
GLOBAL UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT, PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION AND POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CONFLICT IN AFRICA: THE RETURN OF THE THEORY OF IMPERIALISM

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Abstract

The world is witnessing a political-economic passage on a global scale: from economic stagnation, amplified uneven development and financial volatility to worsening primitive accumulation ('looting') and socio-economic conflict. Considering Africa's plight in this way suggests intellectual links between the political economy and security disciplines. Reforms proposed at the global level by elite bodies are apparently ineffectual and actions taken by elites in the name of conflict resolution often undermine peace because they reinforce the very dynamic of external looting. If these reforms continue to fail, it is to popular struggles that we should turn, especially in Africa where oppression is most extreme and global and local elites have the least credibility. For social movements, the objective of transforming power relations as the basis for ending conflict and underdevelopment requires engaging this new theoretical approach with a critique of capitalism. Conflict and peace theorists should also consider other innovations in political economy which address uneven and combined development, primitive accumulation and imperialism more broadly.

Introduction: Crisis and Imperialism

Consider all the attention Africa has received in recent years to 'make poverty history', to provide relief from crushing debt loads, to double aid and to establish a 'development round' of trade. And yet at best only piecemeal critiques of imperial power emerged amid the cacophony of all-white rock concerts and political grandstanding. By 2007, one of the G8 group of nations' court jesters, Bob Geldof, finally became so frustrated that he called those attending the Heiligendamm summit 'creeps' and their work a 'total farce' (Blair 2007). Geldof had earlier summed up the achievements of the G8's 2005 meeting at the Gleneagles Summit as 'On aid, 10 out of 10. On debt, eight out of 10' – a ridiculous formulation (Hodkinson 2005). The Geldof campaign 'achieved next to nothing' because its 'design allowed it to accept inappropriate markers for success that were never real proxies for justice, empowerment or accountability. And also because its demands were never in fact audacious enough' (Hertz 2005). NGO strategists of peacebuilding and development suffered from horizons limited by the early and mid-2000s – years of growing 'humanitarian imperialism' hubris on the part of Northern elites (Bond *et al* 2005). Former Prime Minister Tony Blair's advisor, Robert Cooper, publicly advocated 'force, pre-emptive attack, deception ... a new kind of imperialism' (Cooper 2002:16-17).

But at its roots, this is not really so new. As was the case a century earlier, tendencies to stagnation have characterised the world economy over the past 40 years. The average rate of growth of GDP fell from 3.6% during the 1960s to 2.1% during the 1970s, to 1.3% during the 1980s, to 1.1% during the 1990s and to one percent during the first half of the 2000s (Harvey 2005). Since capitalism's laws of motion rely on the imperative of growth via processes internal to the market, this trajectory can be considered a 'crisis' in which crisis is defined not as a 'breakdown' *per se*, but a state in which the normal reproduction of a system is no longer functioning, and requires processes external to that system to rectify its problems (Cox 1987).

As David Harvey (1999) has pointed out, during the 20th century, especially after the Great Depression, the capitalist crisis-displacement toolbox added two new geographic and temporal displacement mechanisms. In the first, the problems are moved around as one or another group of territorially organised capitalists either push away the devaluation of their capital stocks or resist it, resulting in more extremely uneven spatial development and intensified exploitation of weaker geographical sites. In the second, the problems are put off, insofar as a rising credit system allows today's problems to be mitigated through borrowing against the hope of tomorrow's economic growth. In both cases, crisis-displacement strategy becomes increasingly ineffectual, especially when financial system upheavals adversely affect confidence in debt instruments. At that point, wrote Rosa Luxemburg drawing upon an earlier manifestation of the same problem, we witness

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 (Luxemburg 1968:347).

The system then turns to more extreme forms of exploitation that occur beyond purely market production and exchange: what Harvey (2003) calls 'accumulation by dispossession'. This article sets out why such a formulation is useful for analysing peace/conflict problems in Africa in a context of worsening inequalities structured into global and regional economic relations.

Uneven and combined development

The phrase 'uneven and combined development' can be invoked here, for it suggests that growth (accumulation) and decline (underdevelopment via super-exploitation) happen in a systematic manner, but not one which follows either the modernisation path – directly

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along a line of underdevelopment, 'take-off' and development – or permanent dependency. Instead, accumulation at one pole and poverty at another happen systematically according to processes that we must carefully analyse and document but that can change, depending upon political processes (Bond 1999). The generation of extreme forms of inequality is directly tied to the increasing wretchedness of masses of

people, such that elite deal-making to resolve local conflict tends to work only in the short term, leading soon enough to renewed tensions.

It was Leon Trotsky who originally came up with the phrase 'uneven and combined' (1977:26-27). The 'combined' component is ultimately contingent upon the power of a dominant economic bloc to extract surpluses from weaker blocs, themselves locked into non-capitalist social relations. Many conflicts in Africa – from Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta and northeastern Congo's gold and coltan mines to Sierra Leone's diamond finds and Sudan's killing fields – follow from this power relationship. In past eras, severely repressive social systems (slavery, colonialism and apartheid) emerged to channel labour from pre-capitalist settings to resource-extraction zones, as Walter Rodney (1972) among others showed. Today, as James Ferguson observes

... capital 'hops' over 'unusable Africa', alighting only in mineral-rich enclaves that are starkly disconnected from their national societies. The result is not the formation of standardised national grids, but the emergence of huge areas of the continent that are effectively 'off the grid' (Ferguson 2005:381).

The apparent 'disconnection', as Ferguson (1990) showed in Lesotho, is misleading because one may get the impression at first blush (as do the World Bank and aid agencies) that poverty comes from *lack* of exposure to markets. In fact, it is the migrant labour market that decisively contributes to sustained underdevelopment in a context, often, of political repression. In the process, Ferguson (2005) notes, there emerges 'a frightening sort of political-economic model for regions that combine mineral wealth with political intractability', from African oil zones to occupied Iraq. The model includes protection of capital by private military companies and protection of the 'Big Man' – 'not by his own national army but, instead, by hired guns' – in exactly the way that the U.S. rulers of Iraq, Paul Bremer and John Negroponte, used mercenary firms for personal bodyguards. The bottom line is enhanced profit for international capital and despotism for the citizenry.

Others assume that the continent is not *sufficiently* subject to the laws of the market. Jeffrey Sachs (2005:189-209) acknowledges the problem of looting: 'Little surpasses the Western world in the cruelty and depredations that it has long imposed on Africa.' But he presumes that the critique of corrupt dictators is a 'political story-line' of the 'right' instead of giving credence to progressive, organic African anti-corruption campaigning. From there, Sachs proceeds to rehearse well-known accounts of malaria, AIDS, landlocked countries and other forms of geographically determinist analysis, and then reconciles these explanations with garden-variety policy advice: adopting good governance plus 'implementing traditional market reforms, especially regarding export promotion'.

How does combined development create systemic conflict? Luxemburg in 1913 showed in the following summary how violence 'is the immediate consequence of the clash between capitalism and the organisations of a natural economy which would restrict accumulation':

Capital is faced with difficulties because vast tracts of the globe's surface are in the possession of social organisations that have no desire for commodity exchange... Force is the only solution open to capital; the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day. From the point of view of the primitive societies involved, it is a matter of life or death; for them there can be no other attitude than opposition and fight to the finish: complete exhaustion and extinction.

The next section shows how Africa's relationship with traditional markets is still having adverse consequences.

Looting Africa

Is force 'the only solution open to capital' in Africa? The standard routes by which wealth flows from Africa to the North are permanent but inadequate: exploitative debt and finance, capital flight, unfair trade and distorted investment. Although the resource drain from

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Africa dates back many centuries, beginning with unfair terms of trade and then mediated through slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, neoliberal policies are today the most direct causes of inequality and poverty. They tend to amplify uneven and combined development, especially pre-existing gender, race and regional disparities, as we have seen above. Although the argument has to be situated in each national setting, there are

prima facie relationships between deepening economic exploitation, neoliberal policies and social disintegration, a 'shock doctrine' in the words of Naomi Klein (2007), that can be traced in turn to the global scale.

Through capital flight and debt repayment

Africa has seen a vast share of its resources – more than \$20 billion in 1997 alone – drained out by its own citizens (IMF 2005a:126). James Boyce and Léonce Ndikumana (2000) estimate that over a quarter of a century, \$285 billion was drained from a core group of sub-Saharan African countries whose foreign debt was \$178 billion in 1996. Other net outflows of finance occur through debt repayment. In absolute terms, Third World debt rose from \$580 billion in 1980 to \$2.4 trillion in 2002, and much of it is now simply unpayable, a factor recognised by the G7 finance ministers in June 2005 when they agreed to a partial write-off of \$40 billion of debt owed by the 18 poorest countries. The debt relief was conditioned by standard neoliberal policy requirements, and represented an outlay of merely \$1.5 billion each year for the wealthy countries, in comparison to their military spending in excess of \$700 billion a year. In 2002, there was a net outflow of \$340 billion in servicing this debt. Overall, during the 1980s and 90s, Africa repaid \$255 billion, or 4.2 times the original 1980 debt. As a percentage of GDP, the 2005 multilateral debt owed to the IMF and World Bank exceeded 100% in Sao Tome & Principe, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), The Gambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone and Madagascar, several of which are mired in conflict. The few African countries without huge Bretton Woods debt repayment obligations were South Africa, Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Namibia, Mauritius and Swaziland.

According to Eric Toussaint (2004:3, 384), debt inherited from dictators could be defined as legally 'odious' in at least 16 African countries, such as Nigeria under Abacha (\$30 billion), apartheid South Africa (\$22 billion), or Mobuto's Zaire (\$13 billion). Such debts could therefore be eligible for cancellation since citizens were victimised both in the original accumulation (and use of monies against the society) and in subsequent demands that it be repaid. These amounts easily exceed half of Africa's outstanding debt. As Toussaint (2004:3) remarks, 'since 1980, over 50 Marshall plans (over \$4.6 trillion) have been sent by the peoples of the periphery to their creditors in the centre'.

The absolute value of loans made to dictatorial regimes might disguise sites where the debt ratios are particularly onerous. By the early 2000s, the debt remained unpayable for at least 21 African countries, at a level of more than 300% of export earnings. For countries

like Sudan, Burundi, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, it was 15 times greater than annual export earnings. It is no coincidence that these countries have been steeped in conflict.

The Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative failed to change the debt servicing ratios noticeably, as even World Bank officials conceded (Bond 2006b:78-80). The small debt relief concessions – including the June 2005 G7 finance ministers' offer – came at the expense of tighter neoliberal conditionality. The largest slice of debt relief that year, for Nigeria, required a vast down payment. According to the leader of Nigeria's Jubilee network, Rev. David Ugolor, 'The Paris Club cannot expect Nigeria, freed from over 30 years of military rule, to muster \$12.4 billion to pay off interest and penalties incurred by the military' (Jubilee USA 2005).

Through trade and investment liberalisation

Trade liberalisation has also exacted a heavy toll on sub-Saharan Africa – \$272 billion over the past 20 years, according to Christian Aid (2005) and Kraev (2005). Dependence on primary commodities, worsening terms of trade, Northern subsidies and long-term falling prices for most exports together grip African producers in a price trap as they increase production levels but generate decreasing revenues (Burnett & Manji 2007). Across Africa, four products at most make up three-quarters of export revenues. Natural resources accounted for nearly 80% of African exports in 2000 compared to 31% for all developing countries and 16% for the advanced capitalist economies. Meanwhile, agricultural subsidies to Northern farmers (mainly corporate producers) have risen steeply – by 15% between the late 1980s and 2004, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2005:94), to \$360 billion per year – which has greatly intensified North-South trade inequalities. Developing countries lose \$35 billion annually as a result of industrialised countries' protectionist tariffs, \$24 billion of this as a result of the Multifibre Agreement which protects especially U.S. producers.

Non-financial investment flows are driven less by policy – although liberalisation has also been important – and more by accumulation opportunities. During the 1970s, according to the Commission on Africa, roughly one-third of foreign direct investment (FDI) to the 'Third World' went to Africa; by the 1990s, this had declined to 5%. Thereafter, what seems like significantly rising FDI in the late 1990s and 2001 can be accounted for by the relocation of South African companies' financial headquarters to London, and by resurgent oil

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investments in Angola and military-ruled Nigeria. Tax fraud, transfer pricing and other multinational corporate techniques further reduce Africa's income. In 1994, for example, an estimated 14% of the total value of exported oil went unaccounted for (Cockroft 2001:4).

Through resource extraction

A final example of the processes by which the North drains the South comes from African minerals and petroleum, a major factor in violent conflict across the continent. The World Bank addressed the issue of natural capital depletion in a 2005 document, *Where is the Wealth of Nations?* The Bank methodology for correcting bias in GDP wealth accounting is not nearly as expansive as it should be, but at least it recognises that extractive investments may not contribute to net GDP growth if resource depletion and pollution are factored in. The Bank's 'first-cut' method subtracts factors such as fixed capital depreciation, depletion of natural resources and pollution from the existing rate of savings, but adds savings investments in education (defined as annual expenditure). The result, in most African

countries dependent upon primary products, is a net negative savings/GNI rate. For every percentage point increase in a country's extractive-resource dependency, that country's potential GDP falls by 9% (as against the real GDP recorded), according to the Bank (2005:54) in what is probably a conservative estimate. In sum, even the Bank now admits that exploitation of Africa's natural resources leaves the continent poorer.

The African countries most affected – those with high resource dependence and low capital accumulation – include Nigeria, Zambia, Mauritania, Gabon, Congo, Algeria and South Africa. Also affected are four countries emerging from intense conflict – Angola, the DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone – where data are not available. The Bank compares the potential for capital accumulation and the actual measure of capital accumulation, and finds

... In many cases the differences are huge. Nigeria, a major oil exporter, could have had a year 2000 stock of produced capital five times higher than the actual stock. Moreover, if these investments had taken place, oil would play a much smaller role in the Nigerian economy today, with likely beneficial impacts on policies affecting other sectors of the economy (World Bank 2005:55).

Using Bank data, Gabon's people lost \$2,241 each in absolute terms in 2000 as oil companies depleted the country's tangible wealth. Other large absolute per capita losses were \$727 in the Republic of the Congo, \$210 in Nigeria, \$152 in Cameroon, \$147 in Mauritania and \$100 in Cote d'Ivoire in 2000, although Angola, the DRC, Liberia and Sierra Leone would also probably be on list of countries whose people lost more than \$100 in tangible national wealth (World Bank 2005:66). In net terms, even fairly prosperous countries – like Mauritius which lost \$3,183 per person and Botswana which lost \$2,111 per person – witness dramatic declines in income/wealth statistics using the Bank's indicator compared to per capita GDP. In sum, the role of extractive FDI in countries rich in oil and other resources should take into account the net negative impact on national wealth, including natural capital. The Bank's new accounting of genuine savings is a helpful innovation in the broader task of measuring

looting, in part so as to establish grounds for reparations in a future, hopefully more just multilateral climate.

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capitalist world and between the North and South. Managing large-scale resource extraction requires strong geopolitical and military capacity, and given the failure of many Pentagon missions in Africa, most notably in Somalia in 1993, local strongmen are required. For example, in Central and East Africa, according to Ian Taylor:

Pro-American leaders in Asmara, Addis Ababa, Kampala and Kigali seemed to be constructing a new bloc of regimes friendly to Washington's interests, linking up with South Africa as a group of states that America could do business with (Taylor 2003:49).

A conservative estimate of three million dead in Central African wars follows logically from the victims' proximity to coltan and other mineral riches. From the late 1990s, the Uganda/Rwanda alliance was contested by a bloc composed of Laurent Kabila's DRC, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia. Only with Kabila's 2001 assassination and Pretoria's management of elite peace deals in the DRC and Burundi has the conflict ebbed, however

briefly, into a fragile peace combining neoliberalism and renewed opportunities for minerals extraction, although thousands continue to die in localised conflicts in the northeastern DRC.

Bridging sub-Saharan Africa and north Africa is another resource-rich sub-region of crucial importance to U.S. imperialism. Libya is being brought into the fold of weapons certification

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and control, and already U.S. troops have been deployed for small-scale interventions in Mali, Chad and Mauritania. A site of future extraction lies between northern Nigeria and southern Algeria, where the U.S. multinationals Halliburton and Bechtel have contracted gas pipeline options. The major

petroleum prize remains the Gulf of Guinea. With Africa closer than the Persian Gulf to Louisiana's oil processing plants, the world's shortage of supertankers is eased by direct sourcing from West Africa's offshore oil fields.

But the African terrain over which capital hops in search of extractive enclaves remains pockmarked by military and civil conflict, in many cases due to the way global corporations and powerful imperial states establish cosy relationships with warlord regimes. The continent's civil wars and adverse climate, producing droughts and floods, are increasingly identified with structural political-economic power relations of the sort examined above, ranging from post-Cold War geopolitical fragility to global warming. New conflicts are in the offing because the scramble for Africa's resources has been joined from the Far East. The rapid rise of Chinese investment in Africa appears not as an anti-imperialist bulwark but rather intra-imperial competition which will exacerbate the looting process (Marks & Manji 2007).

In spite of establishing a new Africa Command in February 2007, in order – as George W. Bush put it – to 'strengthen our security cooperation with Africa and create new opportunities to bolster the capabilities of our partners', the Pentagon cannot police Africa properly. Already by 2002, Washington had established the African Contingency Operations Training Assistance programme which, according to Horace Campbell (2007:21), provides 'offensive military weaponry, including rifles, machine guns and mortars under the guise of "regional peacekeeping"'.

Although local proxies – especially South Africa – will be required to carry out sub-imperial functions (Bond 2006a, 2006b), former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Walter Kansteiner made a frank declaration of imperial interests:

As the political and security conditions of the Persian Gulf deteriorate, the availability and appeal of reliable, alternative sources of oil for the American market grows. African oil is emerging as a clear direction U.S. policy could take to provide a secure source of energy (Campbell 2007:46).

Willingness to pay

What do African elites get out of this by way of a national payoff? After all, non-military overseas development aid to Africa dropped 40% during the 1990s. Contributions from almost all developed countries fall well below the agreed United Nations target of 0.7% of GDP, with 0.12% of U.S. GDP and 0.23% of Japanese GDP as extreme examples. The 2003 total official aid of \$69 billion is reduced to just \$27 billion in 'real' aid to poor

people because of a variety of 'phantom' aid mechanisms, according to a study by ActionAid (2005:1). 'Untied' aid rose from \$2.3 billion in 1999 to \$4.3 billion in 2003, but declined as a proportion of total 'aid'. There is enough aid to ensure African elites are tied into the imperial orbit, with many African countries relying on aid as the basis for a large proportion of state expenditures.

One related legitimating strategy – which unfortunately far too many development and peace activists have endorsed – is the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. According to feminist economist Peggy Antrobus, they suffer from

... inadequate targets and indicators; their restriction to indicators that are quantifiable, when much of what is most important – such as women's equality and empowerment – is not easily quantifiable; their omission of important goals and targets, such as violence against women and sexual and reproductive rights ... their silence on the context and institutional environment in which they are to be met (Antrobus 2003).

For a stronger sense of a political economy that can resist the uneven development and primitive accumulation responsible for so much conflict in Africa, African social movements are promoting more promising ways forward. Before turning to examine their efforts, some consideration is given to what peace researchers and peacemakers propose.

What Do Peace Researchers Offer?

Peace and security researchers do build political-economic factors into their discussions of African conflict, but they often rest at the level of localised incidents or institutional malevolence instead of adopting the structural analysis advocated in this article. Laurie Nathan, for example, cites international organisations and foreign powers which

... undermine democratic principles and incur resentment and resistance from African leaders and communities when they operate without any semblance of respect for local actors ... The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund insist that countries that receive their grants and loans should abide by the principles of democracy, accountability and respect for human dignity. Nevertheless, these institutions have *imposed* macro-economic policies on debtor countries; they have aggravated poverty through structural adjustment programmes; they are accountable more to their Northern 'shareholders' than to recipient governments in the South; and they are not held accountable for their mistakes and failed policies (Nathan 2004:13).

This is a useful start, to be sure, but because the argument neglects to take on the system of capitalist/non-capitalist relations described above, Nathan (2004:14) merely directs his conclusions towards the power elite, asking them not to use their power in the ways they have grown accustomed to:

The most significant contribution that the international community could make to peacemaking and peacebuilding in Africa would be to attend to the ways in which foreign powers and multinational bodies provoke and heighten tension and violence. The critical issues in this regard include injudicious arms sales; political and economic support for authoritarian regimes; the debt crisis; structural adjustment programmes; and global trade relations (Nathan 2004:14).

Along with so much other peace/conflict literature, Nathan's analysis fails to grapple with the underlying *dynamics* of accumulation and political power discussed in this article. If the analysis stops at the level of symptoms (institutions and policies) of that power, it is not surprising that advocacy campaigns such as Make Poverty History turn to 'the international community' to fix itself. But repeated failures of global governance reform initiatives within the existing power structure should instead generate strategies that break from such institutions (Bond 2007). We should instead follow more closely the way Hugo Chavez is trying to *delink* Latin America from the Bretton Woods institutions (through his commitment to socialism and offers of petro-financing resources) as a means of contesting their roles as central pivots of imperialism – not just malevolent institutions that need reforming.

If such a course were followed, reliance on elite deal-making in conflict situations would be less harmful. Months after Tony Blair had established the Commission for Africa, three key regimes anointed by Blair as modernising, liberalising states – Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia – were racked by violence (Cawthorne 2005). By early 2006, Ethiopia's President Meles Zenawi had hammered his opposition with a massacre, mass arrests and beating. Aid was put finally put on hold to Addis Ababa just as World Bank credit was withdrawn from Kibaki's corruption-riddled regime in Nairobi. Then with Western consent, Congo-Brazzaville President Denis Sassou-Nguesso was chosen as the 2006 head of the African Union, notwithstanding his two ascents to power (in 1979 and 1997) through coups, between which he shifted ideology from Marxist posturing to 'an unashamedly market view of economics' (Cornish 2006). A few months earlier in New York, Sassou-Nguesso demonstrated how such a shift could improve one's personal comfort by running up a \$300,000 hotel bill during a brief UN summit. 'The main purpose of the president's visit was to deliver a 15-minute speech to the General Assembly's 60th anniversary summit. He was also entertained by an American oil firm' (Allen-Mills 2006).

Within the elite global and African circuits, as Jean-Jacques Cornish recently noted, conflict resolution is at best fragile:

Things have gone distinctly pear-shaped in South Africa's two most prized mediation subjects – the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. Governments put in place in both these countries as a result of South African-brokered peace processes ... saw a repeat of bodies in the streets and floods of refugees, reminiscent of their days of civil war (Cornish 2007).

With respect to the DRC, according to revolutionary scholar Wamba dia Wamba:

When a [transition process] takes off on a wrong footing, unless a real readjustment takes place on the way, the end cannot be good ... Some feel like South Africa has actively put us in the situation we are in. They had a lot of leverage to make sure that certain structural problems were anticipated and solutions proposed. They seem to have fallen into the Western logic of thinking that mediocrity is a lesser evil for Congolese if it stops the war (Majavu 2004).

The 'wrong footing' amounts, simply, to self-interest, even where the highly touted South African role in Africa becomes rife with sub-imperial contradictions. In 2002, Pretoria lent \$75 million to the regime of Joseph Kabila to repay the IMF for arrears on Mobutu-era loans. According to the South African Cabinet (2002), '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.' In the same statement, the Cabinet recorded its payment to the World Bank of \$8 million for replenishment of its African loan fund to

'benefit our private sector, which would be eligible to bid for contracts financed from these resources'. The same year, the UN Security Council (2002) accused a dozen South African companies of looting the DRC during late 1990s turmoil which left an estimated three million citizens dead. Indeed, within 18 months, President Thabo Mbeki was negotiating multi-billion dollar deals through the World Bank for South African corporate access to the DRC. In June 2005, AngloGold Ashanti was caught by Human Rights Watch (2005) giving 'meaningful financial and logistical support which in turn resulted in political benefits' to brutal warlords in the Nationalist and Integrationist Front in the Eastern DRC. Also in 2005, a diplomatic crisis erupted in the three-year old Côte d'Ivoire conflict. According to *Business Day*:

South Africa told the UN Security Council on August 31 that its mediation efforts had removed the obstacles to implementing the latest peace accord ending the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire. It was now up to the government and rebel leaders to carry out their part of the deal.

But like Mbeki's ineffectual mediation in neighbouring Zimbabwe, the harsh reality emerged within days when a 'highly tense meeting' of the African Union's Peace and Security Council found that Mbeki's mediation role had only 'reinforced the divide' between President Laurent Gbagbo and rebel forces thanks to Pretoria's 'biased' (pro-Gbagbo) report and its delegation's endorsement of Gbagbo's anti-democratic actions in prior weeks (Kaninda 2005). These disasters led *Business Day* to ask:

Why then, if there is little chance of success, does SA get involved? One reason might be what one could euphemistically call SA's economic diplomacy. Congo and Côte d'Ivoire are rich in mineral resources and peace there would open up new markets for South African companies. In Congo, for instance, the likes of telecoms company Vodacom took the risk of investing during that country's most troubled period. So far, the dividends have been significant ... It is no wonder then that Pretoria has invested so much time and resources in peace efforts in Congo. The same applies to Côte d'Ivoire. If peace and stability is restored in Congo and Côte d'Ivoire, there can be no doubt the economic and financial benefits for SA would be considerable.

Connecting the dots between imperialist relationships – entailing both accumulation processes and local compradors – is not difficult. What does seem to be beyond the grasp of many in the NGOs, research institutes and peace industry is the kind of critique that anticipates the negative outcomes of elite deal-making. Progressive social movements are launching these critiques and suggesting useful ways forward that address the international political economy behind Africa's looting.

Social Movement Solutions?

Elite-driven conflict resolution will not bring sustainable peace to the African continent. Similarly, elite reform proposals ranging from Millenium Development Goals to multilateral

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restructuring and other forms of 'global governance' (Bond 2007) will not reverse the outflow of African wealth or serve the deeper agenda of African development, which is to meet the reasonable needs of all its citizens. Social movement campaigns mostly fail, but

the key examples of victory suggest principles of 'de-commodification' and 'de-globalisation of capital' that we should take seriously.¹ Specific campaigns aimed at reversing resource

flows are emerging from grassroots struggles and progressive social movements. They are targeting issues such as:

- De-commodification movements to establish basic needs as human rights rather than as privatised commodities that must be paid for;
- Campaigns to de-globalise capital, such as de-funding the World Bank and securing the right to produce generic (not patented) anti-retroviral medicines for people with AIDS;²
- Demands for civil society oversight of national budgets; and
- Activism to ensure equitable redistribution of resources in ways that benefit low-income households, grassroots communities and shop-floor workers.

Were there even a single genuinely leftist government in Africa (Zimbabwe does not qualify due to its brutality against poor/working people by a corrupt elite), a variety of national policies could be applied to reverse socio-economic collapse:

- Systematic default on foreign debt repayments;
- Strategies to enforce domestic reinvestment of pensions and other funds;
- Reintroduction of currency exchange controls and prohibition of tax-haven transfers;
- Refusal of tied and phantom aid, along with naming and shaming of fraudulent 'aid';
- Import-substitution development strategies;
- Refusal of foreign investments that prove unfavourable when realistic projections factor in costs such as natural resource depletion, transfer pricing and profit/dividend outflows; and
- Reversal of macroeconomic policies that increase inequality.

Reversing the trends towards socio-economic collapse in the absence of government policy in this direction requires bottom-up social movements to intensify their work. It is crucial in the short run to recognise anti-capitalist efforts to bridge intra-African, global-local and

It is crucial in the short run to recognise anti-capitalist efforts to bridge intra-African, global-local and Northern-African divides.

Northern-African divides. They include the mid-2007 general strikes by revitalised labour movements in Swaziland, South Africa and Nigeria; campaigning for reparations and the closure of the World Bank and IMF by Jubilee Africa; AIDS treatment advocates breaking the hold of pharmaceutical corporations on monopoly anti-retroviral patents; activists fighting Monsanto's drive to introduce genetically modified crops in several African countries; blood-diamonds victims from Sierra Leone and Angola generating a partly successful global deal at Kimberley; the Kalahari Basarwa-San community raising publicity against forced removals as the Botswana government clears the way for De Beers and World Bank investments; Lesotho peasants objecting to displacement during construction of the continent's largest dam system (intended solely to benefit Johannesburg); a growing network questioning Liberia's long exploitation by Firestone Rubber; and the OilWatch network of civil society activists that link Nigerian Delta communities and many others in the Gulf of Guinea and elsewhere. When at its strongest, the South African chapter of the global Jubilee movement addressed political-economic exploitation, socio-political conflict and foreign debt in picketing eight international banks in Johannesburg in September

2005 (Jubilee SA 2005). The Washington-based Mobilisation for Global Justice and a coalition of Swiss activist organisations joined Jubilee protesters in solidarity demonstrations. Citibank was a particular target, for as the UN's Special Committee against Apartheid had observed in 1979, 'Citigroup has loaned nearly one-fifth of the \$5 billion plus which has gone to bolster apartheid' and in subsequent years made yet more loans for segregated housing and for the rollover of apartheid debt during the 1985 financial crisis. In Berne, Credit Suisse and UBS were the subjects of protest because from the early 1980s they replaced U.S. and British banks as the main apartheid financiers. By late 2007, the case for reparations against these banks and corporations was so strong that the U.S. Appeals Court overturned a lower court rejection of an Alien Tort Claims Act lawsuit for \$400 billion filed by Jubilee SA and the Khulumani victims' support group, allowing the case to proceed potentially as far as the U.S. Supreme Court.

There are no shortages of such opportunities, for African movements regularly voice anger against international capital. David Seddon and Leo Zeilig identify a 'first wave' of popular struggles and 'IMF riots' from the mid-1970s through 1980s which might be seen as a 'precursor to the contemporary phenomenon of the "anti-globalisation movement"'; others are more sceptical, seeing them as merely localised expressions of anger and outrage' (Seddon & Zeilig 2005:16-22). The second wave of popular protest during the 1990s, say the authors, was 'more explicitly political with more far-reaching aims and objectives', involving 86 major protest movements in 30 countries evident in 1991 alone, and three dozen dictatorial regimes swept out of power from 1990-94 'by a combination of street demonstrations, mass strikes and other forms of protest'.

In no cases, however, did the 'three dozen dictatorial regimes' give way to genuine democracies and prosecution of those responsible for long periods of enforced looting. It is here that much greater international solidarity deserves our attention. The most formidable single case of this since the anti-apartheid movement itself may have been the Treatment Action Campaign's international effort to end the pharmaceutical patent monopoly on life-saving anti-retroviral medicines during the early 2000s. Given that AIDS has so much potential for generating social conflict in micro and macro settings, such cases deserve continual revisiting and revitalisation with the aim of linking issues and movements in a manner capable of responding to vast challenge represented by uneven development, primitive accumulation and social conflict.

In sum, to become a more effective force in fighting for eco-social justice and not only peace (for one without the other is impossible), social movements need to transcend the

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often purely political analysis offered in the shallower (or even neoliberal) versions of peace studies. A far-reaching critique of capitalist social relations is crucial to prevent the kinds of renewed socio-economic conflict that emerges between elites in 'post-conflict' situations. For Africa, suffering such

intense, unrelenting looting, perhaps theories such as uneven and combined development can assist with more accurate diagnoses, and potentially guide us to a broader politics of genuine, durable conflict resolution.

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Endnotes

¹ The idea of 'de-globalisation' has been articulated by Walden Bello, Samir Amin, John Maynard Keynes and others. It would entail disempowering the major global institutions and replacing their functions with local and regional institutions. Instead of using hard-currency loans for, say, education (whose import content is near zero), local deficit spending would be preferable, saving countries from the foreign debt trap.

² 'De-funding' in this instance would mean disempowering the World Bank; for example, by taking away its securities market through a World Bank bonds boycott.

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