The New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Global Political Economy: Towards the African Century or Another False Start?

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In the last two years, a developmental agenda has been advanced by leading African elites aimed at revitalising Africa’s place in the global political economy. This recently culminated in the launch at the OAU summit (the last one before the new African Union) in Lusaka on July 11, 2001 of the so-called New African Initiative.¹ This was subsequently renamed, in Abuja on October 23, 2001, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).² The leaders of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa have been at the forefront of this movement and have been advancing what may turn out to be an interesting new period in Africa’s relations with the developed world, particularly in the post-Seattle period.

This article aims to investigate what exactly this new developmental agenda stands for and what is “new”, if anything, about the positions being advanced by leading exponents of this group, as crystallised by the NEPAD. The role of South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki is examined, although not exclusively, as his voice has been among the loudest in promoting the project around the globe. The articles contends that the hearing being granted to the NEPAD is precisely because the message communicated fits the neo-liberal discourse and avoids blaming particular policies or global trade structures on Africa’s marginalisation but rather, if pushed, simply passes off the blame on “globalisation”. In addition, the leading African elites promoting the NEPAD have gained the North’s seal of approval regarding their outward commitment to liberal democracy and market economics, and are held up as models by which the rest of the continent can/should learn from. It will be indicated why this is problematic.³

³ For broad comments on this orthodox “recipe” for “good governance”, see Ian Taylor ‘Globalisation and Democracy: Rethinking the Link Between Africa’s “Democratisation”, Aid, and Neo-Liberalism’ in Lisa
This does not mean that I see no merits in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development. In many respects it is one of the best documents to emerge from the African political elite for a considerable time. In particular its publicised commitment to the developmental needs of the African people is appreciated, as are the attempts being made to penetrate the shield of sovereignty behind which too many corrupt leaders have hidden. But I fear that these noble goals may be undermined by the broader global power games that the G-7 countries is clearly out to play with this new generation of African leaders. I am also concerned that there is no obvious strategy to be found in the NEPAD to counter these power games, and that some of the language used, and some of the economic measures proposed in the document, play into the hands of the G7 strategists. Indeed, as South Africa becomes ‘just another country’ in terms of its foreign policy and bearing in mind its leading role in pushing the NEPAD, concern is expressed over the “policy fit” between Northern elites and their counterparts in some African states.4

**The NEPAD and the Global Political Economy**

Thabo Mbeki has been lauded as a leading light promoting the run-up to the launch of the NEPAD: ‘as a result of his recent interventions, Mbeki has emerged over the past six months [January – June 2000] as the developing countries’ single most important voice in the world economy’.5 This is frequently in tandem with other African allies. According to one report, ‘a tough triumvirate of African leaders...South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki, Nigeria’s Olusegun Obasanjo and Algeria’s Abdelaziz Bouteflika...dominate Africa’s continental club, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). With their good political and diplomatic track-records, the three [are] taken seriously in Africa and in the West’.6

As Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), South Africa has led this organisation in a series of negotiations with the G-7 countries, trying to convince them, along solidly orthodox lines, to improve the conditions for Africa’s place in the global economy.7 For instance, South Africa used its “Statement at the Africa-EU Summit” in Cairo in April of 2000 to make an impassioned plea for the ending of Africa’s economic marginalisation and to end

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4 For a critical perspective on the ‘just another country’ thesis, see Peter Vale and Ian Taylor ‘South Africa’s Post-Apartheid Foreign Policy Five Years On—From Pariah State to “Just Another Country”?’, *Round Table: Commonwealth Journal of International Relations*, no. 352, October 1999.

5 *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg), July 14-20, 2000.


human suffering on the continent. In a similar way Mbeki used his speech at the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 1999, and particularly his “Address as Chairperson of the NAM at the opening of the South Summit” in Havana, 12 April 2000 to develop an eloquent plea for the introduction of what he calls a global “caring society” to soften the harsher aspects of global capitalism. Such activism has fitted with Mbeki’s much-touted “African Renaissance”, which although devoid of any meaningful content, uplifting rhetoric aside, has underpinned post-apartheid South Africa’s foreign policy, particularly since Mandela stepped down. But, this Renaissance has been criticised as fitting, much as the NEPAD does, with the Northern-dominated hegemonic order. As one critical commentary put it,

The African Renaissance suggests a continental effort led by South Africa to advance the familiar ‘end-of-history’ thesis … South Africa's African Renaissance (this choice of words is important) is anchored in a chain of economies which, with time, might become the African equivalent of the Asian Tigers … In this rendition, the African Renaissance posits Africa as an expanding and prosperous market alongside Asia, Europe and North America in which South African capital is destined to play a special role through the development of trade, strategic partnerships and the like. In exchange for acting as the agent of globalisation, the continent will offer South Africa a preferential option on its traditionally promised largesse of oil, minerals and mining.

Mbeki and other African elites are increasingly playing a prominent role in discussions relating to some reform of the international political economy. Indeed, the presence of Mbeki, Obasanjo, and Bouteflika at the G-7 Okinawa summit in July 2000, Mbeki’s guest appearance at the EU summit in Portugal in late 2000, and the prominent role these leaders played at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, as well as at the Davos 2001 meeting (notable for the lack of attendance by assembled elites during Mbeki’s session) and the Genoa G-8 summit, illustrates the status that they currently enjoy. The fact that President Bouteflika was the first active president to give a presentation at the closing session of the 53rd Annual UN Conference, is an indication of the high-profile role members of this reformist group have assumed in recent months. Indeed, it seems as if the Twenty-first Century is starting with a concerted push by key African state elites to put development back on the international agenda after a decade of post-Cold War neglect and marginalisation. One source claimed that such dialogue ‘represented a growing consensus

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among countries of the South to engage with the wealthiest countries...on the need to examine, collectively with the South, the global economic system and its impact on developing countries'.

Having managed to incorporate Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade's "Omega Plan" with the Millennium Africa Renaissance Programme, the NEPAD now seeks to cultivate some sort of fellowship with the North. This idea of a “partnership” between the North and Africa, aimed at reversing the growing income disparities in the world, has been readily endorsed by leaders such as (then president) Clinton, Schroeder and Blair. In his report aimed at the Millennium United Nations Summit of Heads of State and Government in September 2000, Kofi Annan also endorsed the idea of a “partnership” between North and South, specifically aimed at the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and lifting more than one billion people out of it, by 2015.

At first glance, the high energy diplomatic initiatives pursued by the NEPAD’s promoters, either singly or in concert with one another, suggests a positive development for the continent. After all, rather than continuing to point the blame for the continent’s woes at the colonial legacy or on a philosophy underpinned by dependencia, both “explanations” having more and more lost their currency in the North, this grouping is engaging the developed world on its own terms, arguing for liberalisation and free trade and for globalisation. This engagement and the calls for partnership are far more likely to gain a hearing in London or Washington than the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and appeals to special treatment. But, it is this very acceptability and “fit” that carries within it the danger that the message of this group will serve to legitimise (perhaps unwittingly) existing global power relations rather than restructure them. Asserting that Africa must “gel” with the world, as one report put it, without interrogating the structural situation within which the continent (and the South in general) finds itself, is highly problematic. Furthermore, the agenda that they seek to push holds within it seeds for a further marginalisation of the majority of Africa’s peoples whilst granting a highly privileged strata of African elites the potential to benefit from the ongoing globalisation process. Indeed, a main criticism of the initiatives being advanced is that they serve the interests of externally-oriented fractions within key (comparatively developed) African states whilst leaving the rest of the continent to sink or swim, as it were,

11 Clinton’s advocacy of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act must be seen in this light.
with the globalisation current. Motives for their activism were summed up by one source as being ‘drawn together because these middle-income developing countries were all feeling the pinch of Northern projectionist trade policies’.

Making neo-liberalism somehow “work for all”, rather than rethinking the overall global trading system, is the key strategy of South Africa particularly and the NEPAD more generally. The linkage between globalisation, export-driven trade policies and a nascent transnational elite in Africa is to what we now turn.

Globalisation and an Emerging Transnational Elite

Concomitant with notions of globalisation is the three-fold domination of the world by a) transnational capital; b) the hegemony of neo-liberalism; and c) the emergence of a global historic bloc. This last feature of our contemporary world is led by what may be termed an emergent transnational capitalist class. ‘Today, transnational class relations cannot be ignored. Just as capital, production, labour and culture have become globalised, classes too are increasingly becoming transnational’. This fraction does not openly admit itself as a class per se. However, it would be accurate to say that it has ‘attained a clearly distinctive class consciousness’ with an ‘awareness of a common concern to maintain the system that enables the class to remain dominant’. This global elite is comprised of transnational executives and their affiliates; globalising state bureaucrats; capitalist-inspired politicians and professionals; and consumerist elites. Originating in the capitalist core, this transnational elite is increasingly developing linkages with like-minded parties in the South to form a truly global elite. The elites promoting the NEPAD may be seen as key representatives of this phenomena.

Having said that, it is important to recognise that this is no monolithic bloc advancing a unified and uncontested agenda. The fractions from which this transnational historic bloc are drawn share a fundamental principle for sure—the maintenance of global capitalism—but outside of this core concern tensions and disagreement mark out their interactions with one another. Indeed, ‘fierce competition among oligopolist clusters, conflicting pressures,
and differences over the tactics and strategy of maintaining class domination and addressing
the crises and contradictions of global capitalism make any real internal unity in global ruling
class impossible'. Nevertheless, such a transnational elite has become increasingly aware
of shared values and interests that transcend petty and immediate strategies. This has been
facilitated by an emerging network made up of ‘transformed and externally integrated
national states, together with...supranational economic and political forums’. The economic
forums are institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and regional banks. The
political forums include the G-7, G-22, the OECD, European Union, the United Nations
system etc. ‘It is through these global institutions that the [transnational elite] has been
attempting to forge a new global capitalist hegemonic bloc’. The developing world’s elites
have been inexorably drawn into this process, with the ‘leading capitalist groups in the Third
World [having] transnationalised by integrating into global circuits of accumulation through a
variety mechanisms, ranging from subcontracting for global corporations, the purchase of
foreign equity shares, mergers with corporations from other countries, joint ventures and
increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) abroad of their own capital'.

However, as this brave new world has been built, tensions and contradictions have
been increasing and cracks in the monolith (the unity of which was always exaggerated)
have now developed into potential cleavages. The crowning moment (so far) in this ongoing
process was of course at the WTO meeting in Seattle in November 1999, but previous open
disagreements between the IMF and World Bank already hinted that the “Washington
Consensus” was increasingly under threat. Indeed, for perhaps the first time the voices of
the South, which had long criticised the one-size-fits-all programmes of the IFIs were now no
longer disregarded: much of their criticism seemed to be taken on board. This was further
graphically shown at the 2001 meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF). Whereas
previously WEF meetings had been largely summits of the great and the good converging in
a celebratory (if not self-congratulatory) jamboree in praise of globalisation and the free
market, concern over the direction globalisation was taking now staked out this conference
par excellence of the transnational elite. This consciousness, sensitised post-Seattle, has

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18 Leslie Sklair ‘Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action’, Review
19 William Robinson ‘Capitalist Globalisation and the Transnationalisation of the State’ Paper presented at
20 William Robinson and Jerry Harris ‘Towards a Global Ruling Class? Globalisation and the Transnational
Capitalist Class’, Science and Society, vol. 64, no. 1, Spring 2000, p. 27.
21 Ibid., p. 28.
22 Jerry Harris and William Robinson, 2000, p. 4.
23 See Moises Naim ‘Fads and Fashions in Economic Reforms: Washington Consensus or Washington
meant that a certain space has opened up for (limited) questioning of the globalisation incantation. As one source put it,

[T]he greater receptiveness to the developing world’s concerns has everything to do with the WEF’s realisation of a widespread backlash against globalisation...It recognises the belief amongst the world’s poor that globalisation has brought more benefits to the richer developed countries than to the poorer developing countries...This year’s Davos gives more attention to this backlash against globalisation, recognising that earlier...expressions of intent to narrow wealth discrepancies has not yet borne much fruit.24

Similarly, the July 2001 summit in Genoa of the G-8, with the much-publicised welcoming stance regarding the NEPAD, did seem to indicate that the North’s elites were now somewhat concerned. Tellingly, and in a perhaps unintentional—but still damning—indictment of the G-8’s track record on priorities, Italian foreign minister Renato Ruggiero claimed that ‘the G-8 is, for the first time in its history [emphasis added] dealing with the questions of poverty [and] access of the commodities from the developing south to international markets’.25 But equally, as one commentator put it, ‘it was inevitable that [the NEPAD] would be well receive by the G-8 since it was spot on in terms of timing and political correctness. When you have rioters trashing Genoa in the name of kinder Third World treatment, no politician is going to say it is a bad idea’.26

Is the seeming ready response to the NEPAD genuine or not? Certainly, widespread political unease from African elites at the social cost of liberalisation and economic restructuring, as well as growing protests against “globalisation” in all its myriad forms by massed ranks of protestors at every transnational meeting point means that global elites must contend with a number of major issues at the cusp of the new millennium. Whilst opposition to globalisation has also been building in the North, it has been relatively contained, trashings of downtown Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and Genoa notwithstanding. Such protests and riots should not be belittled however: they have, by all appearances at least, rattled the composure of the Northern elites. The fact that African elites now give also voice to some of the concerns, although arguably as equally incoherent as the masked anarchists, means that issues surrounding the continued thrust and direction of globalisation needs to be taken seriously in the global power centres. Indeed, a number of African leaders have been quite active in the debates surrounding strategic questions related to the world order. Having said that, the inherent limitations for Africa within such a debate is important if

we are to understand the potentiality (or lack of it) within the professed agenda being advanced by certain African elites. Although South African spin doctors claimed that Thabo Mbeki was ‘at the helm of the most imaginative and resolute plan yet to emerge from Africa’, other commentators remarked that the NEPAD was ‘not the most radical documents ever but because of that, there is more chance that the G-8 leaders will buy into it’. So, various tensions, both within readings over the potentiality of the NEPAD’s agenda, as well as intra-elite strains are of intense interest. Interrogating such tensions demonstrate profound weaknesses to any optimistic assessment of the project and certainly places into perspective any appraisal that seeks to cast the emerging project as symbolised by the NEPAD as a NIEO for our post-hegemonic era. Why this is so is turned to below.

North vs. South? Not Quite

Although media coverage at Seattle was given over to the antipathies evidenced by elite delegations from the developing world, it is clear that the objections raised by elite delegations from the South at Seattle were a pot-pourri of—often contradictory—agendas, ranging from the demand for global reform, to special treatment for Southern exporters, to equal treatment for the same. Frustration at the North’s apparent haughtiness in their treatment of the South, particularly African representatives, contributed to the build-up of pressure at the meeting—which eventually boiled over and caused the abortion of the Summit. However, it must be emphasised that on the main, what elites from the South were advocating was not a radical restructuring of the global capitalist order, despite the more optimistic accounts advanced by their self-proclaimed allies (largely Northern-based “solidarity” groupings). Instead, what most Southern delegations were pressing for was increased access to the world market for externally-oriented fractions of the South, as well as a greater part in administering the world system. Far from stopping globalisation, the elites were actually pushing for greater integration into the global capitalist order, but on renegotiated terms that favour externally-oriented Southern elites. The actual neo-liberal underpinnings of the global market are presumed to be sacrosanct. As Trevor Manuel, South Africa’s finance minister asserted, ‘there is a new resilience and a new will to succeed in the African continent. We in South Africa have called it a renaissance, a new vision of political and economic renewal. It takes the global competitive marketplace as point of departure’.29

This position, an essential acceptance of the basic tenets of the ongoing world order, reflects the actuality that elites from Africa are, in the main, just as interested in maintaining the global system as their colleagues in the North. Reflecting on the monumental sea change of the 1980s regarding macro-economic common sense, one account has correctly remarked that:

Third World elites were not the passive victims of the US liquidation of the development project. At least some fractions of such elites [i.e. the externally-oriented] were among the strongest supporters of the new Washington Consensus through which the liquidation was accomplished. To the extent that this has been the case, Third World elites have been among the social forces that have promoted the liberalisation of trade and capital movements.30

Thus imagining that resistance to neo-liberalism might be located in the elites of the South is, to put it mildly, naïve. As if to prove my point, the reforms being advocated by the supporters of the NEPAD are increasingly cast as sensible strategic choices in order to defend world-wide neo-liberalism from some sort of populist reaction. The United Nations secretary-general has made this quite explicit, stating that ‘the unequal distribution of benefits and the imbalance of global rule-making which characterises globalisation today inevitably will produce backlash and protectionism. And that in turn, threatens to undermine and ultimately unravel the open world economy that has been so painstakingly constructed over the past half-century’.31

Thus defending globalisation and the advancement of specific externally-oriented interests and values, whilst ameliorating excessively negative aspects of this project, is the new message. Certainly, one analysis, talking specifically of South African involvement in this project, asserted that ‘for President Thabo Mbeki, the renaissance means, essentially, the promotion of Western political and economic values’.32 This is somewhat problematic, as Thompson and Leysens point out, ‘there is [a] quite obvious tension between on the one hand supporting global free trade, and on the other committing oneself to changing the rules of the system to ensure greater equity’.33

Internally-oriented nationalist projects heading in the direction of de-linkage (or couching their rhetoric in such terms) that characterised much of Africa in the pre-globalisation era have evaporated as the global economy has experienced a profound restructuring and as the developing world has been on a full-scale retreat from the heady

days of the NIEO. With the lost decade of the 1980s marking out Africa’s fortunes, debt and
decay have left a legacy which has hollowed out the ideological and material bases of the
old nationalist and inward-looking programmes—whether capitalist or socialist. At the same
time, the opportunities afforded to those national bourgeoisie (and state elites) in Africa with
the vision to “ride the globalisation wave” mean that those pushing integration and/or
accommodation with global capitalism have had their positions emboldened in quite
phenomenal terms. As this process has occurred, divisions between inward-looking and
externally-oriented fractions of national elites have emerged: the root cause of much of the
contradictions and political struggles within national spaces over recent times.

In Africa, dominant elite fractions have increasingly effected this transnationalisation
process through locking into the global. They have indulged in mergers or co-operative pacts
with transnational corporations, moved offshore their portfolios, engaged in financial
speculation, diversified their holdings outside the national space, and invested abroad. For
instance, from March 1995 until mid-September 2000, the South African Reserve Bank
approved 7.85 billion rand worth of direct investment by South African companies in
southern Africa, whilst globally, South African companies received approval for a total of
74.5 billion rand in foreign direct investment overseas.\footnote{34} One analyst remarked that ‘South
African big companies listed themselves in London and New York with the purpose to collect
capital more efficiently. To sum up, South Africa is now firmly integrated within the
international financial and business network.’\footnote{35} This process is played out, to varying
degrees, throughout Africa. Elite fractions have continued to integrate themselves into
‘international financial and business networks’ and have played the role of agent-on-the-
ground for foreign direct investment (FDI). It is interesting to note that between 1993-1998
the three countries in Africa receiving the most FDI also happen to be among the three key
promoters of the NEPAD, namely Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa.\footnote{36}

The point is, is that outward-looking elites, having bought into the globalisation
discourse, actively encourage FDI from TNCs. This in itself may not be problematic as all
developing states need capital in order to finance development, setting aside for one

\footnote{33 Lisa Thompson and Anthony Leysens ‘Comments: South African Foreign Policy Discussion Document’,
unpublished paper, August 1996, p. 8.}
\footnote{34 Tito Mboweni ‘The Role of the South African Reserve Bank in Economic Integration in the Southern African
Development Community’, Statement by Mr T T Mboweni, Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, as a
contribution to the Africa Dialogue Lecture Series presented by the University of Pretoria’s Department of
Political Sciences, the Institute for International Affairs and Accord, in the Senate Hall at the University of
Pretoria, 21 September 1999.}
\footnote{35 Katsumi Hirano ‘Globalisation and African Renaissance’, unpublished paper, 2000, p. 8.}
\footnote{36 Figures taken from various UNCTAD reports and cited in Elsabé Loots ‘Foreign Direct Investment Flows to
African Countries: Trends, Determinants and Future Prospects’, \textit{Mots Pluriels}, no. 13, April 2000.}
moment the fact that there is actually a net outflow of capital from Africa. It is the type of FDI that is welcomed and the manner in which this is managed and guided (or not) by the host country that is crucial: the question is how to make those corporations engaging in FDI in Africa development oriented. Problematically, the proponents of NEPAD are those state elites who have embarked on profound liberalisation projects that aim to further open up their domestic economies to external capital with little or no control, whilst abetting the wider process of connecting to the globalising world market. As such, fractions of African elites are in themselves emerging as vital sections of a wider transnational capitalist class. Such sections have more and more attempted to make usage of the global capitalist system in a strategy aimed at bolstering their own position within the global historic bloc. In general, they come from countries whose economies have ‘a magnitude that cannot be sustained only by regional running but requires more openness to the world economy...[thus compelling] a strategy for combating marginalisation and adapting to globalisation’.37 The close fit between interests of externally-oriented elites and the type of project advanced by the NEPAD is increasingly evident. In South Africa for instance, ‘President Mbeki is on a marketing mission for his economic plans for South Africa and the continent. Mbeki and several top cabinet ministers met twenty members of the President’s Big Business Working Group…to elaborate on [his] envisaged economic programme…In response, the business leaders applauded the president and the government's strong emphasis on matters economic’.38

Reformist impulses that do emerge from this fraction of African elites emanate from a sense that the rules of the game within global trade (not, mind, the wider overarching architecture) is “unfair” to them and their national allies.39 Thus, ‘IMF-bashing is back in style [in Africa]—even if the rhetorical flourishes of their leaders have different origins...Self-evidently, the trajectory chosen...amounts at best to attempting to join the system, to play by its rules and, having discovered that the game is set up unfairly, to adjust these rules somewhat in the Third World’s favour’.40 The strategic choice made by the NEPAD is to challenge the North at its own game. This is not a North vs. South engagement however and is not an attempt à la the NIEO to re-write the global rules. Rather, it is a broadly Southern attempt to use the North’s rules. ‘Free trade is the only issue that [Africa] can beat the G-8

37 Katsumi Hirano, 2000, p. 12.
38 Cape Argus (Cape Town) February 19, 2001
over the head with; and [we] must do so by shaming them in front of their voters'. The increasing usage of anti-dumping strictures is a case in point. Certainly, South Africa, India and Brazil have since 1995 been consistently amongst the main initiators of anti-dumping measures, invariably against Northern exporters. This in itself reflects the changes that have occurred within the global economy and in particular mirrors the dominant ideology that is an integral part of the ongoing order. As one analyst wrote, ‘the history of the developing countries in the world trading system reveals initial hostility to a regime that was controlled by advanced and industrialised countries. However it is obvious that the developing countries' attitudes [have changed]. This attitudinal change has coincided with the rise to hegemony amongst the transnationalised elites of the neo-liberal discourse.

Yet such challenging of the North takes place within a milieu where the essential underpinnings of the global order are unchallenged. The NEPAD’s message, like South Africa’s broader trade strategy, is very much linked to the discourse of globalisation and the workings of the “free market”. After all, South Africa’s finance minister is chairperson of both the IMF and World Bank’s Board of Governors. Indeed, commenting on the NEPAD one analyst remarked that:

> Nothing here [in the NEPAD] would dismay the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, although reform of these institutions is also a priority. The latest buzzword in the corridors of these institutions is “authorship”—jargon for a hands-off approach to reform. The plan chimes with this new approach by encouraging African governments to claim “ownership” of reforms which, just a few years ago, foreign lenders were happy to prescribe from Washington.

For sure, it is apparent that leading fractions within key states in the South regard the integration of their territories into the global economy as absolutely crucial and inevitable. Thabo Mbeki summed up this attitude when he proclaimed that ‘the process of globalisation is an objective outcome of the development of the productive forces that create wealth, including their continuous improvement and expansion’ [emphasis added], whilst Nigeria’s Obasanjo stated that ‘we must get used to the idea that globalisation is a fact of life. It’s a

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reality of the new age. However, as Philip Cerny remarks, ‘globalisation is driven not primarily by some inexorable economic process, but rather by politics: by ideology, by the actions, interactions and decisions of state actors, their private-sector interlocutors and wider publics’.  

In the NEPAD document, it states that SAPs ‘provided only a partial solution’, removing serious price distortions but giving ‘inadequate attention to the provision of social services’, resulting in the situation where ‘only a few countries managed to achieve sustainable higher growth under these programmes’. Patrick Bond asks a number of very important questions about such statements, worth repeating here:

- What if structural adjustment represented not ‘a partial solution’ but instead, reflecting local and global power shifts, a profound defeat for genuine African nationalists, workers, peasants, women, children, manufacturing industry and the environment?
- What if promoting reforms really amounted to the IMF and World Bank imposing their cookie-cutter neo-liberal policies on desperately disempowered African societies, without any reference to democratic processes, resistance or diverse local conditions?
- What if the removal of ‘price distortions’ really meant the repeal of exchange controls (hence allowing massive capital flight), subsidy cuts (hence pushing masses of people below the poverty line), and lowered import tariffs (hence causing widespread de-industrialisation)?
- What if ‘inadequate attention to the provision of social services’ in reality meant the opposite: excessive attention to applying neo-liberalism not just to the macro-economy, but also to health, education, water and other crucial state services?
- And what if the form of IMF/Bank attention included insistence upon greater cost recovery, higher user-fees, lower budgetary allocations, privatisation, and even the disconnection of supplies to those too poor to afford them, hence leading to the unnecessary deaths of millions of people?

46 Thabo Mbeki ‘Keynote Address of the President of the ANC, Comrade Thabo Mbeki, to the National General Council of the ANC’, Port Elizabeth, July 12, 2000.
47 Quoted in Middle East Times (Cairo) July 23, 1999.
49 Patrick Bond ‘What is Pretoria Planning for Africa?’, KABISSA-FAHAMU-SANGONET Newsletter no. 45, December 2001, www4mail@kabissa.org
Ignoring such fundamental questions, the NEPAD puts forward an agenda that demands that global integration must be facilitated by a working relationship with transnational capital and corporations, an aggressive liberalisation policy and an essentially prostrate attitude towards the international financial institutions. Hence at Seattle such elites came out in favour of the activities of the TNCs and the continued presence within their countries:

In Seattle they fought hard to maintain...advantages for themselves and their transnational partners. Arguing for low wages is not a plan for national development, but a defence of Nike paying 25 cents an hour, and Third World sub-contractors running industrial zones for the TNCs that drive the global economy.50

It is, of course, of no coincidence that the elites promoting the NEPAD most energetically spring from states at the forefront of advancing liberalisation and the neo-liberal package within their own territories: South Africa is currently busy implementing its own self-imposed structural adjustment programme known as GEAR.51 Indeed, according to one account, ‘it is only a small exaggeration to say that the [NEPAD] prescribes for an entire continent the kind of policies already pursued in South Africa’.52 Under Obasanjo, Nigeria has pushed ahead with deepening reform and is currently a favourite in Washington.53 Setting itself the goal of attracting $ 10 billion worth of FDI per annum, opening the telecommunications, oil, transport and energy sectors and pushing for a free trade area with Ghana to broaden the market for investors, Obasanjo’s Nigeria is determinedly seeking to lock into the global economy after years of growing marginalisation and neglect.54 Cairo, likewise, is following orthodox policies – approved by the core – in an attempt to restructure its economy as a site of foreign investment and a welcoming destination for transnational capital.55 Although beset with internal insurrection, Algiers has been pursuing a liberalisation policy since 1995, intensifying on the accession of Bouteflika.

These projects have been advanced at the behest of the global powers and have been encouraged by the transnational elites, with bail-out packages, new loans etc. acting as lubricants to ease the process. Such processes stand to benefit specific fractions. Although talking of Asia, Gill’s comments can be equally applied to Africa when he asserts that ‘deregulation, privatisation, and liberalisation are a means of strengthening a particular

50 Jerry Harris and William Robinson, 2000, p. 4.
54 See Business Day (Johannesburg) April 17, 2000.
set of class interests, principally the power of private investors. Structural adjustment allows for a redistribution of claims on future profit-flows that enable foreign capital to gain power and control over regional development patterns.  

On the ground in Africa however, such reforms have generated considerable social conflict and threaten the position of the African globalisers. Key leaders promoting the NEPAD are in place to advance a liberal democratic project, however uneven (Mkapa in Tanzania, Wade in Senegal) or “liberators” from past oppression (e.g. Obasanjo, the African National Congress). Their mandate was to improve the lot of the marginalised and dispossessed, not deepen social conflict and exacerbate the insecurity of the poorest, whilst opening up markets for their own elites and transnational counterparts. This has resulted in a profound contradiction as there is ‘an inconsistency in…requiring both democratic reform and continued economic adjustment and austerity. It is unlikely that the newly enfranchised citizens will actually vote for further austerity’. The compromise they have made with the North now seems to be increasingly one-sided and instead of rising prosperity and stability brought about by the globalisation message, increased discontent and even questions regarding their legitimacy are emerging. Whilst this occurs, the Northern elites have to date seemed oblivious to the social tensions their neo-liberal nirvana has reaped in the margins. The message of the NEPAD and other reformist impulses is that it is the South that has had to shoulder much of the burden for global restructuring, and it is the elites in the South who have to face the wrath of the affected. In order to ameliorate these conditions, some of Africa’s elites are claiming a much greater input in managing the global economy and in evening out the playing field.

Such impulses were graphically illustrated at the Seattle WTO meeting where African elites in particular expressed outrage at the cavalier fashion in which they were being treated at a supposedly global forum. It was this feature of the negotiations that primarily contributed to the collapse of the Seattle talks—an important point to remember when reflecting on the latest WTO round. Certainly, the breakdown of negotiations was not triggered by any monumental clashing of economic agendas or philosophies: Seattle was not the background of North vs. South. Rather, it was the form and procedure of the negotiations that stimulated such discord and antagonism. For sure, competing agendas surfaced and interests were not

common across the board, but what was evident was that the substance of global trade, the neo-liberal underpinnings of international commerce, was not under attack by the assembled elites of the South and most certainly not from those African delegates from countries later to advance the NEPAD. Whilst the headlines back home may have portrayed the elites as “standing up” to the developed world, amid sub-paragraphs mentioning neo-imperialism and colonialist arrogance, the substance of the talks remained untouched and will frame any subsequent WTO Rounds. In that sense, for all the drama, Seattle did not mark any “victory” for Africa, but rather reflected the hegemonic status that neo-liberal economics had achieved amongst the transnational historic bloc. As one commentator cynically put it, 'getting the rhetoric right is one thing, changing behaviour is quite another. It's easy to make all the right noises about making globalisation inclusive, but what does this mean when the rich countries of the North spend $1 billion a day subsidising their farmers, with an annual subsidy three times as large as the entire amount spent on aid budgets? Not a lot'.

The launch of the MARP at Davos and later the NEPAD merely underscored this point.

The MARP and NEPAD: Another False Start?
The launch of the Millennium Africa Renaissance Programme (also known as the Millennium African Recovery Plan) project at the WEF in late January 2001, and the NEPAD’s launch in October 2001 were the first concrete crystallisation of what key African elites have in mind in advancing their cause. The background to the NEPAD is of interest. Essentially, in 2000 the OAU meeting in Lomé, Togo agreed (under lobbying from Nigeria and South Africa) that Africa should draw up and agree on an African Recovery Programme, authorising the presidents of Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa to work on this programme. The New African Initiative is a merger of MARP the so-called Plan Omega proposed by Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade. The NEPAD was unanimously adopted by the OAU’s Lusaka Summit on 11 July 2001, being promoted as a blueprint for the regeneration of Africa. The MARP was ‘designed to present a common front when Africa deals with the developed world, seek aid and investment in return for good governance, and unite African countries against social and economic problems like AIDS. On the other hand, the Omega Plan, drawn up by the Senegalese president, sets goals and defines financial means to narrow infrastructural gaps’. Only hard bargaining managed to prevent Wade’s Omega Plan from sabotaging African unity before it had even begun, particularly when Wade began claiming that his plan

59 Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg), February 2-8, 2001.
was ‘a practical initiative for overcoming Africa’s economic difficulties’ whilst the MARP was ‘more of a manifesto’. Yet, Wade’s plan was extremely problematic and did not deserve the status that it was given (though no doubt satisfying the ego of its author). It involved obtaining repayable treasury bonds from the North to finance a pan-continental infrastructure scheme which, Wade admitted (and supported) would advantage Northern contractors. As Wade asserted, ‘I will show how the West will benefit. To carry out all this infrastructure work we will need foreign and European firms, which are technically more advanced than ours and which can build roads much faster than we could do…two-thirds of the resources I’m talking about would go to western companies to carry out the work’.

After a “fusion” with the MAP, the Davos document is now somewhat different from Lusaka and the one presented in Genoa.

Although then still in its embryonic stage, Thabo Mbeki, announced that the advocates of the MARP would seek to enrol like-minded elites across the continent: ‘participating African leaders would form a compact committing them to the programme and a forum of leaders who would make decisions about sub-programmes and initiatives’. The contents of both the MARP and the NEPAD (which effectively replaces it) are recycled from previous “visions” and statements that have marked out Africa’s post-independence experience at regular intervals. As one commentator framed it, ‘there have been a number of African initiatives, like the African Human Rights Charter, to deal with its [the continent’s] problems, and agreements and instruments have been approved, signed and even ratified, without being used effectively to deal with wars, human rights’ violations, genocide, and also with prevailing under-development and poverty’.

Perhaps what is new about the NEPAD is its very mainstream approach to development, which can relatively easily settle into the hegemonic norms that stake out the global political economy, as well as promoting a greater role for the international financial institutions in Africa. One analyst put it thus about the MARP, ‘while calling for African leaders to assume ownership of economic development, Mbeki in the same vein calls for World Bank-led strategic partnerships with Africa and the International Monetary Fund Poverty Reduction Programme. This is despite the role the two organisations have played in wreaking havoc to the economies in Africa’.

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60 This Day (Lagos) July 23, 2001.
61 Daily News (Gaborone) June 28, 2001
64 Mmegi/The Reporter (Gaborone) February 2-8, 2001.
65 Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg), February 2-8, 2001.
Obasanjo and Mbeki flew to Bamoko in Mali to meet Horst Kohler, head of the MF, and World Bank chief James Wolfensohn in order to discuss how to construct a ‘global partnership for African development’ and advance its integration into the world, with the help of developed countries, the private sector and multilateral institutions such as the Bretton Woods bodies. As the director of the South African Council of Churches’ ecumenical service for socio-economic transformation, Mongezi Guma said, ‘NEPAD correctly states that current “globalisation” policies fail to lift Africa out of socio-economic decline but then goes on to say that Africa therefore needs more of the same policies’.

It is self-evident that Mbeki has been highly active recently touting what was first known as his “global initiative on Africa”, and now the MARP. This enthusiasm to posture himself as the “voice of Africa” evidenced itself in the overt public relations attempt by the ANC to craft Mbeki as some sort of philosopher-king, centred around the African Renaissance. Ironically, Mbeki is only able to pass himself off as such a visionary because of the receptivity in Northern capitals to hear his reformist message that remains well within – indeed legitimises – the current hegemony of neo-liberalism. As Dot Keet asked, ‘is it that they are representing the developing world to the WTO or legitimising the WTO to the developing world?’

Certainly, the apparent sympathetic hearing that Mbeki, and others have received in various global power centres, is precisely because the message they are communicating lets off responsibility for growing world inequality and African immiseration on any particular policies that cause such processes and rather, pins the blame on the amorphous phenomena known as “globalisation”. Even this is embraced by the NEPAD: it is the way in which globalisation acts on Africa, and not the very contents of it, that are the source of Africa’s woes. As Patrick Bond put it, writing on Mbeki’s global strategy:

There is never to be found, in Mbeki’s repertoire of explanations, the dangerous notion that the gulf between rich and poor widens precisely because Northern capital enjoys ever-growing capacity to source inputs ever more cheaply from the South, thanks to asymmetric trade relations, debt peonage and currency crashes generated by regular bouts of financial-speculative raiding. That possibility, and the policy implications it suggests, can never be considered, much less stated in polite discourse.

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69 Quoted in Khan, 1999.
70 Patrick Bond Can Thabo Mbeki Change the World? Strategies, Tactics and Alliances Towards Global Governance, inaugural Frantz Fanon Memorial lecture, University of Durban-Westville School of Governance, August 17, 2000, p. 8.
This problem lies at the heart of the NEPAD’s agenda and is derivative of the fact that its apparent credibility with their transnational elite counterparts in the North is predicated on the shared acceptance and advancement within their national spaces and beyond, of precisely the hegemonic agenda that Mbeki et al (unintentionally?) cast as undermining their own domestic legitimacy. The promoters of the NEPAD cannot openly reject the neo-liberal thrust of globalisation because that would entail a rejection of their own position, as well as call into question their own individual compromises with externally-oriented capital from which they draw much of their advice and support.71 Bridging the gap between their popular constituency, which in the main is far more critical – if not openly hostile – to the continued ravages of globalisation, and their elite class allies in big capital, the promoters of the NEPAD remain caught within a web of contradictions that send out mixed signals vis-à-vis their own positions regarding the future ordering of the global political economy.

Already, tension over particular countries roles have threatened to undermine unity. We have already mentioned Abdoulaye Wade’s apparent solo attempt to represent the whole of Africa. Nigeria and south Africa’s growing cosy relationship has also been noted. One report asserted that when Pretoria and Abuja were negotiating about the MARP in its initial stages ‘it seem[ed] a little undiplomatic to have excluded Egypt, which is said to resent what it sees as South Africa’s pretensions to the leadership of the African continent’.72 This dispute is over form not substance however, as the Egyptians have been as enthusiastic about neo-liberal solutions to Africa’s developmental impasse as Pretoria. Indeed, one senior Egyptian official, in advocating the African Renaissance, asserted:

The need to recognise and realise the importance of economic integration, open markets and free trade among African countries as a prerequisite to achieve economic development…
The goals of [the African Renaissance] should be…empowering the private sector as an engine of economic growth…and achieving sound macro economic indicators and creating an environment that is investment friendly.73

Certainly, relatively petty diplomatic spats aside, the contents of the NEPAD’s agenda are highly problematic if a new vision for North-African relations (and the NEPAD claims just that) are being advanced as some sort of new consensus on how the global political

72 Mmegi/The Reporter (Gaborone) February 2-8, 2001.
economy is to be re-ordered. This is particularly so if such visions see the adoption of neo-liberalism as a prerequisite for development.

In the post-Seattle era and with growing disenchantment with the panacea of globalisation emerging, particularly in the South, space apparently is opening up for a strategic intervention by key African elites on how the world may be run on more equitable lines. However, the overall thrust, exemplified in spirit at Seattle and other elite meeting points and crystallised in some sort of shape by the NEPAD, leaves the agenda being advanced very much in line with ongoing global hegemonic norms centred around neo-liberalism and standard approaches to export-driven development paths. As one commentator remarked, ‘where once there was talk of curbing the power of multinational corporations and promoting self-reliance, now one hears only of lifting restrictions and increasing trade’.

This reality undermines the potency of the NEPAD’s message and suggests that the call from Africa is crafted by and for an externally-oriented elite who recognise, with their transnational allies in the North, that some sort of cosmetic changes may be required if the whole house of cards is not to collapse in on itself. This process would most probably start in the developing world, where the position of the liberalising elite remains precarious and more open to domestic (and volatile) unrest than their Northern counterparts. Hence the call from the NEPAD can be cast as a defensive measure to protect key African elites’ positions in the face of withering domestic criticism at the path they have chosen to take their home polities. Whilst this may temporally placate critics who may believe that at last “their” governments are doing something to ameliorate the negative effects of globalisation, the very narrowness and limited nature of the NEPAD agenda reveal fundamental shortcomings. These shortcomings are rooted in a too narrow a conception of the global political economy, and a too easy acceptance, and naïve belief, of the willingness of the North to compromise its power. This limited reading of the current world order belies any real potentiality for the necessary changes required for a more equitable world.

**Limited Reformism and the NEPAD**

Clearly, the major factor absent from the NEPAD’s message is a coherent analysis of the organising principles of the current global order. These organising principles stipulate that sovereign states are the ultimate building blocks of a co-operative order, and that power differentials between states are unavoidable: all one can do is to try and mitigate some of the

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effects of these differentials. On a structural level, thus, no analytical attention is paid to other sources and loci of power and privilege in global affairs, such as transnational classes or multinational corporations. Such a restricted focus on power and privilege can lead to nothing more than a programme aimed at partial and piecemeal change, the core features of any reformist tendency. Although a great deal of emphasis is placed on the phenomenon of “globalisation”, the absence of any sustained structural analysis of global interaction is also evident in the failure of the NEPAD to interrogate the structural effects that globalisation, driven by the liberalisation of the markets for goods, ideas and capital, has had on the very nature of the state. The problem with globalisation is not so much that it has restricted state autonomy or has eroded sovereignty, but rather that its logic induces states to opt for being instruments of competition, rather than being instruments of development.

One of the marked features of the NEPAD’s promoters is their apparent supine position before the globalisation juggernaut. Exemplifying this, Nelson Mandela remarked that ‘globalisation is a phenomenon that we cannot deny. All we can do is accept it.’ However, instead of having “no alternative” but to embrace globalisation and then embark on reformist measures, a variety of policy choices and strategic instruments remain unused. This, naturally, helps craft a convenient blind spot concerning the NEPAD’s authors and promoters. Their own policies aid and abet the very marginalisation and immiseration that they now decry. Options that may include real attempts to change the very dynamic of globalisation by restricting the “openness” of specifically financial markets, are largely ignored.

Indeed, by raising essentially reformist questions and negating the very possibility of alternatives, many African elites contribute to making neo-liberalism accepted as the “only” macro-economic framework and development strategy within which they (and by implication, all others) can work within. The best option which one can pursue in such a scenario is hence to work via a “tactical” engagement policy to maximise benefits. This essentially self-reinforcing policy has occurred within the context of a globalised international political economy and the concomitant rise to hegemony among the transnational elite of neo-liberalism. Not only is this linked to the material benefits that this transnational elite and its externally-oriented allies can expect to benefit from a liberalisation strategy, it also reflects the development where the elite in all international financial institutions and most multilateral bodies and national administrations earnestly believe that neo-liberalism is the best and only

way to promote growth and development (importantly, in that order). As one analyst remarked,

Core interests have supported neo-liberalism not only for material gain but also because there has been a genuine belief that it will lead to development. For peripheral interests (LDCs as well as the “emerging market economies” of central and eastern Europe), consent has been given with conviction that participation in the global marketplace will benefit them.76

This helps account for the acceptance of the broad principles of neo-liberalism within whose framework the NEPAD proffers up support within the global order. If this is accepted, the agenda for change pursued by the NEPAD is clearly a restricted, reformist agenda and not one aimed at transforming global relations, which is obviously a precondition for the drastic reduction of global poverty. Yet, this lack of a real agenda for fundamental change suits the transnational elite, those both in the North and the South. The post-Seattle order, as evidenced by the NEPAD, will almost certainly not be marked by a rejection of the liberalisation discourse and orthodoxy, but rather that in future the North will have to tread more carefully in pushing the neo-liberal agenda. Sceptics would assert that this will simply be “spin” on an older and more established orthodoxy, and parallels with Blair’s rhetoric around the “Third Way” may lead to some clues as to how this more “caring” neo-liberalism may be cast. After all, it has been said that ‘Blair is a new-style social democrat who promotes a Third Way. Its chief proponent in Africa is Mbeki’.77 Yet critics point out that the Third Way is but spin-doctored neo-liberalism. As Callinicos reminds us, ‘far from breaking with the neo-liberal policies of the New Right, it has continued and, in certain ways, radicalised them. The Blair government has carried privatisation further than its Tory predecessors dared’.78

Advancing this (admittedly cynical) scenario, co-operative elites in Africa will be needed to sell the message. This is where the NEPAD fits in. Having taken on board the discourse of globalisation, liberalising elites in the developing world are the best candidates for pushing a more co-operative posture on their part in trade negotiations, whilst at the same time winning a degree of latitude from the global powers-that-be. This in itself reflects the changes that have occurred within the global economy and in particular mirrors the dominant ideology that is an integral part of the ongoing order. As one analyst wrote, ‘the history of the developing countries in the world trading system reveals initial hostility to a

regime that was controlled by advanced and industrialised countries. However it is obvious that the developing countries' attitudes [have changed]. However, the danger of being co-opted by the holders of power is one that a reformer always has to be aware of, and develop a strategy against. So far, there has been little signs of such a counter strategy on the part of the NEPAD. As one analysis framed it, 'supporting free trade while at the same time insisting that [Africa] must attempt to change the rules of the system in a non-confrontational manner [and within the neo-liberal discourse] amounts to a one-way traffic bridge. It accepts that the end of history, or for that matter ideology, has indeed been reached'.

It is for this reason that any celebratory mood that was, momentarily, sounded in the aftermath of Seattle and that is wrapped around the NEPAD banner, needs careful reflection and interrogation. Africa-based initiatives are vitally needed, but it seems clear that what is emerging is a nascent reformism, emanating from key elites in the developing world, that far from ushering in a Twenty-first Century NIEO, remains rooted in an orthodox discourse that benefits but a small elite. Unfortunately:

African officials are so conditioned by the neo-liberal "development" paradigm, or, alternatively, they are so conditioned by their own class interests, that...[alternatives cannot be envisioned] without pressure from below. At the end of the day, it is the people, especially the working people in mines, factories, farms, and the service sector, that have must take upon themselves the responsibility to protect their own jobs, income, family welfare, the environment and national patrimony.

Certainly, 'recent South African politicians have sung the global neo-liberal tune. President Thabo Mbeki often talks left but acts right; Minister of Finance Trevor Manuel and Minister of Trade Alec Erwin don’t even bother to talk left anymore.' Such activities are not restricted to South Africa alone, but increasingly mark out the behaviour of the elites promoting the NEPAD, with their rhetoric of reformism staking out the limited boundaries from which they engage the North. Despite Mbeki’s claims that the NEPAD reflects ‘the sovereign will of the people’ and the ‘aspirations of the masses’, the whole initiative has been remarkable for its lack of consultation with civil society in Africa. If it were, then irritating questions over the WTO’s project of advancing a corporate-dominated world and the related pressure to commodify everyday might have been raised. As it were such impulses were not consulted

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82 Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) February 16-22, 2000.
during the NEPAD’s formulation. If this is the best hope for Africa then the future indeed looks bleak for the continent and its peoples.