

# The contradictions of development

## Primitive accumulation and geopolitics in the two Sudans<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 Introduction

The recent opening ceremony of the so-called Lamu Port and Lamu Southern Sudan–Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET) has laid bare yet again the inherently contradictory nature of post-colonial development. The mega project creates a new East African transport corridor connecting land-locked South Sudan and Ethiopia with a 32-berth deep-sea water facility at the Indian Ocean. Among a variety of development objectives in the participating countries, the project is designed to offer an alternative export route for South Sudanese crude oil. Since its independence, the ‘world’s newest country’ has been at loggerheads with its former rulers in Khartoum over a transfer fee for using the pipeline, refineries and port facilities for the traditional export route through the Red Sea. Yet even though the project, if implemented, will have a tremendously positive effect on South Sudan’s development potential, local communities in Lamu claim they have not been consulted over the development of the UNESCO heritage site into a major infrastructure hub (Gari 2012; York 2012).

This dispute reflects but one of the imminent contradictions South Sudan faces in its effort to catch up. Closer to home, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is sought to develop the post-war economy and increase state revenue (*Sudan Tribune* 2012a) as well as agricultural production as a means to boost food security (Lupai 2012). This strategy is influential across Africa (Bush *et al.* 2011: 188–9), but the Horn of Africa appears to be a special case due to its high vulnerability to food insecurity (USAID and Famine Early Warning System Network 2012). In fact, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) expects to feed up to half of South Sudan’s population in 2012 (WFP and FAO 2012). Measured by these objectives, the land investment activity in South Sudan to this day has not yielded great results. Acquisitions lacked good practice with regards to community consultation and environmental impact assessments (Deng 2011), while most transactions appear to remain merely speculative (Mosley 2012). It is not only food insecurity that remains a paramount issue for the Republic of South Sudan, however, but also the long-established need to diversify the economy after the dispute with the North has led to the loss of all oil revenues at a time when ‘internal’ and ‘external’ conflicts spiral and put heavy burdens on the stretched budget.

In many ways, however, the contradiction between community rights and agricultural development, geared to increase production, either to meet local demand or to increase state revenue as an export commodity, is not unique to South Sudan in 2012. Sudanese history features a wealth of examples where contradictions turned into confrontation and armed struggle. Prior to the discovery of oil, the country's conflict-ridden trajectory from traditional modes of subsistence to a modern capitalist regime of accumulation has by and large evolved 'on the ground' around transforming land and labour into productive sources of surplus value, thought to fill imaginary African and Arab breadbaskets respectively. Many conflicts and maybe even the division itself can be seen as a long-term result of this process of 'mal-integration' into the capitalist world economy (Ayers 2010). Despite the new South Sudanese Land Act and Land Policy explicitly addressing some historic conflict dynamics around land by inscribing John Garang's slogan of 'land belonging to the people', some intrinsic contradictions should be on Juba's radar.

This chapter will provide an overview of historical and contemporary dynamics and transformations leading to these development contradictions. The core subject matter of this analysis is the process of appropriation and primitive accumulation of previously uncommoditised productive resources, notably land, labour, capital and, in the case of agricultural development, water. However, instead of merely identifying 'dispossessed' classes and 'appropriating' agents whose actions (or inactions) are assumed to be solely based on a self-interested profit motive, this chapter will further explore the complex set of global structural relations informing local agents and underlying their actions. While the literature has usefully reflected on *transnational* global markets as a driving force behind such processes, notably in the form of foreign capital, sometimes competing strategic orientations of different state powers – in other words, *geopolitical* relations and the ways in which they intermingle with market relations – have received less attention in the analysis. This chapter will try to remedy this shortcoming in the Sudanese context. This emphasis on the dualistic structure of world politics consisting of global markets and an inter-state system should not be read, however, as an attempt to diminish local, individual agency in the process, or as reducing them to passive executors of global or geopolitical imperatives. Equally, it is not intended to see any of these spheres of social interaction as self-contained and unrelated to one another. Rather, this chapter aims to take into account regionally and historically specific social relations between macro-structures and local agents and, in doing so, provides a nuanced analysis of the process of accumulation in Sudan and South Sudan.

## 2 Primitive accumulation, development and the state

### 2.1 The concept of primitive accumulation

Although the concept of 'previous accumulation' was first developed by Adam Smith (1982), it gained more prominence in Karl Marx's historical materialist re-conceptualisation as the process of 'primitive accumulation'. This is for Marx the historical process whereby producers are divorced from their means of production, notably the enclosure of land in 16th-century England (Marx 1981: Ch. 26). This act of dispossession of subsistence farmers from their primary means of production is, however, not seen as a 'natural' occurrence, but as a precondition, instituted by extra-economic – i.e. political and violent – means, so that market relations can engage in a process of impersonal, market-based appropriation later (Brenner 1985; Wood 1999). It involves not only the commodification of land via enclosing commons, but also the transformation of peasants into waged agricultural labourers. The essential objective of this process is the commodification not only of land but of all factors of production, turning land, capital and labour into marketable goods, generating the specific form of social reproduction

known as capitalism. Marx's own preoccupation was with the transformation of subsistence producers into wage labour, or the proletarianisation as the essential intermediary step in generating the future revolutionary class. In that sense, he was not morally averse to the process, and in fact saw it as part of a necessary, if violent, transformation. However, far from being a finite process whereby productive factors, once commodified, remain in the market sphere, primitive accumulation has to be understood more as a permanent, infinite process necessitated by capitalism's expansion, and the need to overcome its inherent contradictions and to maintain the separation of producers from productive factors (De Angelis 2004; Luxemburg 1951). Even though Marx specifically refers to colonialism as one outcome of this process, expansion does not necessarily have to be seen as a territorial process only, but can involve constant transformations, in particular with regards to the changing nature of labour-capital relations within the 'global north', 'north-south' relations as well as incomplete transitions within the 'global south' (Harvey 2003).

Given the Marxist leanings of many Third World nationalist revolutionary movements, including the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLM) during the initial phases of the struggle in 1983 (Berhanu 2011: 83),<sup>2</sup> this concept has also found inroads into the development literature (Amin 1977). However, the major shortcoming in applying this concept to South Sudan is its presumption of a direct, stationary relation between producer and land. Dispossession in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe thus required the extraction of direct producers from the land. In the case of more mobile forms of subsistence, like pastoralism or shifting cultivation, the opposite transformation is required (and pursued): namely, the settling of populations is a precondition for the commodification of land and labour. 'Primitive accumulation' in Africa is, thus, not always comparable to the processes in Europe. Apart from settling mobile populations, it also implies the monopolisation of land use and the dispossession of producers from their means of social reproduction. The role of states in general and post-colonial states in particular, rather than private entrepreneurship, is crucial in driving this socio-economic transformation. In other words, colonial administrations as well as post-colonial state formations introduce capitalist social relations. Though they never introduce an ideal-typical European 'mirror' image, transformation always happens via a process of violent dispossession, rather than developing organically driven purely by an indigenous entrepreneurial spirit.<sup>3</sup> This also includes the recognition that government accumulation can still be carried out with the objective of commoditisation, even if no privately owned capital is initially involved. Private ownership does not per se constitute a condition for commoditisation, as the state is frequently the appropriator par excellence in post-colonial contexts – itself appropriated by private interest, local, national, global or simply intangible. Hence, different geographical instances of accumulation and dispossession are heterogeneous while historical and contemporary dynamics are highly complex based on different social formations producing different forms of resistance (Glassman 2006: 622). In sum, the core premises of this analysis are that (a) accumulation and dispossession are *a priori* extra-economic, *political* processes, and (b) that they are necessarily *permanent* in scope due the enduring labour-capital dialectic.

## 2.2 Primitive accumulation in the two Sudans

### 2.2.1 Sudan

A brief look at Sudan's history reveals many instances of appropriation and dispossession, both in its colonial as well as its post-colonial history (e.g. Abdelkarim 1992; Ayers 2010). Here, the most frequently cited examples are the Gezira and Gedaref irrigated agricultural schemes, which introduced mechanisation and varying forms of mostly casual waged labour while strengthening

the local merchant (or circulation) capital. Despite being institutionalised by the colonial masters and being run by private operators, the Sudanese state in its different articulations remained the key agent of development as all land remained *de jure* public property (Barnett and Abdelkarim 1991). Sociologically, however, what Ayers calls Sudan's 'mal-integration' into the global political economy produced 'a dependent class of "local resource extractors"' (Ayers 2010: 163), a local appropriating capitalist class, who intensified resource extraction in Sudan in accordance with a global regime of growth and accumulation. On the flipside, they served not only to deplete Sudan's ecology, but also to impoverish the vast majority of Sudan's population by making them low-income wage earners.

Primitive accumulation in Sudan arguably has a long tradition, though this history is rather complex and uneven. During the Turco-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian regimes, forms of private landownership were established, while private 'foreign' capital (Greek and Syrian) had started penetrating Sudanese agriculture and semi-feudal landlords were established. These were usually close to political power both prior to and after independence. This also implied integrating into a global economy, appropriating land, labour and subsequently surpluses together with European formal or informal colonisers. This was particularly visible in the export-oriented cotton production in Ghezira. In fact, cotton exports made for a trade surplus in the first years of the nowadays debt-stricken independent Sudan. As a result, it was the only post-colonial Arab state not declaring a large-scale land reform with independence (Awad 1971: 212), simply because it didn't appear necessary to the established beneficiaries of a system of global wealth extraction. In other words, private and semi-statal forms of land acquisitions, but also the violent appropriation of free and unfree labour, had already developed as a 'tradition' in colonial and further into post-colonial Sudan. However, its uneven and partial nature had equally allowed pre-capitalist forms of subsistence, in particular nomadic livelihoods, to survive.

The crucial turning point in trying to close these gaps was President Nimiry's 1970 Unregistered Land Act, declaring all unclaimed land (i.e. unless claimed by investors) state property. This modern-day form of enclosure established the legal basis for large-scale land acquisitions by Nimiry's socialist-labelled regime. While it was by no means the first such example, it certainly constitutes a highlight in the uneven development of land policy in post-colonial Sudan. Modernisation and land reform came packaged in an agenda of 'Sudanism' which was meant to overcome traditional, or rather fractional, rule. Nimiry's administrative reforms replacing the British system of 'Native Administration' were meant to implement a more centralised administration further facilitating land use. In reality, it represented only another step in the incomplete transition from traditional to modern authority (cf Mamdani 2009: 173), creating what Mamdani calls many Sudans within a single state (*ibid.*: 174).

These were necessary steps to implement the 'Arab Breadbasket' strategy, geared to supply food to the Middle East while raising national income through crops exports. It rested on three pillars, namely Sudanese land and resources, Arab capital and Western know-how. The 'know-how' came from Washington as early as 1968, when the Mechanised Farming Corporation (MFC) was established upon request from the World Bank to secure loans and facilitate credit to farmers (Suliman 1994: 16). Subsequent expansion of mechanised farming was further funded by the World Bank under the MFC umbrella. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programmes continued the encouragement of growing export-oriented cash crops rather than establishing food security at home. This resulted in the slow loss of self-sufficiency for Sudan, once running a trade surplus, and applied not least to the cultivation of wheat, which was considered unsuitable for an export-led growth regime by agricultural specialists. The Arab/African food basket ideology, in conjunction with the influx of foreign capital politically facilitated by the Washington Consensus, continued to open the Sudanese market and production.

Domestically, the Unregistered Land Act coincided with the 1972 open door or *infaith* policy which had codified Sudan's dependence on foreign capital (Elnur 2008: 40). Investment into the Arab Breadbasket was not only *politically* driven by the food strategy of Gulf states but also *financially* fuelled by the need to recycle OPEC petro-capital, especially after the 1973 oil crisis had cut off Western markets. However, expansion was driven not only by the imperatives of a global political economy, but also by the rapid soil depletion the somewhat thoughtless cultivation of newly introduced cash crops had caused. Expanding the frontiers of cultivation and eventual environmental degradation led to more land conflict, notably in the Nuba mountains, southern Blue Nile and eastern Sudan (Ayers 2010; Suliman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c). In short, through unsustainable farming, capitalist expansion was dependent upon territorial expansion as long as the economy would remain focused on primary commodity export. This led not only to increased prices and depressed wages but also to the continuation of unsustainable 'short-termist' cultivation practices. These factors co-determined the ecologic and economic crisis still ongoing today, which is characterised by an enduring current account deficit, only disrupted by – in retrospect – a short era of oil riches.

After Nimery's fall, the 1986 interregnum of parliamentary democracy led to the rise of Islamist parties, possibly in reaction to socio-economic developments. In 1989 the continued economic failure led to another coup by an impatient 'ruthless business and finance segment of the ruling elite' (Suliman 1994: 19). The finance segment was based on an emerging Islamic banking sector majority-owned by Gulf investors. The Faisal Islamic Bank, for example, is 60% owned by foreign investors. Not only did Islamic banks enjoy tax breaks not available to other banks, but as a result of politically engineered privileges the lending and business practices of Islamic banks 'revolutionised access to credit, and wrested the virtual monopoly of this vital sector from privileged groups (many of whom were of foreign extraction)' (Elnur 2008: 70). In that sense, it was, according to Elnur, the single most important factor explaining the rise of the Islamist movement (*ibid.*). Its success in negotiating political and tax concessions from the state meant that it enjoyed a competitive edge over Sudan's established banks, quickly outgrowing them. War, in turn, hammed primary production in Sudan and led to increasing economic pressure on the Khartoum bourgeoisie (or Jellaba), leading to a consolidation of mercantile capitalist activity with Islamic finance, fuelled by a growing oil income in the Sudanese capital. Accumulated capital, in part due to the endemic state of political instability, moved abroad, however, along with skilled labour and upper middle-class urban population throughout the 1980s and 1990s, destined for oil-producing Arab states and Europe.

This consolidation of a strong class alliance, based in Khartoum, between agricultural capital, a merchant bourgeoisie and political elites was in fact quite similar to previous Umma and Mahdi administrations. Nimery's socialist experiment can be seen as the exception to the rule here. What made the NCP's regime different from its predecessors, though, was its much more pronounced Islamist agenda. Second, not only capital accumulated in the agricultural sector but also a petro dollar-fuelled Islamic finance became major pillars for the regime (Elhiraika 1996; Khaleefa 1993).

However, as capital wants to see quick returns on investments, the rapid and violent replacement of more sustainable forms of production in a subsistence economy by forms of production amenable to surplus extraction continued. Not only did this perpetuate social strain and conflict, it also exhausted ecosystems. The latest two instalments of these policies are the outsourcing of production in Gezira to Egyptian state investors, dispossessing farmers there (Ali 2010), and the hydro-engineering and irrigation developments in north Sudan and Blue Nile.

Agricultural developments around the Merowe multi-purpose dam project, for instance, have led to the displacement of many Manasir, Amri-Hamdayab and Nubian people far from their ancestral lands. The creation of new communities around new production areas is then marred

with a policy of homogenisation in the form of Islamisation. Arguably, thus, flooding current and future hydro-engineering and agricultural projects follow the purpose not only of increasing production, but also of transforming livelihoods, expanding mechanisation along with controlling wage-labour relations. In sum, this amounts to what some call 'demographic engineering' (Iftashim 2010), some of which is said to be achieved by settling Egyptian farmers in the Sudan (Ali 2010). These are a few examples epitomising the top-down approach to development which explains to some degree the various complex and persistent conflicts in the country. However, it is worth noting at this point that the web of personal relations as well as transnational connections which constitute Khartoum's military-financial complex make the clear identification of *agency* as well as *structures* difficult.

### 2.2.2 South Sudan

Compared to the vast history of failed, unsustainable or conflict-ridden agricultural development in North Sudan, South Sudan has seen little to no such investments or development in general, though plenty of conflict. Largely owing to a policy of neglect but also through decades of almost uninterrupted conflict and hostilities, large agricultural schemes are absent.<sup>1</sup> This makes the newly founded Republic of South Sudan a peculiar place, which is markedly different not only from its northern neighbour but also from its East African neighbours Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, South Sudan's main economic partners (Yongo-Bure 2007). Following the establishment of a semi-autonomous government in Juba in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), income was largely generated by oil revenues, which translated into one of the highest per capita incomes on the continent, comparable to that of South Africa. Paradoxically, owing to the legacy of Africa's longest civil war, it also features one of the lowest human development indices as well as being severely food insecure in a region vulnerable to the effects of weather extremes, such as droughts and floods.

Agricultural production and rural livelihoods remain by and large based on tradition. Because of its variable climate, both spatially as well as temporally, South Sudan traditionally features changing land-use patterns and a highly mobile population. Livelihoods are based on shared land use, which is the rule rather the exception. This also includes the farming areas of the so-called Equatoria Green Belt, where shifting cultivation is common. Arguably, these conditions don't lend themselves easily to the introduction of a Western-style private property regime, let alone large mechanised schemes. While entrenched in local tradition, shared land-use practice was never entirely conflict-free and many use rights were negotiated using differing levels of violence. Currently, however, it leads to high levels of violence and scores of casualties. Decades of war have damaged old conflict-resolution mechanisms along with traditional authority while having proliferated fire arms. Several campaigns of disarmament have only been partially successful so far (Schomerus and Allan 2010: 10). Thus, conflict and displacement have led to the disorientation of wide parts of the population and a general deterioration of the traditional social order, which has only very inconsistently been replaced by modern state structures. In short, South Sudan has thus far failed to implement Max Weber's famously defined modern state as 'a human community (that) successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1991: 78).

Another aspect is the prevalence of pastoral or agro-pastoral livelihoods. Measured by the output of marketable commodities, this is by and large a non-productive sector. Farming is more traditionally rooted in Greater Equatoria, where soils are thought to be more fertile, but even here the legacy of conflict has destroyed many traditional farming skills. As far as land-use patterns are concerned, this does not necessarily lead to more stationary livelihoods more adaptable to capitalist modes of production. On the one hand, conflict has brought many

pastoral communities to the region, increasing pressure on existing land and water resources. On the other hand, farmers have traditionally adhered to shifting cultivation. Lastly, if existing farms produce beyond subsistence levels, marketing skills are insufficient and necessary infrastructure for producer's access to the market is either poor or non-existent, so that food supply remains dependent on imports from Kenya and Uganda as well as WFP handouts.

Current South Sudanese development and agricultural policies are trying to attract FDI for the purpose of food production. Beyond local consumption, President Kiir and Vice-President Machar pointed to the potential export orientation of production when noting South Sudan's capability of becoming the regional food basket, with 'the entire world benefiting it' (Uma 2010). Notions of South Sudan as the region's breadbasket depend on the assumption of 'resource abundance', notably abundance of land (Lupai 2011). However, the seasonal use of land precludes such an easy and somewhat foregone conclusion. Awareness of the historical trajectory of Sudan's 'mal-integration' into the world economy is therefore essential when these policies are implemented.

Having said that, there are various obvious differences between north and South Sudan with the latter being incorporated into a regional East African economy, rather than developing a dependency on petro-dollars for its agricultural development. Equally, it is not exposed to the same climatic conditions as the north and might, therefore, be capable of introducing mechanised agriculture in a more sustainable manner compared to the unsustainable schemes that have led to environmental degradation north of the new border. Partly through historical experience, partly through the current debates about land grabs, the South Sudanese leadership is not unaware of potential problems (Nhial 2008). It aims to introduce legal safeguards against non-productive investments or those only directed by high yields rather than food security, such as carbon sinks and biofuels. Equally, South Sudan might not be subjected to a similarly rapacious investment regime of Islamic/Gulf finance, even though the activities of a venture capital firm like the Jarch Group or the private Egyptian but state-dominated Citadel group, as well as other investment activities, give rise to some concern (Deng 2011).

### 3 The nation, the global and the geopolitical

#### 3.1 Global capital accumulation

Much of the literature on land grabs has rightly pointed to the issue of 'global' market forces as the core agent behind the process of land grabs across Africa, which, to some, constitutes a new wave and new form of 'primitive accumulation' (Sassen 2010). Though some disagree that the observable forms of land investment in South Sudan can be seen as part of the pan-African phenomenon of land grabs (Mosley 2012), the government of South Sudan's repeated rhetorical commitment to private investors<sup>5</sup> as the key means of development in the new country begs some questions, not least because it also leaves the notion of a 'right to self-determination' incomplete at best. Inflow of private capital to compensate for lost oil revenue might help South Sudan in its determination to an independent destiny vis-à-vis the north; however, it creates new forms of dependencies, potentially leading to a damaging foreign debt cycle as was showcased in north Sudan. In that sense, the involvement of global commodity markets and the long-term impact of the capital flight from the sub-prime crisis<sup>6</sup> on rising food prices can be seen as new forms of a phenomenon well known to Sudan. In other words, land grabs are not only a contemporary phenomenon. They are but the latest step in a long historical legacy of primitive accumulation happening across the globe with implications for both Sudans.

As was described above, Sudan's development and in particular its agricultural development were tightly interwoven with the international political economy long before oil revenue flowing. This history of international involvement can be traced back to the colonial establishment of cotton cultivation which had produced local intermediaries for the rising world economy of the 19th century. The trajectory since then has slowly led into the prolonged state of economic, ecologic, social and security crisis still ongoing, interrupted by periods of relative peace in the 1970s and oil wealth in the 2000s. Foreign indebtedness and trade deficits remained, though. Long gone were the days of the cotton-owned trade surplus of the first post-independence years. This history illustrates how the process of global capital accumulation subjects local social relations to systemic pressures. This also applies to the SPLM, which, beyond its developmentalist agenda, is subject to a wider political economic imperative that necessarily involves social contradictions inherent in capitalist development per se. However, while 'global' market forces certainly play a role in understanding the current process of primitive accumulation, carried out by a global market, international institutions and local elites, there are also geopolitical aspects that influence outcomes, which is a neglected aspect in many analyses.

### 3.2 Geopolitics

The most obvious and most commonly referred to geopolitical aspect in Sudan as well as South Sudan is the effect of competition over the access to hydrocarbons, especially between 'Western' powers like the USA and 'Asian' players like the People's Republic of China. As will be demonstrated in the following section, resource competition alone is insufficient for explaining the respective Sudan policies of major powers. Rather, this section will try to analyse these policies in their historical-social relation towards one another to account for a multitude of global and regional dynamics determining the actions of external powers in the region.

Historically, geopolitics has always constituted a strong component of the history of the region. This reached from the long-lasting Egyptian influence and domination to the Ottoman Empire's tributary relation (or *Turkiyya*) to the British Empire. While these relations of domination were formalised, post-colonial independence suggested a degree of self-determination that is not necessarily reflected in the scope of action provided to the respective leaderships in Juba and Khartoum. In other words, even without mobilising a neo-Marxist vocabulary of 'neo-imperialism', 'neo-colonialism' or 'Empire', geopolitical social relations frame the past and future in the two Sudans alike.

#### The United States of America

From today's vantage point it seems difficult to believe that Sudan was a key US ally in the region during the Cold War. It shows, however, the malleability of global social relations, known as geopolitics, and the value in analysing those. This historic involvement is reflected in the key contribution to the CPA. Arguably, the United States continues to be a determining factor in the future of both Sudans. Today's US foreign policy at the Horn of Africa is no longer characterised by Cold War strategising, however, but by the 'war on terror'.

The George W. Bush administration's 'strategic philanthropy' (Barnes 2005: 16; Huliaras 2006), which led to the administration's commitment to the Sudanese peace process, not only came about as a spontaneous reaction to the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 (9/11) but is historically rooted in a long history of involvement in the Sudan (Mamdani 2009; Woodward 2006). Regardless, the strong US position providing the leverage necessary to end

the war was effected not by a long-term post-Cold War strategy for East Africa, aiming at installing a 'client state', but rather by the inadvertent combination of Cold War legacy commitments, like those to Uganda and Ethiopia, the perceived imperatives of the war on terror and the rise of the evangelical right in the USA.

The end of the external 'necessity' of the Cold War had initially left US policy-makers in a state of disorientation towards the whole of Africa but especially in a region as geopolitically sensitive as the Horn. This is evidenced by the aborted Somalia mission followed by a wider disengagement under President Bill Clinton. While West, Central and East Africa, despite all their conflicts and instability, were arguably more subject to the influence of their respective former colonial powers, the Horn's geopolitics are more fragmented. The proximity to natural resources and maritime energy routes makes it subject to competition by independent rising post-colonial powers. Notably this applies to the mostly hydro-political relations between Egypt and Ethiopia in the immediate neighbourhood and, in the periphery, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel and until recently Libya.

It is precisely these ambitions that had also put them at the centre of Cold War dynamics, with such dramatic implications for the 'internal' social relations in Sudan (Mamdani 2009). Apart from these rivalries the region adjacent to the energy-rich Middle East is of natural geo-strategic interest to powers aiming at global reach, but also to smaller middle powers active in the environment. For example, while being geographically far removed, Sudan has always played an important part in the Arab-Israeli conflict, prompting long-lasting Israeli involvement in East Africa and in Uganda especially. Similarly, Sudan currently has to balance its declared friendship with Iran with the long-standing financial and religious influence of the more proximate Saudis, who look at this 'friendship' with disapproval.

Additionally, no clear regional hegemon has emerged, providing ample 'room to manoeuvre' to all players on the chessboard, including any regime Khartoum has produced (Marchal 2010: 81). Due to the geopolitically ambiguous post Cold War situation, the US had difficulties 'in defining an overarching set of national interests' which could have provided the context for a more interventionist policy (van de Walle 2009: 1). Consequently, the Clinton administration's policy, preoccupied with peace-making in the Balkans, was one of 'retrenchment and timidity' with the active discouragement of intervention in the Rwandan genocide constituting a possible low point (van de Walle 2009: 2). Despite its ineffectiveness, the Bush campaign still criticised Clinton for being too committed to the continent. Paradoxically, Bush thus turned out to be much more pro-active in Africa as a whole, starting with his commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS. If the increase in aid had come to many as a surprise, the increased engagement culminating in the 2007 creation of a dedicated command for the continent Africa Command (AFRICOM, without Egypt) can be seen as part of a redefinition of US interests in the continent post-9/11. As opposed to the Middle East, the Africa engagement did not suffer from a portrayal as unjustifiable neo-colonialism. Starting from what van de Walle calls 'ad hoc humanitarianism' it was especially the success of the CPA that led many commentators, including many vocal critics, to describe the administration's record in Africa as a unique success in stark contrast to the rest of the Bush legacy (Mamdani 2011; van de Walle 2009: 6).

While the war on terror began focusing more directly on Somalia, the continued US interest in the region also includes both Sudans. South Sudan as a reliable ally is supported by the ongoing militarisation of US Africa policy, epitomised most clearly by the launching of the Combined Joint Talks Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in response to the threat of Al Qaeda and affiliates in the region in 2002, but also by direct and indirect military aid as declared in President Barack Obama's latest budget plan. Interestingly, militarisation and aid became intertwined under these circumstances, so that AFRICOM now manages one-fifth of the US aid budget to Africa (van de Walle 2009: 13). Relations with Khartoum away from the public image are not in any case as

dreadful as is commonly believed. The main bone of contention is humanitarian access and the fact that the USA has not removed Khartoum from the list of states sponsoring terrorism, as initially promised. More generally, though, the NCP is no stranger to Washington. After the US strikes on Khartoum in the aftermath of the Kenyan and Tanzanian embassy bombings, the NCP leadership has demonstrated a highly co-operative spirit, especially with regard to intelligence co-operation, which is considered vital to US operations in Somalia. Official US policy, in particular those parts of the Republican party influenced by the evangelist right and those parts of the Democrats influenced by humanitarian lobbyists, continues painting a public image of hostility towards Khartoum (Mamdani 2007, 2009). However, the picture is far from black and white. Similarly, while the US role, especially in the drafting of the CPA, is crucial, its actions have to be understood in relation to other powers' actions and events in the region and globally.

### The People's Republic of China

By contrast, China's involvement in both Sudans is frequently reduced to pure energy security policy (Mohan and Power 2008). While the heavy investments in Sudan's oil industry certainly determine Chinese Government's interests in the region, this does not come in the form of a strict anti-American support of Bashir and the NCP.<sup>7</sup> Given that 70% of proven reserves are in the south, Juba is an equally important partner for China. With independence and the strong ties between the SPLM and the US, competition for natural resources and influence is certainly a factor, though the concrete nature this competition may take is unknown. Most likely it will be a matter of considerable complexity (Large 2008, 2009) also involving other powers, notably India (Narlikar 2010).

Similar power constellations can be found in broader geo-strategic terms beyond the issue of energy security. China's growing external trade requires securing global routes, a policy which has been articulated in the so-called 'String of Pearls' strategy, of which LAPSSET could be a part. While this could just represent legitimate and recognised maritime trade interests (Khurana 2008), it might equally lead to competition with India and the USA. Military and security implications are far from clear, though. In any case, the fact that it provides room for speculation is sufficient to make the String of Pearls relevant. For even if there is no 'hard' security issue at stake, the strategy exists at least as a perception, which in turn might influence naval policies of other powers, like the USA (Genz 2005; Pehrson 2006).

### The dialectics of geopolitics

The discussion around the placement of AFRICOM and China's String of Pearls strategy in the Indian Ocean provides two indicators of what underlies the respective Great Power strategies in the region beyond resource access. However, these should not be seen as two 'tunnel visions', blindly followed by these powers independent of their environment. Nor should analysis be limited to a 'global' competition between Beijing and Washington.<sup>8</sup> More likely, the two powers are preoccupied with finding a new modus vivendi allowing each the continuation of their respective strategies of accumulation.<sup>9</sup> This also includes the thus far highly fragile post-CPA intra-Sudanese relations, which are to be strengthened instead of contributing to destabilising the region with Great Power competition. In fact, most states will be concerned with post-CPA stability – a desire that has become even greater at a time characterised by an increasing sense of post-revolutionary volatility and unpredictability in the Arab world.

This short portrayal of the complexity of global political economic and geopolitical relations is by no means exhaustive. It simply goes to show that policy decisions are not taken in a

vacuum, purely determined by what Robert Putnam once famously called ‘two-level games’ (Putnam 1988). Rather, they are the outcome of a complex web of social relations, ‘domestic’, ‘international’ and ‘global’ in scope, sometimes part of a wider policy, but also sometimes ad hoc reactions to other actors and emerging structures. Geopolitics is therefore better understood as the dialectical relationship between different historically and geographically specific foreign policies emerging from a social substance, rather than purely structurally generated socially empty Great Power competition (Waltz 1979). While competition is part of this dialectic, including the competition over resources for profit, it might equally follow different imperatives in different situations. It is therefore the dialectical relationship of powers and the unintended consequences this relationship has generated that constitute the geopolitical structure into which South Sudan was born. This is what delimits the new country’s scope of action. Within the dual structures of global markets and a pre-existing inter-state system South Sudan can adapt, react, influence and contribute, but it cannot determine the shape of its future entirely independently.

#### 4 Conclusion

An historical perspective on the contemporary process of primitive accumulation reveals various dialectical relationships determining the nature and scope of development in the Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan. The first of these relationships is that with its own history. Historically constituted social – productive – relations continue to influence the current trajectory of both Sudans. This is not to argue in favour of a path dependency, however, but rather that any analysis of the contemporary policy dilemmas requires a thorough search for their historical origins. Second, from a classical Marxist perspective, how the relationship between capital and direct producers develops is crucial for the future of production and, hence, wealth creation. This relationship needs careful calibration, usually by the state when undergoing capitalist development. In other words, the establishment of a waged labour force as the basis for a capitalist growth regime will have to separate direct producers from their means of production, implying a tremendous social transformation that requires careful negotiation. Third, the establishment of a private property regime is subject to similar conditions with regards to land rights. How the carefully crafted South Sudanese land policy will be implemented is crucial in this regard. Fourth, clearly identifying local agency in this process is problematic as it is subject to an increasingly volatile global regime of capitalist accumulation. This regime of accumulation is in turn itself embedded within global and regional geopolitical systems. Political decisions directing the future path of South Sudanese development are therefore themselves part of a ‘global’/‘geopolitical’ dialectic, the complexity of which is sometimes difficult to penetrate analytically. Fifth, these difficulties should not obscure the view on an intra-elite competition, carried out locally and regionally as well as globally over the sources of surplus, with arable land being second only to oil in its desirability. Developmental contradictions are thus reproduced locally as well as globally, specifically within the agricultural/land development sector, reaffirming the view that ‘primitive accumulation’ has to be seen as a permanent, rather than finite, process.

In the meantime, development in South Sudan, agricultural and otherwise, remains in its infancy. What some might see as a ‘privilege of backwardness’ provides incentives for devising ‘mega projects’ for others. This applies in particular when it comes to addressing the paramount issues of food security and pressures to diversify the economy away from hydro-carbons. However, the lesson that South Sudan can learn from its former northern foe is that big projects, more than offering valuable services for the population or a quick fix to food security and other problems, more than anything offer high levels of surplus to investors, which is frequently

siphoned off by markets. Capital does not necessarily benefit the local population, who have to buy back services at inflated rates to accommodate investors' expectations. Historical and contemporary experiences in the global north and elsewhere in Africa suggest that development in big projects involving foreign interests can have detrimental effects on communities.<sup>1</sup> Capital thus accumulated, however, will find a way to turn profitable, especially if instability persists and the institutions of the new state remain weak. Thus, while big projects might seem an intuitive reaction to the current situation, small-scale community-based projects nevertheless offer more sustainable forms of development, a more direct return on the investment, but also a safeguard against the outbreak of similar patterns of conflict. This applies to the expansion of agricultural production as well as to hydro-engineering and other big projects.

While this chapter has focused on questions of the relationship between land, social power and the environment in – by now – two countries, it has to be recognised that the sources of war and instability are equally located within the globally and historically constituted social relations briefly outlined here.

## Notes

- 1 Parts of this research have been conducted under the EU FP7 CLICO project, for details see: [www.clico.org](http://www.clico.org). The author is grateful for the support.
- 2 Bernalu (2011: 83) quotes Article 5 of the SPLM legislation No. 1 of 1983 at length:

The Marxist-Leninist movement known as Sudan's People's Liberation Movement shall be the sole people's political organisation established in the interest of the oppressed working masses of the Sudan people to liberate the country from the oppressive, corrupt and reactionary bourgeois government of Khartoum.

Thus, in the early stages of the struggle, arguably still dominated by the imperatives of the Cold War, the SPLM adopted an anti-capitalist, rather than antinorthern/Arab, language.

- 3 This point has been made by various social theorists, from within both Marxist and Weberian traditions; Wood (2002); Tilly (1990).
- 4 The Aweil Rice scheme is an exception that proves the rule. It has to be added that it is based on flood irrigation and in the early stages of donor-funded rehabilitation.
- 5 Statements of this nature are frequently aired by South Sudanese politicians and Vice-President Riek Machar in particular. There is a concerted policy plan backing up such plans, as evidenced by the repeated invitations to investors (*Sudan Tribune* 2012b).
- 6 The effect of the European debt crisis has yet to be established and cannot, therefore, be discussed here.
- 7 The most striking example of its rather nuanced Sudan policy is China's abstention when the Security Council Resolution referred the Darfur War Crimes to the ICC in 2005. Notably, the USA cast the same vote along with Brazil and Algeria, while Russia and the European permanent UN Security Council (UNSC) members voted in favour.

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