

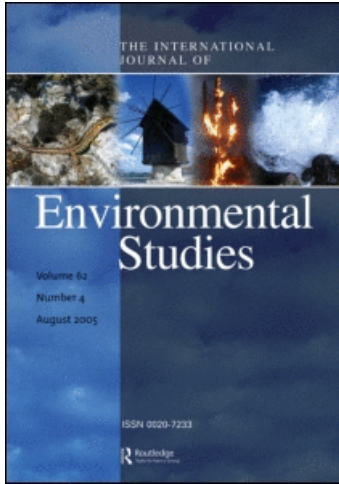
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Foreword

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Foreword

The Horror, the Horror!

Those who know Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), will recall the dying words of Kurtz, its anti-hero. Those words are the motto of this foreword. They echo through Stephen Smith's depressing account *Le fleuve Congo* [1]. The power of Conrad's novel remains its challenge to the West and to Africa to be virtuous.

Since the publication barely a year ago of a previous special issue on Africa, the general position has worsened. It appears that the prolonged wrecking of the Zimbabwean economy – and thus the lives of all Zimbabweans – will change only when internal or external military reaction supervenes. The apparent paranoia of Mugabe causes him to propose that his economic problems are caused by Western machinations. But it is not Western machinations which appear in the flight of Zimbabweans into South Africa and elsewhere; nor in the aggressive and incompetent expropriation by State-authorized thugs of white farmers; nor in the equally cruel destruction by the black authorities of black shanty towns. This is what would be called, in London policing terms, *black-on-black violence*. As Sir Robert Muldoon – a former New Zealand Prime Minister famously remarked to Mugabe many years ago – 'The trouble is you've been out in the bush too long shooting people.'

A similar mentality can be seen in the allegations of Sudan's dictator that the West is trying to impose colonial control on his enormous and unwieldy country, and that the *janjaweed* are not being aided by and encouraged by himself and his minions. At the same time, the same man appeals for help for the floods in his country. Most observers would find that the split in Sudan between the Muslim North and the Christian and Animist South has been a colossal waste of energy and life which ought to have been ended years before it (apparently) was ended; and that since such disputes can occur, as they do in Darfur, with impact on neighbouring states, there is something defective with the thinking of leaders and the allocation of resources. Currently the Tuareg of Niger – a people distributed across the ancient caravan routes of North Africa – are fighting their government because they are excluded from the benefits of uranium exploitation. The governments of Niger and Mali, in response, seek help from Sudan and Libya. And no-one dares to observe that since Vietnam it is clear that an effective guerrilla force can always conquer a conventional army: though this is clear in Iraq, in Africa in numerous continued cases, and in the Caucasus.

The immense horror of Darfur has caused the world to do nothing for several years; and although one may see compassion fatigue, and over-extension of American and British efforts in other (and those other being also Muslim!) areas as instrumental, a little denunciation of fantasy and paranoia would not come amiss from those who protest that freedom is important and that human rights are sacred. But no truly decisive condemnation of the misgoverning of Zimbabwe has come from the African Union, the United Nations or any world figure. On the other hand, President Nicholas Sarkozy has spoken for France (and by

implication the European Union) in calling for an end to the Darfur massacres and Gordon Brown the British Prime Minister has joined his position to that of Sarkozy.

These sacred human rights – deriving politically from the great change in the Western world originated by the French Revolution – are incorporated in the U.N. Charter and in the Declaration of Human Rights, and are made part of the law of the United Kingdom. They have a Christian substrate; they have an ecological dimension via the idea of environmental justice and the meeting of basic human needs. Yet they are treated as valueless by Mugabe, Bashir and a great many other people who are running Africa very badly and pretending instead that they are well loved, well justified, and well intentioned.

The consequences for the vulnerable resources - human and natural - within that vast, ill governed continent are truly dreadful. One cannot wish the British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, German or Italian Empires to be brought back; and yet one cannot ignore the contrast between the prosperity and order which in several cases was notable under the British Empire especially, and which is nowadays almost impossible to find throughout Africa. Far too many African states within the Commonwealth are compromised by injustices, corruption, unrealism. The same is obvious throughout Francophone Africa, a state of affairs which would appear to have been of no concern at all to the former President of France, Jacques Chirac, whose power of decision in such matters was not exercised with any prudence or generosity to ordinary Africans.

The Holy Blair, having established a Commission on Africa, did nothing to make it effective. The equally wan attempts of the simplistic Bush to convince the world that he was doing useful work in invading Iraq have caused his words about freedom to be separated from any effective concern with the rights of the suffering and the need for ecological facts to be paramount.

The worst indictment perhaps should be that attaching to South Africa. Here, truly from long and grossly unjust suffering, many lessons should have been learned; and that rainbow culture should be expounding them and taking responsibility for its own problems and those immediately within its sphere of interest. Instead, fantasies of health are allowed to govern the alleged policy on HIV; President Mbeki does nothing to moderate the evil misconduct of Mugabe; and where one would wish to see evidence of ecological good sense (e.g., control of erosion) one sees no sign that South Africa wants to help itself or other countries. Bishop Desmond Tutu, a year ago, lamented that South Africa had lost its way. What has Mugabe achieved which parallels remotely the achievement of Mandela? Hatred promotes destruction; love achieves change.

Degeorges and Reilly illustrate the consequences of Mugabe's choice of unequal development. Agyeman examines the injustices arising from water privatization in Ghana – a country which having been wrecked by the fatuous self-glorifications of Nkrumah is now moderately successful and progressive. Vanderpost examines the role of conservation in development in Botswana and makes some points central to this relationship throughout Africa. Hamandawana also examines resource issues in Botswana and makes some telling points. O'Brien deals with the essential issues of policy, politics and energy in the context of general poverty and fuel scarcity. And in the midst of turbulence, Ukpebor reports a conventional assessment of NO₂ concentrations in a city amply polluted, where health could be made far better with directed investment in respects which Nigeria is well able to pay for without seeking external help. Oil is flowing from its wellheads and benefiting not at all the masses of this enormous population. The Delta region is in flames because the lack of wisdom prevails in Nigeria.

Indeed, if the budgetary criteria of Ghana were applied with similar effectiveness (and the hardships mitigated better) in Nigeria, how could Nigeria fail to be an engine for economic

development in West and North Africa, as potentially South Africa can be for its sub-Saharan region?

The signs of change for the better reported here (e.g. Sengul *et al.* on carbon sequestration; Jum on democratization of forestry resources in Cameroon) are far outweighed by the inane criminality which is everywhere apparent. The facts reported by Hayanga on pollution of watercourses and the destruction of societies by low-grade operators with narrow economic ends – diamond geezers indeed! – are more representative than the accounts of success, well-sustained effort, and eco-conscious meeting of basic human needs.

The failure of politicians to integrate ecological criteria in their economic plans is catastrophic. The bill is paid in debt relief – which generally fails to impose conditions for change on the ungracious and ungrateful recipients. The bill is paid in blood: in the destruction of human potential, the wrecking of innocent children's lives, and the degradation of women driven to prostitution to sustain their lives and those of their children. And when so often these women succumb to HIV, only the children must struggle to survive; often with the result that they themselves perpetuate the misery which has overwhelmed their parents.

Thus, however, steady and fruitful some efforts at ecologically sensitive development may be, the stark fact is *the horror* – engineered by Africans against Africans, supported by outsiders for international economic reasons, and tolerated at large by all who are not adversely affected by it; while those who suffer it must continue to do so until some undreamed of change breaks through the unreality of all of us. *How long, O Lord, how long?*

Michael Brett-Crowther

[1] Stephen Smith, *Le fleuve Congo*, ACTES SUD, 2003.

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