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Globalization and Politics of Transformation in Africa: NEPAD and Pitfalls of Transnational Elite Developmental Projects

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Abstract

This article examines the New Partnership for Africa's Development initiative launched in 2001. The article discusses the political and economic conjuncture that resulted in the adoption of this initiative. In the main, the analysis demonstrates the ways in which the initiative dovetails well with the global neo-liberal project and, consequently, contests the claims by African ruling elites and their counter-parts in the global North that it represents a transformative framework for economic and political change for national social formations in Africa.

La globalización y las políticas de cambio en Africa: NEPAD y los fallos del desarrollismo elitista transnacional

Este artículo examina la iniciativa de la Nueva Alianza para el Desarrollo de Africa lanzada en 2001. El artículo analiza la coyuntura política y económica que resultó de la adopción de la iniciativa. En su conjunto, el análisis demuestra la forma en que la iniciativa casa bien con el proyecto global neoliberal y, en consecuencia, rechaza la pretensión de las élites africanas y sus contrapartidas en el Norte global. Esta iniciativa representa un esquema transformador para el cambio político y económico en la sociedad africana.

Globalisation et politiques de transformation en Afrique: NEPAD et dangers de développementalisme d'une élite transnationale

Cet article examine le Nouveau Partenariat pour le Développement de l'Afrique, une initiative lancée en 2001. Cet article parle de la conjuncture politique et économique qui a découlé de l'adoption de cette initiative. Dans l'ensemble, cette analyse démontre comment cette initiative se raccorde avec le projet global néolibéral et, par conséquent, conteste les revendications de l'élite africaine au pouvoir et de ses homologues du Nord. Cette initiative procure enfin une structure de transformation économique et politique pour la formation nationale et sociale en Afrique.

Keywords

neoliberalism, development, NEPAD, democracy

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Introduction

Current discourses on international political economy generally contend that the decade of the 1970s generated significant shifts in economic, intellectual and political spheres that continue to shape national and global developments. On the economic level, these discourses claim that the period saw the emergence of a serious global recession characterized by decline in production, high inflation, crisis of profits for the majority of firms, technological developments, rise in government deficits and massive layoffs for workers. These economic developments and major changes in the political landscape of major countries in the global North in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the rise of Margaret Thatcher in the UK, Helmut Kohl in Germany and Ronald Reagan in the United States – and intellectual shifts that called for the dismantling of the global Keynesian economic framework are highlighted as core factors that ushered in a new phase of globalization underpinned by neo-liberal economic discourse.

In the context of African countries, analysts argue that these global economic, political and intellectual shifts have had a significant influence on the continent's development process. In the economic realm, for instance, the core features of the neo-liberal economic globalization are said to have contributed to an economic downward spiral in most African countries. These countries, however, are not the only ones that have faced major economic crisis, for as John Rapley has argued, the crisis of capital accumulation has been a core feature of the current phase of globalization in all parts of the world.¹ In essence, the onset of this phase of globalization marked the end of the post-1945 'golden age' of global capitalism which had seen significant economic growth in the global North and various parts of the global South. In Africa, the crisis of postcolonial capitalism was characterized by a serious economic crisis, evidenced by decline in economic surplus, levels of investment and savings, inability of African states to meet their debt obligations to public and private lenders, and failure of these states to maintain what Yusuf Bangura has termed the post-colonial social contract.²

The developments that emerged globally in the 1970s have, over the years, seen states institute various economic and political strategies in efforts to address the economic crises and other contradictions generated

¹) Rapley 2004.

²) For detailed discussions of the various elements of this crisis see, Ihonvbere 2000; Bangura 1992.

by neo-liberal globalization. This paper's objective is to examine the ways in which African states have responded to neo-liberal globalization, with a specific focus on their New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative. The underlying argument of the paper is that African states, like other states elsewhere, have not been bystanders in the evolution of the contemporary phase of globalization and other global shifts that characterize the current global conjuncture. Situating my arguments within the critical international political economy intellectual tradition,³ the paper argues that the launching of NEPAD demonstrates the political agency of these states but contends that their agency is mediated by local and global factors and thus challenges the dominant theoretical perspectives to studies on African states especially the neoliberal approach that tends to represent their agency as unfettered in the current phase of globalization. The paper has three sections. In efforts to contextualize the discussion on NEPAD section one highlights the ways in which the constitutive ideas framing neo-liberal economic globalization shaped Africa's development discourse in the pre-NEPAD era. Section two critically examines the core features of the NEPAD initiative while section three demonstrates the limitations of the initiative as a blueprint for Africa's development in the contemporary phase of the historical process of globalization.

Contextualizing NEPAD: Neo-liberal Globalization and the Emergence of a New Development Discourse in Africa

Over the last two decades, the emergence and evolution of neo-liberal globalization has greatly shaped Africa's economic and political processes. On the economic front, this development has seen the rise of a new development paradigm that borrows heavily from the constitutive ideas that underpin global neoliberalism, such as calls for a limited role of the state in the economic arena, cuts in social spending, valorization of private capital and the promotion of international free trade. In specific terms this discourse has explained Africa's economic crisis and stagnation as being a result of the state's extensive role in economic affairs, especially through

³ Here I am referring to the following texts that use a Neo-Gramscian political economy approach to study state formation and shifts in global capitalism among other political economy related issues. See: Cox 1987; Robinson 2004; Gill 1993, 1997.

the expansion of publicly owned enterprises in the postcolonial period.⁴ Other contributing factors to the continent's economic crisis as articulated by advocates of neo-liberal restructuring are extensive trade protection measures, such as high tariffs and licensing procedures, and overvalued currencies. In addition, agricultural policies, especially the practice of paying small-scale producers limited returns for their products and the decline of agricultural exports in the 1970s, are also highlighted as contributing to economic stagnation and crisis. The expenditure patterns followed by postcolonial governments of providing subsidies in agriculture and in social sectors such as education and health, and the expansion of the civil service are also highlighted as factors.

With the rise of a neo-liberal development paradigm and in response to the serious economic crisis that came to a head in most African countries in the late 1970s, African states have, over the last two decades, implemented core elements of the neo-liberal economic globalization agenda. In line with neo-liberal development thought these states, at serious cost to many people, especially women and children, have cut spending in various social sectors. In the health sector for instance, neo-liberal reforms that call for the introduction of a market-based approach to health service provision have resulted in increases in health costs – a process that has, in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, seen a decline in women seeking prenatal care and hospital visits for young children.⁵ Neo-liberal reforms have also been implemented in education, a development that has facilitated the deepening of the gender gap that has historically existed in this sector.⁶ Other reforms have included layoffs of public sector workers in the effort to achieve what various reports from the World Bank on Africa term as the 'rationalization' of the civil service.⁷

Privatization of publicly owned enterprises is another element of neo-liberal economic reform. As African countries entered a period of serious economic crisis, their reliance on public enterprises as engines of economic growth came under heavy criticism by scholars working within the new development paradigm of neoliberalism and the international lending

⁴ World Bank 1981, p. 37.

⁵ Turshen 1994, p. 81.

⁶ For extended discussion on the impact of neo-liberal based reforms on the education sector in various African countries see, Tsikata and Kerr 2000.

⁷ For seminar reports from the World Bank on neo-liberal restructuring in Africa see World Bank 1981, 1989, 1994.

community and its leading institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. According to supporters of neoliberal economic reforms, public enterprises were largely responsible for the African continent's limited development and economic crisis because they were inefficient, created rent-seeking opportunities, and stifled the entrepreneurial spirit.

These core measures of neo-liberal economic restructuring described above were by the late 1980s deemed inadequate for the transformation of African economic development along modern capitalist lines. Consequently, by the late 1980s, advocates of the neo-liberal development paradigm begun to call for reforms in Africa's political arena. As a World Bank seminar report declared in 1989, the economic problems of the continent were also due to political practices: "Underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance. . . . [a] deep political malaise [that] stymies action in most countries."⁸ The discourse on political reforms highlighted the lack of good governance frameworks as a factor that had led to economic crisis, extensive personalised forms of rule, human rights abuses, and limited foreign investment, due to an inefficient judiciary that had failed to "protect property and enforce contracts."⁹

This trend, according to this line of thought, also led to high levels of corruption, waste and lack of economic development in most of Africa. Thus, according to advocates of good governance, changes to regime structures were necessary for the economic and political recovery of the continent. By the late 1980s, the debate on political reforms had evolved beyond calls for good governance practices to include the promotion of the establishment of multiparty democratic states. In contrast to their earlier development paradigm, which supported the establishment of 'development dictatorships' in the periphery, their new discourse no longer upheld dictators and their authoritarian strong-arm regimes as the foundation for economic development. Consequently, multiparty democracy (along with other terms such as governance, human rights and free markets) in Africa and other parts of the global South occupied a prominent place in the development discourse of the international lending community who utilised foreign aid as a powerful tool in the push for its establishment.

While the global elite driven twin project of promoting market-led capitalism and democracy in Africa in this era of globalization continued to

⁸) World Bank 1989, p. xii.

⁹) World Bank 1989, p. 9.

shape development discourse in Africa and elsewhere in the global South, by the late 1990s this project was increasingly being challenged from various sites. In the main, for analysts of Africa's development, the nirvana that advocates of the neo-liberal development model had promised had not emerged. Instead study after study of Washington Consensus policies in Africa demonstrated the failure of these policies as a model for equitable and democratic development. As one analyst has stated:

the anticipation [economic recovery and development] proved to be false. Balance-of-payments gaps were often narrowed, but by less than expected and only temporarily. The benefits of reforms were often overwhelmed by the effects of adverse external shocks-like the collapse of export prices. New investment failed to appear. Indeed, the demand-restraint policies encouraged by the IMF depressed investment instead of increasing it, and many African economies continued to stagnate in the 1980s.¹⁰

These sentiments were expressed in various reports by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in one of which was stated:

Economic turnaround had not occurred in almost all of the countries that had tried SAPs... Even the countries that followed adjustment programmes with the most rigor were barely holding their ground. Most were suffering further set-backs including high inflation, lower spending on health, education, housing, sanitation and water. Also, laying off people from their jobs or the declining real wages caused suffering to reach unbearable proportions.¹¹

The evident failure of the neo-liberal development model did not deter its advocates from claiming that this model had benefited African societies especially the poor. For the World Bank for instance,

the poor are mostly rural, and as producers, they tend to benefit from agricultural, trade and exchange rate reforms... As consumers, both the urban and the rural poor tend to be hurt by rising food prices. But adjustment policies have seldom had a major impact on food prices in either the open or the parallel market, which supplies most of the poor.¹²

This claim contradicts empirical evidence from various parts of Africa and the fact that most of the IMF riots in the continent whether in Zambia,

¹⁰ Lancaster 1993, p. 16.

¹¹ Minter 1992, p. 16.

¹² Quoted in Bond 2001.

Sudan or Tunisia emerged following the hiking of food prices due to other Washington Consensus policies of currency devaluation and cutting food subsidies. It is in the context of increasingly local and global (the anti-globalization riots in Seattle among others) discontent with neo-liberal economic restructuring that African states emerged with the NEPAD initiative that they claimed would lead not only to economic recovery but to an African Renaissance characterized by sustainable economic growth and democratic politics. It is to a discussion of NEPAD I turn to next.

Response to Neo-liberal Globalization: African States' NEPAD Initiative

The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) emerged in October 2001 when African Presidents launched it at the Organization of African Unity (now African Union) meeting in Abuja.¹³ Prior to this launch, however, African citizens had not heard of this initiative. African elites especially Thabo Mbeki had consulted widely with global North political elites such as Tony Blair and had presented a draft version of NEPAD (New African Initiative) to G8 leaders at their meeting in Genoa in July 2001.

The NEPAD initiative outlines what it conceives as the origins of Africa's underdevelopment and offers an economic and political roadmap geared to addressing the continent's perpetual crisis of development and "exclusion in a globalising world."¹⁴ The document highlights five developments as being the sources of Africa's underdevelopment. First, it claims that the evolution of the global economic system has resulted in Africa being relegated to the role of producing primary commodities for international markets and as a reserve for cheap labour. This global division of labour has contributed greatly to the continent's economic stagnation since, "of necessity, [it] has meant the draining of Africa's resources rather than their use for the continent's development. . . . Thus, Africa remains the poorest continent despite being one of the most richly endowed regions of the world."¹⁵

¹³) NEPAD 2001.

¹⁴) NEPAD 2001, p. 1.

¹⁵) NEPAD 2001, p. 5

Second, the document argues that the nature of colonial economic and political structures laid the foundation that would haunt the continent's development for a long time. The era of European colonialism led to the deepening of the continent's integration into the global system on unequal terms as mainly a producer of primary commodities for the industrial needs of the colonizing powers, and to the establishment of weak state structures. In the main,

colonialism subverted hitherto traditional structures, institutions and values or made them subservient to the economic and political needs of the imperial powers. It also retarded the development of an entrepreneurial class, as well as a middle class with skills and managerial capacity.¹⁶

Third, postcolonial political and economic developments did not usher in a new period of democratic and sustained economic growth. According to NEPAD,

At independence, virtually all the new states were characterised by a shortage of skilled professionals and a weak capitalist class, resulting in a weakening of the accumulation process. Post-colonial Africa inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies, which were further aggravated by poor leadership, corruption and bad governance in many countries. Africa's experience shows that the rate of accumulation in the post-colonial period has not been sufficient to rebuild societies in the wake of colonial underdevelopment, or to sustain improvement in the standard of living. This has had deleterious consequences on the political process and led to sustained patronage and corruption.¹⁷

Fourth, while emphasising the role of local historical conditions in facilitating dependency and the emergence of undemocratic and weak states, the document argues that international conditions in the immediate post-colonial era were no less important. In particular, "the divisions caused by the Cold War hampered the development of accountable governments across the continent."¹⁸ Fifth, even after twenty years of neo-liberal reforms, the document declares that the fundamental characteristics of African states remain: weak, underpinned by corruption and patronage and thus "a major constraint on sustainable development." According to NEPAD, while the neo-liberal economic restructuring of the 1980s–90s was meant

¹⁶ NEPAD 2001.

¹⁷ NEPAD 2001, pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ NEPAD 2001, p. 5.

to reconstitute African political economies, leading them to a dynamic capitalist path, it did not lead to a fundamental shift in the continent's economic structures thus there remains an

urgent need to implement far-reaching reforms: Structural adjustment programmes... provided only a partial solution. They promoted reforms that tended to remove serious price distortions, but gave inadequate attention to the provision of social services. Consequently, only a few countries managed to achieve sustainable higher growth under these programmes.¹⁹

Architects of NEPAD do not stop at articulating the historical developments that have generated obstacles for the continent's development, they are keenly looking forward and asking, "What is to be done?" – to borrow a pertinent phrase from Vladimir Lenin. On this front they see the current phase of globalization as offering an opening not only for the continent's economic development, but also for it to join and take on an important role in the 'global body politic.' So what is to be done for African countries to make a sound transition to capitalist modernity? According to NEPAD the measures that are needed to address the continent's underdevelopment encompass reforms in the economic and political arena and the formation of 'a new partnership' between African states and their global North counterparts. The NEPAD initiative proposes several economic and political measures to facilitate not only Africa's economic recovery but also the emergence of sustainable economic growth. Here we concentrate on four measures that NEPAD's advocates claim will lead to a new era in Africa's development.

A first measure is a rethinking of the continent's integration into the global system in the contemporary phase of globalization. For African political elites, African countries can benefit from developments generated by neo-liberal globalization such as new technologies and economic production methods. In order for this to happen they argue that the integration of Africa countries need to be rethought since it has historically generated inequality. In their view, what is needed is a new integration framework that views this process from a global interdependence perspective. Such an approach to global integration would take as its starting point the reality of "global interdependence with regard to production and demand, the environmental base that sustains the planet, cross-border

¹⁹) NEPAD 2001.

migration, [and] a global financial architecture that rewards good socio-economic management.”²⁰

A second measure, which in a way derives from NEPAD’s call for an interdependence approach to globalization, is the redefinition of the relationship between African states and their global North counterparts, which NEPAD argues has historically been marked by inequality due to the global power asymmetry that has characterized the evolution of the global system. For African states, what is needed is ‘a new partnership’ between African countries, the global North and the leading global governance institutions. In this respect, such a partnership would require the global North “to reverse the decline in ODA flows to Africa and to meet the target level of ODA flows equivalent to 0.7 per cent of each developed country’s gross national product (GNP) within an agreed period.”²¹ Further, the partnership would involve a more progressive approach to addressing development problems generated by the debt overhang that most African countries face, by having countries in the global North and multilateral institutions increase “aid flows [that would] be used to complement funds released by debt reduction for accelerating the fight against poverty.”²² In addition, this new partnership would seek to address the unequal nature of the contemporary international trading system by having global North countries admitting goods from African countries to their markets and seeking “more equitable terms of trade for African countries within the WTO multilateral framework.”²³ Last but not least, this partnership would see African political elites working collaboratively with their counterparts in the North in efforts to push and encourage private capital involvement in African countries with the World Bank and other international financial institutions playing a central role in this process.²⁴

Taking ‘ownership’ of the development process by African peoples and their leaders is a third measure proposed by NEPAD advocates. In this regard, NEPAD declares that a time has come for Africans to be agents of their own destiny and to “understand that development is a process of empowerment and self-reliance” which requires that Africans “not be

²⁰ NEPAD 2001, p. 8.

²¹ NEPAD 2001, p. 53.

²² NEPAD 2001, p. 54.

²³ NEPAD 2001, p. 53.

²⁴ NEPAD 2001, pp. 53–54.

wards of benevolent guardians” but “the architects of their own sustained upliftment.”²⁵ This spirit of ownership, argue African ruling elites, is embodied in NEPAD, for the initiative “centres on African ownership and management of its development process including its relationship with the global North.” For these elites the NEPAD initiative is a bold turn in their development thinking as it represents their first step in taking responsibility for the continent’s development. For them NEPAD is their pledge

[it is] based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development... an agenda for the renewal of the continent. The agenda is based on national and regional priorities and development plans that must be prepared through participatory processes involving the people.”²⁶

A fourth measure is the *Peace, Security, Democracy and Political Governance Initiatives* that is aimed at the promotion of democracy, good governance and peace. While the various components of this initiative are all important, here we will highlight the core elements of the *Democracy and Political Governance Initiative* since it takes centre stage in the NEPAD framework. Like the transnational lending community, the architects of NEPAD claim to strongly endorse political reforms. In this respect, African rulers claim that they are aware and acknowledge that development will only occur in the context of a political framework that embraces “democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance.”²⁷ NEPAD also states that African leaders’ pledge

to respect the global standards of democracy, the core components of which include political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers’ unions, and fair, open and democratic elections, periodically organized to enable people to choose their leaders freely.²⁸

According to NEPAD advocates, embracing global democratic practices and other political reforms is the only political option for African countries, since with the end of the Cold War the world community will tolerate

²⁵) NEPAD 2001, p. 6.

²⁶) NEPAD 2001, pp. 1 and 10.

²⁷) NEPAD 2001, p. 17.

²⁸) NEPAD 2001.

nothing else. In this respect they claim that the post-1989 world has seen the definition of core political concepts such as “democracy and state legitimacy” which must now be accompanied by a demonstration of good governance, “a culture of human rights and popular participation.” With this development African ruling elites claim that they have instituted political reforms that are widely “recognized by governments across the world” a development that according to them has led key players in the global system to view Africa through a new lens as evidenced they claim by developments such as the following: “The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000, confirms the global community’s readiness to support Africa’s efforts to address the continent’s underdevelopment and marginalisation.”²⁹

NEPAD as a Blueprint for Africa’s Politico-economic Change

As the preceding discussion indicates, the central message of the proponents of NEPAD, both on the continent and outside, is that it provides a blueprint for Africa’s economic and political transformation that will lead to an *African Renaissance* characterized by sustainable economic growth and democratic political practices. But does the NEPAD initiative provide an economic and political framework that will facilitate such a renaissance? Does the framework represent a transformative move in Africa’s development discourse or a consolidation of the contemporary hegemonic neo-liberal development paradigm with an indigenous imprint? The paper contends that, as it stands, the NEPAD framework has several limitations as a blueprint for political and economic change in Africa. These limitations emerge from: its underestimation of forces that underpin the global system; the neo-liberal theory that informs NEPAD’s economic framework; its neglect of the class foundations of African states, and its narrow definition of democracy.

In terms of Africa’s economic development, NEPAD’s discussion on the historical origins of the continent’s underdevelopment illuminates an important historical development that has had a great influence on Africa’s development and that challenges the a-historical tendencies of some of the dominant approaches in studies of the continent’s political economy. To argue, as some analysts do, that the roots of the continent’s economic

²⁹) NEPAD 2001, p. 9.

stagnation lie in postcolonial patterns of accumulation, especially the neo-patrimonial basis of the African state, which it is claimed are the “essential operating codes for politics” in the continent, offers only partial insights.³⁰ The neo-patrimonial foundations of these states have their roots in the evolution of colonial political economy whose hallmarks were to limit both the emergence of an independent capitalist class not dependent on the state for its reproduction, and the development of diversified economic structures. NEPAD’s historical approach to the question of underdevelopment further challenges the hegemonic neo-liberal development perspective which considers colonialism and other local-global structural and political conditions irrelevant to our understanding of Africa’s development crisis.

NEPAD’s foregrounding of the historical roots of Africa’s development crisis leads to its call for a rethinking of the relationship between African countries and the global North. As it astutely argues, this relationship has been marked by inequality, with the global North forcing its own development visions on African countries and supporting an international economic architecture that has continually deepened the continent’s marginalization. What is needed then, as mentioned earlier, is a new framework that outlines responsibilities and obligations for African and global North states. The call for ‘a new partnership’ may be all very well and good on paper, but it reflects a major departure from NEPAD’s grasp of the profound ways in which the economic, political and ideological foundations that underpin the global system shape Africa’s political and economic development. After stating how Africa’s integration into the global system has been marked by ‘exclusion,’ NEPAD’s architects now envision a new era whereby the modalities of global capitalism can be tamed by a civil dialogue and gentlemen’s agreements between African elites and their global North counterparts.

The notion that at this global conjuncture the forces of global capital can be persuaded to become partners with African states and contribute to the continent’s recovery and development demonstrates the many limitations and contradictions that pepper the NEPAD initiative. For instance, the initiative does not explain how the competition that has marked the evolution of global capitalism would suddenly not set structural limits for Africa’s development, and why forces of global capital would be willing,

³⁰ Bratton and Van de Walle 1997, p. 63.

given their search for expansion and profits, to facilitate the continent's development. Global capitalism involves competition, not only among local firms, but international ones, and also among nations. As an early analyst of the rise of global capitalism astutely observed:

the development of capitalist production makes it constantly necessary to keep increasing the amount of capital laid out in a given industrial undertaking, and competition makes... competition to be felt by each individual industrial capitalist as external coercive laws... compels him to keep constantly extending his capital, in order to preserve it, but extend he cannot except by means of progressive accumulation.³¹

Thus capitalism as a mode of production remains a spectre of competition which continues to incorporate various parts of the world into the global capitalist order unevenly and under unequal terms. Consequently, the rhetorical of free trade, global village and interdependence notwithstanding, the process continues deepening the historical economic divide between the global North and global South, a reality that is captured by one of NEPAD's organic intellectuals, Thabo Mbeki, in his constant critique of the contemporary global system as being marked by "global apartheid" – a system that "has pity neither for beautiful nature nor for living human beings."³²

NEPAD supporters' underestimation of how the imperatives of global capital limit the emergence of 'a new partnership' between African countries and the global North, extends to its claim that a partnership can emerge between African states and institutions of global governance. As mentioned earlier, these supporters claim that the embrace of market-led development and good governance measures have resulted in global governance institutions viewing African countries through a new lens. But the empirical evidence stemming from the efforts of global South states and civil society actors to craft a civilized dialogue with the global North and institutions of global governance demonstrate otherwise and make the claims of African states ring hollow. A few examples will suffice here. In the last decade or so, civil society groups have been involved in a persistent struggle for the democratization of leading institutions of global governance to address what they deem as a serious case of 'democratic deficient'

³¹) Marx 1961, p. 592.

³²) Mbeki 2002.

in the way these institutions are governed.³³ In addition, the promotion of “unregulated economic globalization” by these institutions, a process that is generating deep social dislocations, is another source of discontent between these institutions and groups in civil society.³⁴

It is important to note the nature of civil society’s engagement with leading international institutions varies depending on the institution, the nature of issues that frame the dialogue and the global political conjuncture. In the specific case of the World Trade Organization’s involvement with transnational civil society, the process has been generated through major critiques by groups in transnational civil society and intellectuals who have highlighted the asymmetrical nature of the international trading regime. From its establishment in the immediate post-1945 period, this regime has served and reflected the needs and interests of dominant transnational interests drawn mainly from the industrialized North at the expense of countries in the developing world. Thus, contemporary challenges presented by transnational civil society to the WTO – from the ministerial meetings in Singapore and beyond – have a long history, but the intensity of the undemocratic and unjust nature of this international trading regime has been shaped by the nature of the current stage of globalization.

Since its inception in 1994 the World Trade Organization has used an inclusion/exclusion strategy in its involvement with transnational civil society. The founding moment of the WTO’s strategy with transnational civil society was in 1996, when the institution issued guidelines that were to govern its relationship with this community. The six guidelines stipulated that first, the WTO’s association with non-state actors was to be at the ‘discretion of the organization, and the latter would only be involved in a dialogue with non-state actors who showed ‘concern’ with the central issues of the WTO.’³⁵ Second, non-state actors involved in the dialogue had to play an important role in disseminating information about the WTO; and third, the latter would become more transparent by making its documents increasingly available on its website.³⁶ The fourth guideline spelled out specific ways in which the relationship between the WTO and

³³ Beetham 1998, p. 67.

³⁴ Murphy 2000, p. 789.

³⁵ Wilkinson 2005, p. 163.

³⁶ Wilkinson 2005, p. 163.

non-state actors would develop mainly through the WTO's organized "issue-specific symposia."³⁷ Fifth, WTO staff who participated in dialogues with non-state actors would do so in a 'personal' capacity.³⁸ The last guideline stipulated that "under no circumstances" would non-state actors be engaged in "the work of the WTO or its meetings."³⁹ The preceding clearly indicates the limited room for maneuver for transitional civil society actors in their engagement with the WTO. What has occurred since the establishment of the guidelines is that non-state actors whose agenda is closer to that of the WTO are legitimized and those that raise questions are delegitimized. Global political shifts that have emerged post-September 11 have also tempered criticism of the organization, thus giving it no incentive to engage in institutional reforms.⁴⁰

The other global institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, have also increasingly adopted the strategy of engaging transnational civil society. These two institutions have been criticized mainly for their lack of accountability and their endorsement of global neoliberalism. In terms of representation, countries that have what Ngaire Woods terms the most 'intensive' relationship with these organizations are inadequately represented on their Executive Boards.⁴¹ In the context of representation in these two institutions, African countries are the most underrepresented. For example, "The 21 anglophone members of the IMF, 11 of whom have 'an intense' relationship with the IMF, are represented by one Executive Director."⁴² The same countries, including the Seychelles, are represented by one Executive Director at the World Bank. This power asymmetry has led transnational civil society to call for reforms in the structure of these two institutions. The IMF and the World Bank have in the past few years opened up spaces for dialogue with transnational civil society. Both institutions have made attempts to provide information on their activities and to hold biannual meetings with some members of transnational civil society. While these efforts mark a significant development given the history of secrecy in these institutions, it would be naïve to think that their practices will become democratic in the near future. As Ngaire Woods declares, even with recent

³⁷ Wilkinson 2005, p. 163.

³⁸ Wilkinson 2005, p. 165.

³⁹ Wilkinson 2005, p. 165.

⁴⁰ Wilkinson 2005, p. 170.

⁴¹ Woods 2001, p. 84.

⁴² Woods 2001, p. 85.

developments, non-state actors “have not taken a place as major ‘stakeholders’ in the institutions: they have not acquired control, nor a formal participatory role in decision-making.”⁴³

Lest we repeat the analytical errors of scholars who place the problems of creating ‘a new partnership’ for Africa’s development on the shoulders of external forces, it is important that we explore the reasons underpinning African states’ claim that ‘a new partnership’ is possible between them and the dominant forces that shape the global system. While not denying that African states, like other states elsewhere, have to find ways to solve or contain accumulation crises and other issues of development, we contend that the issue at hand for these states is how to achieve political legitimacy both internally and externally, given the serious crisis of legitimacy they have had to contend with from the late 1970s due to internal and global developments. In the main, African political elites are aware that finding a solution for the continent’s development crisis at this current global conjuncture calls for the embrace of neo-liberal thinking and practice. Thus for African states the era of seeking development paths that diverge from the global norm as epitomized by Julius Nyerere or Thomas Sankara in an earlier period is deemed as gone. What has emerged in Africa in the era of NEPAD is that the leading lights of this initiative “talk left and walk right” as Patrick Bond has argued in various works. Mbeki’s scathing critiques of market-led development – e.g., “The critically important task to end the poverty and underdevelopment, in which millions of Africans are trapped, inside and outside our country, cannot be accomplished by the market. If we were to follow the prescriptions of neo-liberal market ideology, we would abandon the masses of our people to permanent poverty and underdevelopment” while referring to himself as a Thatcherite⁴⁴ – exemplify the phenomenon that Bond articulates. The fact of the matter is that, given the nature of the current global conjuncture and the social class bases of African states, it would be ‘political suicide’ for these states not to embrace Lady Margaret Thatcher’s mantra, “There is no alternative” to global neo-liberalism. Given these political realities it becomes imperative for the African states to construct global capitalist expansion as a process that can be civilized through the forging of a partnership with the global North and its attendant institutions.

⁴³ Woods 2001, p. 96.

⁴⁴ Mbeki 2003.

At the local level, African states' embrace of global neo-liberalism through NEPAD has enabled the reproduction of their legitimacy – at least for the dominant classes – even though the continent continues on the same economic downward spiral that marked its pre-NEPAD era. With the launching of NEPAD, African leaders claim that they can deliver the long-awaited 'development cake' since they 'own' the continent's development process. Further, they claim that 'a new partnership' with the global North has emerged, since their NEPAD initiative has been endorsed by leaders of the global North, as evidenced by the enthusiastic support it has received from various northern quarters, especially in Canada under Prime Jean Chrétien, the G8 meetings in Genoa, the European Union, and in Washington, where one commenter stated, "NEPAD is philosophically spot-on. The US will focus on those emerging markets doing the right thing in terms of private sector development, economic freedom and liberty."⁴⁵ How long this transnational elite neo-liberal pact will last is difficult to tell, since African states are facing growing anticapitalist and anti-globalization social movements. The ability of African states to contain these movements, however, cannot be ruled out, given what has gone on in Zimbabwe in the last several years and efforts in Malawi to contain through punitive laws the agenda of progressive social movements.⁴⁶

Moving beyond the limits of NEPAD's doctrine of the formation of a new partnership, the initiative has other limitations as a blueprint for African countries' politico-economic change. To begin with, its conceptualization of capitalist transformation of African countries falls within the same narrow parameters advocated by the Washington Consensus. The latter deems the transition of the continent to capitalist modernity as involving merely the introduction of 'market incentives' in all the key sectors of the economy and limited investment in social sector development. This limited view of social change stems from the ahistorical and reductionist nature of the neo-liberal theory of development that underpins NEPAD and Washington Consensus development frameworks. Both frameworks view the transition of a society to capitalist modernity as a process that only requires letting the 'invisible hand' of the market determine economic and social change. NEPAD's goes even further and claims that what African countries need is 'far-reaching' neo-liberal reforms since SAPs did not

⁴⁵) See Bond 2004, p. 15.

⁴⁶) Sable 2006.

go far enough especially in the restructuring of the social service sector along market lines. That the historical experience of societies that have undergone capitalist transformation demonstrates a radical transformation of all aspects of society and the centrality of the state in the process is ignored by advocates of neo-liberal economic development in Africa and elsewhere. As Joseph Stiglitz, a former steward of global neo-liberalism, states in a recent forward to Karl Polanyi's seminal text:

The advocates of the neoliberal Washington consensus emphasize that it is government interventions that are the source of the problem; the key to transformation is 'getting prices' and getting the government out of the economy through privatization and liberalization. In this view, development is little more than the accumulation of capital and improvements in the efficiency with which resources are allocated – purely technical matters. This ideology misunderstands the nature of the transformation itself – a transformation of society, not just of the economy, and a transformation of the economy that is far more profound than their simple prescriptions would suggest. Their perspective represents a misreading of history, as Polanyi effectively argues.⁴⁷

Further, NEPAD's approach to politico-economic change is deeply reductionist and leads it, like its Washington Consensus counterpart, to conceptualize transition to market-led capitalism as a unilinear process leading all societies to the last stage of economic development, as W. Rostow articulated almost fifty years ago in his 'stages of growth' argument.⁴⁸ Such an approach to social change neglects to acknowledge that even the transformation to capitalism in the global North involved complex social processes that took different trajectories. European transitions to capitalist modernity, for instance, took various paths, and were highly mediated processes. Consequently, in the context of Africa and elsewhere, it would be fruitful to think of these processes of social change as being complex and taking different trajectories. As H. Cardoso and E. Falleto have argued, these transformations are mediated by local class structures, cultural practices, colonial history, and of course the nature of the global political and economic conjuncture.⁴⁹ Taking such a complex view of politico-economic change will not only historicize Africa's development trajectories, but also Europe's and America's transformation to their own forms of capitalism.

⁴⁷) Stiglitz 2001, p. xiv.

⁴⁸) Rostow 1960.

⁴⁹) Cardoso and Falleto 1979.

Such a development would hopefully contain the simplistic solutions offered by global neo-liberal architects and their African counterparts as far as Africa's transformations are concerned.

NEPAD's advocates also misrepresent the transformative potential of the social forces closely linked to African states. In essence, their claim that African states are committed to leading their societies to a new era of development marked by equality and 'people-centred' development ignores the social bases of these states. This approach to African states represents them as institutions that float above history and class dynamics. In the case of the latter, for instance, the class foundations of the initiative were embedded from the beginning, for the process leading to the adoption of the NEPAD framework was initiated and framed by members of the continent's ruling classes. Throughout the framing process, for instance, civil society groups were never consulted. Further, like the architects of earlier and contemporary hegemonic theories of development, modernization and neo-liberalism respectively, proponents of NEPAD consider ruling elites as the main agents of social change in Africa.

In the political arena NEPAD claims, as mentioned earlier, that the continent has entered a new political age marked by democracy, respect for human rights, and search for peace. Yet, from Malawi to Nigeria and places in between, Africa's so called democratic regimes have all the markings of 'illiberal' democracies.⁵⁰ In the case of Nigeria, the return of President Obasanjo to office was characterized by what internal and external observers termed as 'massive irregularities.' Electoral records in the southern River State, for instance, indicated "a near 100 per cent turnout with 2.1 million of 2.2 million registered voters supporting President Obasanjo," a result that contradicts the low turnout trend recorded by observers in the state; and in Obasanjo's home region he "won 1,360,170 votes against his opponent's 680."⁵¹ Confronted with questions about the legitimacy of the election results given the irregularities that characterized them, not just in his home state but in others as well, President Obasanjo offered a 'cultural' explanation: "Certain communities in this country make up their minds to act as one in political matters. . . . They probably don't have that kind of culture in most European countries."⁵² These comments roll off the tongue

⁵⁰ Zakaria 1997.

⁵¹ IRIN news service, 12 May 2003 and *Mail and Guardian*, 26 April 2003, respectively, quoted in Bond 2004, p. 18.

⁵² IRIN news service, 12 May 2003.

of one of the framers of NEPAD and a self-proclaimed leading force in the African Renaissance project. The same undemocratic trend and return to authoritarian tendencies is also evident in Kenya. In 2006, faced with a major political crisis generated by questions surrounding his response to corruption in his government with the emergence of Githongo's report, Mwai Kibaki's regime has returned to the old repressive ways of Kenyatta and Moi eras. In the middle of the night in early March, the regime had workers of the media outlets of the *The Standard Group* attacked by hooded men. During these raids workers at *The Standard* newspapers were ordered to lie down by men carrying AK-47s, who went on to burn newspapers meant for delivery the following day and arrest three journalists. Yet the regime's response through its Internal Security Minister, John Michuku, was that "the raids were designed to protect state security."⁵³ With national and global criticism of this incident and the increasing intolerance of independent media and dissent in the country, Kibaki's regime responded by stating that it was committed to the "promotion of responsible journalism."⁵⁴

The class bases of African ruling elites' commitment to democratic politics and their disrespect of the popular will is also clearly evident in their stipulation in the NEPAD blueprint that they hold each accountable for the deepening of democracy and other good governance practices. According to NEPAD, this is to be achieved through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Thus far, African leaders have ignored their much-touted APRM framework. The support of Robert Mugabe's autocratic rule in Zimbabwe by Mbeki and other African political elites demonstrates how rhetorical their support for democracy and respect for human rights is. For several years now Mugabe has consolidated his power in an authoritarian political structure that has no regard for basic human rights, let alone the broader human rights embodied in second and third generation human rights discourses. Yet, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Mbeki had no qualms stating that the push to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth was nothing but sheer racism on the part of the leaders of the White Commonwealth. This resorting to claims of White Commonwealth racist conspiracy ignores facts pertaining to the March 2002 presidential elections in Zimbabwe. As various observers have

⁵³) BBC news, 2 March 2006 and *The Standard*, 3 March 2006.

⁵⁴) Mutahi Kagwe, Kenya's Information Minister, BBC news, 2 March 2006.

stated, intimidation and other forms of state-sponsored terror characterized these elections. According to one report,

The Presidential election was marred by a high level of politically motivated violence and intimidation. . . . We were concerned that the legislative framework within which the elections were conducted, particularly certain provisions of the Public Order and Security Act and the General Laws Amendment Act, was basically flawed. Limitations on the freedom of speech, movement and of association prevented the opposition from campaigning freely.⁵⁵

While Mugabe continues to deepen his autocratic rule, his NEPAD colleagues are silent or, like Mbeki, claim they believe in “quiet diplomacy.” In 2005, for instance, Mugabe continued his policy of gross violation of human rights by ordering the destruction of homes of the most marginalized communities in Harare under his regime, so-called “Operation Murambatsvina-Shona” or “drive out trash” campaign. But African elites have thus far not called for political sanctions or any other disciplinary measure and nor have their global ‘partners’ called for regime in Zimbabwe.

The emergence of limited forms of democracy is not surprising if one takes a careful look at the nature of the democracy that is being promoted in the era of neoliberal globalization. Elites drawn from government and business sectors are deemed by the transnational lending community to be the central players in the establishment of democracy in the developing world. As the World Bank declared in 1989, “A common mistake is to ignore local leadership, often on the grounds that it is exploitative. . . . On the contrary, studies show that working with existing leaders” yields better results.⁵⁶ The intellectual origins of the international lending community’s democratisation campaign make it clear that underlying the push for peripheral democratisation is the stabilisation of the existing economic and social system, and hence the interests of capital at both the local and international levels.⁵⁷ In addition, like its view of market economic reforms, the community’s view of democratisation in Africa and elsewhere in the global South is not that of a historical and social process; rather their idea is that as long as there are local elites who are interested in implementing procedural democracy, liberal democracy can generally operate.⁵⁸

⁵⁵) *Star*, Johannesburg, 31 March 2002.

⁵⁶) Quoted in Sable (forthcoming). World Bank 1989, p. 61.

⁵⁷) See for example, Huntington 1991.

⁵⁸) See Sable (forthcoming).

Concluding Notes

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the ways in which African states have responded to the current phase of globalization. As the discussion has indicated, these states have been heavily involved in the process and have used their political agency in efforts to reproduce themselves given the nature of the contemporary global conjuncture. The paper has also challenged the claims by African states as outlined in the NEPAD initiative and has demonstrated its limitations as a tool for Africa's transformation along democratic and equitable lines. Finally the paper has also highlighted how in very profound ways the NEPAD initiative represents the recycling of the hegemonic neo-liberal development and thus offers not a new start for the continent but a deepening of neo-liberal political and economic practices in the continent.

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