



Epic Battles in Radical Development Theory, Field Research and Praxis: A Celebration of Björn Beckman (1938–2019)

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Abstract

This article reviews the contribution of Björn Beckman, the Swedish political economist, in the study of development. It addresses three issues. The first is his engagement in theoretical debates on the political economy of development. These focus on the nature of the African state, capitalist development in poor countries, whether the military can act as a revolutionary vanguard in spearheading democratic and progressive social change, neoliberal theory of macro-economic adjustment, and the dynamics of state-civil society relations in advancing development and democracy. The second is his field research work in Ghana and Nigeria. This examines the role of organised farmers and the state in the production and marketing of cocoa in Ghana in the 1960s; the entrenchment of wheat import dependence and the failed project of wheat import-substitution in Nigeria; and the construction of a union-based labour regime in Nigeria's textile industry that enhanced the bargaining power of unions even as a worsening macro-economic environment and industrial restructuring impacted adversely on employment and wages. The third deals with his collaborative work on a variety of organised interest groups, including labour movements, scholar activists, the Nigerian student movement, and organised informal sector groups. The last part of the article discusses the costs of Björn's combative style of scholarship.

Résumé

Cet article passe en revue la contribution de Björn Beckman, l'économiste politique suédois en étude du développement. Il aborde trois questions. La première est son engagement dans les débats théoriques en économie politique du développement. Ceux-ci portent sur la nature de l'État africain,

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le développement capitaliste dans les pays pauvres, le potentiel rôle d'avant-garde révolutionnaire de l'armée comme fer de lance du changement social démocratique et progressif, la théorie néolibérale de l'ajustement macroéconomique, et la dynamique des relations entre l'État et la société civile dans la promotion du développement et de la démocratie. La seconde est son travail de terrain au Ghana et au Nigéria qui examine le rôle des agriculteurs organisés et de l'État dans la production et la commercialisation du cacao au Ghana dans les années 1960; la dépendance accrue aux importations de blé, et l'échec du projet de substitution des importations de blé au Nigéria; et la mise en place d'un régime syndical dans l'industrie textile du Nigéria, ce qui a renforcé le pouvoir de négociation des syndicats, même si la détérioration de l'environnement macroéconomique et la restructuration industrielle ont eu un impact négatif sur l'emploi et les salaires. La troisième traite de son travail collaboratif sur divers groupes d'intérêt organisés, notamment les mouvements syndicaux, les militants universitaires, le mouvement étudiant nigérian et les groupes organisés du secteur informel. La dernière partie de l'article aborde le coût du travail universitaire combatif de Björn.

Introduction

The Swedish scholar and activist, Björn Beckman, who taught political economy in Nigeria, Ghana and Sweden, and made invaluable contributions in development studies, passed away on 6 November 2019 in Stockholm after a long illness. He was 81. His death is a great loss to scholars and working people in Nigeria and wider African circles, as well as those working on progressive social change in the global South more generally.

Björn taught, mentored, inspired and supported numerous students and young scholars with different intellectual persuasions, even as he was strongly committed to a radical Marxist approach to the study of development.

His Marxism was devoid of abstract theorising, dogmatism or sloganeering – he used Marxism as a tool to ask probing questions and get to the fundamentals of issues. He was amazingly creative in dissecting problems and providing methodical reasoning, using lucid, direct and attractive prose. As a great communicator, his writing was as effective as his oral delivery, which mesmerised audiences in seminars, public lectures and conferences.

He excelled in combative scholarship and brought enormous clarity and fresh insights to the understanding of complex and contentious issues. His interventions were always guided by values of social justice, fundamental principles of democracy and the rights and interests of popular sector groups.

This tribute celebrates Björn's scholarship through the wide-ranging debates and research activities that informed the construction of radical development theory. Björn left behind a huge body of work, which is

impossible to treat exhaustively in this review. However, I have selected the publications that I believe are the most relevant in understanding his scholarship and activism and divided them into three parts.

The first was his fierce and sustained engagement in theoretical debates on issues dealing with the political economy of development. These focused on the nature of the African state, capitalist development in poor countries, whether the military can act as a revolutionary vanguard in spearheading democratic and progressive social change, neoliberal theory of macro-economic adjustment, and the dynamics of state-civil society relations in advancing development and democracy.

The second was his painstaking, multi-year, field research work. This examined the role of organised farmers and the state in the production and marketing of cocoa in Ghana during the rule of Kwame N’Krumah’s Convention People’s Party in the 1960s; the entrenchment of wheat import dependence and failed project of wheat import-substitution in Nigeria (co-researched with his wife, Gunilla Andrae); and the construction of a union-based labour regime in Nigeria’s textile industry that enhanced the bargaining power of unions even as a worsening macro-economic environment and industrial restructuring impacted adversely on employment and wages (also co-researched with Gunilla Andrae). These three research studies were each published as books.

The third part of his scholarship was his collaborative work in edited books and journal articles on a variety of organised interest groups, including labour movements, scholar activists, the Nigerian student movement and organised informal sector groups.

Combating Underdevelopment and Dependency Theory

Björn’s sustained engagement with theoretical debates in a series of articles in the *Review of African Political Economy* raised his profile as a frontline theorist on the political economy of African development. His first major intervention was the debate in the late 1970s and early 1980s on the development of capitalism in Kenya.

The dominant radical perspective in the study of development in the 1980s was underdevelopment and dependency theory, whose chief proponents were the German-American scholar, Andre Gunder Frank (1966, 1970), who specialised on Latin America; and Samir Amin (1974, 1976), the prolific Egyptian political economist. Underdevelopment theory questioned the mainstream, modernisation theory of development (see, for instance, Rostow 1960; Apter 1965; Huntington 1968; Lipset 1959) that was influential in the 1950s and 1960s, which posited a binary divide

between tradition and modernity as the root cause of underdevelopment. Scholars of modernisation theory argued that poor countries could follow the same paths of development as Western industrialised countries if they could transform their societies by embracing modernity. The burden of moving from tradition to modernity, and thus development, was put squarely on poor countries, albeit with the assistance of foreign aid, without reference to the unequal ways poor countries were integrated into the world economy.

Many of the ideas of underdevelopment and dependency theory that challenged modernisation theory are useful in understanding why the majority of poor countries have remained poor. However, five in particular generated much controversy: the description of the indigenous capitalist class as 'comprador', 'neo-colonial' or foreign capital-dependent in siphoning surpluses from the economies of the global South; the belief that the lack of independence of indigenous capitalists diminishes their ability to advance industrial capitalist development; the view that state power largely serves the interests of foreign capital, which controlled the indigenous capitalists as junior partners; the conviction that dependence, foreign capitalist domination and symbiotic ties between foreign and local capital made it impossible for poor countries to develop; and the belief that only by 'delinking' from global capitalism could poor countries experience national development or industrial transformation.

It is crucial to note that underdevelopment and dependency theory emerged when most African countries had gained independence, pressures to industrialise were high and a discourse of anti-imperialism was pervasive in most sections of society, including among dominant groups in the economy and state bureaucracy. In general, the struggle against colonialism (external political domination) was indistinguishable from the struggle against imperialism (external economic domination), which gave rise to the notion of neo-colonialism. Problems in achieving rapid development led to the belief that imperialism was incompatible with economic development in newly independent countries.

The most influential radical critique of imperialism was the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1963), which analysed the changing nature of capitalism in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in several important areas, such as the growing concentration and centralisation of capital; the increasingly distinct and dominant role of finance capital in capital accumulation; the emergence of monopolistic practices in protecting profits; and the brazenly interventionist role of the state in supporting the new monopolies, leading to colonialism and wars.

Lenin's primary objective in *Imperialism* was to explain how this stage – or these new forms – of capitalist development in the global North provoked profound rivalries among imperial powers for control of raw materials, markets and investments, and resulted in the First World War. As Björn noted in his critique of the Kenya debate, this work had little to say about how imperialism affected capitalist development in the colonies. In other words, it did not answer the question of whether imperialism blocked or advanced the development of productive forces in periphery countries.

Although Lenin's other work, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1964) was unequivocal in demonstrating how foreign and local capital were transforming the Russian economy (an economy that was poor in the early twentieth century) and creating a home market for large-scale industry and a modern working class, it did not enjoy the same visibility as *Imperialism* among scholars grappling with the problems of post-colonial development.

By the 1980s, incontrovertible evidence of rapid industrialisation in East and South-east Asia dealt a blow to the core ideas of underdevelopment theory: imperialism does not, it seems, block the development of productive forces at all times and in all countries; and local capital can work in tandem with foreign capital to produce large-scale industrial transformation.

The leading work in the radical attack on underdevelopment theory was Bill Warren's 'Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization' (1973), which was later upgraded into a full-length book, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism* (1980), after Warren's premature death in 1978. John Sender and Sheila Smith's *The Development of Capitalism in Africa* (1986) extended the argument to Africa. These studies saw imperialism as a progressive force in developing the productive forces in colonial and post-colonial countries. They focused largely on the role of colonialism in developing modern capitalist relations of production; domestic markets that were integrated into the dynamics of global capital accumulation; a rising, even if fragmented, wage labour regime; a state system that was shaped by the logic of capitalist development; and basic infrastructure of roads, railways and ports that facilitated the advance of capitalism in the global periphery. They downplayed the extractive, non-developmental, racist and oppressive nature of colonial capitalism.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the usefulness of underdevelopment theory in understanding development in Africa came under intense scrutiny in the debate on capitalism in Kenya, a former settler colony with a high penetration of foreign capital and a budding indigenous capitalist class. In that debate, Colin Leys (1978; for a different view on the subject see his 1975 book) and Nicola Swainson (1977, 1980), longstanding researchers on Kenya's political economy, were confident that a significant and independent

capitalist class had emerged in Kenya and was playing a leading role in industrial development. Raphael Kaplinsky (1980) and Steven Langdon (1977, 1980), who had also done substantial research on foreign capital in Kenya, were critical of this reading of Kenya. Their own studies revealed that Kenya's indigenous capitalist class was still highly dependent on foreign capital, manufacturing share of GDP and industrial employment were low, industry was not well integrated with agriculture, and the country remained primarily an agrarian economy with a large informal sector.

Björn's contribution to this debate was issued in five substantive interventions: 'Imperialism and capitalist transformation: critique of a Kenyan debate' (Beckman 1980); 'Imperialism and the national bourgeoisie' (Beckman 1981); 'Whose state? State and capitalist development in Nigeria' (Beckman 1982); 'Neo-colonialism, capitalism and the state in Nigeria' (Beckman 1987); and 'The post-colonial state, crisis and reconstruction' (Beckman 1988a).

By systematically unpacking the key assumptions of the contributions through a series of detailed arguments, Björn demonstrated that the debate was largely inconclusive. In other words, arguments could be marshalled to support both sides of the debate. The key problems were the fixation with the idea of an independent capitalist class as a prerequisite for capitalist development in the periphery, and the search for an ideal capitalism that is comparable to what obtains in advanced industrial societies. In this respect, the defenders of underdevelopment theory underplayed the development of capitalism because the changes were not far-reaching enough and foreign capital or imperialism still dictated the process of change. Critics of underdevelopment theory on the other hand magnified the changes and celebrated the indigenous capitalist class as an increasingly independent class that controlled state power at the expense of foreign capital.

In contrast, Björn theorised the process of capital accumulation in the global periphery as a joint project consisting of both foreign capital and the emerging indigenous capitalist class. Foreign capital is clearly dominant because of its superior access to finance, technology and other production factors; but local capital is not a passive or 'comprador' class that serves only the interests of foreign capital in siphoning surpluses from poor countries. Local capital has a life of its own. It can use the state and nationalist discourse to advance its own interests, embed and expand the interests of foreign capital in the local economy, and work with foreign capital to hold down the demands of labouring classes as well as broaden the scope of its activities in the domestic economy and world market.

The state in this formulation serves the interests of both foreign and local capital or, to use Björn's favourite phrase 'capital in general'. An exclusive

focus on continuous rivalries between fractions of capital (national versus foreign) misses the unity of the process of capital accumulation, the capital-logic of the state, and the complex ways labouring classes are subordinated and respond in the dynamics of development.

It should be stressed here that the full impact of Africa's protracted struggle with economic crisis, the harmful effects of structural adjustment programmes, and the generalised regression and instability in the 1980s and 1990s had not been fully felt when the Kenya debate was conducted. It was, therefore, possible to be optimistic – as Björn was – that some of the structural constraints raised by underdevelopment theorists that restricted capitalist industrialisation in the global periphery could be overcome by foreign and local capital. To quote Björn, 'if excessive foreign exchange utilization becomes a threat to capital accumulation, is capital itself not going to seek solutions for overcoming such obstacles? There is clearly nothing inherently unprofitable in having a high level of local value added' (Beckman 1980:58). As he affirmed, 'transnational capital does not represent one strategy, but a series of interacting and partly competing ones, which have very different consequences for linkages, both locally and externally...As one strategy is exhausted, others will be generated' (Beckman 1980:58).

Björn's theorisation of the state and capital accumulation was influenced by the capital-logic or 'derivation' school of the state, which was inspired by the German student movement of the late 1960s and popularised by the work of John Holloway and Sol Picciotto in *The State and Capital: a Marxist Debate* (1979). It took its point of departure from the famous debate between Nicos Poulantzas, the French-Greek Marxist theoretician, and Ralph Miliband, the British political scientist, on the state in advanced capitalist societies in which Miliband (1969, 1970, 1973) adopted an empirically-grounded and instrumentalist view of the state against Poulantzas's (1969, 1975, 1976) more theoretical and structuralist view in which the state is seen as an institution that serves and is reproduced through the process of capital accumulation, and has a logic that cannot be reduced to the interests of those who directly work in it. The capital-logic school sees the state as performing for the capitalist class as whole, tasks that each fraction of capital or capital in general cannot perform.

It would be wrong, however, to situate Björn's ideas on the state and capitalist development neatly within the capital-logic school. He did not like labels; indeed, he used the term capital-logic only once in his interventions, and was quick to distance himself from the main criticism of the capital-logic school, i.e. its insufficient attention to social forces, especially working class forces. To quote his summary of his position: 'This is, if you like, a position

of “capital logic”, without, however, robbing social forces of their autonomy through class struggle and class organisation’ (Beckman 1980:59–60).

The optimistic view of the African state and capacity of both foreign and local capital to overcome structural constraints to industrialisation received a boost in Björn’s subsequent interventions on the post-colonial state (Beckman 1982, 1988a). Despite the crisis of the 1980s, he had profound faith in the capacity of ruling class forces, both domestic and foreign, to support state reconstruction for industrial survival and expansion. Indeed, he believed that capitalist development had generated ‘an accumulation of experience and competence on the sides of both ruling class and popular forces’ (Beckman 1988a:33).

As I noted in a critique of his theory of the state in discussing ‘new directions in state reform’, belief in an ineluctable process of organisational capacity building and professionalisation in the class institutions of employers and workers runs through his theory of the state, capital accumulation and development (Bangura 2001). Popular pressures for change, when combined with capacity building and professionalisation, were expected ultimately to discipline ruling classes and policy makers, and force them to make the state more efficient and accountable to popular interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that Björn’s theorisation of the state paid scant attention to state reforms, which he saw as managerial, and which he believed the ruling classes were capable of undertaking for their own survival and growth. Seen from this perspective, the job of the activist scholar is to focus attention on the experiences and struggles of popular forces in confronting the project of state restructuring.

As it turned out, the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s took a terrible toll on African economies and societies far beyond what I suspect even Björn would have imagined. It exposed the continent as not only a laggard in most social and economic indicators, but as the only region where, apart from South Africa, large-scale industrialisation has not occurred and which has not experienced much income convergence with industrialised countries. Despite a narrative of ‘Africa rising’ during the 2010s, Africa’s per capita income as a percentage of rich countries’ per capita income is still substantially lower than in the 1960s and 1970s (Bangura 2019).

No serious analyst would today challenge the view that capitalist relations of production have developed and are well entrenched in Africa or that the state serves the interests of both foreign and local capital, and not just one fraction of capital against another. The critique of underdevelopment theory has laid to rest that aspect of the debate. However, some of the problems raised by underdevelopment theory, which made it appealing to large sections of activists, policy makers and scholars, have not been resolved.

These include the highly unequal or stratified integration of African economies in the world economy, which may distort and obstruct national development; the high import-content of local manufacturing that exposes industry and the state to perennial foreign exchange and balance of payments crises; the low levels of employment and value added in domestic industries; the weak linkages between industry and agriculture; and the limited impact of industrialisation on social development.

In other words, African economies remain largely agrarian, in both output and employment shares, with a large informal sector and weakly diversified industrial sector. This failure to achieve substantial industrialisation negatively impacts the development of class forces and capacities to discipline state institutions, making it difficult for states to work for popular classes. Instructively, Björn recognised the relevance of these aspects of underdevelopment theory in his research work on the wheat trap and underdevelopment in Nigeria, which we will address shortly.

The point must be stressed, however, that contrary to the postulates of underdevelopment theory, structural constraints to industrialisation are not insurmountable and overcoming them does not require countries to delink from the global capitalist system. The quality of industrial strategies, policies and institutions for advancing national development and engaging the world economy is crucial in explaining why some countries in the global periphery thrive and others stagnate or remain poor.

Applications of Radical Development Theory

Björn's critique of underdevelopment theory strongly influenced his interventions in debates on other aspects of African development, such as on military rule, structural adjustment programmes, democratisation and state-civil society relations. I would like to highlight three such interventions: his critique of the military as a vanguard for progressive social change ('The military as revolutionary vanguard: a critique', Beckman 1986); his interrogation of neoliberal adjustment policies ('The World Bank and structural adjustment: repression or empowerment', Beckman 1992; and 'The post-colonial state: crisis and reconstruction', Beckman 1988a); and his theorisation of democracy and state-civil society relations ('Whose democracy? Popular versus bourgeois democracy', Beckman 1989; 'The liberation of civil society: neo-liberal ideology and political theory', Beckman 1993; and 'Civil society and alliance politics', Beckman 2001).

Long-running crises in Africa and elsewhere produced a high turnover of regimes and military coups in the 1970s and 1980s. Radical scholars turned to sections of the military to play a revolutionary role in debating

solutions to the crisis of governance and economic development. In the case of Africa, left-wing military power grabs in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville and Libya provided a context for theorising such a possibility. In a series of pointed arguments against a host of Nigerian and Soviet scholars in 'The military as revolutionary vanguard' (Beckman 1986), Björn laid bare the theoretical shortcomings and dangers of such works.

The case for 'military vanguardism' is based on the belief that the military is a site of fractional struggles that mirror the contradictions of society; and, because of the low level of development of productive forces, levels of class antagonism within society are believed also to be low. In the eyes of theorists, these two factors suggest that there could be a convergence of interests between sections of the military and the mass public. Indeed, as they argued, the humble social origins of the top cadres of the military make them ready allies of the masses and opponents of imperialism.

Björn raised several telling points against this reading of the class character of the military in post-colonial societies, which he derived from his theoretical and research work on the state and capitalist development in agriculture and industry in Nigeria. These include the lack of explanation for the large number of right-wing military regimes around the world; the failure of left-wing military regimes to sustain radical programmes as local and foreign ruling class forces regroup to derail reforms and co-opt left-wing leaders; and the underestimation of the strength of ruling classes, which are conflated with political regimes that periodically change, raising false hopes of a power vacuum.

Especially in the case of Nigeria, Björn noted that foreign capital is deeply embedded in national economies, whose expansion has been facilitated by an indigenous capitalist class that also plays a role in development. The military itself serves as a vehicle of capitalist class formation as officers are incorporated into business networks, appointed as managers and directors of boards of parastatals and private companies, and receive contracts for the supply of defence materials. In this regard, it would be foolhardy to expect the military to play a vanguard role in advancing democratic and progressive social change. Indeed, as Björn concludes, the theory of military vanguardism is 'an invitation to adventurism' (Beckman 1986): it exposes activist cadres to military repression (as the Ghanaian Left experienced under Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings' military regime in the 1980s) and encourages them to neglect political organisation, grassroots politics and democratic practices.

The economic crisis of the 1980s led to heavy intervention by the IMF and World Bank in African economies. In order to receive funds from these

institutions and reschedule national debts, countries were subjected to high doses of stabilisation and structural adjustment measures that sought to roll back the state, change its mode of regulating the economy, balance national budgets through sharp expenditure cuts, and liberalise domestic markets and exchange rates. This intervention, which had the strong backing of bilateral donors, raised questions about the future of the African state, prospects for industrial and agricultural development, the rights and interests of organised interest groups, and democratic politics.

The project of state restructuring, price realignments, negative branding of interest groups and protracted crisis challenged many of the assumptions and propositions of radical development theory. Björn confronted this challenge in his field studies on the wheat trap and on union power and adjustment in the textile industry, as well as in a number of articles and book chapters on the state ('The post-colonial state, crisis and reconstruction', Beckman 1988a); structural adjustment programmes ('Empowerment or repression: the World Bank and the politics of adjustment', Beckman 1992); civil society ('The liberation of civil society: neo-liberal ideology and political theory', Beckman 1993; 'Civil society and alliance politics', Beckman 2001); and democracy ('Whose democracy? Bourgeois versus popular democracy', Beckman 1989). We shall address the full-length books in the next section.

Here I tease out key elements of his interventions in his journal articles and chapters in edited books. The value of those interventions was his combative style of methodical reasoning, which exposed the repressive agenda of the World Bank and neoliberal scholars in reconstituting the African state and economy. The spotlight was on the 1989 World Bank publication *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. Björn demonstrated that this work – and neoliberal theory in general – provided justification for repressing the main groups that had capacity to challenge the adjustment project. Neoliberalism discredited the African state as corrupt, neopatrimonial and inefficient; and delegitimised organised interest groups as urban, elitist and unrepresentative of the national interest. The World Bank labelled such groups as vested interests engaging in rent-seeking politics that stifle the development of markets, the incomes and wellbeing of farmers, the liberation of civil society and flourishing of democracy.

It is not surprising that the imposition of adjustment programmes in Africa was highly repressive as governments and multilateral financial agencies encountered resistance from organised interests and, in wider society, a potent nationalist critique of adjustment, which was identified as imperialism or external economic domination. The World Bank imagined an Africa in which the post-colonial state would be rolled back, price

realignments would change the terms of trade in favour of farmers and export-oriented business groups, and urban-based interest groups would be replaced by a civil society of fragmented and independent groups, such as non-governmental organisations, that would spearhead the democratisation process. Some of the language of underdevelopment theory as it relates to rent-seeking activities and weaknesses of the national bourgeoisie were co-opted by the World Bank and its supporters in the onslaught against the nationalist project and urban-based group politics.

Despite the triumph of neoliberalism in macro-economic policy-making and the repression of organised interest groups in most African countries, nationalism continues to challenge the legitimacy of neoliberalism because of the failure of adjustment to substantially improve the living standards of the majority of people, including those of farmers, who demanded democratic change and a politics of inclusion. As Björn observed, contrary to the pronouncements of neoliberal theory, it is not the liberalisation of markets that generated pressures for democratisation, but the failure of adjustment to improve the lives of citizens.

Path-Breaking Research on Agriculture, Industry and Union Power

Björn did not only excel in theoretical debates; he was also strongly committed to field research. This took him to challenging and remote areas in rural and urban settings in Ghana and Nigeria. It helped him to bond with ordinary people and social activists, develop a large network of friends and colleagues, and assess, refine and sharpen his theoretical insights on development. Even after he retired from full time teaching at Stockholm University, his impulse for ground level research was still strong, as he and Gunilla embarked on their last piece of field research on the links between informal and formal workers in the garment industry (see 'Trade unions, tailors and civil society', Beckman and Andrae 2011; and 'Engaging with African informal economies: Lagos traders, trade unions, and organizations in the informal economy, Beckman and Andrae 2013) before Björn's health issues disrupted their research activities.

Björn's first major field research was his doctoral work, *Organising the Farmers: Cocoa Politics and National Development in Ghana* (1976), which examined the politics of the production and marketing of cocoa during Ghana's late colonial and early independence period. Ghana was the centre of the continent-wide struggles against colonialism and its leader, Kwame N'Krumah, and his Convention People's Party (CPP) had embarked on a radical programme of dismantling the colonially inherited institutions and promoting 'people-centred development'. Cocoa was the backbone of

Ghana's economy, accounting for about 60 per cent of its export earnings and providing employment to hundreds of thousands of farm families.

The CPP was determined to control the cocoa economy, organise the cocoa farmers and project its power in the countryside. It encouraged the formation of a farmers' organisation, the United Ghana Farmers' Council, as a wing of its party. The CPP state later recognised this Council as the sole organisation for representing the country's farmers. Foreign firms that had dominated the marketing of cocoa were expelled and the Council became the sole buyer of the country's cocoa. Indeed, the Council was responsible for marketing the entire cocoa crop (which was 36 per cent of the global output) from 1961, when it was granted commercial monopoly, to 1966 when it was dissolved after the overthrow of the CPP.

In his fieldwork in Ghana, where he lived from 1967–71, Björn studied the struggles of the key actors in the cocoa economy by interviewing a large number of cocoa farmers, traders and government officials in villages and the capital city. He also had unrestricted access to the rich records of the Farmers' Council. He explored the dynamics of the political and commercial monopoly enjoyed by the Farmers' Council, its relations with cocoa producers, and its role in enabling the CPP to organise the cocoa farmers and project its power in the rural economy. He also examined the struggles over the distribution of cocoa income between farmers and the state, and the struggles among trader groups competing for a share of the trade left by foreign firms.

The middlemen traders, who had thrived under colonial rule as buying agents of the foreign firms, were squeezed out by the Farmers' Council, and rural co-operatives were forcibly merged with the Council or eliminated all together. *Organising the Farmers* contains rich insights on the class character of the CPP state and the Farmers' Council, including how the political and commercial monopoly of the Farmers' Council created a new class of middlemen that led to the siphoning of surpluses from cocoa producers. It reveals that both the cocoa farmers and the state were unable to compel the Farmers' Council to serve their conflicting interests, allowing middlemen to operate in the marketing of the product and in mediating the way the state extracted surpluses from producers.

Björn turned his research focus to Nigeria when he joined the Department of Political Science at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in 1978. His second major piece of research was his joint work with Gunilla on the political economy of Nigeria's food system that resulted in the widely acclaimed publication *The Wheat Trap: Bread and Underdevelopment in Nigeria*, which was published by Zed Books in 1985 and reprinted in 1989. In this work, Björn and Gunilla emerged as exceptional researchers with an eye for detail,

thick empirical analysis and critical engagement with the development literature. Michael Watts, in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, described it as 'a first-rate case study of food dependency and the complicated links between the world market and the village' (see blurb of Andrae and Beckman 1985a). To Barbara Hariss, in *Development and Change*, it was 'thoroughly well written, modest and serious...an example of policy-relevant, timely, critical... interdisciplinary social science' (see blurb of Andrae and Beckman 1985a). And the *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* hailed it as 'must reading... especially enlightening in highlighting the many interests involved in the modernization of agriculture and the industrialization process in developing countries' (see blurb of Andrae and Beckman 1985a). Writing from the Dakar-based Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, Thandika Mkandawire challenged some of the book's theoretical arguments, but concluded that it is 'an important building block in our understanding of the dynamics of agrarian transformation in Africa...an excellent combination of rigour and lucidity' (see Mkandawire, nd). *The Wheat Trap* was, indeed, a big hit. It is perhaps the most widely read and referenced work of Björn and Gunilla, thus far generating more than 200 scholarly citations.

The oil boom of the 1970s fuelled large scale migration of villagers to towns, changes in household consumption patterns and massive food imports, such as wheat, to meet the demands of the growing urban population for cheap, clean, easily available and easily consumed food. A network of interests spanning wheat producers in industrialised countries, US agro-business firms, wheat importers, mill operators, flour distributors, bakers, producers and traders of bakery machinery, and local state functionaries provided the conditions for the entrenchment of wheat in Nigeria. The pro-wheat lobby was so entrenched in the political economy and policy circles that even when a wide-ranging austerity budget was introduced by the military government of Muhammadu Buhari in 1984, wheat was excluded from the duties imposed on imported agricultural products. According to Buhari (1984), 'bread has become the cheapest staple food of our people'. Björn and Gunilla provide a detailed account of the activities of these pro-wheat groups in sustaining wheat import-dependence and the futility of allocating huge sums of money to costly and unviable large-scale irrigation programmes for the purpose of wheat import substitution, which only served to entrench the wheat trap.

The Wheat Trap is a vivid example of the relevance of some of the key arguments of underdevelopment theory. It brings out in bold relief the subordinate and unequal ways Nigeria's economy is integrated into the world market, distorting and obstructing national development, even as capitalist relations of production continue to be developed on a large scale.

Curtailing food imports; redirecting household diets away from bread; promoting alternative foods that are cheap, clean, easily available and easily consumed; investing in local food processing technologies; and getting workers to support a strategy of food self-reliance are some of the policies Björn and Gunilla advance to break out of the wheat trap. As they argue in the conclusion, workers, who are attracted to the cheapness, convenience and reliability of bread, may only buy into these policies if the state takes workers' interests seriously, including their concerns for food security and political rights of organisation and representation. Unfortunately, about 35 years after the publication of the *Wheat Trap*, Nigeria is still mired in food import dependence, and the issue of how to break out of the wheat trap is still a contentious issue in policy debates.

By the 1990s, Nigeria and other African countries had experienced massive setbacks in industrialisation, following efforts by the state and private capital respectively to stabilise the macro-economy and restructure industrial activities. Workers and unions were badly hit by the crisis and had a huge stake in the state's stabilisation policies and restructuring programmes of industries. Wages were being eroded by inflation and exchange rate depreciation, and the ranks of the labour force and unionisation were in steep decline.

The textile industry, which is labour-intensive and can generate backward linkages with agriculture, offered opportunities to buck the trend of the disappearing industrial working class. Björn and Gunilla turned their research attention to this industry to examine the kind of restructuring that was underway in textile firms, the way workers and unions were coping with the economic crisis and industrial restructuring, and the extent to which a union-centred labour regime emerged to improve the bargaining power of unions and mediate the restructuring process.

The result is the highly readable, thought-provoking and innovative book *Union Power in the Nigerian Textile Industry: Labour Regime and Adjustment* (Beckman and Andrae 1998). I followed very closely this research project as it complemented work on crisis, adjustment, livelihood strategies and social change I co-ordinated at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in the 1990s. UNRISD published an overview of the findings of this research as 'Bargaining for survival: unionised textile workers in the Nigerian textile industry' (Beckman and Andrae 1996); and I served as a discussant on this work in a conference in Zimbabwe on industrial restructuring and labour regimes where Björn presented the research findings.

The research required a focus on both industry and agriculture, including the dynamic linkages between the two sectors; deep knowledge

of the modes of operations and livelihood strategies of workers and farmers; detailed case studies of textile firms to understand varieties of industrial practices, labour subordination and unionisation; and tracking of union organisation, internal union politics and collective bargaining. It would not have been possible to produce this work without the wide network and trust that Björn and Gunilla constructed with broad sections of Nigeria's working class and their unions, especially the National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria, and the central labour organisation, the Nigerian Labour Congress; deep ties with informants in the agriculture sector; and support from the management and staff of the textile companies.

Despite the unfavourable conditions in Nigeria's macro-economy, huge financial losses of textile firms and large-scale retrenchment, Björn and Gunilla demonstrated that a union-centred labour regime that helped to stem the process of de-industrialisation and erosion of the bargaining power of unions and workers' wellbeing had developed. A labour regime refers to the institutionalisation of industrial relations and conflict. This is about the rules and practices that regulate capital-labour relations at the workplace and society at large. Union power in the textile industry is derived from the relative autonomy of workers in the production process. This has three features: the high educational status of the workforce; the existence of smallholding agriculture, which offers alternatives to industrial work; and the nature of pre-industrial forms of labour control.

Nigeria's textile workforce is overwhelmingly male and boasts of a high level of education when compared to textile workers in Asia, Latin America and Europe at similar stages of industrialisation. Björn and Gunilla argued that the policies of import substitution industrialisation, which heavily protected domestic markets, also contributed in raising the status of Nigeria's textile workers. Because domestic markets were protected, the cost of labour was not very important to manufacturers. The state's role as a major employer of labour also played a part. The demands of public sector workers (who dominated Nigeria's labour movement in the 1960s and 1970s) for unionisation and good conditions of service were extended to the private sector when manufacturing employment expanded in the 1970s and 1980s.

The prevalence of smallholding agriculture and informal livelihood activities served to reinforce the relative autonomy of workers. The possibility of alternative non-factory work meant that workers could withdraw their labour if they were unhappy with management. In other words, managers had problems disciplining workers to meet the requirements of industrial work. The nature of subordination of the workforce before its transition

to factory work is also important in understanding union power. Nigeria's pre-industrial agrarian economy lacked the feudal forms of peasant subordination that were prevalent in Asia and Latin America. This suggests that Nigerian workers could resist submission to oppressive factory regimes.

Union power in collective bargaining was linked to the fortunes of the industry itself. During the early phase of the crisis when the import squeeze was severe, unions were unable to check the high levels of retrenchment and sharp wage declines. However, bold industrial restructuring arrested the decline even though employment did not improve. Restructuring eventually produced rapid expansion, with employment levels, wages and benefits recovering lost ground.

The textile industry and the national union experienced two major shocks before the book was finalised, which questioned the narrative of the union-centred labour regime: a workers' rebellion in 1993 against union leaders, leading to the destruction of the union headquarters; and a sharp decline in industrial performance, which coincided with a severe macro-economic crisis and heavy state assault on unions in the mid-to-late 1990s. These developments forced Björn and Gunilla to revisit the central argument of the book in a post-script. They remained convinced, however, that despite these setbacks, the union-centred labour regime would be resilient enough to prevent the disintegration of the textile working class.

I had the opportunity to discuss this book with the Secretary General of the national textiles union, Issa Aremu, in November 2019 when he visited Geneva for a global union meeting. He confirmed the terrible toll of the crisis and industrial restructuring on the textile union, whose membership has declined from 250,000 workers during the pre-crisis period to only 40,000 today. He was, however, optimistic about a turn-around in the industry as textile imports face huge tariffs, Nigeria's land borders are better policed and local cotton production expands in leaps and bounds.

Collaborative Work on Interest Group Politics

Björn worked with many people not only in advancing democratic and interest group politics, but also in documenting and analysing them. The question of how to improve the material conditions and freedoms of working people informed much of his scholarship. Central to this concern was the challenge of building and capacitating interest group organisations, defending the rights of these organisations to contest ruling class policies and making state projects deliver outcomes that are beneficial to the working majority.

His passion for positive social change may explain why he disliked ideological labels or being boxed into competing schools of political

economy: he combined general theory, empirical field research and practical work in studying development processes. It is in this sense that his commitment to the analytical categories of the 'capital logic school' did not prevent him from addressing the countervailing power of popular sector forces, class organisation and class struggles. This may also explain his profound dissatisfaction with mainstream political science, which, he believed, focuses excessively on electoral politics, political integration and political stability. In his article 'Political Science and Political Economy' (Beckman 1983), Björn argued that the discipline should instead be concerned about the 'roots of politics' and focus on 'the level of production, social relations and social organization of class forces', as well as on how politics impacts economic and social forces, including the contradictions and struggles that arise from them.

His collaborative writings were conducted with individuals who were active participants in interest group politics and democratisation, or had a commitment to, or done research on, those issues. Björn pushed his research agenda on interest group politics in many research institutions that he collaborated with. These included the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, attending its General Assembly meetings, serving on the editorial board of its journal, *Africa Development*, participating in its research networks and evaluating the Council's work for the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC); the Centre for Documentation and Research, the Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Research and Training, and the Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD), all based in Kano, where work was done on civic advocacy, interest group politics and democratisation; as well as the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva, where he contributed papers on unions and industrial restructuring.

Björn was also a founding board member of the Accra-based Institute for Democratic Governance, having supervised the doctoral work of its Executive Director, Emmanuel Akwetey, on trade unions and the politics of democratisation in Zambia and Ghana at Stockholm University. He was instrumental in the creation of the Politics of Development Studies Unit (PODSU) at Stockholm University, which focused on interest groups, civil society and democratisation, and involved the participation of many postgraduate students.

The interest groups that featured prominently in his collaborative work included industrial unions; professional associations of academics, lawyers and journalists; gender advocacy groups; and the radical student movement. Björn (1988b) also published a think piece on Left strategies for mobilising

the Nigerian peasantry in which he warned against prematurely trying to resolve the internal contradictions within the peasantry before state power has been sufficiently democratised. He argued that the focus instead should be on the 'broad middle ground within the peasantry', and on issues that unite rather than divide the peasantry, such as the appropriation of peasant lands by state and capital and improved provision and equitable distribution of public services in communities. He published a research piece on peasant struggles against the state and capital as they manifested in the costly and unsustainable irrigation dam project at Bakolori in Sokoto state (1985b). The Bakolori dam displaced about 18,000 people and destroyed many livelihoods. Controversially, state authorities failed to provide adequate compensation to the displaced, forcing them to rise up against the project. More than 350 people lost their lives in the armed confrontation between the displaced peasants and security forces.

A selection of Björn's collaborative studies on interest group politics include his edited books with the Zimbabwean political scientist, Lloyd Sachikonye (*Labour Regimes and Liberalization: The Restructuring of State-Society Relations in Africa*, 1999), and with Sachikonye and the South African sociologist Sakhela Buhlungu (*Trade Unions and Party Politics: Labour Movements in Africa*, 2010); his jointly authored article 'Scholars and democratic politics in Nigeria' (1995) with Attahiru Jega, a former leader of Nigeria's Academic Staff Union of Universities; his edited book with Gbemisola Adeoti, *Intellectuals and African Development: Pretensions and Resistance in African Politics* (2009); his *Great Nigerian Students: Movement Politics and Radical Nationalism* (2005), which provided a platform for student activists to recount their experiences; his edited book with Y.Z. Yau, *Organising for Democracy: Nigerian and Comparative Experiences* (2012); his conference books with Eva Hansson and Anders Sjöorden, *Civil Society and Authoritarianism in the Third World* (2001), and with Lars Lindström and Mats Wärn (*Globalization, Imperialism, and Resistance*, 2007); as well as our joint paper for UNRISD, 'African workers and structural adjustment: with a Nigerian case study' (Bangura and Beckman 1991). Björn also edited a conference book on Vietnam with Eva Hansson and Lisa Roman titled *Vietnam: Reform and Transformation* (1997).

We learn a great deal from these publications about the capacity of organised interest groups to block unpopular reforms and their inability to promote or sustain radical alternatives; the complex ways groups align narrow production-based interests with broader national concerns to gain relevance and defend the public interest; how radical groups build organisational capacity and deploy nationalism to delegitimise state programmes and

policies that impact adversely on society; the conditions under which democracy makes sense to popular sector groups; the potential of alliance politics in processes of democratisation and economic restructuring; and the importance of building internal democracy in the organisations of popular sector groups.

Confronting the Cost of Combative Scholarship

Combative scholarship is not cost-free. Scholars whose theoretical positions are questioned may use dirty tactics to hit back, academic careers may be undermined, and state and administrative power may be mobilised to settle scores. I would like to discuss four cases of Björn's interactions with scholars and power, two of which had direct costs on him.

The first was his academic encounter with Claude Ake, a prolific writer on Africa's political economy and one of Nigeria's – indeed Africa's – foremost scholars in the 1980s and 1990s. Three of Ake's books, *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa* (1978), *Social Science as Imperialism* (1982), and *A Political Economy of Africa* (1985) were widely read on Nigerian campuses. Indeed, *A Political Economy of Africa* was required reading in the courses I taught at ABU. Students loved it. Ake's theory of development was heavily influenced by the propositions of underdevelopment and dependency theory. It was clear that he would clash with Björn at some point, especially as both were ideas-driven, eloquent debaters and active members of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA).

The first encounter was at the NPSA's annual conference at Bayero University Kano in 1981, one year after my arrival at ABU. Björn presented a paper, 'Whose State? State and Capitalist Development in Nigeria', which was an application of his critique of underdevelopment theory in the Kenya debate to the Nigerian situation. Ake dismissed it as Althusarian Marxism that had no connection with social reality and popular struggles. Björn was shaken by the Althusarian label, which had become a dirty word among radical scholars for its high level of abstraction and structuralism. He responded that his work was not Althusarian, but was unable to mount a strong retort, quite possibly because of the balance of scholarly opinion in the NPSA in which political economists were few. Perhaps, to demonstrate his ties with groups in underprivileged settings and the falsity of the Althusarian label, he took us, somewhat bizzarely, that evening to a very shabby eatery down town for dinner that the Kano or Nigerian elite would never think of patronising.

Björn seized the occasion of the major international centenary conference on Marx at ABU in 1983 to fight back. As a conference on

Marxist political economy, he was on familiar territory with allies. His conference paper, 'Marxism and underdevelopment: a critique of Ake', was a systematic takedown of Ake's approach to political economy, which, though illuminating, suffered from the standard limitations of underdevelopment and dependency theory. The Beckman-Ake debate was one of the anticipated highlights of the conference, but Ake declined to debate. During the panel discussion, Ake stood up, briefly retorted that Björn did not understand his work, and sat down.

The second case, which I will discuss in detail because of its significance in understanding the politics at ABU's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) and wider national developments, deals with the forces that pushed Björn out of ABU in 1987. When I arrived at ABU in 1980, the study of political economy was already well established and Björn was a powerful intellectual force in the Faculty. Students and young lecturers gravitated towards him, and he built a well-stocked political economy library that kept students and staff abreast of scholarly developments. My own training at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) was on international political economy, having written my doctoral thesis on how the defence of the pound sterling's role as an international currency affected the politics of African decolonisation around issues of monetary policy, trade, investment and aid relations. My exposure to radical political economy at the LSE was outside of the classroom in study groups such as the Afro-Asian Solidarity organisation, which had a strong Marxist focus. Björn's decision to change his full time contract to visiting lecturer, requiring him to teach for one or two terms per year a few years after I arrived, and the non-renewal of his contract in 1987, meant that I had to take over some of his responsibilities, including the supervision of his postgraduate students in completing their dissertations.

I consider the eight years I spent at ABU (1980–88) the happiest in my working life. Deep friendships, built on values of solidarity, trust and integrity, supported scholarship and activism in a fiercely competitive environment. By the mid-1980s, however, the radical academic groups at FASS had split into two antagonistic camps. One camp was influenced and led by the charismatic historian and public intellectual, Yusuf Bala Usman. It was wedded to a populist type of politics and less keen on systematic Marxist theorising of development, preferring instead to eclectically and uncritically embrace the ideas of underdevelopment and dependency theory. Its core members had joined the radical People's Redemption Party (PRP), which governed Kaduna and Kano states after the 1979 elections. One of the key targets of this Faculty camp was the northern ruling class, which

they characterised as a 'Northern Oligarchy'. That characterisation had a lot of merit when seen from the perspective of the struggles of the northern peasantry – *the Talakawa* – through the platform of the Northern Elements Progressive Union and the PRP for liberation from feudal oppression. However, their politics was the flip side of the politics of the Northern Oligarchy that they decried.

Because of the way politics was structured during the first three to four decades of Nigeria's post-independence history, power was heavily skewed in favour of the North. Whoever dominated northern politics was likely to dominate national politics. The politics of the Bala Boys, as this Faculty camp were known (although they self-identified as Bala Mohammed Memorial Committee or BMCM after the assassination of Bala Mohammed, a political adviser to the Kano State Governor, Abubakar Rimi, in 1981), followed the logic of the politics of the Northern Oligarchy. They imagined that oppositional progressive forces in the North would defeat the Northern Oligarchy and then govern the rest of the country. They were very sceptical, therefore, of pan-Nigerian forces – which they did not control – such as the national Academic Staff Union of Universities and the national labour and Left movements as vehicles for effecting progressive social change. They did not want to subject their struggles to broad national movements that did not grant their group a hegemonic role.

The second group in the Faculty, which self-identified as 'Zaria Group' and operated as a collective, embraced a Marxist approach to the study of politics and society as well as aspects of the global critique of underdevelopment theory, of which Björn was the chief proponent in the Nigerian context. It developed strong ties with organised interest groups and the budding socialist movement in the country. Predatory and authoritarian rule at the national level, poor living conditions in the context of an oil-fuelled and skewed distribution of income and wealth, mal-administration and neglect of student needs and rights radicalised students across the country, leading to periodic riots and the killing of students at ABU in 1986 by the anti-riot police force. The repressive and corrupt military government of Ibrahim Babangida and university administrators put the blame on radical academics whom they accused of 'teaching what they were not paid to teach'; The state and university authorities decided to move against those academics, using, in some cases, one of the radical groups to carry out the purge.

Björn's contract was due for renewal in 1987. The Head of the Department of Political Science, Oga Ajene, who was an ally of the Bala Boys, invited me for an evening drink and *pepeh soup* (peppered or hot, spicy, soup) at a restaurant down town where he broached the subject

of Björn's contract. He argued that the department did not need Björn's services anymore because there were enough qualified Africans who could handle the teaching of political economy. He asked me to take over the programme. I was surprised that he could use a divisive Africanist argument to get me to support the university's design to get rid of Björn. I reminded him of Björn's contributions to the department, the need to attract and retain international staff of high quality, and the dangers of using Africanism to get rid of a valued asset. I stressed the latter aspect in particular could easily become a slippery slope in which the next targets would be non-Nigerian Africans, to be followed by Nigerian academics that were not from ABU's northern catchment area. I left him with the understanding that I would oppose his decision in the department.

Björn's contract was terminated not long after that meeting. He was visibly disturbed when he came to my office to break the news. I called a meeting of the political economy group in the department and we resolved to challenge the decision. We prepared a statement highlighting Björn's contributions to the department and called for a reversal of the decision. The main challenge was to mobilise most of the staff members to sign it. The divisions in the faculty were particularly acute in the departments of political science and history. In addition to the two polarised camps already described, the department of political science also contained a third group – the largely apolitical or moderate middle, which constituted the majority. When we went round canvassing for signatures, we were surprised that virtually all staff members in the middle group were enthusiastic to sign the petition. They valued Björn's scholarship as well as his respectful disposition towards colleagues; we also learned that they had their own grievances against the Bala Boys whom they regarded as overbearing. The head of the department was shocked that we could mobilise about 70 per cent of the twenty-five members of the department to sign the petition even though we were a minority force. Only members of the Bala Group and their allies refused to sign.

Instead of focusing on the issues raised in the petition, the head of department decided to invite to his office each signatory to the document to determine who wrote it. I told him it was a useless tactic, that he should accept the signatures as co-authors of the document and address the demands. His willingness to advance the administration's policy of clamping down on critical scholarship was strongly condemned during the departmental meeting that discussed the issue. The majority of the staff members of the department supported the demand to get the university to reverse the non-renewal of Björn's contract, even though it was ultimately unsuccessful.

When Björn returned to the Department of Political Science in Stockholm in 1987, he decided to apply for one of the professorships that the research wing of Sweden's international development agency, SAREC, had launched for scholars in development studies with a background in political science. The third case of the cost of contestation involves the denial to Björn of the professorship he applied for. He had clashed with Göran Hydén, another well-known Swedish political scientist with specialisation on Tanzania. Björn had written an incisive critique of Hydén's influential 1983 book, *No Short Cuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective*, which argued that the African state is not structurally rooted in society and African societies lacked a dominant social class that could drive the development process. Björn linked this reading of Africa to the jaded or overused 'neo-patrimonialism' theory of the state in which the state is dismissed as a poor agent of development because of its penetration by what Hydén called 'the economy of affection' or nepotism and clientelism. The Ugandan political scientist, Mahmood Mamdani, had described this book in a critical review in *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* as 'a great leap backward' (1985). Björn's critique, 'Comments on Göran Hydén's State and Nation Under Stress,' was published in the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' book, *Recovery in Africa: A Challenge for Development Cooperation in the 90s* (Beckman 1988c). Hydén, it seemed, was clearly offended by the review.

SAREC sent Björn's papers for the professorial post to Hydén for review. There was clearly a conflict of interest for Hydén to review Björn's work, but Hydén did not exclude himself from the review process. Hydén was not impressed by Björn's scholarship and recommended against awarding him the professorship. He justified his decision by presenting what he believed were objective data on Björn's publications: the quantity and spread of the publications, and their impact in the scholarly community. He argued that Björn's body of work was not large and deep enough for a professorship. His bias was exposed when he acknowledged that based on the Social Sciences Citations Index, Björn enjoyed high visibility among scholars, but he dismissed this as irrelevant because many of the publications appeared in the *Review of African Political Economy*, which had Björn on its editorial board. Surprisingly, he also did not think highly of *The Wheat Trap*, despite, as we have seen, its enthusiastic praise from scholars working on agriculture and food systems. Dozens of prominent scholars from around the world petitioned SAREC's decision to have Hydén review Björn's work. Björn finally got his professorship in a subsequent round of evaluation.

The final case of contestation I would like to address is Björn's attack on Richard Sandbrook, the Toronto-based political scientist, and a group

of Latin American scholars during a conference in Jamaica in 1989 that was sponsored by UNRISD on the social and political consequences of structural adjustment programmes. Sandbrook's paper, which drew heavily on his 1985 book, *The Politics of Africa's Economic Stagnation*, was, like Hydén's, highly critical of the African state. It posited that the African state is mired in communal ties and 'one-man rule', and overwhelmed by incoherence, indiscipline and a shrinking fiscal base, rendering it unfit as an agent of capitalist development. The Latin American scholars at the conference shared Sandbrook's views on Africa, even though many of the features described by Sandbrook also applied to Latin America. Björn unleashed a scathing critique of Sandbrook and his Latin American allies and became an instant star to the graduate students from the University of the West Indies who had been invited to participate in the conference. The students followed him around for the rest of the conference.

Deep Friendship and Family Life

Despite his instinct for fierce contestation in his scholarly work, Björn was remarkably charming, humorous, supportive and democratic in his personal relations. He built a large network of friends and was brilliant in sustaining friendships through regular mails, phone calls and visits. His long union with Gunilla, spanning more than 59 years, was a model of love, care and democratic governance of the family. Their wonderful children, Malin and Petter, related amazingly well with their network of friends, making occasional visits and building their own friendships in the countries where their parents worked.

Björn developed excellent relations with the families of his friends. Children were fond of him because he devoted a lot of his time to them – indeed, they often saw him as a grandad or grand uncle. He introduced our daughter, Mariama, to ice-skating, sledging and the books of Sweden's famous writer of children's fiction, Astrid Lindgren. Lindgren's book, *Lotta's Bike*, which Björn gave to Mariama when we spent a year in Sweden in 1988–89, became a family treasure. Mariama passed it on to her younger brother, Bangali, and we have been trying to introduce it to our grandchildren.

After Björn was pushed out of ABU in 1987, I was at risk of being removed from the university. I had been made aware that my contract would not be renewed, or that I may even be deported, as had been the case with the popular Jamaican sociologist, Patrick Wilmot, and an Irish lecturer in French, Firinne Ni Chréachain – who was close to us – who were both kidnapped and forcibly deported in 1988. I had to look for alternatives. My attempt to transfer to the University of Jos was blocked at the Vice

Chancellor's Office, even though the Head of Department of Political Science, Aaron Gana, recommended my recruitment after a successful faculty-wide interview. I was determined, however, to deny the authorities the pleasure of having the final say on my contract. I consequently informed the university that I would not renew it. Björn facilitated a research fellowship from the Swedish Institute that enabled me to spend a year at the respective departments of political science at the University of Stockholm and University of Uppsala. In Sweden, I worked closely with members of Björn's Swedish research network, the Working Group for the Study of Development Strategies (AKUT), which specialised on Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Algeria, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Chile; and the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, helping the latter to develop their research project on the social and political consequences of structural adjustment programmes in Africa.

During my fellowship in Sweden, Björn was invited by UNRISD to write a paper on Nigeria's adjustment experiences for their conference in Jamaica on the social and political effects of crisis and structural adjustment programmes. I knew nothing about UNRISD at the time, but Björn persuaded its director to sponsor both of us to write the paper and attend the conference, since I was working on the politics of adjustment. That conference changed the trajectory of my professional life. After our presentation and the discussion of the paper, the director of UNRISD walked up to me and asked whether I would like to work with the Institute. I spent two weeks in Geneva with the Institute after my return to Uppsala on the invitation of the director and helped him to prepare and comment on a few research proposals. I was offered the UNRISD job and stayed for about 20 years.

Björn leaves behind rich memories of love, care, deep friendship, integrity, purposeful scholarship and commitment, which we will always cherish. He meticulously kept a detailed diary of his working life. When I visited the family in Stockholm in 2017, he was already frail, and Gunilla and Malin were reading the diaries to him. Despite his frailty, he developed a routine of walking for an hour every morning and evening around the neighbourhood, and prepared breakfast every morning. I hope that his diaries will be translated, edited and published for us to understand the full range of his ideas and activities.

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