Institute of African Studies
Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada)
2024 (11)

We dedicate this special issue to Djombi de Kaze Keegan Valery,
Son of contributor, Tindo Narcisse Saturnin Kaze,
and Abeng Élisabeth Alexandrine
He passed away, February 19, 2024 at 6:17 pm. at 3 years 8 months old

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INTRODUCTION

Militarization and Shifting Dynamics of Power in Africa

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Transformation is underway from the post-Cold War order, characterised by American supremacy, towards a new multi-polar, or multiplex world order (Acharya, 2018; Carmody, this issue). This coincides with an increase in rhetoric departing from practices of international relations grounded in neoliberalism by core capitalist nations, toward what some, like Canadian Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland, describe as "friend-shoring", or "friend-sourcing", alongside a discursive return of economic protectionism (Hyder, 2022). The degree to which this actually represents a material shift in the architecture and trade flows of the international order remains unclear, however, some political economists periodize the neoliberal era as commencing in 1973 and concluding in 2008 (Davidson, 2023; Martineau and Folco, 2023). For others, the project is ongoing, with 2008 leading to a renewed round of "primative accumulation" and reconfiguration of production systems causing displacements of African peasants, increases in commodity exports, in turn leading to surpluses, declining prices, reduction in foreign exchange while food prices increase as more land goes to primary commodity exports (Maswi, et al. 2022, 10-11). Throughout the past two years of this issue's production, these transformative dynamics were felt across Africa and around the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic sent shockwaves through the global economy while core capitalist economies doled out billions in short term relief, often in the form of cash payments and emergency loans to the newly unemployed, while injecting far greater sums to private industry. At the same time, the Russian invasion of Ukraine brought runaway inflation fostering a renewed debt crisis most forcefully impacting Africa's largest economies. Core donor nations, already facing unprecedented budgetary strain, increasingly diverted unprecedented sums into military aid to Ukraine while slashing international development funding. Soon after, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) collapsed and Ethiopia's brutal war in Tigray altered the regional security and humanitarian landscape. Recently, tensions escalated in the Horn of Africa after Ethiopia and Somaliland swapped access to the sea for the former in exchange for formal recognition of the latter. More concretely, military rule has reasserted itself, with seven recent coups, or "Unconstitutional Change[s] of Government" (UCG), partially resulting from, "an overemphasis on security at the cost of governance" (Okachukwu 2023). Across Africa and the globe, political soils are shifting.

Amid this turbulence, while weapons, surveillance technologies, and troops move across and within borders, responding to social, political, and ecological issues with violence and coercion continues to fail to improve human security or well-being. Dominant media coverage tends to present recent extra-constitutional changes of government as a retraction from a liberal democratic order in which African countries were, under the tutelage of the core capitalist states, learning to be more like the "West", or were at least pressed, through disciplinary powers, such as loan conditionalities, to adopt liberal institutions. The realities, however, are far more complex, with political dynamics within donor, recipient countries and among wider geopolitical actors coming into play in the past and present (Cheeseman, et al, 2024, Cheeseman, 2015). Nevertheless, from its inception, "there has been a clear antidemocratic disposition in the liberal capitalist social order" (Gordon and Webber, 2023). Authoritarianism is entirely compatible with the interests of western capitalist nations, neocolonial elite, and among the rising powers (Losurdo, 2014). This is blatantly evident in cases such as Egypt and Rwanda, and the disastrous invasion of Libya, but also in the neoliberal economic frameworks imposed under the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, often tantamount to "Economic strangulation"(on the latter see Mazwi et al. 2022, 6).

For more than thirty years, African countries implemented policies tied to the Washington Consensus, which sought to entrench a liberal international order. Governments rewrote constitutions to protect private property and foreign investment, diverted state expenditure from social goods, crippled economies with unpayable debt, while facilitating widespread (and ongoing) privatization, ultimately expanding the depth, reach and intensity of capitalism. Likewise, the US Africa Command (US-AFRICOM) sought hosts for US troops, resulting in a surge in US military presence across the continent, with American troops working alongside, training, and equipping African forces. Concretely, the United States gained interoperability agreements and a network of bases throughout Africa. Most can only be described as "lily pads", though bases in Kenya and Niger are concretely more significant, while American forces train thousands of troops each year on a daily basis. This expansion occurred with little public scrutiny, and resulted in regimes of legal immunity for US troops resembling or even exceeding those of prior colonial regimes. The military presence of UK, France, and Canada in Africa continues largely under the pretext of capacity building in counterterrorism, in lockstep with the US. In Kenya, the largest recipient of US military aid, the UK maintains 200-300 soldiers, mostly deployed to train Kenya's military to combat counter-terrorism. The now disbanded French-led MINUSMA mission involved Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Also aimed at preventing "terrorism" in the Sahel, with West African governments pledging a billion dollars to the effort. This, despite the fact that known "terrorist" groups remain "embedded in local dynamics, and have some degree of political authority and legitimacy as they find support in criticisms of and protests over bad governance and lack of justice" (Bruno Charbboneau, 2018). Indeed, militarization often fails to align with stated goals of democratization. Furthermore, foreign involvement in the guise of counter-terrorism seems to only fuel the very armed groups it seeks to oppose.

The European Union (EU) also contributes to militarization in Africa. While refugees flee wars, often fought with weapons produced in the EU, and attempt to cross the Mediterranean, they face what the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner described as the EU's "lethal disregard" for human rights (Farmer and Blomfield, 2018, Khan and Cooper, 2023, OHCHR, 2021). In 2022 the bloc withdrew its own vessels from search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean (Sunderland, 2022). Instead, it installed a network of aerial drone operations run by private companies to surveil its borders. When ships are in distress, coast guards have forcibly obstructed migrant vessels, with EU guards even firing on them, sinking them, and pushing them back (OHCHR, 2021). Human Rights Watch argues the EU's "let them die" migration policies contributed to increased cases of "death, torture and abuse" (Salah, 2023). The EU works with countries like Tunisia and Libya to extend its hardened borders into African jurisdiction, funding and exporting the detention of migrants to Libya despite "overwhelming evidence of torture and exploitation of migrants and refugees" (ibid,

Sunderland and Pezzani, 2022). Europe's interventions constitute a militarized response toward people who are often already victims of war and economic devastation thus further victimizing, and failing to protect them, while increasingly politically exploiting their plight as a resource in domestic populist mobilization. And yet in many instances, militarization remains the response of choice to non-military problems caused by failed economic policies, poor governance, ecological stresses, and persistent or growing poverty.

Western nations are not alone in increasing military funding in Africa. Since the 2008 financial crisis there has been a marked geopolitical recalibration. China, Russia, middle-powers, and former colonial countries established military relations with support for mercenary groups and the arms trade generally in countries where they have economic (generally extractive) interests. Meanwhile, smaller powers such as India and Saudi Arabia have since emerged as major sources of arms across Africa while both Egypt and South Africa ramp up arms production with the hopes of expanding exports on the continent. China's formal military presence in Africa commenced with ground troops in 2011 with the aim of withdrawing its citizens during the war in Libya. Chinese arms sales to Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Sudan, Tanzania, Morocco, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe increased 55% between 2013 and 2017 (Hendrix, 2020). Algeria is the third-largest buyer of Chinese weapons after Pakistan and Bangladesh. China's 8,000 member standby force with the UN is ready to take part in peacekeeping, training, and operations in Africa.

Russia's footprint in Africa is a fraction of China's, yet much of Russian growing diplomatic and military presence comes in the form of private armies, providing security to fragile states and weak regimes without political strings attached (Eguegu, 2022) making it a driver of instability, while encouraging kleptocratic and autocratic governments (Klomegâh, 2023). Russian natural gas and arms interests have established ties across the continent, while the state signed nuclear energy deals and support agreements with the Central African Republic and Mozambican militaries, revealing a pattern of entanglement between African militaries and business interests. In this special issue, Mahder Serekberhan examines this phenomenon in the context of Sudan. Just before the current war broke out between the Rapid Support Force (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAR), Russia concluded an agreement with the RSF to host a military base on the Red Sea, and to supply munitions. Initially, the RSF was under the command of the National Intelligence Security Services and directly accountable to the president—and therefore during the revolution, with the ousting of Omar Al-Bashir, they faced an existential threat. Thus, in signing the agreement without including the SAF, Russia contributed to the development of war, and continues to fuel it through military sales. This links to a broader Russian strategy of bolstering its regional influence, evident in the two Russia-Africa Summits, held in 2019 in Sudan and 2023 in Ethiopia (Mwangi and Fabiano, 2020).

As power continues to take on new forms and recalibrate across Africa, our contributors grapple with these shifts across a wide range of disciplinary, thematic and geographic foci. In "Singing against the State's Guns and Goons: Timothy Wangusa's Poetry and the Quest for Democratic Governance in Uganda", Danson Sylvester Kahyana offers literary analysis as an entry point into the politics of militarization in Uganda. The author employs Fanonian critique while drawing from Achile Mbembe's necropolitical framework to offer a damning condemnation of the postcolonial kleptocracy. To do so, Kahyana explores the often satirical work of Ugandan poet, Timothy Wangusa, to consider the nexus between neocolonial elite capture and the military at the expense of postcolonial Ugandan citizenry.

In "The Struggle to Transform Sudan", Mahder Habtemariam Serekberhan shows how the military structures in Sudan are deeply embedded in virtually every sector of the economy. Most importantly, their power is vested in processes of extraction, and as gatekeepers of global commodities, including access to foreign capital itself. In turn, foreign capital, foreign states, regional and global bodies (EU and the UN) and International Financial Institutions including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are deeply implicated in upholding military power, against the nation's progressive anti-militarist movement. While international actors such as the "Friends of

Sudan" present themselves as righteous bearers of modernity in its material and ideological forms, including progressive social values such as women's rights, cosmopolitanism, as well as inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony, functionally they bolster military-industrial interests that viciously repress progressive forces within Sudan. As the author notes, despite gruesome violations of human life and dignity, external actors like the United Nations continually legitimize the military, by both treating it as legal-political entity capable of managing a democratic transition, and through political gestures, such as admitting the re-election of Sudan to serve on the UN Human Rights Council. Regional involvement from countries such as Yemen and Chad further destabilizes Sudan. As Serekberhan explains, following South Sudanese secession, the economic interests of military-industrial and foreign powers shifted from oil, toward the extraction of gold, with most stemming from small-scale and artisanal means, perpetuating the unequal terms in which Sudan is integrated into the global capitalist system; under-developing it further from its prior position as an oil exporter, once utilizing more sophisticated means of extraction, and in turn investing those proceeds into development of other sectors.

Likewise, the Anglophone secession in Cameroon is not simply a conflict between the central state and a unitary secessionist movement but characterized by a multivalent privatization of violence. In, "State Fragility, Non-State Armed Groups, and the Privatization of Violence in the Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon", Tindo Narcisse Saturnin Kaze outlines the background and dynamics tied to the proliferation of violent actors. Similarly, the article examines conflicts between and within these movements while considering the political economic dynamics underpinning armed groups in Cameroon. The author concludes by offering a sobering analysis of the prospects for peace that considers the economic incentives for sustaining the war and the role of diasporic separatist leadership.

Kialee Nyiayaana examines a "fundamental shift" taking place within Nigeria, towards the development of regional security complexes or security communities emerging in a context of the Buhari regime (2015-2023), characterized by the perceived systematic ethnicization of the state in favour of his ethnic Fulani against the interests of other ethnolinguistic groups. In response, the latter formed regional vigilante groups, the "Amotekun" and "Ebubeagu". These emerged from security frameworks established in 2020 and 2021 as the institutional expression of collective aspirations of state governments of the Southwest and Southeast regions to protect and defend their territories in ways that approximate a security complex. Nyiayaana shows how fighting new criminal activities, armed banditry, kidnappings, atrocities informed by religious fundamentalist ideologies and perceived ethnic and cultural differences, cattle-rustling and state support for such activities serves to bolster violence and results in regional approaches to security that reinforce these very polarizations. Thus, regional vigilantism driven by an integrationist bias to secure members of the imagined community, has also, paradoxically, contributed to the politicization of protection in ways that often deepen ethnic consciousness and mistrust. As Nyiayaana shows, vigilante groups fail to provide greater physical safety. Rather, killings, kidnapping, armed robbery, and arms trade continue to increase, while the territorial reach of the vigilante groups remains, like the federal police forces, also limited. The Ebubeagu and Amotekun seek out greater weaponry while the federal government obstructs the arms trade yet neither sufficiently wields any significant claim to sovereignty over their territories. At the same time, local politicians use vigilante groups to pursue and achieve their own narrow political goals, potentially creating further fragmentation. These entanglements impede the practice and effectiveness of security communities.

In his briefing note on "Shifting Geopolitics in Africa" Padraig Carmody provides an updated assessment of the relationship between militarism and processes he described in his influential book, *The New Scramble for Africa*. He notes signs of "de-linking", with the French military pulling—and being pushed—out of former colonies, while the rise of neo-populism across the globe offers potential signs of declining appetites for foreign engagement from within the Global North. The latter aligns with xenophobic fears in core capitalist countries over climate refugees, leading to an increase in securitisation; what he terms a "negative security scramble". Meanwhile, most African countries remain dependent upon exports of primary materials, with fossil fuels accounting for about half.

This coincides with a returning debt crisis. Climate change remains the largest challenge facing Africa in the emergent multiplex world order, where various actors at differing scales, driven by differing material forces, mix and mingle rather than stand off against each other.

China is becoming more involved in the continent's security frameworks through increased military cooperation. However, Carmody cautions against overestimating the Chinese position in Africa. He shows that one must disaggregate the Chinese state, in which "much of the real power" lies specifically within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In turn, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) operate under conditions of "bounded autonomy" (Breslin, 2021), with a distinctive structure of "webpower", where the centre directs or sets the incentives for the improvization in commercial strategies by the nodes (such as SOEs) where power is simultaneously both concentrated and diffuse.

This raises the question of how much power Africa-based actors wield in these relations or networks. As Carmody cautions against analysis that, "...overstates local abilities to alter outcomes" and overlooks negative forms such as corruption, crime and "illegitimate regime maintenance". Furthermore, "political opportunity structure" does not generally encourage policies towards economic diversification. For Carmody, "The liberal global order is in a period of flux and challenge...in an era of great power competition and conflict". This amidst an existential challenge, from *omni-crises* of global power shifts, climate change, pandemics, and inequality with Africa being "one of crucibles" where the contradictions of the global order play out.

Turning away from the geostrategic field and toward the political economic foundations of material life, where the existential threat is the rapid loss of biodiversity, Sobantu Mzwakali examines issues of intellectual property, self-determination, and ecological preservation. His policy brief considers these dynamics amongst local communities in South Africa. In, "Community Protocols: The Legal Framework to Safeguard Biocultural Rights in South Africa", he outlines how Biocultural Community Protocols have far-reaching effects and offer the potential to stretch across questions of sovereignty, identity, and the preservation of biodiversity. Accordingly, Mzwakali highlights the potential of Access and Benefit-Sharing initiatives, while considering the intersection between biocultural rights, community self-determination and consultation, and the nexus of both international and South African law.

Three decades into South Africa's democratic dispensation, the traumatic imprint of the nation's liberation struggle continues to impact the lives of former freedom fighters and their families. In "Ukugrumba", isiXhosa for "to dig up", Tshepiso Mabula, herself the niece of a late freedom fighter, reflects on this complex, painful history directly. Weaving together images of people, landscape, and items, Mabula's photo essay sheds light on the enduring presence of this unresolved past in the present. Her work offers the viewer an opportunity to reflect on the many unrecognized, uncelebrated, even "forgotten people" who contributed to South Africa's liberation, often suffering deeply to do so. Visually revealing the tensions of reconciliation and the "new" South Africa, Mabula's work offers a reminder of the intergenerational fallout of anti-apartheid activism; that histories of state violence and murder continue to impact former activists, their loved ones, and wider post-apartheid society. While dynamics of power may shift, the fallout of struggle and activism against previous orders endure.

Our final piece is a review essay on Ukamaka Olisakwe's novel *Ogadinma* by Chibueze Darlington Anuonye. Anuonye identifies a shift taking place in African feminist literature away from "womanist" positions that tend to accept biological explanations for sociocultural differences between men and women. Instead, she shows how Olisakwe joins other contemporary African feminists tilting "towards socialist feminism, by identifying the root of women's oppression in the economic inequality that exists between men and women in patriarchal societies". Chibueze shows how the narrative in *Ogadinma* "identifies the economic disempowerment of women and girls as a tool of patriarchal oppression", yet Olisakwe also shows how solidaristic sisterhood creates, for Ogadinma, the protagonist, the feminist agency she envisions for herself. Anuoonye also shows how Olisakwe's contribution seeks greater representation of working class women in African feminist discourse, showing how struggles for economic and cultural emancipation are intertwined.

Our issue's focus, militarism, forms as an extension of and is sustained through masculinist, patriarchal authoritarianism, often enshrined in chains of command (despite the relative integration of women into many militaries throughout the world), and expressed in wartime gender-based violence. In *Ogadinma* Chibueze reveals Olisakwe's clear analogies between rape and war, with both profoundly violating the dignity of their victims. Ogadinma lost her own mother to war—not through her death, but in her determination to escape the patriarchal constructs it depended upon. Chibueze examines how for Ogadinma's new husband Tobe, being sent to prison further cements the violent patriarchy he brings home upon his return, and which is then reinforced by the church. The trauma of prison life also deepens Tobe's material impoverishment, while intensifying his use of violence. Ogadinma seeks to escape the roles of being the "virtuous wife" and "sweet mother," which demand absolute self-denial.

Returning again to the example of the attempted revolution in Sudan, it is impossible to overlook the fact that women were overwhelmingly the leaders of the revolutionary effort to oust the military and instil a framework to facilitate civilian rule in increasingly democratic terms. The counter-revolution, backed by external, predominantly western governments and bankers, unleashed gender violence in sickening ways. For these reasons, we must applaud Anuonye for bringing such an insightful reading of *Ogadinma* that helps us understand the crucially important turn taking place in feminist thinking amongst African women writers.

Together the contributions reveal that existing theories for understanding power remain insufficient in grasping the complicated and shifting dynamics of power in Africa and indeed, around the globe. Moreover, they reveal the ways weapons of war and structures of domination are disrupting, even ravaging the lives of Africans. In close pursuit of profit motives, militarization works against common desires for meaningful development and human dignity for all.

Special thanks are given to the following people for their help in various aspects of this issue's production: Nduka Otiono, Christopher Huggins, Firoze Manji, Willow Berridge, Chichi Ayalogu, Pablo Idahosa, Elizabeth Cobbett, Shireen Hassim, Blair Rutherford, and Horace Campbell.

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