Methodology

This PhD project was initially conceived as a comparative historical study of reformist attempts from the global South to transform the world system. This included a focus on the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), the South Commission and the more recent AU-NEPAD initiative. Originally, my thinking concentrated on how the centre/industrialised powers responded to these initiatives both within multi-lateral institutional processes and outside these institutional settings but within the global power structure of the world system. This focus was meant to yield an understanding of centre and periphery relations during and after the Cold War, within the UN multilateral system and outside it. I wanted to understand the similarities and differences between these initiatives and the factors that explained the emergence of these initiatives.

However, after extensive debates and discussions with my supervisor we agreed it was necessary to scale back the focus of this study and concentrate on the AU-NEPAD. We agreed that the questions I was asking about North-South relations could still be pursued through a more focused study. Thus, I chose to study AU-NEPAD macro-restructuring. Besides having a more focused study, I also felt studying AU-NEPAD macro-restructuring was important for three reasons. First, AU-NEPAD macro-restructuring was not an anti-capitalist alternative. It expressed a break with the political economy of state-led development and, on the face of it, also reflected a ‘home grown’ African response to neoliberal global capitalism. How the AU-NEPAD was constituted and came to dominate development discourse on the continent at the beginning of the 21st century intrigued me. I was not willing to reject it as another ‘elite sell out’ nor was I willing to embrace it as the answer for Africa’s deep and multi-faceted organic structural crisis. Essentially, I felt that the AU-NEPAD initiative needed to be studied. In particular, the relationship between AU-
NEPAD and the hegemonic ideology of transnational neoliberalism required further investigation in order to understand the impact of AU-NEPAD on the continent.

Second, mainstream globalisation discourse tended to suggest that external processes shaping the world needed to be brought into national spaces and that the nation state needed to be called into question in the context of remaking the global political economy. The European Union integration process and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) tended to point to new regional institutional forms as the basis of a new global capitalism. Regions were being understood and perceived as crucial international relations actors post-Cold War and it would seem the political economy of global capitalism needed a seamless and unified global market anchored in geo-political spaces. An extroverted regionalism was being hailed as consistent with globalisation and necessary to make globalisation succeed. In the African context regionalisation has been on the agenda for a few decades. The case for regionalisation has been made consistently, both during the Cold War and after, given the structural weaknesses of individual African countries and the advantages to be gained by common markets and harmonised regional development. How the demands and pressures for a globalised and market-led regional integration process were expressed through the AU-NEPAD also attracted my interest. In particular I felt it was important to understand the social agency of Africans in this process and how this repositioned Africa in the global political economy.

Finally, as a citizen of an African democracy and living on the continent I felt it was important to try and understand the ‘big changes’ taking place on the continent. In general terms, I perceived continental politics to be far removed from my own life and the lives of other Africans. This was fuelled by the scepticism about African elites both in everyday African society, but also in the academic literature. I felt studying the AU-NEPAD would assist in bringing this initiative closer to the everyday life of Africa’s people. I believed that by studying the AU-NEPAD I could contribute to the continental and global conversation about Africa’s challenges and its transformation.
This study tries to explain the role of AU-NEPAD macro-restructuring as a multidimensional class project that deepens a model of Afro-neoliberal capitalism and hence Africa’s passive revolution. This study explains AU-NEPAD macro-restructuring through historicising the conjunctural underpinnings of AU-NEPAD, studying the strategic thrusts of AU-NEPAD as situated class practices and brings into view the content and implications of the articulation between the US-led transnational historical bloc and the Afro-neoliberal historic bloc. To facilitate this study I employed various research methods over the five years of this study.

First, was the use of archival research. This took me to the UN library in New York, which was facilitated by the UN office in Pretoria. Spending time at the UN library assisted in unearthing several primary sources of information related to UN-Africa relations over the past few decades. In addition, the University of California, Berkeley library is one of the few repositories of UN documents, which also provided a crucial information base for this project. I spent a total of four months in Berkeley during the course of this project. In the South African context two institutions also opened access to their primary materials relevant to my study: the Africa Institute of South Africa and the Edge Institute. In the case of these institutions the Executive Directors, namely Eddy Maloka and Stephan Gelb, respectively, were both associated with the AU-NEPAD process at different stages. In the case of Stephan Gelb many of the documents I copied from him came from his personal collection when he was part of the NEPAD/MAP technical task team.

Besides these traditional methods of archival research, my research practice revealed other non-traditional sources of obtaining primary materials. The internet has proven to be an invaluable source of credible primary documents. Almost all the institutions in this study have websites with public access to most of their documents. The only exception was the G8, although important NGOs like the G8 Information Centre (research group) in Toronto provide important web-based information. What once would have required months of archival research was now available on the web. The
widespread availability of primary material on the web assisted me in obtaining import primary information regarding the implementation of AU-NEPAD, the role of the UN and Economic Commission for Africa, the role of the World Economic Forum and the role of the IMF and World Bank vis-à-vis AU-NEPAD.

While my primary method was document analysis, I also supplemented this with expert interviews from key people in some of the crucial institutions covered in this study. From 2006 –2009 I conducted 17 expert interviews relevant to my study and had one informal conversation. While the availability of field-work research funds constrained my endeavours I was able to utilise opportunities for other professional research work to do this. In 2006 while in Geneva I visited the World Economic Forum head office and had an informal conversation with the Associate Director for Africa. He did not want to give a formal interview, but highlighted in very general terms the role of the WEF, pointed me to online resources and gave me primary material that the WEF had produced. I tried to secure invitations to the Africa Forums of the WEF in order to observe its internal operations, but was not successful. While in Geneva I also visited the South Centre and had an interview with its Executive Director. This gave me a broader view of how AU-NEPAD related to the politics of the global south.

Access to the NEPAD secretariat and the AU Commission was an extremely tedious task and required multiple phone calls and numerous emails to these institutions to secure interviews. Regarding the NEPAD secretariat I was not successful in securing interviews with relevant people currently employed at the Secretariat, but I was able to interview three individuals involved with the initial development and institutionalisation of NEPAD at a high level (see interview list). With the AU Commission a visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia gave me the opportunity to visit AU headquarters to secure interviews with relevant people. This was extremely difficult, but in the end I secured an interview with a senior economist. While in Addis Ababa, I also visited the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa and interviewed two senior officials working on the AU-NEPAD process.
On another professional work related trip to the US I was able to secure various interviews with IMF staff dealing with Africa (one of whom worked in the South African presidency and played a crucial behind the scenes role in the MAP/NEPAD process) and eventually I conducted a telephonic interview with a senior economist in the World Bank who worked on Africa at the time the NEPAD formulation process was underway. I also interviewed a senior member of the World Bank working in South Africa. Finally from within African civil society I interviewed a leader of the South African Communist Party and a prominent anti-capitalist activist from the SOWETO electricity crisis committee actively involved in protests against NEPAD and who participated in the protest action at the G8 Glen Eagles Summit. Moreover, I interviewed one of Africa’s leading neo-Marxist thinkers and critics of the NEPAD based in Senegal. Again a work related opportunity made this interview possible.

Besides interviews, my fieldwork also included participant observation. I attend the World Social Forum in 2007 in Kenya, which exposed me to various critiques of global capitalism and neoliberalism. I was also privileged to participate in a panel debate with Patrick Bond on Africa and spoke on a panel launching a research project by Southern African trade unions on alternatives to neoliberalism. In 2009 I also attended a seminar entitled: ‘Africa in 2009’, hosted at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The purpose of the seminar was to understand the global economic crisis and its impact on Africa. The seminar featured prominent analysts and business strategists on its various panels. Also a key member of the NEPAD Business Foundation played a prominent role in these proceedings. Attending this seminar gave me interesting insights into how the transnational fraction of African capital was further organising a presence on the continent including through launching a ‘Africa board’ at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Finally all my fieldwork was supplemented by numerous secondary sources of information. In this regard the William Cullen collection at Wits was extremely helpful.