

LABOUR IN AFRICAN HISTORY

Trends and organisational forms

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At the

**Second ITUC-Africa New Year School
Kisumu, Kenya
Jan 22-27**

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Background¹

Several efforts have been devoted to examining African labour history from different perspectives. Most have focused on the representatives of labour, trade unions in specific countries (Akwetey E. O., 2001; Andrae & Beckman, 1998; Anyemedu, 2000; Arthiabah & Mbiah, 1995; Baskin, 1991; Beckman, 2001; Britwum A. O., 2007; El-Shafei, 2001; Jeffries, 1978) (Kraus, 2007). Significant attempts by others such as Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1978), Kraus (1988), Gutkind (1978) Kester and Sidibé, (1994) have tried to cover the entire continent focusing on specific phases in history. Of particular interests has been unions and the nationalist struggles from colonial rule to independence or the transition from political dictatorship to political liberalism during the 1990s (Kraus, 2007; Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; El-Shafei, 2001; Anyemedu, 2000; Kester & Sidibé, 1994; Graham, 1989). Some focused on unions and their contribution to political change (Kraus, 2007; Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; Kester & Sidibé, 1994). Others focused attention on the proletarianisation of the African labour force, the development of a class identity and ability to carry out a class revolution (Crisp, 1984). A remarkable feature is the connection they have all made to highlight the relations between state and trade unions.

This study traces the trajectory of labour as it has evolved within the changing production modes in Africa drawing on information from existing literature on African workers and their labour movements. News coverage both print and electronic, have been instrumental in providing the information on the present. These sources pose their own challenges, I acknowledge. In their generality though, the sources reflect as close as possible the situation of labour in Africa. As an attempt to highlight the fortunes of labour in Africa, the study focuses on the response of the African workforce to dominant economic forms and the implications of the emerging forms and structures for Africa's organised labour. It explores political systems and their accompanying economic structures shaped by production modes within which workers carry out their labouring activities. Attempt is made to highlight the cracks in capitalism and the implication for organised labour. This allows for shedding light on what workers' response has been and how their movements have positioned themselves to deal with their peculiar context. The study employs representative cases to signal similarities and deviations to buttress the consideration that, the conditions of labour are shaped by several interlocking forces, not least the existing social orders which are in turn impacted by production relations. This recognises that labour is shaped and moulded by the dialectical relations that link it to production modes and their accompanying social formations. The study devotes attention to the extent to which labour in its various forms, has served as a significant social category. Additionally, it examines the demands labour has made for change to reflect its conditions and how the response of various actors, like capital and the state or the representatives of capital in the workplace, management, have shaped further labour conditions. The premise, borrowed, is expressed in the form of a task set by Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1978) and sets to '...test the proposition that the "true" history of colonial Africa is the history of [labour]'. The study extends the period beyond colonial rule to the present. The perspective it carries, expounded very early in Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, insists that colonial rule, though over in its raw form, persists.

Structural and conceptual issues

Borrowing from the works of Kester (2007), Kester and Sidibé (1994) as well as Cohen et al (1978) the paper breaks up the history of the African labour force into distinct epochs to allow some ease in teasing out significant events that have characterised the fortunes of labour on the continent. These epochs have transformed production relations in Africa and impacted the form and shape of the labour force. It is therefore the distinct forms of labour shaped primarily by their accompanying production modes that distinguish these phases.

They are:

1. Pre-colonial
2. Colonial and the creation of waged labour
3. Transition to independence
4. Early independence
5. Dictatorships – civilian and military
6. Neo-liberal reforms
7. Globalisation and global financial crisis

These largely political phases and the framework they inform, determined by the production modes on which they rest, regulate the conditions under which the various forms of labour emerge and operate as well as the subsequent relations with other players. The works of Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1978) as well as Kester (2007) and Kester and Sidibé (1994) have been useful guides for outlining these epochs in the history of labour formation in Africa. These works variously trace how these epochs have largely transformed production relations and impacted the fortunes of labour in Africa.

This examination of labour's fortunes in Africa will concentrate on three main social forces and the factors regulating relations among them: labour, the state and capital. In this context, two conceptual frameworks are valuable in terms of how they facilitate the examination of labour-state-capital relations. These are the concept of labour regimes used in various contexts by Andrae and Beckman (1998), Cohen et al (1978) as well as Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) in their introduction to a collection of works examining the labour histories in the context of liberalising economies in selected African countries. The second is Roberts' (1982) notion of articulation, a concept useful in explaining how colonial capital re-drafted pre-colonial forms of production relations to serve its interests.

Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) drawing from the work of Andrae and Beckman (1992) use the concept labour regimes to explore economic policies and their corresponding forms of social orders that affect how labour is regulated. Labour regimes used to denote 'the ways and means in which state and organized interests intervene and mediate' (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001, p. 9). The relations between capital and labour, they explain, are 'the complex of institutions, rule and practices through which relations between labour and capital are regulated both at the work-place as well as in society at large' (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001, p. 9). In discussing the constituents of labour regimes they further elaborate, one may be concerned with the manner in which the reproduction of labour is regulated, including the training of labour, supported by family, community and state outside the workplace. Labour regimes can be specified with

reference to different interlocking “arenas”, such as the individual workplace, the industry or sector, the locality, region or national economy (*ibid*). The focus of any exercise attempting to outline labour regimes goes beyond production relations in workplace to detail how labour is itself reproduced in daily encounters and over the generations. Thus, it allows an interrogation of how capital ensures that there is a steady supply of labour within and between generations. The application of the concept labour regime, allows a connection of what happens in the workplace with broader society including the household and traditional political orders.

The central goal of any form of capitalist labour regime according Beckman and Sachikonye (2001), is to ensure that labour performs in accordance with the requirements of capital. The process ensures that labour that is available has the required characteristics that are functional for the requirements of production under a particular production mode. Thus, what usually appear, as capital’s interests in labour welfare are restricted to the conditions that allow workers to present themselves for work in the workplace in required quantities and with the desired qualities or skills. Labour/capital relations as a result are characterised by relations of contestation, resistance and domination. Labour is dominated either through despotism or hegemony. In the latter form, labour’s compliance with its domination is secured through its acceptance of its subordination. Forms of labour segmentation either on gender, racial or ethnic lines are but mechanisms for securing labour’s compliance. In the same way interest mediation, such as the labour laws, workplace rules and regulations, that structure the existence of trade unions’ collective bargaining regimes are all ways of securing labour’s compliance with the conditions under which capital can exploit it (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001).

The concept labour regime can be used to explore the sources of labour power as well as examine forms of labour resistance and the enhancement of labour’s bargaining power. Thus it is possible to distil the skills and availability of options, labour’s ability to utilise these to fight back against capital through various strategies of non-compliance or disruption of production. The concept therefore is useful for examining the way in which social and production roles of labour is regulated. Labour regime is a practical tool for exploring the nature of labour, the structure of relations between capital and labour and their representatives; between organised labour and management or the state. It also allows an examination of the forms of labour that exist and the manner in which they are reproduced and how this reproduction is shaped by an ideology that allows dominant production mode to redraft itself onto existing production modes and secure its interests.

The second, concept that informs the examination of events in this paper is Roberts’ notion of articulation (1982). According to ‘Articulation’, for Roberts ‘means the joining together of modes of production in such a way that the specific form adopted by each mode of production is a condition for the existence of the social formation, or the specific historical case’ (1982, p. 6). For him, articulation provides the ‘most persuasive conceptual apparatus for dealing with overlapping modes of production’. Capitalism he goes on to explain ‘does not merely destroy pre-existing modes of production; it subordinates their processes of social reproduction to the needs of capital accumulation and capitalist relations of production. Pre-existing modes of production are maintained, but emasculated by the coercive instruments of the state’ (Roberts, 1982, p. 6).

While Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind's labour regimes theory explains how different forms of relations between capital and labour as well as the state and other interest groups function, articulation theory, although largely used to examine colonial capitalism, allows one to explore the structural connection between the simultaneous existence of different production modes that have persisted in Africa. Thus articulation explains how workers integrate their participation waged employment in colonial establishments like mine or plantation work with their dependence on subsistence production in their home communities. It is useful in explaining state role in balancing the contradictory demands of the varying modes of production that exist in a particular time in Africa's history. In this case, articulation can represent a particular form of labour regime and their social reproductive capacity.

Studies on labour history cited earlier, have focused largely on waged labour, its emergence and role in political transitions. Such studies have tended to portray waged labour as the significant force in African history. Such studies have been limited by their theoretical frameworks and it is in this light that the theory of articulation is useful, for it allows a capturing of all forms of labour, irrespective of their location, to be included in the larger evaluation of labour history. Labour regime theory on the other hand situates waged labour at the centre of its analysis and submerges the intricacies of these and other forms in their own right. This study combines the two theories to explain the present structure of the African labour market, levels of women's incorporation into waged labour as well as the extraction of women's reproductive labour. It will also rely on the theory of articulation to show how the predominant proportion of the African labour force, informal economy workers are an integral part of African labour history.

Pre-colonial African labour force

Though the study is limited to the period between the nineteenth century and the present, it is important to remind ourselves of production forms before then. Information on pre-colonial production forms in Africa is patchy, largely gleaned from works reviewing other epochs. They are likely to be single country focus, some regional and a few continental. Cohen, Copans and Gutkind (1978) explain that the main forms of production were hunting and gathering, subsistence farming, pastoralism and trading. There were mining activities organised around gold and salt mainly. The majority of African labour force was based in agriculture, producing for direct consumption (Hymer, 1970). Others were nomadic groups herding cattle. Remnants of these groups include the Fulanis of the Sahel and the Masai of Kenya. The African economy however, was in touch with other continents especially Asia and Southern Europe by means of trade through the Northern African route, trading in gold, salt, cloth as well as slaves (Hymer, 1970). Such trade provided evidence of labour involved in mining, weaving and the development of industrial implements for production independent of European contact.

Our interest is also attracted to evidence of the existence of production modes away from subsistence that allowed the expropriation of the surplus production of others. According to Cohen, Copans and Gutkind, (1978). 'favoured categories of certain anthropologists, such as kin groups, age groups, and lineage groups were often little more than masks serving to conceal from observed and dispossessed alike relations of dominance and disability, of ... the expropriation of surplus value through "class-like" social institutions'

(p. 11). We are aware of the various forms of existence of homage payments within and between ethnic groups and kingdoms. Such payments were also forms of labour expropriation. There was also evidence of slave labour within some cultural modes but these pale in comparison to the callous slave raids to feed the infamous trans-Atlantic trade that lasted over three hundred years.²

European contact preceding the imposition of colonial rule began the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to crop production for export. Crops produced for export termed cash crops, included cocoa, oil palm, rubber, coffee and tea. Cash crop production for export to feed European factories was undertaken either through plantation or small-holder agriculture or, in places where the existing land tenure system lent itself to support entrepreneurship in cash crop, production for export without recourse to plantation production forms. Direct access to free land made plantation agriculture uncompetitive and the production levels within small peasant holding were able to meet the demands of European industry (Hymer, 1970).

The predominant form of labour in Africa before colonialism therefore was non-waged labour tied to the land producing crops, livestock and fishing. Other forms of labour were the producers of tools and equipment for farming, fishing and food processing. There was in addition mining activities around gold, iron ore and salt. Labour relations were shaped and backed by traditional mores. Significant social events in the form of festivals were all structured around the agricultural production calendar. This is evident in the numerous festivals around harvests, and rituals to purify and pacify land, forests, sea and river gods. There is discussion about how invaluable such practices helped to sustain the delicate environmental balance and maintain the livelihoods of communities dependent on the physical environment. Production and reproduction of communities were merged activities.

Africa's Colonial labour force

Colonialism has been identified as the main mechanism for introducing the general laws of capitalist development into Africa. The operation and survival of capitalism were predicated on stripping Africans of their land. This process began outside Africa with the infamous Berlin Conference of November 15 1884 to February 26 1885 where European countries, whose major forces at the time were France, Germany, Great Britain and Portugal, shared Africa and proceeded to take control over their self-allotted spaces through brutal force. The end of the slave trade precipitated the need to find additional raw materials and markets for European industries. Exploration expeditions had established the location of rich mineral deposits like gold, copper, manganese and bauxite as well as vast resources for the production of agricultural raw materials like rubber, coffee, sugar, oil palm and timber. Within twenty years, European control had extended from coastal areas into the deep interior of Africa (Boddy-Evans, n.d.; Rosebberg, nd).

Capitalism in Africa, as imposed through colonial rule differed, from its origins in metropolitan Europe. Roberts (1982) notes that a deeper interrogation of the continued existence of pre-capitalist relations of production is crucial for explaining the atypical nature of African colonial capitalism. Using the notion of articulation highlighted earlier, Roberts notes that colonial capitalism was unlike the European form in the sense that the viability of pre-capitalist production modes in Europe were gradually eroded. In Africa on

the contrary, such modes were rearticulated and systems set in place to maintain the simultaneous viability of the pre-colonial and colonial systems. Such existing pre-colonial production modes and relations were restructured in Africa to meet the demands of European capital.

The striking feature of colonial imposition of capitalism in Africa was the methods used to redraft pre-colonial forms of production into the colonial order. This was done through arrangements like peasant production of agricultural exports and retail trade (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; Roberts, 1982; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978). Africans maintained their access to land and mutual aid from the kin group through subsistence production. For Roberts, (1982) "access to the means of production reduced the wage bill such that a significant part of the costs of social reproduction (of the worker, of the next generation of workers, and of the generation no longer able to work) was borne by production in rural areas" (p. 315). Rural subsistence production embedded in care labour of females, served to diminish the daily and intergenerational costs of African waged labour. Articulation is predicated on disarticulation. The latter involved the destruction of lives and property euphemistically termed pacification, that always preceded the imposition of colonial rule. Disarticulation, disrupts existing modes of production. Citing Posts, Roberts explains that the Algerian population for example was decimated to nearly half of its original size by the French in 1830 and 1852. Re-articulation was necessary to restructure production relations to meet the demands of colonial agricultural capital imposed by the French (Roberts, 1982).

Articulation, though crucial in ensuring that labour was acquiescent to super-exploitation conditions prevailing under capitalism, was not without contradictions; not least were pressures for the state to balance its labour requirements with that of private European capital. Such pressures sometimes resulted in a clash such as that in the Congo reported by Roberts (Roberts, 1982). The coexistence of the two modes therefore, posed problems that required continuous state interventions leading to the emergence of what Roberts termed an 'over developed state' (1982, p. 319). The colonial state had to ensure that labour was not only cheap but also available in the required quantities. Various means were utilized to prevent Africans from being totally dependent on land and subsistence production. These took the form of cash and labour taxes, like the poll and hut taxes. The domestic served as the basis for the reproduction of African workforce. Other strategies adopted to regulate labour size, quality and costs included restrictions on types of occupations and occupational mobility through systems such as the pass laws in Southern Africa.

European capitalism was not a homogenous system it varied from nation to nation. Based on the available resources and climatic conditions, it ranged from agrarian, through mining to commerce and, in the instance of Southern and parts of Eastern Africa, in Kenya for example, it was accompanied by the occupation of a significant proportion of European settlers (Baskin, 1991; Roberts, 1982). Labour force in Africa as a result varied across countries and regions responding largely to the nature of colonial capital. Cohen et al, (1978) identify three main forms of labour under colonialism resulting from the recourse to alternative cash income sources as well as the form European capital took. Utilising these forms outlined by Cohen et al. (1978, p. 12) and Roberts' (1982) notion of articulation, one can discern nearly four forms of labour based on where their main means

of income or subsistence were derived. These labour types largely account for the present structure of labour markets in most of Africa.

The first group were workers located in the capitalist mode of production as full time permanent urban proletariat. Though this was the dominant form in terms of political and economic visibility it commanded, it represented a small fraction of the colonial labour force. Phelan (2011) for example explains that in 1957, only 4.6% of the total working population in French West Africa worked for wages. Such labour forms operated mainly in the administrative, commercial, construction and manufacturing sectors as well as security services. Their relative strengths were determined by the specific nature and needs of the colonial state. The labour force here was recruited on voluntary or forced basis. Britwum's(2010) assertion that colonial rule changed the largely unwaged employment forms in Ghana with the introduction of formal sector employment holds true for most African states under colonial rule. Waged employment was concentrated in the colonial civil service, construction and rail transport, retailing outlets, the extractive mining concerns as well as plantation agriculture. The emerging urban spaces in towns and mining enclaves served as the location for formal economy workers. Social services like healthcare and education also provided avenues for formal waged employment (Konings, 2006; Konnings, 2003).

The colonial state however, because of its insatiable demand for labour for the construction of roads, rail, harbours and other forms of infrastructure necessary for the functioning of the capitalist economy, found itself in competition with private capital for labour. Roberts explains that the solution for the state was recourse to restrictions in recruitment. This was used in the Belgian Congo for example to restrict the labour that could be recruited into the mines to only 25% of the rural population in certain locations (Roberts, 1982). Not all forms of waged labour were permanent or voluntary. The conditions of work, the nature of the labour market largely dependent on the nature of colonial capital which brought in its wake the system of forced labour. Labour policies of colonial capitalism, irrespective of their national origins, shared common features identified by Gutkind as the widespread use of forced labour deployed for rail, road and harbour construction as well as mine work in all colonies (1978, p. 9). Gutkind cites the example of forced labour in Oubangui-Chari of French Equatorial Africa as well as the institution of labour tax which compelled adult males in French West Africa to offer free labour to the colonial government for a certain number of days in the year (Gutkind, 1978). Echenberg also argues that the French armies in colonial West Africa were nothing but reservoirs of cheap, disciplined labour used to construct mainly infrastructure, posts and barracks. In some instances "the detested conscript labour brigades ... were turned over to private contractors for three-year stints under atrocious conditions on such projects as the Markal dam... or as maintenance labourers on the Dakar-Niger railway" (Echenberg, 1978, p. 110).

Forced labour, which has been compared to slavery, was not the preserve of the French and was not restricted to men. Forced labour was the hallmark of all colonising powers in Africa, the Belgians, British, Germans and Portuguese. Forced labour euphemistically termed 'political labour' by the British was necessary as a result of the low wages that kept depressing and what Mason terms 'scarcely tolerable' working conditions. Mason (1978) shows how the British used forced labour to construct the railway line in Northern

Nigeria. In a similar vein, Crisp (1984) explains that the labour force in the Ghanaian mines under colonial rule was forced labour. According to Roberts, forced labour was practiced well into the twentieth century. The British for example ended forced labour in the 1920s, the French in 1947, and in the case of Portugal forced labour ended when it lost its wars with its colonies, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique. Women and children as young as eight years old were reported by Gutkind et al to be undertaking up to 18 months' work as conscripts on road construction, mines and coffee plantations (Gutkind, 1978).

Roberts explains that African workers did not always comply with the dictates of the coercive means used to extract their free labour (1982). They sought through a variety of means to resist colonial exploitative working conditions. African workers used mobility between modes of production (like shifting from farming to craftwork) or moving from one industry to another to express their dissatisfaction with their working conditions. A potent tool employed was outright desertion termed *Chibaro* in Southern Africa (Crisp, 1984; Roberts, 1982). Workers just deserted their positions within the mines of southern Ghana or used the rail they had constructed in Nigeria to escape to urban centres away from the traditional system that structured their compliance with offering free labour (Crisp, 1984; Mason, 1978). For Roberts '[d]esertion was a rational and conscious attempt to avoid not only low wages and exploitative practices, but also to avoid the death and disease rampant in the compound' (Roberts, 1982, p. 332).

The most effective tool against the super exploitative conditions of labour under colonial rule was the recourse to strikes. Notable examples on record were the Lagos strikes of 1897 and 1945 which covered the provinces in Nigeria as well as the African workers' strike of 1940 on the Zambian Copperbelt (Muneku & Phiri, 2011). Zimbabwe, and South Africa had their share of such violent strikes and in Ghana there was the 1945 strike of rail and meteorological workers. Such strikes and many others not mentioned were examples of the exasperation of African workers in the face of continuous exploitation of a system that brought them no benefits.

Low wages and deplorable working conditions were justified by colonial capitalists with the "lazy African" or "target worker" thesis. The largely held perception was that Africans were tied to the traditional system of production or entered the capitalist labour market with a specific aim; once achieved they left only to return when another interest forced them back. Using the work of Hopkins, Roberts explains that the persistence of such ideas only served to justify colonial super exploitation (Roberts, 1982).

The second labour force type was the agricultural work force, present in three categories. There were those that had been drafted into the capitalist production mode either directly through the plantation system or indirectly through smaller holder peasant cash crop farming. The former, the agricultural plantation labour force, was present in a smaller proportion with varying concentrations in different parts of the continent. The larger sections of the colonial African agricultural labour force were indirectly incorporated through the marketing and distribution of cash crops by way of product quality control (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001). Colonial quality control operated in the form of agricultural stations devoted to research on pest control, extension services and the sale of imported inputs such as fungicides, pesticides and seeds. The last agricultural labour force

consisted of the peasant subsistence farming producing food crops mainly for domestic consumption. Such staples were outside the product quality control of colonial agricultural stations.

The third, the mixed asymmetrical form consisted of coupling the capitalist and pre-capitalist or "... domestic," modes of production. This type was exemplified in the case of migrant labour which represented the principal means of exchange between the two modes (Cohen et al., 1978, p. 12). This was characterised by farm workers who migrated during the off-farm seasons to work on mines and return to their respective communities to farm during the rainy season. This type of labour force served the needs of the mines and plantation agriculture. The petty commodity retailing of imported produce, derived from the commercial concerns of colonial trading outlets, formed the fourth labour force type. Examples of such outlets are the British United Africa Company and its French counterpart, the CFAO. This, in addition to the artisanal activities designed to serve the needs of poorly paid waged labour force located in the urban centres or production enclaves created by the mines, served as the incubators for the now sprawling urban informal economy activities.

Colonial rule set the frame for women's employment as well. In fact the present nature of women's employment in much of Africa today is based on the system set in place under colonial rule. Colonial governments transposed the dominant Victorian values and norms about female and male gender roles wholesale into Africa. Men were considered breadwinners with ultimate responsibility for providing for the households. Women were homemakers and did not need to earn income. If they had to it was only to supplement male income. Several accounts show how women were later admitted, selectively, into the colonial waged labour market after their initial exclusion (Masta & Omolo, 2011; Brown, Anokye, & Britwum, 1996; ISSER/DPPC, 1996; Roberts, 1982). Pass laws in countries such as South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe limited women's participation in waged labour on offer during colonial and apartheid rule.

Women's initial exclusion notwithstanding, they made their niche in the pre-capitalist sector where they played instrumental roles in labour articulation, carrying responsibility for the reproduction of waged labour. The process of articulation and heavy reliance on migrant labour for mining brought in its wake demands for services that women provided. The informal or sometimes illegal settlements that developed around enclave mining concerns were the nascent forms of the sector of most African countries, captioned the informal economy. It developed in the quest to expand income sources. Women's economic activities especially in the urban centres assisted in the proletarianisation of waged workers in Africa. Women in several African countries moved to the peripheries of mining enclaves and urban centres serving as "petty entrepreneurs" trading petty commodities, brewed alcoholic beverages, and commercial sex. Such services have been acknowledged as supplementing the low wages of workers and minimised the negative impact of the poor working conditions. The provision of alcohol, sex and meals were important services that mitigated the depressing conditions of work in the mines and other waged work in the urban centres (Brown, Anokye, & Britwum, 1996; ISSER/DPPC, 1996; Roberts, 1982). Waged black women's labour bore the brunt of domestic work for middle and upper class white women (Orr, 2011). In Namibia, South Africa and

Zimbabwe, social reproduction in the form of care work had a racial dimension serving to deepen racial and class separation between black and white women.

One remarkable feature of colonial exploitation of African labour was the emergence of organised labour as a form for collective protests against ultra-exploitation. The collective protest against colonial capitalism was total in the sense that workers in all the production forms outlined above organised in one form or other. The origins of the dominant form, trade unions, can, in some African countries such as Ghana and Malawi, be traced to the informal economy (Britwum A. O., 2007; Chinguwo, 2011). In the early years of trade union development, employer hostility to trade unions in colonial Africa was intense and there was constant recourse to all means possible to frustrate the development of unionism in Africa especially among black workers (Muneku & Phiri, 2011). Where it could not be stopped, all kinds of impediments were erected in the way of unions to render them ineffective (Piet, 2006; Yahaya, 2001; Siebert, 1987; Ananaba, 1979; Jeffries, 1978). According to Ananaba(1979) trade union centres made up of black Africans were non-existent before 1939. Existing unions on the continent were mainly composed of Asian and European employees. The reasons were not difficult to find. First, industrial activities were relatively low and the proportion of African labour force in waged employment small. The depression following the First World War further exacerbated the unemployment situation in the colonies. Colonial racial discriminatory policies expressed in outright hostility to worker militancy was however a major factor restricting the desire of African workers to organise under colonial rule.

European colonial powers differed in the details of their attitudes to the development of trade unions in their colonies. British attitude to unionism has been noted to be the most accommodating. This accommodation however was derived not out of political largesse and the acceptance of the right of workers to representation, but more as a tactic to prevent more radical formations of workers' representation (Britwum A. O., 2007; Akwetey E. O., 1994; Ananaba, 1979; Panford, 1996). Their accommodating attitude was based on their experiences in the West Indies, during the 1920s, that saw widespread violent revolts on the part of workers. In the 1930s, Lord Passfield's famous circulars of 1930s demanding that British colonies allow union formation went unheeded. Ananaba mentions five such dispatches in the 1930s alone. There were consistent efforts on the part of colonial administrators and employers as well as settlers to sabotage any attempt at creating an environment for trade union growth and development. But subsequent events led to the acceptance of unionism albeit under specific conditions.

The demands of the Second World War resulted in industrial expansion and job creation for African workers thus enlarging the African waged workforce. The British Colonial Development Act enacted in 1940 made the existence of protective legislation for trade unions in the colonies a condition for accessing aid. Few colonies, such as Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone had existing legislation protecting the formations of trade unions. Other colonies had to follow suit. Such regulatory provisions stimulated the emergence and growth of unionism. The British closely guarded the development of trade unions in the territories to ensure that their activities were limited to workplace issues within a bureaucratic system that made recourse to militancy impossible. The industrial relations regimes set up to oversee union development included a labour department with a trade union wing and industrial relations law. Such structures had the blessing of the British

Trades Union Congress, but Ananaba explains that a world of difference existed between official posturing in favour of strong unions and practical demonstration of assisting African unions to achieve that goal. The British insisted that trade unions in the colonies remain non-political and set out to implement that directive. J. S Brandie for example was dismissed from Uganda for acting against 'official [trade union] policy'. Joan Davies, quoted in Ananaba observed that in British colonial Africa, unions were not given the leeway to freely grow and develop, rather they were:

Closely supervised by the labour departments, accounts ... scrutinised, political affiliation ... discouraged and offices closed, and ... the right to strike ... severely circumscribed by the emergency actions of Governors or by the introduction of long lists of 'essential services' in which strikes were illegal ... (1979, p. 4).

African workers in French colonies faced similar frustrations in their efforts to organise though the methods deployed were slightly different (Kester & Sidibé, 1994; Ananaba, 1979). The right to organise was granted in the 1930s with Northern African countries receiving this right earlier in 1932 than their counterparts located in French West Africa. This right was however limited to literate Africans in French and possessing elementary school certificate, and was only in 1944 that this restriction was abolished (Ananaba, 1979). A significant turning point came with the introduction of the Lamine-Gueye Law in 1950 which prescribed the acceptable working conditions. The machinery for collective bargaining was established later through the enactment of the overseas Territories Labour Code in 1952 (*ibid*). In the Belgian territories, unionisation for African workers was selectively granted in 1946 to those who had a minimum of three years' continuous service. The authority to form federations was granted in 1957 (*ibid*). The Belgian provisions were however the most restrictive. The Belgian colonial administration, significantly, resisted granting Africans independent representation until 1959. As it was in British colonies, union records, files and accounts could be inspected at will and local authorities had right of access to meetings and determined which members had the right to attend meetings (Ananaba, 1979). The British system relied on the colonial administration and employers for implementation, while in the French colonies popular movements provided the impetus (Ananaba, 1979).³

Ananaba attempts in a characteristically pro-imperialist manner, to justify the strict circumscription of union development in the colonies. In his discussion of the British situation he notes the need to avoid the West Indian experience 'where disaffected persons [manipulate] workers to attain their personal gain' (Ananaba, 1979, p. 2). He tries to suggest that workers in particular African workers, were passive agents incapable of perceiving injustices of colonial working conditions, still less of organising to protest. It is clear from the persistence of worker protests that at a certain level of super exploitation and repeated coercion, workers confront their oppressors no matter the costs as in South Africa or Southern Rhodesia. For Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) the main outcome of regulation is to determine the price of labour. Union organisation on the other hand is critical for workers everywhere to mediate the regulation process and determine the price at which labour is ready to make itself available for exploitation by capital. The ability of existing labour movements to inflict costs on capital and its workplace representative, management, determines the ability of workers to extract concessions. The process of union 'recognition' granted by the state through legal instruments and supporting

institutions, they go on to explain, can serve as a power source for unions. Where effective, legislation can allow unions to bypass their members support in their bid to extract concessions from capital.

Waged labour constituted the dominant labour mode under colonial rule even though it engaged a smaller proportion of the labour force. Waged labour was supplemented by the unwaged labour force. All production activities were structured to meet the needs and dictates of European capital. Female labour located within the pre-capitalist and domestic spheres served the interest of mercantile capital. The development organised labour under colonial rule therefore is significant because it provided waged workers the structured mechanism for their struggle against capitalist exploitation.

Transition to independence: the nationalist struggles

According to Sidibié and Venturi (1994) the formal waged workplace served as the closest contact with colonial exploitation and therefore an avenue to expose its vulnerability. It is in this context that labour movements in Africa as elsewhere played a pivotal role in the struggle for independence (Adu-Amankwah K. , 1990; Adegbidi & Agossou, 1994; Ananaba, 1979; Chakanya & Siwela, 2011; Gutkind, 1978). The expectation everywhere was that independence from colonial rule would lead to enhanced freedoms for working people of Africa and their organisations (Sidibié & Venturi, 1994). Several independent regimes therefore rode on the backs of workers' struggles to power⁴. Waged labour played a pivotal role either in the leadership or on the fringes. Whatever their involvement, their impact was immeasurable partly due to the involvement of non-waged workers based in the peasant cash crop production as well as retailers of imported European goods (Britwum A. O., 2007). The famous stay-aways of South Africa, boycotts, produce holdups in other places such as Zambia, Nigeria and Malawi, were employed by the non-waged labour force based in the domestic and mixed modes in support of the strike actions of waged workers. Such agitations crippled economic activities, rendering the pre-independent state incapable in some instances of maintaining political control. Other examples include the actions of trade unions in Benin in 1958 that toppled the colonial administration and in Guinea, Sekou Toure, the first president was a trade unionist (Phelan, 2011).

The intensity of workers actions in defiance against colonial domination differed and so did the repressive reaction of the colonial governments. Where the actions of workers failed to topple colonial or authoritarian rule, there was recourse to arms struggle as in the case of South Africa, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia as well as Zimbabwe. In the forefront of such struggles were workers and workers leaders (Baskin, 1991). The involvement of various workers' groups and individual workers in the struggle against apartheid represents one of the most intense connections between organised labour and the political overthrow of an authoritarian and exploitative regime. The case of COSATU shows how political and economic forms serve to structure the labour force and its working conditions. Labour form and structure are regulated by existing political systems and union action. The decision to collaborate with other groups bearing the brunt of the authoritarian regimes seems a logical reaction. Perhaps the words of the Chairperson of the South African Congress of Trade Unions inaugural conference in 1955 best sums up

the active involvement of workers in national liberation struggles. Baskin captures the Chairperson as saying:

You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter, or their freedom to move to and from places where they find the best employment, or the houses they live in or the type of education their children get (Baskin, 1991, p. 13).

The ANC's choice for armed struggle underscores this link and serves as an extreme example of the connection between workers' struggle for better working conditions and political struggle for collective rights of the citizens of a nation. Workers' protests were led in most instances by organised labour in its default mode, trade unions (Ananaba, 1979). The devastation of war on human lives especially the African labour force re-drafted into war on both sides of the numerous conflicts either directly or indirectly is yet to be accounted for.

According to Konings there are varied positions on the role of trade unions in the decolonisation of Africa (2006) as well as the benefit of union collaboration with ruling parties in the immediate aftermath of colonial rule. While some like Berg and Butler (1964), Konings explains, have argued that the political significance of trade unions in Africa has been exaggerated, others insist that African trade unions have operated beyond parochial interests especially after independence, to securing economic benefits for their members through collective bargaining. Unions.⁵ Phelan (2011), Kester (2007), Konings (2006), Kester and Sidibé (1994), Adu-Amankwah and Tutu (1997) as well as Adu-Amankwah (1990) note that even though African waged labour force and their representative organ trade unions happen to cover a small fraction of existing active labour force they wield considerable power. Through their strategic location they are able to paralyse national operations politically, administratively as well as economically by threatening the very survival of the regime in power. Their visibility in cities and location in strategic sectors of the economy gave them a peculiar position in African politics (Piet, 2006). They in addition worked to secure the interests of other workers such as those located in the pre-capitalist system of production, like peasant cash crop and subsistence farmers, migrant workers, as well as artisans and traders and collaborated with them over the struggle against colonial rule. Through this capacity, African trade unions have mobilised beyond their direct members and in other instances forged alliances with nationalist movements to topple colonial and other authoritarian regimes. Examples abound everywhere on the continent.

Women's peculiar location in labour the market brought them into persistent conflict with the colonial regimes. Brewing of beer and other alcoholic beverages, commercial sex and retailing of petty commodities brought women into constant contact with colonial capital in peculiar ways. Through women's unusual connection with the colonial regimes arising out of their double exploitation, their reproductive as well as their productive labour, women everywhere on the continent organised with men to overthrow colonial rule in its many guises. In other instances, they organised separately against colonial subordination in whatever form and colour it took (Chinguwo, 2011; Orr, 2011; Baskin, 1991; Tsikata, 1989). Orr (2011) explains that women in South Africa organised actively with men and separately to protest pass laws and restrictions on beer brewing. Orr shows that there was

consistent organising by women around issues that directly impinged on their lives as working women. Struggles led by women in the run-up to independence took the form of bus boycotts, beer hall protests, anti-pass campaigns as well as commodity hold ups (Chinguwo, 2011; Orr, 2011; Tsikata, 1989).

Chinguwo (2011) explains that in Malawi colonial agitation got trade unions to align directly with the nationalist movement. He goes further to link heightened strike activity to political protests against the imposition of the Rhodesia Nyasaland Federation in 1953. Politicians everywhere were apt to utilise the situation which so degenerated, compelling the government to institute a state of emergency. In the same vein, Sechogele (2011) shows how Namibian workers' struggles were linked with the fight to overthrow apartheid. Just like their South African counterparts, Namibian workers could not separate their workplace struggles from those against the oppressive apartheid regime. This is pointedly captured in the words of Mbuende which Sechogele quotes thus: the 'class struggle waged by workers was seen as one and the same as the liberation struggle of South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO)' (Sechogele, 2011, p. 148). The case is similar in Zambia and Zimbabwe (Chakanya & Siwela, 2011; Muneku & Phiri, 2011). Increased agitation on the Zambian copper belt led to the formation of trade unions that aligned themselves with the political party that eventually took over the government after colonial rule. By these acts of agitation, African workers demonstrated their aspirations for better working conditions by aligning with nationalist groups and political parties with the intent to secure these benefits.

Post independence

Independence for several African countries was attained on the wave of considerable euphoria. Workers and indeed all citizens were optimistic of a better future under leaders drawn from their own kind. There were local differences in the conception of the nationalist struggle for independence or majority rule in terms of intensity and levels of violence deployed by colonial rulers against local populations. Anglophone Africa with the exception of settler colonies, was characterised by 'civil disobedience' or what Nkrumah described as 'positive action', using non-violent constitutional means to press for independence. The case of East Africa, particularly Kenya as well as Southern Africa, particularly Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe were peculiar, characterised by prolonged civil strife and recourse to arms. Portuguese Africa, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Angola reached independence through protracted civil wars in the run up to independence that spread to their neighbours in the Congos. These countries are still struggling to overcome the costs of these civil wars (Marshall, 2005).

In the sections below we examine the situation of the African labour force after independence in specific political economic phases. The characterisation of these phases, borrowed from Kester (2007), are the post-independence honeymoon of the late 1950s to the early 1960s, followed by the period of tension or the pre-reform of mismanaged economies within the framework of high political instability. There followed the adjustment era of the 1980s to the 1990s and subsequent poverty reduction era. Several factors account for the economic fortunes of Africa and subsequent political turmoil that emerged. The brunt of these events was borne by the working people.

The wave of independence from colonial rule proceeded in earnest from the late 1950s specifically in 1956, peaking in 1960. Only five African countries were on record to have attained independence before this period however between 1956 and 1968, 37 African countries had gained political independence. This period was followed by a lull of about six years which opened up again when the remaining ten, gained their independence between 1974 and 1990. Namibia is the last country in Africa on record to gain independence from South Africa. The overthrow of apartheid in 1991 in South Africa however, marks the official end to all forms of colonial and authoritarian rule in Africa. The independence agenda was nation building based on western modernisation through industrialisation. Industrialisation was devoted to import substitution of consumer goods previously obtained from colonial Europe. According to Kester and Sidibé (1994) the pivotal role African trade unions played in the struggle for independence was based on the expectation that freedom from colonial rule would lead to enhanced freedoms (1994, p. 11). But colonial rule did not change the structural integration of the economies of African countries into the metropolitan capital as set out under colonial rule (Ninsin, 1989).

The expectations of nationals for improved living and working conditions were largely met in the immediate aftermath of independence. The remarkable feature of the new states in Africa was the restructuring of their economies through massive investments in infrastructure, education, health, housing and manufacturing industries. Increased investments in infrastructure, roads, industries and social investments in the population meant a heightened need for higher educated and skilled workforce. Independence therefore brought massive expansion in the post-colonial economy accompanied by a deliberate effort to 'Africanise' the workplace and its management. Women's access to waged work also increased as their educational opportunities expanded (ISSER/DPPC, 1996). The government was the main economic agent and the state dominated in production and as a result set the stage for production relations (Britwum A. O., 2007).

With independence came the process of decolonisation, the nationalisation of the ownership of major enterprises accompanied by a philosophy of social relations of production that was directed at striking at the roots the traditional domination of foreign capital (Kester, 2007). The expansion in social development, education, health and housing was driven by the notion that nations had to invest in their most crucial asset: their human resource. The quantitative expansion in the waged workforce was matched with the quality of working conditions as well as skills (Kester, 2007). The dramatic expansion in waged employment however, still left large proportions of African labourforce within the pre-capitalist mode of production. State attitude was that it was only a matter of time when such populations would be drawn into the so-called modernising sector (Ninsin, 1989).

The political landscape in some instances, was bent towards the left with some flirtations with socialism. Most searched for a middle or third way, neither socialism or capitalism under the notion of political non-alignment. The Yugoslav attempts at workers self-management constituted an attractive alternative that some African countries tried to copy. Such attempts gained expression in experiments such as the humanist philosophy of Zambia which was predicated on the notion of a transition from a society in which

capitalist enterprises were held in the hands of a few, toward workers' self-management, characterised by human dignity and social justice (Kester & Sidibé, 1994; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978). The second was Tanzania's Ujamaa based on the notion of communalism built on the spirit of self-reliance and state ownership of enterprises (Kester, 2007). Algeria introduced formal structures for workers to be involved in workplace decision making giving them a voice in determining the outcome of their labour. Egypt also engaged similar practices to give workers greater decision making and supervisory roles in the workplace. Ghana had its own version of pro-leftist political orientation expressed in the form of state capitalism. Other experiments were the Libyan Green revolution. The experiments were limited in the extent to which they were able to break the stranglehold of western capitalism over national economies.

Most post-independence governments transformed into single party regimes under the rationale that continuous rule was a requirement for ensuring successful implementation of the decolonisation of the state's nation building agenda. Governments of the post-independence states were quick to question the unconditional availability of workers' loyalty and support and take steps to ensure that workers would always comply with the dictates of ruling governments by neutralising their opposition or putting in place strict rules to demobilise and moderate their power (Webster & Glenn, 2001). These included the amalgamation of trade unions into single federations and their incorporation into ruling parties (Kester, 2007; Akwetey E. O., 2001). Worker's movements, the trade unions, were turned into organs for worker control ostensibly to ensure worker discipline. Governments' expectations were that unions would play productionist roles, stimulating productivity and at the same time moderating their wage demands in the national interest. This idea was aptly captured in francophone Africa as 'responsible participation' (Kester, 2007; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978).

Union/state relations referred to as corporatism has been utilised in several contexts across the globe (Akwetey E. O., 2001; Kester & Pinaud, 1996; Piet, 2006). Union incorporation in Africa attracted state largesse in the form of physical resources as well as labour friendly legislation governing working conditions and union representation. These took the form of closed shop and check-off for dues payment and the tripartite system. Ghana, Zambia and Tanzania are significant cases in the midst of several others (Muneku & Phiri, 2011; Britwum A. O., 2007; Akwetey E. O., 1994; Masta & Omolo, 2011). State generosity extended into material provisions like physical structures, buildings and office space, land for housing and funds for union activities. In addition, public sector workers enjoyed a high degree of employment security. The accompanying social wages like subsidised housing, healthcare, education and utilities were shared by all workers irrespective of their employment location. Unions gained strength organisationally and thus increased their militancy (Chinguwo, 2011; Masta & Omolo, 2011; Muneku & Phiri, 2011; Britwum A. O., 2010; Kester, 2007; Akwetey E. O., 2001). There were important exceptions not all unions in Africa entered into alliances with the state. Konings cites the example of Cameroun where unions were able to preserve their autonomy even though they were in agreement with the anti-colonial objectives of the nationalist movement (2006). In countries such as Togo and Senegal however, labour had little gain from the incorporation of union into the ruling party (Kester & Sidibé, 1994).

The majority of African states were the main economic agents and their economic landscape dominated by state owned concerns with majority of the waged labour force based in the public sector.⁶ Kester uses figures from the World Bank to show the remarkable economic gains attained from the 1960s to the early 1970s. The figures indicate high economic growth, high employment rates, high waged incomes and a labour friendly industrial environment. According to Kester, economic

... growth rate was initially greater than population growth rate from 1961 to 1973; and by 5.6 per cent between 1970 and 1975 (World Bank 1990). As a consequence of growth, achievements were made, especially in the industrial sector: the percentage of industrial production with regard to GDP rose between 1960 and 1980 (2007, p. 11).

There was, as a result, through the length and breadth of the continent national trade union confederations with centralised allegiance to ruling political parties. Union leaders were appointed into government and in some instances, governments controlled the election of trade union officers (Cowan, 1960). African governments, Kester (2007) explains, got the best out of their investments as national development gains impacted directly on the welfare of most nationals. Subsequent events quickly dispelled the euphoria of worker well being, replacing it with despondency and outright hostility to the African leadership that replaced the colonial rulers. The most significant state/trade union alliances, developed in Ghana TUC under the regime of Nkrumah and Zambia under Chiluba, for example went through periods of tension, degenerated into acrimony and then were severed as the economic and political situations the countries worsened (Britwum A. O., 2007; Akwetey E. O., 2001).⁷

Post-independence economic decline

If the 1960s to '70s was a period of remarkable economic gain, the following period, 1975 to the mid 1980s represents the lost development decade for Africa (Kester, 2007). The dismal economic fortunes of African countries during this era have been attributed to a concurrence of factors. In examining the causes of economic decline in Africa Sawyer highlights difficulties in distinguishing between causes and effects and proposes as a way out separating principal causes, from the remote as well as immediate causes (1990). He locates the principal causes in the colonial structuring of African economies. Colonialism he explains integrated African economies into the world capitalist system

'by aligning the dynamic sectors of each economy with the interests of the dominant classes in the metropolitan countries, and crating with the colony the political and social conditions necessary to sustaining and reproduce the relationship established under the colonial system. So successful was this process that the termination of formal colonialism nowhere led to a radical change in the relationship between the former colonies and metropolitan interest, at least at the level of the economy' (Sawyer, 1990, p. 10).

African economies stood to be affected by the vagaries in the fortunes of western capital. The collapse of the boom in the world economy following the Korean War in 1950s led to a

reduction in African imports to western industries. This was exacerbated by capitalists' struggle for supremacy as reflected in the so-called cold war. The most significant event was the world economic crisis precipitated by OPEC oil price increases which caused a reduction in western industrial productivity, further depressing the prices of the primary products of Africa (Hoogvelt, 2001; Sawyer, 1990). The reduction in import revenue was complicated by an increase in oil imports for most non-oil producing African countries. The result was an overnight increase in the budget deficits of African countries making their industrialisation projects appear overtly ambitious and unsustainable. Natural disasters like draught, floods and cyclones and epidemics occurring within the same period worsened the living conditions of Africans (Sawyer, 1990).⁸

Other immediate causes can be found in the self-seeking activities of the African political leadership. Here one is referring to the active illegal accumulation of wealth through the confiscation of political power, (Rathbone, 2003). Workers' struggles in Ghana against the abuse of political office for personal gain discussed in Britwum (2010) are symptomatic of the political history of the majority of African countries and still pervasive in current times. This is the phenomenon described as kleptocracy (Gyimah-Boadi & Jeffries, 2000). Works like Jeffries (1978), Crisp (1984), Akwetey (2001), Ananaba (1979), Andræ and Beckman (1998), Sachikonye (2001) and Silga (1994) show how the kleptocratic tendencies of African political leadership affect workers directly through their impact on enterprises and the national economies. Rathbone attributes the pervasiveness of kleptocracy within Ghanaian political history to the dearth of resources 'which acquire a heightened value simply because of their scarcity' (2003, p. 399). Luckham, Gyimah-Boadi, Ahadzie, and Boateng (2005) explain that,

...the political elites that controlled the state lacked secure and independent sources of income and status. They therefore used the state to accumulate wealth for themselves, rather than to advance a genuine programme of national development. State management shifted surpluses from the rural economy into government hands, introduced severe distortions in the economy and created an environment which was far from conducive to business investment and wealth creation (p. 2).

Riding on the shoulders of kleptocracy, Galarraga and Gogu  (1994), explain are dictatorships both civilian and military aided by clientelism, corruption and internal dissent. The state is no longer preoccupied by national development but by the survival interests of the occupiers of power. The resulting impact of the economic decline on workers was immediate and so was the exhibition of their discontent. Kester, drawing on the works of Vandemoortele (1991, 84), Mihyo and Schiphorst (1995) as well as Colclough (1991), estimated that,

...the extent of open and disguised unemployment in Africa increased by 17 per cent between 1980 and 1988, which was four times faster than during the 1970s ... real wages declined by 25 per cent between 1980 and 1985. ... In some countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone and Zambia, the decline was sharper. For the overall region, real wages were halved between 1970 and 1985 (2007, p. 5).

Governments' attitude to unions only worsened the political environment. The flip side of union incorporation into ruling parties, a process Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) describe

as one party/single union interlude or 'confiscated freedoms', soon became obvious. When it became apparent that there was little to be gained from the incorporation of labour within the ruling parties the leaders of organised labour lost their credibility. According to Ginsburg and Webster (1994), union incorporation into the state isolated the leaders from ordinary union members. National labour centres ceased to have a representative role and trade union bureaucracies were further removed from workers' struggles. No longer were strikes and waged workers' agitation for improved working conditions led by their federations or national unions. Most were the result of workplace based actions. Some unions severed relations with the ruling parties and suffered severe repercussions. In Burundi, for example, the government cut union funding, terminated compulsory check-off for paying dues and withdrew all facilities bestowed on the central federation. In Cape Verde, an outright ban was imposed on workers right to strike (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001). Economic decline therefore undermined the legitimacy of development corporatism but the tragedy was the absolute lack of foresight on the part of union leaders. They failed for several reasons to withdraw their support for discredited often times corrupt and despotic rulers.

The national discontent with economic hardships brought in its wake political instability characterised by opportunistic military takeovers (Kraus, 2007; Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; Yahaya, 2001). Wangome states that the period between 1960 and 1970 has been captioned the decade of coups in Africa (1985). From 1960 to 1969, about 21 African countries experienced successful military takeovers. Marshall (2005) assessing conflict trends in Africa between 1946 and 2004 notes that by 1990 nearly 37 African countries had either experienced some form of military interventions. He observes that

...experiments in democratic forms of governance in Africa were relatively rare and short-lived during the Cold War period. Within ten years from their date of independence, six of the ten new African democracies had failed and those states seized were by autocratic rule: Lesotho, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. Only Botswana and Namibia have maintained democratic regimes since their inception (Marshall, 2005, p. 8).

Akwetey (2001) insists on the need to remember that the dynamics of capitalist accumulation differed from country to country and as a result the emerging conflicts between state and capital on one hand and labour on the other varied. Such conflicts were often exacerbated by the need to stem the influence of progressive leanings towards communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The cold war between communist Europe and the Western capitalist world turned into heated wars in Africa. Congo and the fate of Patrice Lumumba is a case in point so were the wars in Angola and Mozambique (Marshall, 2005). The active involvement of the CIA in the first coup in Ghana is supported by several scholars who draw on declassified CIA files to make their case Boafo-Arthur (Boafo-Arthur, 1999). quotes Beckman, (1984: 228), Stockwell (1978) and Seymour (1980) to support the claim of CIA participation in Ghana's first coup d'état.⁹

Marshall in his analysis of conflict in Africa from 1946 to 2004 observes a

...fairly constant increase in the magnitude of warfare in Africa during the Cold War/ decolonization period, 1946-1989 The upward trend continued through the

early years of the 1990s; over forty percent of the region's countries were experiencing wars at the peak in 1993. The upward trend is mainly attributable to the protracted duration of wars during the Cold War period Upon gaining independence, about half of the anti-colonial wars degenerated into civil wars. Of greatest importance in this regard is the issue of transnational support for both government security forces and anti-state militants (2005, p. 2 and 3).

Military coups did not solve the economic problems of Africa, the impact of civil wars on workers was however, more devastating. Even though Wangome (1985) remains sceptical about an immediate end to military takeovers in Africa he states that, '[r]ather than solve African contemporary political and socio-economic problems, military coups d'état in Africa have tended to drive the continent into even further suffering and turmoil. This has been the case in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Congo and several other African states.'

Economic decline in Africa boiled to a head by the end of the 1970s and by the early 1980s, most African economies were in dire straits and attracted a bail out. As various factions of the ruling elite vied for political control there was increasing recourse to repressive tactics to maintain a semblance of coherence within the society. Military regimes were often more brutal than the civilians they came to replace. In no time therefore workers in several African countries found themselves collaborating with civilian groups for the replacement of military regimes. In the second wave of struggle to end authoritarian rule, workers found allies in the very western powers whom their predecessors had organised to oust to attain independence. Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe however fall into a different category captured as late transistors. Labour in these three countries had the longest and most intense political and industrial struggles for the overthrow of apartheid, the most despotic colonial regime.

Neo-liberal adjustment and pluralist democracies

If the 1970s to the 1980s were characterised as failed economic development in Africa, the late 1980s to 1990s were devoted to the realignment of the national economies, fractured by the fallout of the world economic crisis, environmental crisis, civil and regional wars as well as economic mismanagement. The need to restructure the fragile economies of African states became even more imperative to not only to stem national discontent but to manage unsustainable external debts seen by the west as a threat to the global financial system. Fixing these fractured economies was crucial for global capitalism. The period coincided with the debt crisis precipitated by Mexico. The emerging framework for managing developing countries' debt was shaped within the ultra-liberal ideology promoted under the conservative governments of Thatcher in the UK and Regan in the US. Captioned Regan-Thatcherism, world economic policies saw an increasing tendency to the right insisting on state withdrawal from production, removal of subsidies and the move away from production for domestic markets to production for export (Abugre, 2001).

Neo-liberal reforms or structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) had two aspects: the political and the economic. In all instances, economic reforms preceded political reforms. Economic reforms targeted state spending and participation in production. It was also

directed at reorienting production away from domestic to the international market. Ownership of production enterprises where they existed as state owned were transferred overnight into foreign private hands (Abugre, 2001). National currencies were devalued and trade liberalisation instituted supposedly to make protected enterprises more competitive. Liberalisation was not limited to failed African economies alone. It was the order of the day for strong economies such as South Africa and Namibia who applied adjustment policies without the prodding of the Breton Woods institutions, the IMF and World Bank.

SAPs were presented as a necessary condition for attracting foreign investment, the panacea for the economic malaise in Africa. The cost of re-aligning the fractured African economies was passed on to African workers particularly waged workers at a time when their organisations, trade unions, were facing severe credibility crisis. Economic reforms therefore attacked waged labour as a social category (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001). Liberal adjustment policies led to the retrenchment of waged labour from the public sector as well as the privatised public enterprises. Social wages were withdrawn and labour friendly legislation repealed and replaced with more stringent labour laws. The favoured position of waged workers as development agents was inverted. No longer did they hold the sole key to national development. In fact their actions to protect their interests in the workplace were presented as being at direct odds with building the splintered economies of Africa. Labour law reform sought to remove workers' rights to bargain and in some instances placed a ceiling on wage and salary increases (Tidjani & Ndiaye, 2001; Graham, 1989).

There are records of efforts at introducing economic reforms in Africa before the 1980s but such efforts were met with stiff resistance often used as an excuse for military intervention (Boafo-Arthur, 1999). The 1980s however provided the needed political context for the successful implementation of IMF/World Bank sponsored SAP. By the mid 1990s some 30 African countries had implemented some aspect of SAP under World Bank and IMF directive (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001). The resistance on the part of workers and their organisations to the draconian SAP measures was further coercion and brutal repression. Notable actions of workers against economic reform include demonstrations in Ghana and Zimbabwe against the introduction of valued added tax (VAT) in 1995 and 1997 respectively, as well as the Senegalese national strike against 'Austerity Plan' in 1993. Worker repression under SAP took several forms. They included the stifling of opposition, co-opting radical groups and leaders of labour movements, arrests, detention and repression of trade union leaders, verbal attacks on workers using state sponsored media as well as the abuse of laid down industrial relations procedures (Britwum A. O., 2007; Kraus, 2007; Konnings, 2003; Akwetey E. O., 2001; El-Shafei, 2001; Graham, 1989). Other measures included the disbanding of trade unions as in Nigeria and induced takeover of union leadership as in Ghana in 1983. Sudan, Senegal, Cameroun as well as Nigeria represent situations of union repression¹⁰. In 1993 the Nigerian Labour Congress was banned its leaders arrested and so were all who asked for the release of the arrested leaders. The material gains made by organised labour in the immediate aftermath of independence were eroded under SAPs. Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) described the situation as:

[m]aterial gains achieved by the workers in an earlier period, as, for instance, in Egypt under Nasser, were wiped out. Inflation undermined the process of collective bargaining as a means of protecting workers' income. In addition, the element of a "social wage" that at one point had been provided through public-sector spending on social services, especially health and education, was similarly badly hit by cuts in government expenditure and decline in public management (2001, p. 15).

State/union relations soured further under neoliberal reforms. Beckman and Sachikonye attribute this to the centrality of labour legislation in the reform process. Existing labour legislation enacted in the immediate post-independence era, we have explained earlier, were, in the words of Beckman and Sachikonye, designed with 'explicit commitment to protect workers' interests....' They lament however that liberal reformers saw such laws 'as part of a defunct national developmentalist social order with its excessive statist and welfarist features that were strangulating the free development of wealth generating market forces' (2001, p. 17). Labour law reform became 'an obvious arena for political contestation' (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001, p. 17). Typical changes included deepening flexibility of working conditions, mechanisms for wage determination and heightened employment insecurity (*ibid*). Union power was attacked through the removal of laws that granted closed shop and automatic check-off and the introduction of union pluralism. Notable countries included Ghana where the Ghana TUC lost its position as the sole union centre, in Egypt strikes were banned; Zambia like Ghana saw labour law reform that expunged closed shop and in addition removed the check-off. For Senegal new labour laws increased the power of employers to hire and fire at will. Zimbabwean labour law was revised to reverse the 'one industry, one union' as an attempt to weaken union resistance to public sector restructuring and block worker agitation for increased wages (Tengende, 2001).

SAP policy regimes demanded the removal of subsidies and import tariffs set by the post-independence development state to promote domestic production. The impact on African labour, both waged and unwaged, has been devastating in the extreme. In the first place local enterprises have shed their waged labour force ostensibly to lower production prices. Several local industries have had difficulty matching low costs of cheap imports from the west and China. Britwum (2007), examining the case of Ghana, shows how the removal of tariffs open local industry to international competition causing a collapse in the rice, poultry and textile sectors. She notes further that job losses impact downstream industries particularly distribution and service industries where non-waged labour is located within small and medium scale enterprises.

There has been considerable exaggeration of Ghana's worth, for example, as an adjustment miracle. Bofo-Arthur explains that this credential is based on the successful implementation of stringent adjustment measures and not on the extraordinary economic outcome for the broad masses of Ghana. The successful implementation, he explains, was achievable only under brutal repression of waged labour which was possible only under a military dictatorship. He therefore concludes that economic adjustment is contingent on dictatorship and that worker repressions in Ghana had World Bank/IMF support (Bofo-Arthur, 1999). Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) concur with Bofo-Arthur and note that liberalising adjustment programmes entailed the intensified exploitation of both the urban and rural poor. Galarraga and Gogu  (1994) as well as Ginsburg and Webster (1994)

contend that there is always an economic basis for guaranteeing political democracy. For Ginsburg and Webster it is incumbent therefore on political democracies to deliver material quality of life for all. When the necessary threshold is breached workers' agitation for better working conditions is interpreted by despotic rulers as a threat to political stability and governments react in ways that endanger workers' rights as citizens (*ibid*). For Cameroun for example union demands for autonomy and improved working conditions were met with hostile repression (Konnings, 2003; Ananaba, 1979).

An important aspect of reforms was political liberalisation that saw the transformation of several African governments from military or authoritarian regimes to multi-party rule. Adjustment introduced new forces into the African economic landscape directing the incorporation further into the capitalist mode. These new forces are the IMF and the World Bank working to secure the interests of western capitalism with US interests at the forefront. The strength of these international finance institutions was given further boost in World Trade Organisations (WTO) regimes that are legally enforceable. The era of SAPs then ended effectively all forms of experiments with economic management forms alternative to capitalism. Though the main tenets of political reforms were democracy and good governance underscoring human rights, these rights were not extended to labour. Economic reforms made such rights untenable under the guise that they were at variance with national economic goals.

Towards the end of the first millennium however, there was greater acceptance that SAP induced reforms had failed to deliver the needed economic transformation in Africa (SAPRI, The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network, 2004; SAPRI, Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative, 2001). Even in so called miracle countries like Ghana and Uganda, poverty levels had increased and unemployment defied solution, and debt burdens both domestic and external remained unsustainable. A new idea, the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative (HIPC), was rushed to assuage the misgivings generated by the SAPs and to neutralise the broad mobilisations for debt cancellation led by the Jubilee 2000 coalition. HIPC is only available to countries with external debt burdens beyond available debt relief mechanisms provided by the Paris Club group of creditors and predicated on SAP (Abugre, 2001; Malaluan & Guttal, 2003). Such countries must have a satisfactory record of implementing IMF and World Bank SAPs and produce a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Funds from debt cancellation are released only to countries that have submitted to further implementation of more adjustment policies under the close scrutiny of the IMF and World Bank. As at June 2012, of the 36 countries that have benefited from debt reduction packages under the HIPC initiative, 30 were African countries and three more countries considered eligible are also African: these are Chad, Guinea and the Comoros, with Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan waiting for consideration (International Monetary Fund , 2012). HIPC relief was supposed to be directed towards meeting millennium development goals (MDGs) and therefore not for job creation.

Thus at the end to the twentieth century entering into the twenty first, African countries were in deep economic crisis and under the firm grips of western capital with their supra state institutions, the IMF and World Bank, in superintending over national economic and political decision making. Africa remains, as conceived and crafted at the Berlin conference in the late nineteenth century, producers of raw materials and market for

European goods. The main work force remained waged and un-waged. The dominant position of waged workers as development agents was short lived. In essence, the emergence and operation of waged labour in Africa as key labour force spans a little over one century. The focus at the end of the century turned to non-waged labour forms. These were forms of labour relations that were structured along relations operating within the pre-capitalist mode that had developed outside of the mainstream economic framework set up by colonial administration and the independent state that succeeded it. These forms of labour relations are reflected in the economic activities named informal economy. The next section will discuss the intricacies of this part of African economies and the labour force operation within it.

Globalisation and informalisation of African workplace

Globalisation is the term used to describe the form capitalism has assumed at present. Its dominance is largely attributed to technological advancement and a manipulation by global financial institutions based in Western industrialised nations. Globalisation furthers the liberalising agenda began under economic reforms of the 1980s in terms of the removal of barriers to trade and market access. The role of the state is also reformulated away from direct participation that accompanied independence. The state functions under globalisation to facilitate the operations of private capital and in the specific case of Africa the interest of foreign direct investment from the West. The role of the state in pursuing the interest of globalised capital has been acknowledged by several (Britwum A. O., 2010; Wood, 2004; Rupert & Smith, 2002; Davies, 2004). Though neo-liberal discourse celebrates the small state at the turn of the millennium, state intervention in US, UK, and across Europe during the 2008 financial crisis lend credence to Britwum's assertion that the 'mediating role of the nation state undergoes constant change in order to continue providing legitimacy that it requires to survive' (Britwum A. O., 2010, p. 30).

For Haynes (2005) and Önder (1998), globalisation meant the integration of national economies to support the interest of transnational capital. Neo-liberal adjustment constituted the trajectory transporting globalising economic policies into countries that had hitherto run state led programmes for import substitution policies. State capacity and ability to chart development policies that give place to any macro-economic development strategies promoting alternatives other than capitalism are viewed with hostility, consistently stigmatised. A case in point is Libya. The rule of Ghadafi continuously derided till a violent overthrow was organised in 2011 and the regime replaced with a weak band of opportunists ready to subsume the Libyan economy to the dictates of western capital.

Globalisation largely presented as technological advancement, is on the contrary dictated by economic and production relations (Britwum A. O., 2010). Its effects have been felt by working people as it has triggered profound transformation in the world of work altering the workplace and work relations. Globalisation undermines labour's political and economic position as key development agent. The subordination of workers' welfare to corporate profits through work flexibilisation becomes the order of the day, used as a mechanism to restrain workers' demands for high wages and improved working conditions (Benería, 2001). Such demands, it is argued, undermine national

competitiveness. Flexibilisation or increased casualisation of work in the form of highly insecure or precarious work where permanent jobs are re-designated to be occupied by labour types like, casual, seasonal, part time, piece workers, or the self-employed. Employer obligation to support labour overheads is removed as it is presented as a drain on corporate finances and therefore competitiveness. Workers' demands for employers to bear the social costs of their reproduction like health, shelter and education become unreasonable (Gokel & Vormawor, 2004).

Formal work restructuring has been the hallmark of globalisation. Traditional standard employment relations become uncompetitive driving up production costs and cutting the international market share of national products. Employment creation therefore, shifts to more diffused workplaces where employee/employer relations are blurred. Outsourcing and sub-contracting the dominant production forms bring to an end the supremacy of the fordist production relations.

At the height of the collapse of African economies, the global community made a discovery. Keith Hart's anthropological study of livelihoods in Nima, a low-income community in Accra, Ghana, and the ILO's economic assessment of employment conditions in Kenya revealed the enormous potential of livelihood forms operating on the fringes of mainstream policy to the well-being of low income communities. The informal economy became overnight an economic sphere with immense economic potential and a legitimated area worthy of academic and policy attention (Britwum A. O., 2010).

The initial attitude was to outline a sector of national economies with distinct ways of doing things. But it soon became clear that informality was not the preserve of certain enterprises located outside legal regulation in developing countries (Heintz & Valodia, 2008). Keith Hart outlining informal employment, noted that 'The key variable is the degree of rationalisation of work - that is to say, whether or not labour is recruited on a permanent and regular basis for fixed rewards.' He goes on to explain that an important 'distinction between formal and informal income opportunities is based essentially on that between wage-earning and self-employment' (Hart, 1973, p. 68). Further work by the ILO led to a general acceptance of looking at the nature of work and not enterprise practices. Thus, the general acceptance now is that informal work is characterised by 'employment relationships that are not governed by formal economic regulations and/or basic legal and social protections (Heintz & Valodia, 2008, p. 3).

We have explained earlier that colonial rule articulated pre-capitalist production modes to bear the cost of social reproduction. We noted further that in Africa the post-independence developmental state viewed all forms of pre-and non-capitalist modes of production as backward and a strain on efforts at development. The idea was that massive industrialisation would modernise production modes in only a matter of time. This dream however failed to materialise. One characteristic feature of post SAP however, has been the rapid expansion of the informal economy in African countries. Aksikas, (2007) Reddy, (2007) Cooke, (2006) Davies, (2004) and Munck (2002), acknowledge this unparalleled growth of the informal economy under globalisation as a universal phenomenon.

Von Holdt and Webster (2005) use the concepts informalisation from above and below to capture how the processes set in motion by globalisation fuel the unbridled expansion of

the informal economy. Informalisation from below, they explain, are survival strategies adopted by teeming masses denied access to the formal as their main employment or incomes sources. Thus, they may be formal sector waged workers, as Keith Hart discovered of Accra where:

...the monthly equation of income and expenditure is usually negative, and few manage to escape from the spiral of ever-increasing debt. But the lives of the majority are sustained ... both on a casual and regular basis, in petty enterprises of all types ranging in scale from the most trivial activities to major businesses. ... this is to say that, denied success by the formal opportunity structure, these members of the urban sub-proletariat seek informal means of increasing their incomes (Hart, 1973, p. 68).

Additionally, informalisation from below is pushed by the teeming masses of job seekers unable to find employment promised by adjusting governments who have privatised public or state-owned enterprises or given up land for foreign mining companies (Britwum A. O., 2010; Heintz & Valodia, 2008; Von Holdt & Webster, 2005; Tripp, 1997).

Enterprise cost-cutting measures like outsourcing, subcontracting and recourse to filling permanent jobs with temporal insecure employment forms, drives informalisation from above (Britwum A. O., 2011; Heintz & Valodia, 2008; Von Holdt & Webster, 2005). The main outcome of informal employment is the redrafting of non-market/capitalist forms of production into globalised capitalism. Britwum explains that globalisation rather fuels a process of informalisation not an expansion of a particular sector of enterprises. This assertion is borne out by Aksikas, (2007) as well as Heintz and Valodia (2008). Heintz and Valodia explain that there is 'an important conceptual distinction between employment in the informal sector and informal employment. They insist therefore on adopting the job-based framework endorsed by the ILO in 2003. This framework extends informality from a location in national economies to include informalised employment types in the formal sector. Informal employment forms therefore, 'include employees in informal jobs regardless of whether those jobs are located in formal or informal enterprises.' The defining feature for them, following ILO's cue, is the fact that such jobs 'lack a core set of legal or social protections' (Heintz & Valodia, 2008, p. 4).

Informal economy enterprises are located in all the industrial sectors in Africa. Beginning from their main location in agriculture, they span transport service, construction and manufacturing. Second to agriculture in terms of the labour force it engages, is commerce, wholesale, retail and petty trading. The African labour force is informal economy based. Though there are country and regional variations, current conservative estimates put African informal labour force at 70% (Ghana Trades Union Congress, 2009). South Africa for example is singled out as a contrast and, like countries in Northern Africa, has about 40% of the labour force in formal employment (Ghana Trades Union Congress, 2009; Davies, 2004). But these highly formalised African economies are now beset with work flexibilisation producing what is captured as atypical work. Informal employment ranges from 73% in Senegal to 80% in Kenya, 88% in Zambia and Ghana, 89% in Zimbabwe and a high of 92% in war ravaged Sierra Leone (Davies, 2004; Ghana Trades Union Congress, 2009; Britwum A. O., 2011; Muneku & Phiri, 2011; Orr, 2011). According to Davies, 'formal job' creation virtually ceased to exist in Africa. Quoting an ILO study, he explains that 'Zimbabwe urban labour markets under stagflationary structural adjustment in the early

1990s found that formal sector was creating only 10,000 jobs per year in the face of an urban workforce increasing by more than 300,000' (2004, p. 25).

Informal employment types are varied as are the range of activities they cover. Utilising Britwum, (2011) Heintz and Valodia (2008) as well as Hart's (1973) groupings of informal economy work, we typify the current forms of informal economy workers to include:

1. **Non-permanent waged workers:** Contract, casual, temporal, seasonal and part-time; such workers are employed by public, private large formal enterprises as well as small and medium enterprises the traditional informal economy enterprises.
2. **Independent service providers:** building contractors, manufacturers, housing, labour brokers, transport commodity wholesalers; they might be in the direct contract relations with formal private or public enterprises and likely to take up outsourced or sub-contracted so-called periphery tasks of formal public or private enterprises. They employ non-permanent waged labour.
3. **Self-employed:** agricultural out-growers/small-holders, petty traders, artisans, musicians, vehicle repair, food processing, street hawkers or
4. **Self-provisioning:** agricultural subsistence production located in the rural areas and some urban informal settlements

The labour forms outlined above and their accompanying examples provided are broad strokes of employment types engaging workers in Africa. It is important to outline the labour forms, however, the main issues are the ensuing labour relations and conditions of employment characterising them. The hallmark of informalised employment forms are the high levels of insecurity whether they are located in the formal or informal economy. Hart notes that within informal economy enterprises informal employment 'is risky and expected results highly variable' (1973, p. 78). In the formal workplace, informalisation renders labour amenable to super exploitation (Aksikas, 2007). The term precariat coined by Standing (2011) is used to describe what Britwum, Douglas and Ledwith (2012) capture as a 'hybrid of the proletariat and the precarious worker, toiling in insecure, casual jobs – often several simultaneously – and usually without rights'.

According to Benería (2001) even though globalisation is accompanied by political liberalisation, a process that saw the replacement of several despotic regimes in Africa, the notion of citizens' rights central to pluralist democracies does not extend to the workplace. Globalisation threatens the democratic rights of workers. She notes, quoting Tilly that, the

'rise of Western democracies led to the gradual and incremental establishment of workers' rights through the enforcement of contracts, intense labour struggle, and the creation of citizenship and democratic institutions, ... in developing countries where the welfare state was weaker or hardly built, globalization has generated contradictory forces. To be sure, transnational investment has thrived on the existing lack of workers' rights in many developing countries, as exemplified by the restrictions of rights in many export-processing zones scattered around the globe (Benería, 2001, p. 37).

Even though the political landscape that drives individualised market decisions making can provide avenues for the recognition of individual rights, the space to exercise such rights is only at the individual level since globalisation thrives on the erosion of workers' rights in developing countries. It must be noted that the concessions granted workers in Western Europe was a calculated attempt to stem the tide of communist expansion that had engulfed Eastern Europe at the time. Social wages extracted from Western capital as outlined by Benería and its corresponding absence under globalisation is not a contradiction at all. The situation shows the relative weakness of labour. Currently with the demise of credible alternatives, capitalism has a field day and chooses to exploit this advantage. This relative strength is shown in the rapidity with which labour legislations have been altered to promote the interest of capital. All African countries have seen labour legislative reform that tends to curtail workers' rights and limits the operations of trade unions.

The additional feature of informalisation is the rapid deindustrialisation of African economies. The triggers are several. First is the fragmentation of established enterprises on privatisation with the excuse of concentrating on core business. The second is the collapse of local enterprises through unequal competition by liberalised trade's dumping practices. In the face of uncontrolled competition, several industries have collapsed. One such area has been the textile industry that has been unable to compete with cheap products from China and Western industrialised countries such as the US. The poultry and rice industries have suffered similar fate. According to Phelan, 'the virtual impossibility of establishing a flourishing manufacturing under structural adjustment policies set up in the 1980s and 1990s has meant that the few new factories have replaced those that have floundered' during the economic collapse of the 1970s (2011, p. 13). In the face of such challenges the informal economy is set to grow. But its potential to transform the economies of Africa as being pushed by the World Bank and the ILO is, strongly contested by observers such as Davies (2004) and Ninsin (1991).

Labour response to globalisation

According to Beckman and Sachikonye (2001), the initial excitement that greeted political liberalism turned into disappointment as governments used various means to curtail workers' rights further. Limited as the political space for exercising workers' rights have been under globalisation, one important gain is the increasing recognition and legitimation of trade unions as workers' representatives. Workers have exploited this space to form alliances with other groups to pursue their agenda. Union alliances in contestation with globalisation are however different from that which shaped the nationalists struggles prior to independence. The alliance partners have been broad and yielded interesting collaborations. They have included employers, political parties as well as civil society organisations. Workers have been cautious this time to avoid incorporation. Most unions remain independent of political affiliation. Africa's labour important allies remain civil society organisations ranging from local through to national and international groups. An important example is the Nigerian Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO).

Post SAP globalisation protestations and the ensuing alliances are in sharp contrast to the nationalist struggles that characterised the transition to independence in other ways. The political forces are different and so are the goals of the struggles. Nationalist struggles

aimed to overthrow political regimes and put in their place national self-rule. Struggles against SAP had limited economic goals, only aimed at overthrowing rulers and not a change in political order. The important dimension however is the new entrants: civil society or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Such union/NGO coalitions however have tended to be reformist and careful to steer clear of economic transformation. The amalgamations of groups that are created tend to be issues specific campaigns such as legislative reform or trade or economic policies. Nigeria's LASCO in 2012 for example mobilised across all forms of political divides involving workers in the formal and informal economies to resist fuel price hikes that threatened workers incomes.¹¹

There is a visible absence of a politically oriented labour organisation on the continent that is questioning consistently and critically the dominant economic production relations that continue to exploit Africa and its workers. Also lacking is a critical discourse that is questioning the legitimacy of globalisation and the role foreign direct investment plays on the continent of Africa. The coalitions of trade unions, CSOs, political parties and other groups organising to defend varied interests within the national spaces pose a critical challenge. Diverse groupings have been constituted around issues. These have not been marked by deep reflection on the global political economic framework that produces the varied forms of injustices. This means that interests are yet to be reconciled within and among such groupings. There are varied disagreements within such groups and they fail to transform into movements capable of sustained struggle to set alternatives in place. The continent remains restive. Some states such as Somalia obviously failed and Congo has been unable to shake off deep conflicts and Sudan and the latest nation South Sudan are yet to resolve the strife that tore them apart. Colonial rule leaves deep marks all over the continent from conflict ridden Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, Congo and the simmering pots of Uganda, Rwanda, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire as well as the post-conflict states of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique. Formidable levels of poverty stare in the faces of all demanding organised labour undertake to respond to social concerns beyond the workplace. The question is how trade unions in Africa set out to address this challenge and who they decide to build alliances with.

Conclusion

This study set out in to explore the fortunes of labour in Africa in the context of how dominant economic frames have shaped the African workforce and how the ensuing labour market structures have influenced the working conditions and rights of workers. The study also examined the response of labour, in particular of the representatives of organised labour in the form of trade unions. Throughout history, African workers have sought through a variety of means to enhance their political strength particularly through alliances, to build, expand and deepen their political power to exact compliance from capital or the state with its needs. Labour has been unable particularly under post independent Africa, to identify the real problem at the base of the repression inflicted on it by political power holders, be they foreign or national. This failing has led to several disappointments as their quest to secure better working conditions, regime change failed to institute rulers who will respond to their interests. The transition from authoritarian rule, from colonial to single party and the military, or from apartheid, only resulted in labour having to submit to a replacement of one form of exploitation by another. Though

there has always been some evidence that workers and their leaders locate their problems in the economic framework within which nations are operating in seeking alternatives, their post adjustment struggles hardly demand fundamental restructuring of the economic base of their countries. That labour should invest in prosecuting a political system that superintends an economic framework that undermines its very survival raises questions about union ideology. Indeed the pluralist democracies organised labour in Africa supported had, as travelling companion, neo-liberal export promotion liberalisation inimical to the interests of workers.

There is therefore the need to examine how the shape of the African labour force predisposes it to reactions that do not challenge the domination of capital. This seeming inertia does not push labour pursue alternative social and economic forms that set in place non-exploitative production modes that ensure that the direct beneficiaries of production outcomes are African workers. The limits of labour power, its ability to topple repressive regimes and bring about political change will herald the appropriate economic environment for the free operation of labour devoid of exploitation. Increasing demands on trade unions to act as workers' voice in Africa is shifting union role from economic/waged worker representation to developmental focus. Some questions that arise are the extent to which workers identify with the goals of national development embarked upon by their countries' political leaders. Throughout the historical epochs we outlined it appears that in most African countries the interest of the political leadership, irrespective of racial origins, have always been at odds with that of the working people. In all of Africa's history, the political elite, be they African or foreign, have sought to neutralise worker militancy, feeling threatened by any demands of workers for better living conditions.¹² The dual state function to serve the dictates of foreign capital as well as parochial benefits of political leaders raises fundamental questions about the capacity of the African state, configured to serve global capital, to regulate social and economic relations in favour of its workforce.

Workers in Africa, within their organisations or without, have tried to enhance their political strength to confront exploitation. They have done this by forging forms of alliances to deepen or expand their political power. The main problem however is labour's ability to identify the real problem and confront it with the required strategy. This failing leads to disenchantment within the ranks of organised labour and the possibility of demobilisation is enormous. Until the representatives of organised labour recognise the true nature of labour's fundamental problems and refocus their energies at their real enemies, they will continue to battle against frustrations. The final goal should be building true democracies that ensure that those whose sweat to produce the wealth of Africa will be the prime beneficiaries of the outcome of their labour. It is time that union leaders took up the biggest challenge of the century in the face of historic cracks in capitalism epitomised in the wobbles noticeable in the economies of the US and the European Union.

Women

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¹ Immense gratitude to the General Secretary of ITUC Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, participants of the second ITUC New Year School and the reviewer for their contributions in shaping the final outcome of this paper.

² Walter Rodney makes some effort to address the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on social and economic development of Africa in his work titled, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.

³ The system provided by the British offered the environment for the development of trade unions to some extent. While in the French colonies the absence of such provisions meant that workers had to struggle for the acceptance of trade unions as their basic right for expression in the workplace.

⁴ Significant cases are Ghana, Nigeria, Guinea, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the engagement of COSATU in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

⁵ Arthiabah & Mbiah (1995) provide an elaborate description of how the alliance between the Convention people's party and the Ghana TUC in Ghana provided the occasion for several labour friendly legislations that strengthened the bargaining power of unions in the workplace.

⁶ See for example Tripp's (1997) assessment of state domination of the Tanzanian economy.

⁷ As the time of writing labour/political party alliance only exist in South Africa its basis, however, gets shaky by the day as the political and economic choices of the government increasingly erode workers' rights and fail to expand job opportunities in South Africa (Baskin, 1991; Webster & Glenn, 2001).

⁸ For Sawyer these natural disasters constitute the immediate causes of economic decline in several Sub-Saharan African countries.

⁹ Bofo-Arthur (1999) draws on evidence from the works of Beckman, (1984: 228), Stockwell (1978) and Seymour (1980) to support the claim of CIA participation in Ghana's first coup d'état.

¹⁰ See Britwum (2007) Bofo-Arthur (1999), Panford (1996), Andræ and Beckman (1998), Konnings (2003), as well as Ananaba (1979) for more details on union and worker repressions during the period of economic adjustment.

¹¹ On several occasions the Ghana TUC has forged coalitions civil society groups such as the Third World Network Africa, and Civil Society Coalition Against Water Privatisation to protest against policies perceived to be inimical to national interests because they threatened livelihoods. Some examples include the European Union sponsored Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) and water privatisation in Ghana.

¹² A notable exception is the early years of Nkrumah's regime in Ghana.