

The G8, Africa, and the Reframing of Canadian Foreign Policy

David R. Black¹

¹·Dalhousie University, Political Science, Halifax, Canada

blackd@dal.ca

For most of what history will record as the last decade of G8 pre-eminence in the world political economy, African issues were at or near the centre of its public agenda. From the Kananskis Summit in 2002 where the Africa Action Plan (AAP) was adopted, to the climactic Gleneagles Summit in 2005, through Africa-focused initiatives for the remainder of the decade, the G8's efforts to orchestrate a collective response to the challenges and opportunities of the continent stands as a key measure of its ability to act effectively on the world stage. Surprisingly, the role of the Canadian government – the smallest of the G8 political economies – can be seen as pivotal to the character and limitations of the G8's African efforts. The Canadian government played a crucial diplomatic role in orchestrating the AAP; while its subsequent loss of focus on, and interest in, African issues helps to account for the overriding weaknesses of the G8's collective effort. This paper will analyze the Canadian policy trajectory through two theoretical lenses. The first is a neo-gramscian lense, which locates the impetus towards engagement with Africa in an effort to construct a hegemonic 'new deal' for the continent. The second is a post-colonial perspective, which stresses the degree to which Africa policy has always been as much about defining Canadian foreign policy *to Canadians* as it has been about the issues faced in Africa. In this light, the new Conservative government, elected in 2006, used its shift of focus away from Africa to signal a new approach and priorities for the country's foreign policy, with lasting implications for its presence on the continent.