalf of hostile political interests and are remaining in their position just for that purpose.51

And, finally, this strategy is being pursued in the context of a shrinking economy. That it will encounter serious constraints on its attempts at incorporation of broader social groups seems obvious. The stay-away called by the ZCTU from the 23–5 April 2003 over the régime’s three-hundred per cent hike in the price of fuel, and the further stay-away supported by the MDC a month later are key indications of the government’s failure to eliminate opposition from organised labour. Not that this is a problem peculiar to Zimbabwe. It is one confronted by most developing countries. In circumstances where the economy is weak and authoritarian politics dominant, such régimes frequently attempt to use nationalism as a modality for integrating the majority into a political dispensation.52

IV. Conclusion

The Zimbabwean crisis has spawned a great deal of journalistic comment and academic debate, and taken on what appears to be a surprising international significance given its size and status in international relations. However, on closer analysis, it is clear that the resonance of the Zimbabwean

51 Moyo 2003.
52 Anderson 2002.
debate lies in the ways in which the crisis has laid open the recurring challenges of moving beyond the imperatives of neoliberal capitalism, in forms that do not repeat the historic failures of the international Left on the question of democratic alternatives. This challenge and the contending demands it continues to pose have, not surprisingly, divided the ranks of African radicals. The historic demands for redistributive economic policies on the continent have allowed Mugabe’s rhetoric and policies to resonate at a populist level on the African continent and, indeed, in the diaspora. A number of African intellectuals on the Left have leapt to the defence of ZANU PF, asserting the right of African states to push through the often duplicitous international discourse on democratisation and human rights to ‘more fundamental’ issues of economic rights. Yet this defence has often been based on both a very narrow economistic reading of the legacy of anticolonial struggles, and an evasion of the continuing difficulties of attempting to build alternative economic structures on the basis of authoritarian politics. For the assumption of such a political position is often that democratic questions will be dealt with at a later stage, once the economic kingdom has been conquered. The history of the Left is littered with the casualties of such reasoning.

In the pages of this journal, Paris Yeros has written a useful summary of the differences within the Zimbabwean Left in responding to the Zimbabwean crisis. Yeros summarises the differences between the two main trends as that between the urban civic forces pressing for democratic accountability, while remaining cognisant of the ‘bourgeois’ nature of this platform, and those positioned behind what he refers to as the ‘uncivil’ forces endorsing the land acquisition programme while remaining aware of the ‘democratic deficit’ of the programme.53 In his analysis, Yeros positions himself on the side of the ‘uncivil’, in the belief that a civil society that is ‘largely urban-based, cross-class, multi-racial, and dependent on foreign funding cannot commit itself to a far reaching change in property rights’.54 In a recent piece with Zimbabwean academic Sam Moyo, the authors re-assert Yeros’s earlier positions and go on to present their defence of criticisms of the on-going land issue in Zimbabwe. In addition, however, the authors launch an attack on recent work by Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen55 as well by Bond and Manyanya,56

55 Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen 2003.
56 Bond and Manyanya 2002.
accusing such work as being co-opted ‘to the point where imperialism has become mystified, national self-determination demoted, the state obscured and the agrarian question abandoned’.57

This is not the place to respond in full to both the problems raised by Moyo and Yeros and the major problems in their own analysis, in particular since the most recent criticism is made in a short dismissive paragraph without any substantive engagement with the books in question. A few general comments will suffice, and, for purposes of this discussion, the two articles will be considered together. Firstly, while their interventions present an important overview of the international constraints and determinants of the Zimbabwean crisis, they have little to say about the internal reconfiguration of Zimbabwean state politics. This results in an extremely benign view of the form of authoritarian nationalist state that has emerged, and a casual treatment of the various forms of violence that have become the Zimbabwean state’s favoured form of dealing with its citizenry. Yeros comment that such violence ‘is endemic in the neo-colonial context’58 is simply an evasion of the dynamics of state and class violence in Zimbabwe.

Secondly, the analysis of the land occupations romanticises their ‘uncivil’ nature without dealing with the central role of the state in the events, and the positioning of these occupations in the broader authoritarian nationalist project underway. Thirdly, the current revived nationalism has taken on a particularly selective reading of the past, grossly flattening the complexities of the anticolonial struggles in favour of a narrow, racialised teleological narrative of Zanu PF. This has become a central propagandist tool of the ruling party in the media and the militia training schools, and is threatening to enter the mainstream education system.59 This ideological assault is also being used to demonise legitimate dissenting voices. In the largely economistic and reductionist analysis of Yeros and Moyo, such political developments find little place for analysis. Classes are reduced to ahistorical, economistic figures and the authors pay little attention to how politics is actively constructed, as opposed to its mechanistic derivation from given economic relations.

Fourthly, Yeros and Moyo have little patience with the struggles around ‘free and fair multi-party elections’, seeing these as part of the ‘imperial

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While we agree that issues of governance and human rights have been used as part of the liberal-imperialist project against national sovereignty, it is wrong to assume that such issues do not have a legitimate national basis. The struggles over electoral issues and human rights played a central role in anticolonial struggles and were an important part of the demands of nationalist politics. Moreover, to assume that the current demands of ‘civilised’ civil society are merely the extension of an imperial project is both to deny their historical rootedness and their contemporary importance. For, while it is certainly true that the urban civics have been weak in addressing redistributive questions, they have placed major emphasis on the importance of state accountability in all matters, including issues around the land question. The ideology of human rights and constitutionalism around which civics have confronted the Zimbabwean state, played a key role in forcing democratic issues on to the agenda, in order to contest the argument by the ruling party that such issues were somehow alien to the Zimbabwean crisis. Such contestations were fought to ensure a clearer linkage between human rights, democratisation and sovereignty, as opposed to Zanu PF’s use of national sovereignty to undermine the enlargement of democratic spaces. One of the major problems in Zimbabwean politics has been therupturing of relations between redistributive questions and political democratisation. Yeros and Moyo perpetuate that rupture in their analysis. Finally, it is not true that the work that Moyo and Yeros attack has been diverted to ‘rarefied debates over identity politics’. This is simply an impoverished left formalism. The work in question has indeed taken identity questions and discourse seriously, but has located them firmly within a more layered analysis of the national and international dimensions framing the Zimbabwe crisis. The work by Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen is particular, avoids the kind of one-dimensional land-determinist analysis that has marked the ruling party’s characterisation of the crisis.

Clearly, a great deal more theoretical ground needs to be cleared in the Zimbabwean debate, not least over the nature of the state and the contours of the accumulation process currently underway. It is also apparent that there are areas of agreement in the debate, such as the position that the accumulation process unfolding is of most benefit to the emerging black bourgeoisie. It is
imperative, therefore, for the Zimbabwean Left to develop such theoretical and political questions, particularly at a time when the ruling party has developed an increasingly repressive political project, and the opposition has been weakened both by state repression and its own ideological deficiencies.

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The Worker, No. 100, November 2000.


Interventions

Ashwin Desai

Magic, Realism and the State in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Madiba ‘magic’

In April 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) won an overwhelming majority in South Africa’s first democratic elections and sought to build a Government of National Unity (GNU). The National Party (NP) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) joined the ANC in the GNU. In the economic sphere, capital and labour were ‘locked-in’ to corporatist institutions mediated by the state.

On 10 May 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as President. Before our eyes the racial hierarchy of apartheid morphed into the ‘rainbow nation of god’. The twentieth century had come late to South Africa. But in this time of miracles, would not the last be first? Indeed, while South Africa was a new nation in 1994, it was a uniquely powerful one. Not in military might but in symbolic might. If ever there was a chance to re-imagine the conditions of existence for a ‘Third-World’ state, to engender an economic ethics in a post-Communist world or, simply, to introduce honesty into domestic and international
politics, then the Mandela government in the months after liberation had this opportunity.

While the right-wing threat, jittery investors and bureaucratic hostility could account for some inhibition in not opting for the most radical outcomes, the ANC set its sights, laudably, on an economic programme that was ‘people-centred’, labelled the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP had many of its more radical features shorn by 1994. But, in an era of rampaging neoliberalism, where it was said that history was made from the ‘outside’, in South Africa, the RDP was commended as an example of how history, without ignoring global forces, could be determined from the inside.

Exactly two weeks after his inauguration, Mandela addressed the ‘liberated’ parliament for the first time.\(^1\) Mandela’s speech sparkled with references to RDP. He had a commandment for every department of his government. Healthcare shall be accessible in line with the RDP; education shall be affordable; the labour market shall not shed jobs. Mandela went so far as to say that the liberation struggle was meaningless unless the government stuck to people-centred policies. In every way, the RDP was the ‘centre piece of what this Government will seek to achieve, the focal point on which our attention will be continuously focused’.

Importantly for Mandela in 1994, the RDP was a real policy with actual targets. The RDP was no mere guideline or wish-list. As Mandela himself promised in his maiden speech: ‘We [will] integrate the objectives of our Reconstruction and Development Plan within government expenditure and not treat them as incidental tasks of government, marginalized to the status of mere additions to the level of expenditure’. Taking Mandela at his word, the RDP was the framework for public policy that would put people at the centre.

But, soon, that argument came to be inverted.

Government ministers and big business preached that the RDP did not pay the god of the market enough heed. In the era of globalisation, capital moves. Fast. Greater cognisance would need to be taken of the ‘outside’ forces. By not abiding by the commandment: ‘Thou shall make maximum profits’, South Africa ran the risk of being abandoned in the wilderness for another forty years. And, so, the RDP became apocryphal. A new gospel was preached,

\(^1\) Mandela 1994.
Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). It was an explicitly neoliberal package. What’s more, it was home-grown.

The RDP was a widely discussed document. The main union federation, the Congress of South-African Trade Unions (COSATU), had premised its electoral support for the ANC on the implementation of the RDP. Its former general secretary became the minister in charge of the RDP office. GEAR was drawn up by a small coterie of economists led by a World Bank economist. It was presented to the ANC’s alliance partners as a non-negotiable. One of the drafters of GEAR later admitted:

> Close affinity with the ‘Washington Consensus’ characterized not only the substantive policy recommendations of GEAR, but also the process through which it was formulated and presented publicly. This was ‘reform from above’ with a vengeance, taking to extreme the arguments in favour of insulation and autonomy of policy makers from popular pressures.²

GEAR was presented as the only realistic option, given the balance of forces in the global economy.

However, it was widely believed that, in the land of small miracles, the negative effects of ‘outside’ forces would be mitigated. Here, neoliberalism would never lose its human face. It was trusted that the magic of Madiba would keep things in place. It was also a time when a once racially stigmatised people basked in the defeat of apartheid and a belief in an almost divinely determined better future.

At the end of his tenure as president, the RDP was hardly mentioned. When Mandela did mention it like in his farewell speech to parliament, it was no longer an existing, living thing. It was now tellingly an ‘RDP of the soul’. By now, the Mandela government’s shift from the RDP to GEAR, from nationalisation to the ‘magic elixir’ of the free market was unfolding. Small wonder that Pamela Cox head of the South Africa division of the World Bank was later to enthuse: ‘what they (the ANC) have done to put South Africa on a right footing, is, I think, almost miraculous’.³

There were broader implications to this shift. As Krista Johnson points out: ‘Whereas the RDP sought to define social objectives, and then devise measures to meet them in macroeconomically sound ways, GEAR outlines the macroeconomic framework and then determines which social objectives are

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² Steven Gelb as cited by Marais 2001, p. 162.
³ Quoted in Sparks 2002, p. 16.
economically feasible within it’. 4 This shift is a crucial one. With a macro-economic framework that comes first and is ‘non-negotiable’, the door is left open to channel whatever benefits such a system may produce away from its original and supposed beneficiaries. For instance, upliftment of the very poor could be replaced with the creation of a black elite.

As the transition unfolds, the story of these changing priorities gets told. From the inside. Pregs Govender, former ANC MP, speaking at the 2004 Ruth First Memorial Lecture relates how, for example, Joe Slovo spoke against a multi-billion rand arms deal because it contradicted the ideals of the RDP, but the argument came to naught. ‘By 1996 the RDP office was closed down and a new macro-economic strategy was drafted by a team led by a World Bank consultant. . . . By 1998 negotiations on the arms deal were well on their way and by 2001 it came into effect in our National Budget’. 5

While this changing macro-economic picture is crucial to understanding the transition, what is occluded is how Thabo Mbeki has broadened the reach of the state, blurred the state-party divide and has tied to use this process to absorb, break-up or neutralise any mobilisation outside the state-party ambit. Mbeki has been helped in this by the fact that under Mandela, the state, in the hands of the party, came to be seen as a ‘magnanimous sorcerer’ and ‘acquired a providential hue’. 6

Ten years into post-apartheid South Africa, Mbeki spent most of his State of the Nation address repeating what Mandela had said in his first speech to the ‘democratic’ parliament.

This was surprising, given the fact that, over the last five years, Mbeki made a conscious and strenuous effort to put his own stamp on the presidency. Among many in the media and the academy, while the Mandela presidency was valued for its emphasis on reconciliation, Mbeki was seen as the ‘deliverer’ of transformatory goals: creation of jobs, alleviation of poverty and so on.

But the State of the Nation address did not reveal any new plans for ‘delivery’. The looming election meant that he had to account for the failed promises on delivery epitomised in the targets set out in GEAR – failed targets that had become a shooting gallery for critics. Mbeki’s solution was to try and disguise his failure by showing that he was ruling in the spirit of Mandela, that he possessed Madiba’s magic. Mandela’s inaugural speech was made at

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4 Johnson 2002a, p. 236.
a time when there was still a possibility that the democratic transition would be about more than deracialising apartheid. By the end of Mandela’s tenure, the prognosis was less optimistic.

If Mbeki were honest, he would have reflected how, by the time Mandela made his last speech to parliament, the RDP and people-centred development had disappeared from his orientation. But, instead, he attempted in his last State of the Nation address to cloak himself in the optimism of 1994 as a guise to deny the fact that ten years of ANC rule has progressively undone that optimism. Jobs continued to be lost in the tens of thousands, foreign investment fell short of expected targets and the poorest twenty per cent had got poorer still during Mandela’s tenure.7

The broad outline of the Mbekian project is to try and consolidate a new historic bloc, consisting of large-scale export-oriented capital, the sponsoring of a black bourgeoisie and the drawing in of small-scale capital and the organised working class as subordinate partners: ‘The success of capitalist expansion and accumulation through an export-led growth path is to be a generator of improvements in the lives of every citizen’.8

How has Mbeki attempted to carry out this project and what has been the impact on class relations and alliances in post-apartheid South Africa?

**Mbekism**

Mbeki has increasingly assumed more and more executive power. The president’s office now employs some four hundred people and he has

the power to create posts that cut across ministries, with the incumbents reporting directly to him rather than to ministers or ministerial committees. One example is that of public prosecutions. . . . Also accountable to the president are the new director-generals, who now sign contracts with the presidency rather than with their own ministers. . . . The major losers in the restructuring of the presidency, and its effects on policy-making and the exercise of political power, are parliament and the ANC.9

Increasingly, government and social policy formulation happen in the executive, a trend attested by the Black Sash: ‘. . . it is difficult to influence issues in the

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8 Greenberg 2004, p. 5.
parliamentary context if there is resistance at executive level to accepting input from civil society'. Without any constituency-based system, parliament is further emasculated. As to the present incumbents of the South-African parliament, Marx’s explanation of the phenomenon of ‘parliamentary cretinism’ during the *Eighteenth Brumaire* ‘which confines its victims to an imaginary world and robs them of their senses, their recollection, all knowledge of the rude external world’ is apposite.

Ironically, as the state loosens control over capital flows, it increases its grip on people – particularly those on the margins. White capital supports this, for the state has ensured stability and legitimacy without threatening the commanding heights of the economy. The aspirant black élite supports this centralised control because it is their best hope of accumulating capital. There are class interests at play, ‘conglomerate [white] business, the aspirant black bourgeoisie, and black professionals have benefited in the short term from the imposition of neoliberal economic policies’. Importantly, the black middle class has a stake finding relatively lucrative employment especially within the state apparatus and in the meeting of affirmative action targets. As Sahra Ryklief argues, over the last ten years, ‘we see the rise of a nascent black middle and ruling class, numerically small but ideologically cohesive, inextricably tied to white capital and Mbeki’s government and policies, and willing to act as a consolidated force in order to maintain itself’. Contrary to the argument that globalisation forced government’s hand to adopt neoliberal policies faster than even World Bank prescriptions, it may well be the potential for rapid self-enrichment that made our ruling class such enthusiastic proponents of GEAR.

There are incredible opportunities for the enrichment of people whose political connections get them onto the various corporate boards – Umgeni Water in Durban, the Johannesburg Water Company and so on – and who are paid on highly lucrative incentive schemes that reward them for increasing profit. When water and electricity are finally privatised, local élites stand to become very rich, as the ANC demands that multinationals partner with aspirant black capitalists. A major trend in this regard is the long line of MPs and director-generals that have directly entered the private sector. As Sipho
Pityana, former foreign-affairs director-general who joined banking giant Nedcor and now heads a black investment company, put it,

these developments are no accident... director-generals and other senior public servants bring with them an understanding of public-policy intentions, high level involvement in transformation and a track record of bringing about large-scale organizational change. They also have networking advantages.¹⁴

And the trend is set to continue. Leading members of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) have linked with white mining magnates in a ‘get rich’ scam.¹⁵

But what has been quite ‘magical’ is the tying-up of almost all ‘oppositional’ political parties into alliances predicated on the acceptance of the ANC’s macro-economic policy. So, the IFP, United Democratic Movement (UDM), New National Party (NNP), Minority Front (MF), Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) have all accepted cabinet positions or other ‘perks’ from the ANC. In the latest development, the NNP has disbanded and folded into the ANC! Alongside this, COSATU, the SACP and South-African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) are in formal alliance with the ANC. Business has also been given a stake through corporatist institutions and one-on-one meetings. At the local-level, ward committees have been imposed as the only way people are ‘allowed’ to raise their concerns. Increasingly, ANC foot-soldiers hold that community movements can only be recognised if they are part of corporatist institutions such as the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC).

A document entitled, ‘The State and Social Transformation’ written by Mbeki or his close associates in 1996, laid out how the relationship between civil society and the state is to be viewed:

the issue turns on the combination of the expertise and professionalism concentrated in the democratic state and the capacity for popular mobilization which resides within the trade unions and the genuinely representative non-governmental popular organisations.¹⁶

What is clearly implied in this is

to draw a clear distinction between the government or party experts who ‘know’ and the mass of the people who are supposed to apply this

¹⁵ Mail and Guardian, 26 March–1 April 2004.
¹⁶ ANC 1996.
knowledge... he leaves no room for popular political participation outside of the state or the ruling class.\textsuperscript{17}

John Stuart Mill writing (with disgust) of the way the relationship between the ruling class and the poor was envisaged in the early days of modern capitalism in England elaborated:

The lot of the poor, in all things which affect them collectively, should be regulated for them, not by them. . . . It is the duty for the higher classes to think for them, and to take responsibility for their lot. . . . The rich should be \textit{in loco parentis} to the poor, guiding and restraining them like children.\textsuperscript{18}

In ANC South Africa, the state and party blurs into one, and the president becomes the ‘keeper of the national interest’. Those who challenge the wisdom of the state or the president, challenge the people. No less a personage then Raymond Suttner, former ANC MP and party enforcer wrote recently:

What has happened in the post 1994 period . . . is that statements of leadership have often been presented as \textit{fait accompli} or interpretations of leadership have not met with challenge. This is partly because rightly or wrongly, powers of leadership are now associated with powers to make appointments that may carry prestige or high remuneration. Consequently the authoritative statements of certain leadership figures may limit debate within the ‘broad church’. . . . Thabo Mbeki[‘s] . . . interventions do not appear to be part of a broad debate. They are more in the nature of ‘authoritative pronouncements’ . . .\textsuperscript{19}

Civil society must not simply be demobilised, it must become a conduit for decisions of the party in order to counter-act those opposed to change. According to then presidential spokesperson Joel Netshitenzhe,

mass involvement is therefore both a spear of rapid advance and a shield against resistance. Such involvement should be planned to serve the strategic purpose, proceeding from the premise that revolutionaries deployed in various areas of activity at least try to pull in the same direction. When ‘pressure from below’ is exerted, it should aim at complementing the work of those who are exerting ‘pressure’ against the old order ‘from above’.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} Johnson 2002a, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in Bauman 2002, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{19} Suttner 2003, pp. 24–5.
\textsuperscript{20} ANC 1998, p. 12.
In the aftermath of the 2004 elections, the Minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, declared that the election results showed that the mass of South Africans have ‘declared that no amount of sophistication or camouflage by the opposition can make them lose sight of their liberators’.  

The history of the defeat of apartheid gets rewritten as a struggle conducted by the ANC, the people are passive recipients of a ‘gift’ from ‘their liberators’. And so the process must continue, of the people waiting patiently and unquestioningly as ‘their liberators’ make available the fruits of liberation. The effect of this sleight of hand, where people are asked to believe that their struggles against apartheid were not the ‘real struggle’ and that the ‘real struggle’ was delivered to them by semi-divine beings, is often underestimated in writings on political transitions. The effect starts to feel as if semi-divine heroes were able to make the world in the past, but that, in our fallen age, we just have to get on with the job of trying to survive in the world that we have been given. Almost always it is the new power-wielders and emerging élite that demand or try and invoke this reverence for ‘The Struggle’. This is no accident. They are then able to use the almost magical power of these mystified heroes and struggles of the past to disguise the increasing deprivation of the poorest, their very concrete betrayals, and to delegitimate the struggles that are being fought in the here and now.

The class character of this in South Africa

is reflected most clearly in the relegation of political and civil life of the people to being flag-waving supporters for those in power who speak of the ‘people’. . . the masses are depoliticized, they are made to be ‘unpolitical’, only to be brought back at scripted events to legitimize the political élite. The party becomes administrative, encouraging an administrative mentality rather than a humanist programme. . . . And in practice, when the civil rights come in conflict with the political life of the country, they are trumped. . . . The loyalty of the opposition is decided in advance (for in the end loyalty to the party trumps opposition) and mass action becomes, by definition, disloyalty to the ‘nation’, the ‘revolution’, and so forth. . . . And as the administration sees threat everywhere, the by-word becomes, those who are not for us are against us.  

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The party presents itself as the only legitimate agent of change. It ‘expels the people from history’ and, through nationalist rhetoric, claims that the party incarnates the will of the people and that, therefore, to oppose it is to oppose the nation. So ‘these men who have sung the praises of their race . . . proclaim that the vocation of their people is to obey, to go on obeying and to be obedient to the end of time’.  

In this regard, Michael Neocosmos’s arguments on how state rule is legitimated merits reflection. On the one hand, the post-apartheid state attempts to secure its legitimacy around a state-defined consensus centring on liberalism (economic and political), human rights discourse and a nationalist discourse (e.g. overcoming poverty among the previously disadvantaged racial groups, equalizing access to economic resources between races, economic leadership in Africa, etc.).

On the other hand, ‘a neoliberal economic discourse has presented the solution to poverty as a particular kind of technical intervention by both capital and the state’. The liberal and nationalist ‘discourse relegates questions of political entitlements to the juridical sphere of the state, where claims to rights can be settled by an apparently impartial and technical juridical system’. The neoliberal discourse relegates other political entitlements to an economic or managerial field where they are exclusively reduced to objects of state policy, again devised by apparently impartial experts. In either case, these issues are removed from an arena or domain of legitimate independent political intervention (and often even contestation) by society itself, and placed within the confines of a state-controlled domain where they are systematically ‘technicized’ and thus made out to be politically neutral and to be handled exclusively by apolitical experts. They are thus de-politicized in form while still remaining highly political in context.  

The ANC has ensured that the state is open to serving the interests of global, especially financial, capital and legitimating the power of the IMF, World Bank and WTO. To do this, according to Castells: ‘Nation-states must ally themselves closely with global economic interests and abide by global rules favourable to capital flows, while their societies are being asked to wait

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24 Neocosmos 2002, p. 11.
patiently for the trickle-down benefits of corporate ingenuity’.

In South Africa, an example of this is the much vaunted court case between the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PMA) and the ANC Government, with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) acting as *amicus curiae*. This saw the alleged capitulation of the PMA and victory celebrations of ‘the people’ in the streets. But the ANC had conceded on the crucial issue of compulsory licensing. It illustrated, as researchers Cleary and Ross point out, the ANC wanting to show the WTO that it is a ‘model citizen’ and keeping to its policy of fiscal restraint by not seeming to go ‘soft’ on the HIV/AIDS treatment issue.

This trend had an early start with Mbeki claiming that the transformation of South Africa cannot elaborate solutions which are in discord with the rest of the world . . . which can be sustained by virtue of a voluntarist South African experiment of a special type, a world of anti-apartheid campaigners, who, out of loyalty to us, would support and sustain such voluntarism.

The liberated South-African state is opposed to the mass mobilisations that seek to challenge the architecture of global finance from the ‘outside’. As ANC policy director, Michael Sachs put it:

> We don’t oppose the WTO. We’d never join a call to abolish it, or to abolish the World Bank or the IMF . . . Should we be out there condemning imperialism? If you do those things, how long will you last? There is no organizational alternative, no real policy alternative to what we’re doing.

This is not to imply that the state does not raise questions on issues of power in the global economy, especially where rules are made for all but are routinely ignored or broken by the most powerful. However, post apartheid state policy and practice is not in principle opposed to the dominant global project – that the capitalist market is at the core of the efficient production and distribution of goods and services.

The ANC has been able to progressively undermine COSATU’s influence on the transition. Firstly, corporatist pacts have impacted on its ability to take

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26 Clearly and Ross as cited by Nattrass 2004, p. 53.
27 ANC 1996, p. 5.
28 Quoted in Bond 2004, p. 29.
29 Greenberg 2004, p. 4.
direct mass action. Secondly, increasing job losses have forced it into defensive battles, battles exacerbated by the notion of ‘international competitiveness’ becoming ‘common sense’. Thirdly, more and more union officials have joined capital and the state as functionaries. This ‘drain’ has been reinforced by a discourse that there is no alternative to the ‘normalising’ of capitalism in South Africa. Fourthly, the increasing decline in waged employment, the rise of temporary, casual workers who are paid poverty wages and are not unionised, has challenged the ‘representativeness’ of organised labour as the lynchpin of advancing the interests of the poor. Unemployment spirals. Research on unemployment conducted by the Norwegian Development Agency put the unemployment figure at between thirty-two and forty-five per cent. The research found that a quarter of the currently unemployed lost their last job because of retrenchment or business closure; and that half the job seekers have never worked before.30

Alongside these developments is the state’s agenda to ensure that civil society remains a conduit for state initiatives and limiting democracy to mass participation in decision-making to leadership choice. In areas where there exist autonomous local organisations, the local state has engaged in a three-pronged process to disarticulate these movements:

i) opening of communication by party-local state officials;
ii) putting forward proposals that divide the community (metering systems, selling of flats), co-opting local leaders by offering them jobs with titles such as ‘community liaison officers’;
iii) the launching of a new organisation on the understanding that it is the only way to garner resources.

All the time during the transition, the magical invisible hand building the ‘market democracy’ with its emphasis on ‘securing property rights, fostering the conditions for capital accumulation, and widening the involvement of market forces in the allocation of public goods’31 was being strengthened.

Has there been a challenge to the ANC-led transition? The following section looks at the emergent forms of resistance and the new configurations of class struggle. The locus of resistance was to find the spark in localised struggles against water and electricity disconnections and evictions for non-payment of rent and mortgages.

31 Vilas 2003, p. 97.
A practical magic?

The relentless concretisation of the precepts of the ANC’s ‘market democracy’ has resulted in

a fundamental shift away from the ‘statist’ service delivery models of the past where the state subsidized and delivered municipal services (in an overtly racially-biased manner), towards a ‘neoliberal’ service delivery model where the private sector (and private sector principles) dominate. In the latter model, the state acts as a service ‘ensurer’ rather than a service ‘provider’ and municipal services are ‘run more like a business’, with financial cost recovery becoming the most effective measure of performance.32

These developments saw the costs of basic services escalate. This, in turn, caused increasing cost-recovery mechanisms such as disconnections of water and electricity to occupy the attention and energy of the local state, as opposed to delivery in the first place. Between 1999 and 2000, for example, some 75,400 water cut-offs occurred in the Greater Cape Town area. In Soweto, after the 1999 general election, some 20,000 houses had their electricity supplies disconnected every month. Brian Johnson, the manager of Eskom, the state-owned electricity supply company, indicated that ‘the aim is to disconnect at least 75 per cent of Soweto residents’ because of non-payment.33 Some Councils such as the eThekwini Unicity – the municipal government of the greater Durban area – had proposed moving people out of the already deteriorating apartheid ghettos that serve as rental accommodation for some of the poorest of the city’s residents into a central area of ‘poorhouses’. It is presumed that, once relocated, their water and electricity consumption can be monitored, while the houses that they occupied for over three decades are upgraded and sold at a profit. In Cape Town, residents of Mandela Park, Khayelitsha took bonds from banks. An organisation called Servcon, set up jointly by the banks and government, was designed to educate the mortgage holders on how to budget so that they could meet the required payments. Escalating unemployment and the fact that the homes were structurally defective, forcing many residents to putting their own resources into repairing faulty wiring, cracks in walls, resulted in many residents defaulting. The banks, with the support of both Servcon and the government, began a process of ‘right-sizing’,

33 Mail and Guardian, 6–12 April 2000.
in which defaulters were forcibly moved to accommodation that was accurately described by the Mandela Park community as dog-kennels. The cost-recovery prerequisites of neoliberalism were creating a new kind of apartheid.

Despite these developments, most close observers of the South-African transition could not envisage any real challenge to the ANC-led transition outside of corporatist structures. However, by the beginning of 2000, the neoliberal transition had squeezed and spewed out the poor but was starting to galvanise them at the same time. The ‘poors’, as they came to be known in the South African vernacular, had opposed the water and electricity cut-offs and evictions (consequences of the privatisation of public services). But they had done this without any grand ideology. They were actors on a local stage, squaring off against home-grown villains such as Operation Masakhane (Let Us Build), which supposedly aims to normalise local governance and the provision of local services by convincing people with no money that they must pay for these services.

As the ANC’s assault on the poor resulted in more and more evictions, disconnections and retrenchments, a variety of new community movements began to arise. Hesitantly, at first, these movements surfaced to challenge the water and electricity cut-offs, the evictions, and lack of land redistribution. These movements, based in particular communities and evincing particular (mainly defensive), demands, were not merely a natural result of poverty or marginality but a direct response to state policy. What had started to develop in a series of mobilisations was reminiscent of what Manuel Castells, writing on Latin America, came to call ‘militant metropolitan dwellers’.

What distinguished these community movements from political parties, pressure groups, NGOs and the trade unions is mass mobilisation as the prime source of social sanction.

The rise of community movements saw the emergence of the family as a fighting unit, unlike union membership, which is based on the individual worker. In fact, many of those involved in community movements accept the conditions of the sweatshops and low wages without much of a fight. They attempt to top up their wages by not paying for services. They organise militantly around this issue, and the state is directly brought into the conflict. They act much like Hobsbawm’s ‘city mob’ which he describes as ‘the

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35 Castells 1983, p. 250.
movement of all classes of the urban poor for the achievement of economic or political changes by direct action – that is by riot or rebellion.  

These movements concentrated on fighting in their own locality and are often animated by the immediacy of the situation. When the challenge to water cut-offs or evictions does come, it is fought with intensity and longstanding animosities are often forgotten as the struggle intensifies.

Mobilisation, albeit sporadic, has spread across the country. In Soweto, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) had – through Operation Khanyisa, meaning ‘switch-on’ – stymied the impact of Eskom’s disconnections by reconnecting electricity of residents. In Cape Town, residents of Mandela Park in the sprawling black township of Khayelitsha had put people evicted by banks back into their houses. They all put direct action at the heart of their activities, disconnecting the electricity of the mayor of Johannesburg’s house, occupying the offices of banks in Cape Town, and laying siege to the debt-collecting building of the eThekwini Council in Durban.

The poor are not passive victims of social policy, however. The metropolitan militant who does not pay for water or electricity, who squats and occupies and tries her luck, often succeeds in snatching income from the state and protects this income in collective struggle when the state or (parastatals) attempts to reclaim it. In certain rural areas, stock theft, squatting and slow, semi-legal land-occupations under the guise of land-tenancy, perform the same function. What was emerging was a ‘practical magic’ where ‘there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take responsibility for everything, but the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the magic hands of the people’. A practical, local magic whose conditions of expansion and communication did not depend on traditional left practices of vanguardism and party building.

David Slater makes the point that

the territorial state, in global times, tends to rest on an increasingly fragile and precarious ground, with pressures from below often opening up fissures in its territorial control, whilst the globalization of financial, economic and cultural power increasingly impinges on the nation-state from above.

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36 Hobsbawm 1959, pp. 110–11.
37 Fanon 1976, p. 169.
In South Africa, it is the local state that has become the focus of attacks. It is the entity that advances the water and electricity disconnections, evictions and the loss of jobs through privatisation. A majority of the councillors are elected through wards, making them both accessible to communities and open to direct attack. It is not surprising that it is at this level that the poor have challenged the neoliberal transition.

Coinciding with the end of a millennium, there were suddenly once again on the radar screen of South-African politics autonomous, radical, civil-society actors whose members were, in economic terms, no better off than they have been before Mandela had been released. Ironically, it was precisely the assaults on social income that they had enjoyed during that era when the state was not confident enough to turn off electricity and water or evict masses of people that now caused them to mobilise when the ANC, with the legitimacy to do so, issued those orders.

In 2000, ‘the poors’ formed a core constituency of the 20,000 who took to the streets during the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR). Organised into the Durban Social Forum (DSF), the poors’ main attack was the Mbeki government’s macro-economic policy, GEAR. Two years later, the same forces, this time organised under the banner of the Social Movements Indaba (SMI), despite state repression, once again took to the streets in huge numbers at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Beyond the spectacle of these events, how have community movements related to the state and what are the possible future trajectories of these movements?

**After the event**

Unlike COSATU, the community movements have not entered corporatist institutions. But this does not mean that they have not engaged with the state and taken advantage afforded by democratic gains. In council housing in Durban, the CCF has taken the council to the rental tribunal to challenge increases in rents in Sydenham Heights. In Chatsworth, the flat tenants’ association has forced upon the agenda the refurbishing of flats and the writing off of arrears. In the South Basin of Durban community, environmental movements have addressed parliamentary sub-committees to influence the content of legislation around air quality control. In Johannesburg, the Anti-
Privatisation Forum, as part of a coalition, has gone to court to challenge the implementation of pre-paid water meters.

The charge that community movements do not engage with the state is a myth. The movements have not ignored the state but, rather, challenged its neoliberal orientation by trying to push back the commodification of basic services. Some of the confusion around the question of engagement by political analysts is that, unlike COSATU and SANCO, the movements have spurned an alliance with the ruling party and rejected playing within the rules of corporatism.

The state in the hands of the ANC remains committed to strengthening and extending the market. Self-policing mechanisms like pre-paid meters are increasingly extending their reach. The self-disciplinary powers of pre-paid water and electricity meters tied into personal debt and increasingly precarious, casualised work or long periods of unemployment is a very powerful instrument of social control. The local state encourages individualised responses by tempting people to ‘come in and make individual agreements’ to service mounting arrears. The commodification of basic services, the selling of flats and installation of body corporates and so on attempt to distinguish between the strong and able and the weak and marginalised. The politics of market self-regulation builds on the very poverty and debt that apartheid bequeathed. The market attack has hurt in the first instance casually and unemployed men and women. Community movements offer a collective response, stopping evictions, reconnecting basic services, spreading ‘the word’ to unorganised areas, broadening the reach of decommodified zones, making ‘illegality’ common sense. It is here that the brutality of the ANC’s neoliberal offensive is received and it is here that it is fought.

Many members of community movements accept the harsh conditions of work, with their poverty wages, so that they can have some cash for education, clothing, food. Where workers have tried to challenge agreements that push back the gains made in the 1980s, with bosses citing international competitiveness as the rationale, such as at Volkswagen, their own union has sought to impose new onerous working conditions. Hal Draper’s words here are prescient:

It is the pattern of all countries that, as soon as the bourgeoisie reconciles itself to the fact that trade unionism is here to stay, it ceases to denounce the institution as a subversive evil that has to be rooted out with fire and sword to defend God, country and motherhood, and turns instead to the
next line of defense: domesticating the unions, housebreaking them, and fitting them into the national family as one of the tame cats.  

All this, of course, is done in an ideological environment emanating from the government that holds that future prosperity will derive from South Africa’s position on the world market and future prosperity will emerge from South Africa’s global competitiveness. In the interim, intensification of work and low wages must be endured for the national interest.

Nigel Gibson asks the question:

if the new community movements that have grown up around the issue of rights can be fora for new ideas and action? Can they be schools of participatory democracy where ‘visions’ of an alternative post-apartheid South Africa, of rights and responsibilities, are discussed? Do and can these new mass-based organisations constitute counter-hegemonic movements that are not only capable of representing themselves but also developing through discussion alternative philosophic ‘programmes’ (social, political and economic). Or do they erupt spontaneously around an issue and die off just as quickly and thus remain significant and effective only insofar as they are spontaneous, single-issue campaigns working to gain access to the state? 

Community movements, despite some influence of autonomism, are committed to confronting and targeting state power. Trevor Ngwane cogently captures the dominant thinking within the movements:

... the issue of political power remains crucial. Some people attack the idea of targeting state power – the argument that globalization undermines the role of the nation state gets translated into an excuse for avoiding the fight with your own national bourgeoisie. But we in South Africa can’t not confront the ANC and Mbeki. American activists can’t not confront Bush. The COSATU leadership, the SACP, are happy to fight imperialism everywhere except here at home. It’s been good to demonstrate against world summit meetings at Seattle, Genoa, even Doha, but there are problems with following the global elite around – it’s not something poor people can afford to do. . . . The point is, we have to build where we are.

40 Gibson 2004, p. 16.
41 Ngwane 2003, p. 22.
Now, the movements are talking about participating in local government elections. Already, in places where the SECC are strong, people’s assemblies have been launched. An attempt has been made to signal that the struggle will be waged inside and outside institutions of power. If the movements do participate, then it will really be the first time a movement in post-apartheid South Africa rooted in community struggles with a broad-based organic leadership has decided to contest elections as an organised political force.

Two years ago, Neville Alexander wrote that

the overall programme of demands of this as yet sporadically co-ordinated movement can be described as one of increased state intervention informed by one or other state variant of neo-Keynesian economics.42

Since then, there has been an increasing radicalisation of this movement of the poors, a movement that is explicitly anticapitalist.

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Paris Yeros’s ‘Zimbabwe and the Dilemmas of the Left’, published in these pages recently, invoked Ibbo Mandaza’s characterisation of ‘schizophrenic’ to characterise the state and class struggle in Zimbabwe.\(^1\)

This theorisation describes a petty bourgeoisie in charge of an array of state apparatuses in the immediate aftermath of a war of liberation from a ‘white-settler-colonial’ state-society complex. This class was schizophrenic because it had to condemn white capital yet rely on it for a material base.\(^2\) For Yeros, the (conditional) success of a ‘semi-proletarian’ land revolution offered a way out of such a messy conundrum. In this edition of *Historical Materialism*, Brian Raftopoulos and Ian Phimister outline a deep and multilayered crisis, the resolution of which will likely take more than the 127,000 potentially small-commodity-producing farmers (and perhaps 7,300 middling ones)\(^3\) on which Yeros’s hopes rest, even if

\(^{1}\) Yeros 2002, p. 6, referring to Mandaza 1986a, p. 8.
\(^{2}\) Yeros 2002, pp. 5–10 on state theories in Zimbabwe.
\(^{3}\) Statistics on the ‘new farmers’ are unclear; tenure relations are even more so. In 2002, Yeros estimated 160,000 households had gained land in ‘fast-tracked’ reforms. However, by 2004, state commissions advised by Sam Moyo estimated 127,192
they would be producing optimally and creating a surplus large enough (in proportional terms) to answer the classical agrarian question. Yet Yeros and Sam Moyo – Zimbabwe’s most noted agrarian social scientist and co-author of a recent chapter featuring in this commentary – portray Raftopoulos and Phimister (by extension, one surmises) as part of an ebullient group of postmodern and middle-class denizens living in an NGO-driven ‘civil society’

households, on ‘A1’ plots with use rights and common grazing land, and 7,260 ‘capitalists’ with leasehold and a ‘proposed option to buy’. State media estimate up to 300,000 A1 farmers. In mid-2004, a ‘critical ZANU PF’ newspaper estimated that ‘over 100,000 [are settled] under … A1 villagisation’ (note the Nyererian notion). The A2 or commercial farming scheme has not fared any better, with only 12,943 families resettled out of a projected 56,000’. A state-run paper usually supporting state strategies reported that ‘only 396 out of 5,424 acquisitions had been confirmed [through the courts]. This means that 5,028 or 38 per cent [sic: the figure should be approximately 93%] of all the A2 farms are still under legal dispute.’ Of the 396 cases ‘very few have taken up their land’; see Moyo and Yeros 2004, p. 18; Sachikonye 2003, p. 5 and 2004 p. 69; Chiwanda 2004, p. 2; Zindi 2004, p. 3. Sam Moyo’s African Institute for Agrarian Studies is engaged in extensive continuing research on many of these issues.

Bernstein 2003, 2004a and 2004b, is crucial here. Moyo and Yeros thank Bernstein for comments on their 2004 chapter, but a close look at his ‘World Historical Perspective’ on the agrarian questions in southern Africa throws caution on implicit claims of his support: Moyo’s notion for the superiority of small scale farming is criticised as the ‘simple confusion’ of ‘neo-classical populism’ (2003, p. 214), and ‘romanticism about “peasants” or indeed “worker-peasants” or general assumptions of the superior productive virtues of either large-scale or small-scale farming’ is debunked (p. 218). On contemporary Zimbabwe, Bernstein writes that ‘it is pointless – or counter-productive – to present it, and its current moment, as the pursuit of struggle and exercise of will of any coherent, and idealised, collective class or other subject/agent, whether “peasant”, rural “community” or “worker-peasant”. Such views are supported by neither the social nor political “facts”’. In 2003, he wrote that the land invasions point to a ‘significant, and “objectively progressive,” expression of a (new) agrarian question of labour’ (p. 220), yet cautions that benefits will be contingent on extensive state provisioning or the relatively quick accumulation processes of a highly differentiated, yet productive, formation. In 2004a, he was ‘unconvinced by the sweeping nature of [Yeros’] “semi-proletarianization thesis”’ and more critical of ‘populist ideologies [and by implication practices], of various stripes and in various ways, claim[ing] to articulate the injuries of exploitation, oppression and injustice generated by “structural inequality of resource access” in the countryside, and … address[ing] them through redistributive land reforms’ (pp. 205–6). He was also clearer that ‘employment as well as productivity benefits (and macroeconomic benefits such as foreign exchange earnings) are under direct threat from any redistributive land reform that divides up … [large-scale capitalist farming] enterprises’ (pp. 207–8). Such empirical questions rest on evidence of increasing productivity and distribution. There is no evidence to date to show improvement on any of these scores in Zimbabwe, except in the case of a conspicuously consuming ‘élite’ (wealthier than a ‘middle class’ but with little interest in the production, signifying a ‘proper’ bourgeoisie) with its base in ‘trade’ and rent-seeking at best, speculation and crime at worst. Does this group represent the embryonic stage of a productive bourgeoisie, creating an industrial proletariat along with it? Reports on the new capitalists’ farms suggest much lower and wages and worse conditions than those that afflicted the now decimated agricultural workers historically.
and believing that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) can take Zimbabwe out of the wilderness. They place a new book co-edited by Raftopoulos\(^5\) within a pantheon of academics and oppositional politicians co-opted ‘to the point where imperialism has become mystified, national self-determination demoted, the state obscured, and the agrarian question abandoned’\(^6\). Such scholars – for them including even Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya\(^7\) – are placed into a category of (once?) nationalist intellectuals who have become bourgeois and thereby diverted into ‘rarefied debates over “identity politics”’\(^8\) that hide a ‘crude separation of moral and political economy’ and a marriage with the ‘liberal establishment’ using the ‘authoritarian image of President Mugabe’ to detach ‘the phenomenon from its context’\(^9\).

Historical materialists – among whom Phimister’s credentials are impeccable, given his nearly life-long campaign against the nationalism held by some of his teachers and colleagues\(^10\), while Raftopoulos’s work on the urban working class, nationalism and contemporary politics, cited in Yeros, are evidence enough of his leanings – should not be taken in by such sleight of hand, all too evident in the wider analysis Yeros and Moyo contribute to the struggle between what can be seen as the ‘two Lefts’ in Zimbabwe. This commentary will try to situate these ‘Lefts’ in the Zimbabwean context – a context best characterised by and examined through the categories of stalemate and interregnum developed through Marx’s notions of primitive and primary accumulation at the level of the ‘economy’ with the more ‘political’ lenses of Bonapartism and Gramsci’s Caesarism\(^11\), which force one to see the state as a contradictory site of both accumulation (not necessarily productive) and hegemonic construction. These tropes force one to examine the minutiae of the conjuncture, and thus focus on the authoritarian reality (much more than an image) of the ruler, his possible dauphin\(^12\), and their party. On those simple

\(^{5}\) Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jenson 2004.
\(^{6}\) Moyo and Yeros 2004.
\(^{7}\) Bond and Manyanya 2002.
\(^{8}\) Moyo and Yeros 2004, p. 2.
\(^{9}\) Yeros 2002, pp. 7, 3.
\(^{11}\) Preliminary attempts regarding Zimbabwe are in Moore 2001a, 2001b, 2003a and 2003b. Moore 2003c and 2004a are broader efforts to deal with the issue of primitive accumulation.
\(^{12}\) Professor Jonathan Moyo, Minister of State for Information and Publicity in the
grounds alone, no democratic Marxist could support ZANU PF or its haphazard policies, whether or not some of them have resulted in a ‘land revolution’. Even a Stalinist would be hard put to pull an accumulation strategy out of this hat: a follower of Bukharin would find it even harder. A democrat would not even try.

At one level, the politics and fortuna of this stalemated conjuncture have little to do with political economy:¹³ ZANU PF and the MDC have few qualitative differences at the level of economic strategy. One can at least access and thus assess the latter’s.¹⁴ This cannot be said of the ruling party, although its recent bows to the IMF in the hopes of gaining re-admission, including auctioning for foreign currency, either indicate that its ‘technocrats’ are gaining some ground in their attempts to re-enter the same world economy as most other social formations or that the more erratic ‘young turks’ have run out

Office of the President and Cabinet (the long title indicates presidential proximity and that he was appointed, not elected, to parliament), once a liberal political scientist at the University of Zimbabwe and Ford Foundation officer in Nairobi, personifies the politics of a Bonapartist interregnum in its succession phase. His arrival on the political scene circa late 1999 has created havoc in a party that has throughout its history imploded with leadership crises, yet, in combination with state force, his adept propaganda and election campaign techniques have had some success among the populace and found favour with the President; see Mangwende and Madondoro 2004, Chikwanha, Sithole and Bratton 2004, Raftopoulos 2004b.

¹³ To indicate: in 1997, Morgan Tsvangirai and ‘war vet’ leader Chenjerai Hunzvi agreed that the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions would support the war veterans in their demands for pensions if they would not affect workers negatively. Soon after, the ‘war vets’ forced President Mugabe to agree to the pensions – but they were to be funded by a five per cent surtax that would hit workers hard. The pact was broken. Workers’ demonstrations ensued. Some were killed by police. Mugabe blamed a union-employer pact for the demonstrations, thus invoking a worker-peasant divide, playing on an urban-rural gap that Yeros’s notion of a semi-proletariat defies. Race, too, entered the new equation: workers were now seen as allied with ‘whites.’

¹⁴ Movement for Democratic Change 2004. The party is clear that pre-2000 structures can not be reborn, and promises a Land Commission (there have been many!) if it gains power, but its current hopes are revealed thus: Restart advocates freehold to be maintained ‘where it exists,’ (according to Sam Moyo, 2004b, this will amount to about ten per cent of all land when all the legal issues are settled) and offers ‘resettlement and small-scale farmers long-term leases with options for title . . . resettlement schemes with communal grazing will be given the option of being replanned and demarcated into individual, self-contained family farms.’ In communal areas, ‘rights over land and resources will pass from the state to members of the village or ward assembles. All land in villages will be surveyed and households issued with land registration certificates for residential and arable land’; 2004, p. 43. In response to those who decry ‘capitalism!’ at this, one would caution historical examination of ‘African-socialist’ experiments, the prospect of continued chiefly rural hegemony, and the theoretical problematic of primitive accumulation. Moreover, in a July 2004 interview, Sam Moyo indicated that the ultimate aim for tenure patterns should be freehold – but slowly, to avoid a ‘free for all’.
of ‘radical’ ideas, while both rest their rule on coercive politics, pillage and narrow nationalist ideology rather than policy wonking. Perhaps, then, in the last instance, the balance between the two clusters of intellectuals in the Zimbabwean Left has to rest on the rights they articulate. They can be inserted in two broad international trends.¹⁵

One group could be called patriotic agrarianists. They advocate a series of rights contingent on the construction and consolidation of domestically-based ruling classes and the property rights underpinning their power and accumulation. Their strategies rely on a lot of state force, because ‘sovereignty’ – both in the international and domestic sense – is weak.¹⁶ However, because sovereignty is crucial for local and international accumulation projects, it is celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, and protected jealously. Realpolitik is the name of its game. The strategies thereof entail the railroading of opposition, and, because the class forces buttressing civil society are weak, its organisations are overly dependent on either state or international support and prone to fissure and factions. Left intellectuals who would like to be ‘organic’ with the popular classes and choose to work with this state hope to be able to turn it in to a Caesarist entity with progressive tendencies. Their problems arise when it turns Bonapartist and takes away the limited spaces they helped construct.

The second collection of Zimbabwean leftists could be defined as a subgroup of global ‘critical cosmopolitans’. Since they are often opposed to the sovereigntists, and thus subjected to the latters’ coercive force, their arsenal of ‘rights’ are more clearly in the realm of ‘liberties’ than in the socio-economic arena, although it includes very strong emphasis on democratic participation in processes of material production as well as on ideological freedom and

¹⁵ Bartholomew and Breakspear 2004, from whom much of these characterisations derive, delineate the ‘orders of rights’ within first and secondary ages of modernity, p. 132.
¹⁶ A focus on problems of accumulation in the ‘Third World’ dissolves distinctions between Realpolitik international-relations perspectives on the sovereignty beloved by ‘statesmen’ and the human-rights focus on democratic popular sovereignty. It also clarifies Foucauldian notions of ‘governance’ and sovereignty as ‘power over life through strategies of exception and exclusion’; see Jackson 1990 for a conservative view and Worby 2004, p. 78 for excessive Foucault. Zimbabwe’s involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s war illustrates this; see Nest 2001, and, for historical comparisons, Teschke 2001. Some economists assert that, at its peak, the DRC war cost Zimbabwe half of its export earnings; when the IMF withdrew in 1998, most foreign aid also dried up. Yet, the war became a source of accumulation for many military officers and their families, including the state-run Zimbabwe Defence Industries, which sold arms to both sides of the DRC war.
pluralistic modes of political representation. Their emphasis on democracy in the material realm separates them from neoliberal globalists and brings them closer to socialists, but their equally strong stand on due process undoubtedly makes them uncomfortable with the Zimbabwean land invasions (others call them occupations or resettlements) celebrated as revolutionary by the agrarian patriots.

The problems for both of these groups are rooted in the stalled processes of primary accumulation: thus, the discourse of the national-democratic revolution takes on a different tune for each. The agrarianists place their bets on combinations of social movements and the state breaking the blocks for their choices of class (either small peasants or a new agricultural bourgeoisie). They are aware and concerned about a ‘democratic deficit’ in the liberal sense, but their distrust of the market and doubt about the ability of an opposition based on a weak working class to remain on and of the Left force them to Faustian bargains with the state. The ‘national’ within the national-democratic revolution takes priority. They become patriots, and thus, for those of more liberal inclinations, scoundrels. The critical cosmopolitans emphasise the democratic side of the dualist equation. As one former Zimbabwe African Peoples’ Union member whose Marxism grew in the Soviet shadow put it: ‘whatever happened to the democratic side of the national democratic revolution? Now all we have is nationalism’! And as a Trotskyist graduate of university student radicalism, now an MDC MP remarked on hearing himself talk like a ‘liberal’, said: ‘everything starts with freedom’.

If this division of the Zimbabwean Left appears too ‘liberal’ for historical materialists, it is because the choice of means by which the politics of accumulation are carried out is at its core. The difference may rest on that between political parties and the institutions of state and civil society around them – and those distinctions may be the ones separating an authoritarianism that would be fascist if it had any real public support from a pluralism that would flourish if it were allowed. Aside from the plundering aspirant state capitalists with whom the agrarian patriots are in objective alliance, the material or class base for left strategies cannot be a profound source of difference in the Zimbabwean Left: the working class has been all but destroyed in the past few years, and both segments give structural adjustment policies their

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19 Biti 2004.
due in this regard. Thus both ‘wings’ have to develop strategies incorporating what Yeros defines as a huge ‘semi-proletariat’ – some of it with access to land and the means of migration between rural and urban life, other parts of it almost permanently mired in the siya so (‘leave it as it is’ or informal sector) at best, or lumpen status, at worst: fodder for the ruling party’s – commonly labelled ‘the Taliban’ – Green Bombers, or youth ‘militias’ trained under the aegis of a ‘national service’ curriculum to coerce the opposition. This is the politics of stalemated classes and exhausted accumulation strategies: the ways out of the vacuum are forged by tenuous combinations of violence and persuasion that structure the terrain of the next phase of consolidation. The ideologies formed in the conjuncture, and the ‘rights’ and ‘sovereignties’ they denote, have crucial long-term consequences. When ‘uncivil’ society co-operates with the state in moving above the law and due process – ‘using the gun as money’, as one former ZANU PF stalwart now in the MDC phrased it – they should not be surprised if the same techniques turn against them when the state-party apparatus decides to spit them out and when these modalities become entrenched in the social and political terrain.

At the level of policy, ZANU PF does not even bother to use the phrase ‘social-democratic’ to underline its orientation – as does the MDC – but it does focus on the land question when it feels the need. Indeed, it did need to co-opt the emerging ‘spontaneous’ land invasions and the war veterans’ forcing of the pensions and land issues in late 1997. By 2000, the alliance, solidified in the repressive state apparatuses and spurred by the MDC’s challenge, was ready for ‘fast-tracking’. Now, there are attempts to normalise and rationalise reform (hurried efforts at the time of the invasions to ‘plan’ and instrumentalise rationality were overtaken by events). There is ideological, if not yet material, focus on making the results of the invasions ‘productive’.23

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21 In an interview, Tsvangirai (2004) held spontaneously to an interpretation of ‘sovereignty’ compatible with critical-cosmopolitan perspectives.
23 By mid-2004, one faction of the ruling party announced that the state had expropriated ‘VIP’s’ land exceeding the ‘one-household, one-farm’ dictum. Minister of Special Affairs in the President’s Office Responsible for Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement Cde. John Nkomo, stated that a special task force for a “comprehensive vetting exercise to ensure that only deserving cases are considered” . . . had been put in place to eliminate the danger that “non-performers” and owners of multiple farms will not be awarded the 99 year leases – apparently bankable as collateral for loans – that appear to be the approved mode of tenure on the land. Zindi 2004, Farmer Reporter 2004, Mureriwa 2004.
The posturing of the ruling party’s Church of the African Destiny is also indicative of ideological reconfiguration. The new ideology is buttressed by a ‘mental re-engineering’ that will combine Afrocentrism with strident entrepreneurialism. This notion of mental decolonisation would have Frantz Fanon writhing in his grave.24

The African state and primitive accumulation

How does one analyse such policy making and ideological construction? Studying Africa through the lenses of historical materialism – a modernist mode of reflection and action if there ever was one – forces confrontation with the ugly reality of ‘backwardness’ and the means by which ‘progress’ can be initiated. Capitalist and ‘state-socialist’ societies have always instigated processes of primitive accumulation – the basis for modernity – through state-co-ordinated violence. Thus it would seem, once again, that there is need for reconsideration of theories regarding African states. Postcolonial African states have been somewhat violent, but have not been able to push the social formations under their rule through the ‘stage’ of primitive accumulation. Some might argue that, in the 1970s, African states were developing the capacity to lead their societies to the capitalist prerequisites for a socialism that only ‘Third Worldists’ thought could transpire out of anything other than an all-encompassing modernity – but for every Ivory Coast or even Tanzania, there was a Uganda or a Zaïre. With the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, the state and the ‘rentiers’ embedded in them were ruled out of the intellectual equation.

It has been an awkward reality that capitalist relations of production were most developed, albeit racially skewed, in settler-colonial-capitalist societies such as Kenya, Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. The African inheritors of those social formations and their states have used settler-capitalism’s legacy in various ways: in Zimbabwe, now, that legacy has been part of the schizophrenia of which Mandaza speaks. Zimbabwe’s governing class has relied on white farmers and industrial capitalists not only for much of its

24 Unless Fanon’s condemnation of the African middle class could be twisted to suggest that he would support a ‘true’ bourgeoisie – in which case some of the organic intellectuals for Zimbabwe’s semi-bourgeoisie might agree. See Matamisa 2004, p. 9, for attempts to marry socialism, Biblical exegesis, and patriotic nationalism – by the same man who preached nothing but entrepreneurialism for Zimbabwe’s ‘fourth Chimurenga’ in the previous week – in a mélange that would make Althusser smile, remembering his warnings about the illogic of ideology.
material wealth, but also for the cultural capital – that is, ‘land and race’ discourse – withdrawn whenever the rulers’ political savings are in short supply. As all the forms of capital decrease, hysteria ensues: as the enemy is expelled, new and more imaginary ones – some much further away, but others closer albeit symbolically linked with the puppet metaphor – take its place. The white farmers are all but gone, so the ‘traitors . . . ready to “rush to the devil and call him a friend”’ take their place in the patriotic President’s panoply of evil.26

Can this be analysed within the cold calculus of historical materialism? Calculations of the theory of value, overaccumulation and the like beloved of Marxist economists, are not based in the parts of the world best characterised by the notion of the ‘uneven articulation’ of many modes of production and their ideological cacophony. The resulting constellation of forces seems more stalemated than progressing, although huge infusions of capital or force could break the logjam. Yet, focusing on the continent’s exceptionalism (or ‘uneven articulations’ that, left too loose, can become seedbeds of culturalist postmodernism) can breed a relativism that accepts and even celebrates a bit of brutality, as long as it is directed to the end of what could be described as a ‘national-democratic revolution’ (a concept that fuses relativism with universalism) or, more precisely, the development of a class similar to the yeomanry who supposedly hoisted classical capitalism to its peaks. Some analyst-actors have an agrarian bourgeoisie of grander proportions in mind.

Yeros and Moyo celebrate the yeoman path and criticise the big new farmers, although realising the ‘political divisions and weaknesses of the semi-proletariat’ and its ‘status vis-à-vis the forces of imperialism’ mean it will have great difficulty in creating policies departing from ‘liberal macro-economics’.27 The ‘tenuous and implausible . . . anti-colonial claims of the black bourgeoisie’ raising the ‘spectre of ethno-nationalism’28 will make things worse. Can the ‘new peasants’, only 0.7 per cent of Zimbabwe’s population, if magically stripped of their semi-proletarian conditions and all the connections inherent in that status,29 shoulder the task of primitive accumulation? Can they even

26 Ranger 2004 on how a narrow ‘patriotic history’ has replaced a once inclusive nationalist historiography.
28 Moyo and Yeros 2004, p. 28.
29 This calculation estimates Zimbabwe’s population at fourteen million. With nearly six million in danger of starvation from malnutrition, and an HIV/AIDS infection
stay on the farms, as ruling-party chiefs and ever-lower bureaucrats try to replace them? \[30\] This will be a difficult task, even with the donor contributions demanded by Yeros to ‘re-engage with Zimbabwe [and] meet their reform obligations [to] contribute to the building of the requisite infrastructure for dynamic accumulation in the smallholder sector’. \[31\] This population – with no secure tenure – is not enough to kick-start the nearly seven million people stuck in artificially frozen conglomerations, called ‘communal areas’ of precapitalist and postcolonial modes of production into capitalism, let alone socialism. \[32\]

Further analysis of Moyo’s and Yeros’s work will reveal that, in the last instance, they rely rather mechanically on the state for history’s largest task. Thus, theories of the ‘African state’ are necessary, although here they can be analysed parenthetically only. Debate on the African state from a political-economy perspective has not moved far forward since the work of John Saul in the late 1970s emerging from the Tanzanian experience, on the ‘overdeveloped state’. This – somewhat schizophrenically – claimed that the state could be captured by an ideologically correct intelligentsia. It could make socialism work because colonialism had made the state very strong. However, this state also gave the ‘bureaucratic bourgeoisie’ a privileged socio-economic position, so socialism was often hijacked in its name. \[33\] Aside from Mamdani’s notable exception, \[34\] and Mandaza’s on the settler state, Marxist...
theory has come up with little interesting work on the state in Africa since, so people on the Left have been left with mirror images of Robert Bates’s rent-seeking class or postmodern pastiches in the mould of Jean-François Bayart and Achille Mbembe. The Left sees a corrupt state and sees its salvation in a strong working-class/peasantry alliance, or, in its likely absence, the idealist notion of a vanguard with the right (left) ideology, perhaps swooping down from the World Social Forum. The Right sees a corrupt state: neoliberals think that it can only be saved by the market; liberals think a touch of ‘good governance’ can adjust for market – and democratic – failure; conservatives hope for a dictator to do the job, but have doubts about the capacity of Africans to ‘develop’ at all; while neoconservatives carry a bizarre mélange of all three with a bit of Christianity and a lot of militarism on top. The right-wingers call for a measure of imperialism and thus incredible degrees of meddling with local states, while the internationalist Left calls for global and local civil-society alliances, which, due to the weakness of African civil society, also end up involving the state. These are the conundrums in which one is mired if the politics of primitive accumulation are not taken into account. Where the articulated modes of production in an African social formation contain only some elements of developed ‘feudalism’, a distinctive dynasty-building layer must be added to the politics of the ‘transition’, as would lordly behaviour on the newly acquired estates. Furthermore, as Teschke’s work suggests and Zimbabwe’s recent role in the war centred on Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrates, international alliances are a key component of chains of accumulation as well as links of sovereigntist solidarity.

Yet, with no theory of the state to fall back on, Yeros writes that ‘it is imperative [another moral dictate, especially idealistic given the thorough decay and corruptness of this state] that the state is compelled to remain engaged in the economy to co-ordinate inter-sectoral linkages’ and goes

interrogation with a historical-materialist approach. It is silent on alternatives, too. Mamdani 1996.

37 Teschke 2002. Rumours that Mugabe has allowed Joseph Kabila ‘access’ to his sister-in-law, and awarded the cuckolded husband a ‘privatised’ television news supplier, whether true or not, suggest the prevalence of feudal ideology among the gossip-generating classes. See Nest 2001 on Zimbabwe in the DRC war.
38 Yeros 2003, p. 13. The linguistic difficulties in this phrase indicate theoretical meandering: how can it be ‘imperative . . . that the state is compelled’ to perform in a certain way, unless the state is forced, either by moral dictate or coercive agency (be it inside or out)? Theoretical culs-de-sac can not be opened up through forceful assertions.
along with Patrick Bond’s harking back to the Rhodesian days of capital controls and industrial development corporations. This simply begs the question of the state and its relations to indigenous and foreign capital, and assumes that the Zimbabwean state has the capacity and will for such a task. Yet Raftopoulos and Phimister are similarly hobbled: they write of the ‘constraints of the developmentalist project of the post-colonial state’, and go on to chart neoliberalism’s effects on them (they supply the references for further study: but neither Raftopoulos/Phimister or Moyo/Yeros cite Pádraig Carmody’s striking work on how the industrial sector was hit by structural adjustment\(^{39}\)). Also, neither offer a view allowing for the possibility that opposition politics emerged during the same conjuncture as a new segment of the bourgeoisie was beginning to emerge, but was crowded out of the party-state-capital apparatuses.\(^{40}\)

With Raftopoulos and Phimister, we are left with only tentative postulations such as the one that the Zimbabwean governing class is not really trying to do anything different from

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\ldots \text{old modernisation models, albeit under a new national bourgeoisie [leaving out the question of global linkages]. Notwithstanding the retrograde political language of the régime, the central thrust of its obsession continues to be modernisation [similar] \ldots to most nationalist positions in developing countries where emerging élites seek a modernising path. \ldots This \ldots agenda of élite advancement \ldots has been one of the central pillars of Zimbabwe’s nationalist ideology.}
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It is more vicious now, however, in the context of neoliberal globalisation, opposition, and ‘pressure from below for land reform’, even though the latter is seen as being more important for legitimacy than for accumulation. This advances the theory of the ‘schizophrenic state’, although it clearly needs a lot of work. It leaves Moyo and Yeros, though, with the upper hand on the importance for primitive accumulation of ‘land reform’, although they give its Zimbabwean manifestation too much credibility and are starry-eyed about its chances.

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Note that the word ‘compelled’ was used in regard to international assistance too (footnote 25).


\(^{40}\) Taylor 1999.
Raftopoulos and Phimister take a stab at primitive accumulation and the state with words like this:

> If it is true that one of the major issues in the Zimbabwean crisis revolves around the unresolved processes of primitive accumulation, due to the blockages created by settler colonialism, then violence to some degree was bound to accompany the land occupations. The major question however revolves around the major actors involved in this violence, and in particular the role of the state.

However, they then jump away from grappling with the issue of the state’s role in this new and accelerated mode of accumulation, by focussing on whom the state ‘hit hardest’.

> From the evidence at hand it is clear that the central role of state organs in the violence impacted most on farm workers and other ordinary citizens, leading to a closure of democratic spaces and the reconfigured authoritarianism of the ruling elite.

To be sure, more farm workers (far from purely proletarianised: their relations with the farmers are, or were, arguably more feudal than capitalist, and as Rutherford’s *Working at the Margins* points out so well, they have intricate relations in the communal areas as well) have been hurt more than any other population group. However, as far as capital, international relations and the media are concerned, white commercial farmers have been ‘impacted’ the most. British and American diplomats do not have African farm workers at the top of their list; nor do African statesmen (neither article discusses the way in which Mugabe dismissed the African farm workers as ‘foreigners’ thus highlighting the importance of ‘citizenship’ in Africa’s crisis, although Raftopoulos discusses this in other places). Another shared lacuna is consideration of the ways in which the land invasions have contributed – or not – to state capitalism: Bernstein’s strictures about *production* have not been taken into account, although Raftopoulos and Phimister outline the grave symptoms. So far, the state, in the form of the Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA), seems good at stealing tons of coffee from a white farmer who also happens to be a Movement for Democratic Change.

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42 In Hammar et al. 2004.
43 See note 4.
parliamentarian, and threatening a successful export venture between war veterans and the farmer they once invaded, but with whom they later co-operated.44 It is clear, as Ibbo Mandaza has put it, that,

the manner in which the land reform exercise is concluded will . . . be integral to the process whereby Zimbabwe successfully re-engages in an international community for whom ‘property rights’ are virtually part of the capitalist gospel.45

This cuts to the chase of tenure relations – something marginalised by all four authors, and Bernstein as well, but not by the international financial and development institutions! Until the eventuality of their settlement, it is only very simple strains that can cut through the ideological noise and physical violence produced by the impasse – to bring the conclusion so far denied. In some cases, the dominant chords must derive from modes of thought foreign to much Marxist analysis, but compatible with its universalist and rational aspirations. The discourse of democracy may well fit that bill – and lead to more interesting theorisations of the state. In the meantime, it remains to be seen if the spelling out of ‘class’ gets us anywhere nearer that dénouement.

Classes, the state and the ‘Third Chimurega’

If one remains convinced that it is only through classes that state theory stays alive, one must analyse Moyo and Yeros more closely, because they contend that Zimbabwe’s popular classes have forced the state to its present condition. It is here that Moyo and Yeros step in with efforts to carry out a class analysis, and thus analyse the democratic base, of the ‘national-democratic revolution’ under way in Zimbabwe. This gets to the core of the Yeros and Moyo revolution; the crossroads where the roads of the national-democratic revolution meet. Even if one does the impossible and ignores the state-ensconced actors actually taking land for themselves, examining the admittedly complex array of forces behind the land invasions (and now reform) as documented by Moyo and Yeros reveals, as Bonapartist theory would expect, the state qua the state. Moyo and Yeros contend that war veterans led the revolution,46 and suggest that a

44 The Minister of Agriculture was formerly an ARDA manager who ran the President’s farms. The Kondozi Farm story is at Thorneycroft 2004.


46 For a detailed history, albeit absent of theory, of the relationship between the Zimbabwean war veterans and ZANU PF, see Kriger 2003.
class position arrives out of that process. What they actually illustrate, though, is the primal force of the state:

47 The land occupation was organized and led by the war veterans association... a profound source of strength, combining militancy ... with an organizational structure permeating state and society. The war veterans activated their organizational roots as much in rural districts, through the local branches of the association, as in all levels of the state apparatus, including local and central government, the police, the military, the Central Intelligence Organization, the state media (print, TV, and radio) and the ruling party. [Emphasis added.]

This statement is inserted in the midst of illustrations of complicated assortments of class forces, conceptualised by the authors as a ‘tense but resolute cross-class alliance’ that ‘would stand opposed to the [other] cross-class “post-national” (or “civic national”) alliance of civil society, including the MDC, trade unions, NGOs, and white farmers’. Aside from the ‘tenseness’ of the resolution, and the fact that so much of this base seems to be rooted in the state, the tenuous nature of this alliance is hinted at with admissions of ambiguity around the ‘common social base, that of the rural-based semi-proletariat’, such as these (emphases added):

i) ‘the petty-bourgeois overture would not threaten, as yet, the overall class content of the movement;’

ii) ‘the black capitalist lobby would not yet threaten the working-class [and what happened to the non-existent relationship between the semi-proletariat and the unions previously noted by Yeros?] content of the movement;’

iii) ‘the state bureaucrats would, however, seek to develop hegemony over the land occupations and even own the land revolution’ [but if it is already established that the ‘vets’ were part of the state apparatus, how do they differ from the ‘bureaucrats?’]

The authors follow these equivocations with admission that the war veterans’ association became a ‘source of weakness’ because it was a ‘“single issue” movement’, failed to develop democratic structures linking peasants and workers (again, if all peasants and workers are semi-proletarians, why should this be a problem?), and did not work very hard to ‘prepare for longer-term class-based political education and ideological struggle’. They then go on to condemn both the civic-minded and the ‘indigenisationists’ – and, for good

47 Moyo and Yeros 2004, pp. 19–20 of mimeo, for the next few paragraphs.
measure, blame the imperialists for hyperinflation. All of the above appears to vindicate many observers’ analyses that the ‘war veterans’ association was actually taken over by the Central Intelligence Organisation in preparation for the 2000 invasions: this is the state incarnate.

Why not, with all these problems, just opt for the democrats, liberal and ‘civic-minded’ as they might be? Would not that put the ‘democratic’ back into the national-democratic revolution? Perhaps it would add to it the counts of torture and death made by human-rights organisations, something from which the agrarian patriots shy away: from 1999 (when the contemporary phase of the crisis emerged) to mid-2004, human-rights organisations have estimated 128 murders, 37 attempted murders, 3,849 incidents of torture, 619 abductions and kidnappings, 2,042 arrests and detentions, 712 assaults, 259 displacements, 26 rapes, 33 disappearances, and 190 death threats or intimidations,48 all in the political cause of a party resorting to more and more authoritarianism in the face of something as simple – as superstructural – as a little dose of opposition. To be sure, some of these figures include MDC ‘fightbacks’, and anyone who remembers the wake of ZANU’s splitting off from ZAPU in the early 1960s knows that the emergence of new parties in Zimbabwe entails a cycle of violence. And, in the shadow of the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s three million dead and Nigeria’s ongoing ethnic strife, these figures do not overwhelm. However, this sort of equivocation means the relaxation of the application of universal standards. And, for those who might justify the means by their ends: when does one know that the ends are accomplished? When can the land question be deemed solved? Do the means get turned on those who begin to question the success of the ends? Do these differences illustrate irresolvable and essential distinctions between ‘peasant-based’ and urban strategies? For the former, does liberal democracy pale to insignificance beside the essential desire for land? This is an essentialist and culturalist position, and Yeros’s very wise notion of the semi-proletariat dissolves this divide – unless one stretches peasant exceptionalism to the semi-proletariat.

On close examination, the ‘patriotic capitalism’ argument fails too: the accumulators cannot be separated into ‘local’ and ‘global’. Zimbabwe’s state-centric capitalists have profited mightily in the foreign exchange market, have

48 These estimates are compiled from various human-rights organisations in Zimbabwe, and supplement those of Feltoe 2004 and Reeler 2004.
pirated ‘privatised’ parastatals, and attempted a foreign accumulation project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They straddle patriotism and globalism while claiming anti-imperialism. The locally-driven members of the *nouvelle bourgeoisie* are politically volatile: the group that had to fight state monopolies to get their piece of the cake may be more democratic than those relying on a ruling-party godfather,49 but are few and far between. As for the state representatives of international capital, the critical cosmopolitans do play with fire when dallying with the hypocritical human-rights pushers such as Bush and Blair – but, on their road to power, the nationalists dealt with Henry Kissinger, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as well as Mao and Brezhnev – not to mention the archetypal international capitalist, Tiny Rowlands. The opposition’s language of ‘governance’ sounds slightly World Bankish, but its focus on state capacity is not unsurprising, given that Adam Smith’s invisible hand – barely waving amidst the collapse – is all that is left in the state-induced industrial decay.

All in all, it would seem that the political economy of Zimbabwe has created a dilemma for the Left. While class structures and accumulation processes are a contradictory combination of flux and stagnation and the ruling party implodes in the face of political opposition and productive lacunae, issues of *rights* – themselves tied up with party alignments – divide the Left. However, where the order of the day is a plethora of ‘cross-class’ alliances, and the state fills the void, the issue of democracy is a crucial one. Those Marxists who prefer deliberative debate and the consensual pursuit of hegemony, rather than fantastical ideologies and authoritarian closure when discussion comes close to the bone – and who believe that there can be no African exceptions to this universal desire – know what choices to make. Simple principles and light theory win the day over compromise and convolution.

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Review Articles


Reviewed by Paresh Chattopadhyay

At the Source of the Critique of Political Economy

The volume under review belongs to the second version of the complete works of Marx and Engels (acronym MEGA) undertaken since 1972.1 The first version of the MEGA was undertaken in the late 1920s in the Soviet Union under the direction of David B. Riazanov, perhaps the most knowledgeable Marx scholar of the time, under whom the edition had attained the highest scholarly standard and textual exactitude. But, soon, he was destituted of his function by the régime. Subsequently arrested and condemned as a ‘conspirator’ by the Stalinist show trial, he was executed in 1938. A new version of the MEGA started in 1972 with a ‘trial volume [Probeband]’, of course under full party-state control through the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the USSR and the GDR. This MEGA number 2 envisages four ‘sections’: (i) works, articles, drafts of Marx and Engels, (ii) Capital and the works preceding and preparatory to Capital, (iii) correspondence, (iv) notebooks, excerpt copybooks, marginal comments made by the two authors. This otherwise ambitious and serious scholarly enterprise was, however, marred by its openly ideological orientation. Then, with the downfall of the ‘really (non-)existing socialism’, the situation was radically changed. A total rearrangement for publishing MEGA was undertaken on the initiative of the Amsterdam Institute of Social History (IISG) with the establishment of the International Marx-Engels Foundation (IMES) in 1990. The IMES was statutorily obligated to be an association free of any partisan politics whose task was to continue the MEGA as the ‘complete historical-critical edition of the (already) published materials, manuscripts and the correspondence of Marx and Engels’ with exclusively scientific objective.2 Later, it was joined by the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences (BBAW) – established in 1993 – as a conjoint endeavour towards the same end. The works of

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1 We are grateful to Manfred Neuhaus and Regina Roth for making available to us some important reviews of this volume appearing particularly in the German press. We thank the editors of HM for their fruitful suggestions.
2 Rojahan 1994, p. 5.
the two authors could finally be published, free from any partisan political-ideological control, and, in fact, under the new institutional re-organisation for the edition, revised ‘guidelines’ were established in 1993 – critically oriented towards ‘de-ideologising’ the works of the two authors, who could henceforth be read in much the same way as the other classics such as Aristotle or Spinoza. For example, henceforth, the ideologically surcharged term ‘Marxism’ and ‘Marxist’ would be totally absent from the editorial remarks accompanying the texts. (We take up this question in the concluding section.)

The volume under review is the first MEGA 2 volume to appear under the ‘revised guidelines’, and the difference in editorial orientation, compared to the earlier volumes, is immediately clear. The volume under review is the first MEGA 2 volume to appear under the ‘revised guidelines’, and the difference in editorial orientation, compared to the earlier volumes, is immediately clear.

Each volume of the MEGA 2 consists of two separate books – the ‘text’ and the ‘apparatus [Apparat]’. The first contains only the text of the author(s), the second contains the editors’ introduction (presentation) to the text, as well as the explanations and clarificatory remarks concerning the text. In the present case, the ‘Text’ contains Marx’s notebook [Notizbuch] for the period 1844 – beginning 1847 and eight excerpt copybooks [Exzerpthefte] from the period 1844–5, of which two are from his Paris days and six from his Brussels days. The ‘Apparat’ has the editorial introduction and various explanatory and clarificatory notes. It seems that it took more than a decade to prepare the volume. The editors should be praised for their work, which was undertaken meticulously and with great scientific rigour. Particularly, much to their credit, their work of putting together in the ‘Apparat’ the relevant references to Marx’s later texts will be of great help to all serious students of Marx studies. The excerpts as such will also be of great use for the students of the history of economic analysis.

Marx’s systematic, serious, economic studies in fact begin in 1844, at least partly stimulated by Engels’s Outline of a Critique of Political Economy (1844), later qualified by Marx as a ‘work of genius’. In what follows, we successively deal with the ‘notebook’ and the ‘excerpt copybooks’. In each case, we try to show how, respectively, the ‘notebook’ and the ‘excerpt copybooks’ served Marx in the elaboration of his ideas in his own works. In the concluding section, we elaborate a little further on ‘de-idologised’ MEGA as well as on Marx’s ‘method of investigation’ as seen in his ‘excerpt copybooks’.

I. Notebook

The ‘notebook’ (1844–7) is, as the editors remark, borrowing a term from M. Rubel, a unique source of Marx’s ‘biographie intellectuelle’. This is the first of a set of twenty

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4 Before the revised guidelines came into operation, the editorial ‘introduction’ used to be included along with the text in the first book itself, leaving the rest for the second book.

5 Marx 1980a, p. 101. It was during 1844–5 that Marx (mostly) and Engels composed the Holy Family.

‘notebooks’ covering the period up to 1881. It contains list of books already in Marx’s possession, those which Marx thought of procuring and those which Marx wanted to read. They comprise various fields – jurisprudence, history, philosophy, belles lettres, above all political economy. The list could be seen as indicating the basic direction of Marx’s future investigation. Marx excerpted from only some of these books in his Brussels period, he excerpted from the rest, in 1850s and 1860s. He started excerpting from the English texts from summer 1845 while visiting Manchester. Till then, he had read the British authors (including Smith and Ricardo) and excerpted from them in French translation. The list includes, secondly, different names and addresses as well as remarks and sketches of different sorts. Finally, there are some very interesting short texts inserted in between these items, the most important being the original text of Marx’s famous ‘theses’ on Feuerbach. The ‘notebook’ also contains one text on Hegel, two texts on the French Revolution, and remarks on Proudhon which are important. Let us say a few words on these texts.

On page 23 of the ‘notebook’ we find four-point ‘Hegelian construction of Phenomenology’.

The four points indicate themes for further elaboration in the future, following upon what Marx had done earlier in his Hegel polemic in the 1844 Paris manuscripts. The first point reads: ‘Self consciousness instead of the human. Subject. Object.’ The same idea appears in the Holy Family which says that ‘Hegel posits self-consciousness in place of the human being’ and that ‘Hegel makes the human the human of self-consciousness instead of making self-consciousness the self-consciousness of the human’. Two years earlier, he had written about Hegel’s ‘inversion of subject and predicate’ making ‘idea the subject and the real subject, predicate’. Another point of the same text affirms that ‘Hegel gives, within speculation, the real distinctions which grasp the thing itself’. In the Holy Family, this appears almost verbatim: ‘Very often Hegel gives, within the speculative representation, a real representation which grasps the thing itself.’ On page 25 of the ‘notebook’, the inserted text consisting of eleven points refers to political questions such as the French Revolution, the origin of the modern state, the proclamation of the rights of man, division between legislative and executive powers, the right to vote and the struggle for the abolition of the state and the civil (bourgeois) society. This group of points is related to another group of four points in an insertion appearing on page 53 of the ‘notebook’, where, again, the French Revolution and the history of the origin of the state are the subjects. In both these groups of points, Marx underlines the ‘illusion’ of the revolutionaries about the ancient state and their ‘mixing up’ the modern ‘with the ancient state’. This idea appears in Marx’s other writings.

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7 Marx had already, in his Parisian manuscripts of 1844, excerpted, without comments, from the last chapter of Phenomenology, ‘the absolute knowledge’: see Marx 1932, pp. 592–6.
10 Marx 1972, p. 63; emphasis in text.
11 For example, in the Holy Family, we find the following elaboration, ‘Robespierre, Saint Just
Spread across the pages 53–7 of the ‘notebook’ we have the famous, eleven-point ‘theses’ on Feuerbach.\(^\text{12}\) This is the text where Marx announces his (and Engels’s) ‘new materialism’ as opposed to the ‘old materialism,’ and leaving his earlier ‘cult of Feuerbach’\(^\text{13}\) – as we see it in his Parisian manuscripts of 1844 and even in the *Holy Family* of 1845, the same year, when this text was written (apparently shortly after the book) – makes almost a complete turnaround and comes out with a severe critique of the philosopher. The critique of Feuerbach’s materialism that it does not go beyond considering the reality under the form of object or intuition, not as sensuous activity, is further developed in the *German Ideology*.\(^\text{14}\)

The central point of this text is the accent on ‘revolutionary practice’ as the agent for transforming the world by transforming individuals as well as their circumstances (points 3 and 11). This fundamental idea reappears in Marx’s later writings.\(^\text{15}\) Finally, on page 108 of the ‘notebook’, we have a couple of critical remarks on Proudhon which were elaborated in Marx’s book two years later – that Proudhon was incapable of understanding the revolutionary movement and that he idealises, following the bourgeois economists, the positive side of the modern industry while considering its dissolving side as negative, which had to be eliminated. Within the same text Marx speaks of ‘Ricardo’s merit’ to have posited the ‘historical opposition of classes’.

**II. Excerpt copybooks**

We start this section by citing a line from a letter (10 October 1837) that Marx, as a student in Berlin, wrote to his father: ‘I have made it a habit of making excerpts, from all the books which I read, and, in some places, scribbling down my reflections’.\(^\text{16}\) This method of excerpting is clear in the present volume and, indeed, Marx seems to...
have followed this method throughout his life. (For more on this, see the concluding section.)

There are, altogether, thirty-one authors from whom Marx excerpted in his eight copybooks as given here – three from the Paris period, twenty-eight from the Brussels period. The excerpts are either in French or in Marx’s German translation, often mixed together. Unlike the Paris excerpts – as given in this volume or elsewhere17 – a number of which carry, along with the excerpted texts, Marx’s own explicit and often extensive comments, the Brussels excerpts contain, in most cases, very few comments, if at all, of Marx’s own. However, as with the Paris excerpts without comments, the Brussels excerpts, even when not accompanied by Marx’s remarks, could, in many cases, be considered, by the very choice of the concerned texts, as close to – if not coinciding with – Marx’s own ideas of the time or as objective representations of the prevailing economic-social relations which Marx would draw on in his later work.

Though not always clearly marked, one can discern from the copybooks a number of themes in political economy around which the excerpts were taken and which interested Marx at that period. These also show the orientation of Marx’s future investigations. (i) The social consequences of industrialisation in general and of the application of machines in particular on the labouring poor (first two Brussels books including, notably, excerpts from Sismondi and Buret as well as the fifth including excerpts from Gasparin, Babbage, Ure and Rossi); (ii) money, credit and trade (the Paris book and the fourth Brussels book including excerpts, importantly, from Boisguillebert, Law, Dupré de St. Maur, Pinto, Child); (iii) history of economic thought (sixth Brussels book with excerpts particularly from Pecchio, MacCulloch, Ganilh, Blanqui, Villegardelle). These excerpts also show that along with the classical political economy in general, Marx was also studying and excerpting from the critical literature – here, the most important being Sismondi and Buret. There seems to be no unifying central theme in the third Brussels book, where we find excerpts from the important economist Henri Storch.

Marx’s excerpts do not necessarily come only from the well-known authors in the history of ideas. He excerpted also from the little-known ones. For example, in the third Brussels book, we have the following significant excerpt from an article by T. Fix in the *Journal des économistes* (1842, Volume 2): ‘If the workers do not have enough and the masters have too much, then [things] must be taken from the ones and given to the others. . . . The organisers of labour demand a different kind of wealth distribution. Since this cannot take place under liberty, this must, necessarily be executed under constraint and by force. But for this, constraint must be permanent.’ The editors of the volume find in this statement some pertinence to the Marxian conception of the

17 See MEGA 4.2, 1981.
‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ (p. 472). We submit that the editors’ view is only partially correct, particularly if we take into consideration the last sentence of the statement. Fix’s ideas as given in the statement, taken as a whole, are more in tune, with the Jacobin non-emancipatory conception of the ‘proletarian dictatorship’ as it prevailed in the Third International and beyond than with Marx’s own, which signifies, as the Communist Manifesto asserts, the ‘conquest of democracy’ by the ‘autonomous movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority’. 18 Secondly, far from the ‘constraint’ being ‘permanent’, as in Fix, the ‘dictatorship’ itself is purely transitory, as Marx famously asserts about three decades later in his Gothakritik.

In the following discussion, in our effort to relate Marx’s excerpts along with his comments, wherever made, to his later work, we will be selective about the authors involved, given the space limitation. The few authors we select – admittedly somewhat arbitrarily – could, nevertheless, serve as a representative sample to illustrate what kind of excerpts Marx was interested in making and the way the excerpts would serve him in his own future work – and that is the main purpose of the present article. Within this general framework, we will, in particular, focus on Marx’s relation to the French classical political economy – embodied here by Boisguillebert and Sismondi – in view of the relative neglect of this area as compared to Marx’s relation to the English classical school – Ricardo in particular – in the mainstream of economic writings on Marx. In what follows we start with excerpts from Boisguillebert and Sismondi. Then we successively deal with the excerpts from Buret, Storch, Gasparin, Babbage, Ure.

II.i. Boisguillebert

Pierre de Boisguillebert, it is well-known, is considered by Marx as the first classical economist from France, in the same way as William Petty from England, and of having the ‘same significant place in the French economy as Petty in the English’. 19 In his Paris copybook, Marx excerpted from Boisguillebert’s three works: Le détail de la France, Dissertation sur la nature des richesses, de l’argent et des tributs, and Traité de la nature, culture, commerce et intérêt des grains. The excerpts, appearing in French as well as in Marx’s German translation, are interspersed with Marx’s own comments. Marx excerpted from Boisguillebert around several themes.

First, Boisguillebert’s distinction between money and wealth. Marx excerpts from Le détail:

It is quite certain that money is not at all a good in itself; its quantity does

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18} Marx and Engels 1966: pp. 68, 76. The term itself appeared for the first time in Marx’s Class Struggles in France 1850 as the ‘dictatorship of the working class’. The term became famous as ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in his well-known letter to Weydemeyer 3 March 1852. Actually, the specific term seems to have been used for the first time by Marx’s friend Weydemeyer in the New York organ Turnzeitung, 1 January 1852. (See the remarks by M. Rubel along with Weydemeyer’s article in Marx 1994, pp. 1095, 1679–81.)}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Marx 1980a, p. 36.}}\]
not matter at all for the wealth of a country in general, provided there is enough of it for sustaining the prices contracted by the goods necessary for life. . . . Money is the means and the routing [acheminement] while the goods useful for life are the aim and the end.

Similarly, Marx excerpts from Dissertation: ‘The true wealth [is] the total enjoyment not only of the needs of life but also of all that which, beyond needs, could offer pleasure to the senses.’ (The first excerpt is given in a mixture of French and German. Emphasis in text.) Later, in his Urtext (1858), Marx cites these passages and observes that, according to Boisguillebert, the quantity of the means of circulation is determined by prices, not inversely, and that Boisguillebert, in fact, looks at the material content of wealth (which is) enjoyment, use-value.20

Boisguillebert even went further. In Marx’s excerpts from Dissertation, Boisguillebert points to the contrasting roles of money: money as ‘beneficial’ insofar as it renders service to trade, and money as ‘criminal’ insofar as it has wanted to be ‘a god instead of being a slave, . . . declaring war . . . to the whole humankind’ (emphasis in text). In his comment, Marx emphasises the ‘first decisive polemic (in Boisguillebert) against silver and gold . . . and – since these alone represent money – against money’. Then, he refers to Boisguillebert’s view that with the depreciation of the precious metals, of money, ‘goods would be reestablished in their just value’, and observes that Boisguillebert could not see ‘that exchange itself, on the basis of private property, that value robs nature and the human of their “just value”’ (pp. 53–4; emphasis in text).

Years later, Marx would note Boisguillebert as one of the most passionate opponents of the monetary system ‘waging’ – in contrast with Petty – ‘a fanatical fight against money which through its interference destroys the natural equilibrium and harmony of commodity exchange’.21 At the same time, Marx would note – in the same text – a contradiction in Boisguillebert, to the extent that, on the one hand, he viewed the bourgeois form of labour, the production of use-values as commodities, as the natural social form while, on the other hand, he considered money as an interfering and usurping foreign element – thus lashing out against the bourgeois labour in one form while, as a utopian, exalting it in another form. Proudhon’s socialism, Marx would add, ‘suffers from this national hereditary evil’.22

Secondly, Marx underlines Boisguillebert’s sympathy for the poor and the oppressed.

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20 Marx 1980a, p. 37.
21 In his Urtext (1858), Marx opposes Boisguillebert’s negative attitude to the precious metals (and money) to Petty’s advocacy of continuing accumulation of precious metals (basically through foreign trade) as a ‘spokesperson’ and ‘inciter’ of seventeenth-century England’s ‘energetic, merciless, universal drive for enrichment’ mediated by ‘production for production’s sake’. Marx 1980a, pp. 34, 36. Elsewhere, Marx, with reference to Petty’s (and Misselden’s) veritable apotheosis of ‘chase after treasure’, underlines the ‘most striking way’ in which the ‘opposite approach, which represents, the real needs of production against the supremacy of money (and previous metals)’ comes out in Boisguillebert 1953, pp. 143–4. Marx would note similar opposition between Ricardo and Sismondi, of course, corresponding to a higher stage of capitalist production. See, for example, Marx 1953, p. 314; 1959, pp. 106–7; 1962b, pp. 50–1.
22 Marx 1980a, pp. 36, 132–33.
He excerpts from *Dissertation*: ‘Today men are wholly divided between two classes, that is, the one which enjoys all the pleasures without doing anything and the other which labours from morning till evening and possesses hardly the necessities, and most often is deprived of them’ (emphasis in text). Elsewhere, in the same copybook, Marx notes that ‘Boisguillebert everywhere speaks in the name of the large part of the population who are poor and whose ruin [also] rebounds on the rich. He speaks of the distributive justice’ (p. 43).23

Thirdly, Marx credits Boisguillebert with the ‘doctrine of laissez faire, laissez aller of the modern economists’ (p. 53). He excerpts from *Dissertation*: ‘It is not a question of taking action for procuring very great wealth. It is only a question of ceasing to take action.’ Marx comments that, with Boisguillebert, as with the ‘modern political economists the natural course of things, that is, the bourgeois society’, should bring things in order. At the same time, Marx notes that ‘with Boisguillebert, as later with the Physiocrats, this doctrine has, still something human, and significant; human, in opposition to the economy of the old state which tried to enrich its coffers with the most unnatural means, significant, as the first attempt to emancipate the bourgeois life’ (p. 53; emphasis in text).

Fourthly, towards the end of his excerpts from *Dissertation*, Marx refers to Boisguillebert’s explanation of the phenomenon of shortage in the midst of plenty, noting its similarity to Say’s attempt at ‘explaining away’ (let us add, in common with Ricardo and James Mill) the phenomenon of ‘overproduction’ in his doctrine (‘law’) of markets [débouchés], which Marx considers as ‘false like all doctrines of political economy’ (p. 54; emphasis in text). In this connection, Marx offers significant comments on the problem of overproduction, where one could already discern the sketch of a portrait of capital’s self-destruction as the outcome of its inherent contradictions which Marx would extensively develop in his later manuscripts.24 ‘The political economists,’ observes Marx,

> are not surprised that there can be a surplus of products in a country though there is, for the majority, the biggest shortage of most elementary means of living: overproduction is the depreciation [Wertlosigkeit] of wealth itself, precisely because wealth as wealth ought to have a value. . . . There can be too much of production for the stockjobbers and capitalists, whose commodity can depreciate through abundance. From all sides can arise a surplus of production which is no longer exchanged since it exceeds the need of the solvent humanity, and the movement of private property requires that, in spite of general

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23 Marx would later contrast Petty as a ‘trivial, plundering, characterless adventurer’ with Boisguillebert who, even as the king’s intendant, ‘stood for the oppressed classes with great spirit and audacity’, Marx 1980a, p. 133.
poverty and (precisely) mediated by it, too much is produced. With the increase of production the shortage of markets increases since the number of the propertyless also increases. . . . The mass of products must increase relatively, therefore continually surpass demand more and more, that is, become devalued. It will necessarily turn out that it is not for society but only for a part of it that production takes place and that production for this part will lose its value, since it is destroyed by its mass in proportion to this minority. (pp. 56–7; emphasis in text. The term ‘stockjobbers’ is in English in the text).

II.i. Sismondi

Marx considered Sismondi to be the last representative of the French classical political economy in the same way as he considered Ricardo as the last representative of the English classical political economy. However, Marx considered that, unlike Ricardo, Sismondi also embodied the ‘critique’ of the ‘bourgeois science of economics’.²⁵ Both these aspects are seen in Marx’s excerpts from Sismondi. In his Brussels period, Marx excerpted from Sismondi’s main works: Études sur l’économie politique and Nouveaux principes d’économie politique. However, his excerpt copybook containing the excerpts from the latter book as well as the excerpts from Droz and Cherbuliez has not been found. Several important themes on which Marx would draw later came out of the excerpts from Sismondi’s Études.

In Sismondi’s value theory, we already find a rough formulation of what Marx would later call the ‘socially necessary labour time’ (SNLT) as the determinant of value. Marx excerpts the following from Sismondi (in his own German translation):

> The market value is always fixed, in the last instance, on the quantity of labour necessary for procuring the object evaluated; it is not the quantity which has actually produced it but the quantity which it would cost with the improvement of the means (of production), and this quantity is always established faithfully by competition.

Later, in his Anti-Proudhon (1847), Marx would cite this passage and give what amounts to his first attempt at a formulation of the SNLT determining value: ‘It is important to insist that what determines value is not the time during which an object has been produced, but the minimum of time in which it could be produced, and the minimum is established by competition.’²⁶ About a decade later, Marx, in his two different texts, cites from the same excerpt the following: ‘Exchange value results from the relation between the need of society and the quantity of labour which has sufficed to satisfy

²⁵ Marx 1962a, p. 20.
the need.'

(The whole expression ‘from the relation... the need’ is emphasised in the first text). Marx paraphrases and cites Sismondi to the effect that ‘to reduce the value magnitude to the necessary labour time’ is the ‘characteristic of our economic progress’.

(The first expression within quotation marks is Marx’s, the second Sismondi’s. Emphasis in text).

As could be seen, in his work Sismondi offers a clear idea of the two dimensions of SNLT – the technological and the social needs dimension – which would later find rigorous formulation in Marx. Thus, in his manuscript for Capital III, Marx writes:

For a commodity to be sold at its market value, i.e., in proportion to the socially necessary labour contained in it, the total quantity of social labour, which in the whole description of that commodity is consumed, must correspond to the quantity of needs which society has of it – that is, social needs that could be paid for [zahlungsfähig]. Competition... tends continually to reduce the total quantity of labour employed on every description of commodities to that standard.

[Emphasis in original. The expressions ‘in the whole... consumed’, ‘to reduce’, and ‘labour employed... standard’ are in English in the original.]

Engels translated and rephrased them in his edition. No wonder Marx finds Sismondi’s superiority over Ricardo in this regard. Referring to Ricardo’s formulation of the determination of value by labour time, Marx observes that ‘Sismondi goes further’; in this labour-determined value, Sismondi ‘finds the source of all the contradictions of modern industry and commerce’. In a later text, Marx notes that Sismondi, in ‘direct polemic against Ricardo’, emphasises the ‘specific social character of the labour positing exchange value’.

Marx excerpted from Sismondi’s Études the passages where Sismondi clearly distinguishes between commodity production as such and generalised commodity production (which, of course, is just another name for capitalist production). Marx excerpted (in French and in his translation) from Études, Volume 2, the following:

In the primitive state, in the patriarchal state of society, commerce of course exists but it has not absorbed it wholly. It is practised only on the surplus of products of a person and not on what constitutes the person’s existence. But the character of our economic progress is such that commerce has taken upon itself the task of distributing the totality of wealth communally

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27 Marx 1953, p. 744; Marx 1980a, p. 138.
31 Marx 1965, p. 39.
produced... Commerce has robbed wealth of its primitive character of utility. It is the opposition between use-value and exchange-value to which commerce has reduced everything.

Marx would approvingly cite the above text in his 1857–8 manuscript[^33] and, partially, in *Zur Kritik* (1859).[^34] From *Études*, Volume 1, Marx excerpts the crucial passage:

The progress of wealth has led to the division of the conditions and the professions; it is no longer the *surplus* of each one which has been the object of exchanges, it is the *subsistence itself*. . . . In this new situation, the life of every man who labours and who produces, depends, not on the completion and success of his labour but on its *sale*. [Underlined in text.]

Marx, again, would approvingly cite this passage underlining it as a whole in a 1861–3 manuscript[^35]. The ideas of Sismondi, as contained in the passage here, Marx would make his own in more than one text. Thus, he would assert that, while commodity production as such is ‘compatible with the most historically varied economic social formations’, all products must take the commodity form, seize the purchase and sale ‘not only of the surplus of production but of its substance itself only in the capitalist mode of production’.[^36]

The situation of the proletariat comes out clearly from Marx’s excerpts from Sismondi. With the remark that ‘Sismondi’s statement is true today’ (p. 123), Marx excerpts from *Études*, Volume 1: ‘The economy on the cost of production cannot but be the economy on the *quantity of labour employed to produce* or the economy on the *reward of this labour*’ which, in Marx’s paraphrase, ‘necessarily’ means that the ‘superabundant human hands are thrown on the market where they offer themselves at a discount’ (emphasis in text). From the same text, again, Marx excerpts (in his translation) the following: ‘The Roman proletariat lived almost exclusively at the expense of society. One could almost say that the modern society lives at the expense of the proletariat, from the share which it deducts from the reward of his labour’. In a later text, Marx, would cite this passage in connection with his discussion of the process of capital accumulation, joining it with his remark that ‘classical political economy did not for a (single) moment have any illusion about the birth pangs of wealth’.[^37]

Equally, the other aspect of capital accumulation, which Marx calls elsewhere capitalists’ ‘enrichment mania [Bereicherungssucht]’,[^38] their merciless drive for profit across the globe, is clearly depicted in the following significant passage from Sismondi, *Études*, Volume 1, which Marx excerpted (in his translation):

[^33]: Marx 1953, p. 743.
[^34]: Marx 1980a, p. 138.
[^35]: Marx 1976b, p. 265.
[^36]: Marx 1962a, p. 184; Marx 1976b, p. 286; Marx 1988, pp. 27, 30.
[^37]: Marx 1962a, p. 621; Marx 1965, p. 1099.
[^38]: Marx 1953, p. 80; Marx 1980a, pp. 194–5.
There is no longer any distance that can stop the speculators; the expectation of profit makes capital circulate from one extremity to the other extremity of the known universe. No industry which brings profit stops its operation due to lack of funds, however gigantic might be the conceived scale; and it is not only at one place that it is executed. In twenty different countries the giants are begotten from the teeth of the dragon with which the earth is sown [and] right from the moment of their birth they fight relentlessly one against another.

The first part of the passage finds clear echo in the Communist Manifesto’s famous portrait of the bourgeoisie ‘invading the whole surface of the globe’. The second part points to the broad idea of what Marx would, more precisely, call the ‘competition of capitals’ (in the process of accumulation of capital) and would be elaborated by him in his later writings.

II.iii. Buret

In his second Brussels book, Marx excerpted from the second volume of E. Buret’s De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France. Reading through the excerpts, one could see that the themes appearing in the excerpts were of considerable interest to Marx. Marx also inserted in the excerpts a couple of his own observations. The themes relate to capital’s negative impact on society, particularly its labouring class. Buret underlines modern industry’s substitution of family labour by factory labour and the completely alien relation and silent hostility between the labourers, and the employers, breaking out into open violence on the simplest of occasions.

Large-scale production with machinery divides the population participating in production in two classes with distinctly opposed interests; the class of capitalists, owners of the instruments of production and the class of wage-labourers. In the big manufacturing industries there are only wage-labourers and the administrators of capital.
Marx offers his critical comments on Buret’s somewhat romantic reference to the labour organisation of the past. Marx excerpts from Buret: ‘Earlier there was a legitimate hierarchy, accepted and respected equally by the labourers and the masters in the industry: master, companion, apprentice. . . . There was an old organisation of labour’ (emphasis in text). Marx observes:

A word about the phrase: ‘organisation of labour’. This organisation was there. It belonged to the Middle Ages. The modern-day industry is the dissolved and negated organisation of labour. To wish to re-establish it is a reactionary pious wish. The highest to which it brings is the continuation from feudalism to bureaucracy and the bureaucratic organisation of industry. (p. 145.)

On the question of population, Marx excerpts this significant line from Buret: ‘The law of population varies with the economic condition of peoples’. This is clearly seen elaborated in Capital, Volume 1 in connection with Marx’s analysis of ‘relative overpopulation’ – created by the process of accumulation of capital – called by Marx the ‘law of population specific to the capitalist mode of production’. Against the Malthusian theory of population, Marx writes almost echoing Buret: ‘Each specific historical mode of production has its specific historically valid law of population. An abstract law of population exists only for the plants and animals in so far as they have not come under human action.’

With respect to Buret’s assertion – excerpted in the copybook – that the capitalist production has created pauperism, promiscuity of sexes and destroyed the sanctity of family, Marx comments:

Today it is no longer a question whether private property should exist? Whether the family should exist? etc. If the existing conditions have to be maintained, they have to be maintained in their totality. Therefore should property and pauperism exist? Should marriage and prostitution, family and loss of family exist? All these conditions have developed through their opposition (contradiction) and can only through the biggest lie and illusion be considered as positive. (pp. 142–3; emphasis in text.)

II.iv. Storch

In the third Brussels book, Marx made extensive excerpts from Storch’s Cours d’économie politique. These excerpts deal with several themes such as division of labour and
productive and unproductive labour, national product and revenue, the circulation of capital and the nature of human progress. These would be revisited by Marx in his later writings.

On the division of labour, Marx excerpts the following (in French and in German translation): ‘Division of labour singularly increases the productive powers of labour. It has its starting point in the separation of diverse professions from which it proceeds to the division where several labourers share among themselves the fabrication of the same product as in a manufactory’. Later, in connection with his discussion of the two different types of division of labour – the social and the manufacturing – Marx would cite this passage in *Capital* without comment and in one 1861–3 manuscript with the following comment: ‘Storch connects the two kinds of division of labour like Smith. However, he makes the one the point of departure for the other, which is a progress.’ Then, referring to Storch’s term ‘product’ – as given in the above quotation – Marx underlines that the collective result of the manufacturing division of labour ‘should be called not a product but a commodity’.

As regards productive and unproductive labour, we read in the excerpts (in Marx’s translation) the following interesting lines, which suggest that productive labour is the labour that creates surplus-value: ‘The human activity is productive only when it produces a value sufficient to replace the costs of production. . . . Really speaking, this reproduction is not enough. The activity must produce an extra value’. In his 1857–8 manuscript, Marx refers to this passage, without citing it, with the remark:

> It will be damned difficult [verdammt schwer] for the gentlemen economists to pass theoretically from value’s self-preservation in capital to its multiplication – that is, in its fundamental determination. See, for example, how Storch introduces this fundamental determination through an adverb, ‘really speaking [eigentlich]’.

Storch holds (in the excerpts) that a person cannot produce wealth if the person does not possess ‘inner goods’, that is if the person has not developed, the necessary physical, intellectual and moral capabilities, which supposes the existence of means of development such as ‘social institutions’, and so forth. Storch criticises Adam Smith for excluding from productive labour all that does not contribute to the production of wealth and for not distinguishing immaterial values from wealth. Not making any comment in his Brussels book, Marx returns to this issue in his 1861–3 manuscripts. Marx first says that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is

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* Marx 1976b, p. 266.
* Marx 1976b, p. 266; Marx uses the French terms *produit* and *marchandise* in the manuscript. In *Capital*, Marx made the idea more precise: ‘the collective product of the detail labourers is transformed into a commodity’, Marx 1962a, p. 376; Marx 1965, p. 897.
* Marx 1953, p. 182.
of decisive importance for what Smith was considering, namely, the production of material wealth, and, indeed, a definite form of its production – the capitalist mode of production and that Storch’s approach is ‘unhistorical’.

In order to consider the relation between the intellectual and material production it is first of all necessary to grasp the latter itself not as a general category, but in a definite historical form. . . . If the material production itself is not grasped in its specific historical form, it is impossible to grasp the specific intellectual production corresponding to it and their reciprocal interaction.49

This is, of course, a partial restatement of what he has famously said in 1859: ‘The mode of production of material life conditions in general the social, political and intellectual life process.’50

Some of the excerpts touch on the distinction between gross product and national revenue of a country. There, Storch appears as a J.B. Say critique on this question. He shows Say’s error in equating the two, which would imply that nothing would be kept aside to cover the costs of production. ‘However,’ says Storch,

it is clear that the value of the annual product is divided partly in capital, partly in profits and that each of these portions of the value of the annual product will regularly buy the products which the nation needs in order to maintain the capital as well as to renew the consumption funds. . . . Say considers the gross product as society’s revenue and thus concludes that society can consume a value equal to its product.

Later, in his manuscripts of the late 1850s and of 1860s, Marx refers to these lines, sometimes quoting them from the Brussels book, and positively evaluates Storch’s position against what he calls ‘Say’s garbage [Dreck].’51 In his discussion about the decomposition of the aggregate value of the annual product into constant capital and revenue (which includes variable capital and surplus-value) and its reproduction, Marx cites Storch’s lines given above and observes that what Storch is saying is ‘in fact another expression for commodity’s metamorphosis’ and that he is ‘completely correct’. However, Marx adds, ‘though Storch has very correctly underlined this against Say, nevertheless he was himself totally incapable of explaining and grasping the phenomenon. His merit is to have recognized [constatirt] it’.52

50 Marx 1980a, p. 100.
51 Marx 1953, pp. 15, 316; Marx 1956, p. 69.
52 Marx 1988, pp. 323, 377. Elsewhere, Marx shows the inconsistency of Storch’s acceptance of constant capital as a part of the gross product with his endorsement of Adam Smith’s position on commodity value which contains only wages and surplus-value, but no part of constant capital, Marx 1973e, p. 390.
As regards money and circulation, Marx excerpts from the second volume of Storch’s book the important statement:

All other commodities become objects of consumption sooner or later, money always remain commodity. . . . It’s stuff could not be indispensable for the existence of the individual because the quantity of money which circulates cannot be employed individually. It must always circulate.

In two later texts, Marx approvingly cites these lines and in one of these texts, referring to the second part of the passage, add, that ‘Storch is correct [here]’ and remarks: ‘The individual can use money only if money is separated from the individual. . . . Money coming out of circulation as an autonomous entity and facing it is the negation of its determination as means of circulation and as measure.’

However, Marx calls Storch’s inclusion of money along with credit, workers’ specialised training and transport facility as factors of accelerating capital’s circulation a ‘higgledy-piggledy assortment [kunterbunten Zusammenstellung]’ leading to the ‘whole confusion of political economists’ inasmuch as ‘money, as it exists as a relation of commerce, . . . money as money in its immediate form, cannot be said to accelerate the circulation of capital, it is but capital’s presupposition’. On the circulation of capital, Marx excerpts (in his translation) from Volume 1 of Storch’s work:

The entrepreneur can restart production only after he has sold the completed product and employed the price to buy new materials and new wages. . . .

This continued movement, incessantly renewed, of circulating capital from the entrepreneur to its return in the first form is comparable to a circle, whence the name circulating is given to this capital, and the name circulation given to its movement.

It should be noted that Storch is not speaking here of ‘circulating capital’ in the usual sense of the classical political economy, though his way of putting it is not entirely free from ambiguity. He is, in fact, basically speaking of ‘capital of circulation’ in Marx’s sense. This is, on the whole, what Marx would later call the ‘turnover of capital’, which is tersely defined in the first manuscript of Capital, Volume II: ‘the total time which capital traverses from its starting point in one form to its point of return in the same form . . . is called the turnover of capital.

From the third volume of Storch’s work, Marx excerpts these striking lines on the character of human progress:

That is, as Marx puts it, ‘the different forms which the same advanced capital value assumes and throws off ever successively in its curriculum vitae’, Marx 1973e p. 192. As many as twelve quotations from the Storch excerpts in this sense are uninterruptedly given in Marx’s 1857–8 manuscript, Marx 1953, pp. 529–30.

The progress of social wealth begets this class useful to society which is burdened with the irksome, the most lowly and the most disgusting tasks, in a word, which, taking upon itself all that the life has as unpleasant and servile [assujettissant], procures to the other classes the time, the serenity of mind, and the conventional dignity of character. [Emphasis in text.]

Marx would cite these lines in Capital, where he comments: ‘Storch asks himself in what consists then the real superiority of the capitalist civilisation with its misery and degradation of the masses over barbarism? He has only one answer – security.’ On a similar theme, again, Marx excerpts from the same volume:

It is a very remarkable result of the philosophical history of man that the progress of society in population, industry and enlightenment [lumière] is always obtained at the expense of the health, dexterity and intelligence of the great mass of people. . . . The individual happiness of the majority of people is sacrificed to that of the minority. [Emphasis in text.]

Basically the same idea in a much sharper form appears in Marx’s later texts. ‘The law that civilization has followed till our times’ is that ‘if there is no antagonism, there is no progress’. The development of the human productive powers’ is effected ‘at first at the cost of the majority of human individuals and even of the entire classes’. Indeed, ‘the higher development of the individuality is brought only through a historical process in which the individuals are sacrificed’.

II. Gasparin, Babbage, Ure

The excerpts from these authors appearing in the fifth Brussels copybook have the theme of machinery and big industry in relation to the division of labour and productivity of labour as well as the consequences, on the working class, of the introduction of machinery in industry. The editors of the volume under review point to the importance of this particular Brussels book, underlining that ‘here for the first time Marx intensively deals with the problem of the employment of machinery in the production process’ (p. 713).

Before we deal with these excerpts, let us make a general point. Following what he called in his Paris manuscripts (1844) the ‘dialectic of negativity’, and adhering to what he considered as a ‘law’, that ‘if there is no antagonism, there is no progress’, and that the ‘development of contradictions of a historical form of production is the only historical way towards its dissolution and metamorphosis’, Marx saw both the
destruc
tive and the emancipatory aspects of employment of machinery in industry in relation to the immediate producers. Hence the importance of these excerpts.

Even though Gasparin, with whose excerpts the fifth Brussels book starts, is a little-known author, left no lasting place in the history of ideas and would apparently not appear again in any of Marx’s works, Marx excerpted some significant lines from his writings, just as he did with another little-known writer, T. Fix, considered earlier on. Marx excerpted the following from Gasparin (in French and in German translation):

> Philosophy and Religion have, by turn, proclaimed freedom and equality. But they remain impotent to make them prevail. It is from scientific efforts that the new social order, the great emancipation, has to come. . . . The emancipation of the human species is proclaimed in the noise of the industrial machines. The machine man will be able to replace the man machine. [Emphasis in text.]

Marx comments: ‘unconditional worshipper of machines’ (p. 322).

As regards Charles Babbage, Marx excerpted from the French translation of his book *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures* (1832). Marx observes that Babbage ‘belongs to the Ricardian school’ inasmuch as ‘in the last analysis he reduces the power of labour to costs of production’ (p. 330). Marx excerpted Babbage’s definition of a machine: ‘the union of all the simple instruments put to action by a single motor constitutes a machine’. This definition would be cited by Marx in his *Anti-Proudhon* (1847) while refuting Proudhon’s ‘absurd’ idea of considering ‘machines as the antithesis of the division of labour’. In *Capital*, again, he cites this definition and paraphrases it while considering ‘machine as the point of departure of the industrial revolution’.

In these excerpts, Babbage is seen to lay down two important principles regarding the division of labour and efficiency in industrial (manufacturing) production. The first is what Alfred Marshall would later call ‘Babbage’s great principle of economical production’. Babbage maintains that the master manufacturer by dividing the work...
into separate operations requiring different degrees of skill and force can procure the precise quantity of skill and force necessary for each operation; while, if the whole work were to be accomplished by one labourer, this latter requires to have, simultaneously, enough skill to execute the most delicate and sufficient force to perform the most difficult operation. Later, Marx approvingly cites the relevant passage in his 1860s manuscript in connection with his discussion of the contribution of the division of labour to the reduction in the cost of production of labour-power.67 Again, in Capital, the passage appears in connection with the discussion of the general mechanism as well as the basic forms of manufacturing capital. In fact, Marx there not only cites the passage but also develops the theme around the action of what he calls the (social) ‘collective worker’ formed from a combination of individual workers towards producing a commodity, first arising in cooperation, then ‘constituting the specific mechanism of the manufacturing period’.68

The second principle laid down by Babbage is called by Marx the ‘multiples principle’.69 According to Babbage, following the special nature of each type of product, once the experience shows the most advantageous number of partial operations into which the production should be divided and the appropriate number of workers employed, the establishments which do not adopt an exact multiple of this number (of workers) will produce at higher costs. ‘This is,’ Babbage holds, ‘one of the causes of the colossal extension of the industrial establishments’. Marx cites the relevant passage in his later writings pointing out the pertinence of the ‘multiples principle underlying cooperation and repeated in the division of labour and the employment of machinery’ in the explanation of the process of concentration of capital.70

Marx makes the following significant comment on Babbage:

Babbage, though absolutely convinced that the prosperity of the masters is, in general, advantageous to the workers and that the interest of these classes are identical, finds, nevertheless, that each individual of this mixed association does not receive a portion of the gain exactly proportional to the share which he contributes towards its elaboration. (p. 335; the last sentence ‘each individual . . . elaboration’ is given in French.)

On the great technological progress in the English cotton textile industry Marx excerpts from Babbage: ‘This continual progress of knowledge and experience is our great force, our great advantage on all the nations who would like to try to rival England in industry’ (p. 340; emphasis in text). In a later text, Marx cites the beginning part of this sentence (‘This continual . . . force’) and then observes:

67 Marx 1976b, p. 262.
69 Marx 1976b, p. 263; Marx 1980b, p. 1668.
70 Marx 1962a, p. 366; Marx 1980b, p. 1668.
This progress, this social advancement, belongs to and is exploited by capital. All earlier forms of property condemn the greater part of humanity, the slaves, to be the pure instruments of labour. The historical development, political development, art, science, etc. prevail in the high spheres above them. Capital is the first to have imprisoned the historical progress in the service of wealth.71

Finally, we come to Ure. In Marx’s extensive discussion – in Capital and in different manuscripts – of the factory system, propelled by (automatic) machinery, Andrew Ure takes a central position and Marx draws on his work considerably.

About the contribution of Ure, particularly in comparison with that of Babbage, Marx says:

In his apotheosis of the big industry, Dr. Ure senses the specific character of manufacture more sharply than the earlier economists and even compared to his contemporaries, for example, Babbage, who is much superior to him in mathematics and mechanics, but who nevertheless understands the big industry singularly from the standpoint of manufacture.72

Ure, indeed, is the ‘Pinder of the (automatic) factory system’.73

In the fifth Brussels book, Marx excerpted from the French translation of Ure’s The Philosophy of Manufactures (1835). These excerpts are mainly concerned with division of labour and its change of form under the automatic factory system as compared with the earlier system of manufacture, and the employment of the automatic system in the factory and its consequences for the working class.

From Ure’s book, Marx excerpts Ure’s two-way characterisation of the factory system. Such a system, according to Ure, signifies ‘cooperation of several classes of workers looking over, skilfully and assiduously, a system of productive machinery continually put into operation by a central power’. In another sense, a factory system is a ‘vast automaton composed of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs which operate concertedly and without interruption to produce a common object, all of them subordinated to a self-regulated moving force’ (p. 348). Later, citing these passages in Capital, Marx makes a fundamental point:

These two definitions are not identical. In the one there is the collective worker as the dominant subject and the mechanical automaton as the object. In the other, the automaton is the subject and the workers are only the

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72 Marx 1962a, p. 370. In 1860s manuscripts, Marx writes about Ure: ‘This shameless apologist of the factory system has nevertheless the merit of being the first to correctly grasp the spirit of the factory system and then sharply characterize the difference and opposition between the automatic workshop and the manufacture based on the division of labour treated by Smith as the principal thing’, Marx 1982, p. 2022. Emphasis in text.
conscious organs assisting the unconscious organs and together with them subordinated to the central moving force. The first definition is valid for all possible employment of machinery, whereas the second characterizes its capitalist employment. . . . Ure, therefore, likes to present the central machine not only as automat [automaton] but also as autocrat.74

In the excerpts on the division of labour, Ure speaks of the substitution of manual as well as skilled labour by machines and the substitution of male labour by female and child labour. Adam Smith’s analysis of the division of labour, written only in the infancy of industrialisation, says Ure, does not hold in the age of the automatic system where, instead of adopting works to specific individual capacities, the labour of the individual workers with specific skills is replaced by particular machines, whose ‘automatic operation even a child can supervise’. Ure adds: ‘By the infirmity of human nature it happens that the more skillful the workman, the more self-willed and intractable he is apt to become and the less fit a component of a mechanical system in which . . . he may do great damage to the whole’. Hence the need of ‘combining science with capital, to reduce the task of workers to the exercise of their vigilance and dexterity, early brought to perfection by the youth when they are concentrated on one single object’. Later, in Capital, Marx cites the first part of the statement (‘friend Ure’s exclamation’) quoted above to make his point: ‘Since the handicraft skill remains the basis of manufacture and since its whole mechanism has no material skeleton independently of the workers themselves, capital incessantly grapples with the workers’ insubordination’.75 In this connection, quite logically, Ure, referring to the introduction of the spinning self-acting mule as the ‘iron man’ (workers’ own expression taken over by Ure), says (in the excerpts) that ‘when capital enrols science in its service the rebellious hand of industry always learns to be docile’. Referring to this, Marx comments, in one of his 1860s manuscripts, that with the capitalist production ‘the scientific factor for the first time is consciously developed [and] applied on a scale and is called to life to an extent of which earlier epochs had no idea’.76 As regards Ure’s contention of the ‘youth’ being ‘concentrated on the single object’, as referred to above, Marx has this to say in a manuscript of the 1860s: ‘Ure confesses that the automatic system, like the division of labour, fixes the activity on a single point – only that the undeveloped individual must be broken from the youth onwards into an organ of the automaton.77

74 Marx 1962a, p. 442; Marx 1965, p. 952; emphasis in the French text, taken over from the first German edition.
75 Marx 1962a, p. 389.
76 Marx 1962a, p. 2062. In Capital, Marx comments on Ure’s ‘iron man’ subjugating the workers: ‘Even though Ure’s work appeared at a time of the little developed factory system, it remains the classical expression of the spirit of factory not only because of his frank cynicism, but also because of the naiveté with which he divulges the absurd contradictions of the capitalist mind [Kapitalhirnis], Marx 1962a, p. 460.
77 Marx 1962, p. 2033; emphasis in text.
On the substitution of the labour of women and children for that of men, with the introduction of the automatic system, Marx excerpts from Ure the following:

The constant aim and tendency of all mechanical improvement is effectively to side-step wholly the male labour... by substituting the labour of women and children for that of the adult workers... The tendency to employ the children with sharp eyes and nimble fingers, instead of day labourers with long experience, demonstrates that the scholastic dogma of the division of labour according to the different degrees of skill has finally been exploded by our enlightened manufacturers.78

Citing this passage in a later manuscript, Marx observes:

After describing correctly the 'tendency' and the 'constant aim' [of] displacing labour, subjecting the labourer under autocrat = autocrat, lowering the price of labour through the substitution of women and children in place of adults, that of the unskilled for the skilled labour, after describing all this as the essence of the automatic workshop, [Ure] reproaches the labourers that they, by their strikes, hasten the development of this beautiful system! Since, this system is the best for them, what can be more intelligent for them than to 'force' its development!79

**Conclusion**

We conclude by a little elaboration on two points touched upon earlier in the text above: (a) 'de-ideologising' MEGA under the new direction and (b) Marx's method of excerpting from works by other authors, including the importance of his 'excerpt copybooks' and, in particular, of the one under review here.

(a) To appreciate the 'de-ideologising' of MEGA, it may not be out of place, first, to briefly recall Marx's own position on ideology. Marx did not set out to create a new ideology as opposed to bourgeois ideology, what he (and Engels) did was to found against the despotism of capital in manufacture'. Marx 1962a, pp. 416, 424.

78 Later, citing the last part of above passage ('the scholastic dogma... manufacturers') Marx holds that 'Ure was right' in noting the historical character and the outmodedness of Adam Smith's notion of the division of labour in relation to the modern industry, Marx 1976b, p. 273. What Ure is saying in the above paragraph seems to be quite relevant to the following statement by Marx: 'To the extent that machinery dispenses with the muscular power, it becomes the means of employing labourers without muscular power, but with greater suppleness of the limbs. The labour of women and children was therefore the first word of the capitalist employment of machinery... By annexing a preponderant mass of children and women to the combined labour... machinery finally breaks down the resistance which the male labourer still puts up against the despotism of capital in manufacture'. Marx 1962a, pp. 416, 424.

79 Marx 1982, p. 2034. In his List manuscript, composed much earlier (1845), Marx cites the first two passages given above from the 'English Pinder of the manufacturing system' ('by the infirmity of human nature...') and 'the constant aim and tendency...') in order to affirm against List: 'that the worker develops all his facilities, sets in motion his productive power, himself activates humanly and, thereby, activates what is human in him – does the bourgeois, the factory owner, have anything to do with all this?', Marx 1972b, p. 440.
'new materialism' (see his discussion on 'theses' on Feuerbach above), and his aim, based on 'materialist and, therefore, scientific method' was precisely to demystify all ideologies by revealing how the 'conditions of real life' give rise to these 'intellectual representations'.80 His theoretical work is in the realm of science, not ideology. The aim of his 'scientific endeavours,' as he wrote to a friend in 1862, was to 'revolutionize science' and to lay down 'scientific' foundation'.81 In Capital, Marx opposes 'disinterested investigation and unbiased scientific research' to 'malevolent conscience'.82 What Marx was doing was the exact opposite of creating 'false consciousness' or the inverted representation of the human relations, which is what ideology is all about. 'In all ideology,' Marx declared, 'the human beings and their relations appear to stand on their head, as in a camera obscura.'83

It is ironic that the proclaimed disciples of Marx – who himself had a negative attitude to 'ideology' – denigrated only 'bourgeois' ideology as opposed to which, however, they posited and glorified a new 'proletarian' ('Marxist' or 'Marxist-Leninist') ideology, completely standing Marx on his head. It was the great merit of David Riazanov that he, the first director of Moscow’s Marx-Engels Institute (founded in 1931) and a card-holding member of the ruling party, did not allow any ideological incursion into the editorial principles of the MEGA 1 appearing under his direction. MEGA 1, at least till Riazanov was eliminated from his position, was a shining example of scientific and meticulous presentation of the texts of Marx and Engels without any ideological maquillage.

There was a complete reversal with MEGA 2 which, starting in the early 1970s, was explicitly ideologically oriented. The two Institutes of Marxism-Leninism (in Moscow and Berlin) were no academic or research institutions. These were Party institutions under the Central Committees of the two Parties. The whole MEGA 2 project was conceived in terms of political finality and set in the context of the 'development of a worldwide ideological offensive of Marxism-Leninism', as the central Party organ Einheit put it in 1972. It was obligatory for the editors to explicitly connect Lenin with the works of Marx and Engels, 'stylizing Lenin' as Dlubek, a principal editor of MEGA 2, later put it, 'as the singular continuator of the works of Marx and Engels and the unerring interpreter of their ideas'.84 We offer here just two specimens which are self-explanatory. In the very opening volume of MEGA 2, in their 'Foreword', the editors wrote:

80 Marx 1962a, p. 393.
81 To Kugelmann, 28 December 1862 in Marx and Engels 1972c, p. 114.
82 Marx 1962a, p. 21.
83 Marx 1973b, p. 27. Years later, in the same vein, Engels wrote to F. Mehring in 1893: 'Ideology is a process which is carried out by the so-called thinker, of course, consciously, but with a false consciousness', in Marx and Engels 1964, p. 465. Emphasis added.
The further development of the teachings of Marx and Engels, the victory of Marxism in the twentieth century are, above all, bound up with the name of V.I. Lenin. Leninism is the triumph [Errungenschaft] and theoretical weapon of the entire international working class. It is the Marxism of the epoch of the general crisis of the capitalist system . . ., the epoch of humanity’s transition from capitalism to socialism and of the establishment of communism.85

Later, in their ‘Introduction’ to the first edition of Capital I appearing in MEGA 2, the editors wrote:

Marx has left behind an invaluable legacy for the proletariat of the whole world: the key to the scientific investigation of the road to the new society, the analysis of this society, the investigation and recognition of its laws and therewith the possibility of recognising its future development as well as bringing it about in a planned way. The fundamental principles of the new society (as laid down by Marx) served for Lenin and the Bolshevik Party as the starting point for setting about building the future and for erecting on them the basis of the new state and the new society. More than six decades of socialist society in the world have directly and spectacularly [eindrucksvoll] confirmed this.86

This blatant apologetic of the ‘new state and the new society’ appeared just a few years before they spectacularly crumbled.

Hence the great significance of the post-1993 MEGA (the process starting in 1990–1), ending an entire epoch of ideologically-politically guided reading of the two authors under the tutelage of the Party, glorifying all acts of the ‘new state and the new society’ and, in the process, infinitely discrediting the two authors. From now on, the writings of these authors, at last freed from the Procrustean bed of partisan politics, could again be read like any other great classic, leaving the reader entire freedom to read these authors in their own way, to interpret them in their own way. The volume under review is indeed the first fruit of this scientific endeavour. The great difference should be clear to any reader comparing this volume with the volumes published before the new arrangement came into force. ‘Marxism’ or ‘Marxism-Leninism’ – serving as ideological cover for the existing régimes and, needless to add, forming no part of Marx’s own categories – have, in our view, rightly been abandoned. Hence the great importance of the present volume. Last, but not at all the least, a new publishing event has also taken place corresponding to the new course. The old publishing house – Berlin’s Dietz Verlag – historically associated with the Party and which had published all the volumes of ‘Works’ by Marx and Engels (MEW) and the beginning volumes

85 ‘Vorwort zur Gesamtausgabe’ in Marx 1975, p. 25.
of MEGA was abandoned and the exclusive publishing rights for MEGA were taken over by a well-known academic publishing house, ‘Akademie Verlag’ of Berlin to signal MEGA as an academic endeavour on a par with the other classics. It is this publishing house which has published the volume under review, which also lends special significance to this volume.

(b) Finally, a word on Marx’s working method as seen in his ‘excerpt copybooks’, on the importance of these ‘copybooks’ in general and of those included in the present volume in particular.

Marx wrote in the ‘Afterword’ to the second edition of *Capital*:

> The method of presentation must formally differentiate itself from the method of investigation. Investigation has to appropriate the matter [as its own] in detail, analyse its varied forms of development, and to track down their inner connection. Only after accomplishing this work can the real, corresponding movement be presented.87

Marx’s twenty ‘notebooks’ and particularly, more than two hundred ‘excerpt copybooks’ – written during almost the whole of his adult life (1840–82) – demonstrate this famous ‘method of investigation’ very well indeed. A familiarity with them is indispensable for a proper understanding of Marx’s ideas for which a reading of his established texts alone is insufficient.88 Till now, very few, writing on Marx, have bothered to refer to them. There are two texts which throw important light on Marx’s ‘method of investigation’ – his working method. The first is from the ‘preliminary remarks’ which Marx’s daughter Eleanor Marx-Aveling wrote while publishing Marx’s letter to his father – cited earlier in the present article – in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1897. There, we read, among other things, the following:

> We already see here the almost superhuman working power and drive for work which have marked Marx’s whole life. . . . We see how he wrote dozens of pages and calmly destroyed the work, with only one consideration – ‘to be clear to himself’ and to grasp and master his subject. We see here how he criticizes himself and his work with the utmost severity. . . . We already see here the flashes of that original humor which characterized him later so much. We already see him not at all confined to one speciality but a reader who is all embracing, all devouring – everything, juridical science, philosophy, history, poetry, art, all is water to his mill, and always what he did, he did that completely.89

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87 Marx 1962a, p. 27.
88 See the important paper by Rubel on Marx’s ‘excerpt copybooks’: Rubel 1974, pp. 302–59.
89 In Marx 1975a, p. 661.
The second text – a more specific one relating to Marx’s ‘excerpt copybooks’ – is by David Riazanov, the great Marx scholar and the initiator and first director of MEGA 1. Riazanov was, in fact, the first to signal the great significance of the copybooks. Referring to them, he wrote towards the end of the 1920s:

It is not easy to trace a boundary line between a simple excerpt copybook and a preparatory work in Marx’s method of copying. In many of the copybooks [even] when they carry no comments by Marx himself, the excerpts cluster around definite problems so closely that they are to be considered as preparatory work for planned and [well] thought out investigations. Many [copy] books are scattered with a small or a large number of short remarks, while in others Marx gives rein to his own thoughts and, in course of excerpting, long excursuses are generated which, as regards their form, appear as Marx’s independent products.

For our present purpose, let us note that Marx, convinced that political economy had to be studied for an understanding of the ‘anatomy of the bourgeois (civil) society’, specifically mentions in his famous ‘Preface’ of 1859 that he began to study the subject in Paris and Brussels. That is why the early ‘excerpt copybooks’, on political economy of the period 1844–7 – comprising those made in Paris and Brussels (and Manchester) – are of extraordinary importance for investigating the origins of Marx’s ‘critique of political economy’, as the title of the present article indicates. In fact, the first fruit of Marx’s explanations in this domain was his justly famous Paris manuscripts of 1844 – the so-called Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts – which, Marx claimed in his ‘Foreword’, was ‘based on a conscientious, critical study of political economy. Indeed, this was Marx’s first ‘critique of political economy’. Later, as we know, he would characterise his work – including Capital – as ‘critique of political economy’.

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It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity – as a complete outsider to both economic history and to the history of India – to review these two important works. My credentials for doing so must be no more the strength of my innocence – with the pious hope that the weakness of innocence, the capacity to make gross errors, is not too blatant. The review has thus claims neither to expertise nor authority.


Professor McCormack’s book is both narrower (in time period) and, given its great length (1,101 pages), much denser. His is a grand attempt to put together from many different sources a picture of the emergence of the European economy in what used to be the Dark Ages. He uses a great diversity of sources most creatively – documents, (including those from the Baghdad Caliphate), coin hoards, the provenance of holy relics, etymology, early medieval monastic medical recipes, archaeological sites (the location and residues of toll posts, industrial waste sites, sunken ship contents, as
well as the remains and sources of cargo). It is, of course, difficult to identify what is commercial trade in all these sources, but he is adept at rigorous inferences from limited data. As he notes, those who wrote the records disdained trade and merchants in favour of kings, officials and prelates, so trade is least documented. Nonetheless, he has identified a wealth of evidence to contradict earlier notions that Europe in these times had very little trade.

He begins with an attempt to assess what of the late Roman imperial economy survived as the polity disintegrated, concentrating on the persistence or change in routes of communication (of pilgrims, prelates, diplomats and rulers as well as traders) from the beginning of the revival in the seventh century. He plots the creation of new clusters of economic activity, urbanisation, in the Mediterranean, the Frankish and Carolingian Empires, as well as the peripheral areas (Britain, Eastern Europe and the far north). Out of this, he identifies – in response to the major expansion of the richer and more advanced Islamic world (up to the tenth century) – the remarkable rise of Venice and the north Italian cities, the revival of river trade and development of new trade points. It is an impressive and fascinating compilation, a masterly summing up of the point we have reached in the enquiry, a bench mark for further explorations.

What is the justification for putting together these two works? It is to consider the essence of historical research, revisionism. The perception of the past is continually changing and must do so as evidence accumulates and new sources become available. Yet revisionism is, in principle, always a challenge for governments and the intelligentsia, for settled ways of considering the past and thus our present. What makes history important outside the ranks of historians is thus its impact on the present, how we see ourselves and our times. Historians, whether they know it or not, are thus continually undermining the present, subverting our comfortable assumptions that we know who we are. It is not just more immediate questions – as with the work of Israel’s revisionist historians,1 to the violent protests of the government, showing that the official account of the foundation of the State in 1948, is remote from the ‘truth’ and this bears directly upon the appalling conflicts in the Occupied Territories at the moment (no less, the myth of the lands of the ancient Israelites is a powerful – if in principle absurd – moral element in present Israeli claims). The revision of Irish history2 has less painful relevance but is no less upsetting for the ruling order. A recent London satire on the performance of British generals in 1914 produced strong protests from the Conservative backbenches, and one need not mention an obscure mosque at Ayodhya in a similar connection.

However, surely ancient or medieval history cannot have any such importance? Yet, even here, the cultures within which we grow up do indeed equip us in certain ways that can be challenged. Both Chakravarti and McCormack present arguments

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2 George and O’Day 1996.
that our views of the past are seriously wrong. One of the most powerful reasons for this, in my view, is that history as a formal study is an intellectual by-product of the rise of the modern state over the past three hundred years or so, and these origins easily turn it into a glorification of the present and a re-organisation of the past to show the steps by which the glories came about. Hegel’s extraordinary history of the world as the saga of the self-realisation of the spirit of Reason, culminating in the pinnacle of achievement in the Prussian monarchy of 1818 is, thus, not an unlikely model for histories written in the nineteenth century and after. Chakravarti sees the myth of the brutish past as imposed by British imperialism, a myth contrasting the ‘eternal, immutable, static and stagnant India . . . stuck to its rural agrarian inertia’ (p. 2) with the ‘vibrant, innovative, adventurous, progressive and dominant West’. But McCormack shows that the British also invented a world of ‘static subsistence villages’, ‘feudalism’, in their own past, this time to enhance the glories of the present. After his immense work, he concludes that it is no longer possible to defend the idea of a Europe as the ‘impoverished, inward-looking and economically stagnant place many of us learned about in our student days (p. 797). Indeed, the word ‘feudalism’ does not occur in his index (though footnote 28, p. 734, gives a short non-committal reference). In other sources, the ‘industrial revolution’ has disappeared or rather there are many industrial revolutions, not all equally well-documented, at different points of time in the last three millennia. Angus Maddison, in his recent statistical account of the last thousand years of the world economy, similarly has no use for ‘feudalism’, ‘the industrial revolution’ or a transitional phase of ‘merchant capitalism’. Capitalism, in his view, rises unevenly in Europe from 1000 AD up to 1820, when it finally emerges fully fledged.

The reason why this is emerging now, I would like to suggest, is as a by-product of ‘globalisation’. The slow, contradictory and uneven emergence of a single global economy is exposing how far history in the past has been presented as the story of a separate, self-realising, autonomous ‘country’ or ‘society’ (for which, read the population governed by one independent sovereign state). The national defined the universe of concern, whether a polity, a society, an economy or a culture (at the same time, often imposing a quite implausible homogeneity on the domestic). Globalisation thus exposes not only the Eurocentric (or Anglocentric) character of the past history of the rise of capitalism and its industrial revolution, it exposes the idea of an autonomous national history in the premodern state period in favour of a history of the world and its communities.

One element in the old history is the idea that capitalism arises only in north-western Europe (and Britain specifically) at a particular moment. Part of that is to deny the significance of trade in the past, or – as in the case of both Rome and China –

to say that what appears as large-scale ‘trade’ (in grain, for example) is only the movement of state appropriations. Thus, for example, in ancient Greece – now emerging as the first prototype for free enterprise – de Ste Croix finds the merchant class ‘a wholly imaginary’ concept since significant commercial trade did not occur in Greece and Rome. A capitalist class is reserved for, say, the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, England in the eighteenth century and so forth. The insignificance of trade earlier partly fits the ancient European prejudice against the trader (usually a foreigner) by peasant and lord, both natural mercantilists. Such trade as there was, it is said, concerned only the supply of luxuries to a small class of the wealthy, a phenomenon entirely marginal to the isolated subsistence economy of the village. Yet, as Chakravarti notes, what are luxuries at the point of consumption may not be luxuries at the point of production (he mentions black pepper from the Coromandel coast), so that trade may indeed not be at all marginal but compel the re-organisation of production. More important, the basic proposition is false as shown in both these works. Thus, only modern conceptions of ‘inter-national trade’ induce us to separate long- and short-distance trade, ‘external’ and ‘domestic’ or ‘internal’ (implying the modern separate national economies). But, if we look at both, then it is abundantly clear that necessities were always traded and generally in bulk. Even long-distance trade occasionally handled necessities – salt, grain, industrial, building or war raw materials and so on. Some of the large estates that McCormack cites – and that earlier writers might have identified as prototypical feudal domains – were important producers of marketed goods, agricultural and craft manufactures, for long distance shipment. In some cases (the evidence includes 2,500 industrial waste dumps and iron pits at different sites throughout western Europe), the great estates were important sources of exported metal manufactures. By implication, a pure exchange economy was already important and sufficiently so to induce the re-organisation of production so that producers were dependent upon exchange. Furthermore, even if we accept the idea of trade being significant in the past, the conception of a merchant class separate from production looks increasingly doubtful – as both volumes show, often merchants were landowners, mine owners and organisers of manufacturing.

The economic geography of this economy was, however, quite unlike modern ‘political-economic geography’, where development occurs almost independently of natural endowment. It is a world of cities along water courses, trading clusters, not political enclaves, with often only contingent relationships to territorial rulers. International trade – trade between ‘nations’ – exists only in the sense that inhabitants of different cities are called ‘nations’ – Venetians, Florentines, Goans, Malaccans and so forth.

McCormack stresses the important role of the more advanced and wealthy Islamic world in stimulating clusters of activity in backward Europe between the seventh and tenth centuries, and perhaps the same may have some bearing on the growth of Indian cities in the same period. The Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad (750–870) established some measure of economic interaction within its sphere from the Atlantic to what became Iraq, with linkages through the Gulf to littoral India and South-East Asia, and through Andalus to the rest of Europe, particularly to the great trade fair of St Denis near Paris. Neither book is, understandably, concerned to explain the emergence of this engine of growth; McCormack suggests some possible factors: the economic effects of territorial integration and some measure of security of communication, a green revolution in some agricultural areas, a propitious political and religious context, an urban civilisation as the result of conquest and so on – but its effects in Europe seem substantial. McCormack records the appearance of Arab coins in hoards in the Italian cities, in Frankish and Carolingian Europe, and records of some Arab traders and, more important, Jewish traders from the Muslim world. Europe imported luxuries (with some industrial raw materials) but still, he estimates, ran an export surplus, arising, he suggests, from the export of slaves. Slaves were drawn from the Mediterranean littoral, but then from further inland and finally from the periphery (Britain, Eastern Europe – whence the word ‘slave’ derived from Slav). He estimates that the export was a response to the demographic disasters in the eighth century Islamic world following on the ravages of bubonic plague (the first recorded slave ship was in 748 from Venice). Slaves were, he says, also drawn from Africa and Asia.

But the European ‘Dark Ages’ are only one fragment in a story that, in Chakravarti’s volume, suggests the importance of trade throughout earlier periods, indeed, for much of recorded history. The subsistence village, that stalwart character in so much of social science, can hardly ever have existed. Of course, the trade in some ages may have been largely state appropriations (especially of raw materials for war – for example, tin for bronze), pillage or purchase by territorial rulers, but the movement of goods on whatever account seems to be as old as any other economic activity, and often on a scale that must have depended upon a re-organisation of production, creating a class of producers dependent upon exchange. This is not necessarily the same as the creation of private merchant capital, although that also seems to have been crucial at particular historical moments.

Of course, there have been great fluctuations in the importance of this trade economy. Europe in the sixth century appears to be one of those troughs in activity, particularly marked (as also its reversal) in the Mediterranean. The obverse to the troughs are great surges of growth that in particular areas were sustained for quite long periods before being curtailed by, one speculates, natural disasters, foreign invasion and widespread destruction particularly of communications, the apparently infinite depredations of territorial rulers, the collapse of markets elsewhere and so forth. But
the surges take place on a long-term rising – albeit slowly – plane of productivity, population and innovation.

Many of our notions of the historical periods in the rise of capitalism owe much to Marx. He performed a brilliant service in seeking to capture the essence of a system, ‘capitalism’, and the historical logic which preceded it and defined its peculiarities. Given the exiguous basis of the knowledge available to him, a tiny fragment of what we have now, it was heroic. But his scheme bears the marks of the time of its origin, already into the period of domination of the modern state and its sociological shadow, the ‘nation’. His is an account of national capitalism in which the rise of manufacturing is seen as the core distinctive feature, and the resulting conflict of national classes sets the whole in political and social movement. The national stress perhaps explains why he devoted so little attention to the earliest phases of post-Roman European commercial and manufacturing growth in the north Italian cities. He could not have seen the earlier phases of growth outside Europe – from those clusters in ancient India, Mesopotamia and China. He would, no doubt, have been astonished to learn of the extraordinary growth of manufacturing under China’s T’ang dynasty or, even more, the southern Sung (960–1279), with a coal-fired metallurgical output not matched in Europe until the late eighteenth century.

If globalisation undermines the old forms of national history, the collective self-glorification of the state, the postindustrial age undermines the notion that manufacturing is the peculiarity of capitalism. An age witnessing a decline in manufacturing in the developed countries either suggests a postcapitalist system, or that capitalism is not so defined and the predominance of manufacturing was no more than a phase. The second would seem more plausible and more consistent with the core of Marx’s thought. But, if capitalism is defined as a system of competitive production for private profit and accumulation, an exchange system focussed on market-establishing prices which, in turn, determine the conditions of production and territorial divisions of labour, then this has been a thread in the economic story for perhaps thousands of years in one form or another, one locality or another. In some cases – for example, southern Sung China or even the time of Greek city-states – it appears to have been economically dominant. It did not always include free labour and if that – the existence of a free labour force – is made a defining element, it narrows drastically the number of cases (but this still does not restore the primacy of Europe or the modern period).

Only in the past couple of centuries has capitalism begun to have a dominance over the world capable of surviving the disasters that afflicted it in the past. But, even then, the system still has far to go to achieve an unchallenged position – and far to go in many fields to establish a set of world markets and prices, with the corresponding division of labour of a single global economy.
Meillassoux – according to Shereen Ratnagar in Chakravarti’s collection – argues that any suggestion that capitalism is as old as recorded society is to suggest it is ‘natural’ to human beings and therefore cannot be changed. But this does seem a weak objection – as weak as to suggest that agriculture or handicrafts are equally ‘natural’. An exchange economy has been part of the agrarian, mining and handicraft economy for thousands of years without any suggestion that these need to last for ever.

If we disallow Marx’s account of capitalism as founded on the recent phenomenon of national economies, as Eurocentric (and more narrowly, Anglocentric), it does not mean he did not detect something genuinely new in the European case. But that was, I think, not capitalism *per se*, but a state-directed capitalism, emerging out of the war-driven rivalries of the European powers. Of course, warring rulers are as old as anything else in recorded history, but not rulers who, in the interests of waging war directly, shape or facilitate the accumulation of capital in the interests of territorial purposes. Marx himself put his finger on the question in the famous citation:

> The different moments of primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies, the national debt, the modern tax system and the system of protection. These methods depend in part on brute force, for instance, the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the State . . .

This is, incidentally, a good example of the omission of the Italian cities – since they did not constitute a valid historical character, a country or national state. Nor was this process one of ‘primitive accumulation’; that had occurred many times before. But the decisive role of the state was, I suggest, very new, dedicated to forcing the creation of a national ‘political economy’, rather than exploiting an existing cosmopolitan economic geography of trading cities. This peculiar conjuncture – of the State and its obsession with warfare forcing private capital and trade into an exclusive national framework – may be Europe’s peculiarity.6

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This has been a rather long excursus from these two excellent volumes. But both have some importance in undermining our inherited conceptions both of the economic system that exists now and of the past, of the relationship between trade and the production economy in the past (and indeed, on the doubtful distinction between merchant, agrarian and industrial capital). Above all, they suggest that what is peculiar

5 Meillassoux 1972.
6 This is explored in much more detail in Harris 2003.
historically is not the return to a ‘globalisation’, which was the norm historically, but
the intervening period of state capitalism. Once we are able to displace Europe (or
Britain) as the exclusive source of ‘capitalism’, we can begin to see many other false
starts on the road to modern capitalism in many parts of the world, and ask questions
about why they did not succeed. In the end, both volumes are powerful contributions
to defining the present.

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Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates
TOM BRASS
London: Frank Cass, 1999

Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth
TOM BRASS
London: Frank Cass, 2000

Reviewed by SURINDER S. JODHKA

Unfree Labour and ‘Postmodern Myths’:
Towards a Critical Re-Examination

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw many changes in the world. Though we continue to live in a capitalist global economy, its nature and form have undergone many modifications. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War revived the confidence of advocates of free-market economy. Breakthroughs in telecommunication technology and the increasing reach of capital to virtually every nook and corner of the world ushered in a totally different phase in globalisation. These changes also initiated certain new trends in social sciences. The ‘old’ modernist theoretical perspectives gave way to a variety of ‘postmodernist’ ways of looking at the world. Not that everyone in social sciences quickly converted to these ‘new ways of looking at things’, yet their pressure was felt virtually everywhere. Even the language of left-wing politics changed. From class analysis, the focus shifted to questions of culture, from revolution to empowerment, from politics to governance, from production to consumption.

The emergence of some new global institutions and increasing integration of agriculture in the global market, coupled with weakening of states in the Third World, has generated a fresh set of challenges for the agrarian economies of these countries. However, research interest in agriculture and the related issues has seen a steep decline during this period. Even when issues of agriculture are raised, rarely do questions relating to social relations of production come to the fore. Discussions on agriculture are invariably in very general terms, as a sector of the wider economy.

This is quite in contrast to the dominant trends in the Indian academy until the
1980s. Apart from a wide variety of empirical studies, various aspects of changes being experienced in the agrarian sector and the specificities of different regions and sub-regions of India were debated quite vigorously in academia and political circles. Development of agriculture was also critical for the newly liberated states of the Third World in the post-World-War-II period.

Interestingly, the framework of political economy had all through been much more popular with students of agrarian change than it had been with scholars engaged in the study of other aspects of social and economic life in the Third World. Though quite different in terms of its theoretical orientation, this had perhaps been partly because those working with the political-economy perspective were able to engage quite effectively and meaningfully with the issues of development being pursued by Third-World states at that time. It was maybe for this reason that, in many of the debates on the nature of the social and economic transformations taking place in the Third World, questions of class and social inequality were among the central issues. For example, in the Indian case, the literature on land reforms, rural credit, the green revolution, and in the famous debate on mode of production in Indian agriculture, the issues of political economy remained in the foreground.

The two books by Tom Brass being reviewed here ought to be seen in this context. Apart from various other issues that he deals with in the two volumes, he, rather passionately, tries to confront all what he thinks are ‘deviations’ from the classical political-economic perspective. Besides attacking the ‘new’ writings and their theses on agrarian processes in the Third World, he also presents his own formulations on the agrarian social structure and change in Latin America (mainly Peru) and India, the two settings where he himself has done some fieldwork. Brass’s concern, however, is not confined to confronting postmodernists. He criticises all those who, he thinks, deviate from the basic notion of class as propounded in Marxist social theory.

Though the books appear to be quite different in terms of their general themes, there is a great deal of similarity in the arguments presented by Brass in both the books.

Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates, brings together several of his earlier writings and engagements with other scholars carried out in the pages of the Journal of Peasant Studies and the Economic and Political Weekly over the last decade or so. His main focus in this volume is to critically interrogate the manner in which production relations, specifically those between labourers (mostly landless) and their employer farmers have been conceptualised. The empirical context of his arguments is capitalist agriculture, that is post-green-revolution agriculture in India and a few case studies from Latin America.

During the 1970s and 1980s, many scholars working on agriculture in India argued that, despite its specificities, classical trends of capitalist development/modernisation were clearly visible in the Indian agrarian scene. As a consequence, they argued, the
social relations of production too had been loosening up. The employer farmers no longer enjoyed the kind of control that feudal masters had over their serfs/labourers. The old structures of jajmani-type caste-governed relations were giving way to formalised arrangements. While some of these scholars were working with Marxist frameworks of class analysis, others used theoretical categories of neoclassical economics or functionalism/modernisation theory.

Brass questions them all. His main theoretical contention is that the development of capitalism in Third-World agriculture had not only not been leading to the disappearance of unfree labour, but, in certain instances, had in fact introduced/strengthened such relations. He also questions the classical assumption of Marxist political economy that the development of capitalism will lead inevitably to the emergence of free labour. In the classical-Marxist formulation, development of capitalism in agriculture frees labour in a double sense of the term: it frees it from the ownership of means of production, which in most cases implies peasants’ dispossession of land, and it frees it from the extra-economic coercive power of the employers. This, in the Marxist vocabulary, is known as proletarianisation.

According to Brass, much of the contemporary literature on agrarian change in the Third World has been produced within this framework. It is assumed, rather unproblematically, that capitalist development always transforms peasants into proletarians. Even where unfree production relations such as debt bondage have been found to exist, the general tendency among scholars, as he claims, has been to attribute them to the innate conservativeness of the peasantry, evidence of the continuation of semi-feudal structures in the agrarian sector.

Against the popular Marxist commonsense that characterises all unfree labour as a pre-capitalist relationship, Brass argues that unfree labour was,

...a crucial aspect of class struggle between capital and labour in specific agrarian contexts, and as such may be introduced (or reintroduced) by employers at any historical conjuncture: either to pre-empt the political consequences of proletarianization in situations where a proletariat is in the process of being formed, or to re-impose capitalist authority over the workplace in cases where a proletariat already exists. (p. 9.)

Thus, according to Brass, unfree labour was not only compatible with relatively advanced productive forces, but such relations could also be introduced from above in developed agriculture to cheapen and discipline wage-labour. Such a process, which he describes as ‘deproletarianization’, may, in fact, occur precisely when rural workers begin to demand higher wages and better working conditions. The three interrelated claims that he makes in relation to the process of proletarianisation are:

...first, the contemporary bonded labour is a modern form of unfreedom; second, that in the contexts under consideration this relation is an important
method whereby capitalist farmers and rich peasants increase their control over and simultaneously reduce the cost of their workforce; and third, that this process corresponds to deproletarianization, the ‘other’ of proletarianization. (p. 10.)

In order to fully appreciate his notion of unfree labour, it is worth examining how he conceptualises free labour. A worker, according to Brass, is free ‘when he/she possesses an ability personally to commodify and recommodify labour-power at any given moment in agricultural cycle. Where such an ability is constrained, either wholly or in part, because of debts owed to his/her employer, the worker in question cannot be considered to be free’ (pp. 10–11).

Thus, the typical mode of enforcing contemporary forms of unfree labour, according to Brass, is through debt. Indebtedness of a labourer to a farmer invariably leads to loss of workers’ freedom. The *enganche* system in Peru and attached labour in India were examples of debt bondage that were present in many different rural contexts throughout Latin America and Asia. Since it was the dependence created by debt that instituted bondage, such a relationship was not confined to the permanent labourers who worked with a particular farmer over a long period of time. Bondage or unfreedom could be found easily among the casual labourers who are compelled to work with a specific farmer even during the peak season, often at wages lower than they would have earned otherwise – in other words, had they not been indebted. Likewise, Brass argues that migrant labourers too could be unfree.

Brass, however, is not merely interested in making a theoretical point or in presenting findings of his own fieldwork in India and Latin America. Much of the book consists of his engagements with other scholars who have carried out empirical work on agrarian change and have given their own formulations on the nature of change in Third-World agriculture. Though his theoretical claims have wider and general significance, his primary focus is on India, and, to a lesser extent, on Peru.

Brass seems to disagree with virtually everyone who has written anything on the nature of agrarian change in India. Broadly speaking, he identifies two sets of formulations on the question of unfree labour. First, those who recognise the existence of unfree/bonded labour but view it essentially as an evidence of the continued prevalence of precapitalist/semi-feudal relations of production in the agrarian sector. An obvious corollary to this is the assumption that, as the productive forces advance, such relations will eventually give way to free wage-labour. This, according to Brass, is closer to the position of the neoclassical economists who also see unfree labour in evolutionist terms, namely as the development of a modern economy which inevitably leads to the freeing of labour. The presence of unfree labour, for them, is essentially an obstacle to market formation and thus to accumulation.

However, he asserts, there are variants of Marxism that did not see unfree labour and capitalism as being incompatible. For example, some Marxists have argued that,
during the colonial period, unfree labour was commonly used to accumulate surplus. Brass, however, does not see it as being confined merely to the colonial history of the Third World. He argues that unfree labour exists even today and that it needs to be seen in the framework of class struggle between employers and workers and not as remnants of or a continuation from a past of semi-feudal structures.

The second set of scholars with whom Brass disagrees are the ones who conceptualise the *enganche* system in Latin America or attached labour in India in positive terms, as something that is good for workers. Such conceptualisations present attached labour in terms of ‘a materially reciprocal exchange between landholders and worker, a transaction which, it is claimed, from the viewpoint of the latter corresponded to economically empowering and thus a much sought-after form of job insurance or subsistence guarantee’ (p. 217). Such a view, according to Brass, is more widely prevalent among the students of agrarian change in India. This list includes not only scholars such as Wiser, Epstein and Bardhan, who could be classified in terms of their theoretical orientations as ‘functionalist’ or ‘neoclassical’, but also those who use categories of Marxist political economy, such as Rudra, Harriss and Breman.

According to Brass, they all ‘theorize unfreedom benignly: as a form of “patronage”, to the advantage of what others term bonded labour, and thus freely entered into (not to say actively sought out) by its subject’ (p. 220). This is not a purely academic point. He questions the political implications of such formulations and, at places, even the political intentions or motives of these scholars. He goes to the extent of labelling them as the ‘apologists of slavery and serfdom’ (p. 216) and proponents of ‘employer/landlord ideology’ (p. 218).

It is interesting that, though Brass is essentially making an empirical claim, his criticism of the above mentioned scholars is primarily political. The manner in which he frames his argument leaves no space for anyone to have a respectable disagreement with him. He structures his argument in oppositional terms. There is no possibility of a third position. Anyone not in agreement with his position is essentially an apologist of the landlord! Even when, for example, some scholars (such as Breman and myself) talk about the growing assertiveness among workers in the fast changing politico-economic environment and the consequent inability of the employers to enforce their writ as they could earlier (a purely empirical claim), Brass would see conspiracies in such formulations.

The ‘purist’ position that Brass advocates could also prove methodologically disabling. What if agricultural labourers are indeed not bonded, or that they say that dependency on their employers has reduced considerably? There is no way that one could observe and report such processes if one is working within the framework suggested by Brass. How could one possibly describe all the complex processes of change being experienced in countries such as India without being labelled an apologist of the landlords, a ‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-labour’, one wonders? One could perhaps appreciate this point...
if one was to look at the nature of mobilisations among the poor and labouring classes in India over the last two decades or so, a point I shall return to in the concluding section. While the organised left/working-class movement has weakened, various forms of ‘low’-caste or dalit (those belonging to ex-untouchable caste groups) political formations have become much stronger.

II

The final chapter of the book focuses on the conceptualisations of unfree labour in relation to some of the ‘new’ writings on the agrarian scene in the Third-World societies. His main targets of attack are postmodernists of different kinds and the manner in which they have either talked about unfree labour or have referred to the peasantry. In fact, his second book, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism: The Return of the Agrarian Myth*, in a sense, is an extension of this chapter, where apart from some other questions, the issues raised in the concluding chapter are further developed.

The arguments presented in the second volume, as he himself writes, are in response to the ascendance of various forms of ‘postmodernist’ frameworks during the 1980s. Brass claims that central to much of the postmodernist literature was a particular idea of the peasantry/rural society – the ‘agrarian myth’. In their attempts to sound pro-people, they eulogise the so-called grassroots mobilisations based on ‘non-class forms of consciousness’ (p. 14). Most of their positions, he argues, are similar to the way Russian ‘populists’ conceptualised peasantry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political effects of these writings are also similar, namely, anti-Marxist, nationalist and right-wing.

It may be useful here to quote Brass at length to understand the way he defines ‘agrarian myth’. Agrarian myth, according to him, is:

... a discourse about the desirability/feasibility and ‘naturalness’ of small-scale economic activity (peasant family farming, artisanry) in the countryside. It is also supportive, therefore, of rural cultural forms/institutions based on this economic activity: namely the family, village, regional and religious identities which are perceived as being derived from Nature.

By contrast, the agrarian myth expresses opposition to all forms of large-scale economic activity. ... It is similarly hostile to their accompanying institutional, relational and systemic effects (class formations/struggle, revolution, socialism, bureaucracy, the state) ... depicted in the discourse of agrarian myth as non-indigenous, inauthentic and ‘alien’ ... imposed on an unwilling and mainly rural population ... and thus as responsible for the erosion of hitherto authentic local traditions and values. (p. 9)
Populism, for Brass, is the ‘other’ of Marxism. While the historical subject of populism is a homogenous peasantry and village community, for Marxism, it is the proletariat. While populism talks about tradition, ethnicity and cultural nationalism, Marxist politics are centred on class, economic internationalism and revolution. Similarly, populism celebrates nature, stasis, while Marxism promotes large-scale production processes, social conflict and change. For Marxists, ‘the countryside, the village and the peasantry are all eventually subsumed under capital and accordingly transformed by class formation and class struggle’ (p. 36).

Despite these differences, it may, at times, appear that the two also have some common ground. For example, they both are likely to attack big business, political injustice and the effects of capitalism in general. However, unlike Marxism, populism does not do this in the name of common ownership of means of production but, rather, in the name of individual, small-scale private property, Brass underlines. In other words, the populist criticism of capitalism is politically conservative or backward looking.

As mentioned above, Brass is concerned particularly about ‘the return’ of the populist modes of looking at peasantry, that is, in cultural terms, away from economics. This was a relapse from the manner in which the ‘agrarian question’ was viewed in ‘development studies’ as well as in the dominant political discourses in most Third-World countries during the postwar period. The culturalist/populist revival is interestingly projected as being pro-peasant empowerment. The various new theoretical trends which include, the ‘moral economy’ approach, the ‘middle peasant thesis’, theories of ‘new social movements’ and the ‘subaltern studies’ project, all feed into the re-emergence of a discourse about ‘peasant-ness-as-empowerment’.

Having spelt out the politically conservative nature of populism, Brass goes on to critically examine various political mobilisations in some Third-World countries. As in the first book, his case studies here are mostly from India and, to a lesser extent, from Latin America. Broadly speaking, he focuses on two sets of mobilisations, those by different sections of left-wing parties, and those which have come to be known as the ‘new social movements’.

The main problem, for Brass, with left-wing mobilisations, which includes pre- and post-independence political movements of peasantry under the leadership of Communist Parties in India, such as the Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) or Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI-ML), is that they have tended to support all mobilisations ‘from below’ rather uncritically, even when some of these mobilisations were clearly based on ‘non-class’ identities. Such movements, according to Brass, strengthened commumalist politics and served the interests of dominant classes in the Indian countryside.

One of the more recent examples to which he refers critically is the mobilisation of
the backward castes against the traditionally dominant caste groups of the north Indian state of Bihar by a faction of a Maoist party, the CPI-ML. His main criticism is against their choice of ‘caste’, instead of class, as the idiom of mobilisation. Caste, according to Brass, ‘[does] not correspond to class’ (p. 121). He treats caste as a communalist identity. Such mobilisations, he insists, ultimately feed into right-wing politics.

Similarly, he finds nothing progressive in the environmentalist, ecofeminist or ‘new farmers’ movements’ because they all invoke a populist notion of village community. The new farmers’ movements that emerged in the agriculturally developed pockets of India during the 1980s, worked ideologically with a populist notion of the village community, yet mobilised only landowning dominant caste groups. In some regions (such as in Uttar Pradesh), they quite openly used casteist symbols for mobilisations.

While Brass’s criticism of the so-called ‘new’ social movements seems quite justified, his comments on Communist mobilisations sound more like a moralising discourse. While one need not justify everything that the left-wing parties have been doing in the Indian countryside, making sweeping statements about their politics seems a little unfair. Blaming left parties not only for the absence of a vibrant socialist movement in India but also for the rise of right-wing politics certainly sounds too far-fetched.

Perhaps the more interesting part of his book is his critique of the postmodernists. He rightly observes that the rise of ‘postmodernism’ and ‘new populism’ is a direct result of the collapse of socialism and resurgence of national/ethnic conflicts and the consequent abandonment of, what he calls, ‘Marxist solutions to problems of underdevelopment’. Ecofeminism, subaltern studies, the post-development and postcolonial frameworks are all essentially anti-Marxist and populist in nature. They all claim that ‘the “voice from below” in the so-called Third World is determined not by class formations but by ethnic/peasant/tribal/gender identity’ (p. 318). Class and development are dismissed as Eurocentric metanarratives. Recognition of difference and diversities has come to be viewed as the fundamental premise in the new literature. However:

The difficulty with this endorsement by the postmodern ‘new’ populism of diversity/difference is that, once the premise of plurality is conceded, it then becomes possible to apply it to spheres beyond the ‘cultural’; in short, it can now be argued that the uneven distribution of means of production, of wealth and power, is nothing more than a recognition of this principle at work. (p. 150)

He sees a direct link between the resurgence of populism and the current territorial expansion of capitalism. He is also critical of the alternatives to the ‘old’ kind of development being suggested by the postmodernist ‘new’ populists. They have been arguing for local-level action and ‘grassroots empowerment’ through ‘non-party’
apolitical initiatives, such as the kind of work being done by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in many Third-World countries. Designating their actions as essentially reformist in nature, Brass contends that they create the impression not only that problems are being solved but further that they can be solved locally, thereby diluting antagonism towards the existing class structure and diverting mobilizations away from other, large scale and thus more effective forms of action. (p. 151)

Postmodernism and populism have become popular among academics because they are the most convenient and ‘safe’ theoretical positions to take. Postmodernism means that ‘academics no longer have to be oppositional, nor do they have to represent views other than their own’ (p. 152).

But, surely, the rise of ‘new’ social movements, that is, mobilisations by farmers, women, ethnicities or tribal groupings and dalits, can not be attributed just to the shifts taking place in academia? The Marxist response to these changes certainly needs to go beyond a mere re-iteration of the relevance of classical-Marxist positions.

Similarly, the question of caste and class is not as simple as Brass makes it out to be. Working with a purist notion of class without any understanding of the given social formation and historical context is not what Marxist political economy teaches us. The question of caste, in fact, received far less attention from Marxist scholars and the Communist Parties in India than it requires. We ought to understand who is talking about caste and why. Labelling social mobilisations simply by looking at the language of political discourse may be misleading. For example, the ‘casteism’ of the historically dominated groups needs to be distinguished from the casteism of the dominant group. Dalits of India are today using caste as a source of identity in their fight against casteism.

The rise of a powerful dalit movement in India during the last two decades has not only transformed the old political equations at the local and national levels of politics, but has also had an impact on agrarian social structures, a subject that still needs to be examined in detail. While it is true that, in their stated political agenda, they have often articulated their politics in caste terms, on the ground, the effects of their mobilisations have been quite remarkable. These movements have given the dalits, who are invariably landless village labourers, a new sense of confidence and have considerably strengthened their position in local politics. That caste violence has become so recurrent in recent times in some parts of India is largely because of this new found assertiveness among the dalits.

However, questions of caste and communities have been rather difficult for Marxists. Conventionally, left-wing parties in India have generally seen caste as a negative phenomenon that tends to divide the working class and therefore have not been able to articulate a political programme that can deal with the specificities of the historical
experience of domination and exploitation. While Brass’s criticism is sharp and theoretically sound, it may not be very helpful in dealing with emerging political realities and political processes. It could, in fact, re-inforce the ‘old’ Marxist position on caste. The challenges posed by these new realities need to be taken much more seriously than undertaken by Brass. Merely naming them as conservatives and reactionary and demanding a return to a purist notion of class, without any appreciation for the given historical contexts, is only likely to further marginalise Marxism.
Habermas, Critical Theory, and Health
Edited by GRAHAM SCAMBLER
London: Routledge, 2001
Reviewed by HENRY VANDENBURGH

Habermas, Critical Theory and Health is an excellent treatment of health and health services in modern social democracies, especially Britain. It generously re-orient the reader to the portions of Habermas’s work that potentially bear on medical issues, then provides a closer look at various aspects of the health system. Articles range from Scambler’s detailed introduction to examinations of lay health knowledge, doctor-patient interaction, health politics, inequalities, health movements, rationing, Habermas versus Foucault on health, and issues of democracy and health.

All are provocative and well worth close reading. Scambler’s introduction is admirable in that he pointedly marshals aspects of Habermas’s wide-ranging œuvre in order to provide a basis for discussion. Key, he writes, are Habermas’s re-organisation of Marx’s emphasis on work into a work-communications ontology, the rise of a bourgeois public sphere enabling constitutional democracy, and the possibility of uncoerced ideal speech situations, always a latent expectation in language. Scambler does not neglect dark aspects to which Habermas points: for example, colonisation of the lifeworld (where people exist and communicate) by the system of accumulation and administration, which uses its own mediating forces, money and power. Colonisation systematically distorts communication, and shifts various sorts of crises into the lifeworld. Accumulation crisis, for example, may call for increased advertising of fast food, imposing a health burden on a population that, without advertising, might be able to collectively counsel itself to eat more healthily.

Central to this volume is Scambler’s ‘Class, Power, and the Durability of Health Inequalities’. For historical materialists, this critique of Habermas and analysis of the health system in the light of his theories will have the most resonance. Scambler criticises empirical-theory approaches as artificially disconnected from reality, then turns his critique to Habermas’s de-emphasis of class. He praises the

theory of communicative action, system/lifeworld dichotomy, and notions of selective rationalization and lifeworld colonization that help ‘situate’ and ‘frame’ the theorization of class. (p. 95.)
But he states that Habermas has significant deficiencies, neglecting class much of the time, and overemphasising ways class conflict has become attenuated. Even if people think and speak less of class these days, its effects remain central and profound. He has faith that workers’ and peoples’ movements will re-appear, even if they are temporarily quiescent.

Scambler frames health inequalities in terms of the ‘greedy bastards hypothesis’ (GBH), charging that these occur as largely unintended consequences of the rich and powerful acting selfishly. Closing a factory has tremendous negative health outcomes for workers and others in the local economy, but GBH predicts that it is likely to happen if it can benefit owners (instrumental action). At times, the capitalist executive may intervene in the interest of maintaining legitimacy (reflexive action), but he cites various studies showing that individual capitalist interests can act in various ways in these sorts of situations: either selfishly, in the interests of the class as a whole, or in an intermediate way. Globalisation has made the welfare state more permeable to the vagaries of the world economy, pitching up social crisis tendencies, but it also offers capitalists the alternative of foreign production as a threat against workers’ interests domestically.

Scambler cites Dahlgren’s and Whitehead’s model of health inequalities, showing that class has an impact on biology, lifestyles, social and community influences (for example, ethnic practices), and material contexts (low income, poor housing and unemployment). He also mentions ways in which gender and ethnicity can contribute stressors at each level in this model.

In ‘Lay Health Knowledge and the Concept of the Lifeworld’, Gareth Williams and Jennie Popay state that the smoke has cleared in the aftermath of anti-foundational movements in public health sociology enough to say that

[health] risks are distributed [differentially] by material forces – even if they are also ‘socially constructed’ – and this distribution is systematically unequal.

(p. 27.)

There are at least two approaches to health. One is that of experts who, following Merton, claim it to be universal (in the sense of building universal empirical theory), communal (scientific community), sceptical and disinterested. They may regard lay knowledge of public health stressors as ‘interesting’, but are also likely to regard the content of this knowledge as exaggerated or wrongheaded. For Habermas, and, increasingly, for lay people in general (who see discrepancies between experts as confirmation that experts do not possess ultimate knowledge), this knowledge is tainted by agendas that separate it from truth as praxis. Habermas writes that political decisions are redefined as technical prescriptions, and that technique comes to dominate praxis. But, for Williams and Popay, in contrast to Merton, laypersons may have it right in terms of identifying stressors and health problems, even as they are discounted.
by experts who enact system agendas. The authors vividly show how poor mothers in Britain may choose to smoke as a rational decision in the face of work, housework, low wages and depressing housing. A more global example is Gulf War syndrome, identified by thousands of veterans, but resolutely stonewalled by military health systems in a variety of countries.

The third essay, ‘System, Lifeworld, and Doctor-Patient Interaction’ by Scambler and Nicky Britten, examines doctor-patient interaction. The authors examine the ways medical encounters occur in the sense that they are nested in macro-considerations. Although they endorse its broad outlines, they criticise Waitzkin’s study of medical encounters as too structural and relatively unsubtle. Scambler and Britten want to advance examination of these scenes to capture the contradictory elements in them. These include both differentiation/opposition and association/co-operation. Because of this, the authors propose employing Habermas’s (following Austin’s) contrast between illocutionary speech (where speakers honestly and assertively state what to them is true) and perlocutionary speech (where speakers desire to have an effect on listeners). Communicative action is oriented to use illocutionary speech and allows for honest co-ordination of the purposes of multiple actors. Strategic action is oriented to use perlocutionary speech and allows for manipulation of others: ‘Communicative action, in short, is oriented to understanding, and strategic action is oriented to success’ (p. 52). The authors suggest that Mishler is correct in suggesting that an abstracted, strategic ‘voice of medicine’ which controls and discounts patient communication is dysfunctional, and that Barry et al. are right when they say that practices which give voice to the lifeworld in medical encounters lead to better outcomes.

Scambler and Britten discuss trust in doctor-patient encounters in an interesting way, citing a rise in consumerism in recent years as indicative of falling trust in physicians. Patients realise that practitioners and medical systems have multiple agendas. Misztal cites systems of trust as having three characteristics: stability, cohesiveness and (this is key) collaboration. Significantly, trust must operate independently of sanctions and rewards. They suggest turning away from mere consumerism, a state prompted by manipulation by capital. As medicine is provided in a more marketised manner, including by the state, doctors as well as patients may fall victim to strategic interaction.

Clientelism and consumerism might routinely distort doctor-patient interaction despite all parties acting in good faith and with reciprocal satisfaction (Habermas’ systematically distorted communication). (p. 64.)

In ‘Health Care Decision Making and the Politics of Health’, Ian Rees Jones examines three levels of health-care decisions – medical encounters, managerial actions and
public-health policies – with an eye to the ways Habermasian theory can illuminate them. Jones, Doyal and Gough propose rules for fair discussion of human needs. They hope that democratic discourse will enable these issues to be appropriately attended to. Jones is dubious, however. He wonders whether the power of the medical paradigm precludes easy agreement on issues of care, even with enhanced participation by patients and public. The nature of medicine is complex and extended over time. Because of this, Mishler and Atkinson have argued that treatment can be seen as a juxtaposition of patient and physician narratives. Atkinson sees the practitioner’s possession of technical knowledge as decisive in exerting power over patients.

Attempts to restore patients’ voices are, in principle, laudable, but have generally been provided in ineffective ways. Jones, however, sees Habermas’s contribution to a discourse ethics of care as potentially valuable, since it continues to raise the question of democratisation of the micro-processes of society, an issue that Habermas sees as key to larger positive system change.

Interesting, too, is Jones’s take on managerialism in health care. Here, he invokes Traynor’s citing the privilege of measurement as undermining democracy. For Jones, such terms as ‘internal health-care market’ are highly ideological, as shown by capricious shifts in their meanings and intended results as managers employ them in furthering changing agendas. He also summarises changes that have occurred in public health as it has moved away from its earliest days as sanitary science to a more community-oriented movement. Some have seen these developments as emancipatory in Habermas’s sense, but Jones is not so sure. He wonders whether this movement is an extension of the reach of medicine as domination. He cites Scambler and Goraya as proposing a possibly emancipatory programme involving mass operational, political and structural change in public health.

David Kelleher’s essay on the ‘New Social Movements in the Health Domain’ attempts to locate resistance to medical colonisation of the lifeworld in popular social formations. Citing Scambler’s exploration of childbirth as an arena where expert discourse has replaced very effective popular understandings of biological processes, he re-iterates that rationalisation of the lifeworld has taken place. He introduces research by Vincent showing self-help organisations falling between two ideal types, one pure self-help, the other service-provision. The second type promises to re-introduce the voice of medicine, because such organisations often seek to acquire power and prestige. Groups, according to Katz and Bender, may also be more inner-focused (self-help) or outer-focused (political). An example of the latter is an advocacy group seeking to limit powers of psychiatrists to involuntarily treat patients in community centres. Kelleher artfully recapitulates research showing professional dismissal of mass patient accounts of problems with medical regimens, and cites this as an opportunity for the self-help groups to resist medical colonisation.

Kelleher thinks it important to remember that self-help groups do not automatically
lead to ‘ideal speech situations’, since manipulative agendas can emerge in these settings. Narrative can lead to highly communicative groups and to forming group identity, but not all utterances in groups are illocutionary ones. Non-constrained speech can lead to a sense of patient control over illness not available through medicine, however.

In their contribution, ‘Finite Resources and Infinite Demand: Public Participation in Health Care Rationing’, Paul Higgs and Ian Rees Jones propose bringing a Habermasian analysis to bear on whether there is, in fact, ‘infinite demand’ for health services. Citing a tendency for modern societies to hide potentially discussable policy questions behind rubrics of technocracy and the ‘need’ for expert analysis, they explore whether ‘infinite demand’ is primarily ideological – tendered because it locks in the power of experts. They re-iterate that Habermas does not see a triumph of abstract expertise as inevitable in policy questions, and call for a discursive as opposed to legalistic model, where these questions can be addressed as praxis. They cite Doyal as calling for explicit decisions in health policy areas among others, and tender the case study of age-based denial of services as essentially ideological, in that this puts forward a false view of true consumption of health resources based upon age, and is anti-democratic in that it goes against the interests of a rapidly growing segment of the population.

Still, the authors fault Habermas for failing to stress the role of ideology sufficiently. In light of this, they propose a more muscular response, not one that only stresses enhancing communication. The issue of age-preference, they say, would provide ample grounds here.

Ian Rees Jones’s ‘Habermas or Foucault or Habermas and Foucault: The Implications of a Shifting Debate for Medical Sociology’ is an illuminating essay that delves into the commonalities as well as the antagonisms of these old combatants. Critical of simplistic readings of Foucault’s notion that everything is simply power deployed through discourse, Jones shows how the later Foucault emphasises resistance as much as domination. The later Habermas has similarly shifted to a notion of ‘discursive democracy’, where citizens presumably invent society as they go along, integrating these changes into law and institutions. For Jones, there is possibility of convergence, where the strengths of both thinkers can be used by social critics. Following Delanty, Jones sees Habermas as too easily sweeping issues of cultural and global conflict under the rug.

Jones believes that both Foucault and Habermas can be brought to bear on three areas: firstly, medicalisation, in the sense that each can be used to criticise the extension of the medical gaze, – Habermas’s critique here is one of the extension of ‘expertise’, as opposed to Foucault’s ‘power’ – secondly, globalisation and health, where pervasive inequalities exist both within and between countries – and re-organisation in terms of extended ‘services’ is not the answer, and thirdly, surveillance and government,
where the use of medicine by the state is a form of control. Perhaps the most significant of Jones’s observations is the idea that extension of medicine no longer entails solutions to health problems, but simply extends the definition of who is ‘sick’ and who is not. Human genome research may generate categories of actual or potential disease for which any cure is remote, but the consequences for citizens so categorised may be very real in terms of discrimination.

Scambler and Leslie Martin’s ‘Civil Society, the Public Sphere, and Deliberative Democracy’ ends the volume on a positive note. As in many of the other essays, health functions as a case illuminating a broader principle, here the idea of genuine democracy regarding social problem definition, resource allocation and policy. The authors cite Habermas’s ‘protest sector’ of civil society as being directed toward the public sphere. Although the public sphere once may have played a role in forming social policy, it has now been either re-feudalised or disappeared altogether. New social movements are characterised by

(1) a critical stance toward modernity and progress, (2) decentralized and participatory organizational structures, (3) defense of interpersonal solidarity against giant colonizing bureaucracies, and (4) reclamation of autonomous spaces rather than material advantages. (p. 192.)

These can set the stage for resistance around health issues. Such organisations as ACT UP – which attends to AIDS activism – fit the definition of new social movements and are somewhat effective in focusing attention and resources on this problem.

In addition to recommending the enhanced communicative methodologies carried by these types of organisations, the authors cite Hunter as demonstrating other potentially transformative sorts of groups based upon advocating economic equality, green policies, identity issues, peasant advocacy, and indigenous rights. They believe that Habermasian programmes can give flesh to Kant’s moral imperative, in that all can potently comment on the actual or potential effects of others’ actions. The authors call for recognition of an internal relation between the concepts ‘critical sociology’, ‘civil society’, ‘public sphere’ and ‘deliberative democracy’. The say that the power of Habermas’s ‘ideal speech situation’ is its counterfactual status – that it is desired but not common. In light of these ideas, they call for critical sociologists to sponsor a global critical sociology.

The volume’s authors all do a creditable job of bringing Habermas, particularly the later Habermas, to bear on health care issues. Because Habermas has shifted in his later writings, certainly from *Theory of Communicative Action* (*TCA*) on, to an implicitly social-psychological position, the essays in this fine volume give more voice to micro sorts of issues than macro ones. Echoing Scambler’s critique for his retreat from class, this may be a deficiency in Habermas’s later theorising. From *TCA* on, there is certainly more acceptance by Habermas of normative social democracy as a realistic goal.
Presumably, this would be social democracy in which capital and the state are much more popularly scrutinised than currently, but social democracy nonetheless. In light of his later writings, even though they may in fact today hang together more tightly theoretically than previously, one is nostalgic for the Habermas of *Legitimation Crisis*, where struggle against the state and capital is more immanent.

Nonetheless, lessons from the Soviet Union and other putatively socialist states teach us that cultural and political maturity are as necessary to socialism as maturity in terms of economic production. Here, governance would be based upon the as yet unfulfilled political promises of what Habermas calls republicanism (promises made but not delivered by bourgeois democracy). Norms would be generated rationally through popular discourse, less corrupted than now by colonisation or direct oppression. In a loose way, it is possible to speculate that his notions of popular participation could somehow be conjoined with Gramsci’s notions of an alternative state, providing its own institutions alongside those of the state it is replacing.

In health care, these initially take the form of self-help, cited above, but later also include more democratically administered clinics. In the United States, some women’s reproductive clinics are run sensitively according to agendas requiring much practitioner-patient democratic communication, and overseen by potent community boards. There have been a few attempts to establish people’s health maintenance organisations (HMOs) and the like, serving the poor, with varying amounts of community scrutiny. Exciting new possibilities also exist for breaking down medical authority by training and widely utilising nurses and paraprofessionals in a variety of previously physician-only roles. These practitioners are closer to the community and potentially likely to form democratic relationships with patients, if increased social support for this occurs. Making physicians less in demand potentially lowers the obscene salaries these individuals accrue in the United States, for example, making them in turn more accessible as well. Salary lowering has meant that more women have entered medicine, since they have had an orientation somewhat more dedicated to service, improving communication with patients.

The wider proliferation of ethics boards and an ethical consciousness has the potential to curtail inappropriate heroics, which drive up costs, enhancing the professional mystique of medicine at the cost of true prevention, which would promote quality of life more generally. Currently, these boards operate within the medical paradigm – deciding who gets what organ for example – but they have the potential, if developed in the context of other progressive movements, of altering the deployment of health resources generally. It has been pointed out that nurses, other health workers, and ordinary people can play potent roles on these boards, altering the balance of power with physicians. In countries such as the United States that lack a safety net in health care, discussion of needs and deployment of resources would be a crucial step in improving health chances for the population generally.
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