

# Bulletin

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## *Critiques of Live 8, Debt Reduction, and African Development Initiatives*

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**Editorial: Critiques of African and Global 'Development' in the Context of the Live 8/G8 Process**

Jesse Benjamin

The idea for an issue of the ACAS Bulletin devoted to critical analysis of Live 8 and the G8 Summit on Africa occurred this summer in the midst of the multi-media hype surrounding the conference and the concerts. They claimed to be representative of a qualitatively new period in Western relations with Africa and the ongoing efforts to address Africa's protracted problems of debt, poverty, health crises and more. It was supposed to be a concert that would "make poverty history". But was there any substance beneath the slogans that took over much of the media for several days in early July this year? While it was unusual to see any aspects of Africa on a Western television screen at all, and some of the coverage, especially on MTV seemed to go beyond headlines and stereotypes to include African people, activists and occasionally-critical Western rock stars, it was also hard to miss the corporate aspect of the whole enterprise. Many of us began wondering if nothing had been learned from the clear shortcomings of Live Aid/Band Aid some twenty years earlier – shortcomings that made the term "band-aid" synonymous with superficial for a generation of activists and critical scholars trying to make a difference ever since.

Scholars of Africa and practitioners of change alike were quickly affirmed in their skepticism by elements of this whole enterprise that were soon revealed to be far from new. Many saw the Live 8 concert as window dressing for repackaged imperial ambitions on the part of the Western powers, their corporations and donor agencies. While some pointed out that the new doubling of aid<sup>1</sup> promised to Africa by G8 countries was only a pittance compared to the \$300 billion in debt still owed on the continent,<sup>2</sup> others pointed out that far more was being spent on the supposed "war on terrorism" in Africa than immediate crises such as famine prevention and alleviation in Niger and other Sahel nations.<sup>3</sup> Debt "forgiveness" seemed positive,

and may actually be in some respects, until we see that it remains tied to crippling conditionalities much as it has for more than twenty years. That said, it remained difficult to cut through the hype in order to discern if any of this was positive, and if so what, or if any openings had been created that could be used by organizers and activists, aid workers and policy-minded scholars the world over. Further, how is this latest wrinkle or trend tied to the history of development initiatives and the underlying global inequalities that preceded it?

The intention of this issue of the ACAS Bulletin is to contribute to a debate on these questions and to the wider critique of Live 8 and its G8 allies, and to start opening new dialogue about ways forward despite the global obstacles to development and well-being in the African continent posed by the Western powers, institutions and corporations. We begin by reprinting a short article by Michel Chossudovsky, published by GlobalResearch.ca the day before the huge concert, which outlines the corporate underbelly of the Live 8 concert. He reveals it to be perhaps "the largest media advertising operation in history," which uses "poverty as a marketing tool" that results only in obscuring the real causes of global poverty. Instead of really restructuring unequal global economic relationships, or even truly "forgiving" debt, the author argues that the plan serves in reality as a "social safety net for the IMF and World Bank."

Sheila Carapico, writing a few days later in the Middle East Report Online, just after the London bombings, places the Live 8/G8 spectacle in global context, showing how any attention and momentum gained by the media blitz were abruptly sidelined by the violence which so conveniently afforded the G8 powers the opportunity to get back on-message about the global "War on Terror." A war whose oil hungry overlords may soon be coming to much

of Africa as Bill Martin and Meredith Turshen pointed out in the previous issue of the ACAS Bulletin, as the US plans to be getting more than 25% of its oil from the continent in the next few decades. Carapico's piece helps situate Live 8 and the broader question of "aid" in the context of the geopolitical vice Africa finds itself in, between the clashing "civilizations" the world is currently being structured around.

Ronald Labonte, Ted Schrecker and David Sanders use the issue of African health care to highlight the contradictions and shortcomings of the current G8 plans on debt relief and trade adjustment. The "gap between African reality and G8 rhetoric" is highlighted by dismantling the numbers behind the debt restructuring proposals which are in fact predicated upon additional free-market style conditions. Ignored by the G8 are the historical processes by which this debt was accumulated, and the same goes for current discussions of trade policy – liberal slogans aside, the G8 policies continue to abdicate "responsibility for the damaging legacy of colonialism," and to promote similar global inequalities in the present. In the realm of health care, their 'disease-specific interventions' ignore the context of the production of declining African health care systems and thus conveniently limit themselves to the band-aid solutions of the past. While encouraging engagement with the G8 and efforts to collect on its promises, the authors conclude that the pattern of *Fatal Indifference*, the title of their book on the subject, will not be interrupted from above.

Next we turn to the analysis of Moses Ochonu, whose work is more critical of the G8 than Live 8, although asking pertinent questions of both. Ochonu critiques the critics of both Live 8 and the G8. Calling for debt cancellation rather than "forgiveness," he implicates the "mainstream revisionist histories which exonerate and assuage the West's conscience," and in so doing make the current liberal discourse of condescension possible. The shift to cancellation rather than forgiveness is more than semantic and entails a major political and paradigm shift. Here however, he takes a turn from some of our other authors and offers food

for thought when he distances himself from those who would describe Live 8 as a new scramble for Africa. Arguing that do-gooder celebrities deserve a "lower critical standard than... Western politicians," he is clearly aware of the project's many shortcomings, but maintains that the good intentions should be appreciated if not duplicated, deepened and nurtured.

Leif Brottem, writing for Foreign Policy in Focus just after Live 8 and the Gleneagles Summit, uses the case of cotton, supposedly Africa's "white gold," to illustrate the narrowness of neo-liberal development thinking. Under Bretton Woods conditionality regimes for decades, African economies have continued to promote one-crop "solutions" to poverty that continue to fail despite the planning and money thrown at them. By isolating African national economies from the world system of which they are a part, international financial institutions have been able to ignore the deleterious impact of Western subsidies to its own cotton industries, while African cotton farmers pay the price. Large aid agencies have, to their credit, begun to make trade policy a central part of their campaigns, and some are promoting organic cotton, with its obvious benefit to farmers in both value added and toxicity reduction, but are less concerned with alternatives to monocropping such resource depleters as 'white gold.' Below the economics of this single crop lie the problems of land ownership, the unevenness of the world economy and the local political regimes supported by it.

The problems of development theory are engaged in Noah Zerbe's review of the December 2004 issue of *Historical Materialism*, devoted to "Marxism in African Realities." Decrying the unwillingness of most African studies concerned with development in the 1980s and 1990s to critique the neo-liberal hegemony underpinning Western institutional approaches to the continent, Zerbe finds a refreshing alternative in this recent collection. In contrast to the G8 model critiqued above, the historical materialist methodology emphasizes the significance of Africa's colonial past, "tracing the historical evolution of the

continent's uneven integration into the global political economy." Here the African state, the agrarian question, and the issue of Africa's marginality from capital while at the same time undergoing extreme external regulation by capital, all receive attention within a critical framework, without losing sight of the local level, which is covered by several contributors. At a time when neo-liberal hegemony over even progressive discourse seems to be inescapable, Zerbe found this collection to be a useful substitute.

As we review these critiques of the current round of "aid" to Africa, debt restructuring, and international trade agreements, alternative conceptual models are sorely needed, and it is likely to Africa itself that we must look for answers. Several of the pieces collected here highlight indigenous initiatives to combat the lethal impact of the powerful entities that control the world economy. It is increasingly necessary to cut through the discursive propaganda dominating the airwaves, especially as those very airwaves are more than ever consolidated in the hands of megalithic multinational corporations whose own profitability precedes their other functions as entertainer and newsmaker. Small moments of critical information sharing do infiltrate mainstream media discourse on occasion and, so doing, reach broader audiences than we on the left usually do.

One recent example was when the Canadian band Sum 41 appeared on an MTV program entitled "Think MTV: Rocked: Sum 41 in Congo." During the show, which briefly engaged aspects of the war and its social consequences in a predictably brief manner, the issue of the coltan trade made one of its first mainstream appearances on US television. Audiences were shown that this metal makes tiny cell phones and other components possible and that it is extracted in often violent and human rights violating contexts, drawing the links across the global economy between Western consumers and African producers in a largely unprecedented manner. The footage of Congo was itself largely exceptional in a US culture where most have only seen Congo and

its massive crisis through the oblique and Eurocentric lens of the fictional television drama ER several seasons ago. As such, we must remain critical of mainstream cultural representations of Africa while simultaneously embracing the few opportunities to reach broader audiences these limiting media afford us

As this issue goes to press, the legacy of Live 8 is further complicated by the September 24 announcements of the IMF that "supports the proposal to provide 100 percent cancellation of debts owed by Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s to the IMF, the International Development Association and the African Development Fund."<sup>4</sup> Although the plan is to implement this "debt relief" by the end of 2005, thus freeing billions of dollars from loan servicing to hopefully flow instead into social services sectors, they also emphasize "that countries benefiting from irrevocable debt relief should have demonstrated sound policies and high standards of governance." This leaves the door open for continued deployment of stringent free-market conditionalities that negate the benefits a lightened debt load portends. Some have observed throughout the Live 8/G8 process that "privatization hangs over debt relief,"<sup>5</sup> and this continues to be a concern in this recent announcement. So, while on some levels we may welcome this latest development, and perhaps credit the Live 8 project with playing a part in making it happen at this particular moment in history, we must remain vigilant of the workings behind the headlines, keeping foremost in our minds the deeper question of how to achieve African "development" in the context of a radically unequal global system. We hope that the essays collected here provide food for thought as we confront the days, weeks and years ahead in our work on these issues.

Following the essays on problems of development, Live 8 and the Debt in Africa, we reprint two recent ACAS alerts. The first concerns the expulsion of USAID from Eritrea in August, and the second is a teaching resource from Amnesty International on the film "Lords of War." Please also take note of the new ACAS Bud Day Award and the two ACAS-

sponsored panels at this year's African Studies Association Conference in Washington DC.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim VendeHei and Paul Blustein, "African Aid is Doubled by G8: Anti-Terror Solidarity Helps Blair Win Deal," Washington Post, Saturday, July 9, 2005, A1.

<sup>2</sup> Ann-Louis Colgan, "Op-Ed: The G8 and Africa," The Examiner, July 7, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Norm Dixon, "Africa: Millions for Military Aid, A Pittance for the Starving," Greenleft Weekly, August 24, 2005

<sup>4</sup> "Communiqué of the International Monetary and Financial Committee of the Board of Governors of the International Monetary Fund," Press Release No. 05/210, September 24, 2005, see especially item number 12; web address:

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/omd/2005/eng/091505.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> "Privatisation Hangs Over Debt Relief," Inter Press Service, 12 June, 2005. On related structural concerns, see: "What Debt Relief Means for Africa," Abraham McLaughlin, Christian Science Monitor, 13 June, 2005.

**Live 8 -- Corporate Media Bonanza:  
Disinformation Campaign and Public Relations Stunt on Behalf of the G8**

Michel Chossudovsky  
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Live 8, "the greatest concert" ever aired live, has been presented to World public opinion as an "awareness campaign" in solidarity with Africa. Its stated objective was to put pressure on the Group of Eight leaders (G8) to increase foreign aid flows and cancel the debt of the World's poorest countries.

In the words of its promoter Bob Geldof, Live 8 has provided a "unique opportunity" to save a continent from a humanitarian disaster. The Live 8 concerts organized in the eight major industrial countries (as well as in South Africa), however, were not intended to raise money for the World's poorest countries.

In fact quite the opposite. Live 8 is a multimillion dollar undertaking, which will result in huge profits for its corporate sponsors including AOL Time Warner, the US based media giant, the Ford Motor company, through its Swedish affiliate Volvo and Nokia, the cell phone company, not to mention Britain's EMI Music Group, which has entered into a highly lucrative arrangement with the Live 8 organizers.

AOLTime Warner controls the US broadcasting rights which it has licenced to the Walt Disney Company for broadcast TV on ABC and a myriad of affiliated TV and radio stations,

including Premiere Radio Networks, XM Satellite Radio and Viacom's MTV Networks (for cable TV). AOL also holds the exclusive online rights for the event on the internet.

TV air-time has been auctioned off around the world. Millions of dollars of advertising revenues are expected from the broadcasting of the event, not to mention the repeats, the video-clips, the internet broadcasting and the DVDs, which will be available commercially.

According to the producers, Live 8 will go down as "the biggest global broadcast in history". The organizers expect --through TV, radio and the internet-- to reach some 5.5 billion people, or 85 per cent of the world's population. The advertising industry places the number of potential viewers at a conservative two billion, approximately one third of the World's population.

By far this is largest media advertising operation in history, which will line the pockets of the promoters, producers, corporate sponsors, not to mention the royalties accruing to the performers and "celebrities". A small percentage of the proceeds might accrue to charitable organizations involved in developing countries but this is not the stated objective of Live 8.

The Ford Motor Company has used the event to promote its "up-market" Swedish car division Volvo, with advertising spots during the US broadcast. Volvo has also provided for artist transportation to and from the London and Philadelphia concerts as well as a VIP entertainment suite at the Philadelphia concert. (See <http://www.adage.com/news>, June 30, 2005). "The event, said company spokesman Soren Johansson, "fits with the DNA of the company" and "appeals to people's emotions." One of Volvo's TV spots features 'Volvo for Life' award-winner Rosamond Carr, "who operates an orphanage in Rwanda, and two others talking about Volvo's values and their reasons for Live 8 involvement." (Ibid)

Moreover, Vonage, the US based phone company is said to have spent "'six figures' to become a primary sponsor of Premiere Radio Networks' coverage". And will also run a Live 8 schedule on MTV Networks.

#### **The EMI Deal**

In a multimillion dollar agreement with the Live 8 organizers, Britain's EMI Music Group has secured the exclusive rights on the DVDs of the concerts in six of the G8 countries including the US, France, Britain, UK, Italy and Germany: "An EMI spokeswoman said that once sales had paid for the advance, Live 8 would pay a 'very generous royalty rate' to Live 8 on the rest of the sales." In the words, of Bob Geldof, "I hope this will be the biggest-selling DVD of all time." Meanwhile, the event has contributed to boosting stock market values with EMI's share price triple its 2003 level.

#### **Distorting the Causes of Global Poverty**

The concerts are totally devoid of political content. They concentrate on simple and misleading clichés. They use poverty as a marketing tool and a consumer-advertising gimmick to increase the number of viewers and listeners worldwide.

Live 8 creates an aura of optimism. It conveys the impression that poverty can be vanquished with the stroke of the pen. All we need is good will. The message is that G8 leaders, together

with the World Bank and the IMF, are ultimately committed to poverty alleviation.

In this regard, the concerts are part of the broader process of media disinformation. They are used as a timely public relations stunt for Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is hosting the G-8 Summit at Gleneagles, Scotland. Tony Blair is presented as stepping up his campaign to convince other G8 nations "to take action on poverty".

#### **The G8's Debt Forgiveness Proposal**

Live 8 fails to challenge or comprehend the G8 policy agenda which directly contributes to creating poverty, nor does it question the role of the World Bank, now under the helm of Paul Wolfowitz, the neo-conservative architect of the invasion of Iraq.

In addressing the issue of debt forgiveness, Live 8 does not even acknowledge the impacts of IMF-World Bank "economic medicine" imposed on the World's poorest countries on behalf of Western creditors.

These deadly macro-economic reforms have contributed to the impoverishment of millions of people. They oblige countries to close down their schools and hospitals, privatize their public services and sell off the most profitable sectors of their national economy to foreign capital. In return, the G8 promises to increase foreign aid and provide token debt relief. These reforms kill and the G8 is not the solution but the cause. Actor Will Smith addressed the crowds at the concert venues "to snap their fingers" as a reminder that every three seconds a child dies in Africa. What he failed to mention is that the main cause of child mortality in Africa are the deadly macroeconomic reforms.

Bob Geldof sees an increase in foreign aid completely out of context, as a "unique opportunity" to eradicating poverty, when in fact the proposed increase in aid flows by the rich G8 countries will lead to exactly the opposite results. A large percentage of the debt of these countries is owed to the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank

To address this issue, G8 finance ministers had indeed put forth a proposal which consisted in "forgiving" the outstanding debt owed to these three international financial institutions by the 18 highly indebted countries. The debt forgiveness figure mentioned was of the order of 40 billion dollars. Concurrently, there was a vague commitment to eventually increasing foreign aid flows to the 0.7% of GDP target. ([http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/finance/fm050611\\_dev.htm](http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/finance/fm050611_dev.htm))

Where is the hitch behind this seemingly reasonable "debt forgiveness" proposal? The IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Bank, never cancel or forgive outstanding debts. Because they do not forgive debts, the G8 has committed itself to reimbursing the multilateral creditors acting on behalf of the World's poorest countries.

Where will they get the money? For each dollar of "debt cancellation" to the international financial institutions, the G8 will reduce the flow of foreign aid to these countries. In other words, the foreign aid earmarked to finance much needed social programs will now go directly into the coffers of the IMF and the World Bank. There is nothing new in this financial mechanism. It has been used time and again since the onslaught of the debt crisis.

### **"Social Safety Net" for the IMF and the World Bank**

What we are dealing with is not a debt forgiveness program, but a "reimbursement" process which directly serves the interests of the creditors. The deal constitutes a much needed "social safety net" for the multilateral creditors. It ensures a cash flow towards these institutions, while maintaining the World's poorest countries in the stranglehold of the IMF and the World Bank. It also prevents these countries from declaring default on their external debt.

President Bush has made it very clear. The money paid to the World Bank on behalf of the countries, will be "taken out of existing aid budgets." The "debt forgiveness" program, even if it is accompanied by an increase in foreign aid commitments, will result in a significant

compression of real foreign aid flows to the highly indebted countries.

The proposed increases in foreign aid commitments are fictitious since the money is intended for the multilateral creditors. And the deal will only be implemented if the indebted countries promise to carry out the usual gamut of "free market" reforms, under IMF/World Bank supervision.

An added condition emanating directly from the Bush administration pertains to "governance". It requires these countries to "democratize" on the US model under Western supervision, as well as carry out "free elections" on the example of Iraq and Afghanistan.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The concerts serve to usefully distract public attention from the US-UK led war on Iraq and the broader relationship between war and global poverty. Not a word is mentioned in the concerts on the fact that George W. Bush and Tony Blair are considered "war criminals" under international law.

Moreover, Live 8 tends to undermine all forms of meaningful and articulate dissent to the G8 policy agenda. With the exception of the South African venue, which included the appearance of Nelson Mandela, the concerts are devoid of a broader understanding and commitment.

Live 8 undermines both the anti-globalization and anti-war movements. It diverts public opinion and distracts media attention from the G8 protest movement. It also serves to undermine the articulation of more radical voices against the New World Order.

More generally, the event instills an atmosphere of ignorance among the millions who listen to the music and who have the feeling of doing something positive and constructive. But none of the core elements needed to understand the causes of global poverty are presented.

To the Live 8 corporate sponsors, including Bob Geldof, the EMI Group, AOL Time Warner, The Ford Motor Company, Nokia, MTV, the Walt Disney Company, etc: "Put your money where

you mouth is." If you are really committed to poverty alleviation, give the entire proceeds of this multimillion dollar media operation, including the revenues generated by the corporate sponsors, TV networks, advertising firms, royalties accruing to celebrities and performers, to the people of Africa. Let them use this money as they see fit, without interference from donors and creditors.

To the people of Africa: Do not let yourself be deceived by a giant corporate media stunt where poverty is used as a logo, to attract consumers

and make money. Default on your debt to the IMF and the World Bank.

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### **Killing Live 8, Noisily: The G-8, Liberal Dissent and the London Bombings**

Sheila Carapico  
© Middle East Report Online

The organizers of Live 8, the week-long, celebrity-driven musical campaign for increased aid and debt relief for poverty-stricken nations, plugged their July 6 concert in an Edinburgh stadium as "a celebration of the largest and loudest cry to make poverty history the world has ever seen." By rush hour the next morning, four coordinated bombings in the London transit system had stolen the show from the well-orchestrated international extravaganza and handed the microphone to Tony Blair and George W. Bush. Talk about a vast right-wing conspiracy: the London terrorists could not have done more to strengthen the hand of the world's richest states against dissident voices in the West and beyond if they had actually been in cahoots.

The July 7 bombings in London interrupted the sanctimonious conversation between the British prime minister, the US president and other "world leaders" at a luxurious Scottish resort concerning global warming and what to do about those perennially poor Africans. Instantly, the podium at the Group of Eight summit became a pulpit, from which Blair and Bush preached against evil and claimed the mantle of the Live 8 concerts for themselves. "It's particularly barbaric," Blair intoned, "that this has happened on a day when people are meeting to try to help

the problems of poverty in Africa, the long-term problems of climate change and the environment." His American confrere concurred: "On the one hand, we got people here who are working to alleviate poverty and to help rid the world of the pandemic of AIDS and that are working on ways to have a clean environment. And on the other hand, you've got people killing innocent people. And the contrast couldn't be clearer." The moral of their story is: either you are with the G-8 or you are with the terrorists.

The us-against-them rhetoric relegated popular demonstrations against the G-8's managed haute finance to the sidelines, and muffled the cry of the Live 8 concerts attended by tens of thousands of rock fans and activists in cities across the globe and watched by millions more. Timed to coincide with the summit, and symbolically as much a strike at trappings of global capitalism as the attacks on the World Trade Center, instead the explosions silenced voices against forced debt repayment and the war in Iraq. Blair got to pretend to be the patron, instead of the target, of debt relief activists. The G-8 got to portray themselves as civilized governments magnanimously doling out charity to Africans, Palestinians and AIDS victims,



rather than a resented club of the geopolitically advantaged. Legitimate counter-narratives about what "the West" or "the civilized world" are and ought to be doing about pressing economic and environmental problems were hushed by another act of senseless destruction.

### **Not Exactly Revolutionaries**

There was a time when peacenik rock stars glorified revolutionaries. In the old days of the Algerian resistance and the Viet Cong, the predecessors to the protesters outside the G-8 gathering had sympathy for the rebels. Some of the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon found expression in the crooning of Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Bob Marley. Rock concerts resembled anti-war protests and protest rallies sounded like rock concerts. In what in those days was called a New Left analysis, which laced Marxism with anti-colonial nationalism, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh were standard bearers; as the anti-war movement gained momentum, they became folk heroes. In counter-establishment pop culture, the armed vanguard of the anti-imperialist resistance had a real panache. This is because the revolutionaries offered a cogent and compelling analysis with wide appeal across continents and cultures, one that spoke intellectually to Africans and Europeans or Asians and Americans alike. There was a basis for solidarity, a sense of common cause.

Al-Qaeda is transparently not the spearhead of a progressive movement for peace and justice -- either in perception or in fact. Osama bin Laden is not Che Guevara, even if in places like Honduras and the Philippines one can buy T-shirts depicting him as such. There is nothing in the statements of al-Qaeda and the other jihadists that speaks to the G-8 protesters, nor even to the Afro-Asian masses for whom they sometimes claim to speak. Actually, they offer no coherent ideology at all, but only vacuous far-right incitement like "death to Jews and Crusaders." There is nothing romantic or righteous about blowing up London trains. Nor is there a shred of evidence that the bombers in London admire the protesters or sympathize with their goals.

Al-Qaeda, or whatever spinoff group planned and executed this none too daring exploit, is not lighting the way to relief of African debt. They are not fighting for Palestinian, Iraqi or Chechen independence, or for a revolution in Saudi Arabia, or to free political prisoners in Egypt. They do not respect or abide by Islamic law as understood by those who know what it is about. They are reactionary nihilist-anarchists with no positive vision or program: even the goal of an "Islamic state" per se is more imputed than articulated. They want to destroy the nation-state, the world system and the tourism industry. Issuing no manifestos, they are rebels without much of a cause at all. In post-Orwellian fashion, the medium -- detonating explosives -- is the message. The goal is not even killing, as is so often said, but the cheap thrill of making very loud noises, blowing things apart and letting horrified audiences watch the mayhem replay endlessly on television. The bombing tactic is not particularly directed against democracies. Nor are democracies particularly vulnerable, as targets in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kenya and other places show. Nor, it has now been widely recognized, is this a centralized operation: for all we know, the London bombers were trying to show up bin Laden for laying low these past few years. The tactic of randomly setting off explosions is not going to go away, whether or not al-Qaeda loses its patent.

The Live 8 musicians are not exactly revolutionaries, either. Bono and U2, the specially reunited Pink Floyd, Paul McCartney, Stevie Wonder, Madonna, Elton Jon, Bon Jovi and other stars with a conscience hoped, in the words of Live 8 organizer and Irish rocker Bob Geldof, that their show-biz blitz would "tilt the world a little bit on its axis in favor of the poor." Their modest mission, in the Band Aid tradition, is to evince and thereby elicit some compassion for the rest of humanity.

### **Casualties of War**

But yet another high-profile bombing in the Western heartland further limits the scope for even the Live 8 brand of consciousness raising, by casting global conflict in cultural or civilizational terms, not economic ones. That conflict, pace Blair and Bush, is not about the

wealth of the North perpetuating the poverty of the global South, or the G-8 riding herd over the G-88, or any material issues at all, but instead an ideological struggle that pits East against West and Islam against Christianity, equating this with those who love freedom against those who hate freedom, or the civilized world against barbarism. Blair ascribed the London bombings to people who "act in the name of Islam." Though he hastened to add that the vast majority of Muslims in Britain and elsewhere are "decent and law-abiding," his attribution of religious motivation can only leave non-Muslims wondering what in Islam could justify such acts even as every imam in the isles seeks to disavow any connection between Islam and "violence." The Islamist militants exaggerate their own power by claiming to be backed by a billion believers, princes and paupers alike. For their part, US, British and Russian leaders perpetuate this telescopic magnification of "the other side" in a "global war" because it positions them as defenders of the Free World against a transcontinental army "over there" rather than scattered cells of narcissistic anarchists in their own midst. So even when the bombers turn out to be homegrown Anglo-Asian cultural hybrids, as appears to be the case with the London attackers, the problem has already been classified as "foreign."

There is no evidence of a mass following or widespread public support in North Africa, the Levant or the Arabian Peninsula for a group calling itself al-Qaeda, much less al-Qaeda in Europe. To be sure, Islamist parties have flourished above ground and underground in many countries, often thanks to their governments' campaigns to obliterate what a generation ago was a flourishing Arab left. A number of Arab despots feel threatened by Islamism, as well they might, since nationalism and national solutions to the challenge of social order have been discredited by the likes of Saddam Hussein, the Palestinian sovereignty conundrum and downright crummy governance. A strong majority of Arabs and Muslims undoubtedly share European disgust with the Iraq war, and most deplore uncritical US support for Israel. So yes, they hate US and Western policies. But al-Qaeda is not representative of

Islamism and its pronouncements are not consonant with those of any major Islamist party. Nor do the political sentiments of Arabs and Muslims make them natural al-Qaeda constituents, and anyway many more Arabs than Westerners have died at the hands of the violent salafi fringe. There is no sense conjuring the jihadists as a vast military machine capable of inspiring masses of volunteers and conscripting huge infantries, comparable to the Third Reich or Communism.

If insight is the first casualty of this quasi-war, humanitarianism is the second. Those who would forge North/South alliances, challenge the economic tyranny of the G-8 or march against world hunger have been thrown back on the defensive after only a weak recovery from the blow of the September 11 attacks. The Islamic catchphrases on jihadist websites, the political reaction, especially in the United States, and the failure of progressive and/or Arabist scholars to publicize a more accurate analysis of the problems that face the world in the twenty-first century leave a broad swath of the Euro-American public unable to identify or sympathize with Arabs or Muslims at all. Instead, cracks from Thomas Friedman that "only the Muslim world can root out [this] death cult" again insinuate a pan-Islamic responsibility for the loss of innocent Western life. Friedman's confident, but completely erroneous pronouncement that "to this day -- to this day -- no major Muslim cleric or religious body has ever issued a fatwa condemning Osama bin Laden" puts off more heat than light. Meanwhile, scholars who write knowledgeably about Arabs and Islam, but not terrorism, are open to suspicions of sympathy or even collusion with the enemy.

### **Setback**

When the G-8 summit concluded, Blair, who used to represent the once social-minded, left-leaning Labor Party, announced that loans and technical assistance from the world's wealthiest nations to Africa would be raised to a whopping \$50 billion by 2010. While reminding Africans that they alone are responsible for their impoverishment and must pull themselves up by their sandal-straps, he also promised future cuts

in the massive farm subsidies G-8 governments use to fertilize domestic agriculture in violation of their own free-market mantras and at the expense of farmers in poor countries. Fifty billion dollars sounds like an impressive sum until it is divided by five years and among three dozen countries, or until it is compared with the \$82 billion allocated by Congress in May for one more year's prosecution of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In any case, it is far less than activists had hoped for, and everyone knows promises are not budgetary appropriations or subsidy reductions. Summiteers acknowledged that global warming may be a problem, but bowed to the Bush administration's fears that doing something about it might interfere with wealth creation inside the world's richest economy.

It is too early to tell whether the British public will respond, as Spaniards did after the March 2004 Madrid bombings, by blaming the government that allowed such a thing to happen. Initial reactions indicate that, to the contrary, Blair's tarnished public image may regain its shine, as did Bush's after September 11, 2001. Bono himself blessed Blair's African aid pledges by saying that "the world spoke and the politicians listened." So much for liberal dissent from the G-8's poverty policy.

Already it would seem that death and destruction in downtown London have tightened central, self-interested management of global capitalism at the G-8 level and shored up the reactionary national security state within both the US and Britain while obliterating British, American and international voices calling for a more genuinely global sense of justice and fairness. Together, the violence and the rhetorical response sow distrust and "racial" fears within the West as well as between East and West, bolstering nativism and rationalizing the retraction of civil liberties. The attacks of July 7 ultimately strengthen, not weaken, the power centers of the world system their targets ostensibly represent. This episode, like the September 11 attacks and the Madrid bombings, set back the cause of peace and justice.

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## Who Really Cares about African Health?: Post-Gleneagles, The Question Remains

Ronald Labonte, Ted Schrecker and David Sanders

### Introduction

"So, after the sound and fury of Gleneagles, what are we left with? Have there been any decisive policy changes that will ultimately lead most of Africa out of poverty? One must say, reluctantly given the well-meaning intentions, that there were not (1)." That criticism comes, not from a group of anti-poverty activists, but from the August/September 2005 cover story in African Business ... and it says a lot about the gap between African reality and G8 rhetoric. In this article, we provide an overview of three key areas of industrialized world (in)action: debt relief, trade and support for health systems. We

conclude with a few brief observations about the future role of the G8.

### Debt relief

Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa remain crippled by external debt burdens, despite years of domestic austerity imposed in order to satisfy creditors. The \$15 billion a year that Africa spends on debt servicing is four times what it spends on health and education, "the building blocks of the AIDS response" according to UNAIDS executive director Peter Piot (2). Between 1970 and 2002, African countries have borrowed \$540 billion from foreign sources,

paid back \$550 billion (in principal and interest), but still owe \$295 billion, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (3, UNCTAD 2004: 19).

Over the past nine years, the industrialized world has grudgingly committed a total of \$58 billion to partial cancellation of the debts of up to 38 countries, 32 of them in Africa, under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. Although this initiative has freed up funds for public spending on health and education in several countries (4), it has also been widely criticized for making debt relief conditional on adopting a variety of market-oriented economic policies that have only a tenuous relation to poverty reduction (5,6) and may even worsen health conditions. Debt relief is often also used simply to pay off other creditors. For example, between 2002 and 2005 almost two-thirds of the revenue freed by debt relief for Zambia went to reduce debts owed to other creditors leaving only a third for investing in poverty-reducing programs including health and education (7, Table 2:37).

According to one estimate, half the debts of the HIPC countries will remain unpaid and uncanceled even if all countries receive the full amount of debt relief for which they are eligible (8). And because of the way a "sustainable" debt load is defined for purposes of HIPC – a criterion based on anticipated future export earnings on which the G7 insisted (8) – two African countries (Malawi and Mozambique) have actually seen increases in their debt service costs, while Uganda and Senegal have seen reductions of less than 25 percent (9, p. 148). Thus, the Gleneagles Summit (10) commitment to an additional \$40 - \$56 billion in multilateral debt cancellation is a welcome and overdue next step. However, the commitment applies only to countries that reach their "completion point" in the HIPC initiative. Many countries that are not desperate enough to be eligible nevertheless require substantial debt relief if they are to have any chance to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 (11).

Perhaps of most immediate concern are the conditions that may be attached to debt cancellation. For example, a separate partial debt cancellation deal for oil-rich Nigeria requires acceptance of "intensive surveillance of its economy by the International Monetary Fund" (12), whose priorities may or may not be related to the country's ability to meet the basic needs of its people. Belgium's IMF representative (with the support of Norway, Switzerland and the Netherlands) is seeking similarly "strict controls" over the economic policies of the 18 countries now eligible for full debt cancellation under the G8 plan (13). The World Bank has expressed concern that the G8 debt cancellation announcement "offered no mechanism for suspending debt relief if a debtor country deviated from economic and social reforms" prescribed by it and the IMF (14) ... and historically, the priorities incorporated into those "reforms" have little or nothing to do with improving population health (15-18).

Since countries reaching the "completion point" (18, so far) have all complied with the requirements imposed by the IMF and World Bank in order to qualify for debt relief, addition of new conditions implies that these institutions are not prepared to give up control over the economic and social policies of recipient countries, opting instead for an even more aggressive agenda of forced integration into the global economy. Finally, the Gleneagles Summit continued a long-standing refusal to address the question of whether 'odious debts' incurred by highly repressive or larcenous governments (e.g. those of Zaire under Mobutu, Kenya under Moi, South Africa pre-1994 and Nigeria pre-2002) should be regarded as uncollectible under international law (19,20).

### **Trade**

A less visible but equally destructive failure involves trade. The G8 insist that "drawing the poorest countries into the global economy is the surest way to address their fundamental aspirations" (21). Development policy protagonists who disagree about much else agree on the need for improved market access for developing country exports: industrialized countries must lower trade barriers (14,22,23).

We nonetheless attach three cautions to this basic conclusion. First, economic growth through raw commodity export has proved a dead-end for many developing countries, as well as a source of internal conflict over control of the resource exports (e.g. oil, gold, diamonds, other minerals). The escalating tariffs many G8 countries retain on manufactured or value-added goods are particularly egregious in keeping such countries underdeveloped within a “primary commodity trap.” This applies to agricultural products as well. Second, national policies must ensure that historical gender, ethnic, cultural or class biases within developing countries that do increase their exports do not allow the benefits of export-led growth to accumulate in the hands of a few elite groups or companies. Third, some small poor countries are net food importers, as production and export subsidies (eventually) decline in rich world exporting nations, compensatory payments will need to be made to poor food importers if they are unable to achieve domestic food self-sufficiency. Two years have elapsed since industrialized country intransigence on this point led to the collapse of trade talks at Cancún. Yet the G8 had nothing specific to offer beyond a vague promise to reduce or eliminate such subsidies “by a credible end date” (9).

The irony is bitter because many developing countries have destroyed domestic industries, such as textiles and clothing in Zambia (24) and poultry in Ghana (25), by lowering trade barriers and accepting the resulting social dislocations as the price of global integration. A recent study applied standard econometric modeling to the counterfactual: What would economic growth have been in sub-Saharan Africa over the past 20 years had its countries not been forced to liberalize their economies by the IFIs and conditions attached to aid (26,27). Based on results from a sample of 22 African countries, the study implies costs of roughly \$272 billion – about the same amount the continent received in aid during this time. According to Christian Aid, the organization that commissioned the study: “Effectively, this aid did no more than compensate African countries for the losses they sustained by meeting the conditions that were attached to the aid they received” (26, p. 2).

Recognition is growing among development policy specialists that developing countries need stronger “special and differential treatment” (SDT) provisions under trade treaties (28). The UK Commission for Africa recommended a “development test” whereby a dispute over a developing country’s abrogation of trade treaty commitments could be screened to determine whether it was justified by domestic development goals: “This test would focus on the likely net effects of not implementing WTO rules in favour of more development orientated trade policy, and on negative spillovers, and would allow greater discussion of development concerns, rather than merely the implementation of the rule of law” (22, pp. 280-1).

The G8 itself, as we noted earlier, claimed at Gleneagles that developing countries must “decide, plan and sequence their economic policies to fit with their own development strategies,” for which purpose easing trade treaty obligations and increasing their domestic policy flexibilities are essential. Yet no reference was made to this need in the documents emerging from the Summit apart from a rather bland and arguably contradictory acknowledgement in the G8 Communiqué on Trade that there must be “appropriate flexibility” for least developed countries to “sequence their overall economic reforms in line with their country-led development programmes and their international obligations” (9). G8 members are also reportedly reluctant to support strengthening special and differential treatment provisions in World Trade Organization negotiations (29).

### **Health systems**

African health systems are in crisis and in many countries are too weakened and fragmented to enable the scaling-up of potentially effective interventions (30). This is illustrated by the fact that coverage with the 6 basic vaccines of childhood has stagnated in almost every region of the world since 1990, with Africa at a dismal 50 -60% (31), and is placed in stark relief by the urgent need to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic by providing treatment and care – much more complex operations than vaccination.

In the context of declining national health budgets, health sector reforms and the advent of “public-private partnerships” the past ten years has seen a massive growth of global programmes focused on specific diseases. The largest of these – the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) – have billion dollar budgets and are major sources of health financing in the poorest countries. Hence, perhaps the single most conspicuous failure of the G8 with respect to health system strengthening is the lack of new money for the GFATM, after it was hailed by the G8 in 2001 with rhetoric about “a quantum leap in the fight against infectious diseases.” GFATM estimates that it will need US \$7.1 billion in 2006 and 2007 to fund new proposals and continuations of existing work (32), against pledges of US \$1.45 billion as of July 2005 (33) – and this \$7.1 billion is considerably less than the annual budget recommended for the Fund by the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health (34). The G8 said nothing at Gleneagles about this funding gap beyond a vague promise to “work to meet the financing needs for HIV/AIDS, including through the replenishment this year of the Global Fund” (10).

Many global programs are centred around providing funds for specific technical interventions such as new drugs and vaccines. The GFATM, for example, targets 49% of its expenditure on drugs and commodities, such as ARVs and new anti-malarials, but only 20% on human resources and training (35). In the long term, countries themselves will be expected to pay for these inputs, resulting in a massive burden of recurrent expenditure on national budgets – without any corresponding long-term donor commitments. Hence, above and beyond expanded support for programs like GFATM, there is a need – not addressed at Gleneagles – for multi-year budget support for core health ministry programs. Finally, the proliferation of funds and donor agencies is increasingly criticized for the competing reporting and staffing demands it places on recipient countries (36, 37).

The Gleneagles commitment to work towards the UN AIDS goal of ‘Three Ones’ – one national AIDS implementation agency, one national policy, one monitoring framework – is a positive sign, if honoured. Yet it is substantially less ambitious than the recommendation of the UK Commission for Africa report that a “‘Fourth One,’ a single pooled fund, should also be pursued” (38, p. 198) for AIDS funding. This strategy, if applied more broadly to health development assistance, might begin to decouple aid from the strategic, economic or ideological interests of the donor country and allow greater recipient country control of aid, with disbursements allocated more by health need and local health system requirements. Even under the best of circumstances, though, disease-specific initiatives reinforce the notion that diseases are unfortunate, random occurrences, and allow us to turn a blind eye to the global political and economic conditions that underlie the desperate poverty and ill-health that is so widespread in Africa (39).

#### **What to expect from the G8?**

Can, or should, the G8 play a leadership role in development and global health? It originated after a series of economic crises in the 1970s as an effort to restore the profitability of private investment by coordinating macroeconomic policy (40) – what political scientist Stephen Gill calls “part of an attempt to institutionalize a new form of transnational capitalist hegemony, and to reinforce the power of certain social forces within an emergent transnational civil society” (41, p. 131). Against this background, perhaps the single most disturbing statement from Gleneagles was: “Further progress in Africa depends above all on its own leaders and its own people” (10).

This can be read as a welcome retreat from paternalism, including the paternalism embodied in the celebrity-backed concert series leading up to the Summit. As African Business pointed out, the biggest gainers from that exercise were aging rockers “whose careers were raised from the dead” (1). On the other hand, the Gleneagles statement about “further progress” abdicates responsibility for the damaging legacy of colonialism (22,38), and for subsequent

obstacles to improving population health in the developing world created by market-oriented economic policies promoted by the G8. Those policies were backed up both by conditions attached to loans from the World Bank and IMF, and by the 'softer' conditionality of creating an investor-friendly environment in an era of hypermobile capital (5,15,23,42,43). Gleneagles may set a precedent in terms of the G8's debt and aid promises, which demand critical evaluation and careful monitoring – especially since \$12.3 billion of commitments under the existing enhanced HIPC initiative remain unfunded (9, p. 146). Even if the G8 live up to the new commitments, and can bring the needed pressure to bear on private sector creditors and non-G8 members, in too many other areas Gleneagles continues past years' pattern of Fatal Indifference (23).

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## Debt Cancellation, Aid, and Live 8: A Moral Response to Critics

Moses Ochonu

Since the announcement of debt cancellation to a select group of highly indebted African countries who are said to have met some of the conditions for such a gesture, the gesture has been criticized by a motley intellectual crowd of African and non-African commentators. These critics of the Tony Blair initiative, if I may conveniently call it that, argue that Africa neither deserves what is commonly called debt relief/debt forgiveness nor has it proven itself worthy of increased aid. Extending debt cancellation and increasing aid to African countries, the critics argue, would simply be rewarding bad debtor behavior and would also be providing money to corrupt African governments that they claim mismanaged aid money in the past. What is needed in Africa, these critics contend, is not debt cancellation but a thorough reform of African states with the aim of eliminating wastage and avenues of corruption.

Some critics have gone so far as to ask that increased aid be conditional upon the completion of, so far, largely elusive political reforms, or that aid be channeled outside governmental control directly to what they call the civil society, a supposedly autonomous domain of mobilization and civic action that is free of the problems that plague the state in Africa. In their effort to focus attention squarely

on the internal dimension of the African predicament, some of these critics also seek to minimize the impact on African economies of unfair and hypocritical Western trade practices and of so-called free market conditionalities, which are often attached to Western aid and/or written into reform recommendations of Bretton Woods organs and debt negotiators. Finally, the critics denigrate the efforts of Western anti-poverty groups, especially Bob Geldof's Live Aid, which is critiqued as a feel-good, self-justifying jamboree of naïve Western entertainers and their equally naïve fans.

In this essay, I take on some of these criticisms, outlining their faulty premises, commenting on their weaknesses, and suggesting alternative paradigms of evaluating both governmental and non-governmental Western efforts to tackle Africa's poverty problem. Let me start by deconstructing the idea of "debt relief" or "debt forgiveness," two innocuous but ideologically weighty and suggestive concepts which have come to dominate discussions on the debt cancellation package agreed upon at the recently concluded G-8 summit in Scotland. The two concepts betray the extent to which notions of Western magnanimity have converged in the current analyses of Africa's problems. Even African scholars and intellectuals have allowed themselves to be seduced by the faulty foundational assumption that the West is

altruistically lifting a burden off of Africa. We should reject such misleading assumptions. Instead of the concept of “debt forgiveness,” I subscribe to the more appropriate and neutral concept of debt cancellation.

To people unschooled in the politically powerful art of using words and concepts to shape political discussions and reality, this distinction may seem like a pedantic semantic obsession. Far from being so, it is a distinction upon which the current discussion of Africa's debt problem revolves; it may even help determine what Africans negotiators are able to exact from on-going negotiations. Concepts deployed in international political discussions are hardly neutral; they are often carefully and strategically crafted to shape perceptions and discussions which emanate from such perceptions.

In fact, in this particular case, the medium is the message, to use a mass communication terminology. For the concepts of debt relief and debt forgiveness suggest that Africans do not deserve the gesture and that it is a magnanimous act of minimal or no self-interest on the part of the West. The two concepts also efface the nature and archaeology of these debts, which, as we know, emanate from dubious loans knowingly provided to African governments who, it was known, would, with the active assistance of rapacious Western businessmen, economic hitmen, and financial institutions, embezzle them to benefit themselves and their Western collaborators.

You do not forgive bad loans; you write them off or cancel them. The gesture of debt cancellation (as opposed to debt-relief) connotes, more than anything else, an important willingness on the part of Western governments to be self-critical and to admit a certain degree of culpability on their own part and on behalf of Western actors in the aid-corruption-Swiss-bank-accounts racket. The concept of debt cancellation, then, speaks both to a present programmatic imperative and a need for analytical/historical accuracy in the matter of African foreign debt. The concept of debt forgiveness, on the other hand, re-inscribes the same obdurate insistence on the part of the

Industrialized world that it is merely coming to the rescue of a self-destructive Africa—an Africa wracked by a crisis devoid of Western culpability.

### **The Blair Plan and its Critics**

Most critics have argued that the Blair plan simply endorses throwing money at a bad situation. This is a gross disservice to and a crude mischaracterization of the Blair plan; it reduces the plan to yet another attempt to raise and throw money at Africa's myriad problems. It is an unfair caricature of a three-pronged, nuanced proposal, of which aid is only one aspect. Debt cancellation, which the plan calls debt relief, is another aspect. The most important aspect of that proposal—and this is what makes it radical in an unprecedented way—is its courage in calling for the abolishing of many anti-Africa Western trade practices, not the least of which are the agricultural subsidies which not only close Western markets to African producers but also belies the West's rhetoric of free trade and globalization. The failure of the G-8 to reach an agreement on the issue is not an indictment of Blair's proposal regarding it; it is an indictment of the unrelenting Western commitment to its global economic hegemony.

Critics such as Professor George Ayittey of American University argue that Africa has already received and absorbed the equivalent of several Marshall Plans; they argue that this invalidates calls for an African Marshall Plan. Comparing Western aid to Africa to the Marshall Plan of post-world War II Europe is misleading. The \$450 Billion purportedly “pumped” into Africa between 1960 and 1997 was not free money but a plethora of soft loans, with conditions that are anything but soft. The Marshall Plan, on the other hand, was direct, free America aid, the only condition being that the nations of Europe had to form a collective and devise a comprehensive plan on how to spend the money. One could say the world has changed and that the political threats and goals which made the case for the Marshall Plan no longer exist today. That may be so, but who is to say that hunger, disease, destitution, and anger in Africa pose a lesser threat to the United States

than did the advancing wave of Soviet Socialism?

It is also argued that no African government has been made to account for how it expended past aid money. This is a fair statement, for state accountability is indispensable to any transparent regime of aid disbursement. I have no doubt in my mind that the day of reckoning is coming for all the leaders who mortgaged Africans' collective patrimony and destiny by taking and squandering foreign loans and aid on behalf of expectant and needy compatriots. But I have no illusions that the West will be the champion of such a project of accountability. The West will not demand such an accounting, not because of their anxieties and guilt over historical injuries inflicted on Africans; as anyone can see, the West has since shrugged off the guilt of the slave trade and colonialism, and mainstream revisionist histories which exonerate and assuage the West's conscience now proliferate in academic and non-academic circles. Rather, the West will not pursue such a project because a full accounting will inevitably indict the West and its complicit financial institutions, not to mention some respectable Western figures who do business with African leaders and who are either in power in Western countries or have politicians in these countries that are beholden to them. Such a process of accounting will open Pandora's Box and reveal the underbelly of the fraudulent, two-sided aid-loan-corruption poverty-producing machine. This is why the West will not demand full public accounting. They will not investigate their own institutions and practices.

Analyses which harp only on the misdeeds and corruption of African governments are, at best, one-sided. If African kleptocrats have yet to be held accountable for collecting and misusing dubious aid, no Western contractors and economic hitmen (apologies to John Perkins), who callously pushed dubious waste-pipe projects on greedy African bureaucrats and politicians, have been called to account for their destructive adventures on the continent. They, too, must not go scot-free.

Perhaps the most contentious argument offered so far against increased aid and debt cancellation is the claim that until Africa "cleans its house," Western gestures will be meaningless to the continent's peoples. On the surface, this appears to be a reasonable claim, and it would be a noble assertion were it not for the fallacy which inheres in it. How can Africa not be better off, even with all the corruption and waste, if it no longer has to pay the billions of dollars that it pays annually to service debts that were dubiously incurred; debts which ended up for the most part in the West with the active collaboration of Western institutions and persons? The example of Nigeria, where the country has spent more than four times the amount of the original loan amount in servicing, penalty, and interest payments and is still left with a rapidly appreciating principal, makes repayments of foreign debts and the withholding of so-called debt relief immoral. Nigeria's example is a microcosm of the African debt situation. Is it morally unacceptable for a country to continue to pay interests and service charges on dubious debts for which servicing payments alone have eclipsed the original debt amount? If only the critics would temper their economics with some morality and humanity, it would be easier for them to lend a sympathetic understanding to the clamor for debt cancellation.

I do not subscribe to the notion of aid as *aid*. These aids—which need to be shorn of their soft loan character and the imprisoning strings which make them tools of hegemonic control—should also be seen as token restitutive and compensatory payments *deserved* by Africa and Africans as a negligible material compensation for the ongoing devastation of the continent. Such devastations result from the wanton extraction of the continent's resources by environmentally nonchalant Western companies, and the resultant destruction of African ecologies and agricultural traditions, livelihoods, lifestyles, not to mention Western mavericks' instigation and exacerbation of armed conflict and their repatriation of tax-evading profits to Western capitals. No amount of Western aid will adequately compensate Africans for these

Western schemes or retribute for their devastating aftermaths.

It sounds good to call for a complete reforming of African states and institutions as a prelude to increased aid and debt cancellation. Without discounting the need for transparency, is this complete cleansing feasible or possible—not only in Africa but anywhere in the world? Is this insistence on cleansing as a condition for aid in the interest of the suffering (and innocent) mass of Africans, some of whom depend solely on foreign aid handouts for survival? Is this not tantamount to withholding food and medicine from a child until its parents “clean up their acts” and start being financially responsible?

It is a good thing that the critics of increased aid and debt relief offer some alternatives. The most bandied-around of such alternatives is what the *New York Times* calls smart aid. Smart aid, it is argued, would bypass the predatory African state and deliver help directly to the Africans in the traditional and informal sectors through civil society organizations. This is a sensible alternative, one which does not punish innocent Africans for the sins of their leaders and does not insist on elusive governmental cleansing as a condition for helping Africa's needy populations. But this alternative makes a naïve and crucial assumption: it fetishizes civil society and ignores the organic connections and appendages which unite the governmental sector and the so-called informal sector.

The idea that civil society organizations and the informal sector are corruption-free and could thus serve as an accountable, efficient, and effective channel for aid distribution and implementation reveals a mindset that is hopelessly out of touch with realities on the ground. It is a fiction of self-congratulatory Western development experts symbiotically linked to careerist Western NGO personnel, whose organizations mentor local NGO's and need to justify their relevance in order to have access to a steady flow of funds. The redundant bureaucracies, inefficiencies, and wastage that have resulted from this bureaucratic detachment from African grassroots problems and from the veneration of civil society for its own sake, are

now part of the problem of the failure of aid to improve situations in Africa.

Moreover, since the African state is quite ubiquitous in terms of power, the smart aid proposal may not work as state officials will resist and/or undermine this usurpation of what they consider their jurisdictional prerogative. It is illusory to expect that state bureaucrats will not invade or interfere with the implementation of such a smart aid package.

### **Criticism of Live Aid as a Distraction**

I disagree with certain hypercritical views on the "Live Aid" movement in the West, which compare the latter to the Berlin Conference or the Scramble for Africa that crystallized in it. The analogy is a little far-fetched. The Scramble was animated by a different set of historical forces and was characterized by a more brazenly explicit social Darwinist and racist ethos than the present global initiatives on Africa. What's more, it endorsed and formalized a process of physical conquest and rule, while the present movement, condescending as it is, portends no such scheme.

Certainly, one can sense some rhetorical congruence between the grandiose redemptive proclamations of the G-8 summit and the "save Africa" rhetoric of mid to late 19th century Europe. The spectacle of a self-righteous and arrogant Europe (this time joined by Japan, Canada, and US), pontificating on the failings and supposedly intractable problems of Africa is quite disturbing and reminiscent of similar proclamations in the past. It does conjure up images from a not-so-distant history of Africa's interaction with Europe. And, of course, no self-respecting African would find palatable the television and radio soundbites about do-good white men (and boys) once again raising money to help Africa's needy and hungry. One would wish not to encounter such images.

However, while I remain very critical of, among other things, the G-8's unacceptable failure to make a deal on fair trade and Africa-friendly trade practices, I personally would not extend my criticism of the G-8 summit of political leaders to the "Live Aid" initiative. I have

serious problems with the occasional cacophonous proclamations of the G-8 regarding Africa's problems, declarations which are not usually accompanied by sincere and comprehensive plans for redress, recompense and amelioration. Indeed the forum is more a gathering for Africa bashing and the repetition of an almost pathologized notion of Africa's hopelessness and dependence than it is a meeting for an honest quest for comprehensive solutions to the African predicament.

But I cannot honestly analyze Live Aid in the preceding terms. The "Live Aid" initiative is different in that it casts itself as a purely humanitarian and pressure-generating intervention. That such humanitarian interventions are always targeted at Africa is a cause for concern. The ways in which these initiatives are packaged and the rhetoric deployed to publicize them can be quite disturbing, paternalistic, and patronizing towards Africa and Africans. They are sometimes the stuff of media sensationalism. But these images are also the unfortunate products of the reality of the African situation. The truth is that certain parts of the continent are in dire need of urgent humanitarian interventions. It is sad but true that Africa is still the world's poorest continent and thus the poster face of global poverty. Let me hasten to add that my definition of poverty here rests purely on macro- and micro-economic indices and not on the presence or absence of resources and wealth-generating capacity. This reality of poverty is not the fault of Bob Geldof, Bono, or Madonna. It is the fault of a multitude of actors and circumstances ranging from corrupt African leaderships, to lethargic and indifferent African civil societies, to Western corporations and governments who participate in and tolerate shady schemes and policies which worsen the continent's economic fate.

Western musicians and actors at the vanguard of the anti-poverty movement have no moral culpability in the ruination of Africa. One could argue quite tenuously that they are culpable on a certain level, being vicarious and unwitting beneficiaries of some of the historical and contemporary Western practices that have contributed to Africa's present plight. But this

would be a weak and ultimately untenable argument.

These anti-poverty activists have, for the most part, earned their livings honestly from their creative expressions. They do not have to care about poverty in Africa. They do not have to do anything. After all, they are not the Western politicians, bureaucrats, bankers, and businessmen who have contributed and continue to contribute to the impoverishing of the continent through dubious schemes, intolerable environmental and ethnical practices, the fuelling of conflicts, and hypocritical trade practices. These young musicians are not the Western politicians and corporations who will benefit from a prosperous and stable Africa or suffer the adverse but logical consequences of a poor, unstable, and badly governed Africa. They are not the ones invested in the emergence of an Africa made safe for Western investment by a revitalization of the civil society and the restive rural and urban underclass sectors.

In spite of this mental, moral, and material distance from the African predicament, these privileged men and women in the Western anti-poverty movement have the humanity, sense of compassion, and conscience to craft a humanitarian initiative that could bring immediate relief to the hungry, the diseased, and the needy in many parts of Africa--people who do not care about the nuances or contradictions of the Live Aid initiative or the matters of culpability, causality, and racialized imagery associated with current discussions of the African situation; people who just need immediate humanitarian help. In the interest of their own existentialist preoccupations, these Africans are willing to look past the unpalatable suggestions and connotations associated with Live Aid and similar initiatives.

I don't think we Africans gain anything for ourselves or for our struggle for basic human comforts and dignities by mocking or trivializing the efforts of the anti-poverty movement in the West. It is, at best, a distraction from the challenge of awakening major stakeholders in the African situation to their obligations and responsibilities. We can point

out the near-revolutionary naivety and Utopian idealism which inevitably color Western anti-poverty movements. But in the end, the Bonos and the Geldofs deserve praise and commendation for their extraordinary humanity, and for using a private anti-poverty initiative to put pressure on Western officialdom, which, so far, is behind Oxfam, Bono, Geldof, and others in appreciating the dire need for action and change on the continent and for a departure from faulty premises of problem-solving.

There is room in Africa for both the grandiose, bureaucratic (elusive and pretentious) plans of the G-8 and the humanitarian gesture of Live Aid. The former, if it ever materializes, is a long-term systemic initiative calculated, at least in rhetoric, aimed at generating economic growth, curbing corruption and bad governance, and increasing responsible social spending. The latter is aimed at providing immediate relief for Africans whose life may depend on such help and who cannot afford to wait for the ever-elusive international Marshall Plan for Africa to materialize, if ever it will.

Small, ad-hoc, and target-specific steps like Live Aid [Live 8] should not be derided; they go a long way, and fill niches that often get forgotten in highfalutin international discussions on African problems. Live Aid does not remove from the table the need to devise feasible developmental plans for Africa; it does not obliterate the need to encourage and fight for democratic reforms in Africa or the need to curb corruption and its internal and external props. In fact Live Aid complements these goals and draws a popular, show-biz attention to them. For good or ill, entertainment has proven to be a great tool of activism and awareness in our world. Caring, if self-righteous, Westerners who recognize this convergence of entertainment and social consciousness and are willing to put their show-biz celebrity status at the disposal of the movement to fight poverty in Africa deserve a lower critical standard than the Western politicians who have so far refused to do the right thing regarding Africa because of a

plethora of economic and political pressures from their countries.

In fact, it would be nice to see Africans become Bonos and Geldofs, sidestepping the endless political analysis, discussions, and the complex and long-term "salvation plans" for Africa to save lives, feed hungry stomachs, and deliver medicine to those who need them on the continent. I recognize that initiatives like Live Aid have their own red tape and don't always translate smoothly or mechanically to relief and comforts for needy Africans. But one gets tired of endless, trite, repetitive analysis of familiar African problems and of reading countless developmental models for Africa calling for elusive political, economic, and social actions which may take decades to happen, and most of which mean nothing to the needy in Africa. At least Western anti-poverty initiatives are not hamstrung by the pressures of the domestic politics of Western countries, a problem which is the bane of most Western-originated governmental initiatives for Africa.

What is particularly impressive about the latest Live Aid movement is that, while raising money for humanitarian actions on the continent, it is also focusing attention on the major dimensions of the African crisis, namely, debt cancellation, increased, more responsible, but unconditional aid, fair trade, and political and economic transparency in Africa.

For all these laudable efforts I am willing to forgive the problem of image and rhetoric which has plagued the latest Live Aid installment and which admittedly hurts my pride as an African. I am willing to subordinate my African pride to the imperative of saving and nurturing a few African lives where possible. Africa is not a concept whose honor should be preserved at the expense of its human inhabitants.

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## The Limits of Cotton: White Gold Shows its Dark Side in Benin

Leif Brottem

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According to World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, it is an “extraordinary moment in history”<sup>1</sup> for Africa. World leaders have made a big step towards debt cancellation. If celebrity involvement is any indication, this is the largest upwelling of public concern in Europe and North America for African poverty in recent years.

One surprise theme of this movement has been cotton farming, an industry on which over 15 million Africans depend for their livelihoods. Oxfam, a UK-based charity and development organization, has led an effective campaign to bring cotton subsidies in rich countries to the forefront of the debate on extreme poverty in Africa.

Eliminating the billions of dollars in handouts to some 25,000 American cotton growers would benefit countries in West and Central Africa that depend heavily on exporting the crop. However, the belief that cotton is a panacea for rural Africans ignores a huge problem: in the regions where the crop is grown, the land is being destroyed.

In Benin, a small West African nation that receives 80% of its export revenues from cotton,<sup>2</sup> life passes to the rhythm of that crop’s planting and harvest. In Benin’s largest producing region of Banikoara, decrepit trucks loaded impossibly high with white fluff rumble by every few minutes during the weeks of harvest. Just as hunting is etched into the collective identity of the local Bariba people, the community’s identity in recent times has been defined by growing “white gold”.

Banikoara’s cotton boom began long before the environmental impacts of growing the cash crop were considered. Now that most local forests have been cut down, residents point to the crop to explain why temperatures are rising, there is less rainfall than before, and all the wildlife has

disappeared, including the elephants which attracted the area’s original inhabitants.

### Losing the Forest

Benin loses around 100,000 hectares of forest every year,<sup>3</sup> a loss that is most pronounced in cotton producing regions. In practical terms, forest loss means fewer sources of medicine, wood for fuel and construction, and livestock forage. Rapid population growth has outstripped traditional natural resource management systems. To feed their growing families and produce enough cotton to pay off debt and buy necessities, people leave less agricultural land fallow and exhaust the soil, which forces them to clear more land the following year.

“Cotton production here will have to shrink eventually because the soil is being exhausted” reported Orou Guere, secretary of a local farmers’ cooperative. No one knows better than those who work the land but this statement is supported by recent research. A study conducted in Southern Mali, another important West African cotton belt, raised questions about the widely held belief that poverty is the main driver of environmental degradation in the region. Instead, it showed that cotton production is a more important factor in exhausting the soil.<sup>4</sup>

A 2002 study conducted in Northern Benin found that 65% of farmers surveyed noticed that cotton was causing deforestation. And 75% felt that cotton was responsible for depleting the soil.<sup>5</sup> Unlike other cash crops grown in developing countries such as cacao, the raw material for chocolate, and coffee, cotton does not tolerate shade. In order to maximize production, farmers are obliged to cut down all but a few trees on their plots.

Moreover, as virtually the only source of income in rural areas, cotton farming operates to a simple logic: the more planted, the more money earned. In many localities, clearing a new field

merely requires the consent of neighbors. Until recently, locals were able to freely plant cotton within Regional Park "W," a recently designated UN World Heritage Site and one of the last contiguous wildlands in West Africa.

Adapting to the new pressure of sustainable development is extremely difficult given that cotton receipts pay for schools, clinics, and other community infrastructure. Sabi Dingui, a student who has grown cotton all his life, commented that without the crop, farmers would be "in the dark" without money to pay for school contributions or medicine.

### **Growing Poverty**

Africans have a more difficult time paying for such basic necessities than they did 25 years ago. In Benin, 22% of the population does not get enough to eat.<sup>6</sup> As the wealth gap between Africa and the rest of the world has grown into an alarming chasm, the term "fourth world" has been broached to describe the continent's position in the global economy. The subject was a top priority at the latest Group of Eight (G-8) summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. Concurrently, Bob Geldof organized the "Live 8" benefit concert as part of the "Make Poverty History" campaign.

West African cotton farmers have made some surprise media appearances in recent years. Countless articles have drawn a clear line between their poverty and the now infamous U.S. government handouts. "Dump poverty, not cotton" was the slogan on a flyer depicting Senegalese pop star Youssou N'Dour that Oxfam International released as part of its "Fair Trade" campaign.

Oxfam, working with other influential organizations such as CARE, has elevated trade policy to a high profile role in efforts to end poverty. As part of its mission to support "sustainable livelihoods," Oxfam also supports work in natural resource conservation.<sup>7</sup> Its involvement in small-scale organic cotton production in West Africa is a positive example of this. However, the group's campaign to open global markets to West African cash crops will

have a far greater long-term impact on the region's landscape.

In support of this strategy, Oxfam reported that, in one year, Mali received \$37.7 million in aid from the United States but lost \$43 million in potential cotton revenue due to agricultural subsidies.<sup>8</sup> The organization also asserts that a 1% increase in their share of global exports would generate \$70 billion for Africa alone.<sup>9</sup> Such numbers are hard-hitting and direct but do not give the full picture of human development. Katherine Daniels, an Oxfam America trade policy advisor also said the organization is supporting "several initiatives to promote cleaner cotton using fewer chemical inputs, both in the U.S. and in Africa." Organic cotton farming has great potential because it "fetches a higher price on the world market than conventional cotton, contributing to improved livelihoods for farmers," she said.

Still, Oxfam hasn't addressed the ecological limits of cotton as an export crop, in particular because cotton cannot grow in shade and triggers deforestation. The risk is great that expanding cotton monoculture will not only increase the strain on the local ecosystem but also on other land users, notably the large number of local pastoralists.

Cotton farmers in Banikoara must coexist on the land with the Fulani, an ethnic group that recently shared the media limelight with Wolfowitz during his trip to Nigeria. The Fulani have played an essential role in agricultural systems across West and Central Africa for centuries yet they are adversely affected by expanding cotton production. As the forests that herders rely on to feed their animals disappear, they move closer to farmers' fields or into protected areas.

As a politically marginalized group, the herdsmen and their cattle, which number over 100,000 in the district of Banikoara alone,<sup>10</sup> usually receive the blame for ensuing conflicts. Commenting on this situation, a local Fulani chief stated, "We need to live too."



### Alternatives to Cotton

Alternatives such as ecoagriculture attempt to address this, and other issues, through more adaptive and diversified land use systems.<sup>11</sup> One of the fundamentals of ecoagriculture is the use of native plants that hold economic and ecological value. Economic incentives to exploit and conserve native vegetation are essential but in Benin's cottonbelt, such incentives are practically nonexistent. Shea butter, a valuable ingredient in cosmetics, is an indigenous product that holds such potential yet there is no infrastructure for large-scale production in Banikoara. In some cases, male farmers cut down shea butter trees, which are exploited by women, to make room for their cotton.

In light of changing local conditions, diversification will be more important for farmers' livelihoods than improving market conditions for one single cash crop. The recent commencement of an international effort to conserve the biodiversity of Park "W" is radically transforming access to land. The park, which includes nearly 50% of the district of Banikoara within its boundaries, previously served as an unregulated resource pool and important route for cattle migration. Bans on grazing and hunting in the park are now strictly enforced under pain of a large fine or prison sentence. Herdsmen and farmers alike are driven even further into settled areas.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a network of scientists based in Gland, Switzerland, is working to address this and other issues by promoting ecologically sustainable livelihoods amongst people residing near the park. What is the highest priority of the project? It is to diversify away from cotton farming.

Instead of working at cross purposes with conservation groups, development agencies and G-8 governments must match the rhetoric of sustainable development with policies that integrate poverty reduction and biodiversity protection. In cotton-dependent areas such as Banikoara, farmers would conserve the forest

habitat that bees require if a viable market existed for honey.

But cotton is king in this part of the world and the ambitions of the international community are not always consistent. Proposals by park officials to reduce cotton production near the park are met with hostility and accusations of "worsening the peoples' poverty" by agricultural extension officials who are under pressure to ensure that the cotton piles high in the markets. Weeks after the park director repeats his warning to farmers that consequences of setting foot in the park will be grave, officials in the same agency arrived to tell the same farmers to double their output of cotton.

The forest that is giving way to cotton fields is also the source of traditional medicines. Such cures are still very important for rural residents who often lack the money to buy or do not have access to the modern varieties. Sitting under a mango tree in his courtyard, the chief traditional healer of Banikoara, Lotoro Theophile, described how he now must ask herdsmen to gather materials, which used to be abundant, during their trips deep into the bush.

Degradation of their local environment is not lost on those who live with it every day. Unlike policymakers in Washington and Geneva, the farmers of Banikoara know they cannot rely solely on cotton. Many are planting cashew and mango trees as alternatives. One cotton farmer stated enthusiastically: "These trees are our retirement!"

Leveling the playing field of global trade is a worthy goal, particularly vis-à-vis the poor who are currently shut out of the markets for their products. However, the real potential for market-based solutions to poverty in Africa is seriously constrained by growing populations that rely on shrinking areas of land for life's necessities.

As farmers in Banikoara harvest their cotton, the refusal of the Americans to practice what they preach and give up subsidies to their own is not the most important topic of conversation. The corn and millet crops are more likely on

peoples' minds. If in times past, people thought cotton was the answer, no one is kidding themselves anymore. Africa can't escape poverty through single crop export solutions.

Leif Brottem is a Foreign Policy In Focus scholar (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)). He wrote this article following two years of grassroots conservation work with local people in the most productive agricultural district of Benin.

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**From Impasse to Renaissance?  
Review of Historical Materialism's "Symposium on Marxism and African Realities"**

Noah Zerbe

"The mainstream of Development Studies has increasingly become, probably unwittingly, an ideological legitimation for the practices of neoliberal reordering of capital accumulation in the latest phase of imperialism. This is why it is urgent that we renew the historical materialist critique of bourgeois thought in its current manifestations, and return to examine modern forms of imperialist domination of Africa."

-- Branwen Gruffydd-Jones (2003: 43)

The impasse and tragedy debates that characterized African studies in the 1980 and 1990s have, as Gruffydd-Jones alludes, given way to a narrowing of the methodological scope of the field. "Development" is increasingly conceived in neoliberal terms of trade liberalization, deregulation, privatization, and good governance, and capitalist globalization is increasingly accepted as the context for development. To be deemed "realistic," development is presented in ways that do not fundamentally challenge the predominance of

neoliberal globalization. Consequently, potential progressive contributions to the field have been silenced. Critical "political economy," in Saul's (2001) terms, has been circumscribed by a neoliberal "political science" that both undermines the potential transformative role of the state and limits the possibility of progressive political agency (Saul, 2001).

The December 2004 special issue of *Historical Materialism*, subtitled "Marxism and African Realities," presents a powerful alternative to the mainstream conception of development and represents precisely the type of scholarship for which Gruffydd-Jones is calling; a progressive scholarship which is also at the heart of ACAS' agenda. In rejecting both the Afropessimism presented in mainstream accounts of the African tragedy and ahistorical models based in neoclassical economics and neoliberal politics, the symposium attempts instead to reinvigorate historical materialism as a methodological

framework for understanding contemporary Africa. Collectively, the contributions seek to “demonstrate the strengths of historical materialism in unraveling the negative forces and processes structuring African realities” while simultaneously highlighting the progressive challenges to capitalism and imperialism in contemporary Africa (Campling, 2004: 52).

Methodologically, the historical materialist approach utilized in various forms by the contributors to the symposium presents three distinct advantages. First, it emphasizes the importance of Africa’s colonial past in conditioning contemporary problems. The fundamental weakness of many analyses of the African tragedy centers on the portrayal of Africa abstracted from its colonial history—a portrayal that both naturalizes and dehistoricizes Africa’s present malaise. The historical materialist methodology utilized in the symposium permits a deeper analysis of contemporary African political economy by tracing the historical evolution of the continent’s uneven integration into the global political economy—an integration premised on and conditioned by processes of uneven exchange and primitive accumulation. Idahosa and Shenton’s analysis of the “compromised modernity” of the African state, a function of the precolonial and colonial political economy of governance, builds on precisely such an understanding. Outside the settler colonies of Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, where relatively strong states were established to reinforce racialized systems of rule, elsewhere in Africa the colonial state sought to order society only insofar as such an ordering was a precondition for the insertion of African primary commodity production into international markets. Taxes, conquest, and legal systems which drew on artificial and highly romanticized notions of ‘custom,’ ‘tradition,’ and ‘tribe’ were all structured to achieve this goal rather than genuine national development and broader state building. The compromised modernity of the post-independence state, rooted in the colonial project, thus presented a central paradox for strategies of national development, namely, assuming a state capable of guiding

development where no such state actually existed.

Similarly, Bernstein’s essay on Africa’s agrarian questions firmly grounds its analysis in the historical structures and dynamics of commodification established during colonialism. Indeed, the different historical conditions of the agrarian question in the West and the South—conditions established during the colonial era but transformed during subsequent reorganizations of global capital, particularly during globalization—lead Bernstein to conclude that the African “crisis” is reflective of contradictory forms of “actually existing” capitalism rather than the failure of capitalism *per se*.

Second, the historical materialist methodology employed in the symposium highlights Africa’s uneven integration into the global political economy. Africa is, on the one hand, largely peripheral to the global political economy—it is neither the beneficiary of significant quantities of foreign direct investment nor home to extensive industrial production. On the other hand, the global capital perhaps more dramatically disciplines the African political economy than almost any other in the world. International capital markets and structural adjustment programs force African states to abide by market dictates, yet Africa reaps little from the purported benefits of capitalist economic development.

Bond’s contribution on the economic and ecological failures of capitalist development in Africa exemplifies precisely this point. Indeed, as Bond demonstrates, capitalism demonstrates little capacity to establish the conditions for economic stability (let alone economic growth) on the continent. Rather, the destructive logic of capitalism, particularly in its current neoliberal form, continues to undermine Africa’s future.

Nunn and Price echo this contention in their analysis of neoliberalism, employing a Neo-Gramscian framework based explicitly on Stephen Gill’s new constitutionalism to examine relations between Africa and the European Union. In particular, they highlight the shift

from redistributive and interventionist approaches towards approaches based in free trade and neoliberal orthodoxy entrenched through international agreements. Unlike previous EU-African agreements, which decommodified aspects of their relations through price supports, grant aid, technology transfer, and preferential market access, the Cotonou Agreement moves towards the minimal state prescribed by neoliberalism.

Third, despite retaining a focus squarely on the interplay of Africa in the global political economy, the symposium manages to pay close attention to the specific and diverse social forces at play at the local level. Several of the contributions speak to the constellation of progressive social forces challenging the predominant framework for economic and political organization embodied in neoliberalism. Colás, for example, uses Marx's analysis of populism to understand the influence of Islamism as a political and social movement in the Maghreb, especially as reaction to uneven reproduction of global capitalism. Stressing the need to consider the ways in which political and social authority acts as a mediating structure conditioning the development of local social forces, he emphasizes understanding of the waves of Islamist politics as a historically specific reaction to the uneven development and expansion of global capitalism. For him, therefore, historical materialism permits us to move beyond purely cultural explanations of Islamicism so prevalent today, while simultaneously cautioning Marxism to take "populism" more seriously.

Raftopolous and Phimster's analysis of the "Zimbabwe crisis" highlights the breakdown of the liberation consensus and considers the way in which that breakdown has divided African radicals. In particular, debates over the relative importance of the historical need for redistributive economic policies, especially with respect to land distribution in the rural countryside, and the ideological commitment to human rights and constitutionalism, have divided interpretations of the post-colonial Zimbabwean legacy. While explicitly rejecting the former, they caution that both sides have

tended to underestimate the centrality of state violence and repression in contemporary Zimbabwe. Instead, they advocate the need for a deeper understanding of the postcolonial state and processes of accumulation in the articulation of progressive resistance to global neoliberalism.

Moore's intervention makes a similar point regarding the "two Lefts" of Zimbabwean politics, which he labels "patriotic agrarianists" and "global critical cosmopolitans." For Moore, although debates among the Left over contemporary Zimbabwe undermine unity, "Those Marxists who prefer deliberative debate and the consensual pursuit of hegemony, rather than the fantastical ideologies and authoritarian closure when discussion comes close to the bone...know what choices to make. Simple principles and light theory win the day over compromise and convulsion" (Moore, 2004: 421).

Barchesi's problematizing of progressive social agency in post-Apartheid South Africa also fits into this vein. For him, urban social movements centering in particular on the breakdown of wage employment in South Africa, have facilitated the development and articulation of "grassroots subjectivities" as alternatives to the failing progressive agenda of the ANC. Although the persistence and success of such informal movements remains unclear, Barchesi's analysis nevertheless points to a vibrant and creative social force in need of greater analysis.

For all the strengths of the symposium's contributions, there are two weaknesses in the volume. First, as acknowledged by Campling in the introduction to the special issue, the volume presents a "non-comprehensive diversity" that is, to some degree, undermined by the lack of black African contributions to the issue. Indeed, as Campling acknowledges, the problem is hardly unique to the special issue, but reflects the socio-economic and political realities of contemporary African studies and the historically weak links between African and Western scholarship and activism.

Second, although unified by a common methodological concern based in historical

materialist analysis, the articles themselves cover a dizzying range of topics. While Campling's introduction goes some way to drawing out the common themes and elements, a concluding essay which revisited the theoretical models in greater detail might have provided greater unity to the symposium. Absent such an essay, the volume is of interest to specialists but probably too advanced for undergraduate classroom use.

Despite these relatively minor flaws, this remains both a timely and fascinating volume, speaking to the debate over the scope and nature of African Studies, and in particular to the utility of historical materialism in analyzing contemporary Africa and in overcoming the impasse in development studies. In the last five years, the literature on Africa has witnessed the beginning of a transformation. References to the African crisis, the impasse of development theory, and the lost decades of the 1980s and 1990s, have begun to give way to an "African renaissance." The renaissance, championed by Thabo Mbeki as part of South Africa's vision of a new Africa, includes a number of elements: overcoming internal social divisions, establishing democracy, achieving economic growth and development, and ending corruption and misrule. But critics of Mbeki's vision of an African renaissance caution that, at best, it is a utopian daydream of what might be rather than a coherent or realistic program to address current problems. At worst, the program represents a reformulation of Washington Consensus policies and the expression of South Africa's neo-colonial ambitions on the continent (Cheru, 2002). In either case, the special issue of *Historical Materialism* presents the strengths of critical political economy in analyzing contemporary Africa.

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**ACAS Alert: Eritrea Reportedly Expels USAID**  
**Text of report in English by Eritrean opposition, Awate.com website, 29 July, 2005**

The Eritrean government has ordered USAID to leave the country. An official statement has yet to be made by the government, but the decision has already been communicated to the US ambassador and the USAID director in Eritrea. USAID, or US Agency for International Development, is the United States government's arm for international development and humanitarian aid. The Agency has been present in Eritrea since 1992, and was the main channel for providing food as well as development assistance to the Eritrean people.

In the past few days, government media in Eritrea has been waging a propaganda campaign against international aid providers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dubbing them agents of new colonialism. Under the title 'Relief Aid, the Other Face of Neocolonialism', the government media has broadcast and published a series of Western aid-bashing editorials.

On 11 May 2005, the government issued a proclamation, which introduced new restrictions on the activities of NGOs. These include the requirement for depositing 2m US dollars (for international NGOs) and 1m US dollars (for local NGOs) in Eritrean banks; prohibiting the

channeling, through NGOs, of funds from United Nations or bilateral organizations (practically disallowing working relationships with NGO), and introducing new levies (taxes) on NGOs.

USAID, like all other bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, channels some of its development and humanitarian assistance through NGOs. The bulk of USAID food assistance is provided through the World Food Programme (WFP) and NGOs; whereas the coordination of the distribution is managed by the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC.) In addition to humanitarian food and non-food assistance, USAID's support to Eritrea covers such areas as Health and HIV/AIDS services, economic growth & reducing food insecurity, and creating jobs through small and medium business development in rural areas.

The US government is the largest donor of food aid to Eritrea.

Source: Awate.com website in English 29 Jul 05

BBC Mon AF1 AFEau 30/07/2005 06:39 GMT, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>

**ACAS (Information) Alert:**  
**Amnesty International Re: Lord of War**

Sarah S. Milburn, Country Specialist, Central Africa/Military, Security and Police Transfers, Amnesty International USA (smilburn@igc.org) has sent the following Alert to ACAS members and friends:

Amnesty International USA has created an action guide and online materials to accompany the release of the Nicolas Cage movie, Lord of War, which is about an international arms broker selling to an African country (an all-too familiar story to the ACAS folks). These are available at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/lordofwar/>

There is also an important research report which Amnesty released this July which provides a wealth of detailed information about the international network of brokers and transport companies which have been supplying arms to the various combatant groups in the long-running war in the Democratic Republic of Congo with the possible assistance of Rwanda, Uganda, and the DRC government. This report, "Democratic Republic of Congo: Arming the East" can be seen at:

[http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/dr\\_congo/index.do](http://www.amnestyusa.org/countries/dr_congo/index.do)

It can also be downloaded from our International Secretariat website at:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/> (Look for Democratic Republic of Congo: Arming the East AFR 62/006/2005, published July 7, 2005.)

I have attached a copy of the DRC report for each of you with this message. I would be delighted to email or snail-mail a copy of it to any list member who has trouble getting it online and would like to contact me at [smilburn@igc.org](mailto:smilburn@igc.org). Please feel free to forward this information to interested non-ACAS members also.

Sarah S. Milburn, Country Specialist, Central Africa/Military, Security and Police Transfers  
Amnesty International USA [smilburn@igc.org](mailto:smilburn@igc.org).

**ACAS PANELS at the ASA 48th Annual Meeting**

Held in Washington, D.C., November 17-20, 2005, at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. The theme is: "Health, Knowledge, and the Body/Politic in Africa and the African Diaspora". For details, see the ASA website [www.africanstudies.org](http://www.africanstudies.org).

**ACAS Business meetings Friday, November 18**

**7:00 A.M. - 8:15 A.M. ACAS Executive & Board Members Meeting**

**8:00 P.M. - 9:15 P.M. ACAS Membership Meeting and ROAPE-sponsored PARTY!** We officially receive reports, elect officers and the like at the membership meeting, so please send agenda items and do more than think about new officers – please recruit and talk to nominees. There is a second position on the Political Action Committee that has been vacant for more than a year, which must be filled. Since we are trying to maintain the support of existing members and attract other colleagues, please come to this meeting and bring a new member!

**Two ACAS Roundtables are scheduled:**

Session VI: Friday, 3:15 P.M. - 5:15 P.M.

**(VI-M12) Roundtable: The Political Economy of AIDS Treatment in Africa: Transnational Policies, Drug Distribution, and National Contexts** [Sponsored by the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars]

Chair: Michael West, Binghamton U

Meredeth Turshen, Rutgers U

Kristin Peterson, Michigan State U

Metsi Makhetha, United Nations Development Program

Brooke Schoepf

Session IX: Saturday, 3:00 P.M. - 5:00 P.M.

**(IX-E7) Roundtable: The Militarization of Practically Everything** [Sponsored by the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars]

Chair: Meredith Turshen, Rutgers U

David Wiley, Michigan State U

William Martin, Binghamton U

Jan Burgess, ROAPE Publications

Asma Abdel Halim, U of Toledo



**ACAS: Call for Nominations:**

**“The ACAS Bud Day Award”**

Honoring our colleagues' activist work

Dear ACAS members and friends,

Last year at our annual membership meeting ACAS voted to inaugurate an award in honor of Bud Day to be given to an activist whose work furthers the mission of ACAS. Warren J. “Bud” Day was born in 1927 and died in Flagstaff, AZ on December 17, 2003. He had lived and worked abroad in Angola, Bangladesh, India, Mozambique, Puerto Rico, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, and in Flagstaff he worked with the Navajo Nation. His activism encompassed fights for national liberation and against war and militarism. (For more details on Bud’s life and work see the ACAS Bulletin no. 66 winter 2003/2004.)

So far we have raised \$250 for this award and we are still gratefully accepting contributions (\$10-20 from each of you would make it more than a certificate). This award should help the honoree in his/her work and make ACAS more visible. The nominator should write up a history of the nominee’s activism. The chosen colleague’s profile will appear in the Bulletin and on our website. It will also be posted on the "African Activist Archive" website. The first award will be made at the 2005 ACAS membership meeting at ASA in November.

Criteria for the nomination of honorees are:

- \* someone working in the US for Africa/Africans
- \* someone involved in ongoing work (in other words, not for past performance; the preference is for younger colleagues)
- \* work that spotlights a neglected group or problem or critical situation
- \* work that relates in some way to US policy (a problem that is a result of US policy or a situation that we would like to see US policy affect in a positive way).

Anyone in the current ACAS membership (dues paid, please) can make a nomination. A selection committee (drawn from members of the ACAS Board) will make the final decision.

Please send your nominations no later than 15 October 2005 to Meredith Turshen, at: [turshen@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:turshen@rci.rutgers.edu).

Contributions may be sent to: Kris Peterson, Anthropology, Michigan State University, 344 Baker Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

-- Meredith Turshen and Michael West, ACAS Co-Chairs