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**Czech Association for African Studies**



**This issue is dedicated to the 80th birthday of Vladimír Klíma**



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## Editor's Note

This issue is the first in volume 4 of our journal. It is an important issue as it addresses topics, which have been crucial for modern African studies for a while. The explanation of the African variant of militant Islamism has thus far never been satisfactory. Akubor in this issue offers a plausible explanation by linking it to the *almajirai* system of education and the latter's demise under both colonialism and post-colonialism. Korhonen and Šváblová tackle the often proposed but rarely undertaken problem of comparing African post-colonialism and European post-communism. These two articles are revised versions of papers presented at the Paris ECAS conference in 2015. We hope to publish more papers from the panel on post-colonialism and post-communism in the next issue of *Modern Africa*. Latif presents her research findings on Kenyan political fragility from the viewpoint of revenue redistribution in this country of multi-ethnic composition and deep economic divisions. Finally, we are happy to publish Řezáčová's meticulous research of South African modernity challenges based on the case of the former "homeland" of Venda.

It is perhaps unusual to comment on reviews but we appreciate the number and quality of our recent reviews of important publications. Two volumes from the Routledge series directed by Daniel Bach are a novelty worth reviewing because they analyse the position of Africa in global international relations and signal a compelling need to improve its status. The other books reviewed in this issue also relate to our broad vision of African studies transcending the limitations of a hegemonic metropolitan discourse. One of Fiala's monographic volumes on political parties in individual African countries, reviewed in this issue, is evidence of this approach. So is the edited volume of Vilhanová-Pawliková and Seyni in the field of history. The political philosopher Kasanda reviews a book about the duality of structures in Africa with the help of the dynamic ontology of *-ntu* that might otherwise have escaped the attention of Africanist researchers.

We owe a correction to data in the previous issue. The book of Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová, *The Production of History and Culture in Africa Revisited: Problems, Methods, Sources* (2013), reviewed in *Modern Africa* vol. 3, issue 2, was published in Bratislava by the Slovak Academic

Press, and has not only 119 pages but also a bibliography on the pages vii-xxxii.

On behalf of the editorial board, I wish all readers of this issue the pleasure of gaining new insights for the sake of an improved understanding of modern Africa.

Petr Skalník

# POVERTY AND TERRORISM IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: REFLECTIONS AND NOTES ON THE MANIPULATION OF THE *ALMAJIRAI* SYSTEM AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Emmanuel Osewe Akubor**

**Abstract:** Scholars have posed a relation between Poverty, Ignorance and Terrorism. This is based on the increasing and heightening level of terrorist activities in most parts of the world, which has been linked to the ability of some powerful forces and actors manipulating the minds and hands of those affected by poverty (both material and intellectual) in society to engage in terrorist acts. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out a study with an analytical and narrative historical method. Findings indicate that in the case of Nigeria, with specific reference to the northern part of Nigeria, these actors (often wealthy, influential and disgruntled political and religious persons) deliberately manipulated the *almajirai* system to perpetuate terrorism. It also discovers that this act has in one way or another hampered the socio-economic development of the area in particular and the nation at large. The main reason is that human and intellectual resources, which would have been channelled towards building the nation, have been diverted to destructive tendencies without those involved knowing this under the guise of either liberation movement or fighting for freedom. It can therefore be concluded that unless more drastic measures are taken, the country may face even more severe dangers.

**Keywords:** *Poverty, terrorism, ignorance, development*

## Introduction

Emerging studies have established a link between poverty, ignorance, violent crisis and terrorism, especially in most parts of the Third World

(Oscar 1966; JDPC 2008; Biu 2008; Liman 2013). This is based on the increasing and heightening level of terrorist activities in most parts of the world, which has been linked to the ability of some powerful forces and actors manipulating the minds and hands of those affected by poverty in society to engage in terrorist acts. In the case of Nigeria (with specific reference to the northern part as well as evidence from the Niger Delta area), this is fastly becoming the case as the struggle for survival by those considered the strong hands of the society and their inability to make ends meet as a result of deliberate deprivation (through acts of manipulation and embezzlement) have led to a rise in violent crimes including terrorism.

### **Conceptual Clarification of Terms**

Geographically, the northern part of Nigeria today comprises what is politically referred to as the 19 northern states, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). However, despite the heterogeneous ethnic composition of the area, the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group still predominates, with over 70 per cent of its people belonging to the Hausa-Fulani ethnic stock. By extension, the historical evolution of the Hausa group is closely linked to that of other ethnic groups in the region (while the term Kasar Hausa or Hausaland does not refer to a fixed place name, but merely means “the country where the Hausa language prevails” (Kwanashie et al. 1987).

According to scholars, poverty means more than lacking financial means as it has to do with one’s state of mind and perception of issues of life. Caritas Nigeria (2008) described poverty as the inability of an individual, group or nation to provide shelter, nutrition and other material goods that enable people to live a good life. The concept of poverty includes material deprivation (e.g., food, shelter) and access to services (e.g., health, education). It constitutes a multiple breach of the fundamental rights of human beings and above all a violation of the right to lead a decent life. This right basically amounts to being able to live out one’s life as a human being with dignity (JDP/Caritas Nigeria 2008).

The concept terrorism is derived from the Latin word “terrere,” meaning to frighten, terrify, deter, or scare away. Thus, terrorism is a particular kind of political violence involving a threat of violence



against non-combatants or property in order to gain a political, ideological, or religious goal through fear and intimidation. Usually symbolic in nature, the act is crafted to have an impact on an audience that differs from the immediate target of the violence. Hence terrorism is a strategy employed by actors (state and non-state actors) with widely differing goals they intend to achieve and constituencies they intend to reach (Post 2007: 3; Enders and Sandler 2012: 4).

Manipulation means, essentially, controlling the actions of a person or group without that person or group knowing the goals, purpose and method of that control and without even being aware that a form of control is being exercised on them at all (Usman 1979). In line with this definition of the term manipulation, scholars have argued that manipulation of religion has become a tool in the hands of those in a position to subject their followers into perpetual ignorance and darkness. In this way, it has been argued that this happens, when there is the need to obscure from the people a fundamental aspect of their reality.

### **The *Almajirai* System: As it was in the Beginning**

Historically, the Hausa word *almajiri* (plural *almajirai*), derived from the Arabic *al-Muhajir* (plural *al-Muhajirun*), best describes an emigrant with specific reference to early scholars as well as others in quest for knowledge, who migrates from the luxury of his home to other places or to a popular teacher in the quest for Islamic knowledge. It is hinged on the Islamic concept of migration, which is widely practiced especially when the acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient (Abdulqadir 2003). In a more specific term, Sheik Abba Aji, a renowned Maiduguri-based Islamic scholar (quoted in Abdulrafii 2009), opined thus:

The word *almajiri* is a word borrowed from Arabic language and derived from the word “*al-Muhajir*” meaning a seeker of Islamic knowledge. The *almajirai* system of education practised in northern Nigeria has its origin in the migration of Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina. Those who migrated with the prophet to Medina were called “*al-Muhajirun*,” meaning emigrants, while those they met there were referred to as “*Ansar*,” meaning helpers. To Aji, “these emigrants (*al-Muhajirun*) because of the circumstances of

their migration had no means of livelihood for getting to Medina, but based on the fraternity established by the prophet between the two groups, they did not engage in begging but rather were co-opted by the *Ansar* in their various trades and vocations as apprentices who were paid for their services.” .... Islam frowns at begging in any form because it reduces a Muslim’s self-esteem and dignity.

In the case of the Nigerian territory, this system took root as far back as between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries with the establishment of Islam in the northeastern corner of present-day Nigeria (Kanem-Borno). In this way, the *almajirai* education system, originally called the *Tsangaya*, is recorded as one of the oldest educational system established in the area under a system extending from the frontiers of northern Nigeria across the Chadian region up to the borders of Libya. According to sources, it was established as an organised and comprehensive system of education for learning Islamic principles, values, jurisprudence and theology. It was a replica of Islamic learning centres in many Muslim countries, such as the *madrrasah* in Pakistan, Malaysia, Egypt and Indonesia etc. (Abdulqadir 2003).

Due to the relevance attached to this system, and the fact that it was the major source of training both in cultural and Islamic education (even for the ruling houses), it was funded directly by the state treasury and the state *zakat* funds, and under the control of the emirs of the traditional government system that existed during the period. It was thus not difficult to ensure the welfare of both the students and their teachers, as the community readily supported these *almajirai* most of whom came from faraway places to enroll in the *Tsangaya* schools. In return, the *almajirai* offered services such as laundry, cobbling, gardening, weaving and sewing among others as charity to the community that contributed to their well-being. Writing on the organization of the system, Abdulqadir (2003) stated the following:

The *almajirai* system, though funded, was not over-dependent on the state. The students were at liberty to acquire a vocational and occupational skill in between their Islamic lessons and so were involved in farming, fishing, well construction, masonry, production, trade, tailoring, small businesses, etc. Many of them were the farmers of the northern Nigerian cotton and groundnut pyramids. They formed the majority of the traders in the commercial

city of Kano. They were the leather tanners and leather shoe and bag makers in the old Sokoto Empire. The cap weavers and tailors in Zaria city were said to be *Almajiris*. Thus, they formed the largest percentage of the community workforce and made significant contributions to the economy of the society before the introduction of white collar jobs. After colonialization, they were recruited by the British as columbite and tin miners in Jos city, which was then under Bauchi before the creation of plateau state.

On the achievements of the system up to the eve of conquest, the sources continued thus:

The system also produced the judges, clerks, teachers etc. and laid an elaborate system of administration in Northern Nigeria. They provided the colonial administration with the needed staff. The first set of colonial staff in Northern Nigeria was provided by the *Almajiri* schools and this went on for years. In fact, the *Almajirai* system was a civilizing agent second to none. Before they were gradually replaced, phased out & indeed abandoned. *Almajiri* teachers and their pupils also freely provided their community with Islamic Education, in addition to the development of *Ajami* i.e. reading and writing in Arabic alphabets; ... there were 6000 *Almajiri* schools in Northern Nigeria through which writing came to the North first before any other region. Based on this system, which is founded upon the teachings of Qur'an and Hadith, the then Northern Nigeria was largely educated with a complete way of life, governance, customs, traditional craft, trade and even the mode of dressing. The chronicles of the travellers said that the northern part of the territory was well organised, people were in walled cities, were literate and devout.

### **The British Conquest and the Beginning of the Collapse of the *Almajirai* System**

The colonial invasion of Nigeria with particularly reference to the northern region led to the collapse of the *almajirai* system and the inability of the government to maintain those involved. In this invasion most of the Emirs were either killed or disposed, while those who were subjugated lost control of their territories and accepted their new roles

as mere traditional rulers used only for the system of indirect rule. In most of these areas the British did not give much recognition to the *almajirai* education system as emphasis was on western education. Under the new arrangement, the *almajirai* system did not get the type of attention earlier devoted to it under the Sarauta/Emirate system, especially as related to state funding. This view of the colonial government was based on the fact that the *almajiri* schools were mere religious schools and not directly useful to the agenda of colonialism. This rendered the teachers (mallams) not only unemployed but left them unqualified to be employed despite being able to read and write. Thus, with the British withdrawal of state funding for the *almajiri* schools, the emirs lost fundamental control of the *almajirai* system and it collapsed. In this way, the disregard for the *almajirai* system in favour of western education ignited animosity and antagonism among the *mallams*, their pupils, and northern Nigerian society at large. There was much fear that western education, which is of Christian-European origin, would lead graduates to lose their Islamic identity and embrace anti-social behaviour that negated the values and principles of Islam (Dambuzu 2012). In the opinion of Khalid (1997, 2002), this marked the genesis of the manipulation of the system, which today has become a menace in Nigerian society. In his analysis, the scholar argued:

Forsaken by both the colonial and post-colonial state, the *mallam* receives no salary but lives off the support given by the local community, the contributions of his students and supplementary income-generating activities. Accordingly, for most part of the day, the students are preoccupied with learning to reading, writing and memorization the Qur'an. In between lessons, they engage in a plethora of different activities to secure their livelihoods, notable among which is street begging. These multitude of children as young as five, in tattered clothes, bowl-in-hand, solliciting for food and money on the streets of urban centres has made *almajiranci* system to be synonymous with child destitution, a development that has been accompanied by a decline in respect for the system. The Maitatsine sectarian riots in Kano in the 1980s mark a turning point in writing about them. There has develop the apprehension that this sorely neglected section of the young population could be dragged into major political crises, if urgent steps are not taken to integrate them into the mainstream of the socio-economic life. Already there has been wide, yet to be substantiated, allegations of

the involvement of *almajirai* in the spate of sectarian crises which bedeviled the Northern states in the last decades. Since September 11, there has been renewed pressure on the governments in Nigeria to take a hard look at the system. The pressure has become even more intense since the debut of Taliban-like boko haram armed insurgency in the region.

### **Destruction/Manipulation of the *Almajirai* System and the Rise of Violent Crime in Northern Nigeria**

The conquest of northern Nigeria and the eventual collapse of the *almajirai* system did not go well with those who have benefitted directly or indirectly from the system, since it rendered the teachers unemployed, while the pupils had no direct relevancy in the colonial system. Thus immediately after the colonial authority had overthrown the system and established colonial administration in the area, those benefitting from the *almajirai* system thought of ways of remaining relevant in the new system that had no place for them economically. As a result, the people were made to believe that the colonialists were agents of perpetuating Christian faith and ideology with the target of converting everyone to the new religion. On the other hand, the educators, who were mostly Christian missionaries, were accused of preaching the equality of all men and their system of education was thought to be capable of causing “unrest and fanaticism” by bringing up a “separate educated class in rivalry with the accepted rulers of the people” (Lugard 1922).

Secondly, they were also made to believe that the western education introduced by the infidels was the same thing as Christianisation, which had to be avoided at all cost. It was therefore not surprising that even as late as 1936 enrollment in newly established schools in the northern part of the country was still very low (Akubor and Akinwale 2014). It must, however, be made clear that this sentiment was not shared by all northern aristocrats as some of them wholeheartedly accepted the establishment of schools and even provided land for the building of classrooms and staff quarters. For instance, the Emir of Bida did not only give a boy to Bishop Samuel Crowther to be educated, but also wrote to neighbouring Emirs appealing to them to allow the

Bishop to begin missionary work in their territories (Ayandele 1979). In the case of Zaria and Katsina, Graham (1966) wrote:

...Miller's school in Zaria was at first viewed with suspicion. But gradually, the mallam class in the city appeared to have picked up interest. One mallam was taught Hausa in Roman script and in three months he was able to read. Eight other mallams subsequently joined him. Apparently in response to the growing influence of this mission in the city the Emir was quoted as saying that everybody was free to follow the religion of his choice, that those who had left Islam would not be forced to return, neither will those who were Muslims be forced to embrace another religion. Dr. Miller had a plan to start schools in other emirates, the Emirs of Zaria and Katsina having promised to send two boys each to him.

In the area where they made the people believe that western education was actually the enemy of the religion of most of the people in the area, there were occasional attacks on structures meant for schools. Under this situation little success was recorded in the area of education because of a lack of interest in western education as well as the inability to recruit high quality teachers. The Argungu Mission Diary (1943) reported:

One of the major factors that militated against a successful school programme was the quality of teachers available and the difficulty of finding teachers who could teach through Hausa. It was a frustrating exercise, opening a school in one village and closing one in another mission compound at Argungu so that they would attend the school there but this didn't work out very well. The children didn't want to be in school and the majority of the parents had little interest in educating their offspring. Sometimes it seemed as if the pupils spent more time in running away from school than in the classroom. In the circumstances we must train boys at Argungu who will in future be available as catechists for the surrounding area.

Similarly Sehlinger (1976) wrote:

Those stationed in Argungu over the years, gave their best to the mission but with little results. Perhaps the most devastating experience they had was in 1934 when Frs. Minihane and Dennehy

returned from the annual retreat in Kaduna to find that the house had been burnt down in their absence. There was no question of abandoning the mission; they just had to look for alternative accommodation.

This may be described as the beginning of the period of sowing the seed of manipulation of the *almajirai* system and the subsequent hatred for western education. It led to a situation in which even decades after the overthrow of the system by the British and the subsequent establishment of modern education system a large part of the people continued to resent western education.

### **The *Almajirai* System and Nigeria Today: The Role of Poverty and Ignorance**

With the above situation in view and the impression given of the new system of education as a rival to the religious belief of the majority of the people of northern Nigeria, there is a tendency to view the mindset of the people as being made up by western education, which also increased the level of their hatred to it. Secondly, it set the pace for those who benefitted directly from the system to see Christianity and western education as the same, which therefore should be avoided or eliminated for the survival of Islam. The result was that western education in the area continued to receive low prestige, thereby creating a larger vacuum in term of job opportunities for the youths. This idea later metamorphosed into the Boko Haram Brotherhood. Salihu (2012) described the above position thus:

... More so, political instability and economic hardship since 1980s coupled with other problems including the appalling incapacity of government have resulted in frustration. Unlike the initial stage, when book was suspect because of its evangelization credentials it is now despised for its failure to meet the expectations of many in term of the prospects for better education and employment, and, more fundamentally, the wanton corruption and culpability of its products are related directly to the problems of the country. This is seen as a general background that is relevant to the emergence of the Boko Haram, besides its identity as an Islamist group

It is therefore not surprising that as late as 2006, there were 1.2 million *almajirai* in Kano State alone. In 2009 that number in Kano State (according to the education ministry), rose to 1.6 million *almajirai* in 26,000 Tsangaya schools across the 44 local government districts of the state. Sokoto State had 1.1 million *almajirai* in 19,167 schools; Kaduna State had 824,233, while Borno State, reputed as a centre of Islamic learning, has 389,048 *almajirai* pupils. (The breakdown for Borno State is as follows: Borno indigenes 266,160, followed by those from other states totaling 118,280, non-Nigerians number 4,608 with 4,464 Sangaya *mallams*.) Thus by 2014, it was estimated that over 10 million Nigerian children of school age are outside the school system in the area. According to the estimates carried out by the Ministerial Committee on Madarasah (Islamic school) Education, “the enrolment for the North-East is 2,711,767 Almajiri, North-West has 4,903,000 and North-Central 1,133,288, with a total enrolment of 8,748,055 Almajiri for the three Northern geopolitical zones” (Bobboyi and Yakubu 2005; Abdulrafiu 2009; Idoko 2014). The result is that in a country that officially earned approximately \$50 billion in revenue from its oil reserves in 2012–13, 70 per cent of the northern population lives below the poverty line, and the mostly Muslim north has higher unemployment than the national average (Sodipo 2013).

In line with the above and over the years in Nigeria (especially from the 1980s) the word *almajiri* (derived from the Arabic word “*al-Muhajir*”), which original meant a seeker of Islamic knowledge, has come to represent any child or adult who begs for assistance in the streets or from door to door. The majority of *almajirai* in Nigeria are children between 3 and 18 years of age. It has been established that these children are totally neglected by their parents and teachers, and are being used as economic tools. According to Biu (2008), the situation has resulted in the fact that *almajirai* are now children destitute, who are deprived of the basic necessities of living and seemingly disadvantaged in all facets of socio-economic life in society. This is against the basic tenet of Islamic teachings and contrary to the teachings of the Qur’an and Hadith, which strongly prohibit begging except in very special circumstances (Abdulrafiu 2009). Such situations could include a man’s loss of property in case of a disaster, or when a man has loaned much of his money for the common good, such as bringing peace between two warring parties. Records show that in Kano state alone there are 13,335 *almajiri* schools housing an



estimated 1,272,844 *almajirai* with 45,454 *mallams*, or teachers (Idoko 2014). All these teachers depend largely on the earnings of the children from begging and on the good will of members of the community. Also the situations under which these *almajirai* are trained have exposed them to hard life as they are most often not housed and left to fend for themselves. It has also been found that most of those who claim to be teaching the *almajirai*, do not possess the basic qualifications needed to positively impact the youths (Akubor 2007).

Apart from the above, societal neglect and corruption as exhibited in the government circle, especially since the return to democratic rule in Nigeria in 1999, apparently exposed the underbelly of the age-old neglect of the development of northern Nigeria by different segments of its power elites – the political, military, educated and business elites – who, after attaining high status in society, opt to neglect the well-being of their communities and the region in general. Liman (2013) has argued that over the years the northern politicians in particular have manifested an incredible poverty of ideas, vision and mission in the discharge of their responsibility as leaders in their own states and local governments. In a more graphical form the scholars argued thus:

Between 1999 and 2012, the North had collectively realized a colossal sum of money from the federation accounts as revenue, but there was nothing to show for it by way of investment in human capital development, infrastructure, industry, agriculture and education; areas in which the North has comparative advantage and can rely upon for social regeneration. A recent report has it that the “sum of N8.3 trillion accrued to the North from the Federation Account in 11 years” was all embezzled. The fact that agriculture is the mainstay of northern Nigerian economy, authorities should have facilitated taking it to respectable and sustainable levels. Total reliance on oil revenue within the current context of political jostling over resource control also killed the spirit of self-reliance, industry, accountability and transparency leading to the culture of embezzlement and corruption at all levels of governance.

On the menace of the *almajirai* activities as a tide to total neglect and poverty, the argument continued:

The children that have been forced into begging are proving to be a serious menace to society. They are sometimes believed to be the cannon fodder in the ethno-religious and communal clashes that have become a recurring decimal in the region. All efforts to address the menace of Almajiri, including the federal government intervention to domesticate them and integrate them into society, are more or less not proving effective... However, the increasing rates of poverty in northern Nigeria and the overwhelming indifference of the elites to this social hazard are evidently increasing the number of Almajiri and crime in the streets.

The above coupled with the lack of quality education has indeed increased the number of school dropouts roaming the streets of northern Nigerian towns and cities, thus increasing the tendencies of these youths to engage in evil vices. This is because the unfortunate children and youth who are unable to make it to tertiary institutions or get some training in skills are in their large number exposed to so many anti-social behaviours like theft, armed robbery, rape, kidnapping for ransom, drug addiction and violence in the streets. The worst dimension of it all is in the frequency with which desperate politicians are drafting the youth for criminal activities against their opponents. They use vagrant youths to cause mayhem, to intimidate, to assassinate and to engage in arson. In line with this, Lawan (2012) argued that any country with a high level of unemployment and poverty is sitting on a time-bomb, because such unemployment and poverty stricken youths could easily be mobilised to indulge in senseless killings and destructions (Sani 2015). This is because the teeming unemployed and idle hands of the youths have on several occasions been manipulated by the political, military or economic elites to achieve their selfish, egoistic and destructive ambitions (Sani 2007). It has also been established that the manipulated *almajirai* system provides the training ground of those, who later graduate into full scale criminality. This is because of the hardship they are exposed to and the uncensored lives they live as *almajirai* in the streets. The groups they graduate into go by various names in different parts of northern Nigeria. For instance in Borno they are referred to as *Ecomog*, *Area Boys* in Sokoto, *Kawaye* in Kaduna and Katsina, *Yan Daba* in Kano, *Yan Sara Suka* in Bauchi, *Shinco* in Adamawa and *Yan Kalare* in Gombe and these are armed, most commonly with machetes, clubs and similar weaponry (Kushee 2008; Pongri 2008; Akubor 2012). Due to their

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condition and high patronage from the political class, these have proven easy prey for politicians, who offer them small amounts of money, drugs, alcohol and weapons in exchange for engaging in acts of intimidation and assault or simply to accompany their campaigns in a demonstration of muscle. For example, between December 2003 and April 2007, at least 115 people were killed and scores more injured as a result of *Kalare* violence in Gombe state (Kushee 2008; Akubor 2012).

Illustrating this as demonstrated in Kano in 2002, Sani (2007) observed:

When the Kano riots by youths broke out into violent conflicts protesting the United States Military campaign against Afghanistan in 2002, a highly placed government official, in the person of the then Kano state Deputy Governor, Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, had observed that hundreds of unemployed youths took advantage of the anti-United States protest to unleash havoc and destruction on innocent citizens. He said further that the state was populated with thousands of jobless youths who only wait for any slight opportunity to ignite violent conflicts where they kill and maim innocent lives and loot property.

Thus, without a solid educational foundation, good jobs and viable means of livelihood, these youths must create for themselves means of survival in an already chaotic socio-economic situation as found in Nigeria. Table 1 below provides some explanation to this.

**\*Table 1: General Assessment of Facilities available to the People of Nigeria**

Region	Youth Literacy (% Age 5-16)	Primary School Attendance (%)	Secondary School Attendance (%)	Access to improved Drinking Water (%)	Access to improved Sanitation (%)	Small and Medium Businesses per 100,000	Watches Television once a week (%)	Read a newspaper once a week (%)
North East	18	43	24	39	28	9	19	9
North West	24	37	21	47	37	13	21	10
North Central	43	67	41	51	27	18	49	19
South West	78	79	64	73	26	20	73	21
South South	70	80	59	63	32	14	75	30
South East	66	79	58	71	41	15	52	27

Sources: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria National Population Commission, and the US Agency for International Development (2010-2012)

A critical analysis of the table above shows that not much has been achieved in eliminating ignorance and poverty from the northern part of the country years after independence. This conclusion gives credence to the position adopted by Lamido Sanusi, former Central Bank of Nigeria Governor, when he observed that years after the colonialists have left the gap between the North and the South is widening. In his analysis he particularly noted that only five northern states scored above the national literacy level of 75.3 per cent, which has led to a situation in which the failure to prioritise mass education has saddled Sokoto State with a literacy level of 33.1 per cent and Bauchi 39.5 per cent. Records from the Central Bank of Nigeria also state that female literacy in Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Jigawa, Katsina, Bauchi and Niger is below 20 per cent, compared to 81 per cent

and higher in Ekiti, Imo, Anambra, Ogun and Lagos in the South. Accordingly, unemployment as of 2012 was higher in the Northern states than the national average of 23.9 per cent, with Zamfara having 42.6 per cent, Bauchi 41.4 per cent, and Niger 39.4 per cent (Punch Editorial Board 2012).

## **Poverty, Ignorance and Northern Nigeria: The Road to Terrorism**

Research by academics, Non-Governmental Organisations, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme clearly establish a correlation between poverty, insecurity/terrorism, especially as it relates to the northern part of Nigeria. The situation these young men and women find themselves in as a result of poor governance and obnoxious economic policies has been linked to the root cause of youth crisis since the mid 1980s (O'Brien 1996). In a more specific manner, both Gore and Pratten (2003) and Diouf (2003) argue that because many hopeless youths in this area now operate from a marginal geography and culture that is largely antagonistic to the dominant culture, their engagement with the state has become ambivalent, characterized by complicity, insurgency and disengagement. This alienation, in turn, pushes the youth to embrace alternative survival strategies outside the mainstream and socially approved means of livelihood, which exposes the entire society to instability. This is clearly stated in Oscar (1966), in which he presented this argument thus:

Once the culture of poverty has come into existence it tends to perpetuate itself. By the time slam children are six or seven they have usually absorbed the basic values of their subculture. Thereafter they are psychologically unready to take full advantage of changing conditions or improving opportunities that may develop their life time... The individual who grows up in this culture has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority.

Domesticating the above argument to fit into the situation concerning the northern part of the country in particular, and Nigeria in general, Sani (2008) wrote:

Poverty has become so endemic that the great majority of the citizens have lost hope and faith and have started considering their conditions as a given, unchangeable act of providence since the more they individually struggle to redeem themselves from it, the more they plunge deeper into its abyss.

It is therefore not surprising that the *almajirai* in Northern Nigeria for decades have been part of a complex matrix in which they have been used to extend wars of attrition at different times in the name of God. This conclusion is based on the fact that investigations have revealed that the terrorist group Boko Haram recruited and used *almajirai* as child soldiers over the years. According to USBLA (2013), boys as young as 11 were reportedly paid to fight, plant bombs, spy and act as suicide bomb. Girls have been abducted by Boko Haram for slave labour or sexual exploitation; some of these girls were abducted while working on farms in remote villages or hawking wares on the street. It has also been established that Boko Haram are heavily sponsored by powerful agents within and outside the country with destructive intentions. This opinion is reinforced by Bello-Barkindo (2002):

Their sponsors belong hypothetically to the same group that has for decades, denied them the right to learn how to distinguish right from wrong. If the Almajiri had well-paved streets like the ones in the G.R.A's he would not want them littered with corpses of Christians. If he had a job, he would not expose himself to the danger that rioting comes with. If he had a home he would not be there to be incited. If he had hope, he would not find refuge in extremism.

In this condition, the worst hit people are the *almajirai*, who are totally dependent on alms for survival. Owing to widespread poverty, some parents are left with no choice than to continue sending their children into the street disguised as *almajirai*. According to the 2010 National Bureau of Statistics' poverty profile, though poverty permeates the entire country, it is more profound in the North. The report shows that among the six geopolitical zones of the country, the Northwest and Northeast recorded the highest poverty rates of 70 per cent and 69 per cent, respectively. The projection of the Bureau for 2011 was also gloomy with predictions of 71.5 per cent, 61.9 per cent, and 62.8 per cent poverty rates for North-Central, Northeast and

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Northwest, respectively (Punch Editorial Board, 8 May 2012). The U.N. 2008–2009 human development report rated the North as the poorest region of the country, using such indicators as child mortality, maternal mortality, and the presence or absence of diseases like polio and measles, which have been nearly eradicated in southern Nigeria (Agbaegbu 2012). Punch (2012) noted:

The reality of grim poverty in the North is stark. Of the 100 million Nigerians living in “absolute poverty” those who can afford only bare essentials of food, shelter and clothing — the majority reside in the Northern states. The North-West has the highest poverty rate with 70 per cent of its people living below \$1 per day. The North-East follows with 69 per cent and the North-Central with 59.5 per cent. The three Southern zones have no cause to rejoice either as poverty level there ranges between 49.8 per cent and 58.7 per cent. The lesson from these latest figures from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics is that wrong choices, wrong policies and poor leadership have led to the rise in poverty from a national average of 54.7 per cent in 2004 to 60.9 per cent in 2010.

Thus, the overall socio-economic situation has been growing from worse to worst over the years. This is aptly represented in the table below. Although this situation cuts across all regions in the country, the socio-economic condition of the northern region seems more pathetic.

**Table 2: Poverty by Geo-Political Zone**

Geopolitical Zone	Percentage					
	1980	1985–86	1992	1997	2004	2010
Year						
Northeast	35.6	53.2	54.0	68.0	72.2	76.3
Northwest	37.7	48.2	36.5	62.0	71.2	77.7
N/ Central	32.2	48.4	46.0	53.0	67.0	67.5
South East	12.9	30.9	41.0	79.5	26.7	67.0
South West	13.4	42.0	43.1	74.1	43.0	59.1
S/ South	13.2	38.0	40.8	78.6	35.1	63.7
Nationwide	28.1	43.0	42.7	69.2	54.4	69.0

Source: [www.otiveigbuzor.com](http://www.otiveigbuzor.com)

Scholars have argued that the statistics as presented in table 2 could be indicative of the frustration a large part of the young in the northern

part of the country is experiencing. This frustration has made many northerners (especially the *almajirai*) predisposed to conflict, crime, violence, human trafficking, prostitution and several other social vices. This is better understood when considered in line with various sources, local and international, that over 70 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line. This means that they (the 70 per cent) survive on one U.S. dollar (\$1) (N150) a day for all their needs – food, clothing, education, health care, housing, transportation, water, etc. It has also been established that over 70 million Nigerians have no access to potable water. This represents six per cent of the world's 1.1 billion persons who do not have access to safe drinking water. This calculation is based on the fact that Nigeria's population is about 1.1 per cent of the world's population (Osarenren 2011). Thus the standardised *almajirai* system has provided a sort of economic relieve as some of these children originally sent to other towns and cities to “acquire education” are sent by their teachers and sponsors on the streets to engage in petty trade in items like kola nut, groundnut, maize, and assorted condiments to augment the lean income of their families. Such girl children are exposed to countless social hazards like sexual abuse, rape, kidnapping, etc.

Attempts by various bodies to stop the manipulation of the *almajirai* system and related actions to safeguard children from danger in Nigeria have met with resistance from religious leaders in states where the *almajirai* system flourishes. In areas where conscious efforts are taken to make this work, the states have enacted provisions to bolster protection for working children within their territory. For example, in the 2006 Abia State Child's Rights Law prohibits all children under 18 from engaging in domestic service outside the home or family environment, just as Delta State prohibits children from street trading during school days (Abia State Child's Rights Law 2006). Similarly, governments of Anambra, Bayelsa and Lagos have prohibited children from all forms of street trading (LLC 2010). In the northern part of the country, there is a National Framework for the Development and Integration of *Almajiri* Education in the Universal Basic Education Scheme, while Kano state initiated a prohibition against *almajirai* children begging on the street while Kaduna and Borno states talk of providing free feeding and transportation to school children (U.S. Embassy-Abuja reporting 2014). Nevertheless, not much has been achieved thus far. This is because these efforts have been interpreted



by some quarters as an attempt to destroy the teachings of Islamic religion.

## **Implications for National Development**

From the available evidence it has been established that Northern Nigeria has been the locus of an upsurge in youth radicalization and virulent militant Islamist groups in Nigeria since 2009. Nigeria's ranking on the Global Terrorism Index rose from 16th out of 158 countries in 2008 to 6th (tied with Somalia) by the end of 2011. There were 168 officially recorded terrorist attacks in 2011 alone. Bombings across the northeast prompted President Goodluck Jonathan in May 2013 to declare a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States. Many Nigerians have come to question whether the country is on the brink of a civil war (Sodipo 2013).

One area in which this has affected national development is in the field of recurring violent crises and economic losses. It has been found that before the country attained independence and the incursion of the military into the political scene, most of the conflicts in the country were in the form of political thuggery, that is, gangsters of the different political parties attempting to prevent, if necessary, by forcefully opposing political parties from conducting election campaigns in the territories they regarded as the area of their jurisprudence (Usman 2002). However, from the late 1970s up to the 1980s, (with the rise in the number of jobless young men and women, poverty and the failure of the *almajirai* system) the situation changed to outright violence leading to massive killings and the destruction of properties, starting with the Maitatsine Uprising in Kano, in the northern part of the country, in which *almajirai* provided a ready tool for execution. Although most of these crises are often gabbed with religious colouration, it has been established over time that it is more a result of poverty and economic depression. The Maitatsines has therefore been described as an opener of the gateway for crises, as after the Maitatsine Uprising several other violent outbursts and/or religious riots followed sequentially. These included the Bullum-Kutu (Maitatsine) in October 1982, Rigasa (Kaduna) in 1982, Jimeta-Yola; Gombe (Bauchi state) in 1984. Similarly, Hussaini Abdul (n.d.) wrote:

Since the 1980s, Ethnic and Religious crises have become a re-occurring decimal in Northern Nigeria. There is virtually no state out of the 19 states that constitute the Northern Nigeria that crisis of this nature has not raised its ugly head. Since the middle 1980s the spate of violence has continued to increase. Among these includes: Maitatsine crisis in Kano 1980, Bullum-Kutu 1982, Maiduguri 1982, Yola 1984, Ilorin 1984, Bauchi 1984, Ilorin 1987, Kano 1984, Kafanchan 1987, Zuru 1980, Birnin Kebbi 1990, Katsina 1991, Tafawa Balewa 1991, Kano 1991, Jalingo 1992, Kaduna Polytechnic 1992, Kasuwar Magani (Kaduna) 1994, Gure Kahugu 1987, Kafanchan 1987, 1999, Kaduna 2000 Jos 2001, Kano 2001, Tafawa Balewa (since 2000), Nasarawa 2001. Others include Chamba-Kuteb crisis in Taraba state since 1975 Tiv-Jukun crisis, Bassa-Igbira crisis in Toto and a host of others. While these crises continue to exhibit ethnic and religious colorations, and portray clear manifestation of criminality and frustration resulting from sociological and economic alienation coming from wide spread poverty and unemployment, there are other forces whose identity and character are difficult to define. Many people lost their lives as a result of these crises, some sustained injuries of various degrees, some had their properties worth millions of Naira either destroyed or looted; yet others get permanently dislocated and psychologically depressed. These crises have created a general threat to the security of the citizens, it has resulted in the violation of the rights of citizens. Many people “either through miscarriage of justice or through the failure of the state to prosecute perpetrators and instigators of these clashes” have been unjustly treated.

Focusing on the period 1999–2007, Bui (2008) wrote:

Between 1999 and 2007 Northern Nigeria has witnessed violent ethno-religious crises in Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Adamawa, Jigawa, Benue and Nassarawa states. The common factor in these crises has been an army of young destitute children usually called Almajiri. Over various different periods these young children and youths between ages 6–20 have been manipulated by some unseen forces through a mere “mess of pottage”, to inflict injury, kill, maim, rape and destroy properties belonging to supposed enemies.

Closely related to the above is the consistent rise in number of Internally Displaced Persons in over 26 camps across the country. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) as of April 2015 there were over 1,491,706 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe (IOM/NEMA 2015). Although various reasons have been advanced for this upsurge, the insurgency in the northeast was reported as the predominant cause of displacement, with fewer than 6 per cent of those displaced fleeing inter-communal clashes and disasters. While most were displaced in 2014, up to a third fled violence in the first four months of 2015 alone. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) recorded an additional 47,276 IDPs in Plateau, Nasarawa, Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Kano and Kaduna in February (IOM/NEMA, February 2015). This would bring the total number of registered IDPs to 1,538,982 in these northern states and parts of the Middle Belt. This is indeed a great economic loss considering the quantum of impact this would have made on the socio-economic life of the nation under calm condition.

The immediate impact of the above is that Northern Nigeria continues to display some of the worst human development indicators in the world. In northeast Nigeria, 71.5 per cent of the population live in absolute poverty and more than half are malnourished, making it the poorest part of the country. Insecurity, desertification and flooding have interrupted farming activities, the main source of income for most northerners. Forty per cent of Nigerian children aged 6–11 do not attend any primary school, and northern Nigeria has the worst school attendance rates, especially for its girls. The literacy rate in Lagos, Nigeria's bustling commercial capital, is 92 per cent while in Kano, the north's commercial capital and Nigeria's second biggest city, it is 49 per cent. In the northeastern state of Borno, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, it is under 15 per cent. In 2010, nine of the 19 northern states had the highest levels of unemployment in Nigeria – some as high as 40 per cent – with young northerners being overwhelmingly more likely to be jobless. The worsening challenges which poverty, youth unemployment, poor infrastructure, illiteracy and insecurity pose are inherently systemic and a consequence of the collective failure of leaders at all tiers of government to properly

deliver public goods and services or to accountably manage public funds (Hoffmann 2014).

Also the above has negatively impacted investment in that part of the country as investors and people flee in droves from sectarian strife and terrorism. This has further heightened the level of poverty, unemployment, under-employment and the lack of basic amenities. Thus once these youths are unemployed or underemployed, their idle hands and minds provide a large pool of recruits for violent groups. The most ruinous has been the cynical deployment of religion in the service of politics by a few. It is a potentially dangerous cocktail.

In the area of food production, the area has continued to lag behind when considered from the potential human and material resources it possesses. For instance, it has been argued that with 53 per cent of the population and 65 per cent of the land mass, advantage in food and cash crops, and a wide range of mineral deposits, Northern Nigeria should not be the least developed part of the country it is today. However, a 2007 survey by Economic Associates found that the North contributed only 23 per cent to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product while the three Southern states "Lagos, Delta and Rivers" contributed 36 per cent.

The above situation is not a good sign for any nation that is aiming to be among the Twenty Developed Nations of the world by 2020. It is even more alarming considering the fact that these items become very expensive and are out of reach of the ordinary citizens when they finally get to the market. In line with this analysis the present paper argues that there is an urgent need to revitalise the role of rural families in agricultural production and food security. However, at present, this seems an illusion, as apart from the problem of inadequate support from the Nigerian government, other situations have impeded the large-scale involvement of the family in agriculture. For example, it has been established that ca. 19,000 farmers in 2013, abandoned their farms in the fertile New Marte District in Northern Borno, along the Lake Chad Basin, while a large number could not cultivate their farms due to the Boko Haram insurgency. The insurgency, which took over the areas in northern Borno State bordering on Cameroon, Chad and Niger, forced thousands of residents, most of them subsistent farmers, from their homes. This disrupted farming in the area, which

produces the bulk of the staple food – maize, millet, wheat, rice and cowpeas – grown in the region (Caritas 2014). In line with this, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) has declared a food crisis condition in Yobe and Borno and the other states in the region. This is mainly due to the fact that the northern part of Nigeria, precisely Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Yobe, Borno, Jigawa and Kano, has been unstable due to crises since 1999 that have crippled all farming activities (Idoko 2014).

The situation outlined above is even more worrisome when seen in the light of the report of the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO), which argued that approximately 492,000 children in northern Nigeria are severally malnourished. It further declared (according to the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) that global acute malnutrition rates are highest in Sokoto State at 16.2 per cent, while Kano State at 9.2 per cent has the lowest. The international emergency threshold is 15 per cent. Decrying the situation in Nigeria as well as encouraging the government to turn to the family for agricultural production against food insecurity will certainly remain a mirage as long as the area remains unstable (Idoko 2014).

## **Conclusion**

From the discourse so far, it is clear that poverty and ignorance play vital roles in the emergence of groups of people who, having lost hope and faith in the system and its ability to rescue them from hardship, begin to take their destiny in their own hands. This is even more dangerous when within the system there exist groups of individuals who will continue to manipulate such situations in order to create anarchy so that they can remain relevant both politically and economically. One position the present paper has constantly maintained is that there is nothing absolutely wrong with both *makarantar allo* (Qur’anic school) and *makarantar ilmi* (advanced knowledge school), which produce *almajirai*. However, the manipulation of the system as well as the fact that some individuals have subjected these pupils to ignorance and poverty have led to a situation where they are bound to take their destiny in their own hands. The result is a venture into terrorism by some of them while others have become ready available tools for

politics and still others are bent on setting the nation ablaze. The outcome is the emergence of extreme religious groups, which have become a threat to national development. The present paper thus argues that the current socio-economic situation is responsible for the seemingly gloomy future, which the country is presently faced with as reflected in youths, largely unemployed, who are susceptible to financial inducement and wait for any opportunity to ignite violent conflicts where they kill and maim innocent lives and loot property.

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# **SHARED DIVERGENCE: COMPARING POST-SOCIALIST PERIPHERIES AND PREDICAMENTS**

**Juho Korhonen**

**Abstract:** Based on preliminary research, mainly interviews with social scientists, and theoretical propositions I explore the politics of knowledge in peripheral post-socialist states. The states considered here are Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tanzania. Out of the four a focus is set on Tanzania in order to better argue for and show the global nature of some of the shared predicaments of post-socialist states in general and of the post-socialist peripheries of the former second world, the so-called “post-peripheries,” in particular. The overarching argument is that certain post-socialist predicaments have incapacitated an effective politics of knowledge across post-peripheral states and led to a decrease of substantive rationality. The argument is constructed not to hold categorically but rather to outline an ideal-type description of one perspective with which to better understand similarities of post-socialist states within the divergence of the former socialist world as a whole.

**Keywords:** *Post-socialism, post-peripheries, Tanzania, politics of knowledge, statehood*

## **1. Introduction**

In *Twenty Years After Communism* Bernhard and Kubik (2014) analyse the memory regimes of post-socialist countries pertaining to the fall of state socialism. Their analysis goes to show a divergence of post-socialisms. They trace patterns of conditions that guide actors’ strategies in the construction of historical visions employed in struggles for power (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 262). However, all 17 countries they analyse are European and all of them have to some degree been able to redefine their statehoods and the politics of knowledge that connects memory regimes to interpretations of

present and visions of future. Bernhard and Kubik's analysis therefore does not represent the whole post-socialist story. Not all post-socialist conditions and their patterns have allowed the successful construction and employment of new historical visions. I suggest that we need to similarly recognise conditions of post-socialism that fail to produce new historical interpretations or, when they succeed, fail to connect them to visions of the future and knowledge of the present, i.e., to formulate new politics of knowledge.

National memory, present-day legitimisation and politics, and a country's perceptions of future trajectories and possibilities are tied together through the politics of knowledge. In this paper I attempt to turn our focus towards this intersection when analysing post-socialist countries. I propose that such a focus reveals similarities across former socialist peripheries and their statehoods from Eastern Africa to the Caucasus, from Europe to Central Asia. My cases represent a variety of former socialist peripheries: from a history of direct (Kyrgyzstan, Georgia) to indirect (Albania, Tanzania) dependency on the socialist world and from statebuilding premised to a lesser (Georgia, Albania) and a larger degree (Kyrgyzstan, Tanzania) on socialism.

The ideas presented here are based on a theoretical discussion and on preliminary research in all four countries. The research consisted of interviews with social scientists and sought to approach wider issues of post-socialist politics of knowledge through the keyhole of the production of social scientific knowledge. In order to underline the global reach of post-socialism and its connections to transnational ideas of statehood I focus on Tanzania and compare it to Albania, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan jointly, as they are more commonly taken as parts of the former socialist periphery with legacies of socialism affecting their politics of knowledge today. After presenting my theoretical outlook, I will therefore first discuss the case of Tanzania in greater length and then the cases together.

Theoretically I begin from a problem of research on post-socialism. For example, Outhwaite and Ray (2005) claim that changes in post-communist societies are too "uneven" to provide explicit theoretical implications. Whereas Kandiyoti (2002) notes that in research on post-socialism there is a discrepancy between theoretical perceptions and concrete contexts, I approach this discrepancy not,

like Kandiyoti suggests, as theoretical poverty or, like Outhwaite and Ray suggest, as chaotic reality, but as an actually existing and researchable phenomenon in itself. Drawing from my preliminary research and from theory, I describe this phenomenon broadly as the delegitimisation of substantive rationality and a transition with alternativelessness producing together an incommensurability between the delegitimisation of the socialist past and possible analyses/critiques of the present and visions of future, or, as Sarah Amsler has put it, an “ostensibly expanded space for intellectual experimentation” with difficulty to imagine what it might entail (Amsler 2007: ix).

By the end I hope to have shed light on two mutually reinforcing lines of thought. First, countries of former post-socialist peripheries share a common predicament when it comes to the politics of knowledge. However, in discussing this post-socialist predicament I do not propose that my perspective holds categorically but rather that it can outline an ideal-type description of one perspective with which to better understand similarities of some post-socialist states within the divergence of the former socialist world as a whole. The second line of thought is that any post-socialist country, in this case Tanzania, is possibly subject to that same predicament just like its Eurasian peers. Speaking specifically of African post-socialism Pitcher et al. point out that “the impact of these changes [1989–91] on socialist states in Africa was no less monumental” (Pitcher et al. 2006: 1).

### **1.1 Statehood and Post-Peripheries**

Just as the creation of the states system was part and parcel of the creation of a capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein 1998: 10), today not the disintegration of that system as such, but its devaluation, especially where the politics of knowledge are concerned, is part of the capitalist world-economy; a time of uncertainty and popular antistatism that “has undermined an essential pillar of the modern world-system, the states system” (Wallerstein 1998: 32). Therefore some states are not automatically granted the binary benefits of systemic dependency and state sovereignty, which are still, however, perceived to be the birth right of any state.

For states today the price of recognition is increased demands for dependence and adaptability. Yet, at the same time, as Wallerstein has described (Wallerstein et al. 2013), complexity and competition in the world-economy have intensified whilst fluctuations between markets and power alliances have become manifold and faster, resulting in unpredictability. This tension has excluded actors such as some post-socialist peripheries that lack the capacity to influence them or to maintain themselves the institutions required to adapt to constant change. Furthermore, they themselves would provide unnecessary further unpredictability, a burden for any core actors to incorporate them and be responsible for their adaptability too.

A globally informed theoretical exploration thereby pluralises modernity and proposes that more complex dimensions of a global society and the states within exist beyond the traditional measures of successful statehood of the twentieth century. A way to begin conceptualising this is to theorise an in-betweenness caught in a delegitimisation of substantive rationality and a transition coupled with alternativelessness; a shared predicament of some post-socialist countries across the world. This means that in a world, to paraphrase Amsler (2007), where the state and social movements are considered to be the facilitators of power and resistance, who constitute and reproduce the system, it is also crucial to investigate the limitations and possibilities of the facilitators themselves to engage that system. And furthermore, not simply investigate the results, for shared limitations may produce divergent results, but also the form and process, or lack thereof, of that engagement.

The paradox of post-peripheries' – the peripheries of the former socialist world – politics of knowledge is that their attempts to construct substantive rationality is incommensurate with the statehood that is offered to them by the global community. Whereas the countries from the former core or semi-periphery of the second world with strong state machineries or leaders have used old tropes of tradition, nationalism and religion coupled with new forms of information and communication technology to break through this impasse, the latter states have actively “sponsored the formation and propagation of useful traditions” (Starr 1991, quoted in Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 8). But many post-socialist or post-communist states, particularly those of the former socialist periphery – such as Moldova

or Albania, most African cases, or states of the Soviet south – whose statehood often was largely constructed or even newly created as part of the socialist alternative, have not been able to forcefully reformulate their politics of knowledge.

This trajectory of post-peripheries is premised on the production and legitimisation of knowledge connected to the collapse of the socialist alternative. This is a predicament with which all post-socialist societies have specifically struggled, setting them apart from other societies with similar problems or similar incapacity. Moreover, my preliminary research suggests that the states I call post-peripheries, whose nation- and state-building was predicated upon a dependency on the core of the second world, have struggled in specific ways in terms of dealing with the collapse of the legitimisation of the socialist alternative; as well as with the collapse of their dependent relations in this sense with the core of the second world; and with on-going developments of the wider global states system. This points towards certain similarities and shared conditions for the politics of knowledge in the face of an apparent divergence of the post-socialist experience across the world.

## **2. Post-Socialist Predicament(s)**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union not only societal agreements founded upon or emulating the Soviet as well as the socialist model were delegitimised, conjointly also social inquiry and social science academia in those regions became delegitimised. This was and continues to be a particularly difficult predicament especially for those countries in which the state, the nation, the social order, and academia and the social sciences were for the most part constructed during the Soviet or socialist eras, where legacies, traditions and memories of institutions predating socialism had been supplanted.

The main goal of modernisation in general in its socialist as well as capitalist versions was to make the uncertain controllable and to produce predictability. Some have called this social engineering. It is centred on a mutually re-enforcing relation between theory and action, or in other words between knowledge and social, political and economic reproduction. The first problem then that was encountered by post-socialist societies was to come to terms with how their past – that all of a sudden lost its legitimacy as a modernising project of this

sort – had been built upon the premise of it being an incommensurable alternative to the capitalist mode of modernity that was now the only other option on offer. Societies that to some extent or another successfully navigated this predicament formed new regimes of memory as Bernhard and Kubik (2014) show. Following this first predicament the second one encountered especially by post-socialist knowledge producers and social science academics was the fact that the only critical perspective within the capitalist mode of modernity was nevertheless a variant or multiple variants of the very Marxism they had abandoned. This is the problem of present-day knowledge, of forms and ways of a state and society to analyse, define and understand itself. The problem causes a disconnect between reinterpretations of the past and politics today. The third predicament is how, when the two previous predicaments should have been tackled by politicians and scholars, at the same time globally the era of sovereign national development as a means to an end began to come to an end and ironically made, so to say, obsolete the struggles that had appeared to be of utmost importance. This last one is the problem of future visions. Where all of the three predicaments have remained in place, they have produced a specifically post-peripheral statehood.

Let me illustrate my point with a minor but specific example, of a more symbolic nature, of this predicament. The Ala-too square in central Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, used to be dominated by a large statue of Lenin to symbolise not only the ideology but also the man who literally signed off the creation of Kyrgyz statehood. In 2003 – only – the statue of Lenin was replaced by a statue named “Freedom,” a female figure holding a torch. Kyrgyzstan had joined the WTO already in 1998 and was for a time considered a promising example of transition towards free markets and democracy in the region. Two revolutions later, in 2011, “Freedom” was replaced by a statue of the hero Manas from the national epic as part of an effort to strengthen nationalist sentiment. But Manas has not brought the people together or legitimised Kyrgyz statehood any more than did “Freedom” (and, of course, there is no going back to Lenin).

Following promising reforms after a 2010-revolution, things are again looking unpredictable. Nate Schenckan of Freedom House summarises the situation by stating that the so-called “island of democracy” in Central Asia “is barely staying afloat.” He continues, “Kyrgyzstan



might not be headed to a dictatorship, but neither is it becoming more democratic” (Schenkkan 2015). It is caught in an in-betweenness that could not be reconciled through religion, nationalism, democracy, or the free markets either. A correct symbolism would be to leave the pedestal on Ala-too square empty.

The example of Ala-too square speaks to how there was and to an extent continues to be, to quote Sarah Amsler again, that “ostensibly expanded space for intellectual experimentation” following the fall of the Soviet Union, but “imagining what this might entail was difficult” and continues to be so in some cases and therefore “the reconstruction of existing boundaries of legitimate knowledge”, and of the politics of knowledge, was and is “experienced as a crisis as much as an opportunity” (Amsler 2007: ix).

Often post-socialist debates about what should be done with the politics of knowledge themselves revolve around a paradoxical dichotomy. On the one hand, social scientific knowledge is seen as not sufficiently national and still too influenced by Soviet Marxism, while on the other hand, national traditions are seen as backwards whereas Western credentials and theories are considered the standard (Amsler 2007). Yet, also the Western standard is not seen as outright applicable or fully sensitive to the particular situation these states find themselves in.

## **2.1 Research on Post-Socialism**

There is a problem in research on post-socialism. For example, Outhwaite and Ray (2005), in their discussion of the implications of post-communism for social theorising, claim that changes in post-communist societies are too “uneven” to provide explicit theoretical implications. They attempt to explain that unevenness in terms politics of knowledge by describing the “post-communist” world as “one in which the play of modernization, modernity and otherness has become both intense and unstable” (Outhwaite and Ray 2005: 103).

On a similar note, Kandiyoti (2002) observes that in research on post-socialism there is a discrepancy between theoretical perceptions and concrete contexts. Both Kandiyoti and Outhwaite and Ray touch upon a problem of post-socialism that is perceived to be there by

researchers: A discrepancy between ideas, or theory, and empirical data is brought up in one form or another, from one angle or another. The assumptions that hold theories together appear to make the theories blind to specific aspects of post-socialist societies, or, the other way around, knowledge of those societies seems not to fit well in theoretical assumptions and undertones. However, that is not the real problem I suggest this discrepancy is not, as Kandiyoti suggests, theoretical poverty, or like Outhwaite and Ray suggest, chaotic reality, but an existing and researchable condition of post-socialism in itself. The real problem is that we are disguising our inability to approach this condition as no-good theory or difficult empirics. Instead of poor theory or bad empirics, there may just be a persistent disconnect between the two in post-peripheries that both researchers and societies have failed to displace. To give a simplified description: theories, perceptions and understandings about societies and states in the world are applied and developed today in a more global and unified direction than ever before, while post-socialist peripheries are stuck on a parallel trajectory that keeps being dragged along but is unable to intersect. When researchers then try to bridge these two trajectories, they end up explaining away or excusing for the discrepancies in an effort to produce findings that would resonate with the global trajectory.

Partly this came about as there was no structural support for a reconstitution of politics of knowledge, a crisis that has not been resolved today and has been transformed into a politics of recursive instrumentalisation of that very disconnect within some post-socialist countries (Korhonen 2012). With this I mean sort of a reactionary, status quo oriented, relation to any transformations in the global society due to an incapacity to connect ideas with action. Concretely this has manifested, as Amsler accounts, in discourses of inferiority of local knowledge, polarized responses of unproblematic attraction and irredentist reaction to post-Marxist models of progress in neoliberal development agendas (Amsler 2007: ix-x).

The situation continues to be one where problems encountered are assumed to be natural elements of “the transition.” This, I argue, is the underlying cause of what I see as a knowledge politics of a recursive never-ending “transition” that fails to resist or support anything. Amsler has termed this as being between “Marx and the Market,” which manifests as a situation in which “epistemological and political

architectures, even of methods that aim to dismantle power relations, are structurally embedded within these very relations” (Amsler 2007: x-xi). What this means, I suggest, is that the post-socialist predicament(s) is reproducing itself with the result that “problems of organized knowledge production ... cannot be adequately understood if we view them only through the narrow national and regional lenses through which we had for so long been accustomed to looking”, but rather, these problems “beg questions about knowledge, power and capital at the global level” (Amsler 2007: x-xi). Indeed, comparisons between post-socialisms globally may reveal aspects hidden from regional analysis, as Pitcher et al. argue is the case for African post-socialisms: “most theorists of postsocialism overlook the persistence of historical memories, the symbolic and discursive continuities, and the institutional ruptures and restorations in those African countries that once embraced socialism” (Pitcher et al. 2006: 2).

In post-peripheries a fragmentation of politics of knowledge is visible in the affiliations, differentiations, distinctions, and overall entrenchment that different institutions of knowledge production seek. This fragmentation is a sign of strategies built upon funding received and rhetoric copied from elsewhere (spatially or temporally) rather than interactive and responsive connections to and support of social movements and state building. As Amsler points out, each of these factors of fragmentation is mediated through academics’ decisions about how to negotiate competing logics such as Marxism, nationalism, capitalism and institutional professionalism. Social scientific practice and fields of knowledge are reproduced by strategically negotiating alliances with “a bankrupt and authoritarian state” and with “unstable and uneven relationships ensuing from dependence on development organizations, or reliance on commercial funding” (Amsler 2007: 94, 107). In a situation in which, as Amsler argues about the post-Soviet periphery, such production of knowledge is nevertheless defined as producing objective representations of social reality, little space is left for legitimate substantive rationality that leads to shared ways of life, I suggest. Substantive rationality, as Weber described, differs from theoretical rationality in that it “directly orders action into patterns”, which it achieves “not on the basis of a purely means-ends calculation of solutions to routine problems but in relation to a past, present, or potential ‘value postulate’” (Kalberg 1980: 1155).

Thereby only substantive rationality “introduces methodical ways of life” (Kalberg 1980: 1145).

Lack of substantive rationality leads to limitations in capacity for an effective politics of knowledge, such as what Richard E. Lee calls imagining possibilities for human action that are effective and legitimate (Lee 2011: 36), i.e. negotiating differences between present knowledge, the horizon of expectations, and memory regimes. With limitations in capacity the processes and mediation provided by politics of knowledge cannot aid in the accumulation of capital (social or economic) or state formation. An indeterminacy of “meaning-formation” pervades social movements and state-building, as Emilian Kavalski claims is the case of post-Soviet statehood in Central Asia (2010).

### **3. Pasts and Presents of Socialist State-Building**

Having described my theoretical angle, and before delving into the case of Tanzania and into comparisons, I will present a few remarks about the four cases, which, while not an exhaustive selection, represent different geographical and political peripheries of the former socialist world – varying in terms of direct or indirect dependence, forms of socialism, and historical timelines – these countries’ present moments that are nevertheless defined by their socialist pasts.

While space does not permit replete historical comparisons, it should be noted that all cases, Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania share histories of statehood that were shaped by imperial interventions. And all of them, for a period at least, found or were given a solution to their troubled statehood through socialism. Looking at the longer term, before the Russian Revolution of 1917, the four cases do not vary significantly in terms of the development of infrastructure, foreign trade or local political bargaining capacity with imperial actors, with Kyrgyzstan and Albania probably trailing Tanzania and Georgia in terms of the former two measures. Specifically coastal parts of Tanzania were equally if not more connected to international trade around the 19th century than the other three cases. Comparatively, at least before the Soviets properly turned their eye towards Central Asia and the Caucasus, under the German and British empires Tanzania enjoyed a relatively heavy investment in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for

the development of administration, infrastructure, agriculture and education. Tanzania, for example, had 1200 kilometers of railways on the mainland and tramlines running on the Island of Unguja by 1914, including plans to heavily expand both transportation forms. Higher education in Albania, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania took off in the early 1960s and has not effectively regained its position, as I will later discuss, since the collapse of communism. Georgia's brief period of independence in 1918–21 also saw the establishment of a university in Tbilisi; this academic tradition however, was forcefully interrupted by Soviet occupation.

The analytical variety of the cases originates from the research process itself. My first case was Kyrgyzstan because it represented both a direct dependence on the socialist alternative as well as a statehood that was the direct result of socialist intervention. Furthermore, it distinguished itself from its Central Asian counterparts, for example, by being a poster child of transition at different times following the collapse of socialism, but nevertheless time and time again failed to fulfil those hopes. Next in line, Georgia added variety through its history of independence not only long ago, but also right before Soviet intervention. And similarly Georgia had distinguished itself among its Caucasian neighbours in terms of hopes for a transitional development, which for the most part has failed to actualise. Thereafter, Tanzania served to globalise my outlook as well as present a case of indirect dependency compared to the two former ones. And lastly, Albania presented a case of indirect dependency coupled with a history of independence before the Soviet intervention that in a sense sealed the circle for this stage of research and these particular comparisons.

Finally, it is meaningful to realise, as background, the intertwined nature and history of state-building and socialism. Sovereignty, or national liberation, and socialism functioned practically as synonyms following the First and Second World War. Socialism had become viable symbolic capital for the international recognition of sovereignty. This situation was often in contradiction with socialist policies domestically and led internationally to the proliferation of “socialisms” based on domestic needs, which partly began to chip away its international clout by the 1970s.

### 3.1 Traditional Understandings of Tanzanian State-Building

Neville Linton (1968) wrote one of the earliest pieces on the success of Tanzanian socialism and state-building seven years after the country's independence and one year after the Arusha Declaration that steered the state towards a socialist path: "It would have been enough of a task to set out to build a modern nation-state as was the goal of most new states of the Afro-Asian world. Nyerere's purpose, however, was to create a new order, a truly socialist community, an African vision of what society ought to be" (Linton 1968: 1). A problem of Linton is that he assumes state-building to be a neutral process onto which socialism is added as if a special flavour or extra challenge. He also assumes that there is a specifically African vision of what society ought to be (perhaps in contrast to an assumed Eurocentric understanding). But societies are bound and shaped by the dynamics of the world that constrict their capacity to understand, exploit and define those dynamics. It is in this capacity that Tanzania shares similarities with some of its post-socialist companions.

A common preface to studies regarding Tanzania and Tanzanian-type socialism is like the one offered by Dean McHenry in his *Limited Choices: The Political Struggle for Socialism in Tanzania*. McHenry compares Tanzania to the proverbial elephant in the story about a group of blind men, who each touched a different part of the creature's body and then described the whole animal accordingly (1994).

McHenry's opening assumption is not far from Kandiyoti's and Outhwaite and Ray's lament. This continues to be the case for many studies on and understandings of post-socialist societies. A similarity, bringing Tanzania together with other post-socialist peripheries. I find this curious. McHenry explains this claim by offering accounts as to why in the case of Tanzania scholars have been "blind." His explanations range from ideological bias to concrete problems in conducting research, i.e., from theoretical poverty to perceived chaotic reality.

I suggest rather that such problems are commonplace in the study of any social phenomena and in that sense we are either all blind and Tanzania is no different or we are actually not blind even when we describe the elephant differently. In either case, what is missing

from post-socialist research are the spaces and opportunities in the politics of knowledge to negotiate, legitimise and assign the problems and discrepancies found in the post-peripheries to be defining the characteristics of those states and societies today. This is an actual condition of Tanzania as a post-socialist country. With this I mean that the very existence of the country and especially ideas about the country; the immanent political critique and the practice of the state in trying to understand itself is contingent, volatile, and unstable. The politics of knowledge is constantly torn apart and pummelled by different participants in the process and its environment, yet post-socialist legacy prevents the volatility and instability from being decisively supplanted by stronger perspectives produced elsewhere. This results in divergent and separate accounts of the characteristics of the state and society of Tanzania, which I argue is in fact a characteristic on its own.

This is not accidental. The ability to control and decide which forms of statehood remain stable in the global markets and the states system is important political and ideological currency. One could perhaps say that in this definitional capacity is where actual power lies; in being able to guide and shape the relations that constitute the system.

### **3.2. Possible Revisions**

Paul Bjerck (2010) noted that “scholars are torn between the impulse to understand the theoretical implications of Tanzania’s experience for socialism and a more pragmatic concern to evaluate the country’s claim to sovereign authority”; he continued that “debates have pitted the diffuse international discourses of modernization, socialist and otherwise, against the specific cultural needs of defining a truly independent African state” (Bjerck 2010: 276). This is another angle from which to observe the same discrepancy caused by post-socialist predicaments. It is a common phenomenon as well as a major problem for peripheral post-socialist states struggling to establish autonomous statehood while lacking the capacities needed to formulate an effective politics of knowledge.

Bjerck’s paper is one of the few I found that resonates with my own interest in interpreting Tanzanian socialism as a historical form of state-building within a larger historically specific context of an

international order of nation-states and politics that is, if anything, constituted by that division and not objectively separate from it. “As such, socialist policies must be first understood within the exercise in sovereign authority and its contestation”, Bjerck asserts (Bjerck 2010: 277). Through this understanding we are better able to gauge the problems that a socialist past sets for states’ politics of knowledge as a whole today.

Descriptive of how this post-socialist predicament with knowledge production came about is the manner in which Joel Samoff (1979) described the causes for failure of the state-building efforts of Tanzania. Samoff explained them through a mismatch between state ideology in Tanzania and its place in the world as a state; he has asserted that in Tanzania especially ideology is used to create cohesion and to deal with conflicts of power. This then, according to Samoff, in terms of the ruling class, causes problems with the ruling class’ dealings with international capital, as it attempts to maintain that ideology in the face of the rest of the country and simultaneously to maintain its monopoly position as the intermediary between the state politics and international capital.

It is good that in social sciences and history we have moved ahead from the theoretically straightforward class formational underpinnings of Samoff’s type from the 1970s. Yet, perhaps unfortunately, there has been an urge also to forget much of this type of analysis on state-building and development instead of rereading it and incorporating it as sources in new research. While Samoff’s analysis might not satisfy us today theoretically, the perceptions underlying it offer valuable information as to how the politics of knowledge were perceived and reproduced. In this sense I believe that Samoff, especially in his description of the situation as it was, may not be too far off in terms of pointing out a part of the history of the dynamics of global knowledge production now constraining post-socialist politics of knowledge following the collapse of socialist legitimacy. Therefore, the second tier that can be and should be read in Samoff’s analysis is not how accurately it might have described reality, but how insightfully it resonated with and created perceptions of reality, i.e., Samoff is at once trying to describe the real situation but also creating and reflecting something ideational, something that affected and perhaps restricted



the development of the politics of knowledge in the years following his analysis.

Samoff's description of the failure of socialist state-building through problematically promising national liberation on all fronts – economic, social and political – is a useful description for understanding how a politics of knowledge borrowed from elsewhere but motivated by sovereignty and national liberation was not sufficient for socialist peripheries to secure that liberation, but did produce a specific strategy to, so to say, forge ahead nevertheless, and today continues to produce specific challenges for memory regimes, knowledge of the present, and visions of the future, and especially for all of them successfully coming together to form a substantive rationality.

### **3.3 Tanzanian Statehood**

Peter J. Steinberger (2004: 28) argued, “individual states essentially are attempts to implement the idea of the state” which, itself, is internal to “the idea or set of ideas that constitutes the essence of a particular state.” From this argument Steinberger drew the conclusions that (1) “the state has itself for subject matter” and (2) attempts to examine the nature of the state will always “be a profoundly political endeavor” or, in other words, “a matter of a particular state ... seeking to understand itself, to discover, and to achieve in practice, its own coherence”; “an intelligible structure seeks to make sense of itself, to make implicit claims, to correct its own inconsistencies, to evaluate the degree to which discrete propositions comport with the overall system and to revise those that do not” (Steinberger 2004: 28–30). Such inquiry, Steinberger further argued, “will have the character of an immanent political critique” (Steinberger 2004: 30). Identifying incapacities to conduct this evaluation or immanent critique is another way to observe and understand the post-peripheries’ struggle with post-socialist predicaments.

Part of what makes Tanzania interesting in this context is that it was actively and knowingly constructing a national unity and a working national state while visibly promoting international socialism. Today, though, Tanzania has undergone “structural adjustment” policies of similar and, according to some accounts, greater magnitude than its African counterparts (due to its inability to bargain well for the

conditions) (Aminzade 2013). Tanzania has nevertheless avoided the fate of those counterparts for whom “the idea of state” as an authoritative institutional apparatus separated but strongly engaged in controlling and regulating social processes “has often appeared to match uncomfortably with underlying societal forces and dynamics within the African context” (Doornbos 2006: 48–72). This is another difference between post-socialist states and other states struggling with defining their statehood.

This difference can partly be explained through differences between socialism and ideas that constitute(d) a developmental state. This is present, for example, in the ways in which in Tanzania socialism was also used in an essentially negative way to mean the absence of certain features: “of exploitation, corruption and class divisions in society” (Coulson 1979: 2). Partly due to this difference socialism as a national liberation came to emphasise moral and ideational aspects, socialism as a way of life, which was a strong undercurrent in the writings of Tanzania’s socialist leader Julius Nyerere too. This ethos took place in a developmental and post-colonial state dependent on foreign aid and imports. In this regard, it diverges from socialism in the core regions of the USSR and its western satellites, but shares similarities with the Soviet south and other socialist peripheries that had a dependent relation with the core regions of the Second World.

Another aspect of Tanzanian socialism was the constant undertone of freedom of choice and free will of the people in implementing socialism. This, I suggest, is also a result of the complex relation between socialism and ideas of a developmental state. Similar rhetoric was offered to the newly created Soviet Central Asian republics. This rhetoric has been at the core of constructing Tanzanian nationalism, a relatively successful endeavour which many have applauded for the relative lack of ethnic conflict found in this post-colonial country of over one hundred ethnicities and spoken languages. This peacefulness was demonstrated once again during the tension-filled presidential elections in the fall of 2015.

Susan Geiger (1996) pointed out the paradox that while Tanzanian nation-building has been relatively successful, the narratives of that story remain largely unchallenged and unchanged. They have not been

re-interpreted to be employed in power struggles in a similar fashion as in the cases described by Bernhard and Kubik (2014).

Geiger then argued, with a focus on female Tanganyikan nationalists, that around the time of mobilisation these actors “did not ‘learn nationalism’ (so to speak) from Nyerere or when they joined the party” (Geiger 1996: 468). Rather, Nyerere and the party “provided women with a context within which to advance specific interests: namely, freedom from colonialism and gender equity” (Geiger 1996: 469). Geiger rightly pointed out, following Benedict Anderson, that nationalism in this fashion aligns with large cultural systems and not with self-consciously held political ideologies like socialism. Hereby I note that it was not socialism as such that drove the national movement. Yet, at the same time, it is not inconsequential today that it was socialism and not something else. Cultural systems influenced by socialism did not change overnight and a glue-on capitalist mentality did not displace certain ethos and ideas that had been shaped by socialism. Even more so, nothing automatically repaired the politics of knowledge.

Tellingly, by the 1980s the development debate over Tanzania shifted from critical examinations of the success of Nyerere’s policies to whether the country is already and/or should be socialist or capitalist. This shift overshadowed analyses of state-building and substantive rationality as independent processes of transformation that could be understood through a socialist mode or a capitalist mode but are not equivalent to either.

Duncan Holtom noted the drastic shift in Tanzania’s position during the 1980s: “A former World Bank favorite, it [Tanzania] became one of the few cases in Sub-Saharan Africa where the IMF and World Bank brought their full coercive power to bear in a protracted struggle,” Holtom continued, that “after six years of bitter struggle, Nyerere’s Tanzania, leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, and standard bearer of African Socialism, had given into the demands of international capitalism (McHenry 1994)” (Holtom 2005: 1).

#### **4. Towards a Politics of Knowledge in Post-Peripheries**

Part of the paradox of the tradeoff (of structural adjustment and transition) for Tanzania and other post-socialist countries is its temporality: democratisation movements following the end of the Cold War may have led to “more democratically constituted societies, but global interdependence may mean that those collectivities have very little to indeed decide and determine” (Wagner 2012: x), while at the same time globalising knowledge continues to set increasingly high requirements for participation in politics of knowledge (Kennedy 2014).

For example, recently Tanzania attempted to introduce a new voter registration system ahead of the presidential elections in 2015. This elegant biometric system records individuals’ facial and eye features and finger prints and holds promise for the increased efficiency of democracy and thereby state control and administration techniques as was likely envisioned by the system’s western developers. However, the potentiality of a system based on a continuous supply of electricity and internet access collides with problems of local governance and resources, not to mention eye problems and diseases of much of the elderly population – which seem not to have been considered by the system’s developers as a significant variable – and jam the system as it is unable to read the eye features of those individuals. Similar problems were encountered in Kyrgyzstan that also introduced a new biometric voter registration system ahead of its parliamentary elections in 2015. The promise of democratic state consolidation failed due to technical and governance capacities with the opposite result of what was likely intended. “the uncertainty around the biometrics issue will reduce trust in the outcome of the elections” (Schenkkan 2015). And although such sophisticated systems in conditions like Tanzania or Kyrgyzstan also hold the promise of abuse by the ruling elite, in securing votes or voters, even that type of state consolidation seems to have been ill-served by these technologies due to their poor compatibility with local governance and political organisation, be it real or simply perceived by the public.

While any lower income country may face similar issues with new technology, these are specific aggregate level problems for post-socialist states, which commanded a tradition of their own in techniques

and technologies of population and state control. It is not simply a question of failing to apply the technology, but the technology's function and idea, either in promoting democracy or even in allowing for more abuse, is eschewed by the system. Specifically such problems surface with attempts to align the existing post-socialist state and social structures, local knowledgeabilities, and forms of reproducing privilege with new systems being introduced. In more abstract terms, this problem arises from how "the recognition of knowledge reflects not just its intrinsic value but also the power and privilege organizing the systems in which that recognition functions" (Kennedy 2014: xiii). In post-peripheries forms of power and privilege seem to be kept in place but in check also. The same attitude is extended to the knowledge reflected through them. This interconnection, identified by Kennedy, thereby has its specific problems and characteristics in post-peripheries.

Part of the problem is that we find – unsurprisingly considering the quality, intensity and length of social transformations (in most cases the building of a state and a society from almost scratch) undertaken by peripheral socialist countries – significant resilience in post-peripheries of the form of politics of knowledge, networks and state control from a socialism-that-was.

In the case of the voter registration system this post-socialist condition, that limits the possible configurations that a new control or governance method can take with local knowledgeability, is present for example in a bureaucracy based on specific and unaligned organisational goals (rather than other distributive administrative methods or simple coordination); in the locality's tight connection to bureaucratic power resonating with the ruling party's or simply the political machine's structure; in importance of public and known bureaucratic steps to be followed (in contrast to a special programme set up for a specific function); in compliance with or even admiration of citizens of the bureaucratic models, i.e., seeing it as completely normal to queue for three days to simply register; and in a high value placed on rigidly official processes. All of the above are used as coping mechanisms and survival strategies, at least in post-peripheral academia, according to my interviewees. While at the same time a connection to "value postulates" or a "methodical way of life," as Kalberg (1980) described substantive rationality, is missing. This relates to how the above-

mentioned coping mechanisms are also associated with a perceived loss of shared value; “universities used to be serious places,” as one interviewee put it.

In another instance, at a conference in Tanzania a younger charismatic scholar spoke widely of the need for a new “grand vision,” touching upon the problems of the politics of knowledge and its failure to produce long-term social and political mobilisation and cohesion (Tanzania is very peaceful and perhaps one could say unified, but it is not cohesive or concerted). He explained that this vision should not be yet another piece of paper, but a feeling and a goal shared by all citizens of the country, much like substantive rationality. This, however, immediately aroused strong reactions from the audience. The critique was based on the impossibility of sharing a vision as long as the economy does not work and people are poor as well as on the impossibility of jointly agreeing what such a vision would entail. This is one example of the post-socialist predicament. It is a reversal of the original role of socialism, at least its original intention in Tanzania. The socialist vision was abandoned in favour of an opposite logic of structural adjustment that believed in transforming the economy in order to then residually change the society too and provide cohesion through mutually beneficial competition. It has not done so. It has made a small group of people wealthy. Yet Tanzania has been able to avoid many of the tendencies of strife and failure of government that are present in other post-colonial contexts. And, most importantly, this did not happen under the umbrella of strict authoritarian rule but through at least a perceived emphasis on social equality and societal legitimacy, things that apparently can peacefully coexist with high levels of corruption. My interviewees in Albania, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan – from different sides of the particular national divisions – employed similar arguments of social equality in explaining their problems with successfully reform or re-invigoration of societal knowledge production, i.e., to change something, while at the same time use strong rhetoric against those perceiving and interpreting the past, present or future of the country in a different way than they did.

In another example of the ethos of social equality, coupled with an incapacity to produce it, Ronald Aminzade (2013) pointed out how Tanzanian nationalism operates with exclusionary processes in a relatively inclusionary nation-state. He argued that exclusionary

practices were justified exactly by the need to prevent exploitation, address the consequences of prior colonialism and foster cultural pride (Aminzade 2013: 4). Similarly, the politics of knowledge in Albania, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are based on exclusionary arguments that prevent a shared substantive rationality but try to promote social equality and the rights of all to hold on to achieved gains. The painstakingly slow reform of an exclusionary and thereby fragmented system of knowledge production and legitimacy is justified by the benefits, inclusion and social equality it creates for the individual fragments of the field, while at the same time all parties recognise a dire need for reform. In Kyrgyzstan this had led to a proliferation of academic institutes divided roughly based on religion and ethnicity. In Georgia the divide is more strongly constituted by the ideas drawn from Western, national, or past imaginaries. In Albania this whole process of allowing academia and education to open up has been avoided and delayed based on the same arguments, and the negotiation and recognition of emerging divisions by each other is now underway. In Tanzania reform is kept at bay and fragmentation promoted based most often on social hierarchies that could be upset; even if in many cases, if not in the minds of people but in socio-economic reality, they already have been upset.

#### **4.1 Incapacities and Fragmentations**

Returning to the three predicaments that post-socialist knowledge producers encountered, a multitude of strategies were employed to deal with them leading to the aforementioned fragmentation of institutions of social knowledge. Very little if any exchange of ideas or communication exists between the fragmented camps, though in most cases all are relatively well connected to some official circles of the state or political apparatus. In Albania we can talk of delay and the intentional ignorance of fragmentation, in Kyrgyzstan of a religious and ethnic strategy, and in Georgia of an over-appreciation of the West leading to reactionary responses and a fragmentation based on inflation of that appreciation, while in Tanzania the strategy has been a mixture of delay and fragmentation based on supposed academic autonomy and societal hierarchies. All of these strategies have been the result of a failed response to post-socialist predicaments. Furthermore,

the effects of such fragmentation reproduce the incapacity to respond to the very predicaments.

In Georgia, for example, I encountered dichotomy, inflation and displacement. While the western or Anglo-Saxon mode of academic knowledge is widely appropriated and over-appreciated – with groups of elder Soviet trained academics holding on to their positions at least until retirement – at least two cleavages emerge from it. The first is a practical one. This Anglo-Saxon academia is still purely an imported good. Scholars who were trained or spent time as visitors in the West bring it to the country. As we know, too much quantity-focused imports of one good lead to inflation, like the tulip mania in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Holland. What one then finds is that academic arguments, over concepts, definitions or theories often happen in somewhat of a profane manner, in which the truthfulness and rightfulness of an argument is displaced out of Georgia and an autonomous Georgian field of knowledge production. Rather, validity is sought in reference to the knowledge of and connections to Anglo-Saxon academia elsewhere, namely the USA and Europe. This undermines the usefulness of such debates for a functional politics of knowledge and reproduces incapacity. The second cleavage I encountered in Georgia is a re-appearance and re-interpretation of Marxism, especially by young scholars, through Georgia's brief stint as an independent social democracy in the 1920s. While potentially promising and interesting, these scholars hit a wall since at present this perspective gives them little or no reference to the dominant Anglo-Saxon field of knowledge that serves to reward, organise and orient social inquiry, sort of like trying to sell orchids when everyone is crazy over tulips even though they are both flowers. At worst then this might create a new connection with them and the remaining elderly, Soviet trained and minded, academics.

The result in all cases, while perceivably fostering the rights of all groups, is however increased competition, lack of coherence, and diminishing returns that characterise social science knowledge production. A competition, in which the participants agree on the game, but attempt to win by arguing about and by reinterpreting the rules. This is peculiarly post-peripheral. In most other places, either the game would be changed, one group would impose a set of



non-negotiable rules and players would leave to start a new game, or perhaps many different games would be played from the get-go.

In general, then, what is shared across all post-socialist countries is that a legitimated, coherent, restricted and controlled field of knowledge production organising the politics of knowledge suddenly became instable, and even more so, the perceived organisational logic unifying it globally was presented as the cause of that destabilisation and unpredictability. This condition, lacking a specific disruption or “revolution” that would directly and automatically install a new politics of knowledge, caused specific post-socialist problems of the politics of knowledge for societies to tackle. However, countries whose statehood and sovereignty was predicated on a dependency to that logic externally, the post-socialist peripheries, now share an increased incapacity to do so. They cannot turn inwards to reorganise their politics of knowledge like most other post-socialist countries have done by means of distancing, renegotiation or reinvention (as many successor parties have done), or by the exploitation and critique or even by celebration and nostalgia (as neo-communists or new nationalistic movements have done); effectively employing “politics of memory ... as an integral part of the establishment of new collective identities and new principles of political legitimacy” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3).

Tellingly, the political systems of post-peripheries have remained largely untouched, in a sense even stable. Even two revolutions followed by heavy reforms in Kyrgyzstan have failed to do much more than scratch the surface of the overarching political system. No drastic new interpretations of these countries’ statehoods have buoyed new political parties or movements to the same extent as has happened in most core or semi-peripheral post-socialist countries. The divergence of post-socialist peripheries is shared while the divergence of the rest of the post-socialist countries is a “true” separation from their individual trajectories. “True” in terms of the capacities and conditions governing those trajectories. To point to Bernhard and Kubik again, “the assessment of the fallen system ... something that is neither uniform in or across countries – is a prerequisite ... for fashioning governance in a new system” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3). What is uniform in the case of post-peripheries – ideal-typically, not categorically – is an incapacity of the assessment of the fallen system

in the first place. A shared divergence. In the extreme, as long as the state itself, which borrowed its existence from the socialist core, exists then the post-peripheral systems cannot even fall so that they could be assessed and relegitimised to a meaningful extent.

#### **4.2 Shared Divergence**

Because of the collapse of the socialist alternative these post-peripheries are no longer perceivable as the hypothetical proto-forms of a more advanced core and in that have lost the legitimation for imagining and defining the future of their statehood. The discrepancies found in the politics of knowledge in these countries create an in-betweenness characteristic of the post-periphery in the grip of increasingly demanding, political and globalising knowledge. It is a politics of knowledge neither definable simply through the means of a sovereign state, national independence, nor divorceable from existing recognition and acknowledgement, nor even one achieved merely through distinction.

Michael Kennedy has described the requirements that globalising knowledge sets upon the politics of knowledge today: “Knowledge can’t flow so easily as other virtual expressions because it must be sifted, reassembled, and assessed. And that means that its nodes of accumulation and transformation matter even in a world of information flows. This mattering does not always work in traditionally knowledgeable ways. As reputations globalize, the distinction of knowledge nodes seems to depend more and more on forms of acknowledgement relatively divorced from knowledge as such” (Kennedy 2014: xi),

The socialist project in its 20<sup>th</sup>-century incarnation was founded on seeking such acknowledgement for an alternative form of knowledge divorced from its competing dominant manifestation. But what becomes of a project, like the so-called Second World, founded on such a search for divergence that then collapses and completely loses its legitimation? When thrown back into the world, which it attempted to undermine or diverge from, specific challenges are apparent. Especially when that dominant form of knowledge is itself undergoing drastic changes related to the function and legitimation of knowledge in which, in Michael Kennedy’s terms, “distinction is dissolved into

recognition.” What does globalising knowledge then entail for the post-socialist condition? The politics of knowledge in post-peripheries is fraught with moral and political ambiguities because of how its connection to one of the main critical perspectives of societal introspection and of resistance towards capitalist forms of knowledge production and social organisation, Marxism, has been undermined; because societal agreements founded upon or emulating the Soviet as well as the socialist model were delegitimised and conjointly social inquiry and social science academia in those regions became delegitimised; because while the previous two problems should have been tackled by politicians and scholars, at the same time globally the era of sovereign national development began to come to an end, and ironically made, so to say, obsolete the struggles that appeared to be of the utmost importance creating “places that used to be serious.”

What then overall characterises the politics of knowledge ? Albert Bergesen (2000) has argued that hegemonic domination in the world-system has always been accompanied by a specific cultural framework and that as cultural frameworks actively change so do social theories. For Bergesen postmodernism is the cultural framework of the contemporary world-system, one that represents heightened intercapitalist rivalry. Bergesen sees this as the appearance of multiple competing voices. This would appear to hold true in cases discussed in Bernhard and Kubik’s research (2014) that show how divergent solutions can produce new and adaptable politics of knowledge. But it appears that in the cases discussed here it rather creates limits and the incapacity to participate in that competition in the first place. Access to institutions of knowledge of the core, focusing on the politics of knowledge, which facilitate cultural frameworks, is becoming increasingly more controlled. Thereby a discrepancy between horizons of political future, realities of present experience and memories of then past is maintained in some cases.

It appears then that the case of post-socialist peripheries in the social sciences is somewhat peculiar. Theories and narratives of modern and post-modern, socialism and post-socialism as well as colonial, imperial, neoliberal and capitalist all carry their incoherent and often mutually exclusive weight in studies of and in the regions. However, rarely do these traditions originate from the regions’ positions in global society. Rather, Western and even semi-peripheral narratives

and models dominate and begin from viewpoints used to define and characterise their own position and predicaments. Sarah Amsler (2007) wrote that sociologists of knowledge and science, who in the past have mobilised en masse to analyse lesser upheavals, have remained curiously silent about the fate of ideas in (some) post-Soviet societies.

Don Kalb (2002) perhaps outlined some reasons for this. In terms of statehood he spoke of three overwhelming properties: the erosion of coherence and cohesion everywhere except in the core, the increased disparity between the core and the periphery and a reception of territories in a highly uneven bundle of capital, goods, information and people (Kalb 2002: 317). The result is that national hierarchies are replaced by “imaginary global ones.” Kalb drew a drastic distinction between the promises and realities of civil society in the post-socialist sphere and the detachment of the economic, political and social structures from the realities of the post-socialist countries. Whereas Neil Brenner (2011) put it something like this: aspects of social space under modern capitalism must be understood as presuppositions, arenas and outcomes of dynamic processes of continual social contestation and transformation; a process with variegated and uneven effects. Brenner underlined that this process is a highly conflict-laden ongoing dialectic that continually produces, reconfigures and transforms the political-economic space at all geographic scales. These descriptions sound clearly problematic for a reactionary politics of knowledge attempting to avoid contestation and yet attempting to prevent a much-needed reform and coherent transformation. It cannot be an easy task to participate in this process in general, while at the same it must be said of the post-peripheries that it cannot be an easy task to stay away from or remain somewhat indifferent to it either.

## 5. Conclusions

Certain post-socialist predicaments have incapacitated an effective politics of knowledge across post-peripheral states and led to a decrease of substantive rationality, particularly visible in the problems of social science and social thought in the post-peripheries. This incapacity and absence – though it cannot be as easily approached through classificatory, taxonomic types of analyses – should be treated

as a phenomenon equal to the politics of knowledge in other post-socialist countries or elsewhere.

Socialism was a global regime closely connected to social thought and state-building, to theory and action, and the repercussions of its fall are equally global and equally connected to the relation of theory and action in a society. And just as socialism was defined as the alternative to Western capitalism, so too the predicaments of post-socialism are affected by the dominant political and economic organisation of the world even after the fall of the Second World. Socialism did not simply leave a vacuum that could be easily filled with any politics of knowledge, be it legitimised by the free markets, nationalism or populism.

Rather, I argue, there is a persistent configuration in post-peripheries' politics of knowledge. Their attempts to construct legitimate substantive rationality that leads to a shared way of life is incommensurate with the statehood that is offered to them by the global community.

Bernhard and Kubik's argument of "the assessment of the fallen system" as "a prerequisite ... for fashioning governance in a new system" (Bernhard and Kubik 2014: 3) reveals how a failure to assess or dysfunctionally assess prevents a new system from emerging and, as is the case of post-peripheries, works to keep the old system in place. The assessment of a fallen system is also not the same as fixing a non-working system, creating a new one where there was none or doing so when the old system was more thoroughly displaced, not just delegitimised. At the same time, the existence of sovereign states is a prerequisite for the current states system, which then again endows these states with rights to their statehood. As long as the state itself, which was given its existence via the socialist core, exists, the post-peripheral systems themselves do not need to fall, even when the socialist alternative is long gone. And they are safeguarded from the necessity of reassessment and relegitimation to a meaningful extent. This gives post-socialism its endurance and significance even 25 years after the collapse of socialism.

Thereby post-peripheral forms of power and privilege seem to be kept in place but also in check and the same attitude is extended to the

knowledge reflected through them. Forms of politics of knowledge, networks and state control from the socialism-that-was are significantly resilient in post-peripheries. In their core the political systems of post-peripheries, despite apparent revolts or renewed constitutions, have remained largely untouched and, in a sense, stable.

At least from the perspective of the politics of knowledge it would appear then that social research on post-socialist states, especially post-peripheries, cannot directly and completely uncritically compare them with other developmental or post-colonial cases. Although this too is true only ideal-typically, the conclusion is nevertheless important at least for research design.

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# DEALING WITH THE VIOLENT PAST: TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN LIBERIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

Alžběta Šváblová

**Abstract:** The Liberian civil war left the country destroyed and its population traumatised by violence and atrocities on an unprecedented scale. There were efforts supported by the international community to deal with the past through the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005, and indirectly through the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Both initiatives brought rather ambiguous results.

The Czechoslovak communist regime's record of violence and repressions, starting with the "show trials" of the 1950s, was followed by the persecution of dissidents and other groups. After the Velvet Revolution of 1989, national reconciliation, rather than radical de-communisation was at the order of the day. Soon, the focus of activities moved from criminal investigations to a historical reconstruction of the regime's past.

Although different at first sight, both cases have a number of features worth comparing. The present article analyses similarities and differences in the strategies of dealing with the violent past and their results. Secondly, it focuses on the implications of the latter for the political culture in both countries. It argues that the failure to address the legacy of past injustices has serious consequences for the legitimacy of the state, the rule of law, and the nature of democracy in both countries.

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1 The first version of this article was presented at the panel "Comparing Political Cultures of Post-colonial Africa and Post-communist Europe" at the ECAS Conference in Paris, 9 July 2015, convened by Petr Skalník.

**Keywords:** *Reconciliation, transitional justice, political culture, Liberia, Czech Republic*

## **Introduction**

It may seem unusual to compare Liberia, a low-income African country ravaged by a protracted civil war that still tries to recover from the conflict, with a high-income central European country integrated in the Euro-Atlantic economic and security architecture. Undoubtedly, the intensity and gravity of violence in both countries is incomparable. In Liberia, with fourteen years of violence, massive human rights violations and atrocities that went out of scale, the population is much more traumatised and there is much more to be healed and rebuilt. The Czechoslovak communist regime used violence mainly at the beginning, as a means of power consolidation and intimidation of the population. The “stage trials” in the 1950s and the displacement and coercion related to the economic collectivisation are nowadays almost forgotten and the regime is perceived by the majority of Czech citizens as largely non-violent. It also had a major influence on the socio-economic conditions in the country, a legacy that persists until today.

However, during my field research in Liberia, when discussing issues of reconciliation, relation of the past and the present, or political culture, I often realised how similar some tendencies and phenomena in both countries were. Already at first sight, many aspects allow us to make comparisons between Africa and post-communist Central and Eastern Europe with regard to political culture. Issues such as corruption, a lack of transparency in the management of public funds, or the process of the transition to democracy and the liberal, market-based economy are the most prominent ones. One of the less obvious (but equally interesting) aspect is the process of transitional justice that took place in Liberia and the Czech Republic. In both countries, a need to come to terms with a particular period of the nation’s history was at the beginning of the processes of transitional justice. For both societies, the past represented a kind of traumatic experience, which needed to be addressed so that the civic trust could be restored on the horizontal, interpersonal level, but also vertically, as a relationship between the citizens and their political institutions (de Greiff 2008). In both cases, the legacy of the past also represents

a substantial impediment for the democratisation and reform of the political system.

There are often doubts about the value or even feasibility of comparison of processes from different socio-cultural contexts, but phenomena such as seeking justice, mitigation of trauma, or a quest for catharsis transgress boundaries of individual nation-states. In addition, as Skalník (2000) notes, such a comparison can be extremely useful and bring added value than a comparison of more similar cases. This is especially valid with regard to “universal” concepts such as transitional justice, embedded in the discourse created by a small group of actors from the global “North,” applied and implemented in societies, which are different not only from those, from which these concepts originate, but also from each other. The comparison of how the process works in diverse contexts can be valuable on both a theoretical and a practical level, as it allows to draw more general conclusions and make predictions about similar processes and phenomena elsewhere.

The objective of the article is to analyse the similarities and differences in the strategies of dealing with the past in the two selected countries, as well as their results. Secondly, the text explores the implications and effects of the latter on the political culture and the nature of the political system in both countries

At the beginning, before proceeding to the case studies, the key theoretical concepts (transitional justice, reconciliation, and political culture) and the relation between them are presented, followed by a methodology section. The next part analyses the reconciliation process in Liberia, its institutional and procedural forms, and the consequences the latter had for Liberian political culture. The section focusing on the Czech Republic follows a similar structure, presenting the general approach, its results and the relation to the Czech political culture. The final comparison draws conclusions about the impact of reconciliation in these two countries on their respective political culture and beyond.

## Theoretical concepts

Transitional justice as a term was coined in the 1990s and stands for “an umbrella term for approaches to deal with the past in the aftermath of violent conflict or dictatorial regimes” (Buckley-Zistel et al. 2014: 1). The concept is quite encompassing and driven by practice rather than by theory. Thinking about transitional justice was to a large extent shaped by particular historical experiences, ranging from the war tribunal in Nuremberg the World War II to the Special Court for Sierra Leone or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. Attempts to theorise the field are quite recent (see e.g., Buckley-Zistel et al. 2014). This is mainly due to the fluidity of the concept, its blurred boundaries, and its interdisciplinarity – it can be analysed from legal, psychological, political, critical, gender or other perspectives. Mechanisms or tools of transitional justice include tribunals, truth commissions, memorial projects, reparations, etc.

Issues discussed with regard to the application of transitional justice mechanisms are often presented as conflicting dichotomies, e.g., between peace and justice, punishment and reconciliation, restorative versus retributive justice, or accountability versus impunity (Sriram and Pillay 2010; Buckley-Zistel et al. 2014). In post-conflict societies, where peace is still fragile, there always exists a tension between peace and justice, amnesty and prosecution, remembering or forgetting the past. Would reconciliation bring more than open old wounds? Would justice bring satisfaction or rather undermine the peace? However, such binary “tensions” are rarely extrapolated to the extent of being mutually exclusive. There is a range of other factors that determine the form transitional justice takes, such as domestic and international power constellations, context and type of transition (or of a peace agreement in the case of violent conflicts), character of the past regime, the actors involved, etc.

Nowadays, transitional justice measures are routinely included in post-conflict reconstruction “packages,” since reconciliation is perceived as a crucial step<sup>2</sup> in the process of building sustainable peace (Jeong 2005; Doyle and Sambanis 2006). Reconciliation can be seen as

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2 However, as Thoms et al. (2008) remind us, there is a lack of solid, systematic research supporting this claim. On the other hand, there is no evidence proving the contrary either.

a process, i.e., as one of the selected strategies within the broader field of transitional justice, or as the ultimate goal of the latter, a final stage to be attained (Hazan 2009). Although the international community is often involved in the design of the measures, local contexts, conditions or traditional ways of conflict resolution are – at least nominally<sup>3</sup> – taken into account (Lambourne 2009). Reconciliation efforts can take various institutional forms. Usually a special body is created, responsible for collecting evidence of past wrongdoings, establishing historical record and making recommendations to avoid repeating the past. Legal consequences of the investigations are varied, but obviously, reconciliation commission's work can be used as a base for prosecution.

Where justice is sought through prosecution, often the form of a special tribunal is chosen, since the regular system of judiciary may be discredited or destroyed by the conflict. In some cases, local traditional or informal systems and processes are tapped upon, such as the *gacaca* tribunals in Rwanda. This takes some of the burden off the statutory judiciary, and additionally can be perceived as more credible by the local population. However, traditional ways of reconciliation or managing trauma can be inconsistent with Western values, based on human rights, equality and democracy (Abramowitz 2013). In some societies, the preferred strategy is even not to confront the past at all and choose silence and bracketing as mechanisms of coping and reconciliation (Bellagamba 2011; Jackson 2004; Shaw 2007). This is to a large extent incompatible with the predominant paradigm based on truth seeking, public testimonies and other techniques bringing the past to the fore.

In societies emerging after a period of authoritarian rule, the dilemmas and frictions outlined above are usually less escalated. The debate revolves around similar axes, but endangering peace is rarely an issue. “Softer” topics, such as lustrations, a historiographic record of the past regime, or the interpretation of history are emphasised. Special tribunals are rare and prosecutions are usually left to systems of domestic justice. On the other hand, economic crimes are more

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3 Unfortunately, there is a major tendency towards a “toolkit approach” to transitional justice (Clark and Palmer 2012: 6), which places institutional aspects to the foreground, whereas the local specifics and needs are treated as secondary – both in terms of importance and sequentiality.

often included in the agenda. The adopted strategies vary and are to a large extent dependent on the particular power constellation at the time of transition. The literature on transitional justice in countries undergoing a transition to democracy is less abundant than the one focused on post-conflict societies, however, works such as Alexandra Barahona de Brito (2004), Monika Nalepa (2010) or Lavinia Stan (2009) provide solid analyses of reckoning with the past in the former Soviet bloc and Latin America.

Before proceeding to the particular cases, the second term in focus of this contribution, namely political culture, needs to be briefly discussed. The term was developed in the 1960s by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in their study on civic culture (1963). They define political culture broadly, as the relation of citizens to the political institutions that surround them.<sup>4</sup> Larry Diamond, another “classic” of this field, conceives the term as “people’s predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments, and evaluations about the political system of their country and the role of the self in that system” (Diamond 1994: 7).

In contrast to this long prevalent, rather subjective “psychological” definition provided by political science, seeing political culture as a subjective relation of citizens and social groups to politics, political anthropology took a different approach, built on empirical evidence, and bringing more clarity to the concept. Petr Skalník, as a leading proponent of this approach defines political culture as “an objectively existing phenomenon which can be empirically studied as both behaviour and cognition” (Skalník 2012: 358), as “values, attitudes and practices, usually derived from the past, which cause political processes to vary from country to country, region to region, group to group. Political culture is a social complex of notions and practices which presuppose a certain consensus between the actors of a certain country or cultural area” (Skalník 2000: 65). He further points out the conservative character of political culture and its resistance to change (*ibid.*).

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4 Almond and Verba’s work (1963) distinguishes parochial, subjective and participative political culture. Since then, several other typologies have been developed, in the Czech context, e.g., by Klicperová-Baker et al. (1999: 61–63), who added alienated political culture, in which citizens have negative attitudes to the political system, are suspicious, cynical and pessimistic about a potential change brought about by political action.

The topic of change with regard to political culture is often mentioned, but rarely closely examined in the literature. There is a consensus that political culture derives only slowly from historical experience and changes. Despite this there are certain decisive moments in history, which shape a particular political culture or determine its further direction (Skalník 2000; Pehe 1997; Cabada 2011). My hypothesis was that a violent conflict (such as in the case of Liberia), or a transition from a totalitarian regime (as in the case of Czechoslovakia), and the consequent process of dealing with the past, can represent such a triggering moment. In Liberia, the potential of change is even more likely, since the post-conflict reconstruction process has a strong component of social engineering and one of its tacit aims is to facilitate change of the values and attitudes with a consequent behavioural change on the individual and collective level.<sup>5</sup> Such a change, e.g., in terms of adopting non-violent attitudes, respect for individual human rights, etc. is supposed to contribute to a sustainable nature of peace in post-conflict societies (Abramowitz 2013).

The transition from the communist regime to democracy in Czechoslovakia had a similar potential. Here, the aspect of deliberate change has been absent (there was no external involvement with the ambition of societal change in the transition, comparable to the Liberian case), but still, when reflecting on historical moments that shaped Czech political culture, the Velvet Revolution and the transition to democracy would definitely belong to this category. However, as argued in the final part of this contribution, it seems that in neither of the cases a substantial change has occurred.

Besides this “historical” aspect, the change of a political culture can be the subject of intentional efforts, such as in the field of transitional justice, where it represents one of the aims at the meta-level (although this is rarely explicitly acknowledged). As briefly mentioned at the beginning, the aim of transitional justice is to restore civic trust at both the horizontal and the vertical level. This cannot be achieved without a profound change of the beliefs, values and attitudes, which, at the inter-personal (horizontal) level, implies that former

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5 As Hazan (2009) notes, at the most general level, the ultimate (although tacit) goal of the reconciliation processes is also a change of values, attitudes and beliefs in a direction that allows to build a sustainable, non-violent future, in which the peaceful coexistence of former enemies is possible.

enemies find ways to live side-by-side peacefully. The vertical axis, on the other hand, refers to the trust between the citizens and their political institutions – in other words, to an aspect of political culture. Taking this into consideration and conceiving transitional justice as a deliberate effort to facilitate such a change, we can also expect to observe a change in the field of political culture. This theoretical assumption is, however, not so easy to prove empirically. Firstly, because the actual societal effects of transitional justice mechanisms have not yet been systematically documented (see footnote 2) and secondly, because such a change is not a short-term process. It needs time to take place and to manifest itself.

## **Research Methodology**

The research was based on qualitative approach, using both primary and secondary data. Primary data used for the analysis of the Liberian case stem from 37 semi-structured interviews and over 40 informal conversations conducted between 2011 and 2013. The research in Liberia was divided into three parts (June 2011, April–June 2012 and November 2012) and located in Monrovia, the capital. Respondents included government officials, international staff and civil society representatives, as well as Liberian citizens of various age, educational and occupational background. In order to balance the “urban” bias of the sample, secondary data, mainly ethnographic works dealing with reconciliation, were used as a complementary source for the analysis.

In the case of the Czech Republic, the reflections of the elites about the process of dealing with the past are well documented in the literature, so the collection of primary data focused on the opinions of a wider public. Informal conversations (32) were the main tool of data collection. Similarly to Liberia, the sample included people from different age, education and professional groups, from both urban and rural contexts. The cities of Prague, Ostrava, as well as smaller towns (Náchod, Šternberk) and villages from different regions (Northern Moravia, Eastern and Central Bohemia) were included; the research was conducted from August to December 2014.



There were several limitations with regard to the collection of primary data, mainly linked to the sensitivity of the researched topic.<sup>6</sup> In the Liberian case, for example, none of the respondents admitted to be a former fighter. In the case of the Czech Republic, the perspective of “perpetrators” could not be included either.<sup>7</sup> Their vantage point would, however, especially in Liberia where the people are actually accessible (see footnote 6), represent a very interesting topic for future research.

Secondary sources of data included laws, official documents, newspaper articles, reports of local and international organisations (both governmental and non-governmental), as well as scholarly works focusing on the theoretical concepts of transitional justice, reconciliation and political culture. Ethnographic studies on Liberia were used as a complementary source of information in the cases mentioned above.

## The Reconciliation Process in Liberia

The civil war in Liberia<sup>8</sup> started in 1989 with the invasion of Charles Taylor’s forces from neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire in Northeast Liberia. The conflict ended in 2003, with a signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and left the country and its population in complete disarray. Over 1,8 million people, i.e., more than half the Liberian population, had been displaced or fled abroad,<sup>9</sup> 250,000 people died,<sup>10</sup> and virtually every aspect of a functioning state, from the basic infrastructure, services, through political institutions and economy, had to be rebuilt from scratch. The international community has been heavily involved in the reconstruction efforts, with a large integrated UN-mission in place and substantial financial support from international financing institutions and other channels. The strategy

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6 In the Liberian case, questions of logistics and safety also informed the choice of Monrovia as the principal research site.

7 This was mainly due to difficult access to the respondents. Besides, many of them are no longer alive.

8 For more details about the history of the conflict, see e.g. Ellis (2007) or Bøås (2005).

9 Sawyer 2005. As in many other conflicts, the statistics about refugees, IDPs and casualties are estimates and vary depending on the source.

10 According to UNDP estimates, cited by Insight on Conflict (<http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/liberia/conflict-profile/>).

with regard to our subject of interest, the process of transitional justice, was a part of the peace negotiations already and, as in many other cases, was born as a compromise between the position of warring factions, demanding amnesty, and the civil society's requests for criminal proceedings (ICTJ 2010).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was chosen as the main tool of transitional justice and incorporated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2003 to provide a platform "that will address issues of impunity as well as an opportunity for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences, in order to get a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation" (CPA 2003). With support of the international community, the Commission was established in 2005.<sup>11</sup> Although the Commissioners should have been people of "credibility, high integrity and honour" (Republic of Liberia: 2005), the TRC discredited itself in the eyes of the public soon after starting work. The Commissioners demanded higher salaries, fought among themselves and were engaged in other sorts of unethical behaviour, while complaining about the lack of basic infrastructure, expertise and technical support for their work (Abramowitz 2013). Due to this "credibility disaster" and to financial problems, the TRC stopped working after a few months and was re-activated by the international community only in 2007. The process of taking testimonies lasted from late 2007 throughout 2008; in late 2009 the final report of the Commission was published.

The report provides a solid historical record, lists recommendations, including suggestions for establishing an extraordinary tribunal and domestic criminal court, or the establishment of truth-seeking and reconciliation on the local level using the traditional institution of Palava Huts. It is innovative in some ways, such as including the documentation of economic crimes, or paying attention to the gender perspective. However, it is questionable in other respects. The report lacks coherence among sections, specificity, but first and foremost, the support of two Commissioners, which makes the impact and credibility of the findings, especially with regard to the suggested

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from the main reconciliation program led by the TRC, there were also smaller projects, aiming to bring people together, organized by local and international NGOs, but there are no comprehensive statistics and data about them.

cases of prosecution, highly questionable.<sup>12</sup> Also the testimonies of key figures were missing in the report.<sup>13</sup>

In the public debate that followed the release of the report, the issues of prosecution and lustration gained prominence due to their controversiality, while many other important issues, such as recommendations, or the needs of victims, were put aside. In addition, although the report was envisaged to reach out to the people, it was only published online, as a pdf-file – a bitter irony in a country, where only ca 3% of the population<sup>14</sup> have access to the Internet.

For the Commissioners, the declared main objective of the TRC, besides documentation, was its healing capacity and the aspect of resolving trauma. However, in reality, the language of reconciliation often rather served as an excuse for “*postconflict* wrongdoers,”<sup>15</sup> which further weakened the social accountability in the postwar period (Abramowitz 2013: 208, emphasis in the original). Ordinary Liberians did not trust the institution. The recommendations for prosecution made them suspicious, as the latter could have been used as a tool for personal revenge. People also believed that the government wanted to keep the TRC weak (Abramowitz 2013). Generally, Liberians did not see any added value in “digging in the past,” as it “did not bring anything to the victims” (informal conversations Monrovia, April–June 2012). In 2012, three years after the report was published, reconciliation was no longer an issue. It came up only briefly when the verdict in Charles Taylor’s case was announced in the spring 2012,<sup>16</sup>

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12 TRC suggested 124 people be prosecuted for violating of human rights and international humanitarian law, 58 people for domestic crimes and 49 people, including the incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for lustration and a 30 year ban from public office (TRC 2009).

13 The whole process of taking testimonies has been controversial. Apart from this substantial flaw, the testimonies from some of the remote counties (Nimba, Bong), including areas where fighting was heavy during the war, were missing, because the exercise was scheduled for the rainy season and the roads were impassable.

14 Estimates for 2012 (<http://f.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>).

15 Abramowitz notes that in the first years after the official end of the civil war, when the occurrence of violence in the everyday lives of people was still high, the imperative to maintain peace, to “forgive and forget” was often used to cover up and excuse cases (such as gender-based violence) that had nothing to do with the conflict itself.

16 Although Taylor’s trial is clearly related to reconciliation and transitional justice in Liberia, it will be left out of this article. Firstly, he was prosecuted and sentenced for the crimes in Sierra Leone, not in Liberia. Secondly, although highly praised in the West, as an “accountability message” to potential future warlords, it did not bring

but generally, people already focused on the present and the future and wanted to “forget and forgive” about the past (informal conversations Monrovia, April–June 2012).

In sum, reconciliation in Liberia was a highly controversial process that brought only modest results in terms of actual reconciliation and repairing the relations between the former wrongdoers and the victims. In terms of justice, it is important to remember that local demands and local definition of justice can be quite different from the “Western” point of view, promoted by the international agencies. Despite this, the fact that former warlords are still in high positions in both politics and economy, is commented upon with bitterness by ordinary Liberians (informal conversations Monrovia, April–June 2012).

Liberia is a country with a tradition of restorative justice and contains a strong element of compensation. Maintaining good relations and harmony in a community is perceived as far more important than individual “justice.”<sup>17</sup> That is why conflicts and individual rights are often suppressed – an individual injustice is better than a challenge to the group as a whole (Yoder 2003). This, translated to the language of reconciliation, is the imperative “to forget and forgive,” a situation in which revenge and justice are set aside for the sake of order and peace. This brings us to the topic of political culture, the focus of the next section.

## Political Culture in Liberia

First and foremost, when discussing Liberian politics in general, it is important to mention its meta-physical or supernatural rooting. Every aspect of life, every event that happens in the visible, natural world, mirrors the processes in the sphere of spiritual or religious imagination, with politics as a primary example of this principle

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much emotions, let alone satisfaction in Liberia, where Taylor still was a popular personality, especially in Bong county, where he comes from. The popular support goes so far, that the trial is sometimes perceived as an application of a double-standard, because Taylor “was not the only one committing atrocities” (informal conversations Monrovia, June 2012).

17 The values underlying mechanisms of traditional conflict resolution can also be discriminatory in terms of gender, age and other aspects.

(Ellis 2007; Ellis and ter Haar 2004; Yoder 2003). Despite that, there still is a lot that can be observed by a researcher, even in the field of political culture.

Similarly to everywhere else, history is the key to understanding the political culture of a country. Before the state structures were introduced (and even after that in some areas), the power controlling society has been in the hands of powerful elders, most often organised in “secret societies.” Power was, therefore, always concealed.

The history of the modern Liberian state is marked by 150 years of autocratic rule of a small Americo-Liberian elite,<sup>18</sup> with concentration of power in the capital, financial mismanagement and the marginalisation of large segments of the population. The current president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, represents a turn to the principles of democratic rule, although the political system is still far from the ideals of liberal democracy. Sirleaf’s administration has been often criticised for a lack of transparency in the management of public funds, corruption and nepotism (Tran 2012; Williams 2016).

Liberian society can be described as a “high context” one – an adjective used by Yoder (2013), borrowed from the work of the American anthropologist and communication theorist Edward T. Hall (1989). It describes social structure that favours social status and relations over individuality and independence. As already mentioned above, for the members of high-context societies, the group is more important than the individual. Stability of the group is the ultimate goal, since it is the group that makes individual survival possible. This has profound consequences for dealing with conflict, criticism and voicing opposition – in such a setting, criticising leaders is perceived as a disrespectful attempt to destabilise the whole system. Therefore, criticism and conflict are suppressed, and there is an excessive emphasis on order, stability and security to the detriment of other values (Yoder 2003).

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18 Americo-Liberians are the descendants of the settlers, who came to Liberia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the United States as freed slaves and seized political and economic power. They effectively colonised the “hinterland” and its indigenous population, so although Liberia is not a typical colony, the history of its internal colonisation can largely be compared to the “classic” model of the colonisation of Africa by the European powers.

Governmental and other positions of influence are perceived primarily not as serving the needs of citizens. Their function is rather to honour, show and affirm the status of those who hold them. As a consequence, the expectations about political performance are low, which results in an apathy of the citizens with regard to politics. Corruption, nepotism and neo-patrimonial practices, common also in many other African countries, are rooted so much into the social and political practice that their eradication is hard to accomplish (Yoder 2003; cf. Bayart 1993; Chabal 2009). Corruption is more or less tolerated, unless it exceeds a certain level. Then people despise the culprits as being “greedy.” However, even in such cases the tendency is to keep rather than to replace them, because “they have already eaten.”<sup>19</sup>

Although reconciliation has been proclaimed a crucial step to overcome the divisions caused by the war and bring unity, Liberians still see themselves as a nation of divided people – divided by ethnicity, religion, class or origin (informal conversations April–June 2012). In this respect, the reconciliation process did not bring about a substantial change. Rather, in line with the political culture and traditional ways of conflict resolution, the aspect of restorative justice has been brought to the fore by ordinary Liberians. In this respect, the unaddressed needs of victims were perceived as a major failure. Bringing former warlords to the court was not a priority for the majority population, because of the destabilisation effect it would likely have on the fragile peace in the country. On the other hand, especially civil society representatives often mentioned the legacy of impunity and the lack of accountability as a fundamental problem of the postwar period, hindering the development of a democratic governance and of the rule of law (interviews Monrovia, April–June 2012).

Weighing against its envisaged objectives, the reconciliation process in Liberia neither brought about a genuine reconciliation, nor justice. Contrary to the hypothesis presented at the beginning, it did not have a profound, transformative effect on the political culture in Liberia. Despite the influence of external actors on the institutional design and the basic “settings” of TRC, the process and its results were shaped by the political culture in place.

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19 “To eat” is a common expression used for corruption or diverting public funds for personal benefit.

## Confronting the Past in the Czech Republic<sup>20</sup>

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia (1948–89) started and came to an end non-violently, and probably due to this is regarded as generally non-violent (informal conversations, August-December 2014).<sup>21</sup> However, although not on a massive scale, there is a record of violence against its own citizens that cannot be overlooked. Firstly, there was a wave of stage trials (so called “monster processes”) in the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s. Their goal was not only to get rid of the “enemies of the regime,” as declared, but also to intimidate the population by showing an unlimited power. The processes targeted intellectuals, former resistance fighters, churches, but also members of the Communist Party themselves, such as Rudolf Slánský, the secretary general of the party.<sup>22</sup>

After the death of Stalin and the Czechoslovak president Klement Gottwald in March 1953, the first phase of open persecution and terror transformed into more covert forms, such as the intimidation of dissidents, vexing, spying or tapping the wires. In parallel with the consolidation of political power, a process of land collectivisation was going on. The main phase<sup>23</sup> from 1948–1960 was accompanied by a campaign of intimidation, repression and by the forced displacement of individuals and whole families.<sup>24</sup>

The general trend in the 1960s was liberalisation and “melting,” that culminated in the reforms of the “Prague Spring,” interrupted by the infamous invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968. In the 1970s and 1980s, a period of normalisation

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20 The term “transitional justice” has never been used in the emic discourse. The term used for this phenomenon in the Czech language is “dealing with the past,” “coming to terms” or “reckoning with the past.” The element of “justice” therefore becomes absent – which is indeed symptomatic for the whole process and its results.

21 This kind of perception can also be viewed as a major success of communist propaganda, which pictured the regime as such.

22 During the period of communist rule, an estimated 250,000 people were imprisoned for political reasons, with 248 sentenced to death (Bartošek 1997).

23 The collectivisation reached its peak in 1953. President Zápotocký’s critique of the forced collectivisation led to massive walk-outs from the agricultural cooperatives. This trend was stopped by the second wave of collectivisation (1955–58), which did not use such drastic means ([www.totalita.cz](http://www.totalita.cz)).

24 According to the available historical sources, 1629 families were displaced in the Czech part of the country ([www.totalita.cz](http://www.totalita.cz)).

followed and the regime again tightened control. The Velvet Revolution in November 1989 marked the beginning of a new, democratic era for the country. The revolution, however, did not mean a rupture, bringing complete change in all segments of society, nor did it bring a strong anti-communist reaction. An especially problematic aspect in this regard was the fact that there was no real, profound transformation and change at the level of elites. The former communist cadres soon re-emerged after the revolution in high managerial, administrative or even political positions (Nosál 2000). After the revolution, the order of the day was reconciliation, rather than radical de-communisation. The Communist Party stayed and until today remained a stable part of the political spectrum with a substantial support of the citizens.<sup>25</sup>

The process of transitional justice had two main components. The first was a legal one, with a number of laws, granting recognition and various kinds of compensation measures to the victims of communist repressions.<sup>26</sup> The most important among them was the lustration law from 1991 (Act No. 451/1991), stating that certain political positions and top posts in state organisations and bodies cannot be held by former members or collaborators of the repressive apparatus of the communist regime (such as the State Security Service, People's Militia, military counter-intelligence) or members of the Communist Party before the revolution.<sup>27</sup> In 1993, the Parliament passed Act No.

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25 Despite the fact that the party have not distanced itself from the past and even carries the same name as before, it regularly receives 13–15% of votes during parliamentary elections ([www.volby.cz](http://www.volby.cz)). Although isolated at the national level and never part of a government coalition, it is active and commonly cooperated with at the communal level.

26 The law on judicial rehabilitation No. 119/1990, granting compensations for the victims of the political repression, and the property rehabilitation law No. 403/1990, facilitating the return of property confiscated after 1955 were among the most significant ones. For a complete list of relevant laws, see the website of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes <http://www.ustrcr.cz/en/chronology-coming-to-terms-with-the-totalitarian-past>.

27 Monika Nalepa notes that the law, covering over 400,000 people, had the broadest coverage in comparison to other lustration laws in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite that, curiously, the law did not cover positions filled by election (Nalepa 2010). Concerning publishing the list of State Security collaborators, in 1992, Petr Cibulka published such a list as his own initiative. However, the "Cibulka's directories" have been seriously challenged in terms of their completeness and accuracy. The official publication by the Ministry of Interior came more than ten years later, in 2003. In 2009, the former dissident Stanislav Penc launched a website [www.svazky.cz](http://www.svazky.cz), where an electronic database of the State Security can be accessed.



198/1993 on the illegal nature of the communist regime and on the resistance against it. It charges former communist members and leaders with full responsibility for the actions of the regime in 1948–89 and denounces the regime as “criminal, illegitimate and condemnable” (Act No. 198/1993), whereas the resistance against it is acknowledged as “legitimate, just, moral and deserving of recognition” (ibid.). Although there are some paragraphs that might be applicable in legal practice, the law is mainly of a declaratory nature.

Secondly, at the institutional level, two bodies were established for the purpose of “dealing with the past”: The Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ISTR) and the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism (ODICC). The former, as the name suggests, is not focused only on the communist regime, but also includes the period of Nazi occupation (in the Czech context often called “brown totality,” in contrast to the “red,” communist one). ISTR is a research institute, its mission is mainly to engage in historical research and disseminate its results (ISTR Website). The Institute was established in 2007 and started its work in February 2008.

The element of seeking justice is embodied in the second institution, the Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism. The Office was founded in 1995 and since 2002 has been a part of the criminal police structures. The Office has conducted over 800 investigations and suggested for prosecution 218 persons in 120 cases. The investigations resulted in 87 cases, in which 116 people were held accountable for their actions; 47 persons were sentenced, with the highest penalty of six years of imprisonment (Police of the Czech Republic 2015).<sup>28</sup> Although these numbers seem relatively high, the majority of the accused were foot soldiers of the regime. The top-level communists, such as Milouš Jakeš, Josef Lenárt, Karel Vaš or Alois Grebeníček walked away without a conviction. This is also the reason why the Office has been subject to harsh criticism from civil society and former political prisoners (Respekt 2007). The reason behind the low “efficiency” of the Office lies, however, in the legal reasoning of the judges, which takes “legality” as a gauge. This means that, in order to be punishable, the acts had to represent a breach of the law at

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28 There were a number of suspended sentences and in many cases the service of the prison term was suspended due to health conditions and the old age of the convicts (Police of the Czech Republic 2015).

the time when they were committed. As a consequence, most people, even if accused, were not found guilty, because their behaviour was *legal* according to the communist law.

Contrary to expectations one could have, the level of cooperation between the two institutions is low, and their relation is shaped by rivalry and competition, rather than synergy. Concerning the perception of their work, especially former political prisoners and dissidents are critical with regard to both of them (Respekt 2007). Nowadays, similarly to the Liberian case, the issue of reckoning with the communist past is no longer a prominent topic. It is not discussed in the media and few new judicial cases are coming up.<sup>29</sup>

The general population is rather reserved about the whole issue of dealing with the past. The topic is somehow uncomfortable for most of the people, who lived under the communist regime. Commonly, people say that even the communists were just human beings,<sup>30</sup> the age of the accused is also mentioned as a mitigating circumstance, which should be taken into consideration (informal conversations August-December 2014). By contrast, former political prisoners report that they still feel outcast from their communities (interviews September 2014). An obvious reason for the lack of critical attitudes and willingness to confront the past is the fact that everyone was a part of the system. As Václav Havel put it in his New Year's speech of 1990, "no one is just the victim [of the communist machinery], but all of us have been its co-creators" (Havel 1990, translation by the author).

The process of reckoning with the communist past took place mainly at the symbolical, rhetorical level – adoption of laws, condemnation of past wrongs, dismantling communist monuments and renaming streets. Not much "real justice" was achieved through judicial processes. It is also important to bear in mind that a substantial part of the population still fondly remembers the communist time,

29 One of the reasons for this is the already mentioned old age of the perpetrators.

30 The attitude to the so-called "third resistance", the armed resistance against the communist regime, mirrors this perspective. When asked about the case of the Mašín brothers, a notorious resistance group of young men, who killed several policemen on their flight to Germany, people often express their disapproval with such an approach as a strategy of "resistance." A common argument is that the policemen were just ordinary people, who did not do anything wrong and were killed only because they were part of the official structure of the regime (informal conversations Prague, Ostrava, Náchod, December 2014).

mentioning the social security, affordability of basic services, and overall stability of the regime.

## **Czech Political Culture**

Concerning the Czech political culture, the past is again the key to the present. Pehe (1997) reminds us that it is crucial how politics functioned a 100 or 150 years ago, and that the change of the regime some twenty years ago does not necessarily mean a crucial rupture of the values and principles the political culture grew from.

The first characteristic of the Czech political culture is a certain distance from politics. The origin of this attitude can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when people did not identify themselves with the state and the institutions of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and sought for a greater autonomy within the empire. This tendency only deepened during the communist period. Communist rule resulted in a complete devaluation of the political sphere. People pragmatically participated in order to be left alone and found refuge and fulfilment in the private sphere (Cabada 2011). Politics was perceived as something immoral. It was exactly here that the division between “we” (powerless citizens) and “them” (powerful political elite) had its roots. People felt powerless vis-à-vis the almighty regime. This dichotomy of “us” and “them” persists until today. Politics is perceived as dirty and immoral and the level of political activism is very low, as is the legitimacy of political institutions. People are sceptical about politics and feel they cannot make a change in the way it works (Cabada 2011). An illustrative example of this worldview is the very concept of political culture: most people perceive political culture as the way politicians behave and political institutions function. They do not acknowledge citizens as an integral part of the political culture, as agents who can actively form and shape it (Skalník 2012).

There is no substantial tradition of political activism in the Czech context. The civil society is very weak, which is a legacy of its complete colonization by the communists. This does not mean that there is no civil society at all. It is, however, organised mainly around the private sphere, with no or only limited ambition to influence politics (Cabada 2011).

Another typical Czech trait is pragmatism and patience. It takes a long time before people stand out against something. For 40 years they tolerated the communist regime, pragmatically participated in order to be “left alone” and found compensation in their focus on the private sphere. The non-violent character of the Velvet Revolution and handing over the power confirms this tendency (Pehe 1997; Cabada 2011).

As already mentioned at the beginning of this section, the revolution in 1989 did not mark a rupture in Czech political culture. The same applies about the way the Czech nation chose to come to terms with the legacy of communism. There was no real confrontation or public debate about the past, the measures chosen were mainly symbolical and rhetorical. There was no massive call to bring former leaders to justice, the violent side of the regime from its early days seems to be forgotten. The general attitude to resistance groups is negative. There was no external influence in the process, contrary to Liberia, but a similar pattern is present, namely that it was political culture, which shaped the way the past was reflected upon and the actual process of “transitional justice,” not vice versa.

## **Comparison**

Both countries have chosen strategies of transitional justice that were fairly typical for their respective contexts. Liberia, as a post-conflict country, focused on reconciliation as a means to find a way to a shared future for former enemies. The process was characterised by the strong involvement of international actors. However, because it was based on the prevalent strategy of the application of universal templates, local needs (e.g., the importance of compensations) and even basic concepts (understanding of the concept of justice) were not sufficiently reflected upon. The flawed implementation and controversy over the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission only further contributed to the failure of the process.

In the Czech Republic, the process was entirely under local control. Similarly to other countries emerging after a period of authoritarian rule, a judiciary approach to justice was chosen as the principal method of reckoning with the past, which was complemented by laws, compensations and a variety of more or less symbolic measures.

Despite the different trajectories, the processes did not bring about credible results.

There is a range of differences between the two selected contexts, given mainly the character of the past the respective societies dealt with. On the one hand, a recent, extremely violent conflict that affected almost everyone in the population of Liberia. On the other hand, the scale of violence and number of victims in the Czech Republic were much smaller, and the violent aspect of the regime are almost forgotten. Consequently, the perception of the division between victims and perpetrators was less extrapolated than was the case in Liberia.

Both countries, however, share a number of similar features with regard to their political cultures – distrust, scepticism, a feeling of powerlessness and distance from politics, resulting in the perceived division between citizens and ruling elites. The processes of transitional justice in either country did not bring about a change in values and attitudes, underlying their political cultures. The research does not offer much guidance on factors, which can influence the change of the political culture.

As we have seen, there is a clear link between both concepts, but it would be simplistic to see their relation merely as a causal one. A range of other factors, both on the domestic and international level and not exclusively political in their nature, come into play in this regard.

Although the temporal factor, e.i., the fact that the change could have been incited but needs time in order to manifest, has to be taken into consideration, it seems that thus far the “vertical trust” between citizens and their political institutions has not been restored in either case. In both countries, the scepticism of the population with regard to their political elites and system represents a core attitude defining this relationship.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis has shown a number of similar patterns in the process of dealing with the past in post-war Liberia and the post-communist Czech Republic. Although the approaches in either country were different (reconciliation versus seeking justice through judicial

means), the results in both cases were modest and did not bring about a profound transformation, nor catharsis to the society. The fact that there was no real transformation at the level of elites plays an important role in this respect.

The political culture in both studied contexts turned out to be an independent variable, a key determinant of the way the past is related to, confronted (or rather non-confronted) and dealt with. It was also a crucial element giving final shape to the processes and results of transitional justice. The original hypothesis, assuming that the conflict, respectively the transition itself, can be a triggering moment of a change in the political culture, proved to be false. The values underlying the respective political cultures stayed more or less the same.

Whether it was solely *because* the processes of transitional justice did not succeed is a question difficult to assess on the base of the analysis and would require some “contrary” cases of success in order to be answered. However, it is well conceivable that even the experience of going through the process itself has some added value, compared to a hypothetical case of not dealing with the past at all.

It is also possible that due to the conservative character of the political culture and its resistance to change, the seeds, planted by the processes still need time to ripen and manifest themselves in the public realm. This is still to be awaited, as reconciliation and transitional justice in general are no short-term processes with easily measurable results.

On the other hand, the failure of reconciliation processes has serious consequences for the present and future of both countries. Firstly, in terms of the socio-psychologic state of the nation – people’s trauma was left un-managed, resentments were unresolved, history was un-reflected. This results in a lack of trust in interpersonal relations and staying “stuck” in the categories of past divisions. Secondly, the failure to address past wrongs conveys a message of impunity and has serious consequences for the rule of law and the overall legitimacy of the state, as well as for the nature of democracy that has been under reconstruction in both countries. The “vertical trust” between citizens and their political institutions has not been restored. At the moment, the values and principles underlying the political culture in

both Liberia and the Czech Republic are not sufficient for the creation of a truly civic culture in Almond and Verba's sense, they represent rather an impediment in this respect. Here, both countries still have a long way to go.

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# CENTRALISED REVENUE REDISTRIBUTION AS A POTENTIAL CAUSE OF INTERNAL CONFLICT IN KENYA

**Laila Abdul Latif**

**Abstract:** This article argues that when a large part of a population has either limited or no access to social and economic resources as a result of government policy in redistributing revenue towards the capital, such concentrated redistribution at the centralised level may become a key factor in sparking internal conflicts among the population living outside the capital. A state that does not share the national wealth and resource revenues equitably among its citizens therefore provides a platform to those who want to challenge the legitimacy of the state to engage in violence. Thus, the centralisation of revenue redistribution by a state may be seen as a potential factor that may lead to internal conflict especially in circumstances where high levels of poverty and unemployment in the country are widespread. Although such internal conflict may not necessarily be violent, centralised revenue redistribution may cause an uprising among the population and lead to a substantial change in the form of government, moving it from a centralised to a decentralised form of government in order to appease the population and for the state to retain its legitimacy. Such was the case in Kenya.

**Keywords:** *Internal conflict, centralisation, revenue, post-election violence, secession, Kenya*

## Introduction

Since independence, the Kenyan government has focused on a centralised redistribution of revenue. This means that a huge portion of revenue collected from the country in the form of taxes and non-taxes<sup>1</sup> is redistributed towards the capital city instead of the government redistributing the revenue equitably among its rural

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1 Such as loans, licences and user fees.

areas and other cities. This has resulted in an economically and socially advanced capital city as compared to the rest of the country. Despite the fact that every Kenyan is taxed on their income, profits and on their purchases of goods and services, redistribution of this tax revenue that is collected is not widespread throughout the country (Bowles and Gintis 2002). Further, companies in the form of multinational corporations, small and medium sized enterprises and sole proprietorships exist throughout the country and pay 30% corporation tax, yet a large percentage of this tax revenue that is collected is redistributed at the central level where the national government operates from.

The coastal city of Mombasa<sup>2</sup> is the main region where international trade takes place since the seaport is located there and is an access point for landlocked east African states.<sup>3</sup> Mombasa's pleas to the national government to redistribute the revenues earned from international trade and from the taxes collected in Mombasa towards the development of the region have been falling on deaf ears and since independence Mombasa remains poverty stricken. Its residents lack access to basic health care, there are not enough schools and teachers, access to electricity is minimal,<sup>4</sup> there is a huge percentage of landless people and squatters, and government offices are poorly equipped (Mutua 2009). The rich versus poor divide is glaring. Consequently, a number of Mombasa politicians from the opposition party as well as the civil society, and a majority of the residents of Mombasa began to call for secession and prepared a petition for the High Court of Kenya to determine their right to call for self-determination,<sup>5</sup> and

2 Mombasa was previously a province within the Republic of Kenya, when in the early 2000s the former President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi conferred it the status of city in order to quell the dissent among its residents, who felt that the government had marginalised them despite the region contributing to a major chunk of revenue to the government. The former President was of the view that granting city status to the region would calm the residents and for the moment halt their demands for increased redistribution towards the provision of public goods.

3 Such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

4 See Table 1 in this article.

5 Self-determination denotes the legal right of people to decide their own destiny in the international order. In other words, it is a right that exists under Article 1(2) and 55 of the United Nations Charter and under the Common Article 1 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights granting a population living in a territory to amicably pursue secession in order to maintain its socio economic,

consequently secede from Kenya (Kenya Law Reports 2012). During this period (2009–12), Mombasa was brewing in violent clashes with the police.

This happened after Kenya had concluded its 2007 presidential elections, which were protested against on grounds of vote rigging and which had led to unprecedented violence when two of the largest ethnic communities turned against each other and the country saw bloodshed, murder and displacement of ethnic groups from their localities (Halakha 2013). The post-election violence coupled with the call for secession prompted the government to immediately investigate the causes underlying these two situations. Numerous causes were highlighted during the investigation, such as ethnic dominance in the economy, a misuse of state revenue, poverty and unemployment, poor development, and the lack of finances for infrastructure. All these causes identified were linked to the problem of centralised revenue redistribution (Wrong 2009).

Consequently, this article intends to focus on centralised revenue redistribution as a particular cause of internal conflict, that the author finds quite compelling and on which she has not been able to find adequate empirical literature. Hence, this cause makes this article novel in its contribution to the existing theoretical literature on the causes of internal conflict. The article, therefore, is concerned with answering the research question whether the centralisation of revenue redistribution can be considered as a cause of internal conflict.

## **Research Methodology**

This article employs the case study approach and uses Kenya as its focus point. Further, it relies on desktop and library-based research to identify the literature with which to either prove or disprove its research question. A number of case studies (see generally Collier 2003) exist in identifying the root causes of internal conflicts, and no one study can be said to be of general applicability since each country has its own specific circumstances that drive its population to engage

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political and national identity. The most recent case depicting a people's right for self-determination is the case of the secession of South Sudan from Sudan.

in violent conflict. Many studies<sup>6</sup> focusing on Kenya have concluded that internal conflict therein was driven by landlessness and ethnicity. However, these studies also did acknowledge the role of centralised revenue redistribution as a potential factor. Accordingly, such studies shall form the building blocks upon which this article discusses its research question.

This article, therefore, seeks to utilise the explanatory approach to shed light on the centralisation of revenue redistribution as a factor instigating conflict in a country. To do this, it shall also rely on the cases of Uganda and Sudan, mentioning them briefly as comparative case studies in this article. These two countries are used because of, firstly, their proximity to Kenya; secondly, the similarities in their laws with respect to the centralisation of revenue redistribution; and thirdly, all three countries have experienced internal conflict as a result of centralised revenue redistribution. Accordingly, this article is structured into four sections.

The first section is the introduction. The second section begins by addressing what a centralisation of revenue redistribution means and how it has been practiced in Kenya, highlighting its resultant challenges. In the third section, the article investigates whether a centralisation of revenue redistribution has caused internal conflict in Kenya in order to prove or disprove the research question. To find support for its assumption, the article also mentions the cases of Uganda and Sudan to strongly set out a justification to link centralised revenue redistribution to internal conflict. The secession of South Sudan from Sudan has been linked by Young (2012) to the

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6 See generally on this subject, Ghai, Yash P. (2008). "Devolution: Restructuring the Kenyan State," Vol. 2, 2008, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*; Koki Mulwa et al. (2011). "Devolution and Nation Building in Kenya," Strathmore University, Nairobi; Report by the National Anti-Corruption Campaign Steering Committee on the Constituency Development Fund: An Examination of Legal, Structural, Management and Corruption Issues in Kenya, June 2008; Juma, Dan. (2008). "Devolution of Power as Constitutionalism: The Constitutional Debate in Kenya and Beyond" (August 15, 2008). *Ethnicity, Human Rights and Constitutionalism in Africa*, International Commission of Jurists, eds., pp. 36–58, Nairobi, Kenya; Sihanya, Ben. (2009). "Constitutional Political Economy of Ethnic Inequality and Poverty in Kenya, 1963–2007 and Beyond: Human Rights, Class Formation and Development," Study Commissioned by the Society for International Development (SID), Nairobi; and Grewal, Bajan S., (2010). "Symposium on Fiscal Decentralization: Public Finance and Management," Vol. 10. ILR Press.

centralisation of revenue redistribution and the case of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda where the rebel army has been fighting the government has been linked to Uganda's centralisation of its national wealth and resource revenues Norbert (2006). The article relies on two Kenyan cases; one, which was the post-election violence in Kenya; and two, the call for secession in Kenya in order to test the research question. It is hoped that such comparisons may prove to be an engaging read and may open up the discussion on the causes of internal conflict to a wider debate. The fourth section concludes the article.

### **Defining Centralised Revenue Redistribution and Summarising its Key Challenges in Kenya**

This section addresses the meaning, practice and resulting challenges of the centralisation of revenue redistribution in Kenya. In order to define centralised revenue redistribution, the following terms need to first be defined. Centralisation has been defined as "that method of governing under which the function of government emanate from the supreme body alone, in contradistinction to that under which they are independently exercised by certain subordinate agencies" (Sotheby 1852). Simply put, centralisation refers to a form of government in which the executive exercises absolute discretion in making decisions. "Revenue" refers to the income of a government from taxation, excise duties, customs, or other monetary sources. "Redistribution" means the transfer of revenue back to the population in the form of the provision of public goods (OECD 1998). Accordingly, centralisation of revenue redistribution means the decision by the executive (normally the president) to divide a major percentage of the revenue collected and redistribute it towards the capital city instead of dividing the revenue to redistribute it equally and equitably countrywide (Tiebout 1956).

The centralisation of revenue redistribution as a practice came about with the government implementing a policy based on the theory of fiscal centralisation. This theory suggests that because domestic revenue mobilisation in sub Saharan Africa is generally weak in comparison to other parts of the world it would be more beneficial, in centralising revenue redistribution towards a specific area, to fully

develop it and then move to the next area to develop it and vice versa until the whole country has been developed (Scherer 1980). This was the strategy adopted by the Kenyan government towards state building. This meant that the revenue collected by the government would be allocated to first develop the capital city before the rural areas could be developed.

The rationale behind this theory is that a centralisation of revenue redistribution would make the economy more competitive and grow faster by encouraging the rural population to migrate into the capital city, who would be coming to seek employment and thereafter use their income to invest in the rural areas from which they hailed (Republic of Kenya 1965). Consequently, the rural population coming to work in the capital city would become the catalysts for developing the rural areas. Hence, the government's task was to focus only on employment creation and the provision of public goods within the capital city in order to attract the rural population (Republic of Kenya 1965). For this revenue was required, hence its redistribution towards the capital city. Of course the beneficial consequences of this theory have been questioned by several scholars, who argued that the theory does not ensure sustainable development and instead offers a government poor economic planning with future development consequences such as poverty and inequality (Peterson and Rome 1990; Peterson 1965; Prud'homme 1995).

The post-independence era in Kenya witnessed the formation of a centralised state that captured increasing shares of its economic resources in the form of revenues and redistributed the revenues towards the capital city (Mutua 2009). As a result, the centralised state was able to not only establish and implement a more efficient and centralised system of the redistribution of revenues but it also enjoyed greater success in the political, economic and social development of its capital city (Mutua 2009; Ghai 2008; Mulwa et al. 2011). Consequently, there emerged glaring differences between the rural areas (or the rest of the country) and the capital city. Also, since the redistribution of revenue was towards the capital, job creation, economic growth and wealth were concentrated in the capital city leaving the rural areas in a state of underdevelopment, income inequality, and lack of access to basic services like hospitals, schools, electricity and piped water. It was not long before the rural population and coastal city of Mombasa



embroiled the country in conflict as a result of these inequalities. Table 1 below shows an example of inequality in the provision of electricity as a public good between the capital city and other regions in Kenya. The provision of electricity in terms of percentage to different areas within Kenya is chosen for the following reasons: (a) available and verified data, and (b) electricity being among the top priorities of the country to be fulfilled in terms of policy goals.

**Table 1: Access to electricity following revenue redistribution from income tax collected**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Total revenue from income in %</b>	<b>Access to electricity in %age</b>
<b>Nairobi</b>	45	71
<b>Nyanza</b>	43	5
<b>Rift Valley</b>	43	11
<b>Eastern</b>	42	7
<b>Western</b>	41	2
<b>Central</b>	39	19
<b>Coast</b>	34	19
<b>North Eastern</b>	27	3

Source: Society for International Development (2004)

The columns above shows the regions (column 1) within Kenya and the percentage of the total amount of tax from income collected within each region (column 2). The third column shows the percentage in terms of access to electricity. This data demonstrates that the capital city, despite being on a par with other regions such as Nyanza, Rift Valley, Eastern and Western in terms of taxes on income collected, has the highest percentage in access to electricity as compared to the other regions. One may argue that such divergence between the capital city and the other regions, in terms of the provision of electricity goes on to show at a prima facie level that the total tax revenue collected from income countrywide is redistributed towards the provision of public goods within the capital city since a large proportion of the budget is allocated towards the development of the capital city region. The budget is among other finances based on the total taxes collected. Now there may be no connection between the collection of tax and the provision of electricity. Electricity is a public good in

Kenya and not subject to privatisation, hence one can conclude – based on the argument that taxes are collected by the government in order to provide public goods, hence, is based on the available data on the collection of taxes from regions and the percentage of access to electricity – that a sound argument can be advanced showing the link to the centralisation of revenue redistribution in the analysis of this data.

From the table above we find that the first five regions in the first column accounted for over 40% of total revenue collected from income tax, yet we notice inequality in their access to electricity. Such limited or minimal access to public goods as a result of government policy in redistributing revenue towards the capital, the article in the next section argues, may then become a key factor in sparking internal conflicts from the population living outside the capital. A state that does not share the national wealth and resource revenues equitably among its citizens therefore provides a platform to those who want to challenge the legitimacy of the state to engage in violence.

### **Centralised Revenue Redistribution as a Cause of Internal Conflict in Kenya**

This article relies on Collier’s argument that “the key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development” (Collier 2003) and links his argument to the findings of Peterson and Rome (1990), Peterson (1965) and Prud’homme (1995) who concluded that when a major percentage of revenue is redistributed to the capital city instead of an equitable distribution countrywide, the country is bound to experience economic underdevelopment. These two arguments taken together link economic underdevelopment to internal conflict. As a result, this article utilises these arguments to explain that internal conflict in Kenya emerged as a result of the government’s policy on centralising revenue redistribution towards the capital city. Having reviewed the findings made by Juma (2008) the present article found that such centralisation over the span of 42 years (1965 – when the sessional paper<sup>7</sup> was adopted – to 2008 – the election violence

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7 Republic of Kenya. 1965. African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya, Sessional Paper Number 10, 1965. Nairobi: Government Printers Limited.

period<sup>8</sup>) caused economic underdevelopment, income inequalities and a marginalisation of the rural areas in the provision of public goods.

These disparities, as argued by Bannon (2007), subsequently culminating over the years and the grievances of the rural population not being addressed by the Kikuyu-led<sup>9</sup> government, which in order to appease the rural population promised a new constitution that would be based on revenue decentralisation (*majimbo*), hijacked the constitutional process and blocked reforms (Bannon 2007) and later having combined the foregoing with the electoral vote rigging by the incumbent during the 2007 election period led to an explosion of internal violence (Ghai 2008; Mutua 2009; Mulwa et. al 2011). Ghai (2008), Mutua (2009) and Mulwa et. al (2011), among other causes that led to internal conflict, also identified the marginalisation of the rural areas in revenue redistribution as key features of internal conflict. Furthermore, Waris (2013) has argued that the fiscal policy of the government to favour a redistribution of revenue towards the capital city is detrimental towards state building. This can be observed from the difference in not only infrastructure in the rural areas and the capital city but in life expectancy, school dropout rates, income levels, spending, savings and investment, etc. (Waris 2013) and not just in access to electricity as discussed in section 3 above.

Furthermore, the coastal region of Mombasa, following the post-election violence, began a call for secession. The underlying argument, this article finds, was that the central government had for eons failed to equitably redistribute revenues towards the region's economic development and that the region was capable to self-finance its own development since it was a major hub for international trade having the seaport located within its jurisdiction (Mutua 2009). It also contended that since this region generated huge sums in tax revenue for the government it was unfair that it was shortchanged during redistribution by receiving a share way less than the amount in total generated by the region. It thus called for secession and the government responded by assassinating the leader of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), the party formed to chart the way

8 During this period the government passed the National Reconciliation and Accord Act through which it further enacted laws to ensure equitable revenue redistribution.

9 Kenya has 44 ethnic communities. The Kikuyu make up the majority of the population, followed by the Luo (the tribe from which U.S. President Barack Obama's late father hailed).

towards secession (Botha 2014). This sparked violent clashes between the police and the residents forcing the government to prioritise decentralisation to curb the call for secession and ensure equitable revenue redistribution.

The call for secession and the violence that ensued has now withered away ever since the new constitution was promulgated in 2010, which introduced a new system of governance for Kenya. This new system is a decentralised form of government and with it also came revenue decentralisation, which means that every county can now collect revenue from within its territory and then redistribute the revenue at its discretion within its territory instead of remitting the revenue to the central government, which would then apportion the revenue and decide which county gets how much during redistribution.

From the foregoing, it can therefore be argued that, since revenue redistribution has an effect on the economic development of a state, its centralisation can potentially give rise to internal conflict. This deduction is further corroborated by considering the cases of Sudan and Uganda. In the former case, Sudan opted for federalism as a strategy to end the violent conflict between the central government and the south (Hartmann 2013), which was rooted in the south feeling marginalised in the redistribution of revenue (Young 2012). The south felt that the central government was discriminating against it by redistributing the revenue towards the capital city and leaving out the south, despite the fact that a huge part of the revenue was sourced from the south. The conflict exacerbated and eventually led to the south seceding from Sudan and becoming a sovereign state.

The case of Uganda is somewhat different. Museveni's party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) after coming into power, basically abolished multi-party politics causing dissent in the northern part of Uganda (Kasfir 1998). This led to the recruitment of rebels under the banner of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to fight Museveni's NRM. Museveni retaliated by sidelining the north by halting the redistribution of revenue therein while government troops fought with the LRA. This led to the lack of economic development of the north and steeped the region into poverty and inequality. This then forced the residents to join the LRA in order to fight Museveni's government for its unequal redistribution policy (Norbert 2006). The

key message to be derived from this is that revenue redistribution plays an important role in the economic development of a state and in maintaining a balance in equitable distribution of public goods; when this revenue redistribution fails to achieve its purpose and/or instead is directed towards one specific area to the detriment of the other areas, this will cause the residents to spur internal conflict.

To further support the hypothesis that centralisation of revenue redistribution may cause internal conflict, Hirshleifer (1988), Garfinkel (1990) and Skaperdas (1992), in advancing their economic theory as a possible explanation for internal conflict, stated that internal conflict between two groups arises because of how resources are allocated. Domestically, resources are allocated through revenue redistribution. Azam (1995) and Roemer (1985), in support of this view, have observed that a conflict that arises as a result of how resources are allocated can only be resolved through efficient redistribution. Domestic economic growth of a state is measured through its revenue collection and redistribution and when there is inequality in redistributing revenue countrywide it leads to the underdevelopment of areas outside the capital city, income inequality, lack of access to basic services like hospitals, schools, electricity and piped water. This in turn agitates the rural population, who may turn towards conflict as a way of forcing the government to change its policy.

Prior to the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution, “Kenya had been one of the most centralised states in the world with a very powerful executive” (Muli 2005). Such centralisation further contributed to the marginalisation of various groups and communities in Kenya with regard to financial resource allocation. The centralisation of financial resources in terms of revenue redistribution greatly benefited not only the capital city but also the region (Rift Valley), which was affiliated to the occupier of the office of the presidency. In this way, this centralised revenue redistribution system retarded nation building and economic development and became associated with corruption and financial embezzlement (Ghai 2008). In order to remedy this inequitable financial distribution in the country, the rural population following the electoral vote rigging during the 2007 presidential elections decided to engage in violence at a level never before witnessed in the country. As a result, the government promulgated a new constitution following a majority of the population voting for the new constitution during

the referendum providing the country with a decentralised revenue redistribution system and a decentralised form of government.

The prolonged centralisation of revenue redistribution that culminated into internal violence in Kenya led to a regime change as a strategy to resolve the crisis. After 47 years following independence Kenya moved from a centralised to a decentralised state. What sparked this change was its fiscal policy, which the people violently protested against and even killed and displaced one another.

## **Conclusion**

This article examined whether there is a link between the centralisation of revenue redistribution and the occurrence of internal conflict in a country. It argued that when a large part of a population has either limited or no access to social and economic resources as a result of a government policy in redistributing revenue towards the capital, such concentrated redistribution at the centralised level may become a key factor in sparking internal conflicts from the population living outside the capital. The article further argued that a state that does not share its national wealth and resource revenues equitably among its citizens therewith provides a platform to those who want to challenge the legitimacy of the state to engage in violence. This was seen in the case of Kenya and corroborated by the cases of Sudan and Uganda where inequitable revenue redistribution played a key role in instigating violence.

In Kenya, the centralised revenue redistribution over a span of more than 40 years built up frustration among the rural population about the government, which resulted in internal conflict. This article suggests that the post-election violence and the call for secession of the coastal city of Mombasa were a result not only of centralised revenue redistribution but also of centralisation coupled with other factors, which led to the explosion of internal conflict. Hence, these causes ought to be taken together in understanding what occasions internal conflict in a country instead of selecting only one such cause and generalising on that basis alone. Thus, the centralisation of revenue redistribution by a state can be seen as a potential factor leading to internal conflict, especially in circumstances where the levels of poverty and unemployment in the country are high. Although such

internal conflict may not necessarily be violent, centralised revenue redistribution may cause an uprising among the population and lead to a substantial change in the form of government, moving it from a centralised to a decentralised form of government in order to appease the population and for the state to retain its legitimacy. Such was the case in Kenya.

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# "THE ANCESTORS ARE BEATING US": MEN, MIGRATION AND SPIRIT POSSESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Vendula Řezáčová

**Abstract:** Although studies of migration have grown exponentially in recent years, their focus has for the most part been on individuals and groups moving from (rural) peripheries to (urban) centres, akin to the prophesies of mainstream modernist theory. In South Africa, formidable scholarship has tackled the challenges and opportunities, which urban milieus have provided for rural migrants. Much less attention has been paid to urban-rural movements and the transformations of identities, relations and powers, which these have engendered. This paper considers the dynamics of ancestral spirit possession in the case of TshiVenda-speaking migrant men and argues that urban-rural migration has constituted a significant, although highly contested and multi-faceted process in contemporary South African society. In particular, it aims to show that movements mediated by the notions and practices of spirit possession invoke experiences of place and gender, which problematise both local and analytical conceptions of "city" and "country," "centre" and "periphery," "manhood" and "womanhood."

**Keywords:** *Spirit possession, migration, gender, identity, South Africa*

## Introduction

The long-prevailing teleological view of social change in sub-Saharan Africa, according to which rural-urban migration and subsequent "permanent urbanisation" constituted a dominant driving force of progressive socio-economic, political and cultural transformation (Gluckman 1960; Mitchell 1987; Wilson and Wilson 1968), has been revealed as untenable. Several authors have recently argued that the "rural" has (re-)gained, or retained, significance in contemporary lives of urban migrants, whether for reasons of providing, however

fragile, livelihoods in times of economic crisis (Ferguson 1992; 1999), place of proper burial (Gugler 2002), or conceptions of “roots” amenable to political manipulation (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 1998). As the present study aims to show, the “rural” – both as a “place” and a source of meanings, interpretations of experience and templates for actions, has become an important resource for individuals and groups addressing crises of personal and social well-being and continuity; but it can also be seen to “haunt” unsuspecting urbanites, rerouting their identities and movements, purportedly against their own will. I will address these dynamics in the case of “Venda” spirit possession, which has given rise to an intriguing interplay of “urban” and “rural,” “movement” and “emplacement,” “spirit illness” and “health,” “self” and “other,” “male” and “female,” in contemporary South African society.

The present study concentrates primarily on TshiVenda-speakers – male and female labour migrants – whom I had acquainted during fieldwork between 2004–6 in the region of the former “Venda” homeland in the Limpopo province,<sup>1</sup> and to a lesser extent in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Ancestor spirits, *midzimu* (sing. *mudzimu*), are held to “call” their living descendants to leave cities in Gauteng, conceptualised in the idiom of “place of whites,” *tshikuani*, resettle in rural “Venda,” undergo initiation and take up life-long profession as ancestral mediums and healers, *nganga* or *maine* in TshiVenda, practicing from the rural areas. The ancestral “call,” *mbidzo*, manifests itself first as a grave form of affliction both bodily and social plaguing labour migrants in the city, usually at the height of their urban careers. Settlement in the rural area in “Venda” and acceptance of the “call” ideally results in restoration of health and well-being<sup>2</sup>. The categories of *tshikuani* and “Venda,” city and country, represent a salient dichotomy around which opposing meanings are organised in the life-histories of the possessed men: “illness” – “health,” “immorality” – “morality,” “capricious money” – “stable money,” respectively. I will discuss the extent to which these dichotomies have also been re-enacted in

- 1 Now officially the Vhembe district of the Thulamela municipality in Limpopo Province.
- 2 This socio-spatial and gender dynamics of spirit possession in the “Venda” context has so far been undocumented. Stayt (1931), Blacking (1985) and Ralushai (personal communication, May 2005) have argued that “Venda” spirit possession is a domain of rural women addressing problems of fertility and matrilineal descent in a society conceived as patrilineal and patriarchal.

practice by the possessed migrants and how they have oriented their actions as full-time ancestral mediums.

The above description of the possession predicament is, of course, a shorthand of very complex processes of personal, social and political transformations which this divinely inspired urban-rural movement entails, as will be shown below. Due to the limitations of the scope of this paper, I will concentrate on male labour migrants, involved in different stages of spirit possession and the ancestral "call." This choice of subject is deliberate, as men have been under-represented in studies of spirit possession worldwide. Furthermore, men have been more readily associated with labour migration, city and the public sphere in southern African anthropology, and their vigorous presence in the domain of the household in rural areas goes counter to gender presumptions, which this paper aims to question. Through spirit possession, men have been able to navigate the rural, private, domestic sphere of the household, and stretch its meanings and political significance in innovative and unprecedented ways. However, there are limits to which possessed men (and their spirits) can become agents in the changes to subjectivities and to social and cultural forms which spirit possession entails. In important respects, they are forced to change themselves in sometimes personally undesirable ways – appropriate complex skills, bodily techniques and knowledge, historically dominated and controlled by women, which challenge their gendered identities. Male ancestral mediums, thus, have limited opportunity to change some aspects of the socio-cultural forms of spirit possession in which, predominantly rural, women have retained the upper hand. It must also be stressed that the settlement in "Venda" associated with spirit possession is not a simple reintegration in a primordial community of origin – the migrants had often been born in *tshikuani*, or in a rural location other than that in which they have settled as ancestral mediums. Furthermore, their practices and strategies of healing self and others significantly realign social relations and identities in the rural areas and the very notions of "Venda."

## Reluctant Mediums: Spirit Possession and Life-History

In the following section I will discuss the life-histories of five men, former labour migrants, in which they portray their spirit possession experience in the cities of Gauteng, and their recovery in “Venda.” The men come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds: elite business manager (Mulalo<sup>3</sup>) and university lecturer (Emmanuel), while three men (Lawrence, Thilivhali, Khathutshelo) positioned at the lowest rungs of the urban labour market, engaged in intermittent “piece job” on the mines, as cleaners, security guards, bus and taxi drivers. At the onset of symptoms associated with ancestral possession Mulalo and Emmanuel were in their early 40s, married, with children. Lawrence, Thilivhali and Khathutshelo were single in their late 20s and early 30s. All were sending remittances to dependent families in rural “Venda.”

In each case the onset of possession was associated with diffuse symptoms of chronic pains, anorexia, disorientation, tiredness, depression, sleeplessness and suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, according to their life-histories, the men suffered from inexplicable occurrences disrupting their work routines. Mulalo and Emmanuel would suddenly “lose voice” during presentations and lectures. Furthermore, substantial sums of money would mysteriously disappear from their bank accounts. Lawrence, Thilivhali and Khathutshelo experienced problems with instruments of work which would repeatedly break down beyond repair, their identity cards would disrupt employers’ databases, and, like Mulalo and Emmanuel, they were unable to “hold onto money,” *u fara tshede*. All five men also described themselves as “naughty” at the time of their life in *tshikuani*, engaging in immoral behaviour, illicit affairs and drinking heavily. The afflicted men first sought biomedical treatment, *zwa tshikua* (lit. “things of whites”) and healing in African Independent Churches (especially the Zion Christian Church), but to no avail. Finally, and reluctantly, they consulted a “traditional” healer, *nganga*, who identified the agency of ancestor spirits as the cause of the men’s afflictions and lack of self-control. The men resented the diagnosis stipulating relocation to “Venda” and undergoing initiation to become *nganga*. However, further afflictions and suffering eventually made them abide by the spirits’ wishes. Once in “Venda” and undergoing treatment and initiation, all the men claimed to have experienced

3 All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

significant improvement in health and social relations, regained self-discipline and control over flows of money.

There are problems in relying solely on life-histories when trying to understand socio-cultural phenomena and personal transformations. In retrospective life-histories complex and difficult negotiations and ambiguities often become portrayed as simple, clear-cut linear processes. Due to the constraints of fieldwork I was not able to spend several years with the possessed men in the cities in order to closely observe the dynamics of their affliction and negotiations for cure. However, when the narratives are considered as not simply reflections of "objective" history and experience "as it happened," but as meaningful tools with which people act upon their worlds, it is possible to analyse the way in which they reflect major concerns of individuals and the societies in which they live, and in turn, shape them. As Gardner puts it: "... narratives are first and foremost stories ... stories do not simply entertain or convey experience, they also comment upon it, and hence help to change it" (Gardner 2002: 2).

In their narratives, the men stressed that they shopped around for treatment before being forced by the gravity of their condition to consult a *nganga*. All the men stated the same sequence of options consulted – initially *zwa tshikua*, then Christian churches, finally *nganga* – which reflects the situation of medical pluralism in contemporary South Africa and a hierarchy of resort. However, as a standardised device in the narratives of possession, this sequence also had a rhetorical import. It was used to comment on the superior efficacy of "traditional" healing while at the same time stressing one's own reluctance to embrace it and accept the *mbidzo*; the men used the idiom *ndo mona mona*, literally "I was dodging," a period which in each case lasted 2 to 10 years. This ambivalence towards the "ancestral call" had several levels of significance. On the one hand, the men claimed that they did not want to get involved with "traditional" healing, *vhunganga*, as "it is difficult," *zwi a konda*, requiring a prolonged regime of medicines and rituals. Becoming a *nganga* is a psychologically and physically demanding process, it "hurts," *zwi a vhavha*, and it is for life. Moreover, Mulalo and Emmanuel explained that they were happy in the city, driving BMW's, enjoying the urban life-style. Lawrence, Thilivhali and Khathutshelo felt the pressure of their rural families to stay in *tshikuani*, and send their earnings to "Venda." On the other

hand, the claims of resistance to accept the ancestral “call” served as a legitimating device attesting to its genuineness – the longer the period of “dodging” lasted, the more the men had to leave behind (the BMW’s, houses, well-paid jobs), the more genuine the claim to be in contact with the ancestor spirits was seen to be.

There is a further reason why the men were reluctant to leave urban employment and settle in rural “Venda,” which relates to wider processes of migration and the ways in which they have been incorporated into cultural values regarding gender. The system of rural-urban migration, primarily of men, had been put in place by the colonial government since the 1880s, starting with the imposition of the hut tax, and has been further exacerbated by the dispossession of land of local African populations during the apartheid regime. A system whereby able-bodied (not only) “Venda” men were forced to migrate to the cities of Gauteng, especially to work in the mines, while women and children stayed in the rural areas partially relying on meagre agricultural produce and on remittances, was installed by the apartheid government in conjunction with the major owners of capital in order to secure a large supply of unskilled, cheap labour (Worden 2012). This system began to dissipate in the 1980s as mining and other industrial sectors in the cities were undergoing economic crisis (exacerbated since the 2000s) and as women increasingly migrated, on their own or with their husbands, to seek employment in the expanding service sectors of the urban economy. Against this background it is striking that when I interviewed men and women in “Venda” during 2004–6 they viewed the gendered structure of the forceful system of rural-urban migration as “our culture,” *mvelele yashu*. According to this cultural ideal, men are supposed to migrate to the city to seek employment and send money for bags of mealie meal (*saga a mugayo*) to women (wives, sisters, mothers, grandmothers) remaining in rural “Venda.”

The dynamics of ancestor possession of the male labour migrants, and their reluctance to accept it, has to be seen in this context. For by accepting “the call” and leaving the city, *tshikuani*, the men subverted this gendered ideal of labour migration. The notion that “it is our culture” that the man works in *tshikuani* (also rendered as *tsheledeni*, lit. “place of money”) sending remittances to the rural area, has been articulated also by the possessed men themselves, acknowledging that



due to the ancestral call they were incapable of standing up to the ideal with which they associated self-esteem; returning to "Venda" entailed a degree of emasculation. In all cases, the families of the possessed men also resented their return to "Venda." The case of Lawrence is instructive in this context. Lawrence, now a man in his 80s, had become a migrant worker and suffered from possession illness in *tshikuani* during the 1950s. In his case, a compromise was made with the ancestors. The family pleaded with the spirits that Lawrence was still too young to quit wage work and the spiritual "gift," *mpho*, was hung on a fig tree for the next three decades. Only during the 1980s, at the end of his labour career, did Lawrence relocate to "Venda" to start practicing as a *nganga*. No such compromise was possible for the four men in labour migration during the 1980s (Thilivhali), 1990s (Mulalo, Emmanuel) and 2000s (Khathutshelo). The possessing spirits seem to have gained more power to force migrants to return to "Venda" only since the 1980s, corresponding to the gradual dissipation of the apartheid system of rural-urban labour migration.

While ancestor possession of male labour migrants is subversive of dominant values of masculinity in relation to labour migration, it also constitutes a critical commentary on the conditions of work in the urban centres. In all cases the ancestors manifested themselves by disrupting work routines. However, they did so in significantly different ways in conjunction to the relative socio-economic position of the possessed men. While the elite men "lost voice," the men positioned at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy experienced problems with external, material means of work and anonymising regimes of identity control at the work place. The fact that it was their own body-self and agency, which was problematised in possession in the case of elite men, is a reflection of relatively more control over work processes and their own identity which they had in the urban workplace. By contrast, possession of the men of the urban underclass expressed the consciousness of being more "a cog in a machine," projecting agency to instruments of labour.

### **Life-History Revisited: Healed in "Venda"?**

In their life-histories, all possessed men claimed to have been cured and regained self-control once living in the rural area in "Venda" and

undergoing initiation and practicing as *nganga*. However, during my fieldwork these outcomes seemed to be more ambivalent. At the time when I met Mulalo, Emmanuel, Lawrence and Thilivhali during my fieldwork in “Venda,” they were already established as *nganga* in various rural locations. Only Mulalo and Lawrence appeared to be fully prospering, both in relation to their health and the healing profession. Mulalo had established a significant renown as a successful healer, offering his services to elite clientele from local areas as well as Gauteng, who often also had experience of study or work in Europe or the USA. Lawrence complemented his healing practice with “traditional” arts and crafts venture based in the local urban centre, Thohoyandou, but insisted he could only communicate with his ancestors and attend to clients at his rural home on the outskirts of Sibasa (on which more below). Thilivhali, on the other hand, appeared to struggle. He suffered from recurrent symptoms of ancestor sickness – especially pain in shoulders and head<sup>4</sup> – which had to be repeatedly treated by further conduct of (financially taxing) possession rituals in order to regain momentary respite. Moreover, he had problems attracting clients and struggled with his two wives and children in dire poverty.

Emmanuel appeared to be stretching his authority as a healer, as well as the very notions of how ancestors may intervene in human life, to their limits – as had been perceived by his clients as well as his initiator. He charged extortionate fees for medicines purportedly curing HIV/AIDS, abused women clients by the conduct of “x-rays” of their naked bodies and stopped paying rent claiming the ancestors would take care of the debt. By 2006 he had his property looted by a mob and visited his initiator every other day for treatments (incisions and fumigations) to protect himself from enemies. His moral and psychological integrity as a *nganga* was substantially shaken. During my fieldwork Khathutshelo was still undergoing treatment and initiation, however, his health and self-confidence seemed to have been improving. I will analyse the social and personal dynamics of Khathutshelo’s treatment and initiation in more detail in the next section, especially in relation to power and gender. Whether Khathutshelo will be “cured” and prosper as a *nganga*, however, remains to be seen.

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4 Ancestral agency is held to typically manifest itself in this manner, while witchcraft targets the stomach or belly, *dangani*; for both conditions the idiom of *u liwa*, lit. “being eaten,” is used.

## Spirit Identities and Gender Dynamics of Spirit Possession

The possibility, and plausibility, of spirit possession is part of more widely shared notions held by TshiVenda-speakers in South Africa regarding ancestral agency intervening in the lives of individuals and kin groups. The ancestors are seen as operating for the benefit but also, more frequently, to the detriment of human lives. Although the relationship between the ancestors, “those bellow” (*vha fhasi*) and living humans is essentially seen as contractual and amenable to manipulation, the ancestors’ disposition towards humans is said to be in the first degree violent and coercive: “the ancestors are beating us” (*vhadzimu vha lwa rine*). They do so either directly through their own agency, or by withholding protection and “opening paths” (*u vhala dzindila*) for evil such as witchcraft, *muloi*, to strike the intended victims. The ancestors may act out of dissatisfaction with immoral conduct of humans or improper burial, or just be expressing the desire to be acknowledged and celebrated. Humans can negotiate with wrathful spirits through invocations (*u semana semana*, lit. “to scold”) and propitiation acts – spirit possession (primarily *tshela* and *malombo*<sup>5</sup>), rituals of “returning the grandparent” (*u vhuisa makhulu*) and collective feasts of kin groups. According to my informants, improper burials are nowadays a frequent cause for the ancestors to be troublesome, a situation reflected in the conduct of a rising number of rituals to “return the ancestors.” Overwhelmingly, these cases involve individuals (mostly men) who had died, often violently, in *tshikuani* without obtaining family burials and those whose bodies have remained buried in house yards after whole families had been forcefully relocated as a result of apartheid’s policies of population removal during the 1960s – 1980s. The rituals of *vhuisa makhulu* are a significant counterpoint to spirit possession against the background of the wider dynamics of movement and dis/placement: while in the former case it is the ancestor spirits who achieve mobility through their descendants, in the latter case the descendants are ultimately “moved” by the ancestors so that they may be appropriately emplaced.

5 *Tshela* is often the first stage of spirit possession rituals and carried out in a kneeling position to the accompaniment of rattles, while *malombo*, or *ngoma dza midzimu* (“drum of the ancestors”), *ngoma yo ima* (“drum of standing up”), is a final stage performed in a standing posture to the accompaniment of drum beating, as well as rattle shaking.

In “Venda” spirit possession, three categories of ancestor spirits, *vhadzimu*, are recognised and become the focus of ritual activities – *Ndau* (lit. “lion”) spirits traced to the Kalanga of Zimbabwe, Venda spirits, and ancestors of Shangaan (Tsonga) descent. In terms of strength and power, and associated prestige of the possessed host, *Ndau* stand at the apex of the spirit hierarchy with Venda spirits closely following, and Shangaan being regarded as the weakest. Strength refers to the power of the ancestor to afflict the individual in a most severe manner, to the vigorousness of the spirit’s/host’s dancing necessary during possession rituals, and to the healing ability of the spirit/host. The spirits’ hierarchy closely reflects conceptions of ethnic relations. Kalanga are collectively identified as the group from which the VhaVenda ultimately originated some 200 years ago, hence their prestige. On the other hand, historical relations between Shangaan and Venda have been strained by conflict (Harries 1991: 106), and Shangaan living among the Venda have been treated as a pariah group (I was frequently warned by Venda informants not to visit Shangaan communities for the danger of being robbed, raped or contracting illnesses). In this light it is understandable that Shangaan spirits are ascribed least power. In fact, they are held to be transferable by a coin smeared in goat blood to an unsuspecting victim, who picks up the treated object – however, I had never encountered a person possessed in this way during my fieldwork. Moreover, each of the spirit groups is associated with different medicines, dancing styles, spirit languages and cloths. The “Venda” spirit possession rituals, the *tshela* and *malombo*, are associated with *Ndau* and Venda ancestors, *majomane* with Shangaan spirits. So in “Venda” spirit possession a degree of ethnic diversity is acknowledged, but always subsumed to the principle of descent – ancestors plague only one’s own living kin. Moreover, while possession rituals may be performed for individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, etc., but always with some, even distant, Kalanga, Venda or Shangaan lineage connections), they cannot be conducted anywhere but on “Venda” territory. This relative conservatism of “Venda” possession stands in contrast to other South African contexts where possession rituals are readily conducted also in urban contexts (Janzen 1991), and to neighbouring societies (such as Mozambique) where possessing ancestors may not necessarily be related through descent relationship with the host at all (Igreja, Dias-Lambranca and Richters 2008).

In the following case study of one of the possessed men, Khathutshelo, I shall address the dynamics of spirit possession ritual and initiation in relation to gender and power. As was noted above, Khathutshelo's masculine identity has been challenged by his having to quit wage work in the city and settling in "Venda" as part of the ancestral "call." While in the rural area, he has been reliant on his female relatives, sisters and maternal aunt for care and funding of his initiation process, further reversing the signs of gender dependency. The spirits afflicting Khathutshelo were identified as his mother's father and mother's mother's sister, of the "Venda" category. Many authors have argued that when "...various spirits of different sexes may enter the medium and provide alternate versions of gender, thus displacing the dominant gender hierarchies. ... the person possessed by spirits is given the chance to play, to present a range of choices and alternatives within which people can locate themselves" (Behrend and Luig 2000: xvii). As will be shown in the context of a man possessed by both male and female spirits, playfulness with gender categories is limited in the "Venda" context. Khathutshelo, and his spirits, had very little opportunity to dislodge gender scripts of spirit possession in which women and female performance styles and techniques have predominated.

Khathutshelo was born in 1972 in Thohoyandou where he grew up and finished standard 10. He then went on to study in Pretoria, but did not finish college education due to lack of financial resources. He stayed on in Pretoria and from 2001 worked as a cleaner, miner and dishwasher. He recounted that while working in the mine, he began to suffer from several conditions, later ascribed to the agency of ancestor spirits. He had swellings in different parts of his body and pains in the head, arms, shoulders and legs. Furthermore, strange incidents started to disrupt his work routines in the mine. His identity card was repeatedly not working, when his identity and fingerprints were checked by his employer they could not be verified, and the computer system spontaneously shut down. Moreover, the women whom Khathutshelo dated were constantly leaving him. He began wandering around the city suburbs, disoriented, and dreaming of white goats, *mbudzi tshena* (associated with ancestor spirits), grazing on riverbanks. By December 2005, Khathutshelo had to leave *tshikuani* for "Venda" where he stayed with the sister of his deceased mother in the rural area. His sisters took care of him while all he could do was

lie in bed. In May 2006 I met Khathutshelo at his initiator's (Dakalo) household where he had already been undergoing initiation to become a healer, a process known as *u twasa*.

I took part in a spirit possession ritual, *tshela*, organised for Khathutshelo on a winter Saturday in July 2006. The *tshela* was held in Dakalo's household in a remote village accessible only by a long trip on a bumpy dirt road from Thohoyandou. The gathering consisted of Dakalo, her three female initiates, her brother, Khathutshelo's sisters coming all the way from Johannesburg where they work, twelve elder women – neighbours and friends of Dakalo, and a young drunkard man from the neighbourhood. Khathutshelo's mother's sister paid for the ceremony, while Khathutshelo's sisters supplied the chickens, beer and "cold drinki" (Fanta and Sprite). The guests gathered into a hut which became densely occupied, and seated, started playing rattles and singing at about 9 p.m., creating a circle around Khathutshelo who, kneeling, began to make tentative attempts at swinging his head and torso back and forth. After about two hours the singing and music suddenly broke off. The elder women began to complain that Khathutshelo was not dancing with enough skill and vigour. The company moved to a room in the adjacent house and a series of exchanges between Khathutshelo and the female audience began. The women jokingly scolded Khathutshelo for slacking, commenting that the young generation was lazy and "good for nothing," not as brave as the elders, and that they all came in vain because no spirit would be satisfied enough with the young man's efforts to be lured to descent into his body. Khathutshelo, also in a joking manner, retorted that he was not like the elder women, used to kneeling on the ground, and to painful movements since he was born like the women were. One elder woman, nevertheless, encouraged Khathutshelo not to be afraid of pain and exhaustion and when the spirit would descend upon him, he would feel "godfree." Dakalo smeared more medicines on Khathutshelo's body (*u vhumabela*) to ease his movements and make him attractive to the ancestor spirits.

Then the party returned to the hut and resumed singing and playing the shakers, with Khathutshelo visibly making much more effort in his dancing. Finally, about an hour later, Khathutshelo's movements intensified until he fell prostate on the floor. He was covered with a blanket and a calabash of water was brought to him. He began licking

the water like a wild animal, patted on the face by Dakalo. Then the spirit revealed his identity – it was his mother’s father who demanded *phalu* (red-white patterned cloth), *nzheti* (blue-white cloth), *tonga* (walking stick) and a hat. Still covered in a blanket, Khathutshelo – now the spirit – was brought to the house to change his attire and returned, dignified, to the hut where the company greeted him by hand clapping and ululating while lying on the floor. The spirit greeted the audience by hand claps and the music and dancing resumed. In another hour Khathutshelo fell again, this time he was possessed by a distant female relative, *vhomakhulukuku*, mother’s mother’s sister. More dancing and singing followed, with members of the audience now coming into the centre of the circle to dance alongside Khathutshelo’s spirit, until early hours of the morning. At about 8 a.m. Khathutshelo’s spirit retired into the house and the audience feasted on refreshments, commenting on the night’s events, still joking about how clumsy and inadequate Khathutshelo’s movements had been, mimicking them and laughing. Khathutshelo’s sister immediately made a phone call to the mother’s sister to inform her that the *tshela* was a success and the ancestors had come and accepted the human endeavours.

The following lyrics were sung to the accompaniment of rattles:

*Vuwani, vuwani lotsha	Wake up, wake up, we greet you
Ri a gonya	We are climbing uphill
Ndi a vhona ngoma	I see ngoma
Zwi a vhavha ngoma, u tshina zwi a konda	Ngoma hurts, to dance is difficult
Madambi a nga mu fholi	The witchcraft cannot be gotten rid of
Makhulu vho swika	The ancestors came
Kha vha de vha tungule tangu	Let’s come and throw the divining bones
Nwana uyo vha mu vhonisani wee	This child, hey, you must see him/her
Vhomaine zwinvhe zwithu zwi no konda, ndi do kondelela	Healer, some things are very difficult but I will persevere
Vha I vhona mbudzi tshena, yowee	You are seeing white goat, hey
Ndo hwala mihwalo mihuluhulu	I was carrying a very heavy load
Ndi a tuwa vhusiku vhonoyu	I am leaving this very night

The lyrics sung during Khathutshelo’s *tshela* were not particularly gendered, referring to encouragement and greetings, associating

spirit possession with back-breaking work which humans, addressed as “children,” undergo on behalf of their deceased kin, *vhomakhulu*, to make them once again present in their midst. While the songs did not relate to a particularly female experience, the bodily postures, movements and costumes did. The general atmosphere of *tshela* is serious and dignified, except during the interlude in which joking and riposte is allowed or even stipulated. The ancestors behave in a supremely dignified manner, and must be treated accordingly by the living human participants. What is important for the present argument is that the dignity expressed through spirit possession rituals draws on distinctly female experience and techniques of the body. *Tshela* is carried out in a posture of kneeling on the floor, bearing the upper torso naked with a cloth wrapped around the waist (the proper female attire), and moving back and forth the upper part of the body. Gestures of greeting the ancestors, *u losha*, consisting in kneeling or lying prostrate on the floor, clapping hands and ululating, are important performance forms, and in mundane contexts a typically female conduct carried out most frequently in deference to men in authority such as chiefs or elders.

The performative forms of spirit possession are firmly grounded in women’s experience of conduct and body techniques. This may – as in the instance of *Khathutshelo* – lead to tensions and difficulties when men attempt to appropriate them. It is a significant fact that the audience, whose role it was to transmit knowledge and power associated with spirit possession to the inchoate initiate, were (elder) women, while the recipient of this knowledge and power was a (young) man. Such a distinctly gendered and generational scenario was reflected by all participants during the interlude. In it, spirit possession ritual, as an overarching commentary on the continuities of gender and generation, also became an occasion for the participants to reflect on the differences and rifts between these categories. However, the older generation – of women – scolded the younger man for not being used to pain and suffering, for not trying hard enough and for not being a plausible host of the ancestors; *Khathutshelo* joked precisely about the ridiculousness of the painful body postures and exhausting movements to which women “in the countryside” so readily obey all their life – none of the participants questioned the overarching consensus that the ancestors solicited the young man to become their



human medium. About the possibility of men being called by their ancestors there was no question, only about their individual aptitudes.

The gender tensions in contemporary spirit possession in which women act as guardians of the "Venda tradition," "of long ago," *zwa tshivenda*, *zwa sialala*, while men aspire to appropriate it and make their own, can be illustrated by a further example. During the initial stages, learning to recognise and "read" divination bones and administer medicines, *mushonga*, formed only a minor part of Khathutshelo's initiation process. Most of his time was spent carrying out distinctly women's household tasks such as sweeping, washing dishes, carrying loads, helping with the harvesting and processing of corn. Khathutshelo did not show much enthusiasm doing "woman's work," *mushumo ya mufhumakhadzi*, as he commented, and even tried to defy the prescribed embodied signs of being an initiate, *twasana*. On one occasion he appeared in the yard with the salemore cloths wrapped around his shoulders instead of around his hips (cloths worn around the hips being a distinctly female practice among "Venda" women, as seen above), that is, in a way which he perceived as more "manly." Immediately, however, his innovation attracted a shower of critique and reprimand from the women in the household, including Dakalo. Khathutshelo was forced to change his attire to fit the prescribed female-derived norm: the women in control of knowledge and power in spirit possession prevented Khathutshelo from pushing the cult's rules to encompass more "masculine" bodily experience.

## Domestic Men: Reconfiguring Gender and Household

Men afflicted by ancestor spirits have to immerse themselves in activities carried out from within the sphere of the household, *mudi*, throughout their initiation and healing careers. I have already addressed the gender dynamics, which this immersion entails for the initiation phase in the case of Khathutshelo. Here I wish to add a few more notes on the redefinition of the household sphere and gender in the case of full-fledged practicing male healers. The central feature of being a male *nganga* in the "Venda" context is a state of radical boundedness to own's household. This boundedness entails not only the fact that a *nganga* practices his healing arts from within a hut or a room specially consecrated to the ancestors (and has trouble doing so

anywhere else) and that the whole household sphere assumes the role of providing a base for preparing medicines and conducting healing rituals for clients. It also means that the household is construed as a sphere where health and well-being of the *nganga* himself is maintained – leaving the household for prolonged periods of time results in remission of symptoms of the original possession illness to the initiated men. The male healers with whom I worked claimed to be able to attend to clients in different regions of South Africa, such as *tshikuani*, only for short spans of time, after they had propitiated their ancestors properly. Doing otherwise meant risking potentially grave illness and misfortune. Geschiere (2003: 167) has argued that in central and southern Africa “... a *nganga* should never stay too long in his own village, because he will become a deadly danger to his own relatives. Indeed, *nganga* are often at the margins of the kinship organization; in many respects, they are nomadic figures, not closely tied to a specific locality.” Such a nomadic existence would invite great peril for the *nganga* in the “Venda” context, a fact which attests to the difficulties of making far-reaching generalisations of a region, and of an institution, which has been historically marked by salient local differences and ramifications.

The radical emplacement of men as *nganga* in the household has many repercussions for the significance of gender, the “domestic” sphere and for the wider socio-economic and micro-political milieus. In many respects, male *nganga* have assumed responsibilities culturally ascribed to women. In the case of Mulalo, Emmanuel and Lawrence gender roles have become reversed. The wives of these healers were involved in labour migration, commuting to work in local urban centres (Thohoyandou and Sibasa), while their husbands stayed at home, combining healing activities and household chores with looking after children. Only Thilivhali was accompanied by two wives at home, who carried out most of the household work, including the processing (grinding, burning, cooking) of medicines.

However, while male *nganga*, through their positioning within the household sphere, often acquired female characteristics, they also imprinted the domestic sphere with new meanings and roles through their healing activities. Through divinations and therapeutic procedures the *nganga* became involved in the micro-politics of kin groups, households and neighbourhoods, channelling conflicts in

specific ways, stressing ancestral agency as the ultimate cause of all misfortune. This stance was explicitly articulated in contradistinction to interventions of biomedicine and Christian churches, *kereke*, which were judged to be ineffective where ancestors (and witchcraft) were involved, thus playing into competitive tensions between therapeutic options. Households of *nganga* also became important social centres during the conduct of spirit possession rituals where solidarity of, often trans-local, groups was strengthened in relation to dangerous "others" who may try to disrupt the proceedings. The households of *nganga* served as important platforms of public opinion and social critique as clients waiting for procedures discussed events of the day, voiced opinions regarding the conduct of kin, neighbours, chiefs, prophets and other *nganga*.

### Money and the Moral Economy of Healing

Moreover, through healing practice, the domestic sphere of the household has become tightly knit into wider socio-economic structures, which are mediated by monetary exchange. Divinations, administration of medicines and ancestral rituals were thoroughly permeated by monetary transactions. The clients were responsible for paying for therapeutic interventions, even if they were close kin of the *nganga*. The rationale behind these transactions, however, was not remuneration for services provided. The *nganga* frequently explained to clients not keen to pay that the money is not for them, the healers, themselves – the ancestors would make their mediums very sick if they were not paid in money or did not accept payment. The monetary relationship of remuneration for a service was thus redefined as a moral, and literally vitally necessary, obligation of humans to their ancestors to ensure access to knowledge, success and bare survival.

Money, in the form of banknotes and coins, although conceived as inseparable from the moral economy of healing, was nevertheless regarded with caution as potentially dangerous, "hot", *fhisa*. Banknotes and coins could not be passed from hand to hand between the client and the healer, but had to be laid down on the floor and then sprinkled with snuff by the healer or his initiate. Only then could they be accepted and tucked away. Furthermore, limits applied to how money thus acquired could be used. Legitimate uses of money acquired from healing practice included the provision of members of own household

with every day necessities and education, investment in communal feasts marking life-cycle rituals and graduations from initiation. The way in which healers disposed of, or appeared to dispose of, their income from healing practices served as a basis to judge a particular individual as a healer rather than a witch – a tension which is salient to the institution of the *nganga* who, also, acts as a “witch-finder.” Emmanuel, who flashed his riches by buying a new car and luxury commodities, found himself being accused of dealing with the “head of the crocodile,” *thoho ya ngwena* (a euphemism for witchcraft), and had his car torched by a group of dissatisfied clients. Mulalo, on the other hand, who travelled modestly by taxis, wore the same pair of unassuming trainers (possessing several items of the same type according to the logic of “ostensive poverty”), sponsored graduation rituals of his initiates, *mufheretshedzo*, and a local football team, enjoyed renown for being a “real” *nganga*, *zwa vhukuma*.

As has been shown above, money also carried central significance in the structure of life-histories of the possessed men. Part of the possession “illness” was the experience that while sometimes earning substantial amounts of money, this money was mysteriously dispersing and disappearing from their bank accounts. The men seemed not to be able to hold onto it and reap the benefits of their earnings, even when paid in cash. The ancestors were apparently able to tap into the flows of money and abort them for those whom they had chosen as their mediums to force them to abide by the spirits’ wishes. Significantly, after returning to “Venda” and taking up the profession as *nganga*, the possessed men claimed to have regained control over money flows which became steady and stable. They often specified that all the wealth they had been able to acquire came from income after they have resettled to “Venda” and become healers – it ultimately came from the ancestors. But income from healing practice was not like a salary, they stressed. Only the ancestors knew, and were able to determine, how much there would be at the end of the day. So different character of money was associated with the thoroughgoing transformation of personal identity, mapped onto distinctions of city and country, *tshikuani* and “Venda.” Money itself, the universal means of exchange, has become a means to create particularities and to mark interdependent places and socio-economic units as different and incommensurable. The possessed migrants and healers can be seen as

"experimental practitioners ... they try to make universal signs speak to particular realities" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xxii).

## Conclusion

The implementation of government policies ensuing from the ideology of African Renaissance in the New South Africa since 1994 has engendered new opportunities in the rural areas for "traditional leaders." "Traditional" chiefs have profited substantial income, power and prestige from the state. Likewise "traditional healers" have been engaged in organising associations and collectives to claim support and funding from the government. Becoming a *nganga* in the rural area has in many respects become a profitable venture, and in "Venda" especially male *nganga* have been busy collaborating with chiefs and headmen to gain authority over populations and access to resources of various kinds. While the possessed men I introduced in this paper have often been engaged in these processes, to explain away spirit possession simply with respect to ulterior motives would be reductive and incorrect. I have tried to show that becoming involved in spirit possession and the *nganga* profession is a complex process through which definitions and practices of gender, power and identity are significantly negotiated, subverted and appropriated in a context in which the possessed male migrants have often limited agency in the face of the power of the spirits and of women.

With respect to the relation of migration, gender and cultural forms in South Africa overwhelming attention has been given to processes through which female labour migrants have appropriated urban performative styles of men and assumed male characteristics (Coplan 1994: 179) or appropriated aspects of womanhood and manhood to forge new "mixed" identities (James 1999: 83). Little is known about male labour migrants "returning" to rural areas and engaging with women-dominated cultural forms like spirit possession. In the case of TshiVenda-speaking male labour migrants I have tried to argue that they, at least to some extent, have become "like women," in terms of techniques of the body, ritual roles and association with the domestic spheres in the rural areas.

The case of "Venda" spirit possession involving male labour migrants has proven significant also in another respect. In late 1980s Comaroff

and Comaroff (1987) predicted that the distinction between “country” and “city” (in their work on the Tswana a distinction corresponding to the categories of *setswana*, “Tswana ways,” and *sekgoa*, “white ways”) would dissipate with the greater socio-economic integration of rural and urban milieus. The salience of the “rhetoric of contrast” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1987: 191) of *tshikuani* and “Venda” in spirit possession has proven that these categories have (re-)gained significance for the organisation of identity, agency and practice at least for some groups and categories of people in contemporary South Africa. However, “Venda” in this context is no soothing, primordial rural community. The possessed men make alliances through support groups and networks of initiates, assistants and liegemen who participate in therapeutic processes which clearly delineate some territorial groups from “others” – potential enemies and witches. “Venda” as a “place” in this way dissipates into “Venda” in the plural, retaining coherence only in distinction to *tshikuani*.

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Vendula Řezáčová: "THE ANCESTORS ARE BEATING US" ...

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## REVIEWS

**Bach, Daniel C. 2016. *Regionalism in Africa – Genealogies, Institutions and Trans-state Networks*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 197 pages.**

The book under review is the freshest ever publication of its kind to have recently appeared in bookshops. It is authored by Daniel Bach, a scholar in the field of African Studies, who has devoted a significant part of his life to conduct decades of research on the subject of regionalism in Africa. In this book, the author boldly presents the inception of regionalism, its present form and probable future in connection with Africa. He brings together the various dimensions of regionalism starting from the colonial period up to independence and the present time. Unlike a number of previous publications on the subject of African Studies, whose major objective was solely to entertain European readers at African expense, the present publication makes an effort to analyse facts and make them palatable to both European and African readers, including other world regions that have an interest in comparative studies of regionalism and regionalisation.

At first glance, the book may seem yet another publication to enhance Western knowledge production on Africa that merely glorifies and serves the interests of the developed world, so to say the interests of the decision-making elites and academia contributing to the marginalisation of the African continent while stimulating the revival of old Eurocentric images and racial stereotypes. But, this is not what the publication under review is about. Further reading and a thorough assessment of the publication ascertains the shift in perception across the Transatlantic and other regions around the globe concerning the growing new status of the African region within the bounds of contemporary international relations.

Daniel Bach is one of the few scholars who has observed this development and provided plausible explanations. He is at his strongest when arguing against an old-fashioned Victorian style of thinking that converged with neo-Hegelian representations of Africa, while degrading its status to a “continent of barbarians, devoid of any

history and culture,” a notion that is being reiterated even today by the policy makers of the West. The author has developed this point in his seventh and last chapter.

He effectively framed his efforts to make a complex subject understandable to all kinds of readers in a book of only 197 pages, including seven chapters and a long bibliography. In Chapter 1, the author sets a platform for further discussion by introducing the upsurge of regionalism across the world during the 1980s. Providing examples that illustrate various types of regionalisms, however, he puts special emphasis on Africa under the subtitle “The African maze.” Chapter 2 demonstrates how colonial policies and politics in Africa played the role in shaping the landscapes, topographies and mental maps associated with region building, as they did in Latin America. When this type of inter-territorial arrangement dissolved in Africa during independence, inter-governmental organisations took over; nevertheless, most of them rapidly lost relevance due to differences in politics and national orientations. In Chapter 3 the author examines the politics of economic cooperation, including the linkages with regime consolidation, club diplomacy and patronage. As the author carefully elaborates, around the end of the Cold War period and right in its aftermath, there was no veritable sub-regional integration process underway, because at that time none of the groups in Africa was able to make their impact felt, in a positive sense. Chapter 4 documents cross-border interactions in Africa, as much as goes on in other regions of the world, with intricate, multidimensional and multidirectional dimensions not captured by the discipline of International Relations, because of its difficult nature. As the author argues, in this kind of situation policies pursued under the garb of trade liberalisation serve as a free ticket to plunder a weaker neighbour within the context of the broader scope of trans-border and cross-border practices. In Chapter 5 the author argues that the renaissance of Pan-Africanism during the 1990s has powerfully contributed to the endorsement of the European Union as the best suitable model to fulfil the ambition of establishing an African Economic Community. The European Union remains the model of reference for the founding treaties and programmes of six of the eight regional economic communities in Africa. Moreover, as the author describes, the European Union is believed to have been the provider of the framework and criteria against which the Pan-African institutions monitoring regional integration in Africa seek

to assess their progress without falling into the trap of incantations and rhetorica. Chapter 6 presents how in Africa, as in other world regions, the establishment of regional trade agreements function to cause deeper regional integration that could occur in the process of defragmentation and connectivity.

In the last Chapter, as indicated above, the author presents the new status of Africa in international relations quite successfully. Here, he argues that the new and ascending status of the African continent in contemporary international relations intertwines with the concept and metaphor of frontier. He emphasises that present-day references to the continent may be understood as a new frontier and a global interface, underpinned by the continent's combination of large resources with a strong market potential due to a young population.

Also the engagement of China, and in general the BRICS actions, especially by the mid-2000s, when the economy faced serious difficulties in the United States and the Eurozone, has been a significant addition to the process of deepening and broadening Africa's integration in the global economy. The more Africa's potential domestic market was rediscovered by private investors from across the world, the more upgraded the new status of the continent has become.

The dynamism of African "frontier," which the book highlights in its various parts and particularly in the last chapter, is thus about foreign engagement that has enhanced connectivity and markets defragmentation. All these factors have led towards challenging conventional wisdoms and images of Africa, including the simmering intention for a new scramble, in which Africans will have no voice in the international arena. As the author has thoroughly elaborated, although China is predominantly driven by demands for energy and raw materials, the Chinese massive engagement in Africa has contributed to avert the tendency of diminishing Africa's role in global politics, while making a vivid contribution to sustaining favourable terms of trades between manufacturers and raw materials; it has utterly helped to transform Africa into an arena or a frontier, in which new strategies and paradigms are being tested to an extent thus far unseen in history.

In this very well narrated presentation, the author analysis the indicators for the claims made above, encompassing the ascending role of the new global actors as well as the declining tendency of the major traditional actors and the impact this would have on the economy and politics of the continent, which is actually a major field of on-going debates. Above all, he addresses Africa's new status, the indicators of which include such events as the increase in official visits by non-western actors, the expansion of diplomatic representation across the continent, and the multiplicity of high level public diplomatic initiatives, which were helpful in reconfiguring the global claim of the continent's new status. On top of this, as the author confirms, series of summit meetings that have been conducted in various parts of the South, mainly the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation, held every other year since 2006, is seen as having a major impact on setting the tone in the global environment.

The analysis casts a critical light on major Western actors by emphasising how this ongoing stream of initiatives contrast with the mood in the transatlantic West and East, whose foreign ministers laboured to reduce their diplomatic presence on the continent for most of the 2000s, since in the United States as in most European capitals, Africa was merely seen through the lens of securing the frontiers of the West devising a policy of the global war on terrorism. The author seems to have been concerned with the ineptness of the policies of the West regarding Africa, during bygone times, which may now need serious adjustment. Concerning this point, his observation indicates that it was only in 2014, during the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, that the Obama administration appeared to wake up to the untapped potential and business opportunities of the African continent.

Daniel Bach is concerned about the relations between development and politics in the African region as well as its uneasy relations with the West. In this process of investigation he provides a more tranquil, less publicised evaluation of the process of transformation and its outcomes thus far, suitable to our current era. This should be used to pose some fundamental questions such as: Did the last two decades or so represent a reform or revolution? Was the whole process in general a success story or, as some may say, a catastrophe? In addition, why do countries in the post-Cold War era differ so considerably in their

political, economic, legal perception, and social achievement? Why do some countries descend into open civil and military conflict while others avoid major turmoil? What led to revive the metaphor of the new “scramble” for Africa? Why is Africa poor, marginalised, and portrayed by mainstream media as a region unable to meaningfully interact with the rest of the world? The publication under review offers a sophisticated explanation that reflects on all of the issues indicated above.

This publication is a significant contribution to the literature about African studies. Its content represents a heightened interest to students and scholars of African studies in the fields of economics, politics and history as well as to policy makers and researchers of international relations, including inter-regional studies of various scopes. Its attraction and strength emanates from plausible research and reasoning that vigorously challenge a bankrupted vision of purporting prejudice that tries to depict Africa as a “continent with no history and culture,” a “distant abroad,” a “significant other,” and the like, which culminated during the 1990s with the notion that treated Africa’s status in international relations as an irrelevant area of study, a pervasive idea declaring that Africa’s existence depends on the extent of foreign control imposed upon it. Nevertheless, as the author has insightfully challenged this notion, Africa has since become a more recognised subject of the international system. As the author highlights, Africa has become a source of theoretical and conceptual innovation for the contemporary discipline of international relations.

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**Bischoff, Paul-Henri, Aning, Kwesi and Acharya, Amitav (eds.). 2016. *Africa in Global International Relations: Emerging Approaches to Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 180 pages.**

The publication under review has been authored by a crew of eleven contributors, namely: Paul-Henri Bischoff, Kwesi Aning, Amitav Acharya, Nancy Annan, Lesely Blaauw, Heldi Hudson, Candice Moore, Tim Murithi, Ahmed Ali Salem, Gerrie Swart and Jo-Ansie van Wyk, of whom the first three are its editors. Needless to say, each of the authors

is a renowned scholar, versatile and knowledgeable in the fields of International Relations (IR), Political Science, Sociology, and African Studies. This crew of well equipped authors set out to investigate why Africa has been marginalised in IR research and theory, while contemplating on how to overcome this drawback and addressing the issue in the context of the emergent Global International Relations paradigm.

The authors sought to contribute to the process of producing “a new paradigm of international relations” theory (IRT) that is more global, open, inclusive and able to capture the voices and experiences of both the Western and the non-Western worlds. Nonetheless, they place emphasis on Africa, and its future, given the continent’s uneasy relation with the Western world. They claim that a new IR theory, which is of relevance for Africa, needs to be “more inclusive, intellectually negotiated and holistically steeped in the African context.” In this extraordinarily innovative volume, each of the authors takes a critical look at the existing IR paradigms and offers a unique perspective that relies on the African experience.

The publication represents an advancement of the knowledge production on Africa. It is a significant addition to the literature of non-Western IR theories and to the idea of a Global IR discipline. It exhibits a great departure from the Euro-American-centric, inept field of IR and the theories of heretofore, which do not give a holistic view of the world. To the contrary, the publication employs an approach compatible to the development stage of the human polity in the present century. It claims that the world is in the process of an irreversible awakening from the single Western dominated one-way practice, which is here ever since the Treaty of Westphalia, to the unfolding two-way-street practice, which is in the making to encompass those beyond the West.

The publication under review reflects effectively the high intellectual qualities that crafted it. It is highly rated and can be very much recommended. Consequently, one may confirm it as significant and timely to anyone concerned with the future of global relational politics and the changing status of developing regions. The fact that it embarks on the case of Africa, and the growing representation of Africa’s agency in global international relations makes the publication



unique. While focusing on Africa, the authors herald the readiness of conditions to generate a new paradigm that is able to explain the relevance of the world beyond the West in the field of contemporary global international relations and politics.

The work reflects extraordinary courage; it breaks with traditional approaches. Thus, it confronts the impact of impunity, opportunism, complacency and cowardice of current days. It seizes the opportunity the current moment has offered, rather than unwisely squander it. It is not exaggeration to say that the publication is a critical voice from the non-Western world that contends to reflect on the deficiencies of the contemporary IR discipline and traditional theories that are obsessed solely with great power politics. It conveys a relevant message to those at the top of the world order, or the elites of any country, who are willing to defend a bankrupted paradigm through biased knowledge. So to say, academia and the elite of any country, sitting at the top of intellectually suppressed races, stateless nations and the real misery of the non-West, recognise their own situation in others and will try to stop change elsewhere lest it hit themselves.

The present publication reaffirms what is observable on the ground. It implies how the old order and its corresponding systems refuse to give way to the new one in which power is probably better shared with the rising non-Western actors. The prevalence of the latter would mean the end of the domination of Western-based IR and the emergence of a fairer global political and economic environment, or an order of social justice with corresponding systems, workable to all the actors, West-East or North-South alike.

All its well interplaying nine chapters converge in unison on the rising African agency in global international relations; they so do by invoking a different approach of knowledge production on Africa, which is purportedly contrary to the mainstream approaches. The work envisages a new pathway, a departure from the one-way-street, mainstream orthodoxy towards the all-inclusive direction of genuine multiplicity. One of the outcomes of its approach is that it has shown the deficiencies of contemporary IR theories, such as non-inclusiveness, which is justifiable as related to Africa in particular and to those beyond the West in general. It also makes valuable suggestions that may help to correct the downsides and to revitalise

IR theories and practice to be really global in scope. It is thus timely, critical and relevant.

In chapter 1, the editors reflect on the narrowness of the Euro-American-centric framing of mainstream IR theories that International Relations has seen thus far. In this collective chapter they argue that currently dominant IR theories, namely: realism, liberalism, and partly constructivism deeply associate with the intellectual tradition of the West, therefore they serve the agency claim of the West, while devoting scant attention to the non-Western world. In what they call “Global International Relations” they dare to go beyond the West versus the Rest divide and develop a broader platform that is inclusive to the whole spectrum of IR scholars from around the world. They suggest a world of global international relations that gives centre stage to regions, envision the relevance of an African agency to the study of the marginalisation of Africa in IRT, and indicate how this new approach is important to illustrate the “regional world” perspective. In the rest of their collective chapter, the editors set up a platform for discussion by summarising the consecutive chapters of their fellow contributors.

In the next chapter, Ahmed Ali Salem emphasises the fact that theories and paradigms of international relations that emerge in the non-Western world, including Africa, are not considered a part of mainstream international relation theories, even though regions like Africa can provide original contributions to the discipline. Therefore, the claim that IRT has universal validity falls short of practice when applied to the world beyond the West. He highlights that mainstream IR approaches are not capable to explain a range of events that associate particularly with Africa’s IR. He explains this deficiency by tracing some real examples from North Africa to the realist and constructivist approaches. The author contends that in order for IRT to become truly universal, it needs to enrich itself by African epistemologies and experiences.

In chapter 3, Heidi Hudson examines how Africa’s agential role as a legitimate producer of theory is downplayed. The author contends how Africa in relation to gender has solely become a source of case and political studies in the application of mainstream IRT, unable to come up with a theory of its own. In her view the politics of every-day needs to be theorised in order to be able to provide a truer description

of the world to ordinary people. This would help to get rid of the dual inferiority of Africa and African feminism in the face of conventional IR, thus creating the necessary conditions for IR in Africa to assert its agency. She suggests that “making feminist sense of IR in Africa can serve to reveal latent [...] theoretical contributions and agency.”

In the following chapter, Candice Moore highlights the issue of inclusivity and its centrality for Global IR. She discusses the necessity of incorporating authentic voices from outside the United States (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), in order to develop an inclusive approach regarding research activities and the process of knowledge production in IR. She contends that this approach would enhance a greater reflectivism of the world beyond the West, while broadening the scope of the discipline further beyond the Westphalian model of states. As she claims, this would contribute towards getting rid of Euro-centrism that has continued to trek deeper into the twenty-first century, while inducing new and compatible theory, worthy of the label Global.

In chapter 5, Lesley Blaauw argues that realist definitions of sovereignty, such as their conception of great powers or high politics, barely account for the agency shown by African states in international relations. According to him, the fact that African states have shown opposition, for instance, to US policies of invoking raw force rather than enhance security through peaceful means, from the enactment of counter terrorism legislation all the way to opposition to the war in Iraq and the conflict in Libya, shows African states challenging the central premise of realism, i.e., that great power politics alone is central to political life in international relations. African states, though relatively weak, have shown a deviance in their international relations, posing challenges that mainly defy the conventional neo-realist security theorem. In the economic domain, too, most African countries have shown a deviance in the face of unfavourable conditions of major international financial institutions in which they are not shareholders. They rather invoke the available alternative centres for trade and aid, which contributes to an increasing agency shown by African states in multilateral and regional negotiations. This implies that “African states are no longer compelled to accept the terms of North-South trade and investment proposed by the industrialized states and their major international lending institutions.” The author

claims that the actions of African states, coloured by deviance, may be better understood by employing the theory of soft balancing.

In the subsequent chapter, Jo-Ansie van Wyk discusses significant contributions that Africa has made to international relations. According to her, to the glaring African contributions belong taking the lead in the international campaign against apartheid, its capacity to act as a balancer between the West and the East during the Cold War period, a capacity which is evident even today since it is doing the same with regard to the interactions between the West and China. Africa is a declared nuclear-free zone, which has huge significance for world peace. Africa refused to host the United States' Africa Command (AFRICOM); this has had some symbolic implication of impeding the US's practice of militarising the globe, which appears to be a major threat in itself to peace. African agency is also discernable in South-South groupings such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as well as IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa). Moreover, Africa has evolved a powerful slogan, asserting "African solutions for African problems," that resonates around the continent and beyond. This indicates the continent's determination to tackle issues that relate to the continent on its own, without the interference of external powers, for whatever pretext, since the latter possess less experience regarding issues that are specific to Africa. As the author states, Africa's contribution to the study of IR is significant. An area that needs more research and further development is a unique African approach to IR, one that is independent and capable enough to question Western ideas and contribute to broaden the scope of the discipline and its practice.

In chapter 7, Gerrie Swart embarks on the issue of the normative agency of the African Union by tracing the African Union's agency to the recent case of Libya, in order to answer the question whether the AU responded adequately to the Western powers' intervention that downplayed its legitimate normative agency to its natural region. Whatever the pretext for the intervention may be, events on the ground have shown how African agency in the context of African solutions for African problems that feed into a pan-African ontological framework for the study of IR had been blatantly seduced, without any consideration for the regional efforts whatsoever. The author presents the case that the continental body sought to secure a peaceful resolution to the crisis based on its proposed "AU Roadmap

for a political solution to the crisis in Libya,” which informed the core basis of its response to and intervention in Libya. Nevertheless, the West’s disregard of solutions to the conflict proposed by the AU was seen in Africa and in the larger South as overriding the purpose of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973, which did not authorise the implementation of a regime change agenda that proceeded with the NATO air strikes. This practice may be seen as a precedent, geared to ascertain Western dominance in the new century. The author claims that this issue was the first major test to be confronted by the agency of the AU ever since its inception in 2002, casting doubt on the continental body’s ability to enforce and uphold its, as the author puts it, “lofty normative values.”

In chapter 8, Kwesi Aning and Nancy Annan analyse how IR perceives Africa currently, that Africa with its weak states are seen as a problem that needs to be resolved, despite the continent’s glaring contributions to the practice of international relations. According to the authors, the deficiency lies in the conception of the discipline itself, since it solely heeds great powers as the only ones that make a difference in the global international environment. They argue that this perception needs to be adjusted. The authors develop this notion by focussing their analysis on Mali. By dissecting the ongoing Malian conflict, the authors present the issue of Africa’s position in IR, the gradual rise of African agency, and the process through which the international community “securitized” the Malian crisis and located it within the “war on terror” narrative that has its own downside. The authors contend that as we progress deeper into the twenty-first century, our expectation about the Africans taking ownership of their continent should ascend. African crises would barely find solutions if the wider international community fails to include the contributions African states and organisations have to offer. In recognising Africa’s role in the international system, IR discourses must give an opportunity for African voices to be heard. In this process, if African scholars from both the diaspora and the mainland convince themselves to give up their complacency with the mainstream, and focus on African audiences, this would contribute, the authors claim, to an understanding of current and future African IR academics that is aided by perceptual change.

In the final chapter, Tim Murithi presents a case for bridging the gap between the pan-African school and the dominant theories of contemporary IR, including: realism, the English school, liberalism and partly constructivism that seeks to bridge the traditional and the reflective theories, all of which draw their intellectual heritage solely from the West. The pan-African school is presented as underpinning the continent's approach to IR as a discipline. The author contends that in terms of bridging the gap between pan-Africanism and the above-mentioned Western IRT, the pan-African school is assumed to contribute to the development of a new paradigm of IRT that is really global, open, inclusive and capable to encompass the voice and experiences of the African geographical landscape. Thus, it is suggested that it is timely to converge on a research agenda investigating the link between pan-Africanism and IRT currently at work. Murithi emphasises that pan-Africanism must find a space through engagement, in which it will render its contribution visible and be able to change the use of the existing inadequate conceptions and approaches of the mainstream IR discipline in the face of Africa and those beyond the West. This implies the creation of a platform for serious intellectual interactions and exchanges leading towards an unbiased knowledge production and dissemination about Africa that reflects the lived realities of its citizenry. A truly Global IR as a discipline can refine itself by the benefits of incorporating the African vantage point of looking at the world out there.

In general, one may conclude that the authors have effectively framed and realised their efforts of inducing a knowledge production that will help to enable the African voice being heard in the context of Global International Relations. The reason why Africa has been and is being marginalised in mainstream IR is a subject too complex to undertake in a book of 180 pages. Nevertheless, the authors have managed to provide an impressive presentation of the topic they set out to explore. The publication is the outcome of a long-term cooperation between the authors that emerged at a conference and went all the way through to produce the present volume. We hope to read similar publications in the near future. In fact, there is no magic bullet, in the book at hand, regarding the realisation of their project that the authors are ready to sell. Nevertheless, the overall perception of the reviewed publication is, in my view, very positive. The publication presents

tremendous progress in explaining the African context of agency in the contemporary study of International Relations.

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**Vlastimil Fiala. 2015. *Politické stranictví v západní Africe (Senegal a Gambie). Political Partisanship in Western Africa (Senegal and Gambia)*. Hradec Králové: University of Hradec Králové, Philosophical Faculty. ISBN 978-80-7405-380-1, 200 pages, Czech language**

Within the series of Vlastimil Fiala's studies analysing African politics the skilled author has done a good deal of work when describing in detail political parties and election results in several African, mainly Lusophone countries. This time he has dedicated his attention to two neighbouring West African countries with different official languages, but a similar geopolitical orientation. As both Senegal and Gambia have gone through complicated and turbulent times recently, it is extremely useful to research their political organisms in order to look for conclusions and solutions concerning the broader West African drift to democracy depending on the demographic, economic and international situation. The monograph is a part of the grant research project No. 407/09/0387 "Political Parties of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania."

The Introduction (pp. 5–9) presents the research scheme referring particularly to recent and contemporary political development in both countries. The first part, titled *The Political Partisanship of Senegal* (pp. 13–116), covers the reasonable majority of the space. This part is divided into two steps. Firstly, the author gives an account of the political evolution of Senegal before independence, in the period of 1960–1966, in the one party state period of 1966–1974, in the multiparty system with one dominant party period of 1974–2000, and in the last multiparty system period after 2000 (pp. 21–66). Secondly, he analyses the evolution of the Senegalese political partisanship in four historical periods from the period before independence to the present times (pp. 70–83). The following Overview of Senegalese Political Parties (pp. 84–114) characterises all features, ideological

orientations, intentions and roles of individual parties within the Senegalese political system and its evolution in detail.

A similar composition can be found in the second part, titled *The Political Partisanship of Gambia* (pp. 118–190). The Political Evolution of Gambia (pp. 122–147) is divided into four sections: before independence, during the First Republic (1965–1994), during the military regime (1994–1996) and during the Second Republic (from 1996 on). This is followed by the chapter called The Evolution of the Gambian Political Partisanship (pp. 148–163). The Overview of the Gambian Political Parties (pp. 164–188) is purposefully divided into two sections dealing with the extinct political parties and the political parties of the Second Republic, respectively.

The main contribution of this work consists in answering fundamental questions concerning the social, age, gender, ethnic and other substance of individual political parties, the programming, organisational structure and financing thereof as well as some cleavages influencing the political parties development and practices. The facts expressed in the Conclusion (pp. 189–190) are substantially enriching our knowledge of Senegalese and Gambian political life that thus far have been insufficiently researched.

The clear expression in this well-thought out work is slightly disturbed by small errors in some names (Sierra-Leona instead of Sierra Leone, p. 6) and in the French orthography (e.g., Goreé on p. 21, 23 instead of the correct Gorée). The spelling for the Senegalese president cannot be both Senghor and Sénghor as indicated on p. 26; “aittour” on p. 56 should be “autour.” The terrorist group which assassinated Babacar Sèye (not Babcar Seye) had certainly a French name, not the “People’s Army” mentioned in English on p. 47. “La via politique” (p. 195) should be “La vie politique”, and so on. “Pular” (p. 12) is the language of the Fula people, not the ethnic synonym. Such problems are probably due to the prevalence of English and the lack of French sources. Some of them would have been welcome to support both the history (e.g., Baila Wane, *Le Conseil colonial du Sénégal, 1920–1946*, Paris, 1978) and the personalities (Babacar Ndiaye and Waly Ndiaye, *Présidents et ministres de la République du Sénégal*, 2nd edition, Dakar, 2006) of Senegalese politics. Also the English spelling and orthography has not been perfect all the time, see e.g., “Wahington” (p. 194) or “The End of en



Era” instead of the correct “an Era” on p. 195. Perhaps, the roots of the separatist Casamance movement which affects Senegalese politics would have deserved a more profound explanation. In general, such trifles cannot change the firm opinion that Vlastimil Fiala’s annotated work is a valuable enlargement of our knowledge of African politics.

Jan Klíma

**Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová and Seyni Moumouni (eds.).**  
**2014. *Voices of Africa’s Pasts*. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 164 pages.**

There are many reasons to read and discuss this book offering eight contributions presented to the International Conference on *Sources for African history in African languages written in Arabic (Ajami), African and Latin scripts in Eastern and Southern Africa* that was held in Maputo in April 2012. The conference represented a step forward of the “Fontes Historiae Africanae Project” of the *Union Académique Internationale* based in Brussels. The project, started in 1960s, evolved through several shifts of emphasis and patronage to the current situation, in which the responsibility has been taken over by the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the directorship by the first editor of the book under review, Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová. She tells the essentials of the story in the amply informative Introduction. Information on the project can be also retrieved from the website.

The book presents a great deal of fresh items of knowledge regarding Africa’s written patrimony from pre-colonial and colonial times. A considerable part of the papers deal with manuscripts in Arabic or Ajami, i.e., in African languages transcribed in Arabic script. In this respect, rich information on the available but still unexplored documents in West African languages (Hausa, Fulfulde, Songhay-Zarma, Gonja, Mampurle and Wolof) is provided by the co-editor of the volume, Seyni Moumouni. In addition to his general presentation of the importance of this wide but little known corpus of texts for historians, he pays special attention to the manuscripts preserved in his motherland Niger at the University of Niamey.

The respective chapter suggests a typology and chronological evolution of dated manuscripts (Islamic, Arab and African) and gives a detailed

account and analysis of some of them representing what the author terms a “palaeographic corpus.” This seems to be a promising step towards further research in this field, since a large part of the assembled manuscripts have not yet been analysed in detail. The Department of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts of the *Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines* in Niamey has been preserving a collection of over 4,000 documents in Arabic script written by African authors from a wide range of mostly Western Sudanic countries since the advent of Islam to these regions until today. An important challenge is the research of their dating.

Another kind of cultural links connecting Africa’s Sudanic belt with Arabic culture can be studied in manifold materials of popular imagination reflecting connections between them in the past history. In this field, Zuzana Gažáková (from Bratislava) has contributed rich results of her research on the famous *Sírat Sayf ibn Dhí Yazan*, which for centuries served as the founding legend of the Sayfuwa dynasty of the Kanem-Bornu sultans, governing the Chad area from the Middle Ages until 1846. Gažáková’s research covers the entire range of ramifications of the *síra* from Yemen and Ethiopia over large parts of Islamised Northern and Sudanic Africa in both historical discourse and popular narratives.

In accordance with the goal of the conference, however, the main regional emphasis was on Eastern and Southern Africa. This is clearly manifest in the regional focus of five contributions. Two of them deal with the use of the Arabic script in situations, writings and languages where this phenomenon may seem really surprising. This script is well known as a medium of the rich heritage of literature, in particular poetry, in Swahili, but less so as a means of communication with Africans used by the Portuguese in Mozambique. Liazzat Bonate (from Seoul National University), who is a pioneer in this line of studies, presents three letters in Ajami-type Swahili written by women and a non-Muslim African man to the Portuguese colonial authorities during the 1890s. We also learn that this was the concluding period of this type of correspondence because the “scramble for Africa” made the Portuguese abandon the Arabic script and local language for the official usage of the colonial power. An equally surprising issue is shown by Muhammad Haron from South Africa, whose chapter deals with an Arabic-Afrikaans text on ritual prayer. The combination of these two

languages in the final output of Ajami script is an interesting feature of the religious culture of the Cape Muslim community.

The last but not least set of contributions provides fresh information on non-Muslim sources. Demeke Berhane (founder of the Manuscript and Documentation Department at the Addis Ababa University) presents a survey of the dispersion of Ethiopian literary heritage all over the world, mainly in Europe and the USA. From the chapter, accompanied by coloured reproductions of specimens of Ethiopian texts and pictures, information can be learned not only about the present-day whereabouts of the precious codices and scrolls but also about the damaging policy of the once post-imperial Därg and Mengistu régimes. Historical manuscripts and artefacts were sold abroad regardless of their value for the country itself. Quite another type of sources is discussed in the chapter by Bernard Liesegang, a specialist (*inter alia*) in oral history. His study offers an analysis of the historical knowledge obtainable from Nguni praise poems, once composed in the mid 19th century, as preserved and recited in our day and age. The concluding contribution in the volume is from the editor Pawlikova-Vilhanová. It deals with early historical writing in Luganda, paying special attention to the trend enhancing Buganda's *ekitiibwa* (prestige, honour). At the same time, it shows how African historiography, in this case in Luganda, was conceptualising the past in its own situation between orality and literacy and in the face of the challenge of colonial rule and Western cultural impact.

On the whole, this volume deserves sincere welcome. Rich in new and well-presented bits of reliable information, well edited and published on high quality paper, it clearly reveals the diversity of sources that are still waiting to be identified and exploited for the study of African pre-colonial and colonial history.

Luboš Kropáček

**Elonga Mboyo, Jean-Pierre. 2015. *Africa Through Structuration Theory-Ntu*. Bamenda: Langaa Research and Publishing CIG.**

This work relies on the premise that Africa is stagnating socially, economically and politically. This chronic stagnation is due to the inadequacy of existing structures and the want of the ability of African leaders to successfully manage the continent. Therefore, Elonga Mboyo proposes a theoretical and hybrid paradigm of analysis aiming at overcoming the evoked stagnation. This paradigm includes the sociological theory of the duality of structures as developed by Anthony Giddens, and the African ontology of *Ntu*. Giddens's theory serves as a framework for the conceptualisation of African reality, while the *Ntu* ontology develops as the philosophical background for an appropriate interpretation of African development

The book is structured into five chapters. The first chapter stands on the idea that African intrinsic values associated with precolonial Africa got lost in the colonial era and were alienated in the postcolonial period. As a result, Africa developed on account of Western-centred frameworks, particularly with regard to fields such as education, economy and political leadership (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 4). For Elonga Mboyo, it is not necessary to excavate African lost traditional values in order to create an African-centred paradigm able to improve African systems of beliefs and ideals, including African-centred education and political leadership. According to him, the most important task consists of taking into consideration the interaction between both structure and agency in the shaping of African reality. Thus, he regards Giddens's theory of the duality of structures as an illuminating perspective.

The British sociologist, Giddens, rejects the dichotomization of structure and agency underlying theories such as functionalism and structuralism. According to him, the former places the system of needs over and above the needs of individuals, while the latter insists on structural determinations. He calls to keep in mind that the urgent task of social theory today is not the elimination of the subject neither the consecration of structuralist thought, but on the contrary, the recovery of the subject without lapsing into the imperialism of the subject against structures, and vice versa. He thinks of social environment in terms of the ““duality of structures””, which refers

to the interplay between both structure and agency in the shaping of social reality (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 15). In this respect, it can be noted that, for Elonga Mboyo, the contribution of Giddens' theory to African stagnation consists of outlining of African structures as well as of ruling leaders in both ways: African bankruptcy and its potential recovery.

The second chapter deals with the relation between structure and agency, particularly on account of trust as a central value to each of them. This chapter argues that the claim for primacy of one over the other can be viewed as revolving around the issue of trust that each of them assumes and assures to the other. For Elonga Mboyo, structure can be defined as "hard material, patterning mechanism that has a life of its own and governs a series of other transient and individual happenings. It is the immutable stability that does not only transcend all but also within which everything fits" (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 32).

This definition of structure is essentially operative, and subsequently it allows to take into consideration a variety of approaches. Giddens' singularity consists of identifying some values that the concept has brought "including the recognition of a temporal dimension within structuration [which] represents the foundation of the theory of social reproduction which links to the recursive properties that the structures or 'virtual systems' have come to be" (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 33). In addition, the analysis of the value of cultural objects, and the idea that nation states can be counted as cultural objects including their subsequent cultural value can also be considered as part of Giddens' contributions.

The concept of agency relies on the premise that social interactions are not a pre-determined straightjacket for individuals to fit into. This concept implies individual commitment, a voluntarist subject that can lead to "unconditional respect for dignity and autonomy of all individuals by virtue of their common humanity" (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 36). For Giddens, agency does not represent the global sum of single actions, but a continuous flow of conducts. This implies that individuals are trusted to configure structures and not the opposite. Now, the question is how to reconcile this observation with African traditions which, according to various scholars including Mbiti and Tempels, champion structure over agency. For Elonga Mboyo,

despite their attention to traditional rules, individual Africans “made deliberate individual choices that would have helped or failed the community. Likewise, the community would have set rules that helped or failed the individuals” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 37).

Standing on the previous observation, it can be reminded that the issue at stake is the winning and losing of trust between both structure and agency. These concepts have respective analytical values and they refer to different ontological perspectives. Nevertheless, they cannot be viewed as dismissive of each other. They must be recognised as such and any attempt to ignore or abolish one of them is simply futile. Thus, trust can “be defined as the probability that he [structures or individuals] will perform an action that is beneficial (...) is higher enough for us to consider in engaging some form of cooperation with him” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 38). Probability is the result of a process that applies to various domains including the educational system, health care structures, media, and government policies, to remind only a few. This process builds up slowly and it can dissipate quickly under the impact of various factors, such as political crisis, economic stagnation, etc.

Chapter three concentrates on ontological and methodological issues in order to restore trust in structure and agency –social interactions – across political, educational, health and cultural fields in Africa. For Elonga Mboyo, ontology is the starting point of all research. It can be considered as a part of social reality. Taking a stand on Giddens’ theory, he rejects a sharp dualism between objectivism and subjectivism, structuralism and constructivism, and he subsequently asserts the duality of structures (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 57–58). On account of this assertion, he claims the existence of an African ontology that he describes as both a “minefield” and a “way of acknowledging Africa and the traditions of African thought” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 59–60).

African ontology can be viewed as expanding beyond geographic limits of the African continent and including people who are not black. For being obscured for several reasons including, for example, colonisation and racial segregation, this thought developed in terms of a search for identity and the struggle against domination and (white) supremacy (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 60–61). This social reality characterises the *structuration theory -ntu* which does not insist on the

excavation of the African past, but rests on the idea that “Africa and Africans are not robotically static but rather dynamic agents capable of making conventions around values that they press into perpetuity” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 61–62). The use of expressions such as “force,” “force-beings,” “*Ubuntu*,” and related concepts with the *ntu* root, constitutes, for Elonga Mboyo, another way of conceptualising the evoked struggle (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 62–63).

The methodology focuses on scientific inquiry, as it explores potentialities and limitations of particular techniques or procedures. The question is “how do we go about enquiring about knowledge” and the restoration of trust in a post-conflict and post-dictatorship Africa. Despite the variety of contexts and trajectories of African people, Elonga Mboyo thinks that the structure remains both the medium and the outcome of this change’s process. Once more, he outlines the need for cooperation between structure and agency. “The African experience of agency still has some way to go before we can hope for not only the realisation of an authentic African ontology through the struggle for cooperation between structure and agency but also the production of knowledge in various fields” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 70).

Chapter four analyses the process of “double de-contextualisation.” Elonga Mboyo makes use of the concept of “de-contextualisation” in two different ways: first, he refers to the situation in which a practice or practioner are taken out of their physical environment. Secondly, this idea is also used to refer to the fact that “a theory is taken out of its original context, not simply by someone wanting to grasp it and in the process coming up with incorrect interpretations or distortions (...) but mainly by a researcher, who uses a given theory on a separate set of people or practitioners who do not constitute the original constituency from which the theory (...) was derived in the first place” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 79).

In addition to the context of this work, Elonga Mboyo observes that the “double de-contextualisation” process can be used as a strategy, by African people, to subvert colonial and postcolonial forms of domination (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 82). It also contributes to tackle Eurocentric mimicry as well as to promote African-centred paradigms of knowledge, development and emancipation.

Chapter five represents a case study of the duality of structures in Africa. It concentrates on the experience of the system of higher education in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This chapter rests on the premise that higher education is “an essential component for nations to be competitive in the knowledge society and meet environmental challenges” (Elonga Mboyo 2016: 101). The DRC’s higher education is divided into three categories: universities, higher technical institutes, and higher pedagogical institutes. On account of the process of liberalisation, almost a half of the existing educational institutions have been privatised. The quality of education suffers from a deep erosion with regard to agreed international educational standards. This erosion is due to factors such as the want of competitive structures (efficient policies and material support) as well as the lack of professionalism on behalf of Congolese teachers.

Once more, structures and agency are both involved. It is worth observing here that Elonga Mboyo does not go further to specify how important the responsibility is of each of them. He gives the impression to admit that both “structure and agency” are right and mistaken at times. In doing so, he unfortunately occults social power relationship and its subsequent domination and exploitation.

The work of Elonga Mboyo is a real example of interdisciplinary thinking. It confronts, on the same topic, achievements of modern sociology, ontology, and the science of education. It can be outlined that Elonga Mboyo clearly expresses his preference for sociology, particularly his passion for the theory of the duality of structures as developed by Giddens. Otherwise, by doing so, Elonga Mboyo fails to explore and to highlight the very African contribution in the struggle against domination and supremacy. The use he makes of the *Ntu* notion – which is fundamental to “African” ontology – seems somehow limited as it passes over burning and fruitful debates generated by Tempels’ publication on Bantou’s philosophy. The same observation is still valid with regard to the concept of *Ubuntu* for which he also seems parsimonious concerning its social and political implications.

Summing up, I note that Elonga Mboyo’s work is interesting as a theoretical essay on current African challenges, particularly with regard to social development, education, and the management of African states. It goes beyond nativism philosophies as well as claims



## REVIEWS

for both interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches to the African struggle for emancipation. Therefore it is worth reading and thinking over.

Albert Kasanda



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