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La 'ruée' vers l'Afrique et l'impact sur la main d'oeuvre

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Résumé

Le déclin des économies africaines au cours des années 70 et 80 a été suivi d'une reprise de croissance dans plusieurs pays au cours des années 90. Cette reprise fut stimulée par une nouvelle recherche de marchés et un 'nouveau partage' des ressources naturelles africaines (pétrole et minéraux surtout) entre les investisseurs et partenaires commerciaux traditionnels du continent comme les États-Unis et les autres pays occidentaux, mais aussi entre la Chine, l'Inde et les autres pays du Sud en cours d'industrialisation. La main d'œuvre africaine a contribué à rehausser les revenus moyens dans certains pays, et pourtant les travailleurs ont été largement marginalisés de ces bénéfices. Une grande partie des investissements sont concentrés dans la production intense en capital des secteurs du pétrole et des minéraux, qui est organisée sous forme d'enclaves et qui détourne la main d'œuvre de la production et du commerce locaux. Finalement, l'expansion du capital Sud-Africain à la grandeur du continent fait planer la menace de reproduction d'une hiérarchie gestionnaire radicalisée. Ce nouveau partage se caractérise généralement par l'afflux d'investissements intenses en capitaux dans l'exploitation et l'extraction des ressources naturelles africaines; il semble réduire les perspectives d'emploi pour la main d'œuvre africaine et saper à la base leurs moyens de subsistance; il repose lourdement sur les ententes entre les sociétés étrangères ou les institutions internationales et les élites africaines rapaces; et il importe de nouvelles formes de despotisme envers les travailleurs, particulièrement au sein des enclaves. Une façon de progresser pour les syndicats et les collectivités désavantagées serait de s'engager dans la lutte à plus large échelle pour la démocratie et pour la responsabilisation politique et financière des élites.

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The 'New Scramble' and Labour in Africa

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Abstract

After the decline in African economies during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a return to growth in many countries during the 1990s. This was stimulated by a 'new scramble' for Africa's commodities (notably oil and minerals) and markets among not only the US and other western countries, the continent's traditional trade and investment partners, but China, India and other industrializing countries of the South. Although promoting higher average incomes in some countries, African labour has been largely excluded from the benefits of growth. Much investment in oil and minerals is capital intensive and centered around enclave production; meanwhile, the scramble for African markets is displacing labour in local production and trade, while the expansion of South African capital throughout the continent threatens a replication of a radicalized managerial hierarchy. Overall, the new scramble is characterized by the inflow of capital intensive investment for the exploitation and extraction of African natural resources; appears to be diminishing the prospects of employment for African labour and undermining the foundation of African livelihoods; rests heavily on engagements between foreign corporations and international institutions with predatory African elites; and, especially within enclaves, is importing new forms of labour despotism. One way forward must be for trade unions and disadvantaged communities to engage in the wider struggle for democracy and the political and financial accountability for elites.

Introduction

Over two decades ago, Bill Freund (1988: 139) complained that a gulf had arisen between discussions of economic development in Africa and the literature on labour. He offered this comment against the backcloth of a dramatic decline in African economies, their failure to draw more people into industrial mass production and an expansion of the informal economy as a source of survival. This was combined with an awkward mix of the decline of migrant earnings from rural areas,

the deterioration of agriculture and the growing reliance of African populations upon cash-acquired goods. When Freund was writing, pessimism about African prospects abounded, climaxing in the depiction of Africa by *The Economist* (13 May 2000) as "the hopeless continent" – despite the hopes that the wave of democratization that had occurred throughout the continent since the late 1980s would be accompanied by greater economic freedoms and better growth.

Within a few years, the mood about Africa in development circles had changed dramatically. To be sure, growth prospects remain hampered by major instances of civil war, political strife, autocratic repression, democratic fallback and – in some countries – economic collapse (cf Chad, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia and Zimbabwe etc). Against this, Africa was by the late 1990s and the early 2000s attracting more global investment than at any time since the 1960s; there was an improved flow of exports, more international focus on Africa as a market and a modest increase in the average per capita income.

The higher growth which was being recorded in many African countries was due, directly or indirectly, to the increasing global demand for the continent's resources: notably for oil, but also for gas, minerals, and other energy sources. This was driven, above all, by the sudden appearance of China as a world economic actor, whose dramatic burst of late industrialization fuelled a global upswing. Whereas Africa was formerly regarded during the immediate post-Cold War era as an undisputed sphere of Western influence, the domination of the continent by the major Western powers was now being challenged not just by China, but by other emerging industrial actors such as India.

This changing situation was widely portrayed as having set off "a new scramble for Africa", reminiscent of the high handed antics of the European imperial powers which divided Africa up between themselves in the penultimate decade of the 19th Century. Often, to be sure, the imagery which was evoked was poorly grounded in an understanding of either the past or present dynamics of imperialism. Nonetheless, the idea of "the new scramble" usefully portrays the drama, suddenness and ruthlessness of what appeared to constitute a major advance in Africa's incorporation into the global capitalist economy.

The recent lurch of the global economy into recession throws the immediate prospects for continuing growth in Africa

into question. In the short term, it will lead to a fall in demand for Africa's raw materials, limit foreign markets for the continent's products, hurt access to finance, reduce the amount of aid, and reduce the inflow of remittances from Africans living overseas. However, rather than negating the idea of 'the new scramble', the current recession merely underlines its conforming to the underlying continuities of Africa's insertion into the global economy. First, Africa remains overwhelmingly a supplier of raw materials, demand for which will fall or rise according to the dynamics of global capitalism; second, shifts in the patterns of global production and demand (to China, India etc) involve changes in the composition of the continent's patterns of export and production (notably the continent's emergence as a significant oil producer); and third, and this is the particular concern here, while a post-recession resumption of the 'new scramble' will present major opportunities for both capital and African elites, this will nonetheless be founded very largely on a continuing exclusion of African labour from the development equation. It is this last issue which constitutes the concern of this paper.

The New Scramble for Africa

Prior to the economic downturn, there was no shortage of proclamations about a 'new scramble for Africa'. For instance, Kofi Annan, when UN Secretary-General, noted in 2006 that foreign investment in Africa had increased by 200 per cent over the last five years, but lamented that it remained focused on extracting natural resources rather than developing local economies[2]. Statements that Africa was seeing an 'unprecedented boom in oil and gas investment'[3], that rising prices for minerals were leading international companies to 'hot' new destinations[4], and that there were major profits to be made in capturing the continent's financial markets[5] abounded. However, what really attracted attention were the changing international dynamics which appear to lie behind this, notably the arrival of China, and to a lesser extent India and other players from the South, as rivals to the US and western countries for Africa's raw materials, markets and allegiances[6]. While this was viewed as embodying both cost and opportunity for Africa, it was also seen as presenting major challenges to good governance, and environmental and military security.[7]

Although the phrase "the new scramble" invites comparison with the onset of formal imperialism in the late Nineteenth Century, there is little agreement about whether the analogy is constructive. Some analysts (usually left inclined) portray contemporary Africa as subject to a new phase of US imperialism; others (both left and right) depict the Chinese (especially) as new imperialists; yet others dispute the utility of imperialism as a conceptual focus all together (proposing that increased external involvement in Africa provides for greater African agency, autonomy and development). Meanwhile, some argue that the complexity of the present reality defies firm characterization.

For the purposes of this paper a minimalist approach will be pursued which views "the new scramble" as a product of (i) the end of the Cold War and the rapidly rising status of China, India and other Southern countries as industrial powers, provoking intensified economic, strategic and ideological competition with the established West (the US, EU and OECD); and (ii) a resulting, hugely intensified struggle for global control of key resources conducted by (iii) a mix of state agencies, international actors and not least, multinational companies (which vary in their alignment to and identity with their countries of origin). Whatever the immediate impact of the recession, these fundamentals will remain the same.

The Scramble for Resources

The recent rush by external powers, agencies and companies to profit from Africa's wealth of resources is the most commented on aspect of the new scramble. The thrust of the literature can be summarized as follows:

Oil: There is near unanimity that the new scramble in Africa has been galvanized by the great powers' urgent search for energy security in response to the increased global demand for fossil fuels in light of projected shortages and anticipated threats to supply from established sources. As of 2004, the US Department of Energy cited Africa as having 7% of the world's proven oil resources and being responsible for 11% of the world's total production. Africa holds 7% of the world's proven natural gas reserves with supply set to rise by 5% each year from 2003 to 2030 (Lee 2006: 314). However, the bare statistics understate the

continent's importance.

First, over the long term, there is expected to be a massive increase in global demand. According to the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security (IAGS), world consumption will rise by 60% from 2002 levels by 2020, this driven by greater oil use in China and India. (made one paragraph) Second, the overwhelming bulk of known oil reserves (66% according to the IAGS) are held in Middle Eastern countries, (inclusive of Libya), many of whose regimes are hostile or potentially hostile to the US. Western powers are therefore seeking to decrease their dependence on the Middle East. Given that oil production in Russia (6% of proven oil reserves) is already declining, the US is looking to Africa, notably producers in North Africa (Algeria, Mauritania, Chad, Sudan) and along the Gulf of Guinea (Nigeria, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Sao Tomé and Principe), for an increase in supply, from around 15% in 2006 to between 25 and 35% between 2015-20[8]. Other powers are acting similarly. Africa has attracted investments from virtually all the major oil companies from both Europe and the US, not least because the continent is poorly surveyed and may yet reveal staggering potential. Meanwhile, China is presently drawing around 30% of its oil imports from Africa, and accounts for between 50-60% of oil exports from Sudan and 25% of oil exports from Angola, as well as sourcing further oil supplies from Nigeria, Algeria, and Equatorial Guinea, while looking to sign oil deals with other countries such as Chad, the Central African Republic and Congo (Lee 2006: 318-320; Holmberg 2007).

With western countries attempting to reduce their dependence on the Middle East, and with China's demand for oil rising dramatically, oil and gas (not dealt with here) are at the forefront of the new scramble (Klare and Volman 2006). The outcome has been the 'dirty politics of oil' (Shaxson 2007): the paradox of poverty from plenty (the effective dispossession of local communities in oil producing areas), deals with despots at the cost of democracy (White and Taylor 2001), environmental despoliation, and increasingly, the US and China forging military alliances with strategically placed countries, regardless of their ideological hue (Abramovici 2004).

Minerals: Africa hosts about 30% of the planet's known mineral reserves, including gold (40%), cobalt (60%), and platinum

(90%), as well as significant supplies of diamonds, manganese, chromium, copper, nickel, bauxite, uranium and other minerals. Production is concentrated in South Africa, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), although other countries, including Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Zambia are also heavily dependent on the export of minerals.

The scramble for minerals was at the heart of late 19th century imperialism. Historically, production has been dominated by British, Australian, Canadian, South African and European firms, although since 1945 the US has loomed increasingly large as a consumer, not least for strategically vital minerals such as cobalt, manganese, chromium and platinum (Wiggins 1984). Today, China is becoming not only a rapidly increasing consumer of Africa's minerals, but also a significant investor in mines and mining related infrastructure in, notably, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the DRC (Lee 2006).

Markets and Trade: The EU and US are currently locked in a war for more favourable access to African markets for their subsidised products. The EU has led the way with an attempt to renegotiate its relations with the ACP countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), four of which have been devised for Sub-Saharan Africa. While the EU maintains that the EPAs are designed to increase trade and render EU-African trade relations compatible with the liberalising demands of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), critics respond that the EPAs would favour Europe, facilitate further dumping of EU subsidised products, and undermine Africa's existing regional arrangements (Stevens 2006; Goodison 2007). The US has countered with the formulation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act of 2000 (AGOA) which provides for preferential access to its market. This has allowed for an increase in African exports (notably by African based, but not African owned, textile companies), although US trade continues to revolve around the import of oil, minerals and natural resources in exchange for the export of high tech goods and machinery. Meanwhile, trade with China has increased dramatically, so that China is now the continent's third most important trading partner, behind the US and France, but ahead of Britain. The trade balance overwhelmingly favours China, whose provision of cheap

products – often sold in local markets by Chinese traders – is having a devastating impact on segments of African business (Lee 2006).

Other resources and markets: There are numerous other aspects of the new scramble. These extend from extensive foreign involvement in logging (deforestation), (over)fishing, agro-piracy of indigenous resources, and multinationals securing major construction deals, the privatisation of utilities, and the systematic recruitment of Africa's skilled human resources. An alarming direction of oil and other revenues into military equipment is also setting off a scramble to sell Africa more arms. For present purposes, however, detailed consideration will be principally restricted to the labour related implications of the scramble for oil, minerals, and markets, as well as its impact on Africa as a site for manufacturing.

The Marginalisation of Labour

The Economic Commission for Africa (2005: 57) has noted that "detailed and reliable labour data are difficult to find for Africa". However, it reports that the rates of recorded unemployment are amongst the highest in the world (10.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 10.4% in North Africa in 2003)[9], although it observes that these official figures do not fully reflect the extent of unemployment in Africa (which has large variations across countries and regions)[10]. Working poverty is extreme, with 56 per cent of people employed in Sub-Saharan Africa (employment by this definition including work within the informal sector) not earning enough to provide for their families' basic needs. Indeed, Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest share of formal employment in non-agricultural occupations (38 per cent through 1994-2000) of all world areas (ECA 2005: 67), and is likewise the only world region where labour productivity has declined over the last decade (by 0.2 per cent a year 1993-2003) (ECA 2005: 68). Hence, while average growth rates of 4-5 per cent per annum during the early years of the new century appear high by international standards, they have had little effect on the level of poverty, not least because "growth appears to have been fuelled by capital-intensive industries rather than labour-intensive ones" (ECA 2005: 58). It is this dynamic which lies at the very core of the new scramble.

Labour in the African Oil Industry: The literature on the oil industry in Africa focuses on the scramble for oil by external actors (companies and countries); the 'oil curse', (the view that oil extraction breeds massive corruption, rent-seeking, domestic inequalities, poor governance, human rights' abuses, violent conflict and environmental despoliation while leaving local communities in desperate poverty); and the possibilities of 'corporate social responsibility' and integrated oil 'development'. However, there is little systematic information about the extent of local employment that the oil industry offers or the conditions of indigenous labour. Accordingly, it is necessary to pull together fragments in order to guide our understanding.

First, oil production in Africa is highly capital intensive, and hence acutely dependent on expatriate skilled labour. Western oil majors remain predominant, bringing significant numbers of field services and equipment provision companies in their wake, but overall levels of local employment (for instance in the refinement and local distribution process) appear low. In Angola, for instance, "Virtually all inputs used in production are imported by the concessionaires, including the majority of oil company workers" (Kyle 2005: 273). While local employment in key strategic areas can provide local workers with leverage (for instance, the 150 000 strong National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers of Nigeria has engaged in significant battles with both the government around democratisation in 1994) and security (ironically, against attacks by community protestors in the Niger Delta), labour activism constitutes a significant disincentive to companies to make investments on-shore. Meanwhile, China is emerging as a major market for African oil, with relationships with national governments significantly shored up by arms deals and promises of aid involving the building of infrastructure from railways to hospitals. Recent deals include a $2.27 billion investment by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation to acquire a 45 per cent interest in Nigeria's offshore oilfields; and the same company's ownership of the largest single share (40 per cent) in Sudan's largest oil company (Rupiya and Southall, 2009). However, Chinese ventures are criticised for importing significant levels of labour from China (sometimes contracts require as much as 70 per cent of Chinese labour) and adding little to local employment or skills development (Brookes 2007).

Second, the large proportion of oil production in Africa takes place off-shore, notably along the Western African coast. This is hugely advantageous to both the oil majors and 'petro-elites', for it provides insulation from community, labour, environmental and human rights' activism. In this regard, the struggles of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People from the early 1990s through to the more recent attacks by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) on Western and Chinese oil interests in the Nigeria Delta have proved salutary (Obi 2009). Although major oil companies have responded by stepping up 'corporate social responsibility' measures to appease local communities (Akpan 2009), the fundamental problem lies in the nature of the corporate-government nexus which empowers patrimonial state elites to deny redistribution of the centrally-controlled oil revenues to the mass of the population (or, as in the case of Nigeria, to the oil-producing regions). Oil revenues grease the wheels of patronage. In Equatorial Guinea, the employment agencies authorised to employ local workers for the oil industry are reportedly in the hands of government officials, mostly from President Teodoro Obiang Nguema's family. They only hire workers loyal to the ruling party, making deductions from their wages (Anonymous 2009). Although this case is extreme, it is not exceptional. In Angola, Sonangol, the national oil company which works in partnership with foreign companies employing over 5000 people, is "the pivotal tool for the interests of the presidential clique known as the *Futungo de Belas*", a nebulous group of unelected officials and businessmen around President Eduardo dos Santos which has become the key structure of power (de Oliveria 2007: 606).

Enclave oil production is recognised as having dubious, often negative, consequences. Prior to independence (1975), Angola was the fourth largest exporter of coffee and a major exporter of maize. Since the 1980s, however, oil has come to dominate not only Angola's exports, but also the finances of the central government. The stagnation of the remainder of the economy, which is primarily agricultural and employs the majority of the population, has been largely unchanged throughout the past two decades. The result is that Angola's exports of its major pre-oil export crops – maize and coffee – are now nearly zero (Kyle 2005: 272).

The Angolan experience is not inevitable. Thus prescription by the Nigerian government of targets for improvement in local content development in the Nigerian oil industry, from little over 10% in 2004 to 70% by 2007, linked to the reserving of a 10% quota for indigenous participation in every Oil Mining Licence granted to foreign investors, is an official attempt to spread the benefits of oil production downstream. However, this may well strengthen the capacities of the political elite for profit and patronage rather than promoting increased local employment (Igbikiowubo 2004; Obi 2009).

Labour and Mining: Mining was at the heart of the original imperial thrust for Africa; the literature on mining capital and African labour is correspondingly vast. But how should we characterise the impact of the new scramble on levels and conditions of employment in Africa during the present period?

Any assessment needs to be set against the background of post-colonial policy whereby, responding to the fact that the benefits of mining had overwhelmingly flowed abroad under colonialism, post-independence governments adopted a strongly nationalistic approach to the management of mineral resources entailing the formation of national mining companies and the nationalisation of many mining operations. By 1989, 41.5% of minerals production in Africa was under state control and 40.5% was controlled by state-private joint ventures operated by private firms, while a mere 18% of activity was under the sole ownership of private companies. This shift was marked by a sharp drop in the value of minerals production, on a sample of ten commodities across Sub-Saharan Africa, from 31.5% in 1970 to 10% in 1987 (World Bank 1992 cited by Pritchard 2009). This was linked to a lack of exploration expenditure and a failure to invest in the maintenance of existing operations. From late 1980s, however, at least 35 countries liberalised their mining codes, redefining the rights and obligations of investors, enhancing the incentive framework, and deregulating and privatising the sector. Production increased markedly (although dipping 1997-2002 when global prices declined). Thereafter, spurred by the rapid rate of economic growth in China, the mining industry boomed, promoting significant increases in exploration activities, investment and production in Africa.

Despite the importance of mining to Africa, its

contribution to the economic development of the continent is suspect. At the beginning of the recent boom, while mining accounted for some 60% of foreign exchange earnings, it contributed on average less than 10% to GDP of mineral endowed African countries and accounted for only around 2% of total employment (Brima 2002). Although acknowledging that mining is only variably labour intensive, the industry claims that each mining employee tends to support between 7-10 people. Furthermore, the industry also states that the jobs it creates are normally well paid by local standards and provide considerable training (World Gold Council 2008).

A contrasting assessment, while accepting that average real wages in mining are often higher than the national average in most African countries, is that the contribution of the industry to employment generation is marginal. Further, overall employment is limited compared to other sectors such as industry, services and agriculture, (although Campbell (2008) estimates that 'artisanal small scale mining' provides employment for as many as two million people in Sub-Saharan Africa). An example is provided by Ghana, where through 1992-1995 the mining industry saw export earnings increase from $108 million to $682 million and overtake cocoa as the main export earner. Even so, it was employing no more than 20 000 people or only 5% of total formal sector employment. Indeed, the net impact on employment might actually have been negative if the abandonment of agriculture for small-scale mining was taken into account (Abugre and Akabaza 1997). Hilson (2001) suggests that as many as 200 000 were directly involved in small-scale mining employment, the vast proportion of them illegally (85%) with official figures indicating that small scale gold production rose tenfold between 1990-1997. Yet the conditions of such work are harsh, even if it does to some extent counter impoverishment among those who undertake it. Furthermore, informal mining has to confront the power of both mining capital and the state: the more reliable the signs of profit, the more likely the threat of artisanal miners being forcibly moved on to sites with less potential (Luning 2008).

A strong critique argues that liberalization has encouraged a return to the colonial pattern of domination of the mining sector by foreign firms: the export of profits, and scant regard for environmental damage or for creating local economic opportunities (Campbell 2004). Indeed, the World Bank (1992)

pronounced that the new era should not be interpreted as a return to old ways, and proposed instead "enlightened partnership" via public private partnerships between mining companies and the state. Yet while these may have promoted foreign investment, it is private capital which is the 'big winner', benefiting from greater support to ease industry access to mining deposits, financial mobility and the capacity to produce at a profit. In contrast, there have been neither significant direct benefits to state revenues, nor many indirect development outcomes in the form of increased employment (Dansereau 2005: 59).

State-capital relations are explored in a study of the 'extractive order' in the Central African Copperbelt in which Honke (2009) notes important continuities in the role of foreign mining companies between the early phase of European colonisation and in the early 21st Century. Today's mining companies tend not to have so intimate a relation with the host state as they did under colonialism (although this is being challenged by the growing Chinese involvement). Nonetheless, they need to negotiate with governments, warlords and/or chiefs who are the legal or effective owners of mineral deposits within their areas of jurisdiction. This requires their forging strategic alliances with a wide network of politicians (and sometimes, militias). Just as during the 19th Century companies fostered the development of a central police force and built the capacities of the local administration, so today mining companies rely on private security companies to assume state like functions (the guarding of compounds), although they tend to rely on the state police for more critical tasks such as the control of labour protest. Overall, "the dependence on state security forces structurally binds companies and regimes together", often in a paradoxical relationship, as when state agents themselves are extensively involved in making illegal profits from mining, extracting shares from small scale miners' earning, and demanding 'protection' from the mining companies themselves. Furthermore, because industrial mining requires roads, railways, and stable energy, water and labour supply to run operations effectively, companies themselves invest directly in infrastructure – a necessity in many African countries which is increasingly recognised by China.

Labour plays a minimal role in Honke's otherwise valuable analysis, which is unfortunate in that she omits a contrast between mining company operations in much of Africa

during the immediate pre-colonial and post-colonial periods and the era of the new scramble. Whereas mining enclave production during the former periods often featured paternalistic patterns of organisation and control of African labour (via the provision of family housing, education and health facilities in company villages etc), the trend in the present era is very likely linked to a containment of costs through the housing of single workers, and towards a casualization of work. In some places, this trend has been systematised, as in Katanga, where the state-owned Gecamines company and Chinese firms, alongside Indian, Lebanese and local entrepreneurs, purchase copper ore and cobalt from some 67 000 hand diggers, often via brokers (often for resale via intermediaries to multinational companies such as Sony, Nokia and Samsung). Many of these diggers are children, while the smelters used to extract/refine the ore have little regard for workers' health and safety, and are notorious for their large number of accidents and deaths, even though the DRC officially subscribes to ILO labour standards (Clark, Smith and Wild 2009). Against this, Ching Kwan Lee (2008) argues that because mining activity is necessarily site specific, it may have to be responsive to organised labour: at the Chambishi mine in Zambia, miners have appealed to the 'moral economy' of Chinese communism to partially reverse the trend towards casualization.

The Katangan and Ghanaian cases are not uncommon, for the boom in mineral prices encouraged a major growth in the informal extraction of minerals that are not only valuable but relatively accessible and portable (such as cobalt, gold and diamonds). However, while such work is undertaken overwhelmingly by the poor, the profits are largely absorbed by a mix of small companies, informal bosses, warlords, militias, criminal networks, and often, government officials. While the collapse of the capacity of the state to control resource rich areas can occasionally lead to rich pickings for local people, such gains are usually short term, while the environmental cost can be ruinous for local communities.

African Labour in the Scramble for Markets and Trade: There are four distinct dimensions to this particular aspect of the new scramble.

The first is that growing competition for Africa's retail markets, notably between the EU and China, is leading to the

displacement of African labour in local production. While the EU claims that its efforts to liberalise trade will provide African countries with improved access to its own markets, critics charge that the reality is likely to be uneven, and that an increased flow of European imports will damage developmental prospects for African agriculture and manufacturing (Goodison and Stoneman 2005).

A dramatic example, cited by Lee (2009), is provided by the impact of the increased imports of frozen chicken from both the US and EU markets. In Ghana, this has meant that the demand for local poultry has collapsed, affecting the economic livelihoods of over 400 000 poultry farmers. Whereas in 1992 Ghanaian farmers supplied 95% of the chicken consumed in that country, by 2001 this figure had dropped to 11%. Other countries seriously affected include Cameroon, Togo, Senegal and South Africa. Lee also reports on the adverse affects of the imports of dairy and meat products from the EU on local producers in Kenya, Namibia and Botswana. Given the additional squeeze on local production provided by the surging importation of cheap manufactured goods from China, the consequences for African producers, and whatever labour they employ, are alarming.

The second dimension refers to the expansion of external large scale capital retail operations, notably those from South Africa. Successive studies by Daniel et al. have recorded the expansion of South African capital into the rest of Africa following the end of apartheid (eg Daniel 2009; 2007). While China's bilateral trade with Africa ($74 billion in 2007) dwarfs South Africa's similar trade with the rest of Africa ($17 billion), in 2006 South Africa remained the largest single country investor on the continent, larger even than China. But whereas the penetration of Indian and Chinese capital into the continent is niched, rooted in energy, minerals and infrastructure, the South African move into the continent has been pan-sectoral, ranging from agriculture through mining, telephony, finance and, not least, wholesale and retail. Although research is needed on how the arrival of capital investment from all the new players is affecting the African workplace, particular saliency attaches to the issue of whether South African corporations are exporting post-apartheid South Africa's labour relations.

Pioneering work by Miller (eg 2005a, 2005) on the expansion of South African supermarket chain Shoprite (which in

2005 had 95 outlets in 14 other African countries) indicates a complex transformation of the retail workplace in Africa. The opening up of “glitzy malls” by Shoprite, usually in partnership with local investors and constructed around a Shoprite supermarket, represented utopias of modern consumerism as enclaves amongst otherwise dilapidated urban environments. Shoprite extended its highly gendered and racialized managerial hierarchies from home, with white male South African management exercising close supervision over locally employed black managers.

The workers in Shoprite’s operations in Zambia and Mozambique perceived themselves located in a contradictory position. They recognised themselves as enjoying a relatively privileged position in the labour market, and were eager for the company to be successful. On the other hand, while Shoprite argued that local conditions should determine wages and conditions, workers in both countries expected the company to have uniform standards across the region, holding the superior wages and conditions of the companies’ workers in South Africa as their lodestar. Despite the shopping mall affecting employees’ working conditions positively “with regular pay, formal job descriptions and clear lines of accountability….newly proletarianized workers saw themselves as humiliating beggars” (Miller 2005b: 6). Meanwhile, Shoprite’s expansion has had calamitous effects locally. Not only has the company gobbled up local retailers, but the large bulk of goods sold locally (around 65%) is imported from South Africa, with attempts to forge partnerships with local farming communities having failed (Miller 2007).

This feeds into the third dimension of the scramble for African markets, notably the increasing presence within Southern Africa, and across the continent, of a swarm of entrepreneurs and itinerant traders from China and the Indian sub-continent. Although there is no general study of this highly dynamic phenomenon, and its impact is in any case rendered opaque by the internationalisation of African trade (with, for instance, Nigerian traders selling Chinese goods in South Africa), observation suggests that the use of family labour by Chinese and foreign retailers may be diminishing the scope for employment of African workers.

The final dimension of scramble for African trade and markets concerns the impact on labour in manufacturing.

The Exploitation and Displacement of African labour in Manufacturing: African labour within manufacturing (notably textiles, clothing and footwear) is subject to twin pressures. On the one hand, it is subject to massive competition from Asian (notably Chinese) industry, which is flooding the continent with cheap exports produced by Asian labour itself subject to sweatshop conditions. On the other, African manufacturing labour is also subject to sweatshop conditions as various countries in Africa are used as platforms to produce textile manufactures for exports under such programmes as AGOA and its subsequent amendments. These dual tendencies illustrate two integral aspects of the new scramble. First, although the large bulk of the African population is poor, taken as a whole Africa constitutes a significant market, especially for the low priced goods which China and other Asian countries are adept at exporting. Second, Africa is increasingly subject to the West's formal commitment to 'free trade' and 'trade not aid' which, as Melber (2009) amongst others has illustrated, is highly imbalanced – demanding that African countries drop their own trade barriers whilst Western countries retain key aspects of trade protection.

Total trade between China and Africa is increasing at an average of 24 per cent per annum between 1995 and 2007 (for a total trade value of $74 billion in 2007). African exports to China actually increased at a faster rate (27% p.a.) than Chinese exports to Africa (23% p.a.) over this period. African exports were overwhelmingly resource based (minerals, including oil 80%; base metals 4% and precious stones and metals 4% in 2007). The top Chinese exports to Africa were more diversified, the leading ones being textiles and clothing (13%), machinery (9%), transport equipment (7%), base metals (2%) and footwear (2%) (Hartzenberg 2008).

The imbalanced nature of this trade adversely impacted Africa's already fragile manufacturing capacity. Calculating job losses from Chinese competition requires considerable guesswork, but responsible estimates suggest it amounts to several hundred thousand since the early 2000s. Vlok (2006: 229) indicates that jobs in the South African clothing and textile sector (the continent's most robust such industry) were slashed from 228

000 to 143 000 between 1996 and 2005 (37%), this excluding loss of employment in the informal sector, although some of these jobs moved to the neighbouring states (notably Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland) where labour was cheaper. In Nigeria, a measure of the job carnage is given by the slashing of the membership of NUTGTWN, the textile union, from around 75 000 members, all in formal employment, through 1980 to the late 1990s, to half that figure in 2005 following trade liberalisation and the assault of Chinese imports. Beckman (2008), reporting on the devastation of the Nigerian textile industry, shows that factories have not only closed down but their owners have eloped with key Nigerian production staff to produce Nigerian prints in China. The impact of such closures goes far beyond the immediate domain, affecting tens of thousands of those in employment as service providers, contractors and distributors in both the formal and informal sectors of the market. Across the continent, in Ethiopia, the Chinese impact on the shoe industry, targeted by the government as one of its priority sectors for industrialisation, has similarly been affected. In an industry dominated by medium, small and micro-scale producers (with downwards from 40 workers), the average number of workers per firm as a whole was slashed from 25 to 11 from the time of the onrush of Chinese shoe imports, between 1999 and 2003 (Gebre-Egziabher 2007: 661-663).

Various governments have sought to re-impose various degrees of protection (notably by implementing quotas on textile imports on selected tariff lines from China) in order to provide local industries with opportunity to gear up to meet Chinese competition, but such measures have had a very mixed effect. For instance, the imposition of quotas on textile imports on selected tariff lines from China by South Africa from mid 2006 has led to an increase in textiles from countries as diverse as Pakistan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Vietnam, United Kingdom (sic!) and Zimbabwe (Hartzenberg 2008), suggesting that the arrest of the Chinese onslaught may be temporary. To date, notes Tull (2006: 472) "nothing indicates that Africa will be able to compete successfully with China, a result of which is that its (manufacturing) exports to China are by and large limited to capital-intensive commodities". Yet another effect is the weakening of unions and an erosion of collective bargaining and of the conditions of employment of African labour (Beckman 2008).

However, while established African textile and clothing industries have taken a battering, new, foreign owned, ones have sprung up in countries – mostly in southern Africa – which have sought to take advantage of AGOA. Signed into law in May 2000 by the outgoing Clinton administration, and updated by the Bush administration by AGOA II and III in July 2004, the Act extended preferential access for imports to the US from beneficiary Sub-Saharan African countries until September 30, 2015 and allowed for third country fabric provision for three years, from September 2004 until September 2007. A further amendment, AGOA IV, in December 2006 extended third country fabric provision for an additional five years (http:// www.agoa.gov/agoa_legislation/agoa_legislation.html, accessed 25 January 2009).

Melber (2009) has pointed out the uneven nature of AGOA's results. Undeniably, increased access to the US market – Sub-Saharan Africa's single largest (purchasing 27% of the region's exports in 2000, 30% in 2005) – is welcome. Yet while AGOA reported an overall increase in imports from African partner countries into the US by as much as 44% over the previous year, followed by another increase of 17% in 2006 (to $12.1 billion), the overwhelming proportion of this was made up of liquefied natural gas, crude oil and refined petroleum, imports of other products accounting for less than 10% of the total in 2001 (with no great change since then). In return, US exports to Sub-Saharan Africa almost doubled between 2003 and 2006: this was made up overwhelmingly of aircraft sales and oil field and related equipment. Thompson (2004: 68) reports that by 2004, only six out of a total of 37 eligible participating African countries had recorded positive gains from AGOA, with these having benefited mainly from increased exports in the textile and clothing sectors. However, with the expiration of the WTO's Multi-Fibre Agreement (MFA) at the beginning of 2005, the textile and clothing industries in China, India and other Asian countries were increasingly free to compete with AGOA favoured products, eroding the AGOA-participating countries' short term advantage.

AGOA has undoubtedly facilitated the rapid expansion of textile and clothing production in certain participating African countries (notably Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia and Swaziland). This has been under the auspices of

short term investment by largely East Asian companies (from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore) which have been attracted, not only by the prospect of access to the US market, but by incentives (such as industrial parks, factory shells, tax holidays and restrictions on unions) offered by host governments. Except for labour, the results have been dubious.

Certainly, textile employment initially expanded very rapidly, providing jobs where there were none before. In Lesotho, textile employment went from virtually nothing at the turn of the new century to around 55 000 in 2005, compensating in absolute terms (as in Malawi, Namibia and Swaziland) for the major reduction of migrant labour to the South African mines (as a result of major shifts in the latter's recruitment patterns). Yet such employment is by its nature uncertain, for all of these countries have also recently experienced rounds of job losses (20 000 in Lesotho 2005-2007; 10 000 out of 30 000 in Swaziland over the same period) as a result not only of upward appreciations in the value of their currencies against the dollar, but also of increased Asian competition on US markets after the expiry of the MFA. AGOA may represent a window of opportunity, but definitely not a permanently open door (Southall 2008; Simelane 2007).

On the other hand, conditions in these new textile industries mimic the worst sweatshop conditions of Asia, involving largely young and female labour, low wages (around two thirds less in Lesotho than is earned by remaining migrant workers in the mines), and long hours of work and employer despotism backed up by government hostility to unions. Indeed, where local labour is regarded as recalcitrant (strikes against employment conditions, although short, have not been uncommon), it has sometimes been imported, as in the case of the infamous Ramatex factory in Namibia where the Malaysian owners employed several hundred workers illegally recruited from Bangladesh. After retrenching 1,600 of the 6000 workers originally recruited in 2002-03 as a result of the implementation of the MFA, the company eventually locked the remaining workers out in March 2008 and left Namibia overnight (having earlier started to move its equipment to a new factory in Cambodia) (Jauch 2007; Melber 2009). Not dissimilar incidents have occurred elsewhere in the region, when footloose employers have sought to escape their most basic of obligations such as the payment of wages[11]. While this does not negate indications that

export manufacturing can provide a basis for reducing poverty in Africa if linked to an appropriate industrial policy (Soderbom and Teal 2003), it does suggest that African exporters will have to run harder to stay in the same place.

Conclusion: The Exclusion of African Labour from the New Scramble

If Freund were to update his text on *The African Worker*, there is little to suggest that he would find that African labour is today any more integral to discussions of African development. On the contrary, the emerging literature on the new scramble is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the roles of states, governments, capital, corporations and African elites, portraying Africa as either subject to a new round and forms of imperialism, or participant in new prospects for economic growth. The danger with both approaches is that African workers can be portrayed as without agency, in the former paradigm as victim, in the latter as units of labour. The reasons are fairly easy to discern.

First, the new scramble is overwhelmingly characterised by the deployment and inflow of capital intensive investment for the extraction and exportation of African natural resources. The principal focus of this activity is in oil which not only offers limited opportunities for local employment, but also deliberately and actively seeks to avoid the hiring of African labour for fear of encountering resistance and the costs of appeasing affected local communities.

Second, overall, the new scramble appears to be diminishing rather than increasing the prospects for employment of African labour and undermining the foundation of African livelihoods. Much has already been written about the deleterious impacts of oil production and mining on local environments and local communities, yet if the analysis here had been extended to, for instance, fishing, it would be demonstrated how European and Asian shipping fleets are ruining African artisanal fishing communities and assaulting levels of African nutrition (Standing 2009). Similarly, deforestation, undertaken by a bewildering array of large and small, mostly European companies (usually in league with predatory elites) and massively fuelled by rampant Chinese demand, is eroding the basis for both commercial and subsistence agriculture.

Third, while the hope of the development literature has been that higher rates of inflow of capital investment will have downstream affects on African employment (through increased government revenues and spending alongside an injection of consumer wealth into local economies), there is little evidence that this will take place on a substantial scale. The fundamental reason for this is that the new scramble rests heavily on the engagements of foreign governments and corporations with African elites. While western governments and international financial institutions take considerable efforts to control and discipline wayward African regimes through 'good governance', these strictures systematically fall away when serious access to profits and valuable resources are at stake. In any case, the 'good governance' paradigm is currently under severe challenge by Chinese foreign policy, which curries favour with African governments by elevating the principles of non-interference and sovereignty. It remains worth stressing that it is still the case that more capital *flows out* of Africa than *flows in.* Thus an econometric analysis by Ndikumana and Boyce (2008:6) indicates that the annual extent of capital flight from the 40 Sub-Saharan countries over the period 1970-2004 amounted to $420 billion, or about $607 billion if imputed interest earnings were included. In present global conditions of depression, it is unlikely that this trend will be reversed.

Fourth, the indications are that the new scramble is importing new forms of labour despotism, centred within enclaves of production wherein relatively advantaged African workers are subject, certainly, to the direct controls of management, but more particularly to the disciplines of the labour market: notably the fear of unemployment. In this context, 'core' employment readily gives way to insecurities of 'casualization' which merge into the wider informal market.

The thrust of this argument is that the new scramble is far from providing the conditions for labour which Freund (1988: 143) argued were required for any coherent move out of underdevelopment. It is not wholly clear what such an effective use of labour would be, although Freund's argument would point to a viable strategy of industrialisation, geared as much to addressing African needs as export markets, and agricultural revival, geared principally to addressing African food security. In contrast, for all that the excitement about the implications of

Chinese engagement in infrastructure provision, the new scramble is primarily engaged in deepening the existing African developmental pattern through externally oriented resource extraction which has led to the continent's present global marginalisation.

Within this context, the prospects for labour appear to be worsened rather than improved by the new scramble. One route forward must clearly be for trade unions and disadvantaged communities to engage in the wider struggle for democracy and the political (and financial) accountability of ruling elites; another must be for them to link up with progressive actors on the ground and internationally to challenge the very basis of Africa's integration into the world economy. Addressing the dynamics of the new scramble would be a good place to begin.

Endnotes

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7. The Scramble for Africa's Oil, *New Statesman* (London), 17 June 2007; Scramble for Africa, *The Guardian*, 2 May 2007.
8. General James Jones, head of the US European Command, speaking before the Senate armed services committee, in March 2006. Cited by Thompson (2007).
9. Apart from assuming that those working in the informal sector are employed, official estimates of employment exclude discouraged work seekers, and so on.

10. “Western Africa has the lowest unemployment rate in 2003 (6.7 per cent), while Southern Africa had the highest rate (31.6 per cent” (ECA 2005: 57).
11. See Beckman (2008) for a similar case in Kaduna.

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