

# **On the Peripheries of Citizenship:**

Protest and Public Goods in Continental Africa

**Marcus Walton**

**Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI)**

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# Overview

-Since late 1970's, mobilization related to public goods important in of African politics

Public Goods = goods distributed or made accessible to the public, usually by the state (Rahman 2017, Kushner, MacLean 2015)

-Structural Adjustment (SAPs) 1980s and 1990s

(e.g. Tunisia 1984, Niger 1990, Kenya 1980s)

-More recently, a new wave of similar mass protests have emerged (e.g. Sudan 2013, Zambia 2013)

-Broader research question: Where do entitlements come from?



# Explaining 'Economic Protests'

## 1. Rational Choice

- + Material need (Bates 1981)
- x Protests not linked to reform (Bratton, van de Walle 1997)
- x Riots capture "broader sentiments" (Bienen, Gersovitz 1986)

## 2. Social Contract/State Legitimacy

- Political order based on exchange (goods for legitimacy)
- Protests about abrogation of this agreement, or a breakdown or rejection of political authority
- + Captures history of state-society relations
- x Takes goods at face value (e.g. food = sustenance)

## 3. Moral Economy

- Goods symbolize norms, values, communal life, culture





# My Argument:

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-Protestors motivated *both* by history of conflict with the state and political values.

More specifically:

- **The public goods are considered part of popular, *historical struggles***
- **These goods signify *recognition*, or an acknowledgment of one's identity within a political community.**

-I argue that, when combined, these two grievances are claims to ***citizenship*** , or “a right to have rights” (Somers 2006)

-ability to make recognized claims in a political community

-Not nec. about formal rights, but about the identity of being a rights-bearing member of society

# 3 Cases of Public Goods and Protest



**2011 Egyptian Revolution  
(Bread)**

**2012 Occupy Nigeria Movement  
(Fuel)**

**Service Delivery Protests  
(Housing)**

# Method & Methodology

## Why these cases? :

- 3 of the largest occurrences in Africa in the past 15 years. Important variation

## Variation in regime type:

- Egypt (*Authoritarian*), Nigeria (*Semi-Democratic*), South Africa (*Democratic*)
- Useful challenge to the social contract/ legitimacy argument

## Variation in contested good

- challenge to rational choice explanation

## Methodology

-Mill's Method of Agreement (i.e. *similar* processes across *different* cases)

-I include one 'negative' case for each country, so I compare within cases as well

## Research Method:

A wide-angle, high-angle photograph of a massive crowd of people gathered in a city square, likely Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, during the 2011 revolution. The crowd is dense and extends far into the background, with many people holding Egyptian flags. In the background, several large, modern buildings and a prominent white building with a flag on top are visible under a clear sky. The scene is captured during the day, with bright lighting.

# 2011 Egyptian Revolution

- Overthrow of 30-year rule of President Mubarak
- Various political, social, economic grievances
- “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice”

Why “Bread”?

A high-angle, wide shot of a massive crowd of people gathered in a city square, likely Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt, during the 2011 revolution. The crowd is dense and extends far into the background, with many people holding Egyptian flags. In the background, several large, modern buildings and a prominent white building with a flag on top are visible under a clear sky. The overall atmosphere is one of a large-scale public demonstration or protest.

# **2011 Egyptian Revolution**

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- I. The Legacy of 1977  
'Bread Riots'**
- II. Bread and Dignity**



# I. The Legacy of 1977

- As part of IMF negotiations, retrenchment of several consumer subsidies (esp. food )
- Protests led by workers, public servants and students.
- Largest in Egypt's post-colonial period (prior to 2011 Revolution)

"It has become a given of Egyptian politics that the bread subsidy cannot be touched except at the peril of the regime."

-J. Waterbury (1983)

-Event part of collective memory



# I. The Legacy of 1977

*“There could be a poor people’s revolt if the state fails to provide food. But we must bear in mind that Egyptians rarely explode and then only in specific cases, among them threats to their daily bread or national identity”*

-El-Ghobashy Interview  
~3 months before revolution



*“This country is going on fire soon, very soon...We can’t take it anymore....there will be another bread intifada [uprising], like that of 1977 “*

-El-Hamalawy Interview 2010  
~2 months before revolution





## II. Bread & Dignity

*"...our first duty is to provide the people with their daily bread"*

-G. Nasser 1960



*"there is no freedom without bread...what is freedom for a man who can't afford a piece of bread for his kids?"*

-G. Nasser 1959



## II. Bread & Dignity

*"This [referring to a loaf of bread] is our dignity....[it is] a right they've stolen. We should get this no matter what, not wait in line for it."*

-Interviewee  
(Minya)





## II. Bread & Dignity

*"His protest was not about bread but dignity... [he] snapped after a government official agreed to give him back the bread, not because he was entitled to it, but as charity. They spoke to him like he was a beggar..."*



-Family of self-immolator  
Abdo Abdel-Moneim  
Hamadah,  
New York Times, 3 days  
before 2011 revolution)

# Egypt's Fuel Subsidy

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## *Egypt Cuts Tax Breaks for Fuel; Few Protest*



- How else might we show that bread's political salience not purely about hunger?
- Look at similar economic, social policies or reforms that have never generated mass protest. (i.e. "negative" cases)
- In 2014, President Sisi announced removal of fuel subsidy. (immediate rise in transportation, cooking gas prices etc.)
- Little public backlash. Repeat in '16 & '17
- Fuel not seen as comparable to food.



## 2012 Occupy Nigeria Movement

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New Years Day 2012 price doubled from N65 to N141 per litre (~R5.5 per litre)

- 2 weeks of mass civil disobedience (shutdown of cities)
- Commission into corruption and fuel subsidy
- President Jonathan loses 2015 election to 'anti-corruption' Muhammadu Buhari



## 2012 Occupy Nigeria

### Movement

I. 1988 Anti-SAP  
Protests and Fuel

II. Oil and Inclusion  
in the National  
Wealth





# I. 1988 Anti-SAP Protests and Fuel



- Modest raise in fuel price as part of SAP
- Widespread outcry (labor union, students, professional associations)
- Began cycle of national protests around fuel subsidy (through 90s and 00s).



*"This is the same trick played on the Nigerian people by...[the] military regime in the 80's."*

-Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC),  
2012



# I. 1988 Anti-SAP Protests and Fuel



*"As you all know, the subject of deregulation is not new, we have been grappling with it for more than two decades...if I were in your shoes at this moment, I probably would have reacted in the same manner as some of our compatriots."*



-President Goodluck Jonathan  
(statement during 2012 protests)



# I. 1988 Anti-SAP Protests and Fuel



*"The fuel subsidy is very touchy and always has been, [this is] probably the sixth or seventh time they tried to raise prices, and every time they raise it, people will protest...that's the format."*



- Interviewee

Enough Is Enough Nigeria (NGO)



**#OCCUPY NIGERIA**  
**THIS IS NOT A RIOT**  
**THIS IS NOT A CIVIL WAR**  
**THIS IS A FIGHT FOR DIGNITY**  
**A FIGHT OF GOOD**  
**AGAINST EVIL**  
**FOR ONE FREE**  
**NIGERIA**

## II. Oil and Inclusion

*"Fuel is something that affects you every day...people feel this is the only thing that benefits Nigerians...why would you want to take it away?"*

-Interviewee

Trade Union Congress (TUC)

*"It's one of the few ways the urban and rural poor feel they benefit from this strategic resource...the fuel subsidy is experienced as one of the few things they get."*

-Michael Watts

(NYT interview on protests)



**#OCCUPY NIGERIA**

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NIGERIA**

## II. Oil and Inclusion

*“Oil is a product that can make you transform to a multi-billionaire.... People have seen it [happen]... [It’s in] the backyard of their house...*

*...and at the end of the day, the roads are not fixed, the hospitals are not working, the water is not running, and people are wondering, all the sales we have made from crude oil, what has it translated to in our basic life?...*

*....we are number six in the world in terms of crude oil production.... please, I don’t want to hear [the word] ‘subsidy’ “*

# Housing & Electricity Nigeria

-Fuel is critical for Nigerian's daily lives

-Yet other goods and economic issues with similar utility have failed to garner much if any outcry. (e.g. housing).

- In 2015 APC/President Buhari promised to "create 2 million new home owners in our first year in government and 1 million annually thereafter"

-Today, very little progress on promise. Unlike fuel subsidy, zero mobilization by citizens, civil society, labor on the issue.

-Electricity (source of fuel subsidy controversy) has, at times, generated local protests. Very few

## President reveals plan to build 1 million houses every year

President Muhammadu Buhari has promised to deliver on his party's campaign promise to build one million houses annually.

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NEWS

### Ambode says Lagos needs 1 million houses yearly

Published October 10, 2017

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JUST IN

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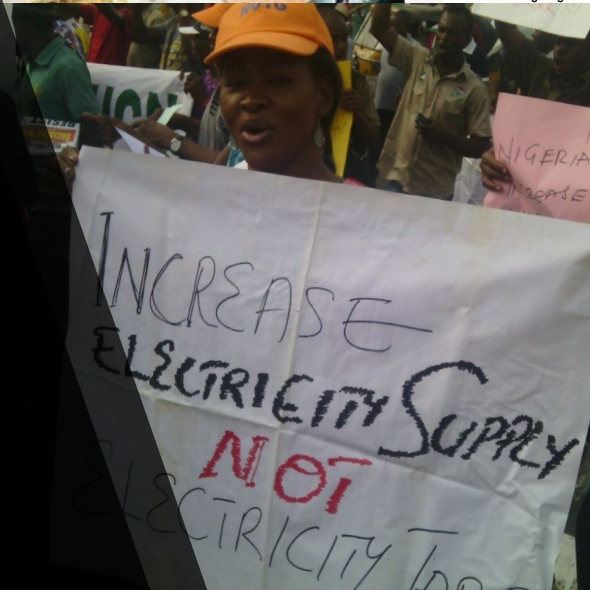
Two killed in US campus sho

BREAKING: Shekau's wife kil  
strike, says NAF

Suspected Boko Haram insur  
attack Yobe village

[BREAKING] Catalan leader c  
appear before Spanish Senat

BREAKING: Odinga urges vot





## **'Service Delivery'**

### **Protests (SA)**

~2004, atomized community protests, typically in informal settlements or townships

- Grievances vary: politics, crime, inequality, lack of basic infrastructure
- Major theme: insufficient living conditions, in particular housing (Alexander 2010)



## **'Service Delivery' Protests (SA)**

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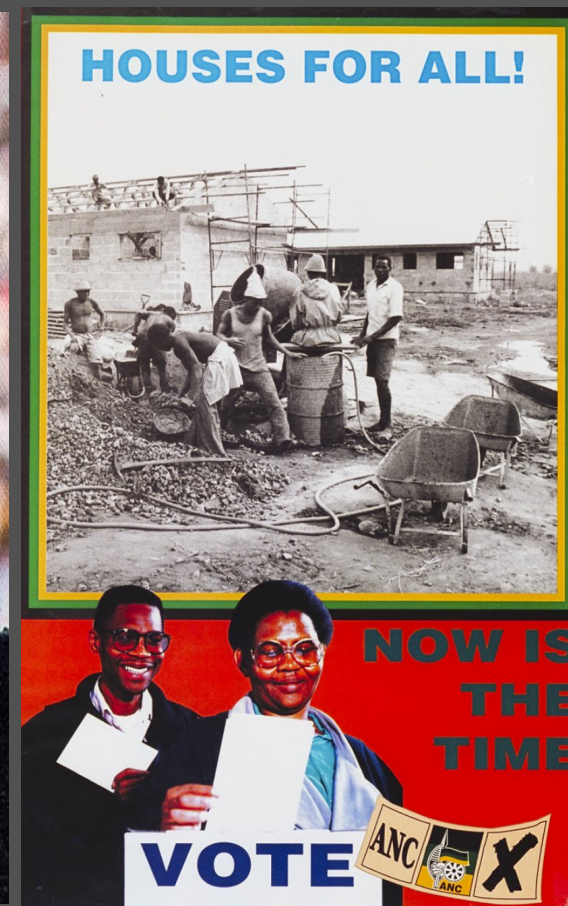
- I. Apartheid and the 1994 Democratic Transition**
- II. Housing as Acknowledgment**



# I. Apartheid and the Democratic Transition

*“The time Mandela got out is the time we started hearing that there is going to be RDP [houses], that we were going to get our freedom, and our houses. People started to get happy, because nobody had that...”*

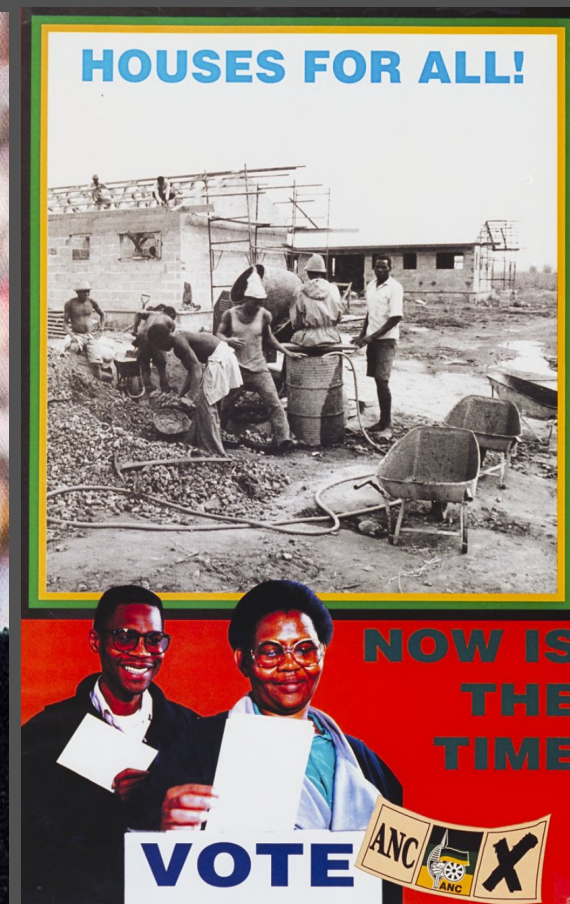
-Interviewee  
(Diepsloot)



# I. Apartheid and the Democratic Transition

*“it all started [as] a community protest in fact... Government, [as] always, as in 1994, promised to give houses in order to bring back the dignity of those people who were left out by the government during the times of Apartheid...What has happened [since]? Nothing...”*

-Interviewee  
(Abahlali baseMpondo)





## II. Housing as Acknowledgement

- Not recognized as a full citizen
  - Their experiences and living conditions unacknowledged, ignored
  - Respondents frequently suggested they feel like they “don’t exist”
- However, these feelings resulted in different political stances
    - Some rejected the democratic system, others simply felt protest was a means of alerting their political leaders to their needs



## II. Housing as Acknowledgement

*“ All people must be respected. People must be given dignity... We feel like we are the foreigners in our own land, in our own society...”*

*.... in our own country, because we are living in these conditions, like we are from somewhere else; we are not part of this country. That is how we feel.”*

**Interviewee  
-Cato Crest, Durban**



## II. Housing as Acknowledgement

*"We don't even have the vote. We don't work, we live in a place of mud. How can we vote? ...our kids are playing by [feces] in the mud, by the sewage..."*

*"...we don't vote in this game ... They'll demolish my shack and now where will I go? That's what we're fighting for"*

**-Interviewee  
(Diepkloof, Soweto)**



## II. Housing as Acknowledgement

**Me:** *Have there been any strikes or protests here?*

**Respondent:** *Yeah, everywhere. I burn everything sometimes. I stopped the road; long time ago, burned the KFC and everything here.*

**Me:** *What was it for?*

**Respondent:** *There's no electricity [in there] until now. That's why they opened these [new] houses*

**[\*Later in Interview\*]**

**Me:** *Do you mind if I ask if you vote?*

**Respondent:** *Of course. I'm ANC, diehard.*

**(Interview in Motsoaledi, Soweto)**

# Food Security in South Africa

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- Service delivery protests not limited to housing
- And protests in South Africa not limited to 'rebellion of the poor'
- But not all material concerns generate popular mobilization or public outcry like housing.
- Despite insecurity being faced by ~11-26% of households, issue "non-antagonistic" in South Africa (Satgar 2015)
- National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security "not something that most people know about." (SAHRC 2017)



WE DEMAND

## Conclusion

-In all 3 cases, two repeated grievances

1. Historical Struggles

2. Recognition

-Claims to **Citizenship**, *"right to have rights"*

-External validity or just a few unique examples?

WHAT IS OURS



# Implications

-NOT just about bread, fuel, or housing. Other issues do matter.

-Respondents shared a variety of economic concerns.

-But why do certain 'valences' bring citizens together in ways that other (similar) issues do not? What can that tell us?

**-“Power concedes nothing without demand”**

-But where does demand come from?

-If common material needs insufficient, what are the historical experiences or shared sentiments at the heart



Mural dedicated to martyrs of the 2011 Revolution  
(Tahrir Square, Cairo)