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COMING IN SEPTEMBER China and East Asia

AFTER ABRUPTLY ABANDONING its draconian zero-COVID campaign, which had provoked protests and strangled the economy, the Chinese government still tried to convince citizens that its policy of months-long lockdowns, repetitive testing, and forced quarantine had been correct all along. But for many, the experience confirmed that a powerful party-state would seize any excuse to extend its control over everyday life. Although feminist movements have been repressed, many Chinese women are rebuffing calls to embrace traditional gender roles to help stave off a demographic crisis. In Japan, meanwhile, the 2022 assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has drawn scrutiny to the role of religion in public life; in Southeast Asia, familiar faces are trying to lead awkward governing coalitions. The September issue of *Current History* will cover these developments and more across the region. (Readers, please take note: We do not publish June, July, or August issues.) Topics scheduled to appear include:

- Chinese Feminists Fight Against the Odds
- Japan's Entanglements of Religion and Politics
- The Marcos Dynasty Returns in the Philippines
- Malaysia's New Leader Comes in from the Cold
- Postwar Conflict and Minority Rights in Laos
- Can Macau's Winning Streak Continue?
- The Regional Rush for Economic Security

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“Any restorative strategies must take into account the fact that this erosion has taken place over a long period and has been precipitated by a complex combination of national, regional, and global forces.”

Citadels of Crisis: The Predicament of Nigerian Universities

EBENEZER OBADARE

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria boasted a small number of public universities that held their own among the world's best and produced scholars who rose to global acclaim in their respective fields. Today, notwithstanding the remarkable explosion in the number of Nigerian universities and the fact that a handful of these institutions intermittently appear in the lower rungs of global university rankings, no one disputes that higher education in Nigeria has fallen on hard times. If there is any controversy at all, it typically centers on the triggering factors and strategies of remediation.

On one level, the diagnosis is straightforward enough: the crisis of tertiary education in Nigeria is, without any doubt, a reflection of the crisis of the Nigerian state. Indeed, the woes of the universities seem poignantly illustrative of this multifaceted crisis of governance, which includes the mutual alienation of state and society, the failure to deliver economic prosperity, and, subsequently, the continued inability of the state to make itself legitimate. Insofar as the first generation of Nigerian universities were products of a certain kind of state formation and rationality, it was only to be expected that the crisis of the state would deflect their identity, character, and operations.

At the same time, efforts by academics to engage with the state and correct its perceived malformations and excesses have invariably left an imprint on the university system. Such interventions required that faculty time and resources be

dissipated on matters with, at most, a tangential relationship to scholarship. If, in hindsight, it appears that the era of military rule coincided with the nadir of the Nigerian academy, that was because it was a time of acute social distress, when university professors devoted considerable energy to thwarting the perceived designs of the military on the intelligentsia in particular, and civil society more broadly. The generals sought to bring them to heel through subordination, co-optation, or sometimes outright elimination.

In its own way, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), the umbrella association of faculty members, continues to show the wear and tear of this encounter. It still pays the price for overexposure in the political arena, even as it struggles to maintain its identity and integrity as a body of university professors with a social mandate to cogitate, research, and write.

Yet one can admit the above and still accept that the crisis is also internal (to the university system, that is) in nature. Indeed, a lingering criticism of ASUU is that its rightful focus on external threats to the system has made it lose sight of this equally important internal dimension. In any event, once it is understood that the academy everywhere is situated within and feeds off of the logics of a particular social milieu, including the prevailing economic ideology and social mores, it should come as no surprise that Nigerian universities have taken on and continue to exhibit some of the worst characteristics of contemporary Nigerian society.

On the campuses, these manifestations include the collapse of academic standards, rampant corruption, alleged sexual exploitation of students by university staff, inadequate funding, and recurrent

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strike action by academic and nonacademic staff. Worst of all, there is a definite sense that Nigerian higher education as a whole has become marginal to the global system of knowledge production. All of this has combined to produce arguably the largest emigration of faculty and students since the heyday of the universities in the late 1970s.

A FRAGILE ENTENTE

Considering the overall high standing of Nigerian universities and the commensurate status of academics just a few decades ago, an observer at that time would have been hard pressed to imagine their physical decrepitude and the professoriate's attendant loss of prestige by the end of the twentieth century, a decline that has continued well into the current century. According to historian Jacob Ade Ajayi, what was generally true of African universities in that post-independence era was especially true of Nigerian universities: "Most African universities in the 1960s were treated with great respect. The governments were, on the whole, generous to the universities financially, and were generally unwilling to disturb their autonomy."

From the governments' perspective, undergirding this concession of autonomy was the understanding (whether or not the academics themselves were on the same page)

that university professors would stay in their lane and not dabble in "such issues as the expansion of primary and secondary education," let alone matters of partisan politics. In a nutshell, governments would keep their side of the bargain by not tampering with university autonomy as long as professors kept theirs and desisted from political interference. Rather than functioning as intellectual powerhouses likely to cause trouble by producing transgressive ideas, universities would stick to their technical mandate. In the words of Nigerian economist and academic administrator T. M. Yesufu, that mandate was to "train and develop the skills and high-level manpower to replace the erstwhile official as well as to staff the new and expanded political, administrative, social, and economic institutions."

This entente did not last. In retrospect, it is surprising that it held for as long as it did. Considering the first-generation university academics' understanding of their role as defenders of the public good, broadly conceived, it was

only a matter of time before any perceived attack by government on the same would instigate them to renounce their oath of political noninterference.

Furthermore, even when academics were not engaged in direct confrontation with the state, the nascent professoriate, given its particular intellectual provenance, was always liable to imagine itself as the vanguard in defense of what it saw as the "people's institution." Being a university academic at one point in Nigeria implied that one was either a card-carrying Marxist or at least generally sympathetic to the left's doctrinal assertions. Many operating under that logic saw the state as an adversary to be challenged and outfoxed, or, in the worst-case scenario, grudgingly accommodated, rather than an institution with which to engage or collaborate. Their relations with the state would deteriorate rapidly from the moment the military, no more inclined to leftism than the government it had ousted, pushed aside the civilian politicians and installed itself in power.

BRAINS VERSUS BRAWN

For a Nigerian professoriate that saw itself as being locked in an irreparably adversarial relationship with the state, the takeover of the state by the military could only worsen this dynamic.

Aside from their sharply contrasting temperaments (one side inclined to domination, the other to deliberation), the military had a clear corporate objective of pacifying agents and forces within civil society as a way of establishing total control. The academy may not even have been a direct target; there is some evidence that among the military leadership, right up until the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was residual respect for the universities, stemming from the conviction that they had a role to play in "national development." In hindsight, though, the showdown between the two was just a matter of time, foretold by the differences in their dispositions and social outlooks.

As the military quickly realized, going after the academy was the social equivalent of killing two birds with one stone. It sent a message to the rest of civil society that no one would be spared the rod of discipline, not even "eggheads" who still enjoyed a modicum of social respectability, and so led to social demoralization. When Yakubu Gowon's military regime (1966–75) sought to

*The crisis of tertiary education
reflects the crisis of the
Nigerian state.*

push academics under the aegis of what was then the Association of University Teachers (the forerunner of the ASUU), pressuring them to call off their strike action by forcibly removing them from their official campus quarters, it signaled that they had lost the last vestiges of their special status. A new era in the military's relationship with the academy had begun.

To be sure, that relationship was not defined exclusively by coercion. The military's methods evolved as it solidified its hold on Nigerian society. For instance, the Ibrahim Babangida regime, in power from 1985 to 1993, perfected a strategy of pacification through incorporation. This involved sowing division among academics by offering plum government positions to leading social scientists. So many well-known scholars worked for the Babangida administration that political scientist Jibrin Ibrahim could cheekily allude to a "Faculty of Social Sciences, Aso Rock." (Aso Rock is the seat of federal power in Abuja.) Babangida also created a Centre for Democratic Studies, directed by political science professor Omo Omoruyi, and donated generously toward the establishment of the Centre for Advanced Social Science under the leadership of Claude Ake, the leading African political scientist at the time.

Together with appointments of leading social scientists to choice posts, these institutional initiatives and related acts of calculated generosity undermined the social standing of the academics as reliable allies in the struggle against military rule, while solidifying Babangida's grasp on political power. Academics found it difficult to present a united front. In a majority of cases, their antagonists were now former colleagues who until recently had been on their side at the barricades.

The university teachers and the intelligentsia more broadly were by no means passive in the face of the military's onslaught; they adopted creative methods of resistance from the global playbook of political dissent and forged alliances with student organizations, trade unions, and cognate social movements. Yet this came at a cost. The professoriate's clever messaging—"My take-home pay cannot take me home"; "My boss is a comedian, the wages he pays are a joke"—may have garnered sympathy for its plight from parents and a cross-section of the Nigerian public, but it also lifted the veil of a profession that many had once regarded with utter adoration. The academics may not have intended to undermine their public image when

they exposed the derelict conditions across the campuses, but that was precisely the effect.

Similarly, expressions of ideological solidarity between the ASUU and nonacademic civic groups, while dictated by the exigencies of social mobilization, had the dubious effect of making the professoriate appear less intellectual and certainly more political. Pulled into the vortex of activism, the academy gradually surrendered its vaunted social prestige.

The impact of these trends has been nothing short of momentous. With the professoriate delegitimized and the system in the throes of an existential crisis—of which the reckless proliferation of universities is an added proof—Nigerian academics have been leaving the country in droves. Currently, they comprise a significant percentage of the estimated 23,000 academics who emigrate from Africa annually in search of greener pastures—predominantly, though not exclusively, in Europe and North America.

The subsequent loss of faith in Nigerian higher education is itself of a piece with the broader erosion of confidence in the quality of public education. This constitutes the immediate backdrop to the explosion in the number of private universities—many of indifferent quality—and the seemingly unstoppable flight of Nigerian students to universities in various parts of the world. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigerian parents, rightly dubious about the quality of pedagogy on offer domestically, spent more than \$28 billion on foreign education in the decade between 2010 and 2020. That this bodes ill for the country's economic growth and the vitality of civil society cannot be overstated. The consequent drain of human capital, at a time when it is badly needed, means that Nigeria will be unable to reach its full developmental potential.

FROM 'MAN OF LETTERS' TO 'MAN OF GOD'

Given that the university in Nigeria occupied a central place in the social hierarchy, laden with real as well as symbolic prestige, the military's attack on it—carried out in conjunction with ancillary centers of critical deliberation, it is worth remembering—was bound to leave a mark. Combined with a prolonged economic crisis, this loss of status has devitalized tertiary education, scattering at least three successive generations of academics and intellectuals to the four winds.

Two other factors have aggravated the professoriate's loss of social standing. One is the global

collapse of socialism, which, among other things, robbed the intelligentsia of its organic identity. Just as in the rest of the postcolonial African academy, Marxism (for reasons outside the purview of this essay) ruled the ideological roost in post-independence Nigerian universities. To be a university teacher in Nigeria was to be a Marxist more or less. This is not to say that every academic was an adherent of this ideology; the point is rather that such was the influence of Marxism that it was the unquestioned lens through which university teachers *as an entity* saw and related to the world. Not only was it the ideological chassis for ASUU's pedagogy, but Marxism also organized and galvanized the union's social mission, as well as its often contentious relationship with the state.

For this reason, the fall of socialist regimes and the ensuing intellectual crisis of the Marxist worldview had a severe impact on the Nigerian intelligentsia. Suddenly denied its accustomed pieties, academia plunged into a crisis of identity from which it has yet to fully recover.

If the global collapse of socialism sealed the fate of the Nigerian professoriate as a coherent intellectual class, the rise of Pentecostalism, by most accounts the defining Christian movement of the past quarter-century, appears to have driven the final nail into its coffin. Pentecostalism's global ascendance no doubt stems from a variety of factors. In the African regional context, the movement found a positive reception and fertile soil for propagation across communities where the well-documented failures of postcolonial states and chronic sociopolitical dysfunction had left people largely bereft of hope and scrambling for meaning. Its message of eventual divine salvation (to be preceded, under the right conditions, by instant prosperity) was music to the ears of people fatigued by unredeemed promises of state-backed development.

As Pentecostal Christianity stepped into the vacuum bequeathed by the retreat of the academy from public life, so, too, did the Pentecostal pastor (the "Man of God") replace the university professor (the "Man of Letters") as the epitome of social

influence and cultural power. The transfer of the baton from one to the other, a profound transition in the basis of authority, has important ramifications for knowledge production, political rule, state legitimacy, and civil society not only in Nigeria, but also across other African countries experiencing a similar shift in authority. Universities established and owned by Pentecostal churches are an important part of this dynamic. In theory they are challenging the norms of secular education, but in reality they are all too susceptible to the same ethical and normative deformities for which secular (educational) institutions have become notorious.

CLASS DISMISSED

Since the country's return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigerian academics have gone on strike on 16 different occasions for a combined total of 1,594 days. In the past seven years alone, they have been on the picket lines for 567 days, suggesting that, the situation is not getting any better. The latest strike was finally called off in October 2022, after eight months. It is likely that we have not seen the last of these strike actions by the university teachers. Although the toll of such frequent disruptions on the quality of pedagogy and intellectual life is perennially lamented, there seems to be general agreement that nothing is wrong with the system that "adequate funding" cannot solve.

The emphasis on funding is not wrong, but if the foregoing account demonstrates anything, it is that funding might be the least of the Nigerian academy's problems. These woes have just as much to do with the delegitimizing of universities as centers of knowledge production and the erosion of the social standing of university professors as an authoritative class set apart from the rest of society. Any restorative strategies must take into account the fact that this erosion has taken place over a long period and has been precipitated by a complex combination of national, regional, and global forces. Nigeria badly needs its universities restored to their glory days. The survival of its young democracy may well depend on it. ■

“Overall, the Namibian government has been cautious in its handling of land redistribution, despite the fact that the gross inequalities in access to and possession of land are a reflection of earlier colonial expansion.”

Namibia's Intractable Land Question

ELLISON TJIRERA

In the course of about 106 years of colonial rule in what became Namibia (then known as South West Africa), historical accounts bear testimony to the fact that the fight against imperialism was by and large about land. From the Massacre of Hornkranz in 1893 to the Genocidal War of 1904–1908, the colonizers maneuvered to force the Indigenous people off their land and entrench their subjugation. The rinderpest epidemic of 1896–97 devastated livestock and impoverished the Herero and Nama communities, forcing some chiefs to “sell” land to the Germans. The context in which these sales took place was clouded by a climate of fear among Indigenous communities whose livelihoods had been decimated. A colonial dispensation is invariably one of power asymmetry, rendering any transaction decidedly one-sided.

In the initial period of German colonial penetration, inter-ethnic clashes between Ovaherero and Nama people made it difficult to form a united front against the colonizer. The Germans took advantage of rifts between Africans. In 1885, Ovaherero chief Maharero signed a protection treaty with Heinrich Göring, the newly arrived imperial commissioner for German South West Africa. Africans eventually took up arms against the Germans once such protection treaties were seen for what they were, a pretext for taking land from locals.

Every opportunity to expropriate land from the Africans was seized upon. Land was confiscated not only through violent means, but also by using fraudulent agreements signed with local chiefs. As if this were not enough, in 1903, the German imperial commissioner, Theodor Leutwein, declared that 75 percent of the land owned by Africans had to be sold to Europeans. The

remaining 25 percent would be designated as native reserves.

Land dispossession continued under South African rule after the Germans surrendered to invading South African and British forces in July 1915. Despite the fierce resistance of Indigenous communities, they were forced to vacate land they had reclaimed after the German departure so that white settlers could move in, and were then relocated to marginal areas. In 1962, the final phase of cementing racially structured land ownership was put in motion with the South African government's appointment of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs, commonly known as the Odendaal Commission.

Entrenching territorial apartheid, the Commission recommended the establishment of homelands for each black ethnic group. The division of land along racial lines was nothing new. In 1921, the Native Reserves Commission recommended that black settlements should be removed from what were regarded as European areas. Four decades later, the Odendaal Commission went a step further by adding the ethnic dimension to land distribution.

What stretches credulity in the post-independence era—though it is unsurprising given the prevailing legal architecture—is that these patterns of land distribution have remained largely undisturbed. Recent figures from the Namibia Statistics Agency reveal that previously advantaged farmers (read whites) own 27.9 million hectares (70 percent) of the freehold agricultural land, compared with 6.4 million hectares (16 percent) owned by previously disadvantaged (read black) farmers.

As a 2022 World Bank report notes, unequal land ownership perpetuates the historically high levels of income inequality in countries such as Namibia and South Africa. It is no wonder that these two countries remain the most unequal in the world.

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PATTERNS OF DISPOSSESSION

Land dispossession in Namibia continued almost seamlessly when South Africa took over the colony from Germany. The South Africans found a well-oiled state apparatus with which to proceed with forced expropriation of land from the Indigenous communities. There were other continuities between German rule and South Africa's occupation. As political analyst Phaniel Kaapama has observed, "The Republic of South Africa, just like [its] German predecessor, deployed similar administrative actions for the transplantation, adaptation and enforcement of foreign and colonial European legal discourses of property rights in land."

By all indications, these continuities have outlived both German and South African colonial rule. Their reverberations are felt in contemporary Namibia, particularly as far as the legal property regime is concerned.

From 1977 to 1982, the Western Contact Group (WCG)—which included three of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (the United States, Britain, and France), plus two non-permanent members (Canada and the Federal Republic of Germany)—led international diplomatic efforts to bring about Namibian independence. Its influence in shaping important elements of Namibia's 1990 constitution, the basis for the negotiation of the country's independence, cannot be overemphasized.

A key stumbling block that precluded the pursuance of radical socioeconomic transformation was the Security Council's imposition of a preliminary set of constitutional principles in 1982. Principle B5 set out fundamental human rights and freedoms, and prohibited any amendment that would repeal, diminish, or detract from them. One of those rights, with a direct bearing on the land question, related to "protection from arbitrary deprivation of private property without just compensation." This formed the basis for Article 16 of the 1990 Constitution, which reads:

1. All persons shall have the right in any part of Namibia to acquire, own and dispose of all forms of immovable and movable property individually or in association with others and to bequeath their property to their heirs or legatees: provided that Parliament may by legislation prohibit or regulate as it deems

expedient the right to acquire property by persons who are not Namibian citizens.

2. The State or a competent body or organ authorized by law may expropriate property in the public interest subject to the payment of just compensation, in accordance with requirements and procedures to be determined by Act of Parliament.

These provisions are seen by descendants of the dispossessed as instruments that protect ownership of land acquired by force during the colonial period. As a consequence of Article 16, the "willing seller, willing buyer" (WSWB) principle became the cornerstone of land acquisition by the state for the purpose of redistribution. To say that this acquisition approach has yielded less than satisfactory results would be an understatement. The WSWB principle is a crude market-driven vehicle, inimical to structural transformation. It has contributed to the escalation of farmland prices well above the land's productive capacity, since sellers inflate the value of their properties.

The WSWB principle had already failed spectacularly in the case of Zimbabwe, where the Lancaster House constitutional provisions of 1979 obligated the independent state to acquire land on a WSWB basis.

The land offered to the government was expensive and marginal, making it difficult to bring about any meaningful land redistribution. As land supply failed to match demand, the WSWB principle came to be seen by many as an instrument for protecting landowners and paying lip service to those dispossessed by the colonial system. Zimbabwe then took the radical path of forced land expropriation without compensation. The Fast Track Land Reform Program formally began with the Land Acquisition Act of 2002. Though this program polarized opinions and its effectiveness is undetermined, the foremost Zimbabwean land expert, Sam Moyo, notes that "[f]ast track land redistribution reversed racial patterns of land ownership and broadened access to land across ethnically diverse provinces, while replacing most private agricultural property rights with land user rights on public property."

Overall, the Namibian government has been cautious in its handling of land redistribution, despite the fact that the gross inequalities in access to and possession of land are a reflection of earlier

There were continuities between German rule and South Africa's occupation.

colonial expansion. This cautious approach has dimly failed to address the land question in any meaningful way. Any proposal of radical alternatives is almost immediately shunned by the state and big landowners, yet preserving the status quo is untenable in the long run. Difficult conversations need to be held, and painful decisions must be made to prevent a festering wound from becoming malignant.

It must be recognized that the WSWB approach has failed. Yet a radical path such as Zimbabwe's runs the risk of encroaching on equally important rights and freedoms. Nonetheless, calls for land grabbing from certain quarters of society cannot be ignored for much longer. Many political and economic elites own several farms, whereas the majority of the population is land hungry. For a start, owning more than one farm should be made illegal.

BALANCE OF FORCES

To signal the centrality of land reform for an independent and potentially transformed Namibia, the First National Land Conference was held in Windhoek in 1991, a year after the country attained political independence. This conference was attended by no fewer than 500 delegates from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including government officials, traditional leaders, academics, and civil society organizations. It was intended to provide a platform for fostering national consensus on the volatile postcolonial land question.

The conference came up with a number of recommendations, such as distributing commercial farmland on the basis of WSWB, introducing a land tax, eliminating foreign-owned land and absentee landlordship, and reallocating underutilized land. But ancestral land claims were regarded as too cumbersome and complex to be addressed.

Twenty-seven years passed before the Second National Land Conference was held, again in Windhoek. In between the two conferences came a number of policy initiatives aimed at redistribution. These include the National Resettlement Programme and the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme (AALS). The former involves the acquisition of freehold farms by the state and their transformation into small farming units for qualifying beneficiaries. Under the AALS, Namibians with the necessary assets are given incentives to buy commercial farms, such as subsidized loans. These two

instruments of land reform have delivered results that leave much to be desired.

Implementing the various resolutions adopted at the two national land conferences has proved difficult over the years. Most of the measures set out in the resolutions adopted at the 1991 conference did not see the light of day. Of the 177 resolutions adopted at the Second Land Conference, only nine were implemented between 2018 and 2020. As the most recent (2018) land ownership statistics indicate, the process of acquiring land for resettlement has proceeded at a snail's pace.

The Second National Land Conference resolved to abolish the WSWB doctrine and replace it with "alternative acquisition methods." The fact that these alternative methods were left unspecified is revealing of the flippancy pervading land reform policy. Two years after that conference, the government backpedaled on the abolition of the WSWB principle. What informed this reversal? A progress report issued by the Office of the Prime Minister in December 2020 stated:

Government consulted thoroughly on the implementation of this resolution and found that Willing Seller–Willing Buyer is entrenched in Article 16 of the Constitution that bestows persons with the right to sell and buy property in Namibia. This means that the express deletion of the principle of Willing Seller–Willing Buyer from the [Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act (No. 6 of 1995)] would be a futile exercise as the right to buy and sell will remain entrenched in Article 16.

In light of the foregoing, it appears that what has been identified as an impediment to an accelerated land reform process has been decreed to remain in place eternally, no matter what alternatives might be proposed. One wonders why a resolution that was destined to hit a constitutional brick wall was adopted in the first place.

With regard to developing "alternative acquisition methods," the progress report states that "[so] far the market has delivered land for acquisition." This observation is contestable, for the market seems to be crudely distorted by sellers, making land acquisition a very expensive undertaking. The political balance of forces remains stacked against the landless and the dispossessed.

The 2018 Ovaherero Traditional Authority Position Paper on Land and Related Matters—which was submitted to the Second National Land Conference—singled out WSWB as one of the legal

constraints that slows down the restitution process and increases its cost. In the eyes of descendants of the victims of settler colonialism, the international community's imposition of the 1982 constitutional principles provided an alibi for protecting vested interests that were established through colonial theft and plunder. This flies in the face of calls for pursuing meaningful national reconciliation based on principles of restorative justice.

THE URBAN TURN

Although the mushrooming of slums has become a noticeable feature of most urban centers across Namibia, it was not until very recently that urban land featured in the national discourse. Whenever discussion of land reform or the "land question" is conducted, most Namibians from all walks of life tend to assume that it concerns commercial and communal land. This framing of land reform is by no means an accident. It has been shaped by the way land issues are approached at the national level.

It is worth noting that none of the 24 resolutions adopted at the 1991 land conference addressed the status of urban land even remotely. In fact, all the resolutions were grouped under the rubrics of either "commercial land" or "communal areas." As events of the past few years have shown, this has proved to be a simplistic reading of the land question.

This state of omission is what the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) movement has sought to address since entering the fray in 2014. In the following year, the group organized a mass mobilization of land applications in Windhoek and other cities in Namibia. This action brought the plight of the urban poor into sharp focus, drawing attention to a hitherto neglected dimension in the broader land question. In 2015, AR was granted an audience with President Hage Geingob, and the government made a commitment to provide public services to 200,000 plots of urban land countrywide.

In 2021, AR took the government to court for having failed to honor the agreement. The High Court dismissed the government's argument that the pact was unenforceable. As for the mass land applications launched under the AR banner, nothing tangible has come of the exercise.

The Second National Land Conference of 2018 had a thematic area of discussion titled "Urban Land Reform Programs and Related Matters." This area included about 56 resolutions dealing with matters such as housing prices, the problem of tenure insecurity in urban informal settlements, the need for town land expansion through extension of municipal boundaries, and compensation.

Although the issue of urban land has entered the public discourse, many challenges remain when it comes to the delivery of affordable land, provided with basic services like sewage, water, and electricity, that would allow low-income residents to build or expand houses. The problem is compounded by the absence of security of tenure for the majority of residents in informal settlements. This discourages them from investing in incremental upgrading of their dwellings, since illegal structures invite evictions and demolitions.

GENOCIDE 'REPARATIONS' AND LAND

There is no denying that the issue of historical land dispossession in Namibia is intricately linked to the Herero–Nama Genocide of 1904–1908, in which no less than 80 percent of Ovaherero and at least 50 percent of Nama people were killed. It took more than a century until Germany finally admitted in 2015 that the extermination order and the subsequent atrocities in German South West Africa were tantamount to genocide. This statement came about as a result of pressure from civil society organizations, the Namibian state, and representatives of the victims' descendants.

Despite protracted negotiations over a formal acknowledgment and reparations for this genocide, the May 2021 Joint Declaration (JD) by the Namibian and German governments did not bring any closure to this ugly period of Namibia's colonial history. The JD has drawn much criticism ever since it was put before the National Assembly for debate. Part of the problem is that the agreement calls for Germany to provide over 1 billion euros in development assistance in parts of the country populated by the descendants of the victims, but without using the term "reparations." Instead, the JD is couched in the language of "reconciliation and reconstruction."

*The process of acquiring land
for resettlement has proceeded
at a snail's pace.*

The declaration skirts the matter of land reform and offers nothing new on this issue. Clause 16—the only clause dealing with land—reads:

A separate and unique reconstruction and development support programme will be set up by both Governments to assist the development of descendants of the particularly affected communities, in line with their identified needs. Representatives of these communities will participate in this process in a decisive capacity. Under this programme, projects will be implemented in the following regions: Erongo, Hardap, ǀKharas, Khomas, Kunene, Omaheke, and Otjozondjupa. The projects will include the following sectors: Land Reform, in particular Land Acquisition, within the framework of the Namibian Constitution, and Land Development, Agriculture, Rural Livelihoods and Natural Resources, Rural Infrastructure, Energy and Water Supply, Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

All these areas of focus are already part of Namibian government programs across various ministries. Land reform-related matters such as agriculture, rural infrastructure, and water supply are some of the key responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water, and Land Reform.

A group of Herero and Nama representatives recently filed a lawsuit to block further discussion of Namibia's agreement with Germany in parliament, which could lead to its subsequent adoption and ratification. The descendants claim that the JD is illegal because it would not provide them with direct compensation. They have also argued that their representatives were not adequately included in the negotiations. Parliamentary debate on the measure has come to a complete halt.

ELITE CAPTURE

More than a century after the end of colonialism, the land ownership patterns that it bequeathed to contemporary Namibia are still difficult to dislodge. Hopes for radical change will remain a mirage as long as a legal stranglehold maintains the status quo. This enduring inequality is compounded by elite capture of opportunities created by the redistribution of land at taxpayers' expense. The politically well-connected own huge tracts of land, while the majority is squeezed into crowded communal areas.

In 2018, the Ministry of Land Reform had to be threatened with legal action to release the list of land resettlement beneficiaries after a public outcry that the process had been hijacked by political elites and their cronies. Before the independent Office of the Ombudsman said it would file for an injunction, a high-ranking ministry official claimed that releasing the list would stoke tribal tensions. This episode gave credence to the perception that the majority ethnic group, the Aawambo, tend to take precedence in land resettlement programs, even though they were not among those who were dispossessed of land.

Elite capture of land resettlement initiatives has ensured a lackadaisical approach to the land question in Namibia. Political elites are the beneficiaries of the gridlock that besets land redistribution. Allowing that stasis to continue might make political sense for those in power, whose election campaigns can point to a problem in need of solving.

This status quo allows unequal patterns of land distribution to persist. The acquisition methods tried thus far have failed to deliver for the land hungry. Genuinely alternative approaches to the land question have yet to be conceived. What exists at the moment is smoke and mirrors. ■

“African women have helped shape African and even global norms on gender policy for over half a century, particularly since the 1990s.”

The Expansion of Women’s Rights in Africa

AILI MARI TRIPP

Two decades ago, at a July 2003 meeting in Mozambique’s capital, the African Union (AU) adopted a landmark agreement on women’s rights, the Maputo Protocol. The legally binding treaty, whose official name is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, took effect less than three years later, on November 25, 2005, after meeting the threshold of ratification by 15 member states. It was the quickest adoption ever for an AU treaty. To date, 42 countries have signed and ratified the protocol. The 13 AU member states that have yet to take that step are facing increasing pressure to do so.

The protocol vows to “combat all forms of discrimination against women through legislative, institutional, and other measures.” It includes provisions on women’s rights to dignity, physical integrity, education, health, economic and social welfare, and protection in armed conflicts. It also addresses equal rights in marriage and divorce, access to justice and political rights, and the elimination of harmful practices. Since its ratification, the treaty has been used throughout Africa to protect women facing various types of abuse, to defend women’s rights that are under threat, and to press for legal reforms. (A March 24, 2021, post on EqualityNow.org offers examples.)

African women have made great strides to advance their status over the past two decades. Yet there are still many challenges to overcome. Progress toward eliminating gaps in women’s rights in politics, economics, education, and health has stalled globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Africa is no exception, according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index.

Nevertheless, Rwanda and Namibia rank among the world’s ten most gender-equal countries, and

Sub-Saharan Africa has registered some of the highest rates of improvement in women’s economic empowerment. Among world regions, Africa has achieved the highest levels of gender parity in labor force participation. African women have also been at the forefront of global efforts to increase female representation in political and business leadership, peacebuilding, and other areas. But Africa ranks lowest in closing the gender gap in education, despite major gains at the primary school level.

One of the most conspicuous indications of change has been the proliferation of constitutional provisions on women’s rights, which has had repercussions for legal reform. Since the independence movements of the early 1960s, the number of provisions relating to women’s rights in African constitutions has increased nearly eightfold. Some of the most notable measures have been adopted in the past two decades.

All African countries except Liberia have fundamentally revised or rewritten their constitutions since 1990. On average, African constitutions now have more references to women’s rights than constitutions in any other world region, according to an analysis of UN Women’s Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database.

These constitutions include clauses on gender equality and quotas, discrimination, customary law, violence against women, and citizenship rights. The most prevalent reforms address equality and discrimination, as well as women’s political leadership and labor rights. The areas that have seen the least constitutional and legislative reform pertain to customary and family law.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Although the Maputo Protocol spurred many changes in pursuit of gender equality, African women have helped shape African and even global norms on gender policy for over half

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a century, particularly since the 1990s. The reforms in the past two decades can be attributed to political liberalization and the end of many civil conflicts, which opened up space for women's mobilization in Africa. Broader international and regional movements promoting gender equality also contributed to the reforms. So did the legitimating strategies of African states, which sometimes seek to instrumentalize women's rights and leadership, mainly to deflect attention from their human rights abuses and nondemocratic practices.

The first international treaty that addressed women's rights globally was the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). All African countries except Sudan and Somalia are parties to CEDAW. The United Nations' Fourth Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing, adopted a Platform of Action encouraging member states to promote women's leadership in all areas across society, including politics. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 called for incorporating women in all peacebuilding and peacemaking activities.

Women's rights associations have also relied on African regional treaties to advance women's status. The Southern African Development Community and, to a lesser extent, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have set goals to increase female representation in their member states and to address other women's rights concerns.

Structural factors also help explain the increased attention to women's rights in Africa. One-party regimes began to crumble across the continent in the 1990s and were replaced by new multiparty systems. This opened space for civil society actors, a more unrestrained press, and more political rights and civil liberties. Such political openings allowed women's organizations and movements to flourish.

What often emerged in both democracies and autocracies, however, was a political system in which one party remained dominant and entrenched in power for long periods. In fact, countries with such parties, including Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, and Namibia, tended to be more successful in advancing women leaders. Sometimes those states instrumentalized prominent women to gain both international and

domestic legitimacy. Nonetheless, authoritarian countries with entrenched ruling parties like Rwanda, Burundi, and Zimbabwe have recorded some of the world's lowest gender gaps in education, health, political representation, and economic opportunities, according to the World Economic Forum.

Prior to the 1990s, women's mobilization, often with the encouragement of ruling parties, was largely focused on developmental and welfare initiatives in areas such as income generation, community health, child rearing, and other domestic concerns. In the course of political liberalization after the 1990s, women's organizations in many countries became increasingly independent of governments and dominant political parties. Women activists began to acquire their own resources, select their own leaders, and forge their own agendas. New women's networks and conferences were organized around a broader agenda that included gender-based violence, peace, the environment, and reproductive rights.

Women's organizations were formed to improve leadership skills, encourage political involvement, press for legislative changes, and conduct civic education. Although the older welfare-oriented and developmental agendas persist to this day, so does this newer emphasis on women's political participation, leadership, and advocacy.

Where women's movements lost momentum, however, declines in political representation followed. Democratic Botswana is a case in point. A women's movement led by Emang Besadi was active in the 1990s and made modest legislative gains. But by the 2000s, the movement had, by all accounts, become anemic due to drops in donor funding, internal difficulties, and the hemorrhaging of leaders of women's organizations to government posts. As pressure for change diminished, the level of female representation in Botswana's legislature dropped from 17 percent in 2005 to 10.8 percent in 2020, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The other development that gave rise to increased female political representation was the decline of armed conflicts in many African countries, mainly after 2000. Peace provided the stability that allowed governments to focus on increasing female representation and women's

African women have made great strides over the past two decades.

rights activists to press for change. Post-conflict countries today have twice as many female members of parliament as countries that did not experience major conflict. They have also enacted more constitutional reforms and taken quicker action on women's rights legislation.

The cessation of conflict enabled newcomers, including women, to enter politics. Peace talks provided an opening for women activists to demand change. Women were united by shared wartime experiences of gender-based violence, loss of land and livelihoods, and lack of leadership opportunities. International actors like the UN Fund for Women and its successor UN Women often supported their efforts.

As a result, women's rights language has been included in proportionately more peace agreements in Africa than anywhere else in the world. The peace agreements were often precursors to constitutional reforms. Expansive provisions for women's rights in post-conflict constitutions in turn paved the way for legislative reforms.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVANCES

Efforts by activists to improve women's economic status in Africa have focused on increasing access to credit and microcredit, reforming laws on land and inheritance, and gender budgeting—the practice of considering the gender implications of funding allocations when drawing up government budgets. Today, African women also rank among global business leaders. Networks of businesswomen have played a role in bringing about these advances.

Africa is a world leader in women starting businesses, with almost equal numbers of male and female entrepreneurs. Female-owned startups are as profitable as male-owned counterparts. The African Development Bank regards female-led startups as key drivers of economic development, contributing to job creation and financial integration across the continent. Women make up the bulk of Africa's self-employed population (58 percent), perhaps because they face extra challenges in finding jobs.

According to the World Bank, businesses owned by women across Sub-Saharan Africa earn 34 percent less in profits than businesses owned by men. Nevertheless, according to the 2022 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs, which looks at 65 economies around the world, women in countries like Nigeria and Uganda were more engaged in entrepreneurial activities than men.

In Madagascar and Malawi, the gender gaps in the entrepreneurial activity rate were among the smallest globally.

The number of women chief executives has been increasing exponentially in Africa. A 2022 study by Africa.com found that the number of women CEOs of African businesses with revenue of \$100 million or more had increased by 50 percent over the past year. The percentage of women on corporate boards is even higher. The world average is 17 percent, whereas in Africa, women hold one in four board seats. This places the continent ahead of other world regions, including Europe, according to a 2019 McKinsey Global Institute report. Surprisingly, Togo has the highest share globally of women in senior roles in the labor force, at 70.1 percent, according to the World Economic Forum.

Women are also breaking ground in finance. A Ugandan businesswoman and educator, Edigold Monday, became the first woman to direct a top Africa-wide bank, the Bank of Africa, in 2008. Standard Bank, Africa's biggest lender, appointed South Africa's Nonkululeko Nyembezi as its first female chair in 2022.

Before becoming director-general of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2021, Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala worked for 25 years as a development economist at the World Bank, rising to the institution's second highest-ranking position. She also held several ministerial posts in Nigeria, serving as finance minister from 2011 to 2015.

TOWARD WORKPLACE EQUALITY

Women in Africa have improved their legal rights and conditions in the workplace. From 2000 to 2022, they jumped 2.5 times in World Bank ratings, and now exceed the world average. Burundi and Algeria now rank among the five countries with the world's highest wage equality ratings for similar work, according to the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Equality Index.

According to the annual World Bank report on "Women, Business, and the Law," the number of African countries with legislation addressing equal pay tripled from 2000 to 2021. Almost all African countries (45) now have legislation prohibiting gender discrimination in employment, compared with 18 in 2000. Forty countries have legislation against sexual harassment today, compared with only 9 in 2000. Despite these gains, Sub-Saharan

Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) still have the lowest levels of income gender parity of all world regions, at approximately 23 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

Mobility is key to women's independence, well-being, and ability to work. It has to do with the rights of women to choose where to live and work, and the freedom to leave the home and travel without constraint. Mobility has been fairly steady in most parts of the world, but not in Africa and the MENA region, where it has increased substantially over the past two decades, according to the World Bank. Gabon, for example, reformed its civil code to allow both spouses to choose the marital home and establish separate homes. In the past, the choice of the family residence was the prerogative of the man.

EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

In 2000, according to UNESCO, only 44 percent of girls in Africa had completed primary education, but by 2020, that figure had risen to 66 percent, exceeding the rate for boys (61 percent). The gender gap is still closing at the secondary and tertiary levels. The percentage of both male and female students enrolled in tertiary institutions almost doubled between 2000 and 2020. In countries including Mauritius, Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Algeria, and Tunisia, there are now significantly more female than male university students.

With more girls in schools, female literacy rates have increased from 47 percent in 2000 to 61 percent in 2020. These figures, which are low by world standards, primarily reflect the fact that older women did not have opportunities to go to school when they were young.

One of the biggest challenges in female education is teenage pregnancy and motherhood. As of 2022, at least 38 AU countries had adopted measures to protect the right to education for pregnant students and young mothers. But pregnant girls in nearly one-third of African countries continue to face restrictions on access to schooling. Many pregnancies are linked to sexual violence, child marriage, and poor access to health services. Confinement as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns exacerbated the problem of teenage pregnancy.

In recent years, governments in Sierra Leone, Niger, the Central African Republic, Tanzania,

Burkina Faso, and Togo have removed legal obstacles that prevented pregnant girls or young mothers from attending formal schools. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, a regional quasi-judicial organ of the AU, ruled in 2022 that Tanzania must stop expelling students who are pregnant or are mothers from school because doing so violates their human rights.

This landmark case will have widespread implications across the continent. Although the ruling is directed at Tanzania, all 49 countries that have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child must abide by the decision.

COMBATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The Maputo Protocol has been used to force governments to take action to protect women against sexual violence. In 2020, the High Court of Kenya drew on the protocol to find the government liable for failing to investigate and prosecute sexual and gender-based violence that erupted after the 2007 elections. Four survivors who sought redress were awarded compensation.

In Egypt, four women who were physically and sexually assaulted in a 2005 demonstration calling for reform of electoral laws reported the case to the Public Prosecution Office. It refused to follow up with an investigation. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights found Egypt to be in violation of the African Charter and urged the government to ratify the Maputo Protocol.

In Nigeria, four women won a case at the ECOWAS Court of Justice in 2017, holding the government responsible for verbal, physical, and sexual assault, threats, and unlawful detention they suffered simply for walking the streets at night. The court found that police officers, military personnel, and staffers from a government agency, the Abuja Environmental Protection Board, abducted the women and forced them into prostitution and child labor. The court ruled that the Nigerian state had violated the Maputo Protocol, the African Charter, CEDAW, and other international human rights instruments. This was the first time a regional or human rights court had held a state in violation of its obligation to protect women's rights under the Maputo Protocol.

*New constitutions have
incorporated women's
rights provisions.*

RISING REPRESENTATION

African women have become world leaders in female political representation. Across the continent, women's share of parliamentary seats slowly increased after independence, and then shot up after 1995. Today, female representation in national legislatures (lower house or unicameral) is three times higher than it was in 1995. Women's movements and coalitions have been key advocates of increasing representation. They have often pushed for the adoption of affirmative action measures to set gender quotas in legislatures and other bodies.

Rwanda's women parliamentarians were the first in the world to hold more than 50 percent of legislative seats. Today, they claim 61 percent of the seats in the national legislature, the highest share in the world. One-fifth of African parliaments have female speakers of the house, well above the world average of 14 percent.

Women began to claim positions in crucial government ministries (such as defense, finance, and foreign affairs) across the continent and increasingly ran for executive positions after 2010. Women now hold at least half of ministerial posts in Rwanda (54 percent) and Guinea Bissau (50 percent), and over 40 percent in South Africa, Ethiopia, the Seychelles, Mozambique, and Angola. Women comprise one-fifth of Africa's foreign ministers, more than in any other world region. Over one-third (10 of 29) of all female foreign ministers globally were found in Africa in 2022.

After the 1990s, more women also began forming political parties in countries such as Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, and Zimbabwe. Today, women serve as leaders or secretaries-general of parties throughout Africa.

In many African countries, traditional authorities exist alongside state institutions. Women have been marginalized in most of these traditional bodies, but some of the patterns of increased female political representation in formal institutions have been seen in traditional governance as well. In a notable example, Mosadi Seboko became the first female paramount chief in Botswana in 2004. When her brother died, she was next in the line of succession, but her father's relatives initially denied her the position because of her sex. Her female relatives argued that the Botswana constitution prevented such discrimination, and she was eventually elevated to the chieftaincy. Seboko, a women's rights advocate, had previously served as head of the 16-member House of Chiefs, which advises the government and parliament on traditional issues.

African women have not only played leading roles within their own countries, they have also become visible on the international stage. Okonjo-Iweala currently heads the WTO. Tanzanian women's rights activist Anna Tibaijuka served as an under-secretary-general of the UN and executive director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UNHABITAT) from 2006 to 2010. Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, another Tanzanian, was UN deputy secretary-general from 2007 to 2012. Nigeria's Amina Mohammed has held the same post, as well as serving as chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group, since 2017.

Mauritian-British lawyer and women's rights activist Pramila Patten currently is the UN special representative on sexual violence in conflict and a UN under-secretary-general. South Africa's Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka was executive director of UN Women from 2013 to 2021, with the rank of UN under-secretary-general. Under her leadership, UN Women launched the HeForShe campaign, a global effort that seeks to involve men and boys in achieving equality by taking action against negative gender stereotypes and behaviors. Mlambo-Ngcuka also sought to increase women's participation in peacekeeping operations.

Women have also held positions in major African regional bodies. South Africa's Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma was elected by the AU Commission to serve as its chairperson from 2012 to 2017, making her the first woman to lead the AU's executive body.

FAMILY LAWS AND HEALTH

Progress on women's rights has been much weaker in the domain of family law. In the past two decades, the number of African countries that have reformed their laws to allow daughters equal inheritance rights has increased by only 5, for a total of 27, according to the World Bank. Over that period, only 3 more African countries have changed their laws to grant surviving female spouses equal inheritance rights, for a total of 34.

The Maputo Protocol has been a source of pressure on governments in this area. In 2011, the Malian legislature passed a Persons and Family Code that set the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys. But it did not require proof of consent to marriage and gave precedence to religious and customary law regarding inheritance rights. In 2018, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ruled that the code violated international human rights standards and found

the government in violation of the Maputo Protocol on the minimum age of marriage, consent to marriage, and right to inheritance.

In South Africa, after a woman was denied access to her brother's estate, though he had no children, wife, or living parents or grandparents, the case went to the country's Constitutional Court. It ruled in 2004 that the relevant law, section 23 of the Black Administration Act, was discriminatory, and that excluding women from inheritance violates provisions in the South African Constitution calling for equality and nondiscrimination. The petitioner was declared the sole heir of her deceased brother's estate. The law was repealed in 2005.

The Maputo Protocol has also been invoked to protect women's rights in cases involving harmful customary practices. In 2021, the Kenyan Constitutional Court referred to the protocol when it upheld the legality of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act, which was challenged by a medical doctor who said it violated the rights of women who endorsed FGM.

The protocol has also been used to press for legal reform in this area. For example, the Constitutional Court in Uganda held in 2010 that FGM must be prohibited as a harmful cultural practice that violates women's rights. It results in chronic pain, decreased sexual pleasure, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as an increased risk of childbirth complications. The ruling led to the passage of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act later in 2010.

In several key areas, African women's health has improved over the past two decades. The Maputo Protocol is the only international treaty that addresses abortion rights. Although it is relatively restrictive on this issue by international standards, the protocol is credited with having helped ease limits on abortion in Africa. It allows for abortion in cases of rape, incest, and "where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus."

Seven countries have enacted reforms that meet, and in one case exceed, the protocol's provisions. But the overwhelming majority of African women live in 43 countries with highly or moderately restrictive abortion laws. Six countries ban abortion under all circumstances.

These restrictions have no impact on the prevalence of abortion, but they do affect women's health. In Africa, 77 percent of abortions are

unsafe, compared with the global average of 45 percent. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest abortion fatality rate in the world, with roughly 185 deaths per 100,000 abortions in 2019, according to the Guttmacher Institute. This is due to the lack of legal protections and the stigma associated with abortion. In South Africa, within seven years of the legalization of abortion in 1997, the number of women who died from complications due to abortion declined by 90 percent.

Life expectancy for African women has increased, from 56.43 years on average in 2000 to 65.89 in 2020. This reflects an overall improvement in health for women. Maternal mortality is one area where women's health has improved in most countries. It decreased from 870 per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 534 in 2017, due to improved prenatal care and health care for women. But Chad, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan still have maternal mortality rates over 1,000, the highest in the world.

CHANGING NORMS

The African Union, through the Maputo Protocol, has played an important role since 2003 in helping legal advocates challenge government practices and laws that run counter to gender equality. The protocol's adoption reflected changes that had taken place at the regional level concerning gender norms.

Many of these changes resulted from reforms enacted after 1990 as African countries opened up politically and underwent democratization. With the decline in major conflicts, especially after 2000, women's rights expanded further. Post-conflict countries have attained some of the highest rates of women's political representation in Africa and the world.

The Maputo Protocol also reflects changing international norms that resulted in pressure on governments to make progress on women's rights. This led to constitutional and legislative reforms and changes in practice with respect to gender equality in the workplace, business, education, health, politics, and many other areas.

Thanks to such changes, African women have made substantial advances since the adoption of the Maputo Protocol in economic empowerment, labor force participation, and political and business leadership. Yet there are still hurdles to be overcome, particularly in enforcing laws and changing practices related to family law, abortion, and female genital mutilation. ■

“Attention to developmental outcomes for mineral-rich countries has once again offered a much bigger space in which to position Africa’s mining sector as a medium of employment and job creation.”

Mining and the Quagmire of Job Creation in Africa

NELSON OPPONG

Over the past three decades, an investment boom propelled by sustained liberal reforms and a new scramble for mineral resources by China and Western countries such as Canada and Australia has led to a renewed focus on job creation in Africa’s mining sector. Results from Afro Barometer surveys in recent years indicate that Africans are viewing mining more favorably as a source of employment and local development. This optimism has inspired a fresh wave of multi-stakeholder compacts—regional and national policy initiatives designed to use a mix of binding and incentive-based principles to position mining as a motor for inclusive development and job creation.

These interventions have opened a new area in Africa’s regulatory landscape, challenging the long-held dogma of the 1980s that depicted mineral extraction as a capital-intensive industry rather than one serving as a tool for pursuing full employment. Yet early signs suggest that expectations of a labor-intensive mining sector may be unfounded. Employment targets across the continent continue to be missed, whereas the expanded embrace of digital technologies stirs anxieties about the future of work and employment.

These mixed signals echo the history of failed development schemes to address the imbalance between capital investments and job creation in Africa’s mining sector. There is a danger that this renewed enthusiasm for the sector could become a detour from more sustainable avenues of development.

THE EMPLOYMENT DISCONNECT

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, many countries have recently posted strong economic growth numbers. The region’s annual growth rate peaked at 6.6 percent in 2004 and was 4.1 percent in 2021, according to the World Bank. But this growth has failed to create enough jobs to absorb the rapid expansion of the labor force.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) in its publication *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2019*, unemployment rates ranged from 6 percent in Nigeria to 18.2 percent in Botswana and 27.3 percent in South Africa. Pandemic-related shutdowns and disruptions to supply chains since 2020 have compounded the problem. Even in areas where employment demand is met, a combination of poor remuneration, generally undeveloped social security systems, and gaps in formal regulation has plunged marginalized groups, especially women, into precarious labor conditions. Trends in the mining sector show a sharp disconnect between high growth and job precariousness.

In low- and middle-income countries, as outlined in the *Role of Mining in National Economies* report issued in 2016 by the International Council on Mining and Metals, foreign direct investment and exports are the dominant contributors to the economies of mining countries. Conversely, the sector’s share of total employment, estimated at 1 to 2 percent per country, remains generally small and highly skewed toward the informal artisanal and small-scale mining subsector. South Africa, despite posting a 23.8 percent increase in gold, iron ore, and coal exports between 2007 and 2016, has seen its total employment decline.

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The number of artisanal miners worldwide has been rising and was projected to reach 200 million by 2020, accounting for about 20 percent of the global gold and diamond supply, according to the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Sustainable Development (IGF). In Africa, artisanal mining operators number more than 9 million, and the livelihoods of almost 59 million people depend on the subsector. Despite sustained efforts to bring artisanal mining under formal regulatory structures, it remains a largely informal and labor-intensive venture.

An analytical divide in the academic literature has focused on the discrepancy between investment flow and employment in the mining sector. For skeptics, mining operations foster the emergence of an enclave economic structure that is often delinked from the local economy. These scholars view mining as a “zero-sum” activity that thrives on an “extractivist logic,” to the detriment of communities, the environment, and employment. They point out the paltry share of revenue allocated to national and local governments and the disruptions to the environment and livelihoods that stem from mining activities. Recent critiques have highlighted the dire implications of these trends for job creation, noting how the proliferation of new technologies undermines employment and the mining sector’s already precarious labor conditions.

A more optimistic tone, shared within the policy community, is struck by other analysts who argue that mining operations have important linkages to economic transformation through the mineral supply chain. Employment from mining investment is generated through direct and indirect means, or via induced effects. Direct employment mostly involves employees and on-site contractors, whereas indirect employment includes off-site contractors, suppliers and their workers, and jobs that arise from social investment activities, especially those of corporate social responsibility programs. Induced employment stems from the broader yields of all such jobs, such as spending leading to local business growth.

The ILO has estimated that indirect and induced jobs provide up to six times more employment than formal direct jobs in the mining sector. In a 2016 study exploring structural shifts resulting from the rapid expansion of mining in Sub-Saharan Africa,

Andreas Kotsadam and Anja Tolonen observed that the opening of mines led to a decrease in labor force participation within a 20-kilometer radius, partly due to effects on agricultural employment, but it offered new employment opportunities for women, especially in the services sector. Another study, focusing on the employment effects of mining in some of Australia’s sub-state regions, found that although mining supports employment in local transport and accommodation services, such effects are not significant in tradable good sectors like manufacturing and agriculture. Tracking employment across these multiple channels is necessary to understand the differential impact of mining on employment for various groups, as well as on the other sectors linked to the mining value chain.

The normative and policy tools that underpin the current social compact for mining are often motivated by a desire to strike a balance between investment and employment. In low-income, mineral-rich countries, these expectations have been fueled by the success of mining-led development in advanced economies like Australia and Canada, where standard “best practices” are often disseminated through multilateral and bilateral initiatives such as the IGF. Across Africa, the question of the moment is whether these initiatives can help reverse the structural limitations imposed by historical trends of employment marginalization, and address the uncertainty engendered by the proliferation of new technologies in the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution.

SOVEREIGN AMBITIONS

In the early 1960s, most of the nationalist leaders who assumed power in Africa’s newly independent countries vowed to reverse colonial patterns of development through aggressive policies of import substitution, industrialization, and state participation in the economy. In line with this “big push” strategy, many African states adopted long-term development plans in a broader effort to channel national independence efforts into rapid improvement of living standards and economic capacity. The first phase of mining reforms after independence in the early 1960s was geared toward positioning the sector as a hub of employment and social development by asserting national sovereignty over mineral wealth.

*Mining nationalism soon ran
into difficulties.*

The newly independent states were handed a major boost by the emerging principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, which evolved through various United Nations General Assembly resolutions from the 1950s to the early 1960s, culminating in the adoption of the landmark Resolution 1803. These measures were a response to newly independent, resource-rich countries' demands to renegotiate concession agreements that had been signed by the erstwhile colonial regimes. Resolution 1803, among others, conferred on states the right to explore and exploit their natural resources, regulate foreign investment, and settle disputes on the basis of national law, rather than the laws of former colonizers. It affirmed, "The right of peoples and nations to permanent sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources must be exercised in the interest of their national development and of the well-being of the people of the State concerned."

Affirmations of permanent sovereignty reverberated across mineral-rich countries in Africa. Most nationalist governments followed up with demands for the payment of taxes by mining companies, acquisitions of equity shares in mining concessions, and, in some instances, renegotiation of agreements that had been struck between mining firms and colonial administrations. With the exception of a few countries where private investment was substantial, like Namibia, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, by the mid-1980s most governments across the region held major shares of the production and management of mineral resources, through either state-owned enterprises or joint ventures with private companies.

Although several mining codes lacked explicit provisions on employment, nationalization of the sector was part of a grand strategy to use mineral resources to promote industrialization and nonagricultural employment. In the UN's 1964 *World Economic Survey*, an appraisal of development plans across the world, including eight African countries, noted explicit targets and policies regarding employment, such as commitments to provide training to increase output in the industrial sector. In addition to investments in training and education to fill gaps in manpower needs, most countries launched special employment-creating projects, particularly processing facilities for minerals and other commodities.

Ghana's Seven-Year Development Plan (1963–70) was typical of this approach to mining-led employment. Two years before the plan was

issued, the government decided to acquire the assets of five mining operations for the State Mining Corporation. British companies had offered to sell their mines because of rising production costs and the low price of gold. The Development Plan envisaged projects that included refinery plants for gold, manganese, and aluminum, along with diamond dredging and polishing. It stated, "The first aim of mineral development policy in the next seven years must therefore be to promote an improved performance in the industry in terms of production, exports and employment."

Overall, postcolonial attempts to absorb the labor force into the mining sector relied on a clustered approach that positioned the state as the primary driver of the linkages between mineral development and industrial development. Within this largely state-controlled approach, employment guarantees were backed with the provision of housing and other social facilities for workers in mining operations. But mining nationalism soon ran into difficulties as African states suffered from shortages and inflation, exhaustion of foreign reserves, nonperforming state-owned enterprises, stagnating agricultural growth, and unemployment.

Between 1960 and 1987, Africa's share of world mineral production fell (apart from bauxite, uranium, and rutile), lagging behind Asia and Latin America in terms of production and export value. The decline in output and the absence of any significant investments raised bigger questions about the role of the state in driving development. Following the introduction of structural adjustment programs by the World Bank in the early 1980s, African governments came under enormous pressure to reorient mining away from its largely labor-intensive structure.

COSTS OF LIBERALIZATION

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Africa's mining sector underwent a new wave of reforms of the regulatory and legal architecture, aimed at building a more favorable environment for private investment. Responding to general dissatisfaction with state participation and the effects of regulatory rigidities on the mining sector, the reforms were intended to reverse the overall decline in production, control inflation, liberalize imports and exports, eliminate price controls, restore the balance of payments, and promote economic growth.

These measures, outlined in the 1992 World Bank report *Strategy for African Mining*, entailed

the divestiture of state mining companies, reductions in corporate income tax and royalty rates, and the abolition of mineral duties, import duties, and foreign exchange taxes. In Tanzania, where liberalizing reforms began in 1986, a National Investment Promotion Policy was introduced in 1990. Among other measures, it removed a requirement for government equity and participation in mining ventures. Institutional reforms were also geared toward minimal state regulation, revolving around what the World Bank strategy paper described as “a small group of adequately equipped and funded institutions with narrowly defined roles, professional staff, and clearly defined decision-making authorities.”

Among other effects, mining sector liberalization in the 1980s led to a decoupling of the labor and commercial dynamics of mineral development, which had been stitched together in the earlier post-independence era. In fact, the World Bank actively discouraged governments from imposing job-creation mandates or even requirements for procurement of local services. As its 1992 report recommended:

Mining companies should not be obliged to use or be offered incentives to use employment-increasing techniques. Most of the large state-owned mining complexes in Africa were constructed when labor-intensive methods were prevalent. As these industries decline, or as re-investment takes place, the numbers employed will decline sharply. New mines will use predominantly capital-intensive methods and are unlikely to be such large employers. Instead of distorting decisions on choice of production methods, employment objectives will usually be best served by allowing existing and new mines to use optimal techniques and for government to use mineral revenues for employment creation elsewhere in the economy.

In addition to subjecting mining employment to the dictates of the market economy, the reforms incorporated measures to regularize artisanal and small-scale mining. This was identified as a critical area for connecting mining with rural livelihoods and employment.

The mining sector witnessed severe job losses as a result of these reforms. In South Africa, gold mines affiliated with the Chamber of Mines shed about 50 percent of their workforce between 1987

and 1999. In Ghana, 45 to 50 percent of formal jobs in the mining and quarrying sector were lost between 1980 and 1991.

The end of state mining monopolies compounded labor precariousness as mining companies assumed more autonomy in hiring and firing workers. Mining workers in southern Africa, many of whom were migrants, endured brutal working conditions and poor wages. As other aspects of the reforms took shape, labor conditions worsened with the proliferation of service contractors that absorbed workers who lost their state mining jobs but did not provide them with long-term employment guarantees. Efforts to reform artisanal mining had counterproductive effects as bureaucratic delays and high fees undermined the expected incentives to obtain licenses and gain governmental protection. So did the influx of workers fired by large-scale operations, which led to a scramble for mining sites.

A COMPACT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Despite a dramatic increase in output, many mineral-rich countries have moved on from the heyday of minimalist pro-investment reforms. Instead, mining reforms over the past three decades have tended toward continued expansion of the regulatory framework to encompass a range of aims, including environmental protection, sustainable livelihoods, multi-stakeholder oversight and public disclosure, community participation, and ethical sourcing and distribution.

The expanding scope of mining reform reflects a varied and sometimes conflicting network of actors, ranging from community activists to transnational agencies, who are forging a new form of compact around sustainable mining. Underpinning this social compact is an explicit goal of retaining the value of mineral exports through provisions for local development, such as local content requirements, “good governance” reforms, increased state ownership and regulation, and citizen participation, as well as local employment. United by the goal of securing “win-win” outcomes for all stakeholders, this growing network also includes leading mining firms. It bridges bottom-up initiatives, in the form of community activism and corporate social responsibility practices, with top-down initiatives around public and private governance, like the FTSE4Good Index

*The end of state mining
monopolies compounded
labor precariousness.*

and ICM's Good Practice Guidance for Mining and Biodiversity.

Attention to developmental outcomes for mineral-rich countries has once again offered a much bigger space in which to position Africa's mining sector as a medium of employment and job creation. This jobs-related social compact in mining has seen a proliferation of global and regional instruments highlighting distinct aspects of employment and training to be expected from mining investments. Notably, one of the key pillars of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is the pursuit of the principle of decent work and economic growth.

In Africa, these transnational initiatives have been reinforced by various regional and subregional protocols. The East African Community's 2006 Protocol on Environment and Natural Resource Management includes provisions for training and human capital development in response to climate change, with ramifications for employment in mining. Other regional initiatives have provisions explicitly related to jobs. The African Mining Vision, adopted by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union in 2009, outlines elaborate mechanisms for linking mineral extraction with national development priorities, domestic capacity building, and local enterprise development.

One of the key principles outlined by the Southern African Development Community's 1997 Protocol on Mining, which was followed by the Mining Strategic Plan of 2001, is to promote the economic empowerment of historically marginalized groups in the sector through policies of subsidized beneficiation and quotas for employment and procurement. Members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in 2012 adopted a model law on "The Prevention and Suppression of the Illegal Exploitation of Minerals," with articles against forced labor.

The Economic Community of West African States adopted the Directive for Harmonizing of Guiding Principles and Policies in the Mining Sector in 2009. The directive, reinforced by the West African Mineral Development Policy of 2012, requires holders of mining rights in member states to submit detailed programs for recruitment, technology transfer, and local personnel. Article 11 (2) states: "A holder of a mining right shall in all phases of its operations give preference in employment to citizens of Member States, especially

affected communities, to the maximum extent possible and consistent with safety, efficiency and economy."

ASSERTIVE APPROACHES

This newfound assertiveness on job creation from mining has led to an increase in the range of relevant policy and legislative instruments deployed by mineral-rich countries across the region. Whereas most of these instruments echo nationalist strategies of mineral development in the immediate post-independence era, they are markedly different in their approaches to integrating requirements for jobs in mining laws and in the space they allow for indigenous entrepreneurship and private sector participation. While emphasizing their diversity, it can be observed that these attempts at positioning development-oriented laws, principles, and policy instruments to encourage job creation have taken four main forms.

The first involves the formalization of artisanal and small-scale mining. Initially broached by the liberal reforms of the late 1980s, various attempts at regulating the artisanal and small-scale mining sector (ASM) have highlighted its importance for employment and livelihoods, enabling this subsector to shed its illicit reputation and enter the mainstream of regulation. In countries such as Tanzania, Sierra Leone, and Ghana, ASM reforms have generally sought to build the monitoring capacity of state agencies; encourage linkages with large-scale operators; clarify and enforce property rights, land use planning, and fiscal regulation; and ensure adoption of environmental and social norms.

ASM regulation tends to focus on issues such as child labor, occupational health and safety, gender disparities, and, more broadly, promoting alternative livelihoods and income diversification for operators. In countries like Ivory Coast and Tanzania, policymakers have focused on building solidarity among marginalized groups in ASM operations and mounting training and awareness campaigns. In Tanzania, the government has facilitated the creation of cooperatives, establishing a Cooperatives Office at the district level to help artisanal miners mobilize to attract investors and purchase equipment.

Second, local content and beneficiation provisions have become common threads in the current mining reform agenda in Africa. They are often designed to pursue specified targets, such as

industrial development, employment, value addition, and incorporation in the value chain. Botswana has attracted plaudits for positioning itself as a global hub of diamond cutting and polishing through a mix of localization policies that included a 50–50 joint venture with DeBeers and other foreign firms. Training encourages local employment; a flexible tax regime waives duties for technology imports and reserves taxes only for unpolished diamonds; and public procurement reforms frame tendering processes to promote production and consumption of local goods and services. These measures, formally introduced in 1999, have been replicated with some variation in other mineral-rich countries, including Ghana and, more recently, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Tanzania.

Third, many national mining laws and policy frameworks contain explicit provisions for skills transfer. These require prospective and existing mining license holders to outline a systematic plan for training locals, and a succession plan to phase out expatriate employees. Under South Africa's Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2002, one of the requirements for obtaining a mining and production permit is a social and labor plan, reviewed annually by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy. Applicants must develop and implement programs for comprehensive human resources development, community development, housing and living conditions, and employment equity, as well as processes to save jobs and manage downsizing or closure.

Revisions to the Mining Charter in 2018 also require new license holders to have 30 percent black ownership and provisions for shares to be issued to qualifying employees and host communities at no cost to them and free of any encumbrance. Some aspects of such binding arrangements have been introduced in Ghana, Kenya, and Senegal. In countries such as Papua New Guinea and Canada, other approaches toward local employment are more incentive-based, relying on measures such as offering mining firms tax inducements to provide training.

The fourth new approach to job creation involves indirect initiatives. Mineral-rich countries such as Guinea and Ivory Coast are rolling out broad-scale employment and

entrepreneurship schemes that may have indirect spillovers into the mining sector. Under Ivory Coast's Youth Employability and Insertion Support Program, "mining and extraction" is among nine sectors designated to be monitored by national committees for addressing skills requirements.

Though the linkages between such flagship policies and job creation in the mining sector are often weakly articulated, they are still important for generating employment in mineral-dependent countries. In the DRC, mining companies have been encouraged to channel their corporate social responsibility initiatives into providing opportunities work in other areas—particularly in carpentry, construction, catering, renewable energy, and security—identified by the Program for Youth Employment in Katanga.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES, OLD QUESTION

Rapid advances in technological innovation, especially digitization, have implications for the industrial structure of mining. These trends have raised doubts concerning the prospects for meeting goals set for employment and job security in the sector.

According to an influential 2015 study by the consulting firm McKinsey, *How Digital Innovation Can Improve Mining Productivity*, when digital

technologies are embedded across the mining value chain, they may enable a "fundamental shift in the way mining works" by "harnessing the flow of information" to "reduce variability" in decision making and execution. A key source of such information is the expansion of spatial data collection and analytics. These tools have not only enhanced prospecting precision, but also helped bridge the information gap among key stakeholders in the industry, including communities and companies.

Such technological advances have been introduced in the artisanal mining sector to improve regulation, health and safety, and overall productivity. In Tanzania, platforms like the US Agency for International Development's Mobile Application for Secure Tenure offer training and support to enable small landholders to file their official ownership documents using mobile technology.

Yet technological advances are also fueling a new scramble for strategic minerals needed for components in products like mobile phones and

Expectations of a labor-intensive mining sector may be unfounded.

electric vehicles, such as coltan, diamonds, cassiterite, and gold. In countries like the DRC, Sierra Leone, and Angola, such resources—known as conflict minerals—are among the key drivers of armed conflicts. Some analysts contend that this demand for strategic minerals has also fostered poor working conditions, especially among vulnerable groups like children.

In his 2014 book *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*, Christian Fuchs argues that digital technologies have facilitated forced labor and other exploitation by armed groups and powerful patrons. He recounts an encounter with one of several “slave mineral workers” in the North Kivu region of the DRC, who told him:

As you crawl through the tiny hole, using your arms and fingers to scratch, there’s not enough space to dig properly and you get badly grazed all over. And then, when you do finally come back out with the cassiterite, the soldiers are waiting to grab it at gunpoint. Which means you have nothing to buy food with. So, we’re always hungry.

Digital technologies are also associated with job losses, especially for those engaged in low-skilled tasks. As the International Institute for Sustainable Development has observed, automation will lead to layoffs in operational areas like drilling and blasting, as well as train and truck driving. Given that a high proportion of jobs in the mining sector are in these areas, the cuts are likely to be substantial. As companies cope with the pressures emanating from regulatory reforms, such as resource nationalism and quotas for local employment, the adoption of digital technologies could reinforce mining’s capital-intensive tendencies.

The spread of new technologies thus appears poised to thwart the intention of those reforms to promote mining as a vehicle for job creation in Africa. It would not be the first time in post-independence Africa that hopes placed in the mining sector as an engine of development have ended in disappointment. Uncertainties around the jobs question portend more challenges for effective regulation and the evolving social compact for sustainable mining in Africa. ■

“Local agency, power, and rivalries are the main determinants of stability in the Horn of Africa.”

External Relations and Local Agency in the Horn of Africa

ALEKSI YLÖNEN

In much of the Horn of Africa, social, economic, and political stability is mainly determined by the strategies and behavior of local actors, even though it is often perceived as being shaped by the influence of external powers. In this region, local agents seeking to strengthen themselves against domestic rivals engage with external actors who might provide them with resources useful for that purpose. Rather than directly causing instability, the aspirations of foreign powers are harnessed by local actors in pursuit of their domestic interests and their own objectives. The nature of their relations makes the difference between stability and instability.

These relationships are largely pragmatic and transactional. Regional states and nonstate actors alike offer foreign powers both tangible and intangible assets under their control, such as land, labor, natural resources, and political influence. In exchange, they receive economic and material support. In the absence of well-established institutional controls, these transactions are mostly opaque, at times are illicit or outright illegal, and often involve far-reaching supply networks.

Local actors in the Horn, including government representatives, community and group leaders, and other prominent individuals, are well positioned to leverage their power and control over local assets as they bargain with external actors seeking to extend their influence and gain access to resources. As a result, local agency and power distribution set the conditions for external actors' ability to make an impact in this context.

Competition among external powers, such as the leading Persian Gulf states and Turkey, has prompted them to pursue greater involvement and

influence in the region. The extent to which such rivalries affect regional stability will depend on how local actors choose to engage with these foreign powers. Recent years offer many examples of such interactions and realignments during a tumultuous period in the Horn of Africa. Yet owing to perceptions of the colonial past, Cold War-era politics, and current state weakness, strategic and security analyses of the region have continued to erroneously portray its instability as mainly resulting from foreign engagement.

RED SEA REALIGNMENTS

On September 21, 2014, Sana'a, Yemen's administrative capital, fell to Houthi rebel forces. Another episode of civil war ensued as this armed militia of a Zaidi Shia movement fought the gradually withdrawing army. On March 25, 2015, as the Houthis advanced, President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was forced to flee his stronghold in the southern port city of Aden for Saudi Arabia. A day later, in response to Hadi's request, a Saudi-led coalition launched an air campaign in support of the government. This set the stage for a prolonged military intervention in Yemen's civil war by the leading Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, backed by their Western allies, mainly the United States.

Before the intervention, Saudi Arabia and its close partner, the United Arab Emirates, had already sought to neutralize remnants of possible sources of Houthi support in the Horn of Africa by putting pressure on Red Sea littoral countries that had previously partnered with Iran. The military campaign prompted the Gulf states to search for bases for their Yemen operations in the region. They approached Djibouti and Eritrea, opposite Yemen on the African side of the strategic sea trade chokepoint of Bab al-Mandab, which connects the

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Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean. Gaining a foothold in the coastal areas of either country was considered vital for monitoring the narrow stretches of the sea surrounding the Houthi-occupied Yemeni shoreline to interdict Iranian shipments of weapons and other military supplies to the rebels.

On April 27, 2015, a physical altercation occurred between Wahib Moussa Kalinleh, commander of Djibouti's air force, and Ali al-Shihi, the UAE's vice consul in Djibouti, during the early Emirati air campaign in Yemen. Although leaders in the Horn of Africa often discuss foreign relations and related strategies behind the scenes, and sudden changes in the orientation of individual states are relatively common, this particular argument set in motion a wider sequence of realignments.

The most immediate effect of the dispute was the deterioration of Djibouti's relations with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. After hosting Emirati and Saudi delegations visiting his country's Red Sea shore, Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki seized the opportunity and headed to Riyadh to sign a security and military cooperation agreement with King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud on April 29. The deal, struck only two days after the squabble between the Emirati and Djiboutian officials, included a military base for GCC forces—a substitute for a previously envisioned base in Djibouti that was to be used for the Saudi-led armed intervention in Yemen. In exchange, Eritrea would receive mainly rents and various infrastructure upgrades.

More importantly, the agreement helped the Eritrean government mitigate the effects of the United Nations sanctions and associated international isolation that had been imposed due to its alleged provision of assistance to anti-state actors in Somalia and its border conflict with Djibouti. The partnership not only brought Asmara strategically closer to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, but also widened Eritrea's spectrum of external sources of funding, investment, and material and development assistance. The pact improved its prospects of beneficial security cooperation and trade as well.

The new alignment subsequently resulted in the termination of Asmara's previously close partnership with Qatar, a casualty of the 2017–21

diplomatic crisis set off by Saudi and Emirati efforts to isolate Qatar. But it paved the way for the unprecedented 2018 rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, brought about with Emirati, Saudi, and American assistance. This ended the Horn of Africa's nearly two-decade cold war, which followed the 1998–2000 Eritrean–Ethiopian War.

Djiboutian President Omar Ibrahim Guelleh made futile efforts to reconcile with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in May 2015. Recognizing the importance of partnership with the two Gulf allies in the turbulent context of the Yemen war, Guelleh sought Washington's intercession, but the Obama administration declined to get involved. The UAE closed its consulate and broke off diplomatic relations with Djibouti. Saudi Arabia then declared Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Yousouf persona non grata, foiling his planned visit to Riyadh.

This predicament prompted Djibouti to lean increasingly toward China. In accordance with its long-term policy of using its strategic location on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to earn rents by hosting foreign military bases, the Djibouti leadership agreed to let China build a naval support base on its territory, adjacent to a Chinese-developed multipurpose port. This alarmed the United States, whose Africa Command (AFRICOM) military base in Djibouti is the linchpin of its security-oriented strategy in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa region.

The following weeks brought further realignments. In early June, also seeking to capitalize on Djibouti's falling-out with the Emiratis, Somaliland's president, Ahmed Mohamed (Silanyo) Mohamud, paid a more than weeklong visit to the UAE. Somaliland has been seeking international recognition and foreign sources of investment and development assistance since declaring independence from Somalia in 1991 and building a de facto sovereign state, successfully conducting a constitutional referendum in 2001 and subsequent elections.

In comments to the media on Silanyo's visit, former Somaliland Foreign Minister Mohamed Bihi Yonis said the discussions had centered on "strengthening of trade cooperation, including the issue of expansion and upgrading of the facilities at the Berbera port." He also mentioned "ongoing development projects and proposed new

These relationships are largely pragmatic and transactional.

projects,” as well as resources to cope with the “surging influx of Yemeni refugees.”

In September 2015, the UAE began upgrading the port and the airstrip in Assab, Eritrea, in preparation for establishing a military base, which it subsequently used for the Saudi-led coalition’s Yemen operations. Less than a year later, in May 2016, Somaliland’s \$442 million deal with Dubai Ports World (DP World) to build and operate the port in Berbera was made public.

The Djibouti government, meanwhile, continued deepening its relations with China. The Chinese naval support base, constructed in early 2016 next to the port of Doraleh, gradually became operational. On February 22, 2018, the Djibouti leadership further consolidated its already strong partnership with Beijing, unilaterally terminating DP World’s 30-year, 33 percent concession to build and operate the Doraleh Container Terminal, handing control to Hong Kong–based China Merchants Port Holdings Company, which had previously acquired a 23.5 percent stake.

American discontent about the proximity of the Chinese naval facility to the AFRICOM base became increasingly acute. The US military explored alternative locations in the surrounding states for supplementary bases. American interest first focused on Eritrea and then turned to Somaliland, resulting in plans to deepen their partnership and stage a high-profile, US-led multinational military training exercise in Berbera. The wheels of regional realignments were turning.

RIVALS SEEKING INFLUENCE

By the mid-2010s, the Gulf states’ rivalry for regional power had intensified and radiated to the African side of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, resembling their engagements during the Cold War. The Arab Spring, which led to revolutions in the Red Sea neighborhood in Egypt and Yemen, heightened security concerns in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Fears about growing domestic and regional instability prompted Saudi Arabia and the UAE to more actively pursue influence in the African Red Sea littoral states. They aimed to counter Iranian support for revolutionary ideas and movements, as well as efforts by Qatar and Turkey to maintain close links with religious groups—above all the Muslim Brotherhood—and empower grassroots movements and civil society organizations.

Riyadh and Abu Dhabi deployed their financial power to woo the regimes of Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea,

and Somalia, with varying degrees of success. In Egypt, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi’s support was instrumental in the military’s return to power in 2013. They also played an important role in assisting Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir until his regime’s downfall in 2019. Eritrea’s Afwerki, Somaliland, various state-level leaders in Somalia, and the Ethiopian government also drew on Emirati and Saudi support.

Qatar, meanwhile, sought to uphold its reputation as a peacemaker in the Horn of Africa while maintaining Islamist connections in Somalia and Sudan. Turkey used humanitarian efforts and religious and cultural diplomacy in its approach to Somalia. Ankara also expanded its presence elsewhere in the region, particularly in Sudan and Ethiopia.

The intensification of the war in Yemen drew governments in the coastal Horn of Africa closer to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The Sudanese regime had been facing continuously dire economic conditions since South Sudan gained independence in 2011, while contending with public discontent and protests. It sought to sustain itself through an ever-closer association with the Saudi-led coalition intervening in Yemen.

The Somali government had been ravaged by corruption and embezzlement scandals amidst its deepening partnership with Turkey. Prominent locals—politicians, clan elders, and religious and militia leaders—sought to take advantage of foreign players’ interest in gaining influence in Somalia, seeking resources to strengthen themselves against their local rivals. Unfolding rivalries among external actors played out in behind-the-scenes support for their preferred Somali presidential candidates, culminating in the February 2017 victory of Qatari-backed Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as Farmaajo.

The Qatar diplomatic crisis, which began in early July 2017, drew Turkey closer to Doha, escalating their confrontation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Riyadh and its closest GCC allies imposed an embargo and issued a series of demands, such as insisting that Qatar close down its regionally influential news outlets, downgrade its ties with Iran, and end its alleged support for terrorist groups. Doha rejected these demands and made no significant concessions. The standoff put pressure on the regimes in the Horn to choose sides between their competing Saudi–Emirati and Qatari–Turkish partners.

Qatar withdrew from its most visible regional commitments by pulling its military contingent from Yemen and its peacekeeping forces from the Djibouti–Eritrea border. But it continued to maintain political networks behind the scenes in countries such as Somalia and Sudan, despite the Saudi and Emirati attempts to purge Doha’s regional influence. Still, the embargo and diplomatic pressure pushed Qatar into a defensive position, despite the support it received from Turkey and Iran.

Eritrea chose to side with the Saudis and the Emiratis in the Qatar crisis. Djibouti’s leadership, seeing an opportunity to mend ties with Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, followed suit. Sudan sought to maximize benefits by continuing to partner with both sides, but its efforts to mediate between the rival Gulf states were quickly shut down.

Despite Saudi and Emirati efforts to persuade Somalia to abandon Qatar, including offers of financial incentives, Farmaajo opted to continue the partnership with his main sponsor. Somaliland and the leaders of the Somali states of Puntland and Jubaland, however, maintained close ties with the UAE. Throughout the Horn, national and subnational actors’ responses to the Qatar diplomatic crisis reflected their own interests and objectives in their positioning toward the Gulf states.

ALLIANCES OF CONVENIENCE

In early 2018, Ethiopia’s ruling coalition elected new leadership in response to a crisis caused by several years of protracted protests, mainly against the political marginalization and exclusion of the Oromo ethnic majority. A former military and intelligence officer turned Oromo politician, Abiy Ahmed Ali, became prime minister. The new government in the Horn of Africa’s central and most populous country gave further impetus to the revision and consolidation of foreign alignments in the region.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE were among the external powers that hastened to approach Abiy. Since they also had good relations with Afwerki, the two Gulf states were able to build sufficient trust to lead mediation that brought an end to the long-running hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Reconciliation with Asmara opened space for Abiy to seek additional external partnerships that could help him consolidate domestic power. It

paved the way for a tripartite agreement among Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia to pursue closer political, economic, social, cultural, and security relations and work together to promote regional peace and security. Abiy, Afwerki, and Farmaajo met several times to coordinate a common strategy.

Cooperation among the trio reflected their domestic challenges. Afwerki, heading what is arguably the region’s most consolidated regime, offered support to Farmaajo and Abiy as they both struggled to strengthen their authority against domestic rivals. In 2018, it was agreed that Eritrea would train approximately 5,000 Somali army recruits for operations to neutralize al-Shabaab, an armed Islamist force affiliated with al-Qaeda that poses the most serious threat to peace and state-building in Somalia. The training was reportedly to be hosted by Qatar, since Eritrea was still under sanctions. The secrecy of the arrangements stirred concern in Somalia and abroad, and later it came to light that the recruits had been trained in Eritrea after all.

The Gulf states’ rivalry radiated to the African side of the Red Sea.

On November 3, 2020, an armed conflict broke out in Ethiopia’s Tigray region between the federal military and Tigray regional forces. Afwerki was in agreement with Abiy on the need to neutralize the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, Ethiopia’s former governing party, as a national and regional player. He deployed the Eritrean military in Ethiopia, where it controlled territory and allegedly committed violence against civilians while supporting the Ethiopian army and associated regional forces and militias. The Somali recruits, many of whom had not completed their training, also reportedly participated in the campaign against the Tigray forces, operating from camps in Eritrea.

In Somalia, rumor had it that sending the recruits for training by Eritrea was part of a bid by Farmaajo to further extend his presidential term, which was initially due to end in February 2021. The arrangement was also seen as an attempt by Afwerki to project Eritrea’s regional power. In late 2022, following the negotiated end to the Tigray conflict, new Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who had returned to power in May 2022, was able to negotiate the return of the recruits to Somalia, where they were deployed in the campaign against al-Shabaab.

But al-Shabaab maintains a presence in south-central Somalia and the capacity to stage occasional high-profile strikes, both against the security forces and in the capital, Mogadishu.

Meanwhile, the conflict in Tigray drew in other external actors. The Ethiopian federal government received military supplies and assistance from countries such as the UAE, Turkey, Iran, and China, despite condemnation of the Ethiopian and Eritrean actions by Western states. After a cease-fire in early 2022 that lasted several months, the destructive war resumed in late August. Tigrayan leaders were forced to accept an armistice on November 2. Although difficult to estimate, the overall death toll in the conflict, including indirect casualties, has been estimated at anywhere from several hundred thousand to nearly one million.

Both the case of the Somali recruits and the Tigray conflict demonstrate how political uncertainty, instability, and armed conflict in the Horn of Africa have local roots. On both occasions, the strategies of the leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia aimed at strengthening their respective governments led to uncertainty and instability in the short term.

Yet Eritrea's regional role also contributed to the strengthening of state authority among its partners. As a result, the federal administrations in both Ethiopia and Somalia are likely to have increased capacity to assert their authority against domestic rivals. If handled in a just and inclusive manner, this increased coercive authority may decrease domestic sources of instability and promote state legitimacy in the long run. But the record shows that such authority has often been misused in the region.

RULES OF THE GAME

The involvement of external actors in political and security affairs in the Horn of Africa is most apparent in the region's weakest states, which attract foreign powers for geopolitical, security, and economic reasons. As the great power competition between China and the United States unfolds in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Horn, regional powers have also extended their rivalries in the region.

In recent years, competition between the Saudi Arabia–UAE and Qatar–Turkey axes first intensified during the Arab Spring revolts and further strengthened in the context of the war in Yemen and the Qatar diplomatic crisis. This competition has taken place in the context of Saudi efforts to

neutralize the potentially destabilizing Iranian influence in the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea region. In Somalia, the competition among the leading Gulf states and Turkey became increasingly visible in attempts to influence the 2017 presidential election. The same powers have actively sought to shape the political transitions in Ethiopia and Sudan.

Yet external actors' influence in the Horn is limited by local actors even in the weakest states. Foreign states' efforts to project power can reach only as far as permitted by their local partners, their foes, and the prevailing circumstances. In Somalia, during the Farmaajo administration, the influence of Qatar and Turkey was limited by the extent of their respective local partnerships, mainly within the federal government structure and public service. Emirati and Saudi influence was also dependent on local partnerships, mainly with Puntland and Jubaland states and Somaliland.

In all these cases, local stakeholders and their rivalries for wealth and power have set the terms of their relationships with external partners and determined their consequent effects on stability. In Ethiopia, in an attempt to consolidate its power, Abiy's new federal administration partnered with Eritrea and Somalia, and with regional Arab powers and Turkey. The Abiy government's interest in obtaining material, military, and financial support from external players largely dictated the terms of these relationships and their effects on local stability.

Similarly, subnational actors such as Puntland and Jubaland, the *de facto* independent state of Somaliland, and nonstate actors—including al-Shabaab, clan militias, and individual leaders—maintain ties with state and nonstate actors in the Gulf and Turkey. Religious and cultural connections often facilitate their mainly pragmatic and transactional relations, which tend to be aimed at consolidating power against local rivals.

LOCAL AGENCY AND STABILITY

It is these local actors, state and nonstate players alike, who act as the guardians of stability or fomenters of instability. They take advantage of heightened interest in the region, using foreign partnerships to boost their social and economic standing and gain power over domestic rivals.

The 1991 state collapse in Somalia, which resulted from the joint effort of various clan-based rebel forces to overthrow the president, Siad Barre, generated conditions in which localized

authority became paramount. Clan leaders, prominent businessmen, and state and federal government agents extracted resources from domestic and external sources that they used to reinforce their authority while competing for power. The emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), an umbrella organization established to deal with the post-Barre disorder, led to short-lived attempts to centralize power. The ICU's disintegration after a 2006–2007 Ethiopian military intervention led to the emergence of splinter groups, notably al-Shabaab, that struggled for power locally.

The extensive involvement of external forces in Somalia since the early 1990s has offered local actors many opportunities. They have maintained a pragmatic approach toward foreign players, including the Gulf states and Turkey, by engaging mainly in transactional relations. Public and private actors, from local leaders and other prominent individuals to groups such as al-Shabaab, have used linkages with foreign state and non-state partners to obtain financial and material resources for their local struggles. Al-Shabaab has developed clandestine commercial and financial networks reaching as far as Yemen, the UAE, Iran, and Qatar.

Similarly, in the Horn of Africa's largest state, Ethiopia, local actors have engaged with external players to obtain resources for strengthening themselves against domestic rivals. Perhaps most visibly, this dynamic has involved the federal government's leadership and insurgent groups.

Established in the mid-1990s, Ethiopia's federal system consolidated ethnic identities by reinforcing their attachment to specific territories. This system, dominated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front through the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, a political umbrella organization, proved to be repressive. It excluded the major population groups—especially the

Oromo, but also the Amhara, Ethiopian Somalis, the Afar, and the Anuak—from effective representation and political and economic power. A number of opposition groups and insurgent forces emerged, some of which maintained connections with foreign actors in and beyond the Horn, causing local instability in several areas of the country.

In response, the federal government sought resources from foreign partners that could be used against local rivals. This dynamic has long persisted in Ethiopia. Its most recent manifestations can be seen in the conflicts in Tigray and Oromia. Again, instability has emerged from local dynamics, shaped by local players' linkages with external partners.

Yet local actors' engagement with outside powers is not always destabilizing. When local state and nonstate actors engage foreign partners for purposes of state consolidation, economic development, and peacebuilding, the relationship may produce stability. Somaliland and Puntland's respective partnerships with the UAE have had locally stabilizing effects, though they have periodically been an irritant in their relations with the Somali federal government. Similarly, Mogadishu's interstate and multilateral partnerships, including with Turkey and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, have produced state-consolidating effects tending toward increasing stability.

State and nonstate actors who wield local power over people, resources, and territory also leverage that power in the relationships they maintain with external parties. Local players' engagement in pragmatic foreign partnerships to consolidate their position against domestic competitors contributes either to local stability or to instability. Local agency, power, and rivalries are the main determinants of stability in the Horn of Africa. ■

COVID-19 and Colonial Legacies in West Africa

KALALA J. NGALAMULUME

Over the past three years, the outbreak and worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic operated as a mirror revealing societies to themselves, with all their divisions along racial, ethnic, class, and gender lines. The pandemic generated particular anxiety concerning Africa. Doubts over the ability of most African states to contain the contagion led to predictions of a viral tsunami on the continent.

Such dire warnings were based on the assumption that poverty, underdevelopment, corruption, and underfunded and poorly maintained health care systems would allow the virus to overwhelm the capacity of African governments to respond. But that did not happen. In part, this outcome was due to the demographic structure of the continent, dominated by a large youth population, as well as previous experience with epidemics.

In West Africa, the COVID-19 experience has had some notable continuities with past epidemics in parts of the region, including yellow fever, bubonic plague, and Ebola. Among these continuities are the legacies of colonial medical practices, the uncertainty of medical authorities in the face of the emergence and high transmissibility of evolving pathogens, and the initial lack of knowledge on transmission routes. The widespread unpreparedness of health care systems has been another constant.

Colonial legacies are also visible in the ways in which epidemics and pandemics are constructed or framed not just as medical events, but also as political events. The very decision to declare a medical emergency is a political act, often reflecting structures, policies, ideologies, and practices from the past that bear on the present, sometimes resulting in unintended consequences.

In the yellow fever and bubonic plague epidemics of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries, the evidence suggests that what began as medical or biological events became major social and urban crises. Today, such colonial patterns can be discerned in the inadequacy of medical infrastructure and personnel and their unequal distribution between cities and the countryside.

Another colonial legacy was the disempowerment of African healers. They were banned, and their medical practice was labeled as superstition. Given that almost 80 percent of the present rural population lacks access to biomedicine because of either the cost or the geographical distance to facilities, turning to the health services provided by healers becomes unavoidable. This factor played an important role in the COVID-19 pandemic.

PANIC AND HYSTERIA

In the colonial-era epidemics, high mortality rates among the European population provoked moral panic and racial hysteria. Colonial administrators and medical authorities associated the black urban presence with slums and disease.

In Saint-Louis, Senegal, yellow fever epidemics led the colonial authorities to adopt a policy of residential segregation that resulted in the forced removal of the urban poor from the city-island and their relocation in the periphery. In British Sierra Leone, malaria provided the most important single argument for sanitary segregation. European residents were evacuated from the African section in Freetown and relocated to the newly erected Hill Station in 1902.

Similarly, the 1914 epidemic of bubonic plague in Dakar helped accelerate a policy of segregation that had been initiated a decade earlier in response to a series of yellow fever epidemics in the late nineteenth century. Plans for the forced removal from the city of thousands of workers would have provoked disruption in the labor supply. A sanitary emergency was declared three days after the election that resulted in the victory of Blaise

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Diagne, the first black citizen to represent Senegal in the French parliament. The people targeted for forced removal were his voters. The policy was only partially implemented, due to these economic and political constraints. Still, it left a legacy of mistrust among the urban poor.

Another example of continuity between past and present in West Africa had its origins in colonial doctors' role in the conceptualization of Senegambia as a tropical region, meaning a diseased space. This fed into the construction of the differences between metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized. It was in this context that yellow fever was framed as the white man's disease (because of high mortality observed among the Europeans and the perception that the black population had acquired natural immunity since childhood), and cholera as the black man's disease.

Doctors also contributed to the production of materials for understanding the black Africans, whom the French authorities referred to as *indigènes*, including claims about their supposed mentality, lifestyle, hygiene, and role in disease production. In the process, doctors helped construct hegemony through various biopolitical interventions against suspected carriers of pathogens and the mentally ill. These interventions included

a registration system, managed by the municipal police, for single women who had to be screened every month for sexually transmitted diseases; a project, eventually abandoned, to open a licensed brothel; and smallpox vaccination.

The construction of Africa as a dangerous tropical environment—a diseased continent—has endured. This form of Afrophobia has been evident in the COVID-19 pandemic. Consider the isolation measures imposed in late 2021 by the United States and other nations on several southern African countries suspected of having high prevalence of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The United States and Europe ended up having what appeared to be much worse Omicron case surges than these African countries.

Global health initiatives to combat epidemics and pandemics have long worked through colonial infrastructures and imaginings. These initiatives have often had unintended consequences due to their failure to take account of realities that do not fit their assumptions. During the period of colonial rule, the enforcement of disease-control measures

such as quarantines and cordons sanitaires created conflicts of interest between public health, commerce, and civil liberties. French merchants in Senegambia protested the long delays caused by the sanitary inspection of ships and the fumigation of merchandise.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, most African governments adopted policies that did not account for management capacity to enforce them, scarce resources, or living conditions in crowded cities. The policies included declarations of emergencies, curfews, school closings, anti-disinformation campaigns, promotion of hygiene measures such as hand-washing and social distancing, movement restrictions, internal border closures, bans on gatherings, and testing and tracing programs.

These measures were gradually abandoned as mortality rates turned out to be low, and as popular protests grew. Most of the urban poor who live on a dollar a day rejected the movement restrictions imposed on them by the state. Mask-wearing and vaccine mandates also became sources of contention.

Unsettled by rumors about the ineffectiveness of the available vaccines, many people turned to traditional health practitioners, who continue to have a huge following in most cities. Public

markets in Dakar have sections devoted to the sale of medicinal plants, and the number of visitors seeking herbal treatments and traditional remedies has drastically increased since COVID-19 struck. Government officials in Madagascar promoted an herbal tea called COVID-Organics, made from the medicinal plant artemisia, already used for treating malaria.

In West Africa, popular mistrust of the state and its biomedical interventions can be recognized as a legacy of the colonial era, when disease-control measures served larger agendas of controlling and segregating the black population. The depiction of Africa as a dangerous, unsanitary tropical zone of contagious diseases that threaten richer parts of the world is another unfortunate colonial legacy that resurfaces in global health emergencies. It is necessary to understand the origins of these views in order to address them effectively. Learning from history can help us better prepare for future pandemics and open a path to more equitable public health measures and outcomes in West Africa and beyond. ■

*Africa has been portrayed as
a diseased continent.*

Who Owns ‘Black’? Decolonization and Its Aporias

HLONIPHA MOKOENA

It seems fitting that after the twentieth century’s poststructuralism and post-modernity, we should arrive at the birth of decolonization as an intellectual trend. Although superficially distant from the deconstructionism and denial of coherent selves that was the hallmark of the post-modern, decolonization’s discomfort with the tactile and factual world fits neatly into this otherwise very “Western” intellectual progression. It seems to build itself from the same theoretical blocks that helped other trends—the New Left, Subaltern Studies, Cultural Studies, and so on—take shape and define the research agenda of the late twentieth century. Yet, in its own self-image, decolonization is a nemesis that deconstructs these predecessors, presenting itself as the theory to end all theories. It is the theory that was built to silence its audience and potential detractors, or else force us all to admit that we are subliminal colonizers or colonial sympathizers who need to “decolonize our minds.”

The advocates of decolonization seem to believe that all the previous denunciations of colonialism were mere child’s play, and only the word “decolonize” can cast the magic spell that will finally close the Pandora’s box of colonialism. The trenchant urgency of Olúfẹmi Táíwò’s *Against Decolonisation* is encapsulated in this one observation: Decolonization does not even understand itself, so how can it claim to understand the colonial condition? In affirming the humanism embedded in Frantz Fanon’s work, for example, Táíwò notes that what decolonizers miss is that “all the things that make us human were shared routinely, without ceremony, by coloniser and colonised in the colonial situation.”

Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously
Olúfẹmi Táíwò
(Hurst, 2022)

Reading the book from a South African point of view, it is peculiar that the call for decolonization succeeded rather than preceded the end of apartheid. It is incongruous that the promulgation of one of the most progressive and forward-thinking constitutions of the twentieth century precipitated decolonization’s disenchantment. It seems that decolonization is about neither rights nor the failure of “decolonization₁”—Táíwò’s term for the end of colonial rule—to deliver on its promises.

Although it could be said that the call to “decolonize” had been long coming, the hashtag movements that erupted in 2015 in South Africa were the apotheosis of decolonization rhetoric. Whether it was university students demanding that RhodesMustFall or that FeesMustFall (the former concerned removing a statue of the imperialist Cecil John Rhodes, while the latter was about scrapping tuition fees), “Fallism” was the complete package of decolonization’s positions.

Long before the protests, South African universities were given the opportunity to present submissions to the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission during its 1995–2003 tenure. In that context, the universities chose the term “transformation” to define the future of the post-apartheid university. In the early 2000s, document after document was produced to actualize this commitment to transform. In these documents, the terms “decolonization,” or even “Africanization,” were hardly used.

This is the first challenge to decolonizers: Why did it take over twenty years for a seemingly self-evident concept to take shape? The fact that South African universities chose to revamp curricula in the name of “transformation” rather than “decolonization” leads to a secondary query: Why did transformation backfire?

In the first instance, the eruption of decolonization demands at South African universities

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could be called a belated and anachronistic reaction to the fact that the country missed the independence boat. Yet this is not absolutely accurate, since South Africa did become a republic in 1961 by exiting the Commonwealth. This putative independence raises its own question: Can “settlers” decolonize?

If we take seriously decolonization proponents’ valorization of indigenous languages, then it follows that the creation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation in 1936 and the beginning of the republic in 1961 laid the foundation for the use of indigenous languages in media and broadcasting. As a consequence, most languages in South Africa have their own radio stations, and when television was introduced in the country in 1976, programs were created in various languages, not just English and Afrikaans. In public broadcasting, at least, South Africa has in fact had a continuous and uninterrupted presence of indigenous languages. Does this count as decolonization?

On campuses, this “freedom of the media” was present even under apartheid—most universities in South Africa have long had their own student newspaper and/or radio station. If decolonization was such an urgent ethical and political issue, why did university students not use their newspapers and radio stations to promote this cause? South Africa’s decolonization movement does not take account of the actual history of indigenous languages, nor the history of their promotion, nor the history of the universities’ commitment to so-called transformation.

RETURN TO NATIVISM?

Táiwò critiques decolonization’s obsession with “nativism” and “atavism.” Where South Africa is concerned, this is one of the most inexplicable aporias, since apartheid assiduously promoted African/indigenous culture. Part of the confusion lies in the assumption that apartheid was just another version of white supremacy, whereas in fact apartheid should also be understood as a form of nativism. In order for Afrikaner nationalism to serve as a credible justification for “separate but equal” segregation, apartheid’s architects had to claim that black Africans were free to practice their cultures in their respective homelands.

Over the decades, the apartheid state sponsored dozens of nativist projects. The school curriculum

for black children included the requirement that each student produce an item of “indigenous craft.” The apartheid state even created an art school whose main objective was to train teachers in indigenous craftwork, as Daniel Magaziner describes in his 2016 book, *The Art of Life in South Africa*.

The point here is not to reiterate South Africa’s supposed exceptionalism, but to observe that the call for decolonization seems to ignore the entire history of apartheid’s obsession with ethnic identity—and the policies and incentives that the apartheid state put in place to encourage black Africans to remain “tribal” and ethnically pure. As Táiwò argues, “the call to ‘decolonise’ lumps together modernity and colonialism, and, in doing so, insists that the rejection of colonialism means the rejection of modernity.” Since it was the apartheid state that rejected modernity for Africans, it seems paradoxical that decolonizers would follow the same anti-modernity ethos.

As Táiwò repeatedly demonstrates, decolonization and the self-image it promotes rest on counterfactuals. Facts are simply not permitted to get in the way of a good argument. The problem with this position is that it leads inexplicably to demands for a return to apartheid thinking. If the promotion of nativism was one of the strategies of apartheid, it does not make sense to return to this politics with the promise that decolonization’s nativism is somehow different and better than apartheid’s nativism.

The appeal of decolonization’s rhetoric has spread beyond the initial site of the university. Even when decolonizers have tried to “eradicate whiteness” by making incendiary statements such as “Fuck White People,” these quotable quotes have been taken up by the larger public and converted into memes and “brands.” South African artist Dean Hutton took that slogan from a T-shirt worn by a Fallist and converted it into an art installation. Such deliberately provocative invectives against whiteness point to the implicit desire of decolonization to put not just white people but South Africa’s other minority populations in their place by preventing them from participating in debates about race.

Contrary to its claims, decolonization in South Africa is not aimed at deepening our understanding of what colonialism was about. Rather, it is

The call for decolonization seems to ignore apartheid’s obsession with ethnic identity.

aimed at annulling the country's constitution and the broad definition of "blackness" that has been affirmed by the courts. (In 2008, the Pretoria High Court ruled that South Africans of Chinese descent were "black" and therefore qualified for affirmative action benefits.) By denouncing "whiteness," decolonization's advocates laid claim to blackness and converted it into a commodity to which only they could assert proprietorial rights.

As Táíwò points out, decolonization also seems to be obsessed with animals and white people's relationship with animals. This adds up to what I would call zoophobia, since there is an implicit assumption that blacks/Africans hate animals. Yet evidence suggests that precolonial African kings loved dogs, especially hunting dogs, and that they would often call these dogs their "children." Linked to this zoophobic obsession is the assumption that colonialism was primarily about human agents and maybe secondarily about antigens (for example, the spread of contagious diseases from Europe to Africa).

There are dozens of plants that are not African but are assumed to be—maize, avocados, mangoes, prickly pears, *Cannabis sativa*, and more. Cattle are also colonizers, having been domesticated in Asia before arriving in Africa via the Middle East. To illustrate Táíwò's point that *modernity preceded colonialism*, evidence suggests that *Cannabis sativa* was in widespread use in southern Africa before the arrival in 1652 of the Dutch commander Jan van Riebeeck. Other "alien" fauna and flora spread to Africa before the colonizers came. Should Africans give up these plants and animals in the name of decolonization?

CALCULUS OF PAIN

Lastly, and perhaps most profoundly, there is a sense in which decolonization has created

a calculus of pain. The argument goes, "If Group X can claim that historical bigotry against them was traumatic and catastrophic, then I, as an African/black person, should also be able to claim that colonialism was traumatic and catastrophic." The assumption is that by making the superlative argument of "my pain is greater than yours," one achieves two aims: first, silencing members of Group X by making them feel less at home; and second, enacting a trauma that for many black South Africans does not actually exist—for example, slavery. The history of slavery in South Africa is not part of the trans-Atlantic narrative, and black South Africans were never enslaved. So it is strange to listen to black South Africans claiming their own "slave narratives," and in the process silencing the "mixed race" community whose ancestors were enslaved by the Dutch and transported to South Africa from what was then known as the East Indies.

Táíwò's book is an erudite and necessary antidote not because he writes against decolonization, but because he shows that decolonization does not even offer a coherent self-image. In my teaching experience, many young South Africans who spout decolonization's verbiage are inundated by academic concepts that they do not fully understand, but because of peer pressure they pretend that they do. Some confuse the words "critique" and "criticism," and thereby assume that the purpose of a humanities education—and the repeated citing of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*—is to criticize everything and anything. Inside the classroom or lecture hall, the term "decolonization" becomes a catch-all phrase that stands in for, "I am unhappy with . . ." As Wahbie Long has observed, there is a psychoanalytic undercurrent to the Fallist movement. This collective unconscious deserves a book as perspicacious as Táíwò's. ■

Misadventures of Soviet-Style Modernization

JOSHUA LUSTIG

A once-familiar specter is stalking Africa again: the ruthless figure of the white mercenary. In the decades immediately following decolonization, the depredations of soldiers of fortune on the continent became notorious enough to feature in Frederick Forsyth's 1974 novel *The Dogs of War*—and subsequently in the 1980 film starring Christopher Walken. Today the news from Africa is again full of tales of mercenaries assisting in coups and seizing control of gold mines. The difference is that they are no longer rogue retirees from the militaries of the former colonial powers, but Russians working for the Wagner Group, the private army known for its gruesome exploits in Syria and Ukraine. Despite being routinely accused of engaging in rapine and pillage wherever it operates, Wagner lately has been welcomed by countries from Mali to the Central African Republic. Military rulers have ordered French forces to leave, preferring to contract out security to the Russians rather than depend on paternalistic aid from Paris.

It may seem puzzling that African states would turn to Russian mercenaries, of all options, as guarantors of stability—and that their columns of armored vehicles would be greeted by crowds waving Russian flags. Moscow nowadays has little to offer on the continent other than brute force. But for some African rulers, that is apparently the most desirable kind of foreign aid.

Some news reports hint at historical reasons for this retrograde trend. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had a presence in the region, but the story is little known. Alessandro Iandolo's *Arrested Development* is a timely account of how the Soviets engaged in a turbulent economic partnership with three newly independent West African nations—Ghana, Guinea, and Mali—in the 1950s and

1960s. The tale is of surprising relevance to current trends in the region, and not only the strange spread of Russian mercenaries. Iandolo has crafted a narrative that is readable, even entertaining, full of interesting facts and striking ironies; he takes Soviet and African aspirations seriously, and scrupulously documents how they collided with reality. (My main gripes with the book are the small type size and the occasionally lax copy-editing, but these annoyances are hardly the author's fault.)

After the death of Stalin in 1953, the new ideological flexibility introduced in Moscow by Nikita Khrushchev soon extended to foreign policy. The Soviets recognized that the global process of decolonization afforded them an opportunity to win new allies by convincing the emerging states of the merits of socialism. In Iandolo's account, the Cold War at this point became primarily a competition for economic influence in the Third World rather than the military standoff of traditional histories.

Citing Soviet policy debates, Iandolo explains how Moscow changed its approach. Stalin, hewing to orthodox Marxist theory, had been reluctant to engage with the Third World (the prevalent term at the time), considering most of its states too underdeveloped to be candidates for communist takeover anytime soon. But under Khrushchev, a new policy took shape by the late 1950s. Instead of insisting on an abrupt shift to communism, Soviet economic aid was directed toward encouraging state capitalism. Market forces were tolerated, but the state would be in overall command.

Although the Soviet economy was no match for those of the Western powers, it still impressed Third World leaders, as Iandolo emphasizes. It had achieved rapid industrialization and growth, with decent (if drab) living standards, after starting from a position of relative underdevelopment. Spectacular technological achievements like the Sputnik space flights enhanced the allure of the Soviet development model. Even though all this

Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968

Alessandro Iandolo
(Cornell University Press, 2022)

had come at a massive human cost, with millions perishing in the Stalinist collectivization drive, it was a model that held appeal for many leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They also wanted accelerated modernization of their economies—and without continued subservience to the West.

State capitalism, of course, is still a seductive model for many countries. China has become the foremost practitioner of this hybrid system, and the new leading purveyor of development assistance in Africa and throughout the former Third World. There are parallels to the Soviet precedent in its approach, particularly in the combination of anti-Western sentiment and pragmatic, infrastructure-focused projects, financed by loans rather than grants.

Compared with China's mammoth Belt and Road scheme, its Soviet forerunner began on a far more modest scale. Iandolo's archival findings show that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies were woefully lacking in expertise on Africa; fieldwork was almost nonexistent, since foreign travel was a heavily restricted privilege. But the Soviets nonetheless were eager to establish diplomatic and trade relations with the emerging states, and they found the most promising candidates in West Africa, where a trio of bold leaders sought freedom from Western influence, or at least a counterbalancing external partnership.

*A trio of bold leaders sought
freedom from Western influence.*

HIGH AMBITIONS

In Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah had ambitions of leading a pan-African movement from Accra, and the more immediate desire of breaking the monopoly on the country's primary export still held by the London-controlled Gold Coast Cocoa Marketing Board. Perhaps inspired by Egypt's Soviet-financed Aswan Dam on the Nile, Nkrumah also wished to build his own great dam on the Volta River to generate hydropower for industrialization.

Ahmed Sékou Touré had already led Guinea to a decisive renunciation of continued fealty to France, in a referendum endorsing full independence rather than participation in a new French-led "Communauté" of former colonies in Africa. In its pique at this perceived impertinence, Paris imposed a trade embargo on Guinea. The Soviets happily took the opportunity to step in as a substitute patron.

In Mali, meanwhile, Modibo Keita openly avowed socialist aims, and in January 1961 his

government "demanded the complete evacuation of all French military personnel from the military bases in the country, a move that Moscow welcomed," Iandolo writes. "At the same time, a Soviet embassy was established in Bamako." Six decades later, the new Malian junta has followed this example by once again banishing French forces from their bases in the country, where they were deployed to assist in combating jihadists who had nearly conquered the capital a few years ago, and who now menace other countries in the region, including Ghana.

For all the radical aspirations of their founding leaders—together they formed the Union of African States, which they hoped "would become the basis for a future federation of all independent African states"—the three West African countries were in desperate need of development. Colonial administrators had been mainly concerned with building only what was required for extracting their resources. The Soviets were taken aback by what they luridly described as "medieval" living standards. Life expectancy in Mali was only 27 years in 1960, the lowest in the world.

Delegations from these new African allies were soon visiting the Soviet Union, where they were treated to tours of dams, factories, and collective farms. The Soviet hosts brought their guests to sites in republics such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, emphasizing that they had started off with conditions similar to those in West Africa, with largely agricultural economies—and had been rapidly industrialized. (They also had largely Muslim populations, which added to their appeal for Mali and Guinea.) The visits were usually capped off by an audience with Khrushchev at one of his vacation spots in Crimea or Georgia. The Africans returned home duly convinced that Soviet-style development was the only way forward for them. The irony that these showpieces in the peripheries of the Soviet empire were themselves forms of colonization did not seem to register with either the Soviets or their African friends.

Iandolo raises the interesting question, "Was the Soviet Union simply replacing Britain and France as a new colonial power in West Africa?" As he observes, "the colonial overtones of Soviet discourse were unmistakable," with officials from Khrushchev on down to technical experts

portraying the USSR as a superior developed society pursuing a benevolent civilizing mission among backwards dependents. “Soviet trade was downright colonial,” with the African countries exporting raw materials in exchange for value-added products, while “Soviet specialists took the jobs that had been traditionally occupied by colonial officials,” running everything from ports to schools. But Iandolo argues that “seeing Soviet involvement in West Africa uniquely as a neocolonial project may not be entirely accurate,” given that “the Soviet Union did not gain much from its engagement.” Even so, the parallels with and divergences from Western colonialism might have been worth further consideration, though he deems this line of inquiry outside the scope of his study.

A FINE ROMANCE

One notable difference seems to be that the Soviet engagement in West Africa very quickly ran out of steam. Almost as soon as diplomatic and trade relations were established and development assistance started to flow, the Soviets began to lose confidence in their vocation as standard-bearer and financier of noncapitalist modernization. The Congo crisis, culminating in Patrice Lumumba’s ouster and murder, exposed Moscow’s inability to protect its African allies from Western-backed threats. And as the USSR’s own economy slowed, officials cast a more skeptical eye on the West African governments’ persistent requests for funding for grand infrastructure projects.

In the book’s longest chapter, a 50-page tour de force aptly titled “Things Fall Apart” (though another editor might have advised against the decision to name every chapter after a famous novel), Iandolo marshals a huge load of evidence from the archives of every country involved to show how the region’s hopes for Soviet-led development collapsed in mutual recriminations. The Soviets complained that their African partners insisted on wasteful prestige projects such as airports, hotels, and presidential palaces. But Iandolo notes that the Soviet experts brought their own “tendency to gigantism” in their planning for 10,000-acre state farms and technical schools equipped with stadiums large enough to seat a third of the local population.

Schemes for large-scale infrastructure like dams and railroads failed to pan out, as the geography proved unsuitable on closer inspection or local road networks turned out to be inadequate to move the necessary equipment to the work sites.

Geological surveys struggled with remote terrain and difficult weather, and the desired deposits of gold, diamonds, and oil proved elusive. Plans for a factory in Guinea even neglected to account for the lack of electricity in the area.

Khrushchev’s removal from power in a 1964 coup brought an end to the flagging Soviet experiment with sponsoring development in West Africa. Under Leonid Brezhnev, the USSR declined pleas from its erstwhile partners to continue funding, and trade was no longer generously subsidized. The loss of their primary patron sent the three countries into economic tailspins, and they turned to the West in desperation. But former colonial powers and the United States were uninterested in replacing the Soviets as fully committed state sponsors. The supplicants were directed to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which demanded that they seek private-sector foreign investment and cut spending on the large-scale projects so central to the independence leaders’ ideas of national modernization. (After its recent debt default, Ghana may be in for more of the same treatment.)

Around this time, China appeared on the scene as a possible alternative backer of state-led development schemes. It sponsored projects, including factories and rice farms, in Guinea, Ghana, and Mali. But Iandolo judges that “China’s appeal in West Africa remained limited.” He notes that “the country had only just emerged from the Great Leap Forward, whose results were unlikely to inspire Third World governments to adopt similar policies.” And the Maoist insistence on violent revolution as the only path to communism was an unwelcome message for West African leaders who had already achieved independence and were preoccupied with repressing any radical challenges to their authority.

Despite their precautions, Nkrumah and Keita fell victim to coups in 1966 and 1968, respectively, and were replaced by pro-Western military rulers. Nkrumah found refuge in Guinea, where Seikou-Touré survived in power until the 1980s after foiling a 1970 coup attempt. But the Guinean economy languished. The expectations that Soviet-led development would result in swift modernization in all three countries had proved illusory, a fatal error for the independence leaders and their nation-building ambitions.

So why is it worth revisiting this brief romance—this fairly obscure episode within the global panorama of the Cold War? Iandolo argues that it was far from marginal: “the history of the

Soviet search for development in the Third World had West Africa at its center.” Though Moscow backed higher-profile projects elsewhere, like the Aswan Dam, “it was only in Africa that the USSR could shape the entirety of a modernization strategy, at least outside the socialist world.”

After recounting this saga in such striking detail, Iandolo asks a provocative question: “Would approaches different from the Soviet one have been more effective?” Since the era of Soviet intervention, he notes, “a succession of West African governments and international organizations” have tried many economic “recipes and counter-recipes,” with decidedly mixed results. It seems worth noting, though, that Ghana, the only one of the three to establish a lasting democracy, has also achieved better development outcomes; Guinea and Mali, prone to coups and dictatorships, have lagged. If political choices matter in development, a patron promoting the virtues of one-party rule might be one to avoid.

Nonetheless, state capitalism has a powerful new sponsor in Africa, or an old one in a new form. Over the past decade, China has drawn much of the continent into its global Belt and Road scheme, building giant infrastructure projects of the kind once envisioned by the Soviets and their newly independent allies. One difference is that the Chinese are less willing to lose money on these projects, or to write off debts, than the USSR was under Khrushchev. The Chinese model of state capitalism is more profit-driven.

Yet some African leaders, especially those in military uniforms, still turn to Moscow for support. It now comes in the privatized form of the Wagner Group, with its penchant for brute force and control over the natural resources of its hosts. Is this the last stage of imperialism, or the inevitable, sordid endpoint of state capitalism? Whatever it is, it seems unlikely that Wagnerism will be the answer to the enduring enigma of development in West Africa. ■

France's Black Citizens in West Africa

*Excerpted from an essay by W. E. B. Du Bois in the
July 1925 issue of Current History.*

A modern African colony is, first of all, an economic development. The French are pushing the cultural and sentimental element in the colony to the fore more than other nations, but their ability and to some extent their will to do this is dominated by economic motives. French colonies, in the long run, must pay; and though at present France is willing to take part of this pay in protection and military preparedness, yet sooner or later the amount of money which the thrifty French peasant and the shrewd French business man can make out of Africa seems bound to be set up as the criterion of the success of this African empire. This means, as the negro writer René Maran has shown us in his sensational novel, "Batouala," which won the Goncourt Prize, that in some parts of French Africa the exploitation of the natives has already rivaled that of Belgium, and though Maran's novel is a picture of equatorial Africa, 1,200 miles from the outposts of Dakar, yet even in French West Africa, in Senegal and Guinea and the ivory coast, profit is the *raison d'être* of this little world. French Africa must be made to pay. Do not British Africa and Belgian Africa pay? Is not this the ultimate meaning of colonial imperialism? . . .

All this means that the raising and civilizing of the natives is being left to the chance of modern economic development, assisted and somewhat hastened by French public opinion, by military considerations and by some education. This is a dangerously slow set of forces and liable to fatal haltings; and especially is this true when the public opinion of the world—and, above all, the public opinion of the white voters of Europe—tend wholly to the view that an African colony is merely a means of enriching a European mother country. . . .

Modern economic forces in colonial lands do not tend to raise the masses. With grudging bits of education the mass raises itself, fighting against the politically powerful bourgeoisie in the home land. Any such fight in French Africa would be, in the main, a color-line fight.

How can this raising of the issue of color by colored folk be avoided? It can be avoided only by a social uplift that outruns consideration of profits; and this today seems scarcely probable. French Africa is organized for profit. Great corporations, great banks, great shipping agencies, great railroads, all unite in well-known and stereotyped ways to overthrow native industry, to prostitute native art, to make economic development in French West Africa mechanical and methodical, and, above all, profitable. ■