



## Bulletin

Spring 2006

No. 73

### *New Politics in Africa*

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School of Planning & Public Policy  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, NJ 08903 USA  
E-mail: [turshen@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:turshen@rci.rutgers.edu)

Michael O. West  
Department of Sociology  
Binghamton University  
Binghamton, NY 13902 USA  
E-mail: [mwest@mail.binghamton.edu](mailto:mwest@mail.binghamton.edu)

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Al Kagan  
Africana Unit, Room 328  
University of Illinois Library  
1408 West Gregory Drive  
Urbana, IL 61801 USA  
E-mail: [akagan@uiuc.edu](mailto:akagan@uiuc.edu)

### Research Committee

Imani Countess  
1921 Featherwood Street  
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA  
E-mail: [icountess@adf.gov](mailto:icountess@adf.gov)

Carol Thompson  
Political Science Department  
Box 15036  
Northern Arizona University  
Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5306 USA  
E-mail: [carol.thompson@nau.edu](mailto:carol.thompson@nau.edu)

### ACAS Bulletin Editor

Jesse Benjamin  
Department of Sociology  
Kennesaw State University  
1000 Chastain Road  
Kennesaw, GA 30144  
Email: [jbenjamin@kennesaw.edu](mailto:jbenjamin@kennesaw.edu)

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Kristin Peterson  
Department of Anthropology  
Michigan State University  
344 Baker Hall  
East Lansing, MI 48824  
Email : [krisap@umich.edu](mailto:krisap@umich.edu)

### Webmaster

Noah Zerbe  
Department of Government and Politics  
Humboldt State University  
Arcata, CA 95521  
E-mail: [noah.zerbe@humboldt.edu](mailto:noah.zerbe@humboldt.edu)

Website: <http://acas.prairienet.org>

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**Introduction to Special Issue Guest Edited by Sean Jacobs**

Editor, ACAS Bulletin

This special on social movements and the new politics in Africa was kindly guest-edited by Sean Jacobs, Assistant Professor in the Departments of Communication Studies and African Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His work on this issue is deeply appreciated, as it provides our readers an excellent window into important issues in politics on and beyond the continent.

The issue starts with an extract from John Saul's new book, The Next Liberation Struggle: Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy in South Africa, Monthly Review Press, 2005. "Starting from Scratch," which is taken from the conclusions of his book, serves as a fitting introduction for this issue, identifying as it does the key historical contexts and movements that characterize this moment in which local social movements confront open and veiled calls for the recolonization of the continent.

Imraam Valodia, Adam Habib and Richard Ballard, of the South Africa-based Center for Civil Society at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, provide analysis of new social movements, also in the post-apartheid context of South Africa. The piece printed here is an adapted extract from the concluding chapter of their new book Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2006), edited by Ballard, Habib and Valodia. Their analysis of social movements on the ground, and increasingly in opposition to former liberation movement

leaders, provides an excellent dialogical balance to the global perspectives of Saul, paving the way for more urgent discussion of contemporary social forces in Africa today.

Brian Raftopoulos, in an analysis of urban politics and social movements in Zimbabwe, extends the discussion into another region experiencing significant social tensions at this historical juncture. A scholar and leading participant in the social movements he reflects upon, Raftopoulos discusses tensions between both the state and social movements, and between urban and rural elements within the movements. This helps clarify where productive energies might best be focused in the immediate future.

The issue rounds out with two reflections on recent publications, Doug Henwood on the career shifts of Jeffrey Sachs as seen through the latter's latest book, and Mike Davis in a Tom Engelhardt interview about his Planet of Slums. In addition, we print an ACAS tribute to Carole Collins, 1946-2006, an active and very much missed comrade whose memory and inspiration fit very well within the context of this issue's focus on new social movements and politics in Africa.

Please note the list of ACAS panels sponsored at this year's ASA meetings in San Francisco, as well as the information about back issues and membership forms. Thanks to our reviewers for their editing, comments, and assistance; and thanks to Sean for all his work editing this issue.

## Starting from Scratch

John Saul\*

Africa is standing on the brink of a crucial new phase of its history - a moment akin to that of 1945 when few could have anticipated the speed with which African nationalist movements would win independence for their territories from colonial rule (or, for that matter, the speed with which that independence would in turn be translated into neo-colonial domination).

What we currently have in Africa is a mode of incorporation into the global capitalist system that seems unlikely to produce a significant measure of material and humane advance for the majority of people. It is also a situation where the road to significant reform within the system and to the advantage of the impoverished seems largely closed. Reinforced by the failure/defeat of socialism, a system has been established that, in the view of observers such as Robert Biel and David Plank, has stepped beyond both colonialism and neo-colonialism and towards the establishment of the ever more unmediated rule of global capital and its presently operative imperatives of capital accumulation (a circumstance Plank terms, writing of the African case, "recolonisation."(1) This is a system in which policy has been downgraded merely to "a question of 'adapting' a country in the South to fit into the system by creating local conditions (for example, reducing interference from local bureaucrats) so that capital could find its way without hindrance to the most promising sectors."(2) This new system is also one that has created a fundamental problem for "the North" and not merely in economic terms: "The 'national economy' is one of capitalism's best inventions because it provides a good basis for social control... The new form of direct rule which I am calling 'post-neo-colonial' would be very risky." As he then further focuses the point,

The new vision may appear plausible to elites, since it presents the North and South as united within a single free-market economic model (in contrast to the division between Keynesianism for the North and development economics for the South which was characteristic of the post-war regime). But in reality the free market is an expression of profoundly unequal power relations, and the practical consequences of this are all too obvious to the masses: to give only one example, it leads to a virtual monopoly by the North of mass consumption.(3)

"All too obvious to the masses": would that things were so simple! But the formulation does have the virtue of leading us back to the question of the "historically possible": the question as to how, if at all, the current system of 'capitalism in Africa' might come to be radically challenged from below by those popular forces that are most disadvantaged by it.

There have been outcries of pain in Africa from those both angry at existing conditions and skeptical about prospects for meaningful reform, stirrings linked at least in part to what we saw Celestin Monga to term the "collective insubordination" of Africa and directed against not only parasitic governments but also IFI-induced austerity. For all the rather anomic form that this more radical amplification of "insubordination" can sometimes take (the so-called "IMF riots" for example) it nonetheless serves to bear out the conclusion of Riley and Parfitt that "African peoples have adopted many diverse strategies to challenge, deflect, or avoid bearing the costs of austerity involved and to seek a political alternative to the politicians they hold responsible."(4) Of course, these initiatives take diverse forms; are more and less well-organised; and are also highly ambiguous as to just how readily

they can move people beyond (entirely laudable) resistances to authoritarianism and towards more counter-hegemonic perspectives on the global capitalist system that feeds and nurtures autocracy.(5) Nonetheless, such initiatives do dramatise the importance, real and potential, of "street-level democracy" and "political settings at the margins of global power." As Jonathan Barker focuses these phrases in his important book on the subject (one which includes a number of suggestive African case-studies):

The fragmentation of political space and the impact of global power on national institutions do not form the whole story. There has been a marked increase in the number, range, and energy of non-state, non-family, and non-business voluntary associations - a trend noted in Asia, Africa and Latin America. On a general level this trend is a social response to the expansion of market logic into social relationships that have more than economic meaning to people... Societies react against the reduction of land and labour and money to the status of commodities.(6)

Fantu Cheru has also written with particular eloquence of such developments in Africa which he characterises as a virtual "renaissance" of "popular resistance from below":

"The flag-bearers of this new renaissance are based in the church, the informal sector, human rights movements, grassroots ecology movements and development NGOs that have sprung up all across Africa in the last decade to articulate alternative visions of survival and democratic governance. They employ both overt and hidden forms of resistance, thus pressing demands on the state through the "politics of claims," non-payment of taxes and open insurrections. These new social movements advance the idea that development is a human right, and that its achievement requires popular participation and control."(7)

And certainly, the range of information on such initiatives is impressive, revealed in diverse scholarly accounts as well as web sites located in, and reporting on, a wide array of such undertakings across a wide range of African countries. Writers like Graham Harrison (8) and others (9) have highlighted an additional range of such emanations elsewhere on the continent, running through varied resistances by youth, unions, women, in Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and elsewhere and including the pinpointing of specific assertions like that of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the successful campaign against the World Bank's policy on cashew nut processing in Mozambique.

True, Cheru also sees dangers in the fact that some of the most organized of such undertakings remain dependent for their financing from Western sources. But he does go on to emphasise, on other grounds, the importance of a "North-South popular alliance" — judging that "in the context of the considerable power held by elites and firms that underpin the globalisation process ... local-level resistance [in Africa] in isolation from potential allies in other countries and regions will have limited impact." For Cheru is frank about the difficulties of building from below:

In the specific case of Africa, the vibrancy of the new institutions of civil society contrasts with the paucity of their strategic power and resources. Organizing around daily subsistence increasingly consumes much of people's energy and meagre resources, thus making the task of developing a counter-project exceptionally difficult and slow.

Still, the African experience has taught Cheru and others that there are no short-cuts via nationalist organisations, liberation movements or vanguard parties (the chimeras of an earlier moment of African struggles), towards mounting a bottom-up hegemonic project: "Instead of focusing on a

unifying conception of society and transformation, we must look for a workable sense of cohesion to emerge out of seemingly irreconcilable modes of resistance waged from below."(10)

Interestingly, Barker also notes the fact that what "we frequently see [is] a dispersed series of piecemeal actions and only rarely observe the revolutionary overthrow of governing institutions."(11) This is a reflection of what he calls the "scale mismatch" between "hopeful localisms" and the more negative impact of global determinations. The question remains then: how might the playing-field of this mismatch be levelled and the further crystallisation of a "workable sense of cohesion" be facilitated? One response to this can be seen, perhaps, in those continental activities (meetings, information exchanges and intellectual endeavours, ranging from Jubilee 2000 to the African Social Forum to CODESRIA) that seek to link actors, initiatives and ideas from across the continent: thus Bond (12) cites such high-water marks in this respect as the Lusaka Declaration of 1999 drafted by "leading African social movements and church organisations working on debt" (and the beginnings of its attendant "African People's Consensus" movement), the Yaounde conference and the Dakar Summit of civil society-based organisations in 2001, and the ongoing work of the Accra-based African Trade Network and of the Southern African People's Solidarity Network (the latter having embraced, in turn, the Jubilee debt cancellation movement, amongst other initiatives).

In more general terms, Colin Leys (in an interesting debate with Barker) has also underlined the importance of complementing Barker's (and, in effect, Cheru's) focus on the centrality of local initiatives with a sensibility that continues to emphasise at least equally the age-old imperatives of ideological coherence and political organisation as building blocks for effective struggle. Here he speaks of the

required emergence of "unified" and hegemonic projects:

Looked at in one way it will necessarily be a multiplicity of projects, in different sectors, nations and regions, the aspirations of different groups, movements and peoples. Yet unless these unite to confront the political and economic power of the transnationals and the states that back them, they will ultimately fail ... As a minimum it will require nation-wide movements and/or parties capable of exercising state power, and making it felt in supra-national institutions.(13)

For, as Fantu Cheru himself acknowledges, "a comprehensive development alternative cannot go far without a basic change in power structures. Until this happens the popular sector can only pressure government for some policy changes and accumulate little victories here and there. This implies that the popular sector has to come up with a state agenda of its own and suggests entering the terrain of the nation-state: national politics."(14)

Fortunately, there have been some signs in Africa's recent practice of precisely such developments. The emergence of an effective opposition party to Robert Mugabe's wretched rule in Zimbabwe out of a dense array of resistances within civil society there could be seen, at least briefly, as one particularly promising example, perhaps. Indeed, Patrick Bond was moved momentarily to write of this new Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in its early years, as representing the birth in Africa of the first "post-nationalist and post-neoliberal" political party.(15) In practice, the pull on the MDC in turn to conform to neoliberal premises proved to be very strong (as had been true in the case of the Chiluba's Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in Zambia before it) and in any case, Mugabe has proven to be ruthless in his ability to command violence and demagoguery in his ability to hold power (while also manipulating the outstanding

land issue to effect). Nonetheless, Bond and his co-authors Darlene Miller and Greg Ruiters have made a strong case for hailing the stirring of such coordinated resistances (keyed by trade unions but very far from being confined to their assertions) across the southern African region.(16)

My own most immediate exposure to such novel developments has come in South Africa. There the costs of the post-apartheid neo-liberal apostasy of the ANC and of its abandonment (in practice) of the basic needs of the mass of the South African population have been particularly high — even if the continuing (if somewhat fraying) legitimacy that the ANC enjoys in South Africa means that any move towards establishment of a new party to challenge it directly seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. There I witnessed the existence of a range of actors and organizations in what some South African writers have come to term "working-class civil society" that have been critical of the direction post-apartheid South Africa has come to take. And they speak of the necessity to begin to coordinate their critical outlooks and activities to exert far more pressure on the ANC than they have up to now.

Initially for me organisations like COSATU and SANGOCO appeared as possible bearers of this new politics, but more recent visits to South Africa have also impressed upon me the salience of a whole new range of grassroots initiatives and groupings: the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, the Treatment Action Campaign, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Concerned Citizens' Forum in Durban, and the Landless People's Movement.(17) Of course, it remains far too early to speak with grand confidence of the attempt by various forces in South African civil society to link up more self-consciously, within and across sectors, in a popular alliance from below. But the fact remains that they have begun to take strength from each other and an encouragement to think beyond the

parameters of their separate and more specific assertions. They may also take further steps towards the effective institutionalisation of a (heretofore often only implicitly) shared theory and practice of struggle. Despite the set-backs that have undermined parallel efforts in Zambia and Zimbabwe, the signs of the first stages of building a "structured movement"(18) in South Africa are present, and this is an initiative that might also begin to find echo in other African countries as well, notably in Nigeria.(19)

Pan-African generalisations are dangerous, of course, especially with reference to a continent as diverse as Africa. Especially in the most marginalised of countries and/or countries of absolute crisis, near-collapse or firmly positioned authoritarianism the pace of change may be very different from that in the most developed of countries. As with the original post-1945 pattern of successful nationalisms across Africa, the pace of radical change, if, as, and when it comes, will be uneven, accelerating and decelerating erratically, and spilling over borders both by example and in more direct ways. Since the progress of "the next liberation struggle" will likely prove complex in its detail, we desperately require a more fine-grained mapping of socio-political contradictions and revolutionary prospects across the continent - something comparable, that is to say, to Allen's brilliant cataloguing of diverse African politics a decade ago.(20) Nonetheless, such movements-in-the-making as are identified here demand to be taken seriously for they are amongst the most important harbingers of an alternative future for the continent.

### **Socialism?**

Movements, parties, tendencies a-borning then -- albeit ones diverse in terms of the sites of struggle at which they erupt and the kinds of socio-political agency they embody.(21) There is an additional question to ask of such initiatives, however: what "imaginary," what sense of projected future, do they, will they, manifest? I return by this

route to the point at which, in my introduction, I began this book: the evocation of Arrighi's and my original argument that, with actually existing capitalism, world-wide and local, being so central to defining the problem in post-colonial Africa, "socialism" will have to be part of the solution. While taking seriously Fantu Cheru's warning that there may be "no single formula for how individuals and communities go about 'decoding' the ideology of developmentalism or globalisation,"(22) I continue to think this to be the case. To so argue is, of course, to court not so much scholarly opprobrium as scholarly ridicule. James Krugman in his latest book, filled though it is with criticisms of the present functioning of the global capitalist system, nonetheless inquires sneeringly as to "who can now use the word socialism with a straight face", concluding that "the heart has gone out of the opposition to capitalism."(23) And writers like Richard Sklar have made latter-day careers out of claiming to have gone 'Beyond Capitalism and Socialism in Africa' and seeking to carry the North American Africanist establishment with them to the right on such questions.(24)

Even more disturbing is the mood on the continent itself. The wholesale move, noted above, of the ANC leadership — after its great victory over apartheid in South Africa — into the camp of neo-liberalism has been sobering enough. But what is one to make of the fact that even Julius Nyerere, who did contest until his death the irrational outcomes produced by global capitalism's cruel grip on Africa, could nonetheless find himself proclaiming, in a defeated and sarcastic tone:

Throw away all our ideas about socialism. Throw them away, give them to the Americans, give them to the Japanese, give them ... so that they can, I don't know, they can do whatever they like with them. Embrace capitalism, fine!(25)

Indeed, even Arrighi, in his recent bleak up-

date of the present plight of Africa within the capitalist world-system, now finds none of the promise of a socialist future there, now merely hankering for some mild reformism to temper the winds that buffet residents of the continent.(26) Meanwhile, the liberal/neo-liberal "common-sense" of the moment has also found its way deep inside the African academy.

No doubt something of this situation continues to exist in Africa, as elsewhere. And yet, as Patrick Bond has emphasized, there are significant centres of intellectual resistance on the continent itself that contest an ascendant, if spiritually and economically bankrupt, capitalism in Africa(27): the pronouncements of those South African activists and progressive commentators whose assertions I noted earlier provide an example, as do those of others, continent-wide, who have grouped behind the undertakings of the African Social Forum and the like. This is not surprising since, speaking more generally, even Paul Krugman assumes that the current situation "will not last forever," that "surely there will be other ideologies, other dreams" — and that these may even "emerge sooner rather than later" under present global circumstances. In this context it seems to me plausible to argue that we are standing on the brink of a crucial new phase of African history. The present can best be seen as a moment akin to that of 1945. Of course, it is no easier now than it was then to divine for the current moment the precise parameters of the likely struggle against "post-neo-colonial" domination. Or to answer the variety of questions that this moment will throw up: as Africans forge more effective organizations for resistance, for example, how will their new movements balance the rival claims to centrality of local, national, regional, continental and global sites of struggle in the focusing of their efforts? How will the trade-off of the relative priorities of plausible short-term reform against the necessary claims of long term structural transformation be handled? And (perhaps most importantly of all) in terms of

what counter-hegemonic imaginary, or imaginaries, will this "post-nationalist, post-neo-liberal" project be cast?

African activists themselves will have to be in the front lines in answering such questions, of course. But the undertakings of a new generation of researchers and writers focusing critically, if also supportively, on the kinds of resistances I have begun to sketch out here will be important — as once was the work of "the Dar es Salaam generation," referred to in my introduction, and its counterparts elsewhere on the continent in interpreting and amplifying earlier rounds of struggle. Certainly, we must continue to ask ourselves whether the relatively up-beat picture of contemporary resistance that I have presented here might again be too much the reflection of an "optimism of the will", even if it does mesh with activities that are indeed visible and marked with genuine potential. Would a "realism" that dictated a more "pessimistic" response of "the intellect" to the severe difficulties of building and sustaining resistance under current African circumstances be more appropriate? Let us merely conclude by saying that, whatever may prove to be the case in this respect, the fact is that the reported evidence of resistance is still too fragmentary, both relatively understudied and undertheorised: there can be little doubt that we must both engage with and know a great deal more about the immediate scope and long-term resonance of the various counter-hegemonic activities evoked both in the writings I have cited above and elsewhere.(28)

At the same time, we need also to ask ourselves what "realism" actually connotes in the present African context. Not a retreat to passivity, or even to mere "reform," surely. For, in concluding, I stand by my hunch that it will prove neither possible nor wise for Africans to avoid, in the long-run, the claims of "realistic socialism" that Canadian political economist Greg Albo has juxtaposed self-consciously to the claims of "utopian capitalism" in his discussion of the

current parameters of global political economy. True, any such programme of 'realistic socialism' (Albo himself suggests the need for "more inward-oriented economic strategies" and the devaluation of "scale of production as the central economic objective") must be specified for Africa by such social forces as mobilise themselves to place a more progressive agenda on the table. Nonetheless, Albo's broader premise — that positive outcomes "can only be realised through re-embedding financial capital and production relations in democratically organised national and local economic spaces sustained through international solidarity and fora of democratic co-operation" — seems a good place to start. But this will only happen when Africans, with others, move to embrace the fact that the existing market-dominated global order — driven by "a minority class that draws its wealth and power from a historically specific form of production" — is (in Albo's words) "contingent, imbalanced, exploitative and replaceable."(29) That struggle continues, in Africa as elsewhere.

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\* This extract is from the concluding chapter of John Saul's book *The Next Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa* (Monthly Review Books, 2006). John Saul is former professor of political science at York University and author of numerous books on African politics.

1. David Plank, "Aid, Debt and the End of Sovereignty: Mozambique and Its Donors," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 31, 3 (1993).

2. Robert Biel, *The New Imperialism: Crisis and Contradiction in North/South Relations* (London: Zed, 2000), 232-3.

3. *Ibid.*, 242-3

4. Cf. chapter one; amongst the texts deployed there were and Stephen Riley and

Trevor Parfitt, "Economic Adjustment and Democratization in Africa" in J Walton & D Seddon (eds.), *Free Markets and Food Riots* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Recall, as well, that the latter authors also identified an impressive range of (primarily urban) actors — "lawyers, students, copper miners, organisations of rural women, urban workers and the unemployed, journalists, clergymen and others" — whose direct action in recent years has shaken numerous African governments.

5. The grim denouement to Chiluba's project in Zambia provides a case in point here of the limits and ambiguities of 'merely' anti-authoritarian mobilisation; the present transition from Moi to Kibaki in Kenya (greeted, understandably enough, with considerable euphoria) will also have to be tracked with close attention in this respect.

6. Jonathan Barker, *Street-Level Democracy: Political Settings at the Margins of Global Power* (Toronto and West Hartford: Between the Lines and Kumarian Press, 1999), 13.

7. Cheru, *op. cit.*, 124.

8. Graham Harrison, "Bringing Political Struggle Back in: African Politics, Power and Resistance," *Review of African Political Economy*, 89 (2001).

9. Leo Zeilig (ed.), *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2002).

10. Cheru, *op. cit.*, 119.

11. Jonathan Barker, "Debating Globalization: Critique of Colin Leys," *Southern African Report*, 12, 4 (1997).

12. Patrick Bond, in his "Cultivating African anti-capitalism," draft manuscript, forthcoming

13. Colin Leys, "Colin Leys Replies" (a

reply to Jonathan Barker, "Debating Globalization: Critique of Colin Leys," above), *Southern African Report*, 12, 4 (1997).

14. As Cheru (*op. cit.*, 128) adds, however, 'Here lies the dilemma of the people's organisations ... They will have to find the appropriate combination of strategies to handle effectively the contradictory trajectories of state politics, which is integrative or centralizing, and social politics, which is horizontal or centrifugal.

15. Patrick Bond, "Post-nationalist politics for Zimbabwe?" *Red Pepper* (April, 1999); for his further considered reflections on the Zimbabwean case see, however, his *Zimbabwe's Plunge* (second edition), London/Pietermaritzburg/Harare: Merlin, University of Natal Press, and Weaver, 2003).

16. Patrick Bond, Darlene Miller and Greg Ruiters, "The Southern African Working-Class: Production, Reproduction and Politics," in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds.), *Working Classes, Global Realities: Socialist Register 2001*, London: Merlin, 2001); see also Harrison, *op. cit.*

17. Aswin Desai, *We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002).

18. Gindin conceives this brand of movement as being "something transitional that is more than a coalition and less than a party" in his instructive article "The party's over," *This Magazine*, November-December, 1998.

19. See, *inter alia*, Harrison, *op. cit.*

20. See Chris Allen, "Understanding African Politics," *Review of African Political Economy*, 65 (1993).

21. For a more general discussion of site, agency and imaginary as relevant criteria for

interrogating and guiding radical practice in Third World settings see my "Globalization, Imperialism, Development: False Binaries and Radical Resolutions," in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds.), *The Socialist Register 2004* (London: Merlin Press, 2003).

22. Cheru, *op. cit.*, 121.

23. James Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics*, New York: Norton, 1999), 5.

24. see John S. Saul, *Millennial Africa: Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy*, (Trenton: Africa World Press 2001), pp. 1-3 and ch. 2.

25. Julius K. Nyerere, 'Reflections,' in Haroub Othman (ed.), *Reflections on Leadership n Africa: Forty Years after Independence: Essays in Honour of Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere on the Occasion of his 75th Birthday* (Dar es Salaam: Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, 2002).

26. Giovanni Arrighi, "The African Crisis: World Systemic and Regional Aspects," *New Left Review*, 15 (2002).

27. See Patrick Bond on, precisely, "African anti-capitalism" in his "Cultivating African anti-capitalism," unpublished ms. cited above.

28. For a perspective on the brand of unity of theory and practice that might be expected to guide effective scientific work in the service of African transformation in the present conjuncture see "Afterword: The Radical Africanist and the Socialist Alternative" to my *Millennial Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001).

29. Greg Albo, "A World Market of Opportunities? Capitalist Obstacles and Left Economic Policies," in Leo Panitch (ed.), *Socialist Register 1997: Ruthless Criticism of All that Exists* (London: Merlin Press, 1997), 28-30, 41).

### The Value of Voices of Protest for Democracy

Richard Ballard, Adam Habib and Imraan Valodia\*

It was widely expected that the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 would negate the need for adversarial struggle by the poor for basic services such as housing, water and electricity. Where the apartheid government had obviously been in the business of excluding poor black South Africans from cities, the new government was to have been their saviour. Yet the comprehensive nature of the exclusions of apartheid meant that it would take a special effort to overcome this legacy. In the end, the ANC government opted for a pro-market, pro-growth strategy which was accompanied with dizzying rates of job loss, widening inequality and growing poverty. Other policy choices were also difficult for many to accept, such as a reluctance to confront HIV/AIDS directly. In this context,

South Africans have returned to the familiar political mode of street protest on a plethora of issues. Some have been brief expressions of frustration, with no clear organisation behind them. Others have been sustained social movements. These include, amongst many others, the Treatment Action Campaign on HIV/AIDS, the Anti-Privatisation Forum and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee on service provision, and the Concerned Citizens Forum, Landless Peoples Movement, Anti-Eviction Camping and more recently Abahlali Basemjondolo on housing and land issues.

There is a widespread notion amongst power holders in South Africa that social movements do not contribute positively to democracy or that they are indeed in some way a threat to democracy. Some have

argued that these movements undermine the democratic project by explicitly challenging, through extra-institutional action, a legitimate democratically elected government. There has been a stigmatisation of critics of the ANC's policies as 'ultra-left' (Cronin 2002; Desai 2003; Greenstein 2003: 30-1; Saul 2001, 2002; Vally 2003). The ANC government routinely tries to prevent marches from going ahead, often on very dubious legal grounds.

The essential problem with hostile perceptions of social movements is that they conflate and confuse the stated aims of social movements with their immediate systemic effect. They also confuse a critical challenge to the ruling party as a 'threat to democracy'. Whatever the ultimate distant goals of these movements (ranging from socialism to what amount to more welfarist measures), their impact needs to be assessed in relation to their immediate systemic effects. And the most obvious tangible effect of social movements on the political landscape of this country is that they represent the interests of the poor and marginalised, and apply pressure on the government to pay greater attention to the welfare of these groups. Social movements are thus an avenue for marginalised people and those concerned about their interests, to impact on material distribution and social exclusion, and to claim a certain degree of influence and power over the state itself. In a context where the formal political system has failed to produce a significant political party to the left of the ANC to more directly champion the cause of the poor, social movements contribute to the restoration of political plurality in the political system.

This then raises the more significant contribution of contemporary social movements in South Africa. The fundamental purpose of a democracy is to make state elites accountable to the citizenry. This is the only way to effect not only public participation, but also to guarantee a development trajectory in the interests of all the citizenry, including its most marginalised and dispossessed. Such

accountability is founded on the emergence of substantive uncertainty in the political system. Political uncertainty is of course the essence of democracy. It takes one of two distinct forms; institutional and substantive. Institutional uncertainty – the uncertainty about the *rules* of the game – implies the vulnerability of the democratic system to anti-democratic forces. Substantive uncertainty – the uncertainty of the *outcomes* of the game – is about the perceptions of ruling political elites in a democratic system on whether they will be returned to office (Schedler 2001: 19). The former – institutional uncertainty – is bad for democracy as it raises the prospect of the return to authoritarianism in the Third Wave of democracies. The latter – substantive uncertainty – is good for democracy for it keeps politicians on their toes and makes them responsive to their citizenry.

There has been much investigation into and reflection on institutional uncertainty (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986; O'Donnell 1993; Huntington 1991) but there is surprisingly little work on substantive uncertainty. This should not be surprising given that researchers and activists concerned with democratisation have been preoccupied with the business of transcending authoritarian regimes and institutionalising democratic ones. Nevertheless the lack of attention to substantive uncertainty has significant political costs. Indeed, the weakness of many contemporary democracies lies precisely in this arena. Despite the presence of institutional mechanisms that are intended to promote substantive uncertainty – legislative elections, separation of powers, civil liberties, opposition political parties, an independent press – this goal still eludes much of what Huntington (1991) has called the 'Third Wave' of democracies. One reason for this is the shift in power from the legislature to the executive of governments across the globe in the last two decades. Another emanates from the inclination of democratisers and democratisation scholars to not rock the boat in societies undergoing

democratic transitions. Fearful of the very real danger of a reversion to authoritarianism, these actors have focused on procedural aspects of democratisation and made significant political and institutional concessions to the state and economic elites of the authoritarian order. Finally, it can be explained by the honeymoon phenomenon where citizens are reluctant to vote against liberation parties who were responsible for coordinating the popular rebellions that brought down authoritarian regimes (Fanon 1967: 137; Mamdani 1996: 21; Mbembe 2001: 104).

As a result of some of these developments, and peculiar contextual factors, such as the racialised or ethnic character of South Africa's principal opposition parties – the Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the New National Party (NNP) – the ANC has not been seriously threatened at the polls. Indeed the most significant political tension in the country since democracy appears to be the development of a split within the ANC between two power centres, and this only took place a decade after democracy. Until this recent development, the lack of substantive uncertainty has eroded the citizenry's leverage vis-à-vis state elites. The ANC, as the dominant party in the liberation movement, came to office with an overwhelming electoral mandate but despite this its policy concessions over the last decade have been largely to foreign investors and domestic capital (both black and white). This is because it has been able to take the citizenry's vote for granted. Policy concessions in favour of capital are most graphically reflected in the abandonment of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. The net effect has been a transition that has deracialised the apex of the class structure and has economically favoured the upper echelons and strata of South African society (Whiteford & Van Seventer 2000).

The antidote to this state of affairs is the reintroduction of substantive uncertainty into the political system. Of course there could be much debate on the precise institutional mechanisms that could facilitate substantive uncertainty. Some may maintain that it need only involve electoral reform and the emergence of social movements (Mattes and Southall 2004), while others would suggest that it would require the former coupled with the break-up of the tripartite alliance and the abandonment of corporatist institutions (Habib and Taylor 2001, Desai and Habib 1997). All of this could facilitate uncertainty, and this is necessary for loosening up the existing configuration of power in South African society. What is important to note in this debate, however, is that none of the other elements except the presence of social movements, exists or is likely to emerge in the foreseeable future. Thus, for now at least, social movements are our only hope for introducing substantive uncertainty, and thereby facilitating the accountability of state elites to our citizenry.

It is instructive to note that the South African government's recent shift to a more state interventionist and expansive economic policy with a more welfarist orientation, coincided with the emergence and heightened activity of social movements in South Africa, including pressure from unions within the ruling alliance. While it would be difficult to establish direct causality between the shift in state policy and the emergence of social movements, very few observers of the South African scene would deny that social movements contributed to the emergence of a political climate that encouraged state elites to become more responsive to the country's most marginalised citizenry. Of course this shift in state policy is not without problems and has as yet not gone far enough (Habib, 2004). It could also be argued that such shifts are the enlightened twin of the strategy of repression. For Harvey, drawing on Gramsci, '[t]he power of the hegemon ... is fashioned out of and expressed through an

ever-shifting balance between coercion and consensus' (Harvey 2003: 37-38). Realising that it has opened the door for others to gain support through more explicitly worded anti-poverty manifestos, the ANC government shifted to re-capture this ground in the build up to the 2004 election. Recognition of this enables us to conclude that the effective operations of social movements is a necessary, if not a sufficient political condition for prompting a sustainable shift in state policy in the interests of South Africa's poor and marginalised. A more human centred development trajectory and the consolidation of democracy thus require in part the systemic presence and effective functioning of contemporary social movements in South Africa.

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\* This piece is adapted from the concluding chapter of *Voices of Protest: Social Movements in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press. 2006) edited by Ballard, Habib and Valodia. Richard Ballard is a research fellow of the Center for Civil Society and Imraan Valodia is a senior research fellow in the School of Development, both at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Imraan Valodia. Adam Habib is executive director of the Democracy & Governance Research Programme at the Human Science Research Council in South Africa.

## Urban Politics and Social Movements in Zimbabwe

Brian Raftopoulos\*

### Introduction

One of the many effects of Zanu-PF's authoritarian nationalist project, in particular since 2000, has been the relegation of the important role played by urban politics and social movements in Zimbabwe's history. In building its legitimacy around the central role of the land question and its rural support, the Mugabe regime has often characterized the urban population and urban social movements as either marginal, or antagonistic elements in the liberation struggle, in a revised version of the 'labor aristocracy' thesis.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, since the onset of the Zimbabwean crisis from 2000, the urban electorate have been regularly berated as 'totemless' people, under the influence of 'foreign' directed opposition and civic groups, and traitors to their rural families and the liberation history.

In 2005 the Government of Zimbabwe demonstrated its disdain and fear of the urban informal sector through its 'Operation Murambatsvina', ('Clean out the filth') which, in the space of a few weeks, destroyed the homes and livelihoods of

some 700,000 people, with 2 million more urban dwellers suffering related losses as a result of the urban 'clean up.' Moreover in the increasingly repressive environment that has characterized Zimbabwean politics over the last six years, the major opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, as well as its allies in the labor, constitutional and broader civic movement, have continuously suffered from the coercive actions of the state.

In sum, the relationship of urban civic and opposition movements to the post-colonial state has been increasingly confrontational, and constructed by the state as the activities of a marginal group working outside of the 'legitimate' discourse of 'national history.'

### Urban Politics in the Colonial Period.

From the 1930's movements that emerged in the early urban settlements provided important forms of struggle against the colonial state. Moreover in their geographical coverage, their mobilization issues and their alliances, they transcended any formal citizen/subject binaries, and the still clumsy efforts of the colonial state to

develop rural governance structures around a traditional/modern dichotomy.

In her excellent new book Jocelyn Alexander has captured this complexity in her *longue duree* discussion of the land question in Zimbabwe, and more particularly in her description of the politics of land over the period 1893-2003. In this regard she provides a nuanced description of the politics of the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) in the 1930's, in which she observes that demands of this initially urban organization, overrode the colonial administrative idea of 'tribal rule' and 'custom', through its involvement of chiefs as well as its alliances and political objectives. Moreover this complexity characterized African politics for much of the colonial period.<sup>2</sup>

However it is also clear that from the 1950's there were tensions between older style urban politicians like Charles Mzingeli, trade unions and the nationalist movement. These tensions involved disagreement over political objectives, forms of political autonomy, and sources of funding. In particular as the trade unions grew stronger from the 1950's, their struggle to maintain their autonomy from nationalist politics, their growing international labor linkages, as well as their attempts to exploit the spaces in colonial labor policy, led to increasing cleavages with the dominant nationalist parties. These disagreements sometimes led to violence between nationalists and trade unionists, and set the tone for long-term tensions between the two.

As the liberation struggle became increasingly rural-based from the early 1970's, the organizational linkages between urban organizations and the nationalist parties weakened, though they did not disappear. Moreover the structural linkages between urban workers and their rural homes led to other connections. Nevertheless by the time of independence in 1980, a difficult relationship had developed between the nationalist parties and urban

organizations like the trade union movement. The urban areas had also witnessed the growth of community, residents and women's struggles, which developed a dynamic connected to, but also separate from, dominant nationalist politics.

#### **Urban Politics in the Post-Colonial Period.**

In the period after 1980 it did not take long for both the legacy of older urban organizations and emergent structures in the cities to confront the new state. By the late 1980's, trade unions and students, breaking their initial close working relationship with the new state, took progressively critical positions regarding the rising levels state corruption and one-party domination of national politics. This led to several confrontations with the state and the arrest and harassment of the leaders of these organizations. The language of labor and student rights challenged the assumed unities of nationalist discourse, and the state responded not only through force but with accusations of betrayal and ingratitude.

By the 1990's, in the period of economic and political liberalization, labor mobilization became more organized and sustained, and through a public sector strike in 1996, a general strike in 1997 and a series of stay-ways in 1998, showed its capacity not only for national organization, but also for confronting the state. In developing this capacity the unions drew both on longer-term structures and their capacity to mobilize a new generation of workers. The labor movement also connected to international labor alliances, as they had done from the 1950's, and appealed to an international language of labor rights and standards to hold the new state to account. As the repression of the Mugabe state has intensified the labor movement has also called on the solidarity of regional labor organizations such as the South African-based COSATU, and through this solidarity, has challenged Mugabe's authoritarian notion of sovereignty with broader ideas of international labor rights.

The 1990's also saw the emergence of a plethora of urban-based human rights organizations, women's organizations and other rights-based forms, that broadened the national debate on human and civic rights, and lobbied the state to account for its abuses in these areas. Foremost amongst these new organizations was the constitutional movement which galvanized an alliance between the labor movement and other civic organizations around the issue of constitutional reform.

A major result of these developments in the labor and civic movement was the emergence of the first national opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, (MDC) in 1999, which provided the Mugabe government with the first major electoral threat to its political power. Through a series of electoral gains at national and local government levels, the MDC, until its tragic split in early 2006, demonstrated Zanu PF's longstanding problems with urban politics. Moreover, the undemocratic manner, in which the ruling party has administratively undermined the elected local government structures dominated by the MDC, has further alienated the urban electorate. As Kamete has written, the ruling party has failed to develop a strategy that 'combines administrative triumphs with a democratic mandate.'<sup>3</sup> The disastrous attack on the urban informal sector through Operation Murambatsvina merely emphasized that for the ruling party the emphasis of its strategy for the urban electorate rests largely on violence and control. Additionally, through a combination of the central role of the state in controlling land through the land occupations since 2000, and the forced disruptions of urban livelihoods in Operation Murambatsvina, the state has made its own disastrous attempt to govern the cost of social and labor reproduction.<sup>4</sup> This authoritarian response to local government has in turn triggered the growth of residents' organizations such as the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) that has challenged the state both in

the courts and through public mobilization over the issue of the state's abuse of local government legislation.

#### Conclusion.

As the political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe deepens, urban social movements continue to present a challenge to the authoritarian Zimbabwean state. In October 2006 members of the labor movement were badly beaten and tortured by the police while in custody, after attempting to demonstrate over the rapidly deteriorating living conditions of its members. Moreover the demonstrations were characterized by the state as the organizational front of foreign masters. This response of the state marks the persistent inability of the ruling party to come to terms with challenges of urban social movements. However, the limits of such challenges to the state also indicate both the geographical and strategic problems faced by such urban organizations. Connecting urban and rural struggles to confront the repressive politics of the post-colonial state remains a major challenge for Zimbabwe's urban social movements. In the context of the post 2000 land occupations and the authoritarian state politics that have accompanied them, this is proving to be an extremely difficult task.

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\* Brian Raftopoulos is program manager on Transitional Justice in Africa for the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, South Africa, and formerly

associate professor of development studies at the University of Zimbabwe. He is also a leading figure in social movements in Zimbabwe.

### BOOK REVIEW: The Long, Strange Career of Jeffrey Sachs

By Doug Henwood

Jeffrey D. Sachs, The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time (2005), Penguin Press, 416 pp., \$27.95.

Jeffrey Sachs is a complicated guy. His first claim to fame was as the doctor who administered "shock therapy" in Bolivia, Poland, and Russia. Now he's Bono's traveling companion. Bono wrote the introduction to Sachs's latest book ("My professor.... In time, his autograph will be worth a lot more than mine"), and Sachs gushes all over Bono in the text ("Bono brilliantly brought the AIDS tragedy to the attention of several key leaders of the religious right...").

This book is a manifesto and how-to guide on ending extreme poverty around the world. The subtitle, "Economic Possibilities for Our Time," echoes Keynes's famous 1928 essay, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," which forecast, rightly, that we would be able to meet all the basic material needs of humankind two generations later - essentially today. We could, but we don't. Worldwide, about 1 billion people live on the equivalent of less than \$1 a day, the official definition of extreme poverty; 2 billion live on less than \$2, which officialdom considers normal poverty. These estimates have been criticized for being too low, and the definition of poverty for being too crude, but still, the numbers are criminally large.

Sachs uses this book to promote the UN's Millennium Development Goals (on which he is an advisor to Secretary General Kofi Annan), which were agreed to by 147 heads of state gathered in New York in September

2000. These include halving the numbers of the extremely poor and halving the numbers of the hungry by 2015; achieving universal literacy and primary education; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; reducing child mortality by two-thirds; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other horrid diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development (which amounts to a nicer neoliberalism)

Achieving these goals, on Sachs's estimates, would require about \$80 billion a year over the next ten years - not much next to current world output of \$35 trillion a year. It's equal to about 20 hours of global economic activity. It's not much more, as Sachs shows, than the income of the 400 richest U.S. taxpayers - and that's not counting the rest of the world's rich. But even these modest goals are impossible in the current political environment.

A measure of that environment is Washington's current approach to one of Sachs's obsessions, preventing malaria in Africa, where the disease is ubiquitous. It would cost very little to provide Africans with mosquito nets to sleep under, something that's beyond the means of most Africans. But U.S. policy centers instead around something called "social marketing." Instead of giving away the nets, "social marketers buy advertising, conduct public education campaigns and create brands, hoping to promote the goods at low prices in the commercial marketplace" (as Donald McNeil wrote in the *New York Times*). They claim that the poor will value more

that which they have to pay for, and the sales will cultivate an entrepreneurial class. There's no money in the budget for epidemiological studies to see if social marketing works. Of course, it probably doesn't. But Washington has big ideas about freedom - so who cares that 10,000 Africans die every day of preventable diseases?

On one level, Sachs's analysis and agenda are unremarkable. Many have written on how much the poor of the world suffer, and how little it would cost to reduce that suffering. But we've almost lost sight of a remarkable fact: this is Dr. Shock, Jeffrey Sachs!

### **Early triumphs**

Sachs's first moment in the spotlight came in the mid-1980s, with the "stabilization" of Bolivia, a policy package he designed that brought the country's inflation rate from 40,000% to near-0%. Sadly, though, it did nothing to relieve Bolivia's poverty - and the current round of almost constant protests, which have driven several presidents from office (and some from the country), suggests that twenty years later, Bolivians still aren't happy with their situation. But the superficial success of what came to be called "shock therapy" - and it must be conceded that almost no one likes hyperinflation - left Sachs well-positioned in the global market for economic expertise when socialism started unraveling at the end of the decade.

Sachs was an advisor to the Yeltsin government in Russia from 1991 to 1994, and also advised Poland, Slovenia, and Estonia as they were beginning their transitions to capitalism. The last three are mixed successes - on the surface, Poland looks like a success to some, but with the transition came higher unemployment, falling real wages, and aimless cycles of political discontent. Russia, though, was a thorough disaster, one of the worst collapses in human history. Living standards fell and the population shrank, an almost unprecedented event in a country not at war.

Bono's new best friend refuses to accept any blame for the disaster, offering the defense that the Russians didn't take his advice, and the West didn't come through with the big aid package he insisted was necessary. Apparently this is a well-practiced strategy. A 1992 Euromoney profile notes: "Sachs is reluctant to acknowledge mistakes, defining them in terms of regret when governments do not take his advice." In that case, he blamed Poland for not privatizing fast enough. Contrasting with Sachs's regrets over advice not taken, several governments he's consulted with have since characterized the material produced by him and his associates as irrelevant, or, as a Slovenian official put it at the time, "simplistic... kindergarten stuff."

### **Lethal gall**

But the outcome illustrates precisely the danger of having the likes of Sachs parachute in bearing the timeless truths of neoclassical economics. Anyone who knew Russia knew that any rapid privatization would immediately lead to the creation of a new corrupt elite through massive theft of state property. Anyone who knew Washington knew that no big aid package was ever going to come through; adding to usual U.S. cheapness, a lot of hardliners wanted to see Russia ground into the dirt. In the words of former World Bank economist David Ellerman, who frequently collided with Sachs's work in Slovenia and has followed him intently ever since, "Only the mixture of American triumphalism and the academic arrogance of neoclassical economics could produce such a lethal dose of gall."

During what officialdom called the transition, there were divisions between those who wanted to reform the existing socialist system and experiment with hybrid forms of ownership, and what Ellerman calls the "clean postsocialist revolutionaries," many of them with American economics PhDs, who dismissed the reformers as tainted nomenklatura and wanted immediate privatization. Adding to the prestige of the

revolutionaries were their trusted foreign advisors, like those from the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID), led by Jeffrey Sachs and partly funded by the U.S. government.

In Poland, Sachs was firmly on the side of rapid transition to "normal" capitalism. At first he proposed U.S.-style corporate structures, with professional managers answering to many shareholders and a large economic role for stock markets. That didn't fly with the Polish authorities, so Sachs came back with a Germanic idea - large blocks of the shares of privatized companies would be placed in the hands of big banks. (As Ellerman recounts it, "Wherever the parade was going, [Sachs] had to be in front.") In both versions the point was to end any hints of worker or social control and institute a conventional capitalist class hierarchy.

His style was always abrasive and domineering; he rebuked the Slovenian parliament for passing a bill without his approval, and dismissed his critics as "idiots" and "self-management imbeciles." Waiting to meet with senior Soviet officials in 1991, Sachs put his feet up on a table. An aide asked him not to do that. Sachs took his feet down for a moment, and when the aide turned away, put them back up. From several public events and an hour-long interview, I can say he comes across as a very unpleasant fellow - cocky, vain, and free of doubt.

### **Russia**

HIID eventually collapsed in scandal, when it was revealed that the principals of its Russian project, Andrei Shleifer and Jonathan Hay, along with their wives (who happened to be mutual fund managers), had been buying Russian stocks and dickering for the privilege of getting the country's first mutual fund license, while dispensing advice to the Russian government. (Shleifer was one of the trinity of so-called Harvard Wunderkinder who were to Russia what the Chicago Boys were to Pinochet's Chile; the

other two were Lawrence Summers - and Sachs.) The U.S. government sued, and Harvard shuttered the institute. Sachs, who was not involved in the scandal, decamped to Columbia (it's said there was no going-away party from his Harvard colleagues). At Columbia, he was appointed to head its new Earth Institute, an interdisciplinary enterprise that would bring together physical, health, and social scientists to promote sustainable economic development.

Sachs admits to no responsibility for the Russian catastrophe. When I interviewed him in November 2002, I asked him to comment on the (incontrovertible) fact that he's viewed by scores of millions of Russians, as one journalist has put it, as either an emissary of Satan or of the CIA. He answered that he found this question "disgusting," "perverse," and like nothing he's ever been asked before. The global elite leads a very insulated life.

Regrouping, to dissuade him from hanging up, I asked how he justified the tearing apart of the USSR and forcing the country headlong into capitalism when there was little popular support for such a strategy. He responded, illogically, by saying he "wanted to support...the democratization of the Soviet Union." He sung the praises of "transparency and honesty in government," even though the Yeltsin regime he was advising was opaque and corrupt. Asked to comment on published reports that he supported creating an inflation, so as to wipe out the savings of Russians (part of the shock therapists' attempts to start post-Soviet Russia with a clean slate), he bristled further, denouncing the quote as "phony," the question as "indecent," and the interview itself as not being in "good faith."

In his academic work, however, Sachs argued that since China was only very lightly industrialized, it could afford to take its transition slowly. Russia, however, was burdened with the bad inheritance of Soviet industry, which was hopeless and had to go.

Yet...

As the 1990s progressed, Sachs became more prominent as a critic of development orthodoxy, arguing against the IMF's austere prescriptions after the 1997 Asian crisis, and pressing for debt relief for the poorest countries. He became an economic advisor to the Jubilee 2000 movement (named after the Biblical exhortation to observe a Jubilee year once every fifty years, in which debts would be forgiven). The harder core of the global justice movement has never fully trusted Sachs; he reportedly lobbied to get himself invited to the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre a few years ago, but was rejected. Along with Joseph Stiglitz, he's one of the leading critics of the economic development establishment who's still a member of the club. But there aren't many of them.

For a member of the club, Sachs does use some strong language. *The End of Poverty* is full of sharp critiques of Western imperialism in Africa and elsewhere. He quotes Mike Davis approvingly on British brutality during famines. He blasts U.S. support of Mobutu and the rest of the posse of Cold War thugs. In late 2003, when Bush asked Congress for another \$87 billion to fund the Iraq war, Sachs took to the pages of the *Boston Globe* to denounce the administration for pursuing an expensive war for oil while neglecting 500 million impoverished Africans. In the op-ed, he reviewed the disgraceful history of U.S. alliances with Middle Eastern despots "to keep the oil flowing," and noted vast reservoirs of ill-will towards the U.S. that that policy had created. He declared that "the world will not tolerate unilateral control by a country that accounts for less than 5 percent of humanity...and the American people will end up paying a high price for the fantasy of hegemony." That's far stronger than anything Paul Krugman would write.

The New Sachs wasn't entirely unprecedented in the utterances of the Old

Sachs. In the early 1990s, as he was busily transforming Eastern Europe, he told *EuroMoney*, a banking trade journal, that you shouldn't press debtor countries for repayment if "there is going to be social catastrophe," and that "reform" programs should be "fair," with "burdens and benefits...shared in an adequate way." But those high-minded concerns were overwhelmed by the political realities of the moment, and the results were anything but fair, as poverty and inequality increased in most of the formerly socialist countries (a situation that they've only recently begun to recover from).

People who know Sachs say he's always considered himself on the political left. His father, who died in 2001, was a long-time Detroit labor lawyer and general counsel to the Michigan AFL-CIO. That puts his passion to destroy worker power in Eastern Europe in an interesting Oedipal light - and might even explain some of the contradictions of Sachs's politics. But that would be speculative psychoanalysis of a suspect sort, so enough of that.

#### **Incomplete critique**

Heavy debts, IMF austerity programs, and fickle financial markets are Sachs's favorite targets. His views on the rest of the development business are more conventional. In *The End of Poverty*, he writes as if all the poorest countries need to do is get a rung or two up the economic ladder; the problem is their distance from the ladder, not the ladder itself. That stands in odd contrast with the strength of his anti-imperialist rhetoric. It's as if he can't see the financial arrangements (with institutions like the IMF at their center - there's usually a state center to a financial system) as crucial enforcement mechanisms for the maintenance of orthodox policies. Finance is an instrument of class power, locally, nationally, and internationally.

In our interview, Sachs told me that to become internationally competitive, Argentina and Brazil need to develop their

educational institutions and technological capacity - as if the history of a couple of centuries of structural subordination and the present of debt service demands haven't made that difficult to impossible. (Africa's long-term prospects, he disclosed, lie in tourism, services, and back-office operations.) There's more recognition of deep structural impediments in this book, but then he offers his reform agenda as if the structurally dominant would easily consent to a weakening of their domination, which is how they see any "aid" program. Asked how he would deal with the enormous political obstacles to his agenda, Sachs pointed to his own efforts at promoting debt relief, which date back to 1985.

We're back to Sachs's enormous ego, which exposes almost anything he does to the suspicion that he's in it mostly for the

attention. But while his work in Russia, though it drew attention, was mostly destructive - something he still can't admit to - his concerns today are a lot more admirable. His criticisms of American warmongering and Western indifference to the poverty of a billion or two of our fellow humans are mostly on the side of the angels. Maybe the best summing up of the latest incarnation of Jeffrey Sachs comes from David Ellerman: "I hope he gets what he wants, but that he doesn't get any credit for it."

\* This review first appeared on the Left Business Review online, at <http://leftbusinessobserver.com/>. Doug Henwood edits the LBR, is a contributing editor of *The Nation* magazine and does a weekly radio program on WBAI Radio in New York City.

### Turning a Planet into a Slum

Tom Engelhardt interviews Mike Davis

Tom Engelhardt of Tom Dispatch.com sat down with Davis, author of *Planet of Slums* (Verso, 2006), to talk about his new book, which includes extensive commentary on the fate of Africa's cities.\*

**TD:** ...Your newest book [is] *Planet of Slums*, ... can you launch us on the subject of our slumifying planet today?

**Davis:** Stunningly enough, classical social theory, whether Marx, Weber, or even Cold War modernization theory, none of it anticipated what's happened to the city over the last 30 or 40 years. None of it anticipated the emergence of a huge class, mainly of the young, who live in cities, have no formal connection with the world economy, and no chance of ever having such a connection. This informal working class isn't the lumpenproletariat of Karl Marx and it isn't the "slum of hope," as imagined 20 or 30 years ago, filled with people who will

eventually climb into the formal economy. Dumped into the peripheries of cities, usually with little access to the traditional culture of those cities, this informal global working class represents an unprecedented development, unforeseen by theory.

**TD:** Just lay out some of the figures on the slumification of the planet.

**Davis:** Only in the last few years have we been able to see urbanization clearly on a global scale. Previously, the data was untrustworthy, but the United Nations Habitat has made heroic efforts involving new data bases, household surveys, and case studies to establish a reliable baseline for discussing our urban future. The report it issued three years ago, *The Challenge of Slums*, is as pathbreaking as the great explorations of urban poverty in the 19th century by Engels or Mayhew or Charles Booth or, in the United States, Jacob Riis.

By its conservative accounting, a billion people currently live in slums and more than a billion people are informal workers, struggling for survival. They range from street vendors to day laborers to nannies to prostitutes to people who sell their organs [for transplant]. These are staggering figures, even more so since our children and grandchildren will witness the final build-out of the human race. Sometime around 2050 or 2060, the human population will achieve its maximum growth, probably at around 10 to 10.5 billion people. Nothing as large as some of the earlier apocalyptic predictions, but fully 95% of this growth will occur in the cities of the south.

**TD:** In essence, in the slums...

**Davis:** The entire future growth of humanity will occur in cities, overwhelmingly in poor cities, and the majority of it in slums.

Classical urbanization via the Manchester/Chicago/Berlin/Petersburg model is still occurring in China and a few other places. It's important to note, though, that the urban industrial revolution in China precludes similar ones in other places. It absorbs all the capacity for light manufacturing goods -- and increasingly everything else. But in China and a few adjacent economies, you still see city growth with an industrial motor. Everywhere else it's occurring largely without industrialization; even more shockingly, often without development in any sense. Moreover, what were, historically, the great industrial cities of the south -- Johannesburg, Sao Paulo, Mumbai, Bello Horizonte, Buenos Aires -- have all suffered massive deindustrialization in the last twenty years, absolute declines in manufacturing employment of 20-40%.

The mega-slums of today were largely created in the 1970s and 80s. Before 1960, the question was: Why were Third World cities growing so slowly? There were, in fact, huge institutional obstacles to fast urbanization then. Colonial empires still

restricted entry to the city, while in China and other Stalinist countries, a domestic passport system controlled social rights and so internal migration. The big urban boom comes in the 1960s with decolonization. But then, at least, revolutionary nationalist states were claiming that the state could play an integral role in the provision of housing and infrastructure. In the 70s, the state begins to drop out, and with the 80s, the age of structural adjustment, you have the decade of going backwards in Latin America, and even more so in Africa. By then, you had sub-Saharan cities growing at faster velocities than Victorian industrial cities in their boom periods -- but shedding formal jobs at the same time.

How could cities sustain population growth without economic development in the textbook sense? Or, to put it differently, why didn't Third World cities explode in the face of these contradictions? Well, they did to some extent. At the end of the 80s and in the early 90s, you have anti-debt riots, IMF [International Monetary Fund] riots, all across the world.

[...]

**TD:** How did policymakers and leaders globally interpret what was happening in the cities?

**Davis:** The discovery by the World Bank, developmental economists, and big NGOs in the 1980s that, despite the almost total abdication of the role of the state in planning and providing housing for poor urban dwellers, people were still somehow finding shelter, squatting, surviving, led to the rise of a bootstrap school of urbanization. Give poor people the means and they'll build their own houses and organize their own neighborhoods. This was, in part, an entirely justifiable celebration of rank-and-file urbanism. But in the World Bank's hands, it became a whole new paradigm: The state is done; don't worry about the state; poor people can improvise the city. They just need some micro-loans...

**TD:** ...And high-interest micro-loans at that.

**Davis:** Yes, that's right, and then poor people would miraculously create their own urban worlds, their own jobs.

*Planet of Slums* is intended to follow up the UN *Challenge* report, which alerted us that the global urban unemployment crisis was coequal to climate change as a threat to our collective future. Admittedly an armchair journey to cities of the poor, it is an attempt to synthesize a vast specialist literature on urban poverty and informal settlement. Two fundamental conclusions emerged.

First, the supply of free land for squatting had ended, in some cases a long time ago. The only way you can build a shack on free land now is to choose a place so hazardous that it will have no market value whatsoever. This increasing wager with disaster is what squatting has become. . . [L]and which once made up squatters' neighborhoods is now being sold, sometimes even subdivided and developed. .. This is true all over the Third World.

Squatting has been privatized... If you went to Soweto [in Johannesburg, South Africa], you'd see that people fill their backyards with shanties which they rent. The major survival strategy of millions of poor urban dwellers, who have been in the city long enough to have a little property, is to subdivide it and become landlords to yet poorer people, who sometimes subdivide and rent to others. So a fundamental safety valve, this much romanticized frontier of free urban land, has largely ended.

The other major conclusion concerns the informal economy -- the ability of poor people to improvise livelihoods through unrecorded economic activity like street vending, day labor, domestic service, or even subsistence crime. If anything, economic informality has been romanticized more than squatting, with vast claims about the ability of micro-entrepreneurship to leverage people out of poverty. Yet scores of

case studies from around the world show ever more people squeezed into a limited number of survival niches: Too many rickshaw wallahs, too many street vendors, too many African women turning their shanties into shabeens to sell liquor, too many people taking in laundry, too many people queued up at work sites.

**TD:** In a way, aren't you saying that the former Third World is being turned into something like the Three Hundredth world?

**Davis:** What I'm saying is that the two principle mechanisms for accommodating the poor to cities in which the state long ago ceased to invest have reached their limits just when we're looking forward to two generations of continued high-speed growth in poor cities. The ominous but obvious question is: What lies beyond that frontier?

**TD:** Here's a quote from *Planet of Slums*: "With a literal great wall of high-tech border enforcement blocking large-scale migration to the rich countries, only the slum remains as a fully franchised solution to the problem of warehousing this century's surplus humanity."

**Davis:** The two major poor cities of 19th century Europe that fit our present model were Dublin and Naples, but nobody saw them as the future; and the reason there weren't more Dublins and Naples was, above all, the safety valve of the Atlantic emigration. Today, most of the south is, in fact, blocked from migrating. There's simply no precedent, for instance, for the kinds of borders Australia and Western Europe have constructed, essentially designed for total exclusion -- except for a limited flow of high-skill labor. The American border with Mexico has historically been of a different kind. It acts as a dam to regulate the supply of labor, not to close it off completely. But more generally, for people in poor countries today, there aren't the options poor Europeans had back then.

Inexorable forces are expelling people from

the countryside and that population, made surplus by the globalized economy, piles up in the slums, on city peripheries that are neither countryside, nor really city, and that urban theorists have difficulty wrapping their minds around.

[...]

... [T]he poorest people [are] shoehorned into the most dangerous sites on tumbling hillsides, next to toxic waste dumps, living in flood plains, leading to every year's rising toll from natural disasters -- less a measure of changing nature than the desperate wagers poor people have to make. In the large cities of the Third World, you do have the flight of some of the rich to gated communities far out in the suburbs, but what you mainly have is two-thirds of the slum dwellers of the world piled up in a kind of urban no-man's land.

**TD:** You've called this "existential ground zero."

**Davis:** It is, because it's urbanization without urbanity. An example of this is the case of the radical Islamist group that attacked Casablanca a few years ago -- about 15 or 20 poor kids who grew up in the city but were in no sense part of it. They were born on the edge, not in traditional working-class and poor neighborhoods that support a fundamentalist Islam but not a nihilist one, or they were expelled from the countryside but never integrated into the city. In their slum worlds, the only kind of society or order was provided by mosques or Islamicist organizations.

According to one account, when these kids attacked the city, some of them had never been downtown before and this, for me, became a metaphor for what is happening across the world: a generation consigned to the urban dumping grounds, and not just in the poorest, most savage cities either.

[...]

**TD:** It occurs to me that, in Baghdad, the Bush administration has managed to create a weird version of the urban world you describe in *Planet of Slums*. There's the walled imperial Green Zone in the center of the city with its Starbucks and, outside it, the disintegrating capital as well as the vast slum of Sadr City -- and the only exchange between the two is the missile-armed helicopters going one way and the car bombs heading the other.

**Davis:** Exactly. Baghdad becomes the paradigm with the breakdown of public space and ever less middle ground between the extremes. The integrated Sunni/Shia neighborhoods are rapidly being extinguished, not just by American action now, but by sectarian terror.

Sadr City, at one point named Saddam City, the Eastern quadrant of Baghdad, has grown to grotesque proportions -- two million poor people, mainly Shia. And it's still growing, as are Sunni slums by the way, thanks now not to Saddam but to disastrous American policies toward agriculture into which the U.S. has put almost no reconstruction money. Vast farmlands have been turned back into desert, while everything focused, however unsuccessfully, on restoration of the oil industry. The crucial thing would have been to preserve some equilibrium between countryside and city, but American policies just accelerated the flight from the land.

Of course, Green Zones are gated communities of a kind, the citadel within the larger fortress. You see this, too, emerging across the world. In my book, I counterpoised this to the growth of the peripheral slums -- the middle class forsaking its traditional culture, along with the central city, to retreat into off-worlds with themed California lifestyles. Some of these are incredibly security conscious, real fortresses. Others are more typical American-style suburbs, but all of them are organized around an obsession with a fantasy America, and particularly the fantasy

California universally franchised through TV.

So the *nouveau riche* in Beijing can commute by freeway to gated subdivisions with names like Orange County and Beverly Hills -- there's a Beverly hills in Cairo too, and a whole neighborhood themed by Walt Disney. Jakarta has the same thing -- compounds where people live in imaginary Americas. These proliferate, emphasizing the rootlessness of the new urban middle class across the world. With this goes an obsessiveness about getting things as they are in the TV image. So you have actual Orange County architects designing "Orange County" outside Beijing. You have tremendous fidelity to the things the global middle class sees on television or in the movies.

[...]

**TD:** ...Although nobody mentions that while a small number of American soldiers were killed in the streets of Mogadishu and we were shocked, an unknown but vast number of Somalis also died, in the hundreds at least.

**Davis:** Well, you can commit carnage on a huge scale; you can kill thousands of people. What you lack the ability to do is surgically take out the crucial nodes because they hardly exist; because you're dealing neither with a hierarchical spatial system, nor generally with hierarchical organizations. I'm not sure the National Security Council understands this, but many military thinkers certainly do. If you read studies from the Army War College, for example, you discover a different geopolitics from that embraced by the Bush administration. The war-planners don't emphasize axes of evil or over-arching conspiracies, instead they stress the terrain -- the sprawling peripheral slum and the opportunities it provides to a miscellany of opponents -- drug barons, al-Qaeda, revolutionary organizations, religious cults -- to carve out fiefdoms. As a result, Pentagon theorists are studying

architecture and urban-planning theory. They're using GIS technology and satellites to fill in missing knowledge, because the state usually knows very little about its own slum peripheries.

The question of the exchange of violence between the city of slums and the imperial city is linked to a deeper question -- the question of agency. How will this very large minority of humanity that now lives in cities but is exiled from the formal world economy find its future? What is its capacity for historical agency? The traditional working class -- as Marx pointed out in the *Communist Manifesto* -- was a revolutionary class for two reasons: because it had no stake in the existing order, but also because it was centralized by the process of modern industrial production. It possessed enormous potential social power to go on strike, simply shut down production, take over the factories.

Well, here you have an informal working class with no strategic place in production, in the economy, that has nonetheless discovered a new social power -- the power to disrupt the city, to strike at the city, ranging from the creative nonviolence of the people in El Alto, the vast slum twin of La Paz, Bolivia, where residents regularly barricade the road to the airport or cut off transport to make their demands, to the now universal use of car bombs by nationalist and sectarian groups to strike at middle-class neighborhoods, financial districts, even green zones. I think there's much global experimentation, trying to find out how to use the power of disruption.

**TD:** I'll tell you what I suspect may be the greatest of disruptive powers -- the power to disrupt global energy flows. Poor people with minimal technology are capable of doing that across the thousands of miles of unguardable pipeline on this planet.

**Davis:** In that sense, you already see elements of an emergent campaign. In the last month alone, there was an attempted car

bombing of Saudi Arabia's major oil facility and the first car bombing in the Niger delta in Nigeria. It didn't hurt anybody, but it did raise the stakes.

**TD:** You end *Planet of Slums* on this note: "If the empire can deploy Orwellian technologies of repression, its outcasts have the gods of chaos on their side."

**Davis:** And chaos is not always a force for bad. The worst case scenario is simply when people are silenced. Their exile becomes permanent. The implicit triaging of humanity occurs. People are assigned to die and forgotten about in the same way we forget about the AIDS holocaust or become immune to famine appeals.

The rest of the world needs to be woken up and the slum poor are experimenting with a huge variety of ideologies, platforms, means of using disorder -- from almost apocalyptic attacks on modernity itself to avant-garde attempts to invent new modernities, new kinds of social movements. But one of the fundamental problems is that, when you have so many people fighting for jobs and space, the obvious way to regulate them is through the emergence of godfathers, tribal chieftains, ethnic leaders, operating on principles of ethnic, religious, or racial exclusion. This tends to create self-perpetuating, almost eternal wars among the poor themselves. So, in the same poor city, you find a multiplicity of contradictory tendencies -- people embracing the Holy Ghost, or joining street gangs, or enlisting in radical social organizations, or becoming clients of sectarian or populist politicians.

[...]

**TD:** So is our collective future simply likely to be a downhill ride to destruction?

**Davis** ... We're building cities without urban qualities. Poor cities, in particular, are consuming the natural areas and watersheds which are essential to their functioning as environmental systems, to their ecological sustainability, and they're consuming them either because of destructive private speculation or simply because poverty pours over into every space. All around the world, the crucial watersheds and green spaces that cities need to function ecologically and be truly urban are being urbanized by poverty and by speculative private development. Poor cities, as a result, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to disaster, pandemic, and catastrophic resource shortages, particularly of water.

Conversely, the most important step toward coping with global environmental change is to reinvest -- massively -- in the social and physical infrastructures of our cities, and thereby reemploy tens of millions of poor youth. It should haunt us that Jane Jacobs -- who saw so clearly that the wealth of nations is created by cities not nations -- should have devoted her last, visionary book to the specter of a coming dark age.

\* The full interview, appearing in two parts, can be found at [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com) and is kindly reprinted here with the permission of Tom Dispatch.

## A Tribute to Carole Collins

1946 – 2006

Carole's whole life was a celebration of life, of dignity, of hope. She danced. She laughed. Carole was motion of body, mind and spirit—symbolized often by her thrusting her fist into the air insisting on dignity and freedom for Southern Africans. *Amandla! Ngawethu!*

At one of the very first organizing meetings among local support groups for Southern African liberation movements in Madison, Wisconsin in 1971, Carole alternated between engaging in intense political debates, dancing and laughing. With sparkling eyes and a quick wit, she would disarm the most persistent debater. Always kind, she offered her incisive analysis in ways that further engaged and honored others.

A vivacious member of the Chicago Committee for the Liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau (CCLAMG), she was chosen by them to attend the independence celebrations of Mozambique, June 25, 1975. Ever after we all chuckled about how careful Frelimo was before accepting the ridiculously modest gift of \$200 from CCLAMG, making sure it was not tainted in any way by the U.S. government.

Carole worked for the liberation of Southern Africa from Chicago to Washington, D.C. to Harare and throughout Southern Africa, including the Congo. She was an early organizer for the Campaign to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa and for the divestment movement. Her life work demonstrates well what ACAS stands for: activism directing research; research informing activism.

Appointed as the American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) Southern African Representative, she and her husband, Steve,

were based in Harare from 1986-1990. She worked with women's cooperatives in Zimbabwe, and in worn-torn Angola and Mozambique, promoting economic justice.

Writing for the National Catholic Reporter and as a UN correspondent, she exposed the corruption of the Mobutu regime in the Congo, the horrors of Renamo in Mozambique, and commando raids by apartheid into neighboring countries of Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. She focused analysis on the role of the U.S. government and corporations in financing repression. Her articles also appeared in *Le Monde*, *Middle East Report*, *In These Times*, *The Progressive*, *Pacific News Service* and in several academic journals.

With a bachelor's degree from Bryn Mawr (1968), she dropped out of the University of Chicago to help organize protests against the Vietnam War (1968-69). She earned a Master's in International Affairs from Columbia University in 1993.

Carole lived the words, *a luta continua*. She served as a policy analyst for the Interfaith Action for Economic Justice, the Africa Faith and Justice Network and AFSC; she was national coordinator for Jubilee 2000, the international campaign to demand debt cancellation for poor South countries. She knew well that elections in South Africa were only the end of political apartheid and that eradicating economic inequalities would be a much longer and even more brutal struggle, across the whole continent.

Afflicted for years with congestive heart failure, Carole still sustained her powerful voice to reduce the suffering of others. As we reach out to reduce the pain of her life partner Steve, and their 8-year old son, Joseph Samora, we can best honor what

Carole has taught us by continuing her work. We can show them how she touched us, and so many others, by sustaining her enthusiasm and her radical vision for justice and equality, in Africa and in the USA.

*Hamba Kahle, Carole.*

- ACAS

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Chair: Sean Jacobs, U Michigan, Ann Arbor

Howard Stein, U Mich Ann Arbor

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Kristin Peterson, Michigan State U

Salem Mezhoud, London

**Session V: Friday, 10:45 P.M. - 12:15 P.M.**

(V-I19) Roundtable: Where is Africa in U.S. Geo-Strategic Thinking?

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James H. Mittelman, American University

**Session IX: Saturday, 11:15 A.M. - 1:15 P.M.**

(IX-B) Roundtable: Resource Wars in Africa

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Chair: Carol Thompson, Northern Arizona U

Wayne Nafziger, Kansas State U

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Kristin Peterson  
Anthropology  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824  
Email: [krisap@umich.edu](mailto:krisap@umich.edu)  
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