Acknowledgments
Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai

1. Introduction
Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai

Part One
From Racism to Reparations

2. The anti-apartheid movement and global civil society
Hakan Thorn

3. Civil society, the United Nations and WCAR
Ashwin Desai and Peter Dwyer

4. South Africa between a rock and a hard place at WCAR
Dennis Brutus and Ben Cashdan

5. WCAR seen from the US left
Eric Mann

6. From WCAR to reparations
Patrick Bond

7. Reparations strategy
Jubilee South Africa

8. Can reparations for apartheid profits be won in US courts?
Patrick Bond
Part Two
From Sustainable Development to Eco-Social Justice

9. From WCAR to the WSSD
Prishani Naidoo

10. The World Summit on Sustainable Development
Ashwin Desai and Peter Dwyer

11. Civil society at an uncivil summit
Patrick Bond

12. The WSSD’s internecine civil society struggles
Victor Munnik and Jessica Wilson

Part Three
Civil Society meets Multilateral Neoliberalism

13. Why I protested at the World Bank
Dennis Brutus

14. Beyond the New Partnership for Africa’s Development peer review
Eduard Jordaan and Ian Taylor

15. Nepad, the APRM and SA subimperialism:
Civil society cooption or resistance?
Patrick Bond

Part Four
South Africa and the World Social Forum

16. Transnational topographies of power
James Ferguson

17. The African Social Forum as site of struggle
George Dor

18. Mumbai WSF as festival of the masses, 2004
Mondli Hlatshwayo and Oupa Lehulere

19. Have the slaves left the master’s house?
Controversies in Lusaka, 2005
Amanda Alexander and Mandisa Mbali
20. Weaknesses at the Bamako WSF, 2006
Nerisha Baldevu

Maria van Driel

22. What actually happened in Nairobi, 2007
Trevor Ngwane

23. The World Social Forum and subaltern life strategies
Franco Barchiesi, Heinrich Bohmke, Prishani Naidoo, Ahmed Veriava

24. Potentials for the World Social Forum
Patrick Bond

Part Five
Explaining and transcending xenophobia

25. Xenophobia in structural and human terms
Patrick Bond

26. Xenophobia: A (long) post-apartheid history
Ashwin Desai
Acknowledgments

At a time of rampant xenophobic attacks in low-income communities, it is hardly appropriate for South Africa to be modeled as a leader in civil society internationalism, is it. Still, the central theme of our study, the rise of a progressive alternative to the neoliberal and subimperial project embarked upon by the South African government, is even more applicable when we consider xenophobic ‘blowback’: i.e., the boomerang effect that inexorably follows when repression at home is required to deal with the consequences of repression abroad. For as we show below, especially in the last chapter, the strategy of state and capital to draw upon the region for cheap labour, the shoring up of the Zimbabwe regime, and officials’ own treatment of immigrants from the region – especially in the last decade when warnings of xenophobic backlash grew sharper – meant that millions of people without adequately protected civil rights have flooded into post-apartheid South Africa. They have apparently lowered the wage rate considerably, to the delight of capital and anger of workers. The lack of services available in townships and shack settlements is another feature of conflict. The rampant corruption in the Department of Home Affairs adds to tensions. There is no excuse for the way that thousands of xenophobic low-income and working-class South Africans responded, by attacking what they perceived as the primary proximate cause of their problems, the immigrant. There is no excuse for the way that many middle-class people – including researchers from the Human Sciences Research Council – joined the bandwagon.

In contrast, this report is about a new internationalism being forged by South Africa’s grassroots social movements and labour at the beginning of the 21st century. Every effort along these lines carries baggage. To do our story justice would require, of course, a full analysis of the 19th century’s anti-slavery movement (easier in the wake of last year’s debunking of Charles Wilburforce on the bicentenary of his prohibition law) and of so many developments in the 20th century. The combination of PanAfricanism, imported progressive traditions (especially from trade unions, radical churches and socialist movements) and Third Worldist unity ultimately made South Africa a crucial site of civil society internationalism.

Tremendous efforts were made to forge solidarity across vast time spans and distances, beginning with the earliest recorded conference of Africans (in London) organised by Sylvester-Williams in 1900 and simultaneous efforts to build diasporic unity by Garvey, Padmore and du Bois, as well as lesser-known stalwarts of African internationalism like Anna Julia Cooper and Anna Jones in New York and Charlotte Manye Maxeke in South Africa. Further conferences in Paris (1919), (1921), New York (1927), Manchester (1945) took these movements forward, and several sites in post-independence Africa – Accra, Dar es Salaam, Harare - soon became crucial staging grounds for solidarity. But it was anti-apartheid internationalism from the mid-1950s that, as Hakan Thorn shows in our second chapter, helped set the moral stage for the global justice movement’s rise in various ways.

For it was only at the outset of the 21st century that we realised the durability of the little seeds of internationalism that had been sprouting around South Africa. This particularly came home in 2001 in Durban, when we as editors understood the importance of residual and renewed internationalist work in civil society. It wasn’t long before Adam Habib had founded the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2002. In 2003-04, CCS scholars Ashwin Desai and Peter Dwyer initiated an investigation into how the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) and World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) promoted internationalism. This study permitted us a chance to consolidate critical opinion about both local and global social policy. The sponsors at the UN Research Institute for Social Development and the Ford Foundation (especially Lisa Jordan) are thanked for
their foresight in bringing this project to life.

The overall objective of the research was ‘to critically assess the impact of the various UN summits on civil society activism at global, national and local levels’. This was done through considering how UN Summits created ‘a favourable political space for increased civil society density and activism’, how civil society planned, implemented and monitored ‘the principal agenda and agreed programmes subsequent to the world summits’, and the ‘linkages among civil society organisations, both horizontally and vertically.’ South Africa has a great deal of empirical material to draw upon, and already two specialised books reflected on the WCAR and WSSD: respectively, Eric Mann’s Dispatches from Durban and Victor Munnik and Jessica Wilson’s A World Comes to One Country. We are grateful to both sets of authors for permission to reproduce excerpts in this collection.

We are most grateful for conceptualisation and organisation by Kléber Ghimire of UNRISD. We also were stimulated by the country teams which reported on similar processes in other UN Summit settings:

- Indonesia: Antonio Prajasto, Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Jakarta
- Chile: Juan Carlos Gómez Leyton, Universidad de Chile, Santiago
- Brazil: Silvada De Paula, Brazilian Institute of Social and Economic Analyses, Rio de Janeiro
- Senegal: Fatou Sarr, L’Institut fondamental d’Afrique noire de l’Université de Dakar, Dakar
- China: Xiaoyuan Shang, Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University, Beijing.

As already reported by UNRISD, there were ‘ambivalent’ findings from research on world summits. In part this reflected the somewhat more hostile environment for civil society in relation to such summits, according to Britta Sadoun, writing in mid 2005:

[A]rrangements—both ongoing and planned—for future civil society participation within the UN policy discussion process set more restrictions with regard to NGO participation. The document on UN–civil society relations prepared by the Secretary-General’s Panel of Eminent Persons on Civil Society and UN Relationships proposes establishing a single accreditation process for the entire UN system, including its sub-bodies and agencies. Though this measure may reduce bureaucratic overlaps, it in fact limits the access of NGOs to parts of the UN system as ad-hoc accreditations are limited.1

A February 2006 meeting of the research group in Durban convinced us that the studies we had embarked upon merited a broader intellectual consideration of how an independent, critical network of South African civil society used the two UN summits to forge relations that encompassed and extended into a variety of other foreign policy and economic policy agendas. Hence ‘foreign policy, bottom up’ became a wide-ranging enquiry, which also entailed relating progressive South African intellectualism to a broader network, in Africa and the world.

Other scholar-activists and organisers were simultaneously contributing to the analysis (and so many fine articles written during the early/mid 2000s have found their way into this

report), especially after South Africans began going to the World Social Forum, African Social Forum, and Southern African Social Forum. Without their stories and their voices, in Part Four, we would not be able to properly communicate just how powerful a politics South Africans have tended to introduce to the process. Many of the articles come from Khanya College’s excellent Khanya journal. These writers are warmly thanked for permission to adapt their analysis for our purposes.

Finally, one crucial event in recent weeks restored our sense that if the organisations of working-class South and Southern Africans set their mind to it, an enormous amount of damage-reduction to Pretoria’s foreign policy can be accomplished. That event – dockworkers as the main catalysts foiling the Mbeki-Mugabe importation of three million bullets to Zimbabwe, ultimately to be used in the backs of the povo - was captured in a series of newspaper articles excerpted immediately below.

Patrick Bond, Durban
Ashwin Desai, Johannesburg
25 July 2008

(Bond is director of the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal; at the time of the initial UNRISD research, Desai was a CCS honorary researcher, and subsequently joined the University of Johannesburg Centre for Sociological Research and Rhodes University Institute for Social and Economic Research.)
Southern African dockworkers defeat the An Yue Jiang, Mugabe and Mbeki

The Mercury, 17 April 2008
Ship carrying arms ‘for Zim’ cleared

A Chinese ship, whose cargo is believed to include arms for Zimbabwe, had been cleared to dock and offload its cargo at Durban’s port, Transnet said yesterday.

Transnet spokesperson John Dludlu said in a statement: ‘As for vessel An Yue Jiang, we wish to confirm that this vessel with its cargo destined for Zimbabwe is at anchorage outside the Port of Durban.

‘As is procedure with all vessels, the vessel and its cargo have been cleared by the relevant authorities.’

However, Dludlu did not say what the ship was carrying, although according to Noseweek editor Martin Welz, its cargo includes a shipment of arms.

The ship’s master, who identified himself as captain Sunaijun, said by radio phone that there was ‘no dangerous cargo’ on board.

Asked if there was cargo destined for Zimbabwe, he said that there was. However, it was not possible to get clarity on the contents of the cargo owing to the poor quality of the radio signal.

Earlier Inspector Nicholas Gunther, of the police explosives unit in Durban, said the An Yue Juang was carrying weapons.

‘There are arms on the vessel and the ship is on the outer anchorage of the port and it’s been docked here since April 14. We have not allowed it in because they have no clearance...’

Press statement, 22 April 2008
COSATU mobilises against illegal Zimbabwe regime

The Congress of South African Trade Unions welcomes the statement by a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman that the China Ocean Shipping Company which owns the An Yue Jiang, has decided to recall the ship because Zimbabwe cannot take delivery of the 77 tonnes of weapons and ammunition onboard.

If true, this is an historic victory for the international trade union movement and civil society, and in particular for the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union, whose members refused to unload or transport its deadly cargo.

Today’s meeting between the COSATU General Secretary, Zwelinzima Vavi and the Secretary General of the Movement for Democratic Change, Tendai Biti, confirmed beyond all doubt that the people of Zimbabwe are now facing a massive crisis - a brutal onslaught from a regime that is determined to cling to power by stealing the elections and imposing its will through violence.

In COSATU’s view the ‘government’ of Robert Mugabe is now illegal and illegitimate. Its term of office expired at the end of March when the people voted. Its has refused to release the results of the presidential election and has illegally organised a recount of votes in 23 constituencies in which the ruling ZANU-PF lost narrowly to the MDC, long after the time limit of 48 hours had expired. It has even been ‘recounting’ the presidential votes in those constituencies before they had been announced.

Combined with this blatant vote-rigging, the ruling party has unleashed a systematic
campaign of violence against MDC members and supporters, which has already claimed at least ten lives. Thousands have been displaced from their homes, five hundred injured and hospitalised and these numbers are increasing by the day.

Meanwhile the ‘government’ is continuing to rule illegally, with the former ministers restored to their posts, even those who lost their seats in the parliamentary elections. COSATU demands that the governments of Africa refuse to recognise this despot who is desperately hanging on to power, and to stop inviting him to meetings of the SADC or AU.

COSATU salutes the stand taken by its transport affiliate SATAWU and other unions around the continent, and now calls upon all its affiliates and Southern African trade union partners, to identify, and refuse to handle, any goods destined for Zimbabwe which could be used to assist the illegal government or be used to oppress the people...

---

**Mail & Guardian, 2 May 2008**

**Did the weapons go through Angola?**

Mandy Rossouw, Nic Dawes and Jason Moyo

For a massive ship that carries tons of ammunition and has its own cranes on board, the controversial Chinese ship carrying arms for Zimbabwe is about as easy to pin down as a cockroach in a dark, damp cellar.

The An Yue Jiang is carrying three million rounds of ammunition for AK-47s, 1 500 rocket-propelled grenades and several thousand mortar rounds. The cargo was destined for Zimbabwe, where the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) says violence is at its worst since the country became independent.

Maritime and arms-control experts could only speculate on the whereabouts of the Chinese Ocean Shipping Company (Cosco) cargo ship this week, which was meant to be heading back to China. It has managed to stay under the radar after leaving South African waters, but was spotted near the Angolan coast on April 25.

On Wednesday the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) said the An Yue Jiang was still outside the port of Luanda but had neither docked nor shown signs of returning to China.

‘It appears that the ship slowed right down over the weekend, probably while it awaited orders. The fact that it then made full speed for Luanda suggests that it got them. We trust that they will be for it to take on fuel and make their way home and that no attempt will be made to land any of its cargo of arms. Given the lack of any definitive promise from Cosco or the Chinese government to this effect, we can promise that the world will be watching what happens next, ITF general secretary David Cockroft said...

Newspaper reports this week said that Malawian and Zimbabwean intelligence officials and politicians made their way to Angola to meet Dos Santos.

The M&G has learned that Mugabe’s right-hand man, Cabinet minister Emmerson Mnangagwa, was accompanied by the country’s top spy, Happyton Bonyongwe, and other security figures on his quest to deliver a ‘special message’ to Dos Santos this week.

‘I think people also underestimate the basis of some of our alliances in the region,’ a senior Zimbabwean diplomat who was involved in the Mnangagwa mission said. He pointed to a decade-old ‘military pact’ between Zimbabwe with Angola and Namibia...

---

**Satawu Media Release, 8 May 2008**

**Chinese Vessel still in African Waters**
Satawu can confirm that the Au Yue Jiang is still on African shores attempting to off load the controversial lethal weapons destined for Zimbabwe. The latest reports through our global trade union federation, the International Transport workers Federation (ITF) confirm that she docked in the Port of Labito in Angola and off loaded building materials only. The report further confirms that the lethal weapons were not handled by Angolan dockers and therefore not off loaded. The vessel is now on its way to Congo Brazzaville where we believe a further attempt will be made to off load the weapons. The Durban based ITF inspectorate working with Satawu has been monitoring its movements and will leave for Congo Brazzaville on an urgent basis to ensure that the weapons are not off loaded there.

Satawu condemns both the Chinese government and the Chinese ship owners, COSCO for creating a false impression globally that they had recalled the vessel. This so called recall was clearly only intended to deceive and remove the massive groundswell of political pressure that had built up in a very short period of time. Both the Chinese government and COSCO have regrettably demonstrated that ‘profiteering’ remains the over riding consideration over human solidarity and ‘saving lives’. It appears a judgement call has been made by them to wait around until the Zimbabwean electoral crises is over, it will be a long wait in the context of avoiding a return trip and wasted expenditure.

Satawu, Cosatu, ITF and ITUC have already been vindicated with regard to the moral stance it had taken given what is taking place in Zimbabwe now in the build up to the presidential run off.

We again strongly call on all African governments and dock workers to refuse the vessel docking access and to refuse handling the weapons with a view to ensure that the vessel leaves African shores immediately.

We call on the United Nations to bring pressure to bear on the Chinese government to practically demonstrate their commitment to recall and stop using the politics of deception.

‘Satawu’s interest lies only with the six containers of lethal weapons on board being boycotted and returned to Beijing until the political crises in Zimbabwe is resolved in the context of the possibility of genuine democracy reinstated based on the will of the people there. To this extent local, African and global media must ensure that this important humane story remains in the public discourse until the vessel returns with the weapons on board as the struggle did not end in Durban on 18 April 2008 ′, said Randall Howard Satawu General Secretary.

Sapa-AFP 22 May 2008

Zim denies taking delivery of Chinese arms

Harare, Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe government on Thursday denied taking delivery of a consignment of weapons from China after a ship carrying the arms was prevented from unloading its cargo.

‘The shipment did not dock and there has not been delivery as yet,’ Defence Minister Sydney Sekeramayi told journalists in Harare...
Lessons of the An Yue Jiang

In the past few days, media have carried reports that the An Yue Jiang did offload its arms cargo in Angola, that South Africa facilitated the process by refuelling the ship and that Zimbabwean government authorities confirmed receipt of the weaponry.

For what it’s worth, I don’t think the reports are true. They seem to be an assemblage of the speculation that has been doing the rounds for some time now and contradict a number of things we know as fact.

We know for instance that the ship took on fuel and supplies at Luanda, a process that would have been unnecessary had it only recently been refuelled at sea by South Africa’s navy. Human rights inspectors confirm that only construction cargo was offloaded in Luanda and so there was no offload of arms there.

Although the ship couldn’t be tracked at all times and reasons therefore are suspicious, its speed and location were nonetheless recorded with sufficient regularity to enable its course to be plotted with some precision.

It seems almost impossible that the ship tracked north of Luanda to discharge its arms cargo, as some reports have suggested, before returning south to reach Luanda on the dates we know it to have entered port.

It also seems incredible that the ship might have offloaded its arms cargo at any port south of Luanda undetected. As for an off-sea transfer of cargo to another ship, there appears to have been no vessels in the proximity of the An Yue Jiang capable of conveying such cargo and such a process is notoriously difficult and time-consuming.

Zimbabwe’s Deputy Minister of Information, Bright Matonga, claims that Zimbabwe is in receipt of the weapons already. But he has been making that claim for several weeks now.

Even if it is true, even if the arms are in Zimbabwe, that wouldn’t mean that the Southern Africa-wide opposition to the transfer of the arms -- on the part of trade unions, churches and human rights organisations -- was for naught. We know that in the interim the Zimbabwean government may have received any number of other arms shipments from a variety of unsavoury sources. The opposition action mattered because of the solidarity it showed with Zimbabwean people -- a concern for their safety and well-being.

Matonga can take television cameras to record the serial numbers of the weapons he alleges were received and still he can’t defeat what the ship action represented.

Sadly, the recent spate of xenophobic attacks in South Africa on foreigners, principally Zimbabweans, can. Because far from standing with Zimbabweans, this violence suggests we would attack them in their hour of greatest need.

In the weeks since the Durban court order halting the transfer of arms across South Africa, we have been inundated with messages from Zimbabweans hoping that we might help in ways I wish we could. My email inbox is filled with the most horrific images: pictures of dead bodies, bandaged children, the skin of men’s torsos ripped through with bicycle chains and seeping from burns and now, almost ubiquitously, men and women’s buttocks, not just bruised, but so broken you can see the tissue beneath.

And then there are the accounts: of an electoral observer who has gone into hiding for fear of Zanu-PF vengeance, but whose 14-year-old son was caught and so badly beaten he had to be hospitalised. As much as the electoral observer wants to return home to his son, he can’t for fear that the perpetrators are waiting.

And of a 65-year-old woman who, with her husband – government recognised ‘compliance farmers’ -- has post-election been evicted from her farm, whose belongings were simply tossed outside and whose breast prostheses, presumably of no value to anyone except cancer survivors like herself, was taken during the eviction process.

These are just isolated snapshots of the widespread violence playing itself out across
Zimbabwe: detail which disrupts the meaninglessness of massive atrocity.

But imagine fleeing all of that arbitrary and senseless cruelty only to find that in the place of your refuge -- here in South Africa -- you are again the victim of violence and intimidation.

May 25, which is traditionally commemorated as Africa Day, will see the launch of the Stand Up (for) Zimbabwe campaign. Events are planned in Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia and throughout the region. Cosatu and the Treatment Action Campaign will march to the Union Buildings in Tshwane.

The campaign is intended to allow church congregations and audiences at sporting and music events to stand up for a few minutes in a demonstration of solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe -- a call to the region and the world to act decisively to end the violence in Zimbabwe and to resolve the political crisis.

The campaign is also intended to show that the only strangers to our country should be those who would use violence and intimidation against others.

Nicole Fritz is the director of the Southern Africa Litigation Centre

---

_The Mercury, 27 May 2008_

Chinese say arms not in Zimbabwe

The Chinese government has insisted again that the Chinese arms that were being shipped to Zimbabwe have not been unloaded and are being returned to China.

The Chinese embassy in Pretoria yesterday issued a statement quoting Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang as saying that recent news reports that the Chinese cargo ship An Yue Jiang had unloaded its arms cargo in Africa were ‘utterly groundless’.

According to the embassy, a journalist asked Qin in Beijing to comment on SA media reports that ‘China’s cargo ship An Yue Jiang had arrived in Zimbabwe (sic) and that the Zimbabwe government had confirmed receiving the goods’.

Qin replied: ‘As we have said on many occasions, relevant military goods will be shipped back by An Yue Jiang which is now on its way home. Relevant report is utterly groundless.’

He appeared to be referring to SA press reports quoting a Zimbabwe government spokesman as saying the Chinese arms had been delivered to Zimbabwe.

The movement of the ship and its cargo of arms has been shrouded in mystery and controversy for several weeks ever since it was prevented from delivering the arms in Durban by a union refusal to unload the cargo, and a court decision.
Chapter 1
Introduction

By Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai

When the State trembled, a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only the outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks... The massive structures of modern democracies, both as State organisations, and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position.

-Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

At the turn of the millennium in South Africa and many other sites across the world, a new spirit seemed to emerge, converge and reach critical mass: dissent at ‘neoliberal’, pro-corporate, anti-people policies. In Gramscian terms, it appeared that the powerful system of states – backed by an essentially conservative civil society – was potentially subject to a war of maneuver, not only of position. The art of politics was moving from trenches to a set of battlegrounds, amongst which several major United Nations global summits would feature. This was especially true in South Africa. It had taken a full half-decade of liberation for a large group of committed progressive activists to realise that there were few prospects of top-down change, given the balance of forces.

Internationally, two decades of ‘IMF Riots’ – short, sharp reactions by oppressed people to international economic pressures – had begun to transform into mass opposition parties and movements. Many moved from a war of position to a war of manuevre.

Most famously, on 1 January 1994, the Zapatista movement spoke from an obscure region of southeastern Mexico about the suffering of Third World people when ‘neoliberalism’ (free market economic policies) accompanies longstanding political repression. The Zapatista guerrillas, peasants, liberation theologians and intellectuals successfully melded indigenous people’s militancy and highly effective use of communication technologies. The result was widespread international resonance with Zapatismo’s critique of the architectures of global power, making the people of Chiapas emblems of something much larger.

At the end of 1999, the Seattle protest against the World Trade Organisation was another critical rupture, putting elites everywhere on notice that democracy’s global-scale deficits were no longer immune to society’s critical gaze.

Back home, here in Durban, the spirit we term ‘foreign policy, bottom-up’ took root at the same moment in what initially appeared as a purely municipal matter: the Concerned Citizens Forum’s investigation of community grievances in Chatsworth and other sites within South Africa’s second-largest metropolis. The problems were soon articulated by grassroots activists in not merely local, but also national and also international terms. The education of Chatsworth and Durban as a whole culminated in a series of physical and court battles between the community and the municipality in early 2000 over evictions and water/electricity disconnections.

In April 2000, the World Bank and International Monetary held their spring meetings in Washington and ‘two Trevors’ – Manuel chairing the Board of Governors and Ngwane teaching 30,000 people to toyi-toyi in protest – were filmed by Ben Cashdan for the SABC news magazine Special Assignment. In no small part thanks to Dennis Brutus, who launched the World Bank Bond Boycott with Ngwane that month in Washington, the Jubilee South Africa movement that had begun a couple of years earlier moved to centre stage by bringing up the problem of apartheid debt, and the demand for reparations.

The reparations campaign would hit national headlines in 2003 when a lawsuit against international corporations that in which Brutus was a co-plaintiff – filed by Khulumani Victims Support Group and Jubilee SA in the New York courts - was opposed by Thabo Mbeki and Penuell Maduna, as discussed below. In 2007, after an early court defeat that threw the case out, the plaintiffs’ appeal in the US courts was victorious, leading Mbeki to again back US corporations, claiming the judges implied ‘that US courts are better placed to judge the pace and degree of South Africa’s national reconciliation. I can’t understand why any South African would want to be brought under such judicial imperialism.’ The answer was obvious: justice was not being done to apartheid’s victims at home. The case continued in 2008.

At the same time the South African activists began targeting international finance, Thabo Mbeki declared himself a dissident/denialist on AIDS, and the Treatment Action Campaign arose above fierce stigmatisation and repression to humiliate Mbeki at the June 2000 international AIDS conference in Durban, and generated extremely powerful internationalist links which by 2001 had defeated the Big Pharma lobbyists in the courts of global public opinion and in the South African courts too.

The next month in Johannesburg, July 2000, an ‘Urban Futures’ conference allowed the newly-formed Anti-Privatisation Forum to flower. A Free Burma Campaign and Palestinian Support Committee gathered strength, with periodic protests at the Myanmar and Israeli embassies, often pointing out Pretoria’s hypocritical relations with both regimes. Other solidarity movements emerged with democratic forces in Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Western Sahara.

When the Iraq War began in 2003, South African activists were very active protesting both George W. Bush and the state’s Denel Corporation, which was selling arms to the Bush/Blair regimes for use in Iraq. (To be sure, one section of the anti-war movement, with Alliance and some church membership, did not raise or support the critique of Denel, and that was one reason for a split anti-war movement, with the left mobilising much larger numbers of protesters.)

**Burma, top-down elite diplomacy and bottom-up international solidarity**

We learn a great deal about what is at stake from briefly reviewing even just one such solidarity struggle: for a free Burma. Founded in 1995 in Durban by academic Kiru Naidoo, the Free Burma Campaign South Africa was given a great boost by Dr Thein Win, a Burmese doctor in exile who regularly convened the group in Johannesburg during the 2000s. Another leading anti-apartheid activist, Graham Bailey, became FBCSA vice-chair as well as coordinator for African Affairs of National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, the government in exile of Aung San Suu Kyi. Burmese exiles were great inspirations, and talented activists like Dale McKinley knew where to apply pressure on the state and capital.

For several years, attempts by the FBCSA failed to generate movement towards goals
such as closure of the Pretoria embassy, full sanctions, support in the United Nations for
tough actions and so on. Periodically, small symbolic victories were won, such as breaking
tourism and trading ties. Although the ANC government permitted an occasional
parliamentary committee hearing (where notably on one occasion, ANC MP Pallo Jordan of
the foreign affairs committee fell asleep during a Burmese exile government leader’s
address), it continued a fruitless quiet diplomacy with the Rangoon regime.

Indeed, instead of showing showing solidarity with Suu Kyi, whose party won the 1990
elections with 80 percent of the vote but was not allowed to take power, the South African
government of Nelson Mandela had actually recognised the military junta in 1994 (the only
government to do so in the wake of the vote theft) and repeatedly coddled the Myanmar
regime. When in 2002 its ambassador to SA was found to have brought a 15-year old ‘sex
slave’ from Burma, the Department of Foreign Affairs looked away. It took the efforts of the
FBCSA to liberate the girl to a place of safety and open a police docket (the ambassador had,
however, diplomatic immunity). The ambassador went home to Burma where the junta
named him a Plenipotentiary and Ambassador Extraordinaire.

Pretoria studiously avoided any public action or condemnation of Myanmar repression,
culminating in January 2007 at the United Nations Security Council, when ambassador
Dumisani Khumalo – formerly amongst the most powerful US-based anti-apartheid activists
- sided with the Russian and Chinese regimes to prevent discussion of a resolution calling
for Burmese democracy which was supported by Suu Kyi’s party. Khumalo claimed that the
case of Burma did not warrant Security Council attention because it was a national not
international matter, and that the Human Rights Commission was preferable.

This produced outrage from many quarters in South Africa, in part given that Khumalo
and his ANC colleagues had lobbied the Security Council on similar issues against apartheid
South Africa for several decades. In March 2007, the KwaZulu-Natal Social Movements
Indaba (SMI) invited Bailey to speak at a Human Rights Day protest at City Hall. To take up
Bailey’s account in The Mercury newspaper,

Having so many real issues and serious problems of their own, it was absolutely
humbling that the SMI were able to find the interest and compassion to make space on
their schedule to invite this author to address them on the issue of Aung San Suu Kyi, the
lady known as ‘Asia’s Mandela’. The elected head of government and Nobel Peace Prize
winner who has been under ‘house arrest’ for 12 years out of the last 18 for winning her
country’s elections, and Burma’s brutal and illegal government which allows it’s military
to rape and murder the country’s women, men and children, burn its own people’s
villages and murder its ethnic minorities.

The Durban SMI recognised that Burma is an issue needing support and international
solidarity. What a heartwarming gesture, people who have little, some almost nothing,
extending their sympathy and political support to another people whom they recognise
also have almost nothing.

Burma (Myanmar) is a matter of international human rights concern throughout the
world, and another matter that has been deserving of serious attention for over 40 years.
It is also another matter that the ANC government has chosen to ignore from a human
rights and good governance standpoint to put profits before principal just as they have
done with the ‘underclasses’ in Durban and continue to allow 50 million people in
Burma to suffer under a dictators bloody mailed fist.

What a contrast therefore that the real benefactors of the fruits of the anti-pass campaign
the ANC government have become so indifferent to the plight of the countries former pass holders. Indifferent to the people that supported them when they needed support, both at home and in the international community.

It is time our government rethought their role, rethought their responsibility.

It was only in October 2007 when the entire world – including even China – condemned the Myanmar junta for its violent crackdown on peaceful protesters (especially monks), that Pretoria took action, with deputy foreign minister Sue van der Merwe calling in the ambassador to extend a vaguely worded protest. Again, the emphasis came from civil society, for the FBCSA and Archbishop Desmond Tutu joined forces to criticise golfing legend Gary Player, who – consistent with his prior pro-apartheid propaganda work - had built a golf course in Burma for the generals a few years earlier. Nelson Mandela was persuaded to end his Children’s Fund association with Player’s famous invitational golf tournament as a result of the great social rising disgust catalysed by the activists, a matter that probably cost the fund millions of rands in lost benefits.

Other forms of grassroots internationalism

Environmental campaigning with global linkages also developed during the late 1990s, as the post-apartheid government’s ecological stewardship proved worse than apartheid’s, i.e., more favorable to profits over people and planet. In nearly every category of threats to ecology – natural and social – this is well enough documented by even the government’s own statistics. Some of the internationalist networks that emerged to fight state and capital focused specifically upon hazardous chemicals (Thor mercury), occupational safety and health (especially asbestosis), nuclear energy, incineration, timber plantations and the petroleum industry. In Durban, by the mid-2000s, some of the strongest civil society linkages and solidarity relations were being forged by communities struggling with oil (South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and groundWork, e.g. with Nigerian and Ecuadoran anti-petroleum activists) and other toxins, and fighting carbon trading (Durban Group for Climate Justice).

Other Durban organisations with international allies include the famous street traders of whom more than 500 were arrested by rigid municipal police over petty by-law violations on a single day in June 2007 (one vehicle was the NGO Streetnet); shackdwellers (the highest profile of whom, in Abahlali baseMjondolo, had marches and protests regularly banned or repressed); municipal services activists (Chatsworth); fisherfolk subject to forced removal from the city’s vast port in part due to US anti-terrorist provisions; and university academics (here at UKZN a 9-day strike in 2006 and ongoing freedom of expression issues receive global media coverage). Durban activists with connections to global networks also helped establish a strong critique of Mbeki’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development, which had a high-profile airing (and protest) at the launch of the African Union at the Durban International Convention Centre in mid-2002. Four years later at the same location, the International Sociological Association met many of the same organic intellectuals who interacted with academics at the organisation’s quadrennial congress, witnessing Desai’s Wolpe lecture referred to below.

South African trade unions also regularly protested injustices on the regional and international stages, especially giving much-needed support to democratic and labor forces in Zimbabwe and Swaziland (the Mbeki government was partial to both repressive
regimes). This was not necessarily easy during a period of rising working-class xenophobia and populist yellow-peril campaigning against East Asian goods.

Labor internationalism was uneven, for during the late 1990s and early 2000s, some sections of the Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) also mistakenly endorsed the failed, protectionist ‘Social Clause’ concept within the framework of myopic World Trade Organisation reform, and occasionally issues myopic global governance proposals stemming from the International Labour Organisation and the South African government.

But generally, Cosatu has maintained a progressive internationalist approach, finding common cause with oppressed peoples. Moreover, Cosatu and the SA Community Party regularly offer strong moral support to the Cuban, Bolivian and Venezuelan governments. The overall problem for Cosatu is its Alliance with the ANC government, which meant, for instance, a conference on internationalism held in late 2007 witnessed state officials posturing about progressive foreign policy initiatives, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding.

These are just examples – not a comprehensive list - of how, dating to the turn of the 21st century, a ‘foreign policy bottom-up’ was established by progressive South Africans under difficult conditions, in which ‘talk left walk right’ rhetoric from the ANC sometimes distracts attention. It is a most impressive group of social forces that call on their global-justice compatriots for assistance, as did the anti-apartheid movement to achieve sanctions, sports boycotts and solidaristic funding from the 1950s-1990s. Many of the detailed stories about this phenomenon, including its contradictions and seamier side, are to be found in the pages that follow.

To illustrate, one obvious point that unites many of the cases above is the middle-class basis for many initial appeals to internationalist solidarity, as workers in NGOs (and to some extent universities) fire up the internet ether and make connections that in turn relate many of the base movements to each other in sectoral gatherings at sites like the WSF. But precisely that power and capacity require serious scrutiny so that they are not misused, as discussed in the final chapter.

As for the WSF, our final section takes on many of the most difficult aspects of organising social forum coalitions in various parts of the country, region and world. Yet, as Dennis Brutus puts it in his collection Poetry and Protest,

All over Africa people are getting together, in fact are compelled to get together. The burden of debt, of hunger, of literal starvation—the lack of drinkable water, lack of food, is forcing people to mobilise, to organise, and to protest. And it will grow. What we need—and this is very important—is allies in other parts of the world... The African Social Forum for me began all the way back in Seattle, when people took the streets and confronted the World Trade Organisation and the World Bank and the IMF plus the corporate powers, Bill Gates and Microsoft and all the rest of them— Boeing and the rest. But since then, 1999, at the beginning of the century, people have been in the streets, challenging corporate power and challenging the corporate agenda. So in Africa we’ve developed an African Social Forum, as there is a European Social Forum and an Asian Social Forum. And there is also the World Social Forum some of you may have attended in Porto Alegre [Brazil], and also in Mumbai, and we are getting it together. If there is global oppression, I’m glad to say there is also global resistance... We are building a world liberation movement.
The report’s architecture

This report considers several areas of popular versus elite foreign policy-making reflected in these and subsequent developments. In Part One, we take up the trajectory from the 2001 World Conference Against Racism to the reparations case – including late 2007 developments - to draw out aspects of anti-racist solidarity that Pretoria would rather forget. To do so we have essays on anti-apartheid era links to the global justice movements by Hakan Thorn; a survey of the civil society scene by Desai and Peter Dwyer; reports from the front by Brutus and Ben Cashdan; a dispatch to the US by Eric Mann; and Bond’s linkages to the reparations debate.

Part Two moves from Durban to Joburg, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Taking us there are Prishani Naidoo, who very frankly lays out the complications associated with civil society alliance-building, followed by further autocritiques by Desai and Dwyer about the movement’s strategy, tactics and alliances. Two further chapters by Bond and by Victor Munnik and Jessica Wilson relate civil society, state and business within the WSSD.

The WSSD was not the first time that South Africans would tackle multilateral neoliberal threat. Part Three includes a brief report by Dennis Brutus on his tussle with the World Bank in April 2000. There are a further two studies of Nepad and the African Peer Review Mechanism, by Eduard Jordaan and Ian Taylor who consider the weak scope for African elite solidarity towards democracy, and Bond who also targets South African subimperial tendencies as one reason for a bottom-up African civil society critique.

Part Four gives a much clearer sense of alternative movements and strategies, because we consider the strengths and many weaknesses of the World Social Forum and its offshoots. To begin, James Ferguson theorises the case for bottom-up linkages across borders.

The most difficult such linkages in Africa may well relate to the Africa Social Forum, which George Dor tracks from its first Bamako meeting in 2002. By 2004, progressive South African enthusiasm for the WSF reflected the more radical turn experienced in Mumbai, as Mondli Hlatshwayo and Oupa Lehulere explain. The following year in Lusaka at the next Africa Social Forum, the debates between contending forces within civil society had become razor sharp, according to Amanda Alexander and Mandisa Mbali.

Further constructive critiques were made by Nerisha Baldevu and Maria van Driel of the Bamako and Harare meetings of the WSF and SASF in early and late 2006, respectively. By the time of the Nairobi WSF in 2007, Trevor Ngwane helped lead protesters against the WSF, or at least that part of which represented ‘globalisation from the middle’. In an even more critical spirit, a chapter by Franco Barchiesi, Heinrich Bohmke, Prishani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava tackle the tendencies to bureaucratisation. To conclude, Bond provides a summary of some core debates over ways forward for the WSF.

Since most of the South African sites of foreign policy-making via popular resistance in Parts One-Three are responses to establishment initiatives, it is important to shift in Part Four to the proactive efforts from below, but to do so with a strong sense of critique. The WSF and its affiliates are still a ‘space’ under construction for progressives, and hence the powerful analysis, critique and activism that South Africans have launched in these pages have to be set in context.

Finally in Part Five, the most difficult issue arises. Bond and Desai address the problem of xenophobia as the antithesis of progressive internationalism. We do so with a sense that
both structural processes in political economy (exacerbating competition for mere survival in many cases), and malevolent state behaviour, are mainly to blame. These led, in quite direct ways, to internecine rivalries and a deep sense of popular disregard for the needs of South African subimperialism’s regional victims.

To turn around that disregard requires the organisations of the working class to more vigorously make the critique of neoliberal political economy and Pretoria’s foreign policy, together.

**When top down politics does not work, bottom-up civil society can**

The most important context, we feel, is that elite global governance projects are simply not working. This was most evident in the Bali climate discussions in December, which represented a failure to agree on serious targets for greenhouse gas reduction, or mechanisms that transcend the Kyoto Protocol’s controversial carbon trading strategy. We are not alone in the sense that elite processes are not effective. From UNRISD, Kleber Ghimire registers pessimism based on his survey of those sometimes too ‘spontaneous and informal’ movements which address debt, trade barriers, the Tobin tax on financial transactions, anticorruption and fair trade agendas:

> [A]lthough governments, bilateral bodies and international development institutions are beginning to pay more attention to such reformist transnational movements, this has not resulted in significant policy impacts... There are major ideological limitations of the system to readily accommodate such demands... There are few signs of stable interactions between formal political bodies and social movements. Internal divisions persist between reformist and radical forces within the movements themselves...  

This is why it is crucial to recognise the South African contribution to more critical kinds of internationalism that often eschew the conference halls and commissions so beloved of NGO internationalists. South African civil society produced three bouts of important mass internationalist protest activity, with more than 10 000 people marching against the UN’s World Conference Against Racism (in Durban, September 2001) for failing to put reparations and Zionism on the agenda; more than 25 000 demonstrating against the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, August 2002) for embracing neoliberal environmental and social strategies; and more tens of thousands protesting the war against Iraq (countrywide, 2003-04).

South Africans have also been instrumental in trying to remove the boot of the Bretton Woods Institutions from Third World necks, harking back to anti-apartheid analysis, strategy and tactics. As a revival of ‘divestment’ to fight apartheid, the World Bank Bonds Boycott has had remarkable success in defunding the institution that is most often at the coalface of neoliberal repression across the Third World. In addition, South Africans and other activists have won dramatic victories in deglobalising the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights regime, by demanding generic anti-retroviral medicines instead of branded, monopoly-patented drugs. Similar struggles are underway to deglobalise food, especially given the Genetically Modified Organisms threat from transnational corporations, to halt biopiracy, and...
to kick out the water and energy privatisers. These are typically ‘nonreformist reforms’ insofar as they achieve concrete goals, simultaneously link movements, enhance consciousness, develop issues, build democratic organisational forms and generate momentum.

This is a matter for nuanced scale politics: determining whether local community, subnational, national or regional strategies can best mitigate and reverse global economic tyranny for particular issues. Usually we find activists turning away from centralised, corporate-controlled systems of global power, to national and local solutions. To illustrate, the local decommodification agenda entails struggles to turn basic needs into genuine human rights including: free anti-retroviral medicines to fight AIDS (hence disempowering Big Pharma’s Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights claims); 50 litres of free water per person per day (hence ridding Africa of Suez and other water privatisers); 1 kiloWatt hour of free electricity for each individual every day (hence reorienting energy resources from export-oriented mining and smelting, to basic-needs consumption); extensive land reform (hence de-emphasising cash cropping and export-oriented plantations); prohibitions on service disconnections and evictions; free education (hence halting the General Agreement on Trade in Services); and the like.

This kind of agenda comes first and foremost from activists who gradually see that the source of their problems isn’t in fact the officious municipal bureaucrat who denies an applicant ‘indigent’ status so as to prevent discounts on basic services – but instead the global financial institutions and aid agencies who insist on fiscal austerity, indigence policies and means-testing rather than well-funded, generous social policies and universal entitlements. To come to grips with the ways global-scale neoliberalism adapts to critiques (for indeed even the World Bank has accommodated the demand for the abolition of user fees), requires expanded networking amongst those activists.

Allied intellectuals are often involved in global networking and global/local translations of analysis, given that their time, resources and scope typically permit a greater interaction with international literatures and academics. Whether or not they have as much as wisdom as the activists – and often we editors find ourselves at a disadvantage as we confess in the final chapter – remains another kind of struggle.
Part One
From Racism to Reparations
Chapter 2
The anti-apartheid movement and global civil society

By Håkan Thörn

Since the late 18th century, up until its ‘rediscovery’ during the 1980s, the various definitions of the concept of ‘civil society’ has been associated with the political space of the modern nation state. The recently emerging discourse on a ‘global’, ‘international’ or ‘transnational’ civil society thus implies the notion of the emergence of a global political space, a global civil society. However, scepticism toward the notion of a global civil society has also been frequently expressed. Even scholars of transnationalism have been sceptical about the emergence of a global civil society, as they have argued that convincing studies of an emerging global civil society are lacking. Contrary to this, this paper argues that it makes sense to define certain developments during the 20th century in terms of the emergence of a global civil society. One of these developments was the emergence of the transnational anti-apartheid movement, which, from a global perspective, must be seen as one of the most significant social movements during the post-war era. The transnational anti-apartheid movement lasted for more than three decades, from late 1950s to 1994, when the first democratic elections in South Africa were held, and it had a presence on all continents. In this sense, the interactions of the anti-apartheid movement were part of the construction of a global political culture during the Cold War. Further, I argue that the history of the anti-apartheid struggle provides an important historical case for the analysis of present-day global politics, as it is evident that the present mobilisation of a global civil society in relation to economic globalisation and supra-national political institutions such as WTO, IMF and the World Bank, has historical links to the post-war, transnational political culture that the anti-apartheid movement formed an important part of. Movement organisations, action forms and networks that were formed and developed in the anti-apartheid struggle are present in this contemporary context, making the transnational anti-apartheid movement an important historical resource for contemporary global civil society.

Given the number of people that participated in the transnational anti-apartheid movement, as well as its geographical dispersion and its achievements, there is no doubt that it was one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era. In addition to the South African movement organisations, the transnational anti-apartheid network connected thousands of groups and organisations, including solidarity organisations, unions, churches, women’s, youth and student organisations in more than 100 countries. For example, only in Britain more than 184 local groups were affiliated to the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in 1990; and its list of international contacts included anti-apartheid solidarity organisations in 37 countries (MSS AAM 13 & M). Existing as a transnational movement for more than four decades, its impact was not limited to the South African context, as it created transnational networks, organisations and collective action forms that made – and still makes - an impact on national as well as transnational political cultures.

Although the significance of this movement has often been recognised (Della Porta & Kriesi 1999, Keck & Sikkink 1998, Cohen & Rai 2000), little research has been done on anti-apartheid, especially from the perspective of social movement theory. Further, while one of the most crucial aspects of this movement was its construction of transnational networks and
forms of action, most research has focused on its national aspects, looking at the Australian, British, American or South African anti-apartheid movement (Fieldhouse 2005; Massie 1997; Jennett 1989; Voorhes 1999; Seekings 2000).

In this chapter I analyse some of the crucial aspects of the action forms and identification processes of the anti-apartheid movement, relating it to relevant political and historical contexts. I argue that the transnational anti-apartheid struggle proves a relevant case for contemporary theorising and research on transnational social movements and the emergence of a global civil society.

Anti-apartheid and social movement theory beyond Eurocentrism

In the cases where the anti-apartheid struggle has been analysed in terms of a social movement, it has often been related to the discourse on 'new social movements' (NSM). In an article on the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), Stuart Hall argues that it could be seen as one of the new social movements, since it ‘cut across issues of class and party, and organisational allegiance’ (Hall 2000:52). In a similar mode Christine Jennett has analysed the Australian anti-apartheid movement as a new social movement, emphasising its cultural orientation (Jennett 1989). I agree that the anti-apartheid movement displayed many of the central features of ‘new social movements’ as these have been defined in the context of NSM theory (Della Porta & Diani 1999; Melucci 1996; Kriesi et. al. 1995; Cohen & Rai eds. 2000). The struggle against apartheid was part of the emergence of a new transnational political culture during the post-war era, that also included other solidarity movements, as well as student’s, green, peace and women’s movements, often conceptualised as ‘the new social movements’. It was able to unite an extremely broad ‘rainbow coalition’ of organisations and groups, with extremely diverse social basis and ideological orientation. Further, the anti-apartheid movement had a strong cultural orientation, it was highly media oriented and the production and dissemination of information was one of its central activities. Finally, although its actions often had the purpose of putting pressure on governments and political parties, it engaged in extra-parliamentary political action, such as civil disobedience and boycotts, the latter its most important form of collective action.

It is however not possible to use NSM theory to analyze the transnational anti-apartheid movement without making a few modifications. First, ‘old social movements’, predominantly labour movements and church networks, and their increased internationalisation during the post-war era, were an integral part of the anti-apartheid movement, which could be defined as a ‘movement of movements’. Second, and more important, the case of anti-apartheid as a transnational social movement reveals some highly problematic eurocentric assumptions made in the context of NSM theory.

Although the global dimensions of contemporary collective action has often been pointed out, especially by Alberto Melucci (1989; 1996), Western nation states and their transformation to ‘post-industrial’, ‘complex’ or ‘informational’ societies have been the point of departure for theorising on new social movements. In general, NSM theorists have pointed to new social conditions of ‘advanced Western societies’ as a precondition for emergence of new social movements. Consequently, where no such new conditions are clearly present, no new movements can possibly emerge. In spite of this, the concept of ‘new social movements’ has in a few cases been applied in analyses of collective action in the South (Slater ed. 1985; Wignaraja 1992), however often without theoretical debate. One important exception is Ernesto Laclau (1985), who has asked:
…is it not the case that this plurality of the social and this proliferation of political spaces which lie behind the new social movements, are basically typical of advanced industrial societies, whilst the social reality of the Third World, given its lower level of differentiation, can still be apprehended in terms of the more classical categories of sociological and class analysis? The reply is that, besides the fact that this ‘lower level of differentiation’ is a myth, Third World societies have never been comprehensible in terms of a strict class analysis. We hardly need to refer to the Eurocentrism in which the ‘universalisation’ of that analysis was based (Laclau 1985: 30).

Thus, as Peyman Vahabzadeh has argued: ‘the presence of new social movements in non-western societies (i.e., gay, women’s or ecological movements) problematises the explanatory linkage between the postindustrial society and the new social movements’ (Vahabzadeh 2001:624).

The implicit eurocentric and evolutionist thinking often expressed in NSM theory is clearly formulated by Christine Jennett as she is applying Alain Touraine’s theory of social movements in her analysis of the Australian anti-apartheid movement. The movement organisation AAM (Australian Anti-Apartheid Movement), consisting of predominantly white middle-class Australian solidarity activists, is by Jennett defined as a ‘new social movement’, characterised by its orientation toward participatory grassroots democracy. The exile liberation movements, including ANC, PAC and SWAPO, are by the same author defined as ‘historical movements’, characterised by hierarchical forms of organisation and nationalist ideology (Jennett & Stewart 1989:21, Jennett 1989:136, 147).

In a sense new social movement theory has often implicitly been reproducing the Eurocentric evolutionist thinking of classical modernisation theory, in which each country in its development has to pass through similar stages, and where the ‘underdeveloped’ countries of the South are always lagging behind the developed countries of the North. This mode of thinking is also based on what has been called ‘methodological nationalism’ in the sense that the nation state is always the basic unity of the analysis, and development/underdevelopment thus always is related to ‘internal factors’ (Beck 2000). This paradigm ignored the existence of global power relations and economic and political interdependence. In the case of theories of post-industrial society, it was often ‘forgotten’ that the transformation to post-industrial economies in the North presupposed moving industrial production to so called ‘low-wage’ countries in the South. Although few advocates of classical modernisation theory are to be heard today, many of its assumptions are still implicitly present in current social theory. This is the case even in recent globalisation discourse, as social conditions and trends specific to countries in the North are often being universalised (Castells 1996; Paolini 1997).

As I see it, NSM theory has contributed with many valuable insights on contemporary collective action, but it must be de-linked from its eurocentric implications. Social movement studies could thus benefit from integrating perspectives from postcolonial theory (Hall 1996, Bhabha 1994). Postcolonial studies have not only emphasised the importance of the presence of a colonial legacy in the context of the latest phase of the globalisation process, but also the presence and influence of the de-colonisation process and the politics of anti-colonialism on present-day politics (Young 2001 & 2004).

*Applying this perspective to the transnational anti-apartheid movement, and relating it to the debate on new social movements*, it is evident that this movement, displaying all the
characteristics associated with so called ‘new social movements’, emerged out of transnational interactions located in the context of de-colonisation. It was initiated under strong influence of not just ANC, PAC and the political community of South African exiles, but also of the broader anti-colonial struggle.

The first international anti-apartheid movement organisation was International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF), formed with the purpose of providing legal support to individuals prosecuted for violating the apartheid laws and to support the families of ‘apartheid prisoners’ (Herbstein 2004; Shepherd 1977). It was initiated in 1956 (but formally founded as an international organisation only in 1965) as an outgrowth of Christian Action, a group inspired by the anti-colonial movements, engaging in solidarity action and civil disobedience. However, the broader international campaign against apartheid took off in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In June 1959, the anti-colonial Committee of African Organisations (CAO) held a meeting in London, in response to the call of the South African Congress Alliance to boycott South African goods. One of the speakers at the meeting was Julius Nyerere, president of the Tanganyika Africa National Union. The Boycott Committee was formed, and soon it evolved into the independent Boycott Movement, which in 1960 changed its name to the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM), run by South African exiles and a few of their British supporters (MSS AAM 1; Guerney 2000). In 1964 the AAM decided to pay special attention to co-ordination of the transnational anti-apartheid network (MSS AAM 13 & M).

The de-colonisation process clearly marked established politics as well as the emerging alternative political culture in Britain at this time. Both IDAF and AAM were formed as part of what in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s was called ‘new politics’, as I see it an early conceptualisation of certain forms of collective action, foreshadowing the latter ‘new social movements’. At the same time in the 1950s that IDAF was initiated, the British peace movement initiated a mobilisation process influenced by the Indian anti-colonial movement. It was called ‘Operation Gandhi’, and organised ‘sit-ins’ outside of the British Ministry of Defence. The founder of IDAF, Canon John Collins, was also the chairman of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the dominant peace movement organisation in Britain at the time. A public personality involved in the more militant civil disobedience actions that the peace movement at this time continued to stage (and which amongst other things led to the trial against Bertrand Russell, that gained media attention around the whole world) was Reverend Michael Scott. Scott was a priest who had been participating in militant Indian civil disobedience actions as well as black political activism in South Africa. Banned in South Africa in 1950, Scott initiated the anti-colonial Africa Bureau in London, supporting African de-colonisation. Just like the Movement for Colonial Freedom, The Africa Bureau was an important part of an emerging anti-colonial political culture in Britain in late 1950s. As the AAM started to reach outside of the exile circles, it attracted individuals who were part of this political culture.  

To conclude the discussion on the implications of the case of the anti-apartheid movement in relation to the debate on new social movements: I argue that if we use this concept, it must be recognised that new social movements in the West partly emerged out of the global context of de-colonisation, and that the collective experiences and action forms of the anti-colonial struggles in the South were extremely important sources of influence. I

3. Interview with Dorothy Robinson, who was active in the Africa Bureau in the late 1950s and AAM in the early 1960s.
think that the reason for this influence being largely neglected in the context of NSM theory,
is partly due to the methodological nationalism which for a long time has dominated not
just social movement studies but the social sciences in general (Beck 2000).

However, recently a new interdisciplinary field of research has emerged, dealing with
transnational collective action and the changing role of the nation state in the context of the
increasing importance of processes of globalisation (Della Porta & Tarrow 2005; Della Porta
As Keck and Sikkink (1998) has showed, this approach is not only valid in relation to the
recent wave of transnational collective action, but also to historical cases.

Emphasising their theoretical model of ‘political opportunity structures’, social
movement theorists like Della Porta, Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow argue that changes in
international contexts and the emergence of international institutions has created new
opportunities for social movement to act transnationally. However, in relation to what
Tarrow (1998a) calls ‘the strong transnational thesis’, according to which national
opportunity structures are giving away to transnational structures, these social movement
theorists have generally taken a more cautious or sceptical approach (Tarrow 1998a; 1998b).
Tarrow, as well as Della Porta and Kriesi, emphasise that the nation state still is, and for
some time will continue to be, the most important context for social movement mobilisation.

According to some proponents of the ‘strong thesis’, transnational collective action has
resulted in the emergence of a global civil society (Anheier, Glasius & Kaldor 2001 & 2004/5;
Kaldor 2003). However, sceptics like Tarrow has argued that ‘it is hard to find, combined in
the same movement, the conditions necessary to produce a social movement that is, at once,
integrated with several societies, unified in its goals, and capable of sustained interaction
with a variety of political authorities’ (Tarrow 1998a: 240). In a similar vein, Keck and
Sikkink argue that ‘there is a lack of convincing studies of the sustained and specific
processes through which individuals and organisations create...something resembling a
global civil society’ (Keck & Sikkink 1998:33)

However, I would like to argue that the transnational anti-apartheid movement fulfils the
criteria that Tarrow mentions. In this sense the interactions of the anti-apartheid movement
was part of construction of a global civil society during the Cold War, if we understand this
concept as a transnational space where different political cultures intersect (Thörn 2002 &

There is no doubt that national policies, national organisations as well as national
political cultures played a significant role in shaping the anti-apartheid struggle in different
parts of the world. Globalisation does not necessarily mean that the nation state, understood
as a political space, is fading away. Rather, the nation state gains new meanings in the context of
globalisation, just as globalisation has different meanings in different national contexts. However, I
also think that in social movement studies focusing on political opportunity structures, the
relevance of a global perspective on social movement interactions, networks and contexts
has been underestimated. It is not just the issues and the networks of the new movements
that have become increasingly global during the post-war era. The structural processes that
creates the preconditions for the emergence of new forms of collective action are
transnational, rather than bound to any specific nation states. Further, looking at the case of
anti-apartheid, the different opportunities and constraints facing anti-apartheid
organisations in the context of specific nation states, were to a large extent determined by
the belongings of those states to different international communities and their interests, as
well as by wider global and historical contexts. Hence, the nation state can not be used as the
basic unit of the analysis of anti-apartheid collective action.

Turning to theories on the emergence of a global civil society, these have recently been fuelled by the appearance of the ‘global justice movement’ (sometimes called the ‘anti-globalisation movement’) in the streets of Western cities, as well as in a globalised media space (Della Porta & Tarrow 2005; Sen et al. 2003; Anheier, Glasius & Kaldor eds. 2001; Bond 2001). In these discussions, the internet is often highlighted as important in the making of a global civil society (Naughton 2001). However, I would like to argue that more importantly, the present global civil society has historical links to the post-war, transnational political culture in which the anti-apartheid movement played a significant role.

In the following, I will look at the context in which the anti-apartheid emerged as a transnational social movement. In an attempt to go beyond the nation-state oriented analysis of social movements, Della Porta & Kriesi (1999) suggests that we should look at how international constraints and opportunities operate on the different levels of international politics. However, as my focus is on transnational political culture, I prefer to use the concept of context rather than opportunity structure. This is in order to emphasise how transnational collective action at any given time is structure not just by the presence of formal political international institutions, but through historically instituted discursive formations and processes of identity construction on a global level.

**Political globalisation, postcoloniality and the Cold War**

In the widest sense the appropriate structural context for the transnational anti-apartheid movement is the process of intensified political globalisation during the post-war era (Held et al. 1999; Thörn 2002). Here, it is also relevant to make an analytical distinction between globalisation from above, and globalisation from below (Falk 1999). Political globalisation from above is constituted by the increasing number and importance of inter-governmental organisations (IGO:s) and international treaties, a process taking off during the post-war era (Held et al. 1999: 53). It is important to emphasise that this increasingly complex international system is not just composed of formal institutional arrangements. It should be conceived as a conglomeration of overlapping international communities, understood as ‘sites of identity and interest’ (Klotz 1995:27). When looking at the political context of the global anti-apartheid struggle, a number of international communities were important. For the European anti-apartheid movement, the EEC was of course important. For example, British AAM built relationships with members of the European Parliament and met the European Parliament Socialist Group. In April 1985 EEC agreed to partial sanctions, which were extended in 1986 (Fieldhouse 2005). Globally, even more important were however particularly the OAU, the Commonwealth, and the UN, being the largest and most complex of the international communities during the post-war era (Klotz 1995). The foundation of these communities, as well as the articulation of their political identities and interests, were in turn shaped by two wider and overlapping global and historical contexts: postcoloniality and the cold war.

Situated in the context of postcoloniality, the issue of apartheid was articulated as an issue of de-colonisation, particularly by newly independent states and anti-colonial movements, and the patterns of conflicts and positions taken in the context of international communities were conditioned by the political history of colonialism. Situated in the context of the Cold War, the anti-apartheid struggle, like any significant political field during the post-war era, national as well as transnational, was divided along the conflict lines that constituted the
Cold War. The Cold War was a crucial factor in the circumstances that made it possible for the South African apartheid government to sustain its position internationally. It was also the Cold War that made it possible to define ANC as part of a bloc that threatened world peace and security, because the organisation did not only receive support from Western states, but also from the Eastern bloc.

**Political globalisation from above: the OAU, the Commonwealth and the UN**

Divided on many issues, especially in relation to Cold War conflicts, the African states declared unity on advocating racial equality and de-colonisation when *the Organisation of African Unity* (OAU) was formed in 1963. The OAU was thus founded on the construction of a postcolonial Pan-African identity and became an important inter-state actor in the anti-apartheid struggle, which it articulated in terms of de-colonisation and national self-determination. When the UN General Assembly in 1973 declared that it was the South African liberation movements (ANC and PAC) that were the authentic representatives of the (national) people of South Africa, it referred to an earlier declaration made by the OAU (UN 1994:30). In 1964, OAU called for an oil embargo on South Africa. The OAU also encouraged its member states to give active support to the liberation movements and gave strong support for the call for sanctions made by the transnational anti-apartheid movement (Klotz 1995). This support was partly a result of persistent pressure from the anti-apartheid movement, particularly the exiled liberation organisations ANC and PAC.

During the period of the anti-apartheid struggle, *the Commonwealth*, an informal organisation based on the historical legacy and political identity of the British Empire, was transformed into a postcolonial community. This was felt by South Africa, which in 1961 was more or less forced to withdraw its request for readmission into the Commonwealth after it had become a republic. It was also felt by Britain itself, becoming more and more constrained as the numbers of newly independent states grew, as did the commitment to issues of de-colonisation and anti-racism. The issue of apartheid caused a large battle in the Commonwealth, in which Britain resisted the overwhelming majority of nations advocating sanctions. In doing this Britain confirmed that, if it was losing its grip over its old colonies, it still had status as a world power, being one of the leading members of the political community of the Western Powers and its military alliance NATO, formed in the context of the Cold War. (It was only as a result of strong pressure from other European countries that Britain, under protest, in 1985 accepted the EEC policy of partial sanctions).

The transnational anti-apartheid movement was allowed a space for lobbying during the Commonwealth meetings. Under the leadership of Shridath Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretariat gave the ANC accreditation to visit the meetings together with journalists, something which upset the British, as the ANC at this time was labelled a terrorist organisation by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

The international community that became most important for the transnational anti-apartheid movement, in terms of providing a space for mobilisation, was the UN. In 1963, the UN Special Committee against Apartheid was formed (Korey 1998; Shepherd 1976). At this time, NGOs did not have the kind of official recognition in the UN that they have at present. In this sense, The Special Committee against Apartheid was unique when it became a crucial node in the network of transnational anti-apartheid activism. The committee

---

4. Interview with Patsy Robertson, Commonwealth Secretariat, Ethel de Keyser, AAM and Mike Terry, both at different times Executive Secretaries of AAM.
supplied anti-apartheid organisations with well-researched information material and, from the late 1970s, in a few cases some financial support. The committee also sent delegations to various countries to consult with national and international NGOs.\(^5\)

However, the most important aspect of the activities of the committee was the organisation of conferences, where representatives from anti-apartheid organisations could come and make important contacts. According to activists, what really mattered was not so much what happened during the formal sessions, but what took place in context of the informal meetings in between them. Here, information was exchanged, overall strategies were discussed, co-operation on campaigns, national as well as transnational, were coordinated, and friendships were made. These conferences might actually be seen as the predecessors of the alternative NGO-conferences that since the 1970s are regularly held ‘outside’ of the large official UN meetings.

However, as any issue in the UN at the time, the apartheid issue was clearly defined by the tensions and conflicts of postcoloniality as well as of the Cold War. Activists, particularly those in the United States, also felt this. According to Jennifer Davis, a South African exile and a leading activist in the New York based solidarity organisation American Committee of Africa (ACOA), the UN was regarded with suspicion in the US during the Cold War, ‘it was regarded as the creature of somebody else – either the 3\(^{rd}\) world or the Soviet Union’.\(^6\) In the context of the UN, the activities of the Special Committee were thus also regarded with suspicion in certain camps. Defining the issue in Cold War terms, the major Western Powers opposed sanctions against South Africa in the Security Council and boycotted the Special Committee (none of the Western countries ever joined the committee). It consisted of representatives mainly from Asian, African and Latin American countries, as well as a few from Eastern Europe.

The apartheid issue points to the ‘Janus face’ of the UN as a political community and a central institution of global politics. On the one hand, as an inter-state organisation, the UN is subjected to the power hierarchy of the inter-state system. The dominant state powers in the Security Council can block or manipulate decisions in accordance with their national interests, as was the case with the issue of effective sanctions against South Africa. On the other hand, the UN might also be seen as a part of a global civil society, as relatively independent UN organisations like the Special Committee interact with NGOs from various countries, bypassing the state level, and giving space for transnational social movements opposing the interests of dominant state powers. To conclude, the case of anti-apartheid shows that the UN can be perceived as political space where the processes of globalisation from above and below sometimes intersect.\(^7\)

**Political globalisation from below: liberation movements and solidarity networks**

The emergency of a global civil society during the 20\(^{th}\) century was constituted by the

---

5. For example, expenses for NGOs to participate in Committee-sponsored conferences, seminars and sessions were provided. However, the budget of the Committee was limited and it could only provide expenses for a few anti-apartheid groups that did not have expenses for travel. Interview with E. S. Reddy, former Principal Secretary of the UN Committee Against Apartheid. See also Korey (1998), p. 96.

6. Interview with Jennifer Davis.

7. For a theoretical discussion on the interaction between social movements and the UN, see also Passy (1999).
increasing number of NGO:s, transnational networks and social movements organising across borders (Held et. al; McGrew ed. 1997). During the post-war era, a transnational political culture emerged through the increasing internationalisation of old movements, such as churches and the labour movement, as well as the emergence of new social movements, which addressed global issues in new ways, e.g. colonialism/imperialism, solidarity, ecology, peace and gender inequality. The transnational anti-apartheid movement was part of this process and became, as a ‘movement of movements’, a space of intersection for a wide range of collective actors.

Social movement studies have emphasised the importance of previously organised networks for the mobilisation of a social movement (Della Porta & Diani 2000; Tarrow 1998b). Since networks are carriers of values, previously organised networks bring a historical legacy into the formation of a new movement. In the context of the anti-apartheid movement, the churches, the labour movement and the anti-colonial movements provided such networks.

The tensions and ambiguities of postcoloniality were particularly evident in the church networks. On the one hand the presence of the European and North American churches in Southern Africa was part of cultural colonialism. On the other hand, many key activists and prominent figures of the anti-apartheid movement were based in the churches, for example Albert Luthuli of ANC, Trevor Huddleston of AAM, Canon John Collins of IDAF and George Houser of ACOA. Another relevant case is that of Gunnar Helander, who in the 1930s went to South Africa to spread the word of Swedish Protestantism. In the late 1950s he came back to Europe on a completely different mission, becoming a leading anti-apartheid journalist and author in Sweden, initiating the Swedish chapter of IDAF, and later becoming its vice chairman in London. Still, old colonial links in some cases influenced positions that were taken by Helander and his church, as for example in relation to the debate on sanctions vs. ‘constructive engagement’. The latter signified a standpoint that opposed sanctions against South Africa, and instead proposed that apartheid should be resisted through successive reforms, which should be forced through by multinational companies with subsidiaries in South Africa (a standpoint that the core of the anti-apartheid movement regarded as a cover for doing ‘business as usual’ in South Africa). Although many intense debates on the issue of isolation vs. involvement were held within the networks of the Swedish churches, and ambivalence as well as internal opposition was frequently expressed, it was only in 1986 the Swedish Church finally sold off its shares in Swedish South Africa companies. In this matter, it is relevant mention the close contacts that the Swedish Church Mission had with chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi of KwaZulu Natal, leader of the Inkatha organisation, which opposed ANC:s call for sanctions. This was a link going back to the late 19th century when the Mission started its South African adventure in Zululand (Sellström 1999 & 2002).

Tensions of postcoloniality also defined the relations between South African exile movements and Western solidarity movements. In her Australian study, Christine Jennett emphasise that the solidarity organisations were dependent on good relations with the exile movements for its legitimacy in relation to its supporters and the general public. However, just as important, it was the other way around as well. For example, it was very difficult for the ANC or the PAC to stage their own public meetings in Britain in the 1960s as ‘black’ and ‘foreign’ organisations. However, with AAM providing the platform through organising

8. Interview with Reg September, former ANC Chief Representative in London.
the meeting, ANC and PAC leaders could give public voice to their issue. I think that this
interdependence between exile and solidarity organisations highlights some of the
paradoxes characterising the condition of postcoloniality, in which colonial dependencies
can be reproduced, rearticulated and sometimes transgressed.

Understood in its broadest sense, the international labour movement played an extremely
important role in the transnational anti-apartheid struggle. However, it also brought into to
the movement its historical legacy of factional divisions, which had gained a new meaning
and a new significance in the context of the Cold War. Particularly the reluctance among
many Western labour Unions to support the ANC and its call for sanctions against South
Africa must be related to Cold War divisions between Soviet Communism and Western
Socialist Reformism. Especially during the 1970s, the strong anti-Communism within the
Western ICFTU (the International Confederation of Trade Unions) caused suspicion against
ANC, since its main union ally at this time was SACTU (South African Confederation of
Trade Unions), that was affiliated to the Communist-dominated WFTU (World Federation of
Trade Unions).

Thus, it was not just through its impact on interstate relations that postcolonial and Cold
War tension, ambivalence and conflict conditioned the anti-apartheid struggle; they were
also structuring the movement’s internal organisation, its debates and action strategies.

In retrospect, transnational support to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa
might appear to have been something uncontroversial in most parts of the world. And
sometimes it was. But to sustain support to the struggle in South Africa against apartheid
through the decades from the 1950s until the 1990s, and especially to support the call for
sanctions made by the ANC, was not always an easy affair. I would argue that, at certain
moments, anti-apartheid action in this context constructed what Homi Bhabha has called a
third space, understood as ‘an intervention into a situation that has become extremely
polarised’. As a position, ‘third space’ does not signify neutrality, rather it is a condition in
which the conflicts, contradictions and ambivalences of a political order is felt most strongly.
This condition was undoubtedly experienced by the anti-apartheid activists who were not
just occasionally participating in a boycott or a demonstration, but spent years and decades
in order to sustain support to the struggle against apartheid.

In the following section, I will analyse how this space was constituted through collective
action, defining transnational anti-apartheid collective action as a social movement.

Defining Anti-Apartheid as a transnational social movement

Departing from the so called ‘identity paradigm’ (Melucci 1996; Eyerman & Jamison 1991;
Cohen & Arato 1985) I analytically define a social movement as a form of collective action
that articulates a social conflict and ultimately aims at transforming a social order; it is a
process of action and interaction involving as a fundamental element the construction of a
collective identity, or a sense of community, of ‘us’, sharing a set of values and norms, and
‘others’, i.e. antagonistic actors, or ‘enemies’ (Thörn 1997). This is a process that not only
involves consensus building but also tensions and conflicts. Although social movements
may appear as homogenous phenomena in public space, they must be conceived as action
spaces constituted by heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory constellations of actions
(Melucci 1996). I would even like to argue that tension and conflict are constitutive of

9. On the notion of ‘third space’, Bhabha (1994). The particular definition of the concept used above is
quoted from a lecture by Homi Bhabha, Göteborg 020919.
dynamic social movement processes. This is particularly the case with in the transnational anti-apartheid movement, which was a ‘movement of movements’, consisting of an extremely broad alliance between liberation movements and solidarity movements, the latter composed of different ‘blocs’ - churches, unions, youth wings of political parties (predominantly liberals and social democrats), women’s, student and solidarity movements.

What then, united the different actors struggling against apartheid, in spite of its many internal differences and debates? They were of course united in the common goal of ending the apartheid system in South Africa. However, a common goal is not enough for a constellation of actors to compose a social movement. What is required is a shared collective identity, and I would like to argue that in the context of the transnational anti-apartheid movement, ‘solidarity’ was the central identity concept. According to the activists that I have interviewed, ‘solidarity’ was a concept that was recognised across the variety of actors in the movement. Church activists, Communists, Union activists, exiled South Africans, Liberals and, of course, solidarity activists, shared an identification with the concept of solidarity. Whatever one was doing, whatever one was participating in, an organisation, a demonstration, a boycott, it was defined as an act of solidarity. Solidarity was thus constructed as a fundamental value that defined the collective identity of the transnational anti-apartheid movement, its ideas as well as its practices.

In terms of collective identity, sustained transnational anti-apartheid action across borders was thus made possible through the construction of an imagined community of solidarity activists. I think it is particularly useful to use Benedict Anderson’s influential concept here (Anderson 1991), since it emphasises the possibility of a shared sense of community among people dispersed over large geographical distances, not the least with the help of communication media. To borrow an expression from John B Thompson (1995), the transnational anti-apartheid movement was constituted by ‘action at a distance’. According to Thompson, this is a form of action that, through the use of various forms of communication media, ‘enables individuals to act for others who are dispersed in space and time, as well as enabling individuals to act in response to actions and events taking place in distant locales’ (Thompson 1995:82). However, as we shall see in the next section, not just media, but also mobility – or travel – played a crucial role in the organisation, mobilisation and articulation of anti-apartheid across borders.

**Forms of transnational action: mobilisation, organisation, media and mobility**

I would like to argue that the central aspects of the construction of a movement space for transnational anti-apartheid action, as part of a much wider process of political globalisation from below, can be analyzed through the following interrelated themes: organisation, mobilisation, media and mobility (travel).

1. **Transnational organisation and mobilisation.** As in the case of most social movements, a crucial aspect the mobilisation in the anti-apartheid movement was done through SMOs (social movement movement organisations) (McCarthy & Zald eds., 2004). Some of them were national, like the British AAM, some of them were international, like the IDAF, and some of them consisted of networks of local groups, like the South Africa Committees and the Africa Groups (before they were formed into a national organisation) in Sweden. These organisations were all part of a transnational solidarity network, which had at least two important nodes on the northern hemisphere; London as a ‘postcolonial capital’, where exiled African political activists played a crucial role in initiating the Boycott Movement,
and New York, where the UN Special Committee against Apartheid became an important forum for interaction. The anti-apartheid struggle also involved alliances between states and actors in global civil society, as states such as India, Tanzania, Nigeria, Holland and the Scandinavian countries in a few cases funded, and exchanged information with, movement organisations across national borders. For example, the Swedish government supported the British Defence and Aid Fund, which was in strong opposition to the policy of the British government.

The British AAM was initiated in 1959 under the name of The Boycott Movement, and I would argue that the boycott was the most important form of mobilisation in the context of the anti-apartheid movement. The ultimate aim of the economic, cultural and sports boycotts was of course to put pressure on the South African government through isolating the country culturally and hurting it economically. However, as several activists that I have interviewed have pointed out, the anti-apartheid organisations also viewed the boycott as an important tool for mobilisation and ‘consciousness raising’ of large numbers of people. Through the launching of boycott campaigns, the organisations offered people an opportunity for ‘everyday’ participation in solidarity action. It was argued that in the long run such active participation would generally raise public consciousness about the issue, and eventually increase the pressure on national governments and international organisations, like UN or EU, to impose sanctions. From this point of view, to participate in a boycott could also be seen as ‘voting’ for sanctions (the British AAM called boycott action ‘people’s sanctions’). It could also be argued that participating in a boycott could be seen as a form of expressive action that was a fundamental aspect of the construction of the collective identity of the movement. It was an act through which the individual subject could feel that s/he became a part of an imagined global community of solidarity activists. In this sense, the boycott was a form of ‘identification at a distance’ through local action. From this point of view the boycott also emotionally connected grass-roots activists in different parts of the world.

2. Transnational media space. Media and information work was a crucial part of anti-apartheid activism. The rise of the international anti-apartheid movement parallels with the growth of a transnational media space, which can be see as a part of the process of globalisation (Thompson 1995). This is not only a space for the immediate transmission of news across the globe, but also a site of political struggle, where different political actors, through symbolic actions, are trying to influence public opinions.

Since the 1960s new social movement groups and organisations are increasingly staging media oriented public manifestations addressing a global audience (Gitlin 1980; Peterson & Thörn 1994 and 1999, Jong, Shaw & Stammers eds. 2005, Opel & Pompper eds. 2003). At the same time movement mobilisations are sometimes shaped in response to events that are globally reported by the media; movement intellectuals and groups are taking part in the struggle over the interpretation of the political implications of these events. Sometimes political mobilisations have taken place simultaneously around the world in an immediate response to events reported globally by the media. This was for example the case with the reports on the shots in Sharpeville in 1960, which lead to an intensified mobilisation against apartheid in different parts of the world.

However, media attention related to dramatic events in South Africa was short-lived. During long periods anti-apartheid activists experienced difficulties to get a voice in public space. In response to this, an active approach to media was developed. This involved the two interrelated strategies of trying to influence established media, and to develop alternative media.

The strategy of developing alternative media consisted in producing and distributing
information through self-controlled channels. News bulletins magazines as well as films and videos were produced and distributed to members and sold publicly. The materials of bulletins like AA News in Britain (that was also read by activists in other countries) or Afrikabulletinen in Sweden often relied on sources within the movement’s transnational information networks. Here, contacts in South Africa established by activists played an important role.

Building up archives of well-researched information material and photographs, as was the case with for example IDAF in London or ISAK in Stockholm, was also a base for attracting established media. There were also activists that worked as free lance journalists, publishing articles in alternative as well as established media, a few of them leaving the movement for a journalist career. Established media was approached in a number of ways; through producing information material designed for journalists, through letters to the editor, often signed by prominent members, and through developing contacts with journalists that was perceived as standing close to the movement. A different way of getting a message across was the dramaturgical approach to political communication (Peterson & Thörn 1994 & 1999), performed through the staging of ‘events’ in public space. For example AAM in Britain in 1970, on Sharpeville day, ‘recreated’ the shootings that had occurred in Sharpeville ten years earlier, as activists dressed as policemen were ‘shooting’ at protesters in Trafalgar Square, an event that was reported on the front pages of newspapers all over the world.

3. Mobility: travel and exile. The ‘action at a distance’ that constituted anti-apartheid as a transnational movement was not only facilitated by the media but also by mobility, i.e. temporary travel, student visits facilitated by scholarships, as well as ‘exile journeys’. This made face-to-face interaction possible between individual activists that were based in different parts of the world or were coming from different places of origin. Of course, far from all of the people who participated in the movement travelled, but among those who did were key activists, who could be understood as ‘spiders’ in the webs of global anti-apartheid activism. They were people who through individual moves and movements were connecting places, organisations and networks.

Travel, or mobility, had different functions within the movement. First, conferences played an important role as a space for networking, discussions and co-ordination of national as well as transnational campaigns. Second, the exile South Africans played an important role as organisers and mobilisers, travelling extensively around the world, making speeches at solidarity meetings and thus giving ‘the other’ a public face.

Third, according to accounts of solidarity activists travel was related to an emotional aspect of solidarity activism, crucial for the individual’s motivation to engage in, as well as to sustain, solidarity action through the years. For some activists journeys to Southern Africa meant making direct experiences of the apartheid system that became a starting point for a commitment to the struggle. More important, travel facilitated personal encounters between South African activists and solidarity activists, sometimes developing into friendships. Some activists mention temporary visits by South Africans to Europe, for example by the UDF (United Democratic Front) in the 1980s, as an important source of inspiration for the everyday routines of solidarity activism. However, according to my interviewees, it seems that the most important aspect of the process through which ‘the other’ was given a face on the level of personal relations in the solidarity movement, was the bonds that were created, and were often developed into long friendships, between exile activists and solidarity activists. The fact that the South Africans composed the largest of the exile groups from
southern Africa in London - the centre of anti-apartheid solidarity on the northern hemisphere - thus appear as an important part of the explanation of the fact that the support to the South African liberation movement was so much stronger than to the other liberation movements in the same region.

Against this background, I would argue that a crucial element in making the transnational anti-apartheid movement possible was the combination of two factors: 1) mediated interaction, particularly the development of a number of media strategies, related to the emergence of new media and media technologies, and 2) face-to-face interaction, facilitating exchange of information and experiences between individuals representing groups, communities and organisations with different locations in the world; and making identification with ‘distant others’ something concrete for grassroots activists in the solidarity movement.

The legacy of anti-apartheid

To conclude, I would like to argue that the history of the anti-apartheid struggle provides an important historical case for the analysis of present-day global politics. During the process of my research it became evident that the present mobilisation of a global civil society, addressing economic globalisation and supra-national political institutions like WTO, IMF and the World Bank, has historical links to the post-war, transnational political culture that the anti-apartheid movement was part of. Movement organisations, networks and individuals that took part in the anti-apartheid struggle are present in this context. For example, as I was doing my first interviews for this project in Stockholm in October 1999, two veteran anti-apartheid activists told me that they were busy interacting with NGO:s in various parts of the world, preparing a protest against the WTO meeting in Seattle in December. ‘It is going to be big’, they told me.10 Their organisation Diakonia, earlier member of the Swedish anti-apartheid coalition ISAK, was one of the 1448 organisations that signed the ‘Appeal from the international civil society’ that was published on the internet during the protests in Seattle.

An example of the fact that different individuals can carry the learning processes of the anti-apartheid movement into very different contexts, is showed in Ben Cashdan’s documentary ‘The two Trevors go to Washington’. It follows two South Africans, Trevor Manuel and Trevor Ngwane, both of them former anti-apartheid activists, on their journey to the IMF/World Bank meeting in Washington in 2000. Trevor Manuel visits the meeting as South Africa’s Minister of Finance and as the chairman of the boards of governors of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Trevor Ngwane is a grassroots activist from Soweto that goes to Washington to protest against the global policies of the IMF and the World Bank. The example thus displays not only the importance of previously existing transnational networks for the formation of new transnational movements, but also that transnational movements sometimes even provide global politics with new elites.

References


10. Interview with Bo Forsberg and Magnus Walan.
27-42.

ANC Archives:
ANC Historical Documents Archive, www.anc.org.za

Bodleian Library, Oxford:
Archive of the Anti-Apartheid Movement 1959-1995:
(for a list of contents, see www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/rhodes/aam/aam.html)
MSS AAM 1: Committee of African Organisations’ papers concerning establishment of Boycott Movement, 1959-60.

The Labour Movement Archive, Stockholm:
AGIS Annual Reports
ISAK Annual Reports

Mayibuye Centre, University of Western Cape, Cape Town:
ANC London papers

Interviews
52 interviews have been carried out for the research project on which this article is based.
The following are referred to in the text:

Jennifer Davis, New York 000620
Bo Forsberg, Stockholm, 990930
Ethel de Keyser, London 000303
Enuga S. Reddy, New York 000621
Patsy Robertson, London 001027
Dorothy Robinson, London 000302
Reg September, Cape Town 010221
Mike Terry, London 000307
Magnus Walan, Stockholm, 990930
Chapter 3
Civil society, the United Nations and WCAR

By Ashwin Desai and Peter Dwyer

As noted in the introduction, the two major UN summits - the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in August 2001 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in September 2002 – played a critical role in reconfiguring an independent, critical civil society. We consider WCAR now and WSSD shortly.

With the end of apartheid, the election of a democratic government, and the entrance of a ‘new South Africa’ onto the world stage, have come several transformations in South African civil society. Key has been the shift amongst many civil society organisations from a position of complete antagonism to the apartheid state to a much more complex set of relations with the new democratic state. With these changes unfolding in a context of neoliberalism, approaches to engagement with the nation state have also meant engaging with issues related to the global economic and juridical order. There have been different responses from civil society organisations to such questions, resulting in divisions within South African civil society regarding its interaction with the South African state as well as the United Nations (UN) system more generally.

The World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), held in Durban in 2001, offers an opportunity for an analysis of rapidly-evolving relations within South African civil society. They are significant in that they have become points for the manifestation and clarification of attitudes and relations amongst civil society actors within the post 1994 context. The changes observed in South African civil society from WCAR to WSSD are also significant in that they illustrate the differences and contradictions emerging within civil society as a result of the transition from apartheid and the entry into the terrain of global governance.

In order to understand these events as windows into South African civil society and for us to be able to contextualise these events within a narrative of post-apartheid South Africa, we begin this chapter with a short history of civil society under apartheid. This is followed by a discussion of the roles of civil society actors during the South African transition, with particular attention being paid to the entry of neoliberalism into South Africa and civil society’s responses to it. The rest of the chapter focuses on the participation of South African civil society in the WCAR, looking closely at the issues causing divisions and splits with regard to engagement with the formal UN processes and civil society’s relationship to the South African government. It is largely based on interviews conducted with members of the major civil society formations involved in the WCAR, secondary research, as well as participant observation.

While a usual review of civil society participation in UN events would focus on the interaction of civil society actors and institutions with the existing UN system and processes, honing in on actual participation by civil society in the debates and discussions taking place in the various committees of the UN, this chapter does not. Taking its direction from the experiences of civil society actors across the political spectrum as told in interviews, this chapter speaks instead to the state of South African civil society at the times of the WCAR, and examines the manner in which the summit processes themselves shaped fissures and alliances.
Remobilisation of civil society

By way of background, consider the revival of militant community politics in the early 21st century. Aside from HIV/AIDS medicines access, perhaps the highest profile of the sites of struggle were over access to water and electricity. Between 1999 and 2000, for example, some 75,400 water cut-offs occurred in the Greater Cape Town area. In Soweto after the 1999 general election, some 20,000 houses had their electricity supplies disconnected every month. Brian Johnson, the manager of Eskom, the state-owned electricity supply company, indicated that ‘the aim is to disconnect at least 75 per cent of Soweto residents’ (SECC, 2001).

In Cape Town, residents of Mandela Park, Khayelitsha took bonds from banks. An organisation called Servcon, set up jointly by the banks and government, was designed to educate the mortgage holders on how to budget so they could meet the required payments. Escalating unemployment and the fact that the homes were structurally defective, forcing many residents to putting their own resources into repairing faulty wiring, cracks in walls, resulted in many residents defaulting. The banks, with the support of both Servcon’s and the government, began a process of ‘right-sizing’, in which defaulters were forcibly moved to accommodation that was accurately described by the Mandela Park community as dog-kennels. The cost-recovery prerequisites of neo-liberalism were creating a new kind of apartheid.

As the ANC government’s policies resulted in more and more evictions, disconnections and retrenchments, a variety of new community movements began to arise. Hesitantly at first, these movements began to arise to challenge the water and electricity cut-offs, the evictions, and lack of land redistribution. These movements, based in particular communities and evincing particular, mainly defensive, demands, were not merely a natural result of poverty or marginality but a direct response to state policy.

The State’s inability or unwillingness to be a provider of public services and the guarantor of the conditions of collective consumption had been a spark for a plethora of community movements. While the movements mobilised around diverse demands like land titles, water and electricity supplies, and access to housing and health facilities, the general nature of the neoliberal offensive concentrated and aimed these demands towards the State. What had started to develop in a series of mobilisations was reminiscent of what Manuel Castells, writing on Latin America, came to call ‘militant metropolitan dwellers’ (Castells 1982: 250). What distinguished these community movements from political parties, pressure groups, NGOs, and the trade unions is mass mobilisation as the prime source of social sanction.

One aspect of the rise of community movements had seen the emergence of the family as a fighting unit, unlike union membership, which is based on the individual worker. In fact many of those involved in community movements accept the conditions of the sweatshops and low wages without much of a fight. They attempt to top up their wages by not paying for services. They organise militantly around this issue, and the state is directly brought into the conflict. They act much like Hobsbawm’s ‘city mob’ which he describes as ‘the movement of all classes of the urban poor for the achievement of economic or political changes by direct action – that is by riot or rebellion’ (Hobsbawm 1959: 110).

These encroachments are often given tacit encouragement by community movements or serve as a catalyst for collective organisation. These movements concentrated on fighting in their own locality and are often animated by the immediacy of the situation. When the
challenge to water cut-offs or evictions does come, it is fought with intensity and longstanding animosities are often forgotten as the struggle intensifies.

Resistance had spread across the country. In Soweto, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) had – through Operation Khanyisa, meaning ‘switch-on’ – stymied the impact of Eskom’s disconnection by reconnecting electricity of residents. In Cape Town, residents of Mandela Park in the sprawling black township of Khayelitsha had put residents evicted by banks back into their houses. They all put direct action at the heart of their activities, disconnecting the electricity of the mayor of Johannesburg’s house, occupying the offices of banks in Cape Town, and laying siege to the debt-collecting building of the eThekwini Council in Durban.

The poor of the new South African civil society are not passive victims of social policy, however and have been known to become un-civil. The metropolitan militants who do not pay for water or electricity, who squat and occupy and try their luck, often succeed in snatching income from the State and protect this income in collective struggle when the State or (parastatals) attempts to reclaim it. In certain rural areas stock theft, squatting and slow, semi-legal land-occupations under the guise of land-tenancy, perform the same function.

David Slater makes the point that ‘the territorial state, in global times, tends to rest on an increasingly fragile and precarious ground, with pressures from below often opening up fissures in its territorial control, whilst the globalisation of financial, economic and cultural power increasingly impinges on the nation-state from above’ (Slater 1997: 261). The State in South Africa has less vulnerability because of the ANC’s image as a liberator. This is aided by the fact that it makes grand statements around the free delivery of services.

The local state, though, is vulnerable. It is the entity that advances the water and electricity disconnections, evictions, and the loss of jobs through privatisation. A majority of the councilors are elected through wards, making them both accessible to communities and open to direct attack. It is not surprising that it is at this level that the poor have challenged the neo-liberal transition.

In attempting to make sense of the transition it is useful to think of the idea of politics and the political: As David Slater writes:

\[\textit{Politics} \text{ has its own public space; it is the field of exchanges between political parties, of parliamentary and governmental affairs, of elections and representation and in general of the type of activity, practices and procedures that take place in the institutional arena of the political system. The political...can be more effectively regarded as a type of relationship that can develop in any area of the social, irrespective of whether or not it remains within the institutional enclosure of ‘politics’. The political then is the living movement, the kind of ‘magma of conflicting wills’, or antagonisms; it is mobile and ubiquitous, going beyond but also subverting the institutional settings and moorings of politics. (Slater 1997: 266).}\]

These movements had created a political scandal by deliberately engaging in actions that create instability and disorder. The community movements had challenged the very boundaries of what for a short while after the demise of the apartheid state was seen exclusively as ‘politics’.

They had also added to the cast many new actors associated with the play of politics in South Africa. The poor are not just involved in recognition, or the discovery of the right
policies, or the creation of the right administrative framework, or even the goodwill of power holders. They are challenging the very distribution of power in society and are doing so in ways that do not stick to the gradualist, corporatist, and nation-building script.

Most importantly, community movements have subverted ‘the traditionally given of the political system – state power, political parties, formal institutions – by contesting the legitimacy and the apparently normal and natural functioning of their effects within society’ (Slater, 1997: 263). They are a source of tremendous potential counter-power, if not counter-politics. As ‘links’ began to emerge these movements have come to be known as new social movements, and include the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), the Landless People’s Movement (LPM), the Concerned Citizens’ Forum (CCF), and the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC).

Civil society has also, post-1994, seen a growth in the number of single-issue NGOs, usually established to complement certain aspects of government service delivery or to lobby for change with regard to specific aspects of government policy. SANGOCO has come to represent South African NGOs, providing a space for the coming together of NGOs at a national and international level. In certain instances, where NGOs have met with obstacles in meeting their objectives, they have formed partnerships with new social movements or community groups, or even been instrumental in the formation of movements e.g. the NLC and LPM. NGOs have tended to receive much funding from foreign donor organisations and government aid agencies. In all interviews, activists drew attention to the power that such funding gives to foreign agencies in determining the nature and programs of South African civil society. In turn, the power given to NGOs over community and new social movements through access to such funding is also highlighted through this.

What is important is that coinciding with the end of a millennium, there were suddenly once again on the radar screen of South African politics autonomous, radical, civil society actors whose members were, in economic terms, no better off than they have been before Mandela had been released. Ironically, it was precisely the assaults on social income that they had enjoyed during that era when the state was not confident enough to turn off electricity and water or evict masses of people that now caused them to mobilise when the ANC, with the legitimacy to do so, issued those orders.

The World Conference Against Racism

The arrival of the WCAR in Durban in 2001 was significant in bringing together organisations in civil society in South Africa at a national level to debate engagement at a global level, with other civil society organisations, governments, and the UN system more broadly. Aside from the much smaller-scale UN Conference on Trade and Development Conference in 1996, this was South Africa’s first big hosting of the world (by both government and civil society). All sectors of South African society became active in mobilising for engagement with the UN system through the WCAR. With South African civil society experiencing internal differences and divisions with regard to the experiences of governance in a neoliberal world order and hence with regard to approaches to the ANC government, the WCAR became a space in which local differences with regard to engagement with the state and the UN system began to surface.

With Durban chosen as venue for the conference, people and organisations started planning to try to get to Durban. South Africa being a large country, and many of the emergent community based organisations and other NGOs based in Johannesburg and Cape
Town, the choice of venue meant that considerable numbers of civil society organisations and people would not make it to Durban due to a lack of funding. Some respite was created by the fact that the UN sponsored not only the official conference, but also created a space for civil society organisations to make their voices heard. What this meant, however, was that many community organisations, such as the APF, had to attach themselves to more well-resourced NGOs, such as the Johannesburg based Freedom of Expression Institute, in order to get funding to go to Durban.

While this might seem like a trivial issue, this was a real distinction that later came to open up points of antagonism between various actors and the so-called grassroots civil society organisations or movements would come to developed quite a disdain for the professionalised ‘NGO types’. The UN, by sponsoring an NGO Forum to be held at the Kingsmead Cricket Ground from 28 August to 1 September 2001, had attracted a significant leadership layer of civil society. This leadership was intent on delivering a stable, well co-ordinated NGO Conference. They barricaded themselves behind the gates of a local cricket stadium and set up the mechanisms for hefty registration fees. They also cast a wary eye for the uncivilised elements of civil society that privileged marching, putting out critical media, linking with the Dalits and Palestinians and debating the merits of memoranda and resolutions.

Space and place became means to exclude significant sections of South African and global civil society, or to ensure the ‘NGO-isation’ or corporatisation of social and community movements. Interviewees spoke of a certain kind of discourse that is encouraged and engendered by the UN processes, and the space of negotiation and consensus-building for civil society during the WCAR certainly tried to direct the interaction and engagement of civil society around the issues of racism in the tradition of the UN.

The World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), was the first time that the majority of South African civil society engaged directly with the UN system. It was also the first time, not including Unctad, that South African civil society would be coming together to engage collectively, as civil society, with the UN system. Unlike other African countries, the majority of South African civil society does not have a tradition or history of engagement with the UN system. Around issues of sustainable development, it is just a few environmental NGOs that have the experience of engaging with the UN system in the forms of lobbying, advocacy, and so on, begun in their participation in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio in 1992.

For most of South African civil society, then, participation in the WCAR and WSSD was marked by individual organisational concerns framed within or against whatever the prevailing discourse was rather than clear and common understandings of the UN system and the position of civil society within it. Differences of approach and understanding with regard to the UN featured for the first time during the WCAR in a context of South African civil society trying very hard to maintain a united front despite these differences.

SANGOCO, and the International Steering Committee (ISC) were seen as the main loci of South African civil society participation. SANGOCO initially saw its role as supporting the WCAR Secretariat and contributing to the NGO Forum resolution to be presented to the main conference.

But there was to be contestation over SANGOCO’s role. Community movements had come together to form the Durban Social Forum (DSF) in the run-up to the WCAR. The general consensus was that the WCAR should be used as an opportunity to expose the South African government’s slide to neoliberalism, with one of the main slogans of the DSF
and SANGOCO being ‘Poverty=Racism; GEAR=racism’. Soon many SANGOCO members began attending DSF meetings. Inside SANGOCO, a fight began to provide resources for a DSF march onto the International Convention Centre (ICC), the venue of the main conference. SANGOCO, not without a few backward glances, was slow and inexorably drawn into supporting the march. For the ANC / Cosatu / SANCO alliance, this was a major setback.

There was very little civil society preparation for the WCAR. With SANGOCO’s proclamation of a Durban Social Forum, all NGOs, social movements and other civil society organisations were brought under a common banner. But ‘unity’ was a forced representation of confusion and power plays, using control of and access to resources to influence organisational positions or to paper over real differences beginning to emerge within civil society (largely the work of SANGOCO). Nevertheless, contradictions were apparent. While SANGOCO hosted the official civil society forum of the UN conference, and participated in its machinery, many of the members of the DSF were openly critical of the UN system.

While the position of the DSF was openly antagonistic to the ANC government (the headbands worn by DSF members during the WSSD said ‘Pansi (away with) GEAR’), SANGOCO invited President Thabo Mbeki to open its NGO Forum, the official civil society forum of the conference. On 31 August 2001, however, global civil society (embodied in the DSF, as it included the participants of the UN’s international NGO Forum) marched as thousands, united against the racism of the ANC-government’s macro-economic policy, GEAR – an international conference being used to draw attention to a local manifestation of the inequities of neoliberalism. The dividing line in civil society was to be the ANC-alliance, with the SACP, ANC, Cosatu, and other Congress aligned formations staging their own march, of approximately 5000 people a day later. While the DSF appeared united at this stage, the cracks had already begun to appear within certain founding organisations, such as SANGOCO, which appeared confused and divided over its relationship with the ANC-alliance.

For many members of the DSF, this was also an opportunity to highlight the separation of powers and spheres of influence between those parts of the UN system that allow for broad consultation with civil society and the international financial institutions, where it is argued power lies. According to this view, civil society’s participation in the UN conferences merely gives legitimacy to the policies adopted in other more powerful spaces, such as the IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Naidoo 2002). The UN is therefore seen as a toothless body that can only give an image of democracy and consultation on a global scale, and not the real deal. But, the differences between groups arguing this position, and SANGOCO and others participating fully in the formal process of the WCAR, surfaced only in the closed sessions of the DSF, away from the public eye.

Some members of the DSF (such as the APF and the LPM) chose not to participate in the NGO Forum hosted by SANGOCO, but only to join preparations for the march to be held on 31 August. The LPM, in fact, hosted its own separate Landless People’s Camp and Assembly during the period of the WCAR. For many activists interviewed in this report, in hindsight, the LPM event was the most successful during the WCAR for civil society as it was clearly separate from the formal UN process and therefore unambiguous in its positions in relation to the UN system (Interviews with Oupa Leihulere, Eddie Cottle, Andile Mngxitama and Zakes Hlatshwayo).
While difference and diversity were celebrated in the DSF march on 31 August, the real differences in terms of approach to the bigger questions were to grow in the months to come, preceding the WSSD. The WCAR, though, proved to be a particular challenge to the ANC. An ANC document entitled ‘Evaluating the WCAR NGO Forum (and preparing for the WSSD)’ (www.anc.org.za/ancdocs) reflected:

The moral and political force of South African delegates was clearly evident at the NGO Forum. The mantle of the South African freedom struggle was held up as a beacon to the struggling people of the world… instead of providing leadership and direction to the forum, South African civil society repeatedly embarrassed itself through public division and open squabbling in full view of the international community. The main responsibility for South African civil society preparations fell to the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO)… it can in no way claim to be inclusive… Key organs of civil society, such as the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), Cosatu, communities of faith, black business, the women’s and youth movements and many others were not considered by SANGOCO to be essential components of the process… Instead of mobilising the voice of South African civil society in a non-sectarian and inclusive debate, SANGOCO directed the bulk of its organisational and financial resources into building opposition to various South African government policies, which it felt it could usefully highlight in the context of an international conference.

Cosatu found itself in a difficult position. The federation had suffered job losses, its influence within the ANC had declined and its election platform of 1994, the RDP, had been overtaken by a conservative economic program. How would it react? It was also a testing time for the ANC. The world was on its doorstep and it was keen both to draw in the NGOs, the symbolic challenges to US hegemony (Cuba and Palestine), and advance its leadership role in Africa. It attempted to do this by trying to occupy the civil society space as a liberation movement (the ANC), while occupying the official UN conference as government and host.

Cosatu, in the run-up to WCAR, decided to go on a strike against privatisation. It led to an immediate attack from the ANC. There was a bubble in the air. But unity within the ranks of the tripartite alliance and celebration of the victory against racism in the form of apartheid with members of the international anti-apartheid movement was the order of the day when the alliance staged its march of the conference.

The ANC was to prove to be much more interventionist in the civil society sphere in the run-up to the WSSD to be held in Johannesburg. That is, the ANC learnt valuable lessons from events at the WCAR in preparation for the WSSD. These we take up soon.
Chapter 4
South Africa between a rock and a hard place at the WCAR

By Dennis Brutus and Ben Cashdan

What to expect in Durban (July 2001)

If you were planning a holiday in South Africa’s east coast resort of Durban before the warm winter season is over, you’d be well advised to steer clear of the city during the last few days of August and the first week in September. Unless that is, you are a government official, a UN bureaucrat, an academic, or a journalist with a burning desire to discuss racism, xenophobia, and related forms of intolerance. If you are one of the latter, you probably already have your hotel room booked.

If you are one of thousands of delegates coming for the official inter-governmental World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) you may well be booked into the Royal Hotel, with its splendid colonial-style accommodation. If you are a lowly NGO worker, you will most likely have to make do with the spartan Holiday Inn Garden Court. Either way, your program will be very full, as you ponder the fight against racism in Durban’s world-class International Convention Centre (ICC), conveniently located opposite the Hilton Hotel and a stone’s throw away from the beachfront, rubbing shoulders with presidents, prime ministers, and luminaries such as Kofi Annan, Thabo Mbeki, Mary Robinson, Manning Marable, and Harry Belafonte.

During your stay in Durban you may take a stroll along Marine Parade, the beachfront promenade, to be confronted by a stream of Zulu-speaking hawkers (South African slang for informal street vendors) eking out an existence or Durban’s incongruous rickshaw drivers desperately competing to pull you along in decorated two-wheeled chariots. As long as you stick to the official conference transport you won’t be bothered too much by the beggars, pickpockets, and prostitutes.

It’s highly unlikely that you’ll follow any of these unfortunate folk back to their homes in the townships of Chatsworth, Cato Manor, or Umlazi where unemployment is up above 50 percent since the collapse over the past few years of the textile industry and other globally ‘uncompetitive’ sectors. As South Africa has implemented WTO tariff reductions, these jobs have moved to East Asian sweatshops where wages are even lower than in Africa.

You will almost certainly not see the desperate living conditions of South Africa’s poorest Indian community in the council flats in Chatsworth’s Unit 3, known owing to its poverty as ‘Bangladesh.’ Last year Bangladesh hit the headlines when ANC-led Durban Metro Council evicted several families from their council flats for failing to keep up with their rents. The council is determined to ensure that rents are up to date in preparation for privatisation of housing. The community resisted the evictions, with Indian grandmothers in saris defending the homes of their Zulu neighbors from the municipal police, who resorted to tear gas and rubber bullets. Thirty years ago these families were evicted by the apartheid government for being too dark in complexion. The ANC is now evicting the same families for being poor. Mandela’s friend and biographer Professor Fatima Meer labeled the council’s actions ‘fascist brutality.’
You also won’t have time to visit the tiny and leaky matchbox housing, constructed by the ANC government under its reconstruction and development programme (RDP) into which some of the destitute are being relocated along the Higginson Highway, far from jobs and services. You’ll also miss the misery of the shackland that is Cator Manor.

With your busy conference schedule you definitely won’t have time to take an hour’s drive north along the N3 highway to Hammarsdale, a former KwaZulu homeland ‘growth point,’ its factories subsidised by the apartheid government to keep black people in the bantustans. Now the jobs are gone and the residents of Mpumalanga township just outside Hammarsdale are literally starving. No one is quite sure whether the twenty bodies in the morgue each weekend are victims of poverty, AIDS, cholera, or some combination.

In Mpumalanga, former ANC and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) activists, once avowed enemies, are now united against a new enemy: Durban Metro Council. Their objection, Durban Metro’s new cost-recovery policies. In Mpumalanga, many residents received subsidised water even under apartheid. Now the ANC government is installing water meters and cutting off services to those too poor to pay. Cholera broke out in Durban and its surroundings last year, making 80,000 people sick and killing 180 across the country. At its center, a community who used to get subsidised water but was recently disconnected. Just before you touch down at Durban airport, you may catch a glimpse of the township of Wentworth, where black workers recently struck against oil refineries owned by Shell, British Petroleum, and a Malaysian oil company after in the same week one worker was killed by exposure to hydrochloric acid and another was injured in a machine.

In Wentworth, where workers live on the hillsides all around the plants, inhaling noxious fumes day and night, residents are eight times more likely to get asthma, bronchitis, and leukemia than the South African population as a whole. Protective labor legislation, won during the anti-apartheid struggle, is currently being rolled back in the interest of international competitiveness.

If you don’t see most of this, you may not be struck by the poignancy and potential for irony of our ANC government hosting a world conference against racism in a city where the majority are black and poor, and a minority, mostly still white, continue to enjoy the spoils of the economy. A question on many people’s minds in the run up to the World Conference Against Racism is whether the economic forces and policies, both local and global, which continue to keep so many black people poor, will be up for debate in the conference at all.

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of this uncertainty is the behind-the-scenes tussle over one particular agenda item in the conference: whether the Global South, and people of color in the North (led by African Americans), deserve reparations for the crimes visited upon them by the largely-white North: viz. slavery, colonialism, and apartheid. African delegates meeting in Dakar in January to prepare for the WCAR highlighted reparations as the key issue for discussion in Durban. As recently as this week, the US and some European governments are reported to have threatened to withdraw their funding or to boycott the conference altogether if the issue of reparations is to be included.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell warned supporters of reparations to withdraw this issue or risk ‘derailing’ the conference. In South Africa, opinion appears divided. Jubilee South Africa has been outspoken in its support for reparations. Jubilee leaders such as Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town have repeatedly called on Swiss banks to pay back the profits they made from trading in apartheid gold and to compensate the victims of apartheid violence for the support the banks provided to Pretoria
during the 1980s. In 1986, when P.W. Botha declared a debt standstill, Swiss bankers provided a major bailout. Yasmine Sooka, a commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has argued that families of freedom fighters killed or injured during the struggle should receive compensation from the banks for prolonging apartheid.

Interviewed at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in January, Thabo Mbeki distanced himself from this call. Whilst commending Jubilee 2000 for its success in promoting debt relief, Mbeki said of the reparations campaign, ‘It’s an NGO call. As government we’ve never made such a call.’ Granted Mbeki was in Davos to promote South Africa to investors as a safe and lucrative place to do business through his Millenium Africa Plan (MAP). A demand from the president that foreign banks pay back profits made over a decade ago would hardly have helped his cause.

In line with Mbeki’s reticence, top South African officials appear reluctant to take sides publicly in the debate over the conference agenda. The differing views on reparations are associated with quite different assessments of how racism should be approached at the WCAR. Northern governments would generally like to see the discussion focus on racial ideologies and psychologies and the need for education and tolerance. This personalised approach to discussing racism avoids an acknowledgement that Europe and the USA built their economies through systematic racially-based exploitation and dispossession.

‘Civil society’ groups in South Africa such as organised labor and NGOs (whose contribution in Durban is confined to a separate venue at a separate time) believe that the WCAR must consider the systemic causes of racial inequality. Amongst these are the historical legacy of slavery and colonialism, the impact of the current phase of corporate-led globalisation on jobs and living standards in the Global South, and, last but not least, the effect of domestic economic policies on the living standards of the black majority.

With the help of the World Bank, South Africa introduced its own home-grown structural adjustment program in 1996, under the rubric, Growth Employment and Redistribution, or GEAR. GEAR focused on macro-economic indicators such as budget-deficit reduction, replacing the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), which had emphasised meeting the basic needs of the population. The South African government is caught between a rock and a hard place. If it limits itself to the ‘personalised’ approach, it risks being co-opted into an agenda set by the North. Debt cancellation would be off the agenda, as would most of the concerns being raised by grassroots groups in South Africa.

On the other hand, if the South African government takes a courageous line against the racial disparities exacerbated by globalisation, it risks throwing the spotlight on its own neoliberal policies. Since the introduction of GEAR, life has undoubtedly become harder for the vast majority of the poorest black South Africans. In 1990 South Africa was the second most unequal society in the world. After seven years of an ANC government, South Africa has won first place.

One option, of course, is to keep quiet and try to bask in the glory of the political ‘miracle’ of the South African transition and the racial reconciliation it was built on. As conference hosts there will be plenty of opportunity for pomp and ceremony, and to promote Durban as a tourist destination. For those off the tourist track in Durban’s black and Indian townships, however, it increasingly seems as if the struggle against racism is a struggle against our own post-apartheid government.

While the government bureaucrats meet in the ICC, and NGOs parley in Kingsmead stadium, community groups across the city are planning their own action. They will call for
an end to cost-recovery in poor townships, an end to evictions, a halt to commercialisation and privatisation of services, and a renewed focus on meeting basic needs. Their Concerned Citizens Forum, or CCF, formed by poor people of every race and religion is likely to make one of the most powerful statements against racism at the WCAR, although they may not be in a lavish venue, and the TV cameras of the world may miss them.

However, we urge all those international groups and activists on the way to Durban to make contact with grassroots groups like the CCF. We’ll certainly be with them, and we promise to bring you the story from the grassroots outside the WCAR in future postings.

**Reflections on Durban (September 2001)**

Most notably, the US government’s premature departure from the World Conference Against Racism was the highest-profile pullout ever staged by such a low-profile delegation. One wonders whether US officials were sent there with the express purpose of being withdrawn in protest. What Bush overlooked is that the damage already done, which the United States cannot dodge its responsibility by its absence.

The damage we are referring to is the legacy of centuries of conquest, subjugation, and economic exploitation on the descendants of slaves and on colonised and indigenous peoples. Granted, Bill Clinton’s apologies pale into insignificance by comparison. In reality, the former colonial and slave-trading powers needed this conference more than the so-called victims. This was a unique opportunity for Western governments to look on politely while representatives of the poor and marginalised aired their grievances, and for those governments to make a symbolic gesture in the direction of their victims—infinitely preferable to the hard-core demonstrators on the streets of Seattle or Genoa.

The European Union recognised this. The Belgian foreign minister stayed an extra night in Durban, holding up an important EU summit in Brussels, in order to try to come up with a final conference declaration. ‘One of the main reasons we need this conference to be a success’ he said at his press conference, ‘is to provide a reply to the ‘anti-globalists.” The message Europe wanted to give to the anti-globalisation movement is that Western powers are aware of their historical responsibility for creating poverty and inequality and are on top of the situation.

Fancy footwork by Europe insured just this outcome. The conference declaration denounces slavery and colonialism and recommends remedies based on a ‘developmental partnership,’ such as ‘promotion of foreign direct investment and market access.’ Presto! Western elites are absolved of the guilt they might feel for having built their economies on systematic racial exploitation, and, as if by magic, minor modifications to their present economic policies are offered as remedies. No need for wild calls like reparations, and never mind a fundamental rethinking of contemporary capitalism. And as a bonus, Thabo Mbeki and leaders of other African elites consent to the outcome. Not a bad result for Europe. Seems like Bush missed the boat.

Even greater legitimacy was accorded the UN conference by the presence of thousands of nongovernmental delegates at the parallel NGO Forum. Not only did African presidents endorse the conference outcome but those boisterous civil society types, who have developed a predilection for trying to sabotage international gatherings of world leaders, had their own meeting just a block away. Not surprisingly, the NGO declaration contains much more radical language than the official UN document. It condemns the contemporary
racist exploitation by states of groups such as the Palestinians, the Dalits (or ‘untouchables’) in India, and present-day slaves in Mauritania and elsewhere. And it calls for direct financial reparations to be paid to the victims of racism. It also points to present forms of globalisation as an ongoing source of racial inequality.

What impact will the NGO document have on the UN or its member governments? Perhaps the best indication of this is given by the response of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, to the NGO document. Her first, private reaction was apparently to reject it outright. Later, at a press conference, she said that while it contained some good ideas, she could not recommend it to the main conference. In particular, she felt that its reference to Zionism as racism was unhelpful.

Could it be that the whole multimillion-dollar event, including the NGO Forum, was a charade, designed to give the impression that the more enlightened elements of global civil society have bought into the empty promises of globalisation? That certainly was the prevailing view in the third gathering, the unofficial ‘pavement conference’ attended by 20,000 landless and penniless people from around Durban and elsewhere in South Africa.

Unable to afford the $100 entrance fee to the NGO Forum, Durban’s poor held their own assembly and march. This was the largest political protest in South Africa since the demise of apartheid, outside of a labor-union general strike. A few US conference delegates strayed wide-eyed into the gatherings. They may not have understood the slogans being chanted by the masses in Zulu: Ulawula ngobubanxa Mbeki, e-South Africa (‘Hey Mbeki, you’re messing up South Africa’); Wena wawutshelwua ubani ukuthi amanzi ayakhokhela? (‘Who told you you could sell us water?’).

But they couldn’t have missed the placards: ‘Landlessness equals racism.’ ‘You promised us land: you gave us jail.’ ‘The landless of South Africa support the landless of Palestine.’ Since the demise of apartheid, just 1 percent of South Africa’s land has been redistributed to the black majority. White farmers still own 85 percent of the land. Homeless families who recently put up shacks on unused land in Johannesburg to fend off the winter cold were promptly and mercilessly evicted by the ANC municipality. Residents of Durban’s still-segregated black townships also condemned the ANC’s cost-recovery policies, which have led to thousands of people having their water and electricity cut off and 100,000 people contracting cholera in the past year. Thousands of workers marched to protest the job losses associated with South Africa’s home-grown (but co-written by the World Bank) structural adjustment program. South African unemployment is estimated to be around 40 percent, and according to the UN Development Program, South Africa recently overtook Brazil to become the most unequal society on the planet.

Across South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, a new social movement is forming to resist the new economic apartheid, which comes in the form of structural adjustment, corporate excess, and debt-dependency. This is a global apartheid system felt almost as strongly in the ghettos of Western cities as in the sweatshops of the Third World. The ‘Durban Social Forum’ was founded on the streets outside the World Conference Against Racism to challenge this system. At Porto Alegre in Brazil in February 2002, the second World Social Forum will unpack an alternative vision for the world, in which peoples’ basic rights are paramount. Later this month protesters will once again challenge the World Bank’s dependency-creating policies in Washington, D.C. Then in November, thousands across the world will challenge the proposed new round of WTO talks to be held in the inaccessible state of Qatar. In September 2002, many thousands will return to Johannesburg
to challenge the hype at the Rio+10 summit on sustainable development. Together with the local struggles for jobs, homes, services, education, and healthcare, this is the real cutting edge of the fight against racism on a global scale. The World Conference Against Racism never provided a real opportunity for change. We are pleased that the US government revealed its real interests by going home. At least Bush, unlike his predecessor, represents a more honest approach.
Chapter 5
WCAR seen from the US left

By Eric Mann

On September 11, 2001, a Black man from Harlem, an NGO delegate to the just concluded World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), was returning home to New York when his plane was detoured to Newfoundland, where he and his fellow passengers were detained for several days.

The symbolism was painfully reflective of the conference from which he was just returning, for Newfoundland had been attacked, not discovered, in 1497, by Giovanni Caboto, an Italian sailor backed by the English Crown. The English called their stolen treasure ‘new found land’ only to subjugate the indigenous Mi’kmaq people and kill all the Beothuk. It was not just a few delegates from WCAR who were driven off course and detained on September 11, 2001. It felt like the whole conference and all we had worked for was being eclipsed by a shadow of reaction.

Seemingly overnight, the Bush Administration and the two-party elite were able to use the events of September 11 to move against any vestiges of progressivism and liberalism—let alone radicalism, anti-imperialism, and socialism—that they hadn’t already beaten out of the body politic over the past two decades. The US Republicans and Democrats have formed a unity party; the Left’s accusation that there is only one capitalist party with two branches is no longer debated, as there is ‘bipartisan’ support for racial profiling, massive expenditures for the military, restrictions on already limited civil rights and civil liberties, wholesale layoffs of workers, and a war hysteria that the Bush Administration is trying to institutionalise. In every historical circumstance, there is a challenge to the Left. In this situation, the challenge is how to build a movement against war, racism, and imperialist expansion in the midst of the most bellicose and reactionary mass politics.

The actual historical impact of an event depends upon the actions, events, and consequences that follow it; the writing of the ‘historical record’ is an organising project, a reflection of class struggle and national liberation struggles. We are all actors in making history, and the writing of it is one form of its making. Walter Benjamin, a German antifascist revolutionary, commented on the Right’s efforts to smash the history of the Left’s victories: ‘Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.’

The organised Right, including far too many self-promoting or disillusioned former ‘sixties radicals,’ is constructing a mass amnesia about the enormous victories of the US and world Left during the ‘two decades of the sixties.’ The struggle to put WCAR back on the agenda begins with the reconstruction of the historical record.

The events that have unfolded since September 11 make a thoughtful sum-up of the World Conference Against Racism even more important than it was in the days immediately following WCAR. To move on, without considering the deep and strategic connection

2. Especially for a younger generation that did not live through those epochal events, I use the term ‘two decades of the sixties’ to refer to the period, arbitrarily constructed, from 1955, the time of the Bandung Conference and the Montgomery Bus Boycott to 1975, the defeat of the US in Vietnam. I would mark, again arbitrarily, the counter-revolution against the gains of the New Left as 1980, with the election of Ronald Reagan.
between the two events, would be a grave mistake. At this point in history, reconstructing an ideological, political, organisational, and tactical unity for a not yet created antiracist, anti-imperialist US Left is the central challenge facing the disparate if courageous social movements in this country.

Durban, WCAR, and the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Forum in particular, created an important laboratory for assessing the actual state of these movements and their efforts to impact a world event of great possibility. If there is ever to be an effective anti-war movement in the US, it must be tied to the development of a viable international antiracist, anti-imperialist united front. The story of WCAR must be told as part of that process. This is one such effort.

The final governmental document coming out of Durban and the brazen US walk out from the entire conference clearly demonstrates that the antiracist forces at Durban did not win many concrete demands. Still, as a dress rehearsal for future world struggles, WCAR was an important and, at times, amazing event, the high points of which were the complete disgrace and isolation of the United States government and its self-exposure as a racist bully, the spirited show of support for the Palestinian liberation struggle, and the strong NGO document against racism—even if rejected in its essence by the world’s governments.

At every point in history, left forces must judge their progress, achievements, and failures against some barometer of what is historically possible given the actual balance of power. There was no way a disparate array of groups from around the world, many of whom had no previous history of working together, could have imposed their will on their own governments, let alone a world body dominated by the US.

The low point of Durban was the recognition of the generally disorganised and ineffective state of progressives working within the UN structures, demonstrated by the inability of any forms, structures, or political forces to provide political or organisational leadership. The historic significance of Durban will depend largely on post-Durban initiatives to move history forward, initiatives that are desperately needed and for which this strategic sum-up can provide a point of reference for debate, discussion, re-examination, regrouping, and reconstruction. Thus, this book is a tactic within a larger antiracist organising strategy.

When I first knew I was going to Durban, I planned to participate in and analyze two separate but interrelated conferences—the UN Governmental World Conference Against Racism, and the WCAR NGO Forum, a meeting of non-governmental organisations held the week before the governments met, ostensibly to impact governmental deliberations. In fact, this narrative focuses almost exclusively on the NGO Forum for several interrelated reasons: 1) my own work focuses on the building of radical and, if possible, revolutionary movements to challenge existing state and corporate structures; 2) the NGO Forum was so badly organised and so ineffective on its own terms that it was unable to actually impact the UN governmental conference; these were fundamentally two separate events that theoretically needed to be interconnected but in practice were not; 3) the UN Governmental Conference did everything it could to exclude participation of the NGO delegates—denying credentials, denying press passes to established media if they were also delegates from NGOs, and denying access to the conference, even as observers, for the thousand or so delegates from the NGO Forum who stayed in Durban for the second week.

In this chapter, I will summarise the main strategic debates and developments at the NGO Forum and evaluate WCAR on its own terms and stated objectives.

The US threat

Malcolm X often repeated his threat to take Black peoples’ grievances against the United
States to the United Nations on the grounds that Black people had inalienable national rights as an oppressed people, and had demands for autonomy and equality that went beyond civil rights granted in the US constitution.

These were ‘human rights’ that were protected by international law, and were best won in an international arena. Despite Malcolm’s agitational threat, there was, in fact, no concerted effort to go to the UN. Everyone in the Civil Rights Movement and Black Liberation Movement understood that the UN was not and could not be an ‘independent’ institution. It was located in New York, ‘USA.’ The United States was the most powerful world superpower at the time, and the US and the European colonial powers dominated the Security Council.

Still, how times have changed. Malcolm’s thinking was shaped by a revolutionary period in which every year contained events of such historical import that they seemed like decades. The Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc nations provided a military and even nuclear counterbalance to the US; the revolutionary movements in the Third World were distinctly anti-US, anti-imperialist, and generally pro-socialist, and the US was painfully aware of some of the limits of its own power, even its need to curry favor with Third World governments to prevent them from ‘going communist.’ Despite the structural obstacles, Malcolm did indeed carry out his UN strategy. He organised one of the most important events in 20th century antiracist history—his brilliant alliance with Fidel Castro to bring the Cuban communist leader to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, after he heard that the Cuban delegation had been pushed around and discriminated against in a midtown luxury hotel near the UN at the instigation of the US government.

For days, Cuban revolutionaries, many of them Black, and Black activists from Harlem held a love fest—infuriating the US government, whose move had backfired. The famous pictures of Fidel and Malcolm talking strategy to each other in the heart of Harlem were sent around the world. This was an embryonic but profound expression of the same strategy articulated in Dispatches: build a strategic alliance of the multinational multiracial working class inside the US with oppressed peoples and nations both inside and outside the US to directly challenge US imperialism.

But WCAR took place in an age of world counter-revolution, 40 years later, in what seems like light years later, in which the former Soviet Union no longer exists, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Fred Hampton, Mark Clark and too many other Black leaders in the US have been assassinated, the vast majority of Third World nations have been reconceptualised into the most blatant form of economic and political dependency, and the US, now the unchecked ‘rogue superpower,’ is throwing its weight around the world with the greatest imperial arrogance. And this was before September 11.

Throughout WCAR, before and after the US walk-out, the United States was aggressively pushing its objectives and had enormous influence with, or upon, virtually every government in the world. Within the Third World especially, the level of economic dependency, fear of US military intervention, and even cultural subordination made a coordinated resistance to US domination very difficult. The US understands the role of ideology.

It tries to rule by intellectual and ideological hegemony when possible and brute force only when persuasion and voluntary self-servitude fail. The US approaches each UN conference as a tactic in its broader strategy of world rule. Thus, despite the weakness of many of the actual antiracist organisations at WCAR, the sum total of their work was still effective enough to momentarily drive the US off a world stage. Clearly, it does not like to be criticised, let alone attacked. The US was uniquely and profoundly vulnerable at the World Conference Against Racism because of its history of racism, which is not only reflected in the vicious ideology of white supremacy, but also in the fundamental structures of capitalist and
later imperialist conquest—genocide, slavery, mass torture, and murder. The myth of white, Christian, European capitalist superiority is central to the master narrative of the US nation-state and its historical justification for its manifest destiny. As such, the antiracist movement in general and the movement for reparations in particular are enormous threats to US ideological hegemony. This history, once exposed, shows Western civilisation as Western barbarism and calls into question the very historical right of the ‘United’ States to exist.

Thus, whether through its own direct threats and influence or working through its proxies in Europe such as the pathetic Belgians (with their own nation also built upon African genocide), the US took WCAR and its potential outcomes very seriously. As a result, the efforts of the US to intimidate Third World nations was a prominent theme at Durban; it threatened dependent governments to stay away from criticisms of Israel, and to disassociate themselves from support for Palestine and reparations, or suffer the consequences.

This UN conference attracted a group of self-selected antiracist NGOs, many with ties to actual struggles on the ground. In that context, the efforts of the majority of NGO delegates to push a strong antiracist agenda, and in particular the work of those who tried to directly focus on the link between racism and Western imperialism provided a strategic challenge that shaped the entire conference. The central contradiction at Durban was between the United States and the G8 nations on the one hand and the world antiracist movement on the other. And this time, the antiracist movement was choosing the United Nations as an important site of struggle.

Decoding the United Nations

At its heart, the World Conference against Racism should be understood as the United Nations Conference Against Racism, only a part of which was the NGO Forum. Many on the antiracist Left see the United Nations as a marginal or even irrelevant site of struggle. The UN General Assembly, the institution’s most democratic structure, allows each nation one vote; but because of Security Council permanent member veto power (held by the US, Britain, China, Russia and France) any resolutions that challenge the US, the G8, or their allies can be roadblocked.

And yet, the UN creates an organisational opportunity for diverse forces to coalesce, debate, and negotiate. In its international aspirations, its structures of public debate on the behavior of the United States, its progressive world conferences—antiracism, environment, development, women, HIV/AIDS, human rights, children and poverty—the UN offers a ray of hope for many Third World nations. In the absence of a Non-Aligned Movement with its own structures, a world Left, or a socialist or communist international, the UN reflects the potential and the limits of the G77 and China (the nations of the Global South) and the actual balance of forces in the world.

The world governments reflected in the UN have, over the last 25 years, supported an expanded role for NGOs, corresponding to the decline and fall of many state socialist governments. The ideological focus on ‘civil society’ and NGOs (along with the

---

3. The story of Belgian ‘slave labour’ and ‘mass murder’ in the cruelly named Congo Free State or as it was once called ‘the Belgian Congo’ and the account of one of the first anti-colonial movements inside a Western imperialist nation is told by Adam Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

4. The United Nations is organised into many different blocs of countries: the United States often functions as a caucus of one, the European Union as one block, and the G77 and China as another. The Group of 77 (G77) represents all the nations of the Global South or Third World, and in actuality contains more than 130 individual nations.
transnational corporations) as ‘civil society players’ comes out of anticommunist theories that critique many of the totalitarian forms of state socialist experiments but never acknowledge the dictatorial tendencies and realities of capitalism as well. The NGOs play an ideological role in the new neoliberal world, in which capitalist governments in structural alignment with the corporate class try to create the illusion that they are impacted by the democratic interaction of ‘civil society players.’ The UN, whose processes for years were restricted to governments only, has opened up many of its processes to include NGO and ‘civil society’ participation, if only at the most minimal and often tokenistic levels of ‘input.’

Today, the UN governments are not that worried about the critiques by NGO structures because, frankly, many of the NGOs are poorly organised, represent little or no social base, have voluntarily accepted accommodationist politics or are directly funded by their own governments, or other governments. Many Third World NGOs are funded by the European Union and US Agency for International Development (USAID) or by the UN itself. Many Third World NGOs cannot afford to get to UN meetings without stipends from the UN. These ties that bind, as one can imagine, create a material constraint on their behavior once they arrive.

**Decoding NGOs**

Outside of the UN context, the NGO phenomenon is under sharp critique by independent social movements, grassroots groups, left trade unions, and national liberation movements—that is, any intellectual or group that is situated in opposition to world racism and imperialism. James Petras, an expert on Latin American revolutionary movements, accuses the NGOs as a whole of being ‘agents of imperialism,’ siding with their governments to undermine radical and revolutionary movements, and putting forth an ‘anti-state’ ideology that fosters the myth that there is a big world of ‘civil society’ in which the poor and the rich interact democratically. In that way, the NGOs function to leave the capitalist state relatively immune from attack.6

The noted Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, expresses similar views, criticising Palestinian NGOs for their objective opposition to genuine national liberation:

Put very simply are they a substitute for a political movement, and can they ever become one? I don’t think so since each operates in a bilateral relationship with the funders, each of whom makes clear that money for work on democracy, health care, education—all important things—is forthcoming only within the overall frame of the current peace process [which the Palestinian Intifada is rejecting]. And these NGOs, necessary as they are to keep Palestinian life going, themselves become the goal, instead of, for example, liberation, or ending the occupation, or changing Palestinian society.7

Given these historically-determined constraints, many militant, radical, and even revolutionary forces have accepted the technical definition of a non-governmental organisation while simultaneously distancing themselves from the dominant history and culture of an NGO structure they are trying to impact.

At WCAR, while there was awareness of the dangers of the NGO phenomenon, many of the delegates were not ‘regulars’ at UN events, but had come to Durban out of a passion to fight racism and just to have said that they had been there.

There is a radical edge to the fight against racism, rooted in the abuses that people of color all over the world have suffered and continue to suffer, that exerted a powerful impact on the general category of NGO and attracted a more militant and independent cross-section of grassroots groups. This is not to say that careerism, funder-driven behavior, and ‘going along with the program’ dynamics were not present at Durban, but they were not at all the dominant tendency.

While the NGOs still ranged over a wide spectrum of politics, as a group, they had come to Durban to launch a historic challenge to world racism—not through sit-ins or take-overs or armed struggle, but in the equally important arena of ideological struggle, in the battle over the language of resolutions.

The primary goal of the NGO Forum was to draft a strong document to influence the subsequent UN governmental conference and its final declaration and program—with the understanding that the antiracist movement in the world, reflected in mass organisations or even ‘advocacy organisations,’ was far more militant and concerned about the structural causes of, and cures for, racist policies than most of the world’s governments. Thus, Durban was a world workshop to evaluate the capacity of the NGOs to impact the policies of the UN.

Many NGOs from the United States, especially those from the Black Liberation Movement and Civil Rights Movement, were aware of the efforts of Malcolm X (and some were aware of the prior efforts by W.E.B. Dubois and Paul Robeson decades before) to bring the antiracist and national self-determination demands of Black people to the UN. But in reality, very few groups had really tested the UN as a forum for moving public debate forward, or tested the capacity of any international body to get the outlaw and racist West to ‘fess up to its past sins, let alone force the US and Europe to begin a process of introspection, repentance, and reparation.

The historical opportunity—based on time, place, and conditions

Given the organisational structure of the UN, and the actual state of the antiracist forces worldwide, what could the delegates from the non-governmental organisations, expect to achieve?

- We might expect to coalesce progressive antiracist forces. Many city-wide and regional groups in the United States, the most viable grassroots organisations with any base on the ground, have very little experience in international networking and relationship building. The UN provides an efficient way to meet people from all over the world, in one centralised venue and to learn from each other. This conference, focused on racism, would draw together some of the most progressive NGOs:
- We might be able to unite in the production of an NGO Forum Declaration, a unifying progressive antiracist statement of policy and demands that could function as an ideological instrument on its own terms and generate a focused and prioritised set of key demands to raise against the Western powers.
- We might expect to unify as many of the 10,000 NGO delegates as possible around an antiracist NGO document, and then try to exercise influence on the governmental document. Even if rejected by the US and G8 the actual movements on the ground could come out of the process strengthened with greater
international moral and political authority. That would require producing a high-visibility document, the NGO Forum Declaration, a manifesto of antiracist, anti-imperialist resistance that could be circulated throughout the world, and among each group’s home constituencies.

- We might expect to create networks of cooperation among the NGOs, both outside and inside UN structures, forged in the process of struggle that could continue after the Durban conference to place even greater pressure on transnational corporations and governments in subsequent months and years.

The idea of using the WCAR as a ‘court of public opinion’ is not utopian. At the past two UN World Conferences to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination (both in Geneva, in 1978 and 1983), the antiracist forces focused their efforts on toppling the Apartheid regime in South Africa. As a tactic, the UN forums played a positive role in an overall international strategy by the African National Congress (ANC) to isolate and eventually bring down the racist government and achieve Black majority rule. The 1983 conference declared ‘Apartheid is totally abhorrent to the dignity of mankind and a threat to international peace and security.’

8 (The United States boycotted those conferences as well.)

It was possible at Durban that the NGOs and some progressive governments developed a mass antiracist mass initiative with a foundation of support for reparations and Palestinian national liberation. But such a forceful antiracist initiative would have required an international movement at a far higher level of consciousness and organisation than presently exists. A few of the problems faced by the NGO forces and the NGO Forum illustrate this gap between an ideal plan and the actual practice at Durban.

Structural opportunity for leadership

Every United Nations conference on a major issue, such as WCAR, has a complex but relatively orderly process by which a series of preparatory committees—PrepComs—are organised, at which governmental delegations argue over policy issues, write draft language, debate, bargain, and negotiate toward a final document. In anticipation of Durban, Regional PrepComs were held in Europe (Strasbourg, France), the Americas (Santiago, Chile), Africa (Dakar, Senegal), and Asia/Middle East (Tehran, Iran). These regional meetings were supposed to feed their results into full international PrepComs at Geneva. NGO activists were present at all of those meetings. The point? That there was plenty of opportunity to develop a functional leadership to provide structure and guidance to the antiracist NGOs in Durban.

At WCAR, an official UN structure existed for the NGOs to write their own parallel document. The UN had organised a parallel and even anticipatory NGO structure (with the NGOs meeting almost a full week before the governments in Durban), allowing the NGOs to have a significant voice, audience, and separate structure from which to try to influence the governmental declarations. These structures were mandated to develop a virtually finished draft document that could be amended and then ratified by the NGO Forum delegates. Some credit should be given to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, the ranking UN chair of WCAR. The UN structures created an organised forum for grassroots groups to challenge the world governments, literally handing the NGOs a golden opportunity.

Caucuses and tendencies within the broad category of ‘NGO’ had the chance to carry out militant challenges under UN auspices, and, at times, protections.

The question remained, who would, and could, provide leadership among the NGOs? Who could take advantage of those opportunities? As we will see, the sad answer was, ‘No one.’

There are some NGOs, national and international, who make the UN a main site of their work, and have specific recognised status with the UN bodies called ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) consultative status. These groups, e.g. Amnesty International, had some organisational authority to lead out of their experience in UN structures but did not reflect a multiracial base or a political point of view around which they had built support, either among the newer NGOs, or in actual communities, workplaces, or specific countries. Others, like the South African NGO Coalition (Sangoco) tried to call for plenary meetings but claimed they were overruled by the International Steering Committee.

While these internal and factional conflicts are complex, one result of them was that these leadership structures were often invisible, and played no public role in trying, let alone succeeding, to organise, mobilise, and focus the activities of the many thousands of delegates who were new to UN proceedings—most of whom went there to be organised.

The logical site for such leadership would have been the opening plenary and yet the first day gave clear indications that no such structures of leadership or rank and file resistance existed. At first, watching 10,000 delegates fill a section of the stadium, with banners and chants from all over the world, there was a sense of hope. Within a few hours, however, it was clear that things didn’t look good. This was not a serious political plenary but a bad attempt at a ‘feel good’ diversion by the UN High Commission and the International Steering Committee. Scandinavian singing, African dancing, and militant but vague speeches masked a political crisis at the conference that was already in full swing.

What would have been reasonable and historically possible for new delegates to expect? We might have expected orientation to NGO and governmental structures, political leadership in analyzing the governmental document and preparing the NGO document, and tactical leadership on daily actions to impact media, the people of South Africa, and the governments. None of those took place.

Perhaps 90 percent or more of the NGO delegates had not attended any PrepComs for WCAR. That meant more than 9,000 people had come to Durban looking for direction and looking for structures in which to be effective. At a minimum, the opening NGO plenary could have provided some sense of structural, if not political, orientation. Instead, the canned opening show was a kickoff for a conference rife with backstage factional disputes among the NGO organising committees, and within every NGO structure, including, unfortunately, many unresolved political conflicts among the South Africans themselves.

Document drafting

At WCAR, although the governments were not yet meeting when the NGO conference began, there was a marked draft of the governmental document available to every delegate. Each section of the document was marked with bold letters and ‘brackets’; governments put language they were disputing in brackets, e.g. ‘[US should take responsibility and pay reparations for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade].’

Given that the NGOs had five days of preparation before the governments formally began their own sessions in Durban, it would have been possible to have a daily briefing on the governmental document, each day focusing on specific components that were weak or objectionable, led by representatives of NGOs that had taken leadership on those issues. Instead, there was no coordinated effort to publicly discuss the governmental document and to find ways to impact it. There were no daily meetings open to all NGO delegates for orientation or where debates about daily opportunities and tactical interventions could take
Ravi Nair, of the South East Asia Human Rights Network, whose organisation independently put out a daily bulletin at WCAR, challenged the authority of those who had taken institutional power in the NGO structures preceding and during the conference: To begin with, the success of the conference depended upon the International Steering Committee (ISC) and the UN NGO Secretariat, represented by the regional NGOs. But in fact, the ISC and in most cases the regional NGOs had no moral authority to call a plenary, no moral authority to put forth any views on policy. Most of them are fly-by-night operators. If you had a ticket to Geneva you could play a role in the Preparatory Committees but these people had no constituency, no track record, and no outreach program.

The only exception was the meeting of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, where many of the delegates had a certain legitimacy and generated substantive language that was not reflected in the final WCAR declarations.\(^9\)

The role of the issue caucuses

With no daily plenary at which a common program and tactical plan could be struggled out, the conference was set up so that if you wanted to be involved, you joined a specific workgroup or issue group. There were 39 such caucuses: Africa, South Africa, Africans and Afro-descendant, Americas, Caribbeans, HIV/AIDS, Women, Youth, Environmental Racism, Poverty and Racism, Indigenous peoples, Indigenous women, and so on. In terms of their impact on the overall WCAR processes, the issue caucuses reflected both the strengths and the weaknesses of the NGO forces and in no way could be called a NGO ‘movement.’

Given the power of Western imperialism and the growing disintegration of public life they so proudly call ‘civil society,’ it is often a good tactical approach that activists and organisers grab one piece of reality, one major problem that the system generates, and try to build an organisation or even a cause around one specific and often profound abuse, such as global warming, police brutality against Black youth, educational racism, violence against women, or Third World debt. The list of good causes is almost infinite.

Still, the challenge is how can we build a movement? How do we form a larger political organisation with a broader and more comprehensive political vision? How do we develop a totalising strategy and organising plan to challenge a totalising enemy—in this case world imperialism led by the U.S.? Despite the dilemmas I discussed, the intention of the UN to divide people up to work on particular issues was actually a good idea. The general NGO document would gain its strength from the power and clarity of people working on the frontlines of actual struggles, who could bring an analytical focus to the actual language of the document, and from there, negotiate with the governments who generally want to weaken or delete the language.

Moreover, many oppressed groups have needed specific organisational forms to advance their goals, often forming separate organisations to unify their own people. From there they can then address the specificity of their oppression as Indigenous peoples, Blacks, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders, women, or Third World women. Each of these structures is in fact essential to the demands for self-determination, for sovereignty, and for finding ways to challenge the larger racist structures formed by Western imperialism.

In the specific political dynamics of Durban, no one was capable of organising viable plenary sessions and no political leadership came forth to propose a program with lead demands, that could, in turn, provide context for the many particular demands. One example could have been that all the caucuses would prioritise support for the Palestinians, and for reparations, not at the expense of ‘their’ issues, but in a way to express that the

---

Foreign Policy Bottom Up  A report by the Centre for Civil Society

...genocide against the Palestinian people and the crimes of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade are all of our issues.

There were no open and effective left or organised groups trying, let alone succeeding, at such a tactical plan. In the absence of a more compelling overarching politics, the issue workshop structure fostered particularism and isolation. Each individual delegate or even small group of delegates had to make individual choices.

Unified, creative daily tactics and coherent cooperation from issue-based NGOs were missing at Durban and could have placed sustained pressure on the governments, whether or not the US walked out. The excellent work in the individual, issue-based caucuses was later reflected in a strong NGO Forum Declaration, but even that was not more and in fact less than the sum of its parts. The caucus work did not translate into a vibrant conference-wide movement or a highly visible challenge to the world governments.

So what were people doing at WCAR?

If there were no daily orientation programs, no common actions to impact the delegates and no efforts at a common written program that could impact the governments, what exactly were people doing at Durban? What did the conference actually look like? Major Kobese, Program Coordinator of Sangoco, commenting on the second day of the conference, observed:

There were no commissions yesterday. Today the delegates are wandering around aimlessly; the panels are in a mess; commissions have failed and will fail. The deadline for the submissions of the inputs is tomorrow. What will the nature of the final document be, considering that the thematic commissions will not have had any opportunity to provide substantive input? What will the final document out of this process represent, and whom?

In the absence of structures for a real political convention, people created their own itineraries. Durban was organised like an antiracist fair with many organisations running booths to advertise their organisation and their products in large tents around the Kingsmead Cricket Stadium.

- There were daily issue caucus meetings in tents outside the stadium, in which 20 to 30 delegates fought over language on Dalits in India, Environmental Justice, Sex Trafficking, and Indigenous peoples. Perhaps 1,000 people were directly involved in caucus writing and debates.
- Workshops organised general discussions of key issues, often, however, with no action plan to impact WCAR. Some NGOs had the objective of publicising their work for an international audience, others of giving academic presentations to an international audience, and some of gaining international support for specific and popular antiracist struggles. While many of these were meritorious as workshops, others fell far short of what was historically required. Unfortunately, the efforts of organisations to publicise their own work did not evolve into a larger coordinated strategy.

10. ‘Program Coordinator of the NGO WCAR Secretariat calls for an NGO plenary,’ Human Rights Features, 30 August 2001, 1. (Exactly. The absence of NGO plenaries throughout WCAR, more than any internal struggles or factionalism, was the primary failing, because in such a public context, individual groups would have had the chance to vie for leadership and offer specific programs and proposals.)
In some instances, there were large workshops of considerable import—historical inquiries into slavery and reparations, a panel of ten women from Indigenous peoples rights struggles, a chronicle of human rights abuses in Palestine, a compelling presentation about the struggle of Dalits—many with 500 or more attendees. These had the impact of popularising a social movement, picking up international connections, and organising the consciousness of other delegates.

The South African Independent Media Center set up a media room with computers for NGO journalists, ran a website for the conference, and held daily press conferences, often well attended by NGO delegates. The press conference criticised Mbeki’s opening speech to WCAR, publicised the demands of the Palestinians, and supported the Durban Social Forum coalition’s critique of South African neoliberalism, in particular the privatisation of public services such as water and its support for the demands of the landless movement.

The African National Congress organised a well attended lecture series at the nearby University of South Africa (UNISA) campus at which speakers, including Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party, Jacob Zuma, Deputy President of South Africa, Aziz Pahad, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mamoud Mamdani, a former Ugandan intellectual who is now a professor at Columbia University, Ibbo Mandaza, a Zimbabwean Marxist political economist, and Samir Amin, an anti-imperialist author, modeled what a high level of principled political debate looked like.

Many groups were able to set up meetings with South African intellectuals, organisers, and revolutionaries, ANC, SACP, and Cosatu leaders, and those from the Durban Social Forum, or just approach them at the many public events in which they participated. Many US NGOs who had worked in the anti-Apartheid struggle for years had built up many international contacts with South African leaders and were able to help facilitate meetings for other members of their delegations.

For example, the Third World Women’s Alliance and the Applied Research Center, both out of Oakland, California, organised large delegations of US activists and set up tours of South African townships in Soweto and Alexandra and meetings with various left organisations in Durban, Capetown, and Johannesburg—many of whom were present at the Durban conference.

Black Workers for Justice, based in Georgia and North Carolina, and the Environmental Justice Caucus also spent a great deal of time setting up meetings with their South African counterparts.

The Palestinian NGOs generated public events everyday, spending most of their time out in the sunlight, away from the backroom word crafting. They held press conferences and organised daily traveling demonstrations of 50 to 100 people that went all over the Kingsmeade fairgrounds in search of audiences. They handed out leaflets, sought out Israeli delegates, who often sought them out as well, held angry public debates, and displayed large banners at the opening and closing plenary sessions: ‘Racism: Israelis Have Right To Return, Palestinians Do Not.’

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the Durban Social Forum both organised large marches to protest specific policies of the South African government. These were profoundly important historical events but were also fundamentally internal to South African politics and the struggle of many forces to define the terms of self-determination. Neither focused on the United States as the main target, nor am I arguing that they should have. But for US delegates trying to place the primary onus for racism on our own government and trying to make the
strategic connection between racism and imperialism, these marches were no substitute for an independent tactical plan.

While all those events, especially taken as a whole, could easily provide a productive week in Durban, the challenge to the NGOs at the World Conference Against Racism was to make an international impact against racist policies and racist governments at Durban, in particular the United States and the G7. In that context, many of the events at WCAR, while of enormous educational value, did not serve those objectives.

The US walk-out provided a ready-made vehicle for two days of protest. All NGO delegates could see a common enemy taking a bold and provocative step, and the world media in Durban saw the walk-out and the anti-US NGO protests as ‘a good story.’ But had the US, instead, stayed in Durban and chosen to further impose its racist agenda on the entire conference through more formal UN structures, could the world NGOs have launched an effective confrontation? My sense is no. That would have required the completion of the NGO Forum Declaration with a well-publicised challenge to the governments as well as organised mass demonstrations against the US for its failure to support true Palestinian self-determination, its failure to stop Israeli aggression and brutality, and its failure to support reparations.

The US walk-out offered an historical opportunity for a short-term resistance, which the NGOs carried out well. But as the NGO Forum limped into its last days, the very low level of organisational unity and capacity among at least 500 highly visible left antiracist activists in the US delegation became more apparent. As such, while the heady events at Durban created a historical experience of a lifetime, they actually camouflaged an even greater crisis of will and organisation among the NGOs and the absence of even the most minimally coordinated movement— even for the duration of WCAR alone.

The challenge of leadership in the world antiracist movement

In the specific context of Durban, the US NGOs—given the prominent and destructive role played by the US governmental delegation—were needed to play a prominent and constructive role in mobilising a worldwide resistance to the US. In particular, Black delegates from the US have historically had the moral authority and legitimacy to lead the fight against slavery, apartheid in all its forms, genocide, and now reparations.

Unfortunately, the conference also exposed profound splits and weaknesses within the Black Liberation Movement, and within the overall US antiracist movement, that prevented such coordinated leadership. In the absence of an organised antiracist movement, several forms of ‘legitimacy’ are needed to be an effective leadership group: moral authority, political power, and organisational will and capacity. For example, the national March on Washington in 1963, a major antiracist united front, was led by what were called the ‘Big Five’ civil rights groups—National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Urban League, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

While they had enormous tensions among themselves, they were able to maintain a viable united front, at least for the duration of the march. The Kennedy Administration and the US public did accept both their moral and political authority and the representative nature of the march that they called. The problem today, however, is not the political and strategic differences in the Black Liberation Movement, most of which would take years or decades to be resolved or even reduced, but the absence of the united front culture that characterised the movement in the 1960s. Such a renewed focus on the united front would
give greater urgency to finding common plans of action, and creating some leadership and governance structures that could help resolve what seem to be historically endemic conflicts among particular individuals and groups that, at least so far, have proven intractable.

Unfortunately, no US antiracist forces have anything near the moral authority that the frontline civil rights groups had in the 1960s. Jesse Jackson, who showed up in Durban surrounded, as usual, by a coterie of media, had more political authority than all the rest of the US delegates combined. Despite the disagreements many of us have with Reverend Jackson for his binding ties to the Democratic Party and US big business, his presence as a one-man movement was a walking criticism of the lack of an organised antiracist united front in the US that was so needed at WCAR.

There was nothing, at least in theory, that would have prevented a US coalition of antiracist forces from holding a pre-convention in the US prior to WCAR. Such a conference could have elected representative leadership and agreed upon a common program and common tactical plan for WCAR. Such an antiracist convention could have had enormous capacity to impact every UN structure—the PrepComs, the regional meetings, the International Steering Committee, and the WCAR NGO delegates as well as setting up mass structures of participation at Durban.

Once in Durban, given the vacuum of official leadership at the UN NGO level and the enormous number of US delegates (estimated at 3,000 or more out of a total of 10,000), any call for an open US plenary meeting, to discuss draft program language and to lay out a tactical plan for the conference, could have drawn 1,000 delegates or more. But the problems would have been enormous and immediate. Who had the moral authority to call the meeting? Who had the political respect and trust of other delegates to put forth an initial political agenda, even for discussion? Which organisations would have had the unity, maturity, and capacity to withstand the inevitable attacks? And would there not have been a strong probability of the meeting breaking up into factional disputes?

For all of those reasons, no forces even tried to organise such a meeting or to reach out to others to see if such an ambitious project were possible. In that individual South Africans and groups called for a decision-making NGO plenary but did not have the capacity or moral authority to make one happen, the dilemma was not particular to the US delegation. There was a unique historical responsibility for the left antiracist forces in the US to challenge our own government. In Durban, that coordinated campaign among US NGOs was limited to the protest against the US government walk-out. One objective of this strategic sum-up is to encourage a better outcome at the next international antiracist conference.

Drafting the NGO Forum Declaration and Programme of Action

The final WCAR NGO Forum Declaration sought to address many issues that would be relevant and historically essential in any comprehensive plan to reduce world racism. Yet, it was the product of an unrepresentative and flawed process whereby more than 90 percent of the NGO delegates played virtually no role in writing, discussing, or voting on it in any manner. The organisational amateurism and factionalism among the NGOs was very unfortunate, because the final document is quite impressive.

It has compelling sections on reparations, Palestine, environmental justice, and Dalits. In fact, many NGOs working on specific issues, e.g. immigration and women, look to their own section of the document as a breakthrough for their work. The problem is that the declaration was supposed to be a highly publicised, historically on-time public document, an actual tactic of intervention in an actual struggle. It failed in that sense, in that most NGOs, even those who attended Durban, have never seen or read it as it finally appeared long after most of them left.
One dilemma that held up the NGO Declaration interminably was whether it was to be a ‘consensus document’ in which all parties had to agree with all sections, or a compilation of each caucus’s writings on each subject area. On September 3, two days after the September 1 final plenary of the NGO Forum, 200 delegates (out of 10,000) were still arguing and debating among themselves in an effort to finish the NGO Forum Declaration and Programme of Action.

At a press conference on September 3, several international human rights organisations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Service for Human Rights, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and Physicians for Human Rights) tried to, in their words, ‘refocus’ the NGO challenge to the governments in anticipation of their disagreements with the final NGO Declaration. The groups’ press conference was an effort, in their view, to accomplish several things:

- They wanted to move the debate away from Palestine and Israel and toward other key issues, such as ‘the rights of Dalits and Roma, racial discrimination in criminal justice systems, the plight of extremely vulnerable groups such as refugees, and dire health issues such as HIV/AIDS.’
- Some groups, such as the Lawyers Committee on Human Rights moved to distance themselves from what they felt was ‘inaccurate and inflammatory’ language against Israel.
- Some wanted to criticise the decision to make the final document, not yet released, a ‘collection of voices from the victims’ as opposed to a ‘consensus document’ drafted to correspond to the specific language of the governmental document.
- Many organisations and individuals at WCAR, including this author, fundamentally disagreed with all of their assumptions.

First, who are these groups and who and what do they represent? There are too many groups, some with large staffs and big budgets, others with just a mailing list and post-office box, that try to project themselves as ‘international organisations’ onto a world stage with no accountability to a grassroots base anywhere. At a conference in South Africa where the vast majority of delegates rallied behind the lead demands of reparations and Palestinian self-determination, who were these ‘human rights’ groups to claim they represented the interests of Africans, Blacks, and Palestinians? None of them had a base in any of those oppressed constituencies. During the anti-US protests, none of the ‘human rights’ groups were present.

Second, the criticism of the Palestinian and Arab caucuses for ‘inaccurate and inflammatory’ language against Israel at a time of Israeli massacres of Palestinian civilians was, objectively, a strong intervention on behalf of Israeli apartheid and racism. The Palestinian people are fighting for their lives, having their land stolen and their children murdered. What possible crime of inflammatory language could exist even in the same breath as the inflammatory weapons the Israelis are using against Palestinian civilians, in violation of every human rights statute in the world? Even if some of the groups had specific tactical criticisms of the Palestinian NGOs, the calling of a press conference to distance yourself from Palestinian rhetoric is simply chauvinist. You don’t criticise the Vietnamese when they are having napalm dropped on them by your own government. You don’t criticise the Jews’ outcries when Hitler is putting them in the ovens. And you don’t criticise the Palestinians publicly for excessive language, unless you want to side with the United States and Israel, who used that ‘language’ as the pretext for their walk-out. This language, by the way, after further investigation into the actual NGO text, proved to be analytical,

factual, and consistent with UN program protocols.

Third, generating a final NGO document based on negotiations between all the NGOs over each caucus’ language, instead of constructing a document based on the core contributions of each caucus, is a recipe for disaster. Achieving ‘consensus language’ would have involved all 39 different issue caucuses voting on each section and each sentence of the final NGO Declaration and Programme of Action. Under this arrangement, the Women’s caucus would have veto power over language in the Reparations section and the Dalit caucus would be debating the declaration of the Palestine caucus until a ‘consensus’ was reached. In that some NGOs felt they were mandated to mimic the UN government process of ‘consensus,’ it is no wonder that the document failed to meet its deadline.

With each caucus meeting often twice a day during Durban, there was the chance to hammer out consensus language within the caucus. At least in each issue caucus there was a chance for international unity, a chance for a coherent politics that could impact the governments and the world, a chance for a negotiated text, and the moral authority that the final language comes from participants with long track records on the issue in question.

Chee Yoke Ling, from the Third World Network in Malaysia, an experienced UN NGO leader who has spent the last ten years trying to build the NGO movement on issues of trade and the environment, raises real concerns about NGO efforts to draft broad manifestos parallel to those of the governments: Some of the NGOs are as bad as the governments. They behave in a self-important manner; they can never reach consensus or even simple agreements. I think the best way to reach greater agreements among NGOs is to begin with bilateral initiatives between specific groups with whom we have some political agreement and a history of common work. Then we generate a document and see who wants to sign onto it. If every group has editorial power we would have a movement of editors, not organisers.

Building on this view, the NGO press conference at the WSSD PrepCom in Bali, Indonesia (a PrepCom for the 2002 WSSD) was a model of how this could have worked at Durban.

In Bali, we organised a press conference of 13 different issue caucuses with each caucus focusing on its central issue. What did it come to Bali to achieve? Did it believe the governmental document reflected progress or regress on that issue? What was the caucus demanding? Unlike WCAR, the World Summit on Sustainable Development has no process for a parallel NGO document. One reason the press conference worked was because all of the caucuses had a baseline political unity in theory and practice—they saw transnational corporations and the United States sabotaging the work of the conference, and they had some actual practice together throughout two weeks of the PrepCom in preparing joint statements as well as organising actual protests and demonstrations. Still, when those of us on the press conference planning group read each caucus’s statement, we realised that each caucus did not really have complete agreement with each other caucus’s statement (e.g. the Arab caucus’s demand that world governments stop blockades against Iraq and Cuba).

So, we came up with a format in which the spokespersons stated, ‘The Women’s caucus says; the Energy caucus says, etc,’ with an understanding that each caucus spoke for itself and we did not speak for each other. And yet, that format, the ‘collection of voices of the victims’ (versus ‘consensus’ format) worked because none of us strongly wanted to disassociate ourselves from the views of any other caucus.

At WCAR, the strength of the final NGO Declaration was the passion and issue-specific knowledge of each section, written by each individual caucus. It was not, nor did it have to be, a ‘consensus’ document. And the self-important human rights groups who felt embarrassed by the language of many of the caucuses, were in fact, inappropriately, trying to speak for the entire NGO Forum. Note that when they put forth their choice of critical

---

issues, they completely omitted Palestinian self-determination (except to condemn its rhetorical excess) and reparations. That is, their effort to get the public message ‘back on track’ came out of a ‘human rights bureaucracy’ caucus no more representative, and in fact a great deal less so, than the African, Black, and Palestinian caucuses which gave the sharpest edge and the most profound content to the antiracist agenda.

I worry that it was the efforts of those who were arguing for a ‘consensus’ document that may have been a major disruptive force, causing the document to never see the light of day while all the NGO delegates were still in Durban. The NGO Declaration never was available for a launch at the final plenary, never was printed in substantial quantities, and still, a year after WCAR, is not available as a mass produced document.

In retrospect, this was a lost opportunity. Had several of the key NGO caucuses been able to reach unity with each other instead of focusing on trying to cobble together the final declaration, the Indigenous peoples, Palestinian, African, Environmental Justice, and Reparations caucuses could have released their own language at a press conference. They could have supported each other’s key demands, printed up an immediate document that was partial but in many ways more representative, and asked all the delegates at WCAR to rally around that document and bring its message to the governments. This could have had so much more impact than the fight for ‘consensus’ on a parallel document that generated neither consensus nor a document that could impact WCAR.

The printed NGO Declaration finally arrived—days after the closing of the NGO Forum. Although the document has some impressive resolutions, it was never presented to an NGO plenary and was delivered to the public and the UN three days after almost all the NGO delegates left. Even when it was finally presented on September 4, only 15 copies were made available and even those had missing pages. In spite of this undesirable and ineffective process, the caucus model succeeded in generating a document worthy of study and use today.13 This discussion is one such effort to continue its impact after the actual events in Durban.

The politics of reparations

The NGO resolutions reflect a major breakthrough in content, regardless of the many contradictions within the African states and the Black Liberation Movement in the US. In terms of its polemical and strategic approach, the NGO Declaration addresses many potential pitfalls in, and attacks upon, the nascent Reparations Movement:

- It offers structural and systematic demands that would take centuries to implement, and would preclude efforts by the West to ‘settle all claims.’
- Its proposal that the West admit to crimes against humanity and institute a cultural introspection to acknowledge that it was built on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade would, of course, put the West on the moral, political, and legal defensive.
- It included, but did not restrict reparations to, individual monetary compensation. It addressed the complexity of the return of land, cancellation (not ‘relief’) of debt, return of art and artifacts, massive expansion of foreign payments for social services, including mental health care for the ongoing pain of colonialism, release of political prisoners, and the correction of the historical record through the creation of tribunals and research institutions. That is, it addressed a comprehensive cultural, economic, structural, psychological payback that involves a complete turning of the tables with the West.

The governmental declaration is complex. On the one hand, it provides language that for the first time admits that slavery was a ‘crime against humanity,’ a major breakthrough of the work of the Reparations Movement that may open the door to future legal claims in both national and international courts. Several governmental delegates from the EU told me that the language was carefully drawn, in order to get European and US support, to make a heartfelt apology but to preclude any legal liability.

Obviously, for most in the Reparations Movement, there can be no ‘heartfelt’ anything without opening the door to legally enforceable reparations. Still, other legal scholars, such as Charles Ogletree, co-chair of the Reparations Coordinating Committee, argue that this is a major legal breakthrough for the Reparations Movement, in that ‘crimes against humanity’ is a specific legal concept in international law that can contribute to both liability and remedy.\(^\text{14}\) Much of this will be tested in future reparations litigation, but as a first step, this was an important victory that should be given even greater attention and scrutiny.

Having admitted that slavery was a ‘crime against humanity,’ there is no offer of reparations in the final UN governmental document, as the text makes clear, by the perpetrators of the Trans-Atlantic, Trans-Sahara, or Trans-Indian Ocean Slave Trade. There is no support for the institutional structures proposed by the NGO declaration to study and document the impacts and scope of slavery, and no willingness whatsoever to address the issue of reparations squarely, except to say that some unnamed nations have already granted reparations.

Worse, after the vaguely-worded general sentiments of apology, the governmental document takes a dangerous U-turn—trying to substitute a US/G8 imposed ‘free market’ diet of ‘aid’ and ‘economic development’ for reparations—that steers clear of the demands for reparations. Unfortunately, while the Mbeki tendency within the ANC government has played an active role in the UN governmental policy debate on reparations, it has equated its immediate demand for ‘economic development aid’ from the West with its definition of reparations. This is in sharp disagreement with the political, moral, ideological, historical, analytical, and strategic approach reflected in the NGO Declaration.

The problem with situating the demand for reparations into more immediate, state-to-state demands for ‘ensuring equitable market access and fair competition,’ ‘bridging the digital divide’ and ‘democratising international institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and WTO’ is that they, in fact, undercut the Reparations Movement by:

- Eliminating the entire process of documenting the crimes of slavery;
- Reducing a mass question of individual and group rights to a state-to-state negotiation, replacing direct democracy with ‘representative democracy’;
- Reducing a cultural, ideological, and political campaign that must take centuries, to a series of very immediate efforts to reduce the profound vulnerability of the African governments in a world market that is a stacked deck.

Many of the West’s aid proposals mirror a neoliberal development model. There is the danger that the West will make tiny concessions to African states in return for luring them even further into a globally integrated imperialist system dominated by the United States and the EU—a system that will even further strengthen the ropes of dependency.

But it should be agreed upon that such programs have nothing whatsoever to do with reparations and should not be used by either the slave-trading West or the African nations fighting for self-determination, as a substitute, in any way, for a Reparations Movement. The ANC leadership has enormous moral authority in the world. Whatever plans and strategies

it has for South Africa’s development, it should be careful to not give the impression that its proposals for Western investment in any way compete with or undermine the fledgling Reparations Movement.

There is the view within the nascent Reparations Movement, with which I am allied, that no government and no civil rights or antiracist group or coalition is authorised to ‘sign off’ or ‘settle’ the demand for reparations. According to this view, each generation, in each nation, has the right to evolve its own understanding of specific remedies and demands (which in itself will involve the most contentious arguments) but no generation has the right to play into the hands of Western bourgeois law in which the entire purpose of ‘settlement’ is to indemnify the perpetrators from any future claims against them and to settle ‘all present and future claims.’ No generation can settle all claims for future generations.

Within the Global South, there is a raging debate about how to effectively and democratically exercise state power, how to drive out, or at least limit, colonial economic penetration, and how to win true self-determination. These ideas were once at the center of anti-imperialist movements in the Third World.

Now, governments and anti-imperialist movements in the Global South are fighting to re-establish their authority and viability in the present reactionary climate. At Durban, we saw the power of the structural demands for reparations and its enormous threat to the ideological and cultural hegemony of Western imperialism. The struggle for reparations will be central to the rebuilding of a Black Liberation Movement and a multiracial left antiracist movement in the US and throughout Africa. It can provide a framework for a programmatic center of a Black and African renaissance that can impact and reshape a world Left and have profound impacts in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and among oppressed nationality peoples all over the world, including those in the United States. Given its profound potential and relatively fragile organisational state at present, the Reparations Movement and its future evolution must be carefully protected and supported.

A sum-up of WCAR’s historical contributions

How does one understand the historical impact of an event like the World Conference Against Racism? Even before the massive post-September 11 backlash, Durban did not create the world challenge to the US that it so richly deserved. The US in general and the Bush Administration in particular had already calculated the cost of walking out, after barely walking in. The Republican Right hardly had to worry about the most radical and militant world forces or about a small sector of angry Black community activists, in that it already writes off more than 90 percent of the Black vote. Many of the weaknesses of WCAR were the limits of the historical period and the historical balance of forces in which it took place. With all the many limitations and indeed failures that I have tried to analyze squarely, there were some important components of the event that warrant final comment, some of which offer hopeful possibilities for future organising work.

Generally, the United States forces others to walk out of international meetings as it controls the rules of the game at the UN, at the World Trade Organisation, and in virtually every arena in which it operates. So why has the US boycotted the two previous UN conferences against racism and used the flimsy pretext of Israel to hide its own vulnerability at WCAR? Why is the US so afraid of a world debate on racism? Because racism has been the ideology, not of ‘discrimination’ alone, but of the far more fundamental crimes upon which US society has been built: slavery and genocide. Antiracism, when tied to anti-imperialist movements and strategy, contains the seeds of a revolutionary challenge to the existing order.

There is encouragement to be found in the US over-reaction, or perhaps appropriate
reaction, to the challenges of an antiracist movement. In Europe as well, other Western capitalists are demonstrating their own vulnerability on the issue of racism as it relates to reparations. France passed a law in 2001 that ‘recognised the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade as well as the slave trade across the Indian Ocean’ as ‘crimes against humanity.’ This contradicted the European Union’s public stance which has, so far, refused to make such an acknowledgment. While many Africans in French speaking former colonies praised France’s leadership, France went out of its way at a press conference at WCAR to distinguish between slavery and colonialism. To some this may seem like a distinction without a difference, but it has profound political and legal ramifications. Politically, it seems to be saying that ‘colonialism,’ the foundation upon which every European nation and the US has been built, is not in itself a ‘crime against humanity’ whereas the slave trade is a ‘crime against humanity,’ a difference between what France is and what France did—a distinction that really can’t be made.

But also, as explained to me by several African delegates to WCAR, in their view the French government was trying to make a substantial apology for its past actions while simultaneously trying to protect itself from legal claims in a world court. Many European governments want to negotiate an ‘apology’ as a way of ‘settling all claims’ which the worldwide Reparations Movement would never accept. The point is that slavery, colonialism, and the demand for reparations are intertwined, and at Durban we saw the G8 powers, at least for a moment, on the defensive in the face of an antiracist offensive.

The strategic lessons must be fully understood and applied in the most rigorous and militant manner to present conditions.

At Durban, we saw not just the strategic weakness of the US and European nations on racism but their literal panic in the face of demands for reparations. The US in particular understands the scope of the programmatic demands of a Reparations Movement.

Moreover, the US, as distinct from the European states, has a Black population of more than 34 million people located in every strategic urban center—New York, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, New Orleans, Atlanta, Houston, Detroit, Chicago, Oakland/San Francisco, and Los Angeles. If we carefully review the NGO declaration on slavery and reparations previously described in this chapter, we will understand that the many components of redress and restitution—punishment for the perpetrators, making the victims whole—will involve demands that are so revolutionary they can barely be imagined—just as the depravity of each individual European and white US colonist and slaveholder murdering each of the tens of millions of individual Africans and Indigenous peoples can barely be imagined.

The Reparations Movement has the opportunity to create the central defining political framework for Black and left politics in the US in the 21st century. It can become the most historical, ideological, and material challenge to Western imperialism and can frame a new series of initiatives among Blacks, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Indigenous peoples, and antiracist whites to reconstruct new politics and new organisational forms for the antiracist movement. It can build new bridges between Blacks in the US and African nations, provide a broader base of support for the urgent demands of 400,000 Indigenous peoples throughout the world, and put the system back on the political defensive.

While Malcolm X (and W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson before him) used the United Nations as an important tactic in the struggle for Black liberation in the US, many grassroots activists, for good reason, are skeptical. The United Nations is still an institution headquartered in and dominated by the United States. The US has always threatened and bullied the UN, withholding its dues as ransom against policies with which it disagrees and maintaining a completely selective and arbitrary posture toward UN resolutions. The US shoves resolutions down the throats of nations when it serves its interests but blatantly
refuses to abide by any resolutions that it sees as limiting its national sovereignty. Thus, UN votes are the ultimate stacked deck.

The recent actions by the US in the UN Security Council to defy the authority of the International Criminal Court (ICC) raise imperial arrogance to legendary levels. The nations of the world ratified the ICC, and the Security Council, always dominated by the US, voted to require all governments involved in UN ‘peacekeeping missions’ to abide by its provisions, in particular that any troops committing war crimes under UN auspices would be prosecuted under the ICC. It provides a reasonable reassurance to nations inviting in UN troops that troops will not torture, rape, or murder civilians or prisoners of war. The US threatened England, Mexico, and other Security Council members that if they did not grant US troops an exemption from the ICC, the US would not participate in any peace keeping missions.

The Security Council members should have let the US go, leaving the US as a pariah on human rights. Instead, the US twisted one arm after another; the Security Council reversed its original motion and agreed by a 15-0 vote to exempt the US from the International Criminal Court’s authority for one year, with a series of renewable one year exemptions obtainable until infinity. This incident brought disgrace and humiliation upon every member of the Security Council and the UN as an institution, but again, that was the US strategy—to show time and time again that it is the world’s policeman and will not be restrained by any principles or any collective institutions. This goes beyond hubris; it’s a calculated strategy to terrorise the world.

Knowing this, why would antiracist forces, environmental and human rights forces, Indigenous peoples, anti-imperialist forces, or any progressive people waste their time at the UN? Because, with all its dilemmas, it is not a waste of time; it is a critical site of international struggle at this point in history.

Given the weak state of the international movement, the United Nations provides an effective way to meet thousands of activists, scholars, and key political figures in every issue area from all over the world. At WCAR there were 10,000 NGO delegates; the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development is expected to draw 30,000 to 50,000. At WCAR I met important activists, organisers, scholars, and progressive representatives of Third World governments from many nations in the world as well as making more than 100 new contacts from the US antiracist movement.

Networking alone is not a strategy, but it is great tactic for those who have a strategy. At the Labor/Community Strategy Center, for example, we now have a key list of more than 200 new international contacts that were derived from the work at WCAR and WSSD PrepComs. Documents and emails are circulating, and some of the WCAR people will also be coming to Johannesburg. There is not now any socialist or communist international body or antiracist international organisation. If we have a strategy that focuses on the needs and interests of the Global South against the G8 world dominators, the UN is a critical place to test its possibilities.

The UN allows us to understand the behavior of governments and the many contradictions among them, to watch UN representatives as real people, to observe the palace intrigues among them, and through trial and error, to learn the few instances when NGO pressure, or simply the governments’ own contradictions with each other, can move things in a positive direction. For example, in the ICC story, one should not see the US victory in a one-sided way.

It was achieved at great costs to its imperial interests. It is not smart politics to humiliate your allies. Every country, rich or poor, big or small, that was forced to change its vote under pressure from the United States dreams of paying the US back. One should not think, for example, that the governments of China or Mexico do not hope to be greater world
powers and do not tell themselves that they are only biding their time until more fortuitous conditions arise to challenge US hegemony. We should not see the struggle among the world’s governments as simply a puppet show run by the US. The US ‘winner take all’ politics—from-defying-Kyoto-to-threatening-nuclear-first-strikes—reflects the overextension of the empire and offers possible points of strategic resistance.

The UN NGO structures offer tactical opportunities to challenge US policies. At Durban, the UN provided an entire structure for NGO organizing, including a massive cricket stadium in which NGOs could assemble, the opportunity to develop their own parallel NGO Forum Declaration and Programme of Action, and some access to the UN governmental structures—if only through considerable struggle. At the May/June 2002 Bali PrepCom for WSSD, the UN organised ‘multi-stakeholder’ dialogues and many structures by which NGOs could put forth their politics and try to impact the governments. The UN is a very promising arena, all things considered, for strengthening international grassroots connections, even if at a later point in history more effective structures and opportunities supercede it.

At the recent UN PrepCom at Bali, an angry NGO delegate complained to Dr. Emil Salim, the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development Bureau in charge of the Preparatory Committees for the WSSD, ‘Why should we come to the UN when the governments don’t listen to us? I just returned from the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and we were able to lay out a whole vision of a new world we want. We had a chance to speak, we were listened to.’ Salim rebuked him, ‘Fine. So if you want to go to a conference of Leftists where you debate strategies that is fine. But when you finish with that strategy, now what do you do? Here is where the power is, here is where the governments are, and you either can or can’t get them to listen to you, you either can or can’t change their policies.

But this is where the challenge is. I can’t make them listen to you, that’s your job.” For the foreseeable future, international conferences, both inside and outside UN aegis, addressing racism, human rights, trade, environment, women’s liberation, Indigenous peoples rights, world peace and world war are critical arenas for organizing.

Any serious grassroots movement rooted in a major constituency has to develop an explicit international organizing strategy. The UN is one important venue in which to carry it out.

Also, the UN holds conferences at important international locations—key meeting spots for building an antiracist anti-imperialist movement. Remember that it was not just the World Conference Against Racism but the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The forthcoming WSSD will be held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Strategy Center chose to pay great attention to the World Summit on Sustainable Development because our work has a strong emphasis on challenging environmental racism and fighting for environmental justice but also because we wanted to make a ‘one-year round trip from Durban to Johannesburg’ and deepen our ties to South African political forces and South African society. For many of us at Durban, just walking on the ground of a free South Africa, under Black majority rule was a mind-blowing and life-changing experience—a model of a society in which talking and doing politics is deep in the daily life of the popular culture, something that is hard to imagine in the United States.

At the WSSD PrepCom IV in Bali, Indonesia, a ‘tourist paradise’ distorted by Western as well as Eastern economic domination (US, England, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Taiwan), we met hundreds of activists from the Indonesian People’s Forum as well as key organizers from the Philippines, Malaysia, and India. The PrepComs for WSSD held at UN headquarters in New York have not been nearly as valuable for US delegates because very

15. CSD Bureau Chair Emil Salim, statement to NGO delegates at PrepCom IV, Bali International Convention Center, Bali, Indonesia, 26 May 2002.
A report by the Centre for Civil Society

Foreign Policy Bottom Up

few NGOs from the Third World come to them. The critics of NGO opportunism have trenchantly observed, ‘Join an NGO and see the world.’ Still, for US organisers in particular, breaking out of a US frame and seeing the world through the eyes of the oppressed nations gives far greater meaning and intensity to concepts of international solidarity, as well as a much broader perspective on organising in the US. We saw Black women in South Africa standing on the highway, risking their safety to stand in traffic for an entire day to sell, hopefully, five or ten giant avocados for perhaps ten rand ($1). We saw groups of 20 men in Bali pulling massive telephone cables by hand in a coordinated work team, giving the distinct impression of a prison chain gang, in which their pay would be unimaginably low for back-breaking labour. The UN has created important arenas of international participation. It is the job of an aspiring movement to grab those opportunities, and with a sense of orientation and power rooted in a grassroots base on the ground, to learn how to operate in an adversarial international arena with big governments and big business.

One of Durban’s greatest achievements was to give greater visibility and moral authority to the anti-imperialist wing of the antiracist movement, and in particular to strengthen actual links between the Black Liberation Movement in the US and the African liberation movements. There has always been a strategic struggle among forces that, broadly construed, could be called ‘the world antiracist movement.’ There is a struggle between a pro-imperialist civil rights strategy and an anti-imperialist, antiracist, civil rights and national liberation strategy.

The form of that debate I am most familiar with has been sharply delineated within the Black community in the US. The dominant view for most of US history has been the pro-imperialist demand for ‘equality within the empire,’ most explicitly advocated by forces within the civil rights establishment. For example, the NAACP, in its pleadings in front of the Supreme Court in Brown v. Board of Education, argued that racial equality was in the interests of the US in its fight against the communists. They urged that civil rights could be a tactic with which to win the Cold War.

A decade later, the civil rights establishment, tied as it was to the Democratic Party and the ideology of ‘loyal Americanism,’ supported the genocidal war in Vietnam. Many groups such as the NAACP and Urban League, up until anti-war sentiment in the Black community became dominant, tried to trade off a hoped-for progress for Blacks ‘at home’ in return for allowing young Black men to fight, kill and die in a war against Third World people. The fledging Black Left at the time, reflected in Malcolm X and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), opposed the war in Vietnam. It said, ‘Hell No, We Won’t Go’ to fight in an imperialist war, and articulated the Black Liberation Movement as one for both full equality within the US and a revolutionary transformation of US society, including solidarity with the anticolonial movements against the US government. The general transformation from ‘civil rights’ to ‘Black liberation’ was not simply rhetorical.

It articulated a new strategic and ideological view that Black people in the US were an oppressed people—for some a Third World people, an African people, an oppressed nation—with rights to self-determination.

Similarly, Malcolm X argued that the US Black Liberation Movement needed to expand its demands for ‘civil rights’—that is, legal equality inside the US—to ‘human rights,’ a framework for demands that could be brought to the UN and other international bodies. Malcolm’s argument, rooted in revolutionary Black nationalism, was based on the idea that Black people in the US had certain inalienable and national rights that the US government could not subjugate nor adjudicate. This analysis was extended by the demand of the Black Panther Party for a plebiscite of Black people to determine their relationship to the US, reflecting that Black people had separate national rights, had a voluntary and conditional relationship to US society that they could terminate if they so chose, and had the right to establish...
structures for Black people independent of the US government.

The tradition from SNCC to Malcolm X to the Black Panthers (rooted in the prior work of W.E.B. DuBois, among many others) reflected the view that the effective fight for civil rights had to be embedded in the struggle for self-determination and sovereignty for oppressed nations and peoples.

The leadership of the Black Liberation Movement at that time influenced the revolutionary tendencies within the Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Indigenous peoples movements, whose advocates argued that US racism was tied to a structural national oppression which in turn led to a concept of ‘solidarity’ between oppressed peoples inside the US and those in the Third World. The Black Liberation Movement also transformed the lives of tens of thousands of antiracist whites who debated about the best tactics for directly challenging the racist practices of US society in direct alliance with and support for the programmatic demands for self-determination of Black, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Indigenous peoples and communities.

Today, we live at a time of profound counter-revolution, and many ideas that were once ascendant and even dominant in oppressed nationality communities have been suppressed and subjugated, as have the organisations and individuals who once advocated them. From 1980 on, we endured 12 years of the most virulent racist Reagan/Bush Administrations. This was followed by eight years of the Clinton Administration systematically working, often with great success, to cultivate and co-opt a Black and Latino political elite by encouraging it to tie its fortunes to the Democratic Party and world imperialism. This growing Black and Latino comprador bourgeoisie has contributed to enormous suffering for working class and low-income people of color, while many Black and Latino Democratic and now Republican operatives are playing a destructive role as agents of imperialism in Africa and Latin America.

As these relatively small Black and Latino elites enrich themselves at the expense of their own people, there is a break in the multi-class united front for civil rights. The Black and Latino working classes are losing hard fought civil rights on a daily basis—as almost two million people, more than 60 percent of whom are Black and Latino, languish in US prisons. Meanwhile, the Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander working class, many of whose members are women and immigrants, suffer growing economic exploitation and political repression. They are trying to organise their own movements and organisations of resistance—some ‘national in form,’ others multiracial including antiracist whites, to challenge the hegemony of white supremacy, US imperialism, and the treachery of pro-imperialist elites of every nationality. But this is very difficult, for the struggle for national liberation still requires a multi-class united front, and the leadership of the working class of color would be strengthened by more allies from the professional and middle classes of color as well as greater antiracist, pro-working class politics among progressive whites.

The dominant, pro-imperialist line has been in bold relief in US politics after September 11, in which the entire Democratic Party, most of the civil rights establishment, and virtually the entire Congressional Black Caucus—with the notable and heroic exceptions of Barbara Lee and Cynthia McKinney—have lined up with the Bush Administration. They have offered no moral or political leadership against the saturation bombing of the civilian population in Afghanistan or the proto-fascist moves of the Bush Administration at home.

This effort to separate antiracism from anti-imperialism was also operative in Durban. There were forces in the United Nations bureaucracy, in anticipation of strong reactionary pressure from the Western governments, who tried to give WCAR a soft line on racism. They focused on individual stories of ‘victims’ experiences of racism’ as a reflection of individual and group irrationality and superiority complexes and thereby decontextualised painful experiences from their structural and colonial roots, the context that would establish
the need for the most radical and structural redress and reparations.

The final NGO document, while unable to serve as a powerful on-the-spot tactic for intervention with the governments, was generally representative of the sentiments of the mass of attendees in that it presented a strong anticolonial content. In Durban, the power of the South African Left in its demonstrations against neoliberalism (both Cosatu and the Durban Social Forum), the demonstrations of the US delegates against the US walk-out, the active organising by the Palestinians, and the preeminent moral and political leadership of Fidel Castro and the government of Cuba set a powerful anti-imperialist tone that became the dominant political discourse of the NGO conference.

This momentary vision of a world antiracist, anti-imperialist united front, even in its constituent parts as of yet unrealised as a coordinated whole, was very encouraging. It remains to be seen whether those momentary unities can be consolidated organisationally in the years after Durban. But the antiracist, anti-imperialist united front and its challenge to the power and brutality of US and Western imperialism did exist, at a very large scale, on an international stage, at least for a few days. The challenge of course is how to build on those partial understandings, momentary organisational breakthroughs, and new alliances made by groups all over the world. Still, in a world filled with capitalist pollution, ideological and material, the World Conference Against Racism was a breath of fresh air.

I end this sum-up with an excerpt from Fidel Castro’s speech to the NGOs at Durban, a model, in microcosm, of the unapologetic voices needed to change the world:

Nobody has the right to sabotage this conference which, in some way, is attempting to alleviate the terrible suffering and enormous injustice that these deeds have signified and still signify for the overwhelming majority of humanity. Far less does anybody have the right to impose conditions, and demand that the issue of historical responsibility and just reparations are not even mentioned, or the way in which we decide to qualify the horrific genocide at this very minute being committed against our sister nation of Palestine on the part of extreme-right leaders who, in alliance with the hegemonic superpower, are currently acting in the name of another people which, for close to 2000 years, was the victim of the greatest persecution, discrimination and injustice committed in history.

When Cuba talks of compensation and supports this idea as an ineludible moral duty to the victims of racism, it has an important precedent in the compensation being received by the descendents of those very Jewish peoples who, right in the heart of Europe, suffered an odious and brutal racist holocaust. However, it is not with the intent of attempting the impossible search for direct family members or concrete countries of origin of the victims in terms of deeds that occurred over centuries. The real and irrefutable fact is that tens of millions of Africans were captured, sold like merchandise and dispatched to the other side of the Atlantic to work as slaves, and that 70 million native Indians died in the western hemisphere as a consequence of European conquest and colonisation.

The inhuman exploitation to which people of the three continents, including Asia, were subjected, has affected the destiny and present-day life of over 4.5 billion persons inhabiting the Third World nations, and whose indices of poverty, unemployment, infant mortality, life prospects and other disasters impossible to enumerate in a brief speech, are both shocking and horrifying. These are the current victims of that barbarity that lasted for centuries, and the unmistakable creditors of reparations for the horrendous crimes committed against their ancestors and peoples.
Chapter 6
From WCAR to reparations

By Patrick Bond

The official World Conference Against Racism splintered over a demand from NGOs and some African governments that payment be made to compensate for centuries of colonial plunder, whose effects continue contributing to vastly imbalanced economies, societies and international power relations. The EU’s chief negotiator, Belgian foreign minister Louis Michel, justified his own country’s appalling history at a press conference: ‘Colonialism could not be considered a crime against humanity, for at the time it was a sign of economical good health.’ UN human rights commissioner, Mary Robinson, broke off discussions with activists because the NGO petition calling for reparations and Palestinian rights was, for her, too radical.

Ironically, even though Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo endorsed reparations along with other African official delegates, Mbeki and his foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, refused support, saying merely that more donor aid was needed. ‘Nigeria has chosen to ditch SA and align itself with other African hardliners over the slavery issue,’ lamented a Business Day editorial under the headline ‘Trapped in the Middle.’ It continued, ‘The difficulties that SA has encountered in Durban trying to move the rest of the continent to a more moderate position in negotiations between Africa and Europe over an apology and reparations for slavery, highlight the gulf, and sometimes deceit, that underlies relations between this country and the rest of the continent... When will our real friends in Africa stand up and be counted?’

Reparations demands were absent from the final WCAR document, and moreover, also soon led to a rupture between the ANC government and civil society activists. Frustrated by the failure of the WCAR to advance their agenda, leaders of Jubilee South Africa, the Khulumani apartheid-victims group and other faith-based activists turned to the US and Swiss courts, as discussed below.

2. Business Day, 7 September 2001. Three days earlier the same editorial column carried these words: ‘There is a new and powerful breed of African leader in Africa, democrats such as Mbeki and Obasanjo, who are determined to end war and want and who also know their economics.’
Chapter 7
Reparations strategy

By Jubilee SA

The civil society reparations conference, ‘Opening Civil Society Dialogue on Reparations’, was held in Randburg on 27 and 28 August 2003. It was attended by some 50 organisations, including those of a national and more localised character. Participating organisations ranged from organisations interested in reparations to others actively bringing together people around reparations-related issues.

The conference had its origins in Government’s response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in April this year, to which Jubilee and Khulumani responded by announcing a call to South Africans to come together to develop an alternative position on reparations to that announced by Government. The South African Council of Churches (SACC) also indicated an intention to hold a conference and efforts were made to work towards a single civil society event.

These efforts were hampered by tensions, leading to a meeting convened by Archbishop Ndungane. The Archbishop’s initiative resulted in all its manifestations, for all those affected, Jubilee South Africa, together with its partners in the popular movement, will initiate hearings where communities can express and define the scale and nature of reparations that satisfactorily address the past. This process will culminate in a People’s Tribunal that will determine the people, institutions and businesses that must make reparations and the forms that these should take. In order to pressure big business into meeting their responsibility to make reparations, Jubilee, with its partners, will undertake a name and shame campaign against the monopolies that were fundamental to the apartheid system.

In addition, we will identify specific companies and products that symbolise the role these corporations played in facilitating the development of apartheid, which will be targeted in a consumer boycott. The broader conference that has been called for later this year by the churches, amongst others, must be based on clear principles, including the need for reparations to comprehensively address the damage done and the right of those struggling for reparations to use the courts of law to this end.

Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane opened the conference. The Minister of Justice, Penuell Maduna, presented Government’s position on reparations and Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza and Father Michael Lapsley critiqued the TRC and Government’s response to the TRC. They also spoke about the reparations lawsuits filed in the United States. Khulumani also presented their critique of Government’s response to the TRC. Jubilee and the Apartheid Claims Taskforce described the process towards and developments in relation to the lawsuits. COSATU, the Landless Peoples Movement (LPM), EJNF, the APF and SANCO talked about reparations and the workplace, the land, the environment and the community, respectively. The Freedom of Expression Institute highlighted the need to address the role of the media under Apartheid.

The final sessions of the conference identified areas of agreement amongst the participating organisations. Two kinds of decisions were made. Firstly, organisations reached a common understanding on who the ‘victims’ of apartheid are, what constitutes reparations and who should pay. Secondly, the conference reached agreement in relation to responses to the TRC, the lawsuits and a reparations movement.

Who are the ‘victims’?
The negative connotation of the word ‘victims’ was raised and alternative terms such as those ‘affected’ or ‘survivors’ were suggested as being more appropriate. The structural, psychological and physical aspects of damage caused by Apartheid were raised. The following were described as affected people:

- People directly affected by Apartheid violence, including police and military brutality
- All other South Africans more ‘indirectly’ affected by Apartheid
- People dispossessed of their land, including those dispossessed of their land before 1913
- People removed to make way for dams and plantations
- Workers suffering low wages and appalling working conditions
- People in the townships
- Workers and communities affected by industrial and mining pollution, including those suffering ill health as a result
- Fisherfolk
- People victimised in the post-1994 period
- Affected people throughout the Southern African region

This was not seen as a definitive or exhaustive definition of those affected.

What constitutes reparations? It was agreed that reparations has a monetary component, and that this component is both legitimate and necessary. Other forms of reparations were mentioned, including:

- Individual and collective reparations
- Targeted reparations and reparations for the whole society
- Debt cancellation as a form of resources for reparations
- Exhumation and reburial
- Memorials
- The forms of reparations identified in Volume 5 of the TRC report
- Uncovering the truth
- Historical documentation
- Rewriting our history
- Education
- Reparations as an element of change to a more equitable society

Socio-economic development was seen as a form of repairing historical inequities, but it was stressed that general government policies and development activities are not a substitute for other forms of reparations. Who should pay and who should effect reparations? It was agreed that the money is there and that all those who benefitted from Apartheid should pay.

More specifically, business, local and foreign, should pay. Foreign governments that supported Apartheid and business activity in contravention of sanctions also have an obligation to make reparations. Government has a major responsibility, and needs to identify mechanisms to increase income from business. It was noted that reparations is a complex issue but that this should not deter us from addressing the complexities. On the contrary, it is important to locate individual struggles for reparations within the broader context and for people, communities and organisations to support each other’s struggles as part of the broader struggle for reparations.

**Responses to the TRC**
The conference agreed that Government’s response to the TRC recommendations is inadequate. The amount of R30 000 is less than a quarter of the amount recommended by the TRC as long ago as 1998. The announcement that 19 000 affected people are due to receive this amount fails to address the vast numbers of people affected. The TRC recommendations themselves are absolutely minimal, representing less than one half a percent of the national budget and fall well short of what could be provided.

Khulumani made various proposals for structures and services to meet the needs of those affected, including the establishment of a reparations desk at the highest level, better resourcing of the National Prosecuting Authority and the inclusion of victim representatives in all memorialisation projects. The conference endorsed the spirit of these and other proposals made during the conference. Due to time considerations, the conference could not consider the proposals in detail. The consolidated proposals were circulated in written form and all organisations agreed to forward detailed comments on the specific proposals.

Reparations lawsuits

The conference stressed the right of all affected South Africans to legal action in any court that best represents their interests, including in courts outside South Africa. The conference expressed support for the litigation in the United States against Apartheid-supporting foreign companies. The conference recognised that lawyers have to take their mandate from the plaintiffs and that the conference had no powers in this regard.

The conference stressed, however, that those affected in South Africa must lead the legal process, and that organisation on the ground in support of the lawsuits must be strengthened. The lawsuits must be located within a broad view of reparations and they must be embedded in a reparations movement. The conference encouraged lawyers to work together in the best interests of all affected.

It was noted that current litigation is only the beginning and that those that aided and abetted Apartheid, both foreign and local, must make reparations. The conference agreed on the need for more dialogue and increased levels of cooperation amongst the participating organisations. It agreed on the need for more education around and pamphlets on the lawsuits. Participants agreed to deepen grassroots support for the lawsuits and work towards maximum unity. The spokesperson for the SACC indicated that the SACC couldn’t take a position on the specific lawsuits before the US courts.

Mediation and the attitude of government and business

Participants expressed their openness to dialogue, mediation and settlement and encouraged Archbishop Ndungane to take the lead in dialogue. The conference noted the antagonistic approach of business. It condemned business for its failure to respond positively to the invitation to address the conference and identified this as a slap in the face. The conference also noted that Government is taking the side of business, as evidenced by its affidavit to the US court calling for the dismissal of the lawsuits.

It was noted that dialogue or mediation requires a fundamental change of approach by business and government. This includes full disclosure by business of their activities. The conference demanded that Government withdraws its affidavit to the US court. It agreed to look into the constitutionality of the Government’s approach in making the affidavit and to the possibility of a civil society affidavit to the court.

It was stressed that any mediation or settlement on a specific claim should not close the door on other potential claimants’ rights to pursue the legal route. The need to unpack what is meant by mediation was identified.
A reparations movement

The conference agreed to work towards building a reparations movement. It was agreed that this movement should include different organisations, enhance communication and relationships between the organisations and support each other’s struggles. The conference agreed that the Apartheid Debt and Reparations Task Team should act as a point of coordination for the movement and that it should be expanded to include organisations not currently part of the task team. The task team should carry forward work in progress and tasks arising from the conference. Partners of the Interfaith Mission in Southern Africa and the South African Reparations Movement indicated an interest in being part of a broader reparations movement. The conference agreed on the need to avoid confusion between the broad reparations movement and the South African Reparations Movement. The conference was informed of the call by the President’s Office for a list of participants to the conference and expressed its condemnation of this approach as an invasion of participants’ rights.

We see this conference as a step in the process towards a popular tribunal and the intensification of campaigning activity towards the realisation of reparations. We believe that it is important that the demand for reparations must be integrated into the ongoing struggles and campaigns within popular civil society that will give the issue of reparations the necessary weight and importance and locate reparations within the increasing challenge to neoliberal policies.

Furthermore, we recognise that our struggle for reparations is part of a broader struggle of the people of Southern Africa for reparations for Apartheid destabilisation and other forms of racial and neo-liberal damage. We stand fully in support of these struggles and demands.

The gathering included participants from the following organisations: Alternative Information and Development Centre; Anti-Privatisation Forum; Afro-Racism; Abrahams & Kiewitz Attorneys; Africa Group of Sweden; Africana Studies Department - University of Pittsburgh; Ceasefire, SA; Concerned Citizens Forum; Church Community Leadership Trust – Pietermaritzburg; Earthlife Africa Ethikwini; Ecopeace; Environmental Justice Networking Forum; Fairshare; Freedom of Expression Institute; Green Network; Inanda Dam Affected Communities; Jubilee South Africa; Justice and Peace – (SACBC)- Rustenburg; Khanya College; Landless People’s Movement; Malawi Economic Justice Network; Madlana & Ngcebetsha Attorneys; NACTU; Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness; Rural Development Services Network; Rosa Luxemburg Foundation; Samancor-Retrenched Workers Crisis Committee; South African Non-Governmental Organisations Coalition; Scapei – Swaziland; Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee; Sounds of Edutainment; Timbila; Young Christian Workers; Youth for Work; Wits University P&DM; Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development.

The conference steering committee comprised the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF), Jubilee South Africa, the Khulumani Support Group, the National Congress of Trade Unions (NACTU), the National Land Committee (NLC), the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF), the SACC, the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) and the Women’s National Coalition (WNC).
Chapter 8
Can reparations for apartheid profits be won in US courts?
by Patrick Bond

‘The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of any civil action by an alien for a
tort only, committed in violation of the law of nations or a treaty of the United
States.’ - The Alien Tort Claims Act

Two hundred twenty years ago, one of the world’s most pressing security problems was
addressed through a US law that would subsequently haunt corporations sued by victims of
repressive states and their corporate allies. In 1789, the US Congress passed the Alien Tort
Claims Act (ATCA) in part to get a legal handle on shipping theft, and in the process to
persuade colonial powers it was safe to trade with the US. ‘Torts’ (personal injuries such as
piracy theft) against foreigners (‘aliens’) could be served on the perpetrator within the US
even if there was no other connection. An obscure statue of just 33 words, only in the last
two decades has ATCA become widely known, and more than 100 cases have been filed in
US courts, beginning with a Paraguayan torture victim. It is one of several ways that the
demand for reparations is being made,¹ but may be most powerful if the US courts agree in
coming months that black South Africans can use the law to win reparations of $400 billion
against several dozen multinational corporations which profited from apartheid.

In 1997, ATCA Holocaust Litigation cases against Swiss banks were settled out of court
for $1.25 billion. The law was affirmed in 2003, in the case of Presbyterian Church of Sudan,
et al. v. Talisman Energy Inc. in the New York federal district court, which denied a
Talisman motion to dismiss the case. Encouraged by the case of Burmese villagers against
Unocal, which in 2003 withstood challenge by the Bush Administration, a group of South
African activists including Dennis Brutus and Lungisile Ntsebeza, as well as the Khulumani
Support Group for apartheid victims and Jubilee South Africa, used the ATCA to sue
latterday pirates: dozens of multinational corporations operating in South Africa during
apartheid, a UN-determined ‘crime against humanity’. As a result of multiple strategies and
players (sometimes in conflict with each other), there were several lawsuits filed during
2002-04 – Khulumani Support Group and 90 others; Digawamaje et al; and Ntsebeza et al -
which were subsequently consolidated in a 2007 countersuit, American Isuzu Motors, et al, v
Ntsebeza, et al.

Not long after the activists’ cases were filed, the South African government was
requested by the Bush Administration to oppose Khulumani and other plaintiffs, and as
noted below, agreed to do so after a period of relative neutrality. Because of the alliance
between Pretoria and Washington (as well as the British and German governments) on
behalf of multinational corporate interest, in November 2004, Judge John Sprizzo initially

¹ For a growing literature on the field, see, e.g. Biondi, M. (2003), ‘The rise of the reparations
movement,’ Radical History Review 87, pp. 5-18; Brooks, R. (Ed)(1999), When sorry isn’t enough: The
controversy over apologies and reparations for human injustice, New York, New York University
‘Achieving democratic equality: Forgiveness, reconciliation, And reparations,’ The Journal of Ethics, 7,
pp.93–113; Thompson, J. (2002), Taking Responsibility for the Past: Reparation and Historical Injustice,
Cambridge, Polity Press; Torpey, J. (2003), Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices,
Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
decided the case on behalf of corporate defendants. He reasoned that ATCA conflicted with US foreign policy and South African domestic economic policy.

But three years later, on 12 October 2007, litigants won an appeal on grounds Sprizzo’s logic was faulty. In May 2008, the US Supreme Court was expected to finally kill the lawsuit, on behalf of the corporations, but four of the justices discovered conflicts of interest in their own investment portfolios (they owned shares in the sued companies). The Supreme Court had no choice but to pass the case back to Sprizzo, who scheduled the next hearing for July 8. But the Supreme Court stand-down, according to plaintiff lawyer Charles Abrahams, represented ‘a massive victory for the international human rights movement as a whole.’

Reparations, social responsibility and public relations

In contrast to Abrahams, establishment commentators worried that this new lease on the reparation lawsuit’s life would blunt the possibility of generating a more nuanced foreign economic policy. Some point to Ronald Reagan’s 1980s promotion of the Sullivan Principles to encourage multinational corporations to raise black worker wages. Others seek out of court settlements and corporate investments.

To illustrate, the conservative Washington representative of South Africa’s International Marketing Council, Simon Barber, was dismissive of the litigants’ Supreme Court win: ‘The endeavour remains quixotic, nonetheless. The only redistribution of wealth ever likely to result is from shareholders to lawyers. There has been plenty of that already.’ Still, he revealed a nervous twitch:

> The US government has been as clear as the South African in calling for dismissal of what is, as President Thabo Mbeki has said, judicial imperialism. The Supreme Court will heed the call when the time comes. It has already shown its hand. One nagging question: what if the next South African administration were to change tack and back the plaintiffs?

Given that the next administration, likely to be headed by Jacob Zuma, has already declared loyalty to the ideals of the Davos World Economic Forum, Citibank and Merrill Lynch, nevertheless, what if the plaintiffs are not only correct in making their demands for torts to be righted, hence winning damages to offset the oppression suffered by black South Africans, but also in disincentivizing such behaviour by multinational corporations in future? According to South Africa’s Times newspaper:

> Millions of South Africans are eligible to join a class-action lawsuit against US-based multinational corporations accused of aiding and abetting the apartheid government... Nicole Fritz, the director of the SA Litigation Centre, said that companies that were not perpetrators of human rights violations but were complicit in such violations through their dealings with oppressive governments were now potentially liable in law for their actions. The Supreme Court ruling could open the way for similar cases, Fritz added.

Similar cases would underscore how important it is to disincentivize profits made through operations within dictatorial regimes such as Burma or Zimbabwe is one objective. In mid-2008, just as Robert Mugabe’s Zanu(PF) committed torture and murder to ensure his

---

2 Independent Online (2008), ‘Groups welcome apartheid lawsuit ruling’, 13 May.
reelection, AngloPlats announced a US$400 million investment in lucrative Zimbabwean mines.

In opposition to sanctions and disinvestment from sites like apartheid South Africa, the phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility grew in part to allow large firms like Anglo to claim they were undermining oppressive governments from within, and that the tax revenues and other benefits to a repressive regime were offset by the firms’ empowerment of trade unions and introduction of market rationality. Such claims were never seriously addressed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which gave large local corporations which profited from apartheid a two-day wrist-slaepping exercise, although the TRC did recommend a wealth tax to redistribute apartheid profits. Hence, according to law professor Danny Bradlow of American University, who opposes the reparations strategy:

> Regardless of their outcome, these legal bouts will result in embarrassing publicity about [multinational corporations’] role in apartheid SA. In addition, they know that these types of lawsuits will continue to hound them unless they can prove that they are behaving responsibly in difficult situations. Consequently, even if they win this case, they may still feel compelled to try and prove, both to SA and the world, that they are responsible global citizens, who accept an obligation to use their profit-making and philanthropic operations to help address social problems like poverty, inequality, unemployment and discrimination. Given these unpleasant scenarios and the urgent need to address the difficult legacy apartheid has left us, it behooves both Kulumani and the corporate defendants to think creatively about resolving their differences out of court.  

An out of court multi-billion dollar settlement was, indeed, the outcome of a prior ATCA-related victory by Holocaust victims’ descendants, in their fight with Swiss and German corporations and banks. Partly because of race, but also because a win against apartheid might also generate renewed reparations interest in three other areas – environmental destruction, colonialism and slavery – it appears crucial for international business to end these lawsuits before they get a toehold in US jurisprudence. Reflecting this concern, Clinton-era US deputy treasury secretary Stuart Eizenstat, once a supporter of reparations claims against pro-Nazi corporations, provided ‘talking points’ to the ‘USA Engage’ lobby of 650 multinational corporations in November, 2002, to help capital fight the ATCA. For if South African reparations activists ‘can galvanise public opinion and generate political support,’ Eizenstat explained, ‘they may achieve some success despite legal infirmities.’

As Abrahams remarks,

> Most notable amongst the three cases is the Khulumani lawsuit that was initiated by Jubilee South Africa and has been supported by the organisation since its filing in November 2002. The substantive basis of the suit is that foreign multinational corporations aided and abetted the Apartheid government by providing arms and ammunition, military technology, transportation and fuel with which the government and its armed forces were able to commit the most heinous crimes against the majority of the people of South Africa. Corporations sued are: the

---

5 Bradlow, D. (2008), ‘Better ways to solve this than through US court,’ *Business Day*, 28 May. Regrettably, Bradlow (a long-time critic of apartheid and strategist for financing post-apartheid development) did not internalise core reasons for naming/shaming the apartheid-linked corporations, nor did he spell Khulumani’s name properly on each occasion he offered it the advice to end the lawsuits.

Reinmetall Group, for providing arms and ammunition to the Apartheid government; British Petroleum (BP), Shell, Chevron Texaco, Exxon Mobil, Fluor Corporation and Total Fina-Elf, for providing fuel to the armed forces; Ford Motor Company, Daimler-Chrysler and General Motors, for providing transportation to the armed forces; Fujitsu and IBM for providing the government with much needed military technology. The suit further argues that this support could not have taken place without the role of foreign banks that provided the necessary foreign currency for these goods and services. These banks were, amongst others, Barclays Bank, Citibank, Commerzbank, Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Dresdner Bank, J P Morgan Chase and UBS. Most of these banks were responsible for bankrolling the Apartheid government... A success in these suits will not only be a legal victory for the victims of Apartheid on whose behalf Khulumani has taken up the case, as well as for the human rights community as a whole, but more so, it will also be a significant moral victory for the Jubilee debt campaigns locally and internationally for their steadfastness in maintaining the view that the Apartheid debt is an Odious Debt of multinational corporations and foreign banks that financed the Apartheid government knowing that it would commit the most heinous crimes against the people of South Africa.7

Roy Jobson of Khulumani Support Group asks,

Is it legitimate for corporations to exploit and profit from situations created by oppressive regimes? The corporations named in the Khulumani Lawsuit profited from funding the apartheid government by lending it money and selling it resources used for carrying out assassinations, indiscriminate shootings, torture, sexual assault, and prolonged arbitrary detention. Does this constitute ‘aiding and abetting’? The court will be asked to decide this. Was it immoral and unethical business behaviour? I believe so.8

Adds Khulumani lawyer Michael Hausfeld, ‘We are contending that those companies were linked in ways to the South African government, such that they were aiders and abetters of crime. They assisted the apartheid government in furthering the commission of crimes against humanity.’9 Although the present South African government ruled by the African National Congress agreed with this analysis prior to 1994, when they insisted that multinational corporations disinvest, in subsequent years they changed position entirely.

South African official hostility

In 2001, the UN World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) was the site of the most vigorous debate about reparations to date. Then-Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo endorsed reparations along with other African official delegates. One suggested clause, for example, was that the ‘US should take responsibility and pay reparations for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.’ But Thabo Mbeki and foreign minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma refused to support reparations and called instead merely for more donor aid. ‘Nigeria has chosen to ditch SA and align itself with other African hardliners over the slavery issue,’ lamented a Business Day

editorial: ‘The difficulties that SA has encountered in Durban trying to move the rest of the continent to a more moderate position in negotiations between Africa and Europe over an apology and reparations for slavery, highlight the gulf, and sometimes deceit, that underlies relations between this country and the rest of the continent... When will our real friends in Africa stand up and be counted?’

Thanks to Mbeki, reparations demands were absent from the final WCAR document, and moreover, also soon led to a rupture between the ANC government and civil society activists.

During 2002, the Burmese villagers who sued oil firm Unocal for damages done while earning profits under a repressive regime began to frighten multinational corporations. As the National Association of Manufacturers argued in a letter to George W. Bush’s main lawyer, ‘If the Department of State fails to intervene when private suits threaten to impose new liabilities on American companies arising from activity abroad by a foreign government, it risks allowing a further erosion of the President’s exclusive prerogatives on foreign policy and his ability to develop relationships with foreign governments in ways that he determines will best advance U.S. national interests.’ Bush agreed and his attorney general, John Ashcroft, lobbied the courts in an amicus curiae brief, hoping to weaken the ATCA. Although they failed, the question of whether foreign policy is damaged in such lawsuits was established as a reasonable consideration, one which doomed the first round of apartheid reparations cases.

Frustrated by the failure of the WCAR to advance their agenda, leaders of Jubilee South Africa, Khulumani and other faith-based activists turned to the US and Swiss courts. Mbeki first reacted to the court applications with ‘neither support nor condemnation.’ However, in April 2003, in the wake of Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s final Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report which recommended a reparations payment by businesses which benefited from apartheid, Mbeki changed tack. Now, he said, it was ‘completely unacceptable that matters that are central to the future of our country should be adjudicated in foreign courts which bear no responsibility for the well-being of our country, and the observance of the perspective contained in our constitution of the promotion of national reconciliation.’ He expressed ‘the desire to involve all South Africans, including corporate citizens, in a cooperative and voluntary partnership.’ But Mbeki failed to reflect upon numerous such attempts by the Reparations Task Force and Cape Town’s Anglican Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane for some years prior to the lawsuits.

Added trade minister Alec Erwin during an April 2003 parliamentary discussion, Pretoria was ‘opposed to, and contemptuous of the litigation.’ Any findings against companies ‘would not be honoured’ within South Africa, and a wealth tax - as recommended by the TRC - would be ‘counterproductive.’ A few weeks later, the director-general in Mbeki’s office, former liberation theologian Frank Chikane, attacked the morals of those filing the reparations lawsuits: ‘I have seen [apartheid] victims being organised by interest groups who make them perpetual victims. They will never cease to be victims because they [interest groups] need victims to advance their cause. I think it is a dehumanising act.’ Chikane argued that lawsuits against banks and corporations would lead ‘businesses here to lose money and therefore to lose jobs.’ As for the TRC wealth tax, ‘My view has always been that healing will happen only if the victimiser stands up and says, ‘let

12 For coverage, see, e.g., Financial Times, 19 May 2003. According to Jubilee SA secretary George Dor, writing to Business Day in the wake of the late August 2003 Reparations Conference, ‘Attempts to engage the foreign corporations were initiated as long ago as 1999 and this had been met with an obstinate refusal to talk. Business reiterated its non-cooperative stance by failing to take the opportunity to address this conference.’
us make it right’. It will not happen if the government says so.’

In July 2003, Mbeki and justice minister Penuell Maduna went to even greater lengths to defend apartheid-era profits, arguing in a nine-page brief to a US court hearing a reparations case, that by ‘permitting the litigation’, the New York judge would discourage ‘much-needed foreign investment and delay the achievement of the government’s goals. Indeed, the litigation could have a destabilising effect on the South African economy as investment is not only a driver of growth, but also of unemployment.’ As a friend of the court on behalf of the claimants (alongside Tutu), Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz replied that the comments by Mbeki and Maduna had ‘no basis,’ because, ‘those who helped support that system, and who contributed to human rights abuses, should be held accountable... If anything, it would contribute to South Africa’s growth and development.’ But by August 2003, even Nelson Mandela decided that the activist pressure on the foundations of global capitalism, namely, corporations’ right to make profits no matter how egregious the regime, was out of control. Hosted by Africa’s richest man, Nicky Oppenheimer, at the Rhodes Building in Cape Town, Mandela gave his name to a new foundation, ‘Mandela Rhodes,’ and used the occasion to attack the apartheid reparations lawsuits as ‘outside interference’.

Maduna’s letter to the US court requested that the lawsuits be dismissed, ‘in deference to the sovereign rights of foreign countries to legislate, adjudicate and otherwise resolve domestic issues without outside interference.’ But in August 2003, at the opening plenary of a major Reparations Conference, Jubilee SA’s Berend Schuitema reported that Maduna made an extraordinary confession: ‘The reason why he had made the objection was that he was asked for an opinion on the lawsuit by Colin Powell. He gave Powell his written response, whereupon Powell said that he should lodge this submission to the Judge of the New York Court. Howls from the floor. Jubilee SA chairperson M.P. Giyose pointed out the bankruptcy of the sovereignty argument.’

In June 2004, the US Supreme Court handed down a surprising defeat for the Bush regime in the case of Sosa v Alvarez, when corporate plaintiffs requested that foreigners not be permitted to file lawsuits for human rights violations committed elsewhere in the world under the Alien Tort Claims Act (cases were then pending against companies for repressive operations in Burma, Nigeria, Indonesia and apartheid South Africa). According to the corporations, US courts might infringe upon the sovereignty of nations and interfere with the business of free trade.

The judgement was mixed, however. On the one hand, although the conservative Supreme Court’s ruling was a ‘huge blow’ to the firms, according to Khulumani and Jubilee South Africa lawyers, on the other hand,

---

15 Sunday Independent, 25 July 2003. Replying to this logic a month later, prize-winning Indian author Arundhati Roy told BBC radio, ‘In what ought to have been an international scandal, this same government officially asked the judge in a US court case to rule against forcing companies to pay reparations for the role they played during apartheid. Its reasoning was that reparations - in other words justice - will discourage foreign investment. So South Africa’s poorest must pay apartheid’s debts so that those who amassed profit by exploiting black people can profit more?’ (BBC, 24 August 2003.)
17 Sowetan, 26 August 2003.
18 e-debate listserv, 30 August 2003. The organisations represented included JubileeSA, Khulumani, Cosatu, the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Sanco, the Landless Peoples Movement, the South African Council of Churches and the Environmental Justice Networking Forum. Notwithstanding important divisions over loyalty to the ANC/Alliance, there was no dispute that Mbeki had erred in his attempt to sabotage the reparations campaign.
The US Supreme Court cautioned that the right to civil relief must be balanced by the
domestic policy interests of the foreign nations in which the conduct occurred and the
foreign policy concerns of the United States. Regrettably though, in a footnote in the
judgment, the US Supreme Court referred to the declaration submitted by the former
South African Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Dr Penuell Mpapa
Maduna, submitted to a district court where the Khulumani and other Apartheid cases are
pending as an instance where the caution should be applied. The declaration expressed the
South African government’s concern that the cases before the court would interfere with
the policy embodied in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The South African
government has specifically asked the court to abstain from adjudicating the victims claims
in deference to its paramount national interests.20

In reality, the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Tutu,
contained a different sentiment, namely that the New York reparations cases posed no conflict
with South Africa law or policy: ‘Business failed in the hearings to take responsibility for its
involvement in state security initiatives specifically designed to sustain Apartheid rule.’ The TRC
also found, according to Jubilee, that

It is also possible to argue that banks that gave financial support to the Apartheid state
were accomplices to a criminal government that consistently violated international law.
The recognition and finding by the international community that Apartheid was a crime
against humanity has important consequences for the victims of Apartheid. Their right to
reparation is acknowledged and can be enforced in terms of international law.21

Taking the most conservative approach possible, judge John Sprizzo of the Southern District
of New York dismissed the apartheid-related lawsuits in November 2004 on grounds that
aiding and abetting claims could not be brought to bear under the Alien Tort Statute. The
judge ruled that Pretoria ‘had indicated it did not support the lawsuits and that letting them
proceed might injure the government’s ability to handle domestic matters and discourage
investment in its economy.’22 Within a few months, the adverse implications of Maduna’s
intervention for international justice became even more ominous, in a case involving
women who were victims of Japanese atrocities during World War II. Fifteen ‘comfort
women’ from Korea, China, the Philippines and Taiwan sued the Japanese government in
the US, using the Alien Tort Claims Act. They had been held as sex slaves, raped and
tortured by the Japanese military. In June 2005, the US Court of Appeals in the District of
Colombia rejected their suit in part by citing Maduna’s affidavit.

Meanwhile at home, the South African government was unilaterally paying just R30 000
to 19 000 families whose members suffered murder or torture, far less than the TRC had
recommended. Complained Khulumani Support Group strategist Roy Jobson,

‘Community reparations’ is part of the government’s mandate. The Department of
Justice has yet to publish its proposed policy on community reparations. Khulumani
submitted proposed suggestions and recommendations on October 29 2003 (the fifth
anniversary of the handing-over of the TRC report). These suggestions were based
on the actual researched needs of the communities in which Khulumani members

20 Apartheid Debt and Reparations Campaign (2004), ‘Support for the Khulumani Lawsuit,’
Johannesburg, 13 July.
21 Apartheid Debt and Reparations Campaign, ‘Support for the Khulumani Lawsuit’.
Associated Press, 29 November.
reside. To date [February 2008], there has been no response to or even acknowledgement of receipt of these proposals.\(^\text{23}\)

Jubilee next took the opportunity to tackle Barclays Bank in a mass citizens’ campaign, in the course of the London financier’s 2005 takeover of South Africa’s second-largest bank, Absa (formerly the Amalgamated Banks of South Africa, a collection of mediocre and failing institutions, several with Afrikaner roots, stitched together by the SA Reserve Bank in a controversial 1991 rescue operation). Once again, when an ATCA suit was filed against Barclays, Pretoria’s justice minister Brigitte Mabandla (Maduna’s 2004 replacement) responded with an October 2005 friends of the court brief on behalf of the bank, prompting a demonstration by Jubilee. Jubilee went on to picket eight international banks located in Sandton:

> All of these banks either never left South Africa during sanctions or have returned post-1994; they are all doing business - making money hand over fist - as if they have no moral culpability or responsibility, supported by anti-poor economic policy. These banks gave billions of dollars of loans to the Apartheid Government, renegotiated its debts and thus enabling it to spend even more on its military, and, in the case of Barclays, gave money directly to the South African Defense Force in 1976. All of these banks need to fully apologize to the South African people for the support they gave to the Apartheid regime, and pay reparations to those who have suffered from its actions.\(^\text{24}\)

The Washington-based Mobilization for Global Justice and a coalition of Swiss activists (Comtec, Declaration de Berne, and Campagne pour l’Annulation des Dettes et pour les Réparations en Afrique Australe) joined Jubilee protesters in solidarity demonstrations. From Sandton to Washington, Citibank was target, for as the UN’s Special Committee against Apartheid had observed in 1979, ‘Citigroup has loaned nearly 1/5 of the $5 billion plus which has gone to bolster apartheid’ and in subsequent years made yet more loans for segregated housing and for the rollover of apartheid debt during the 1985 financial crisis. In Berne, Credit Suisse and UBS were the subject of protest because from the early 1980s they replaced US and British banks as the main apartheid financiers.

**Disunity amongst the plaintiffs**

But during this time, there were also important problems that deserve mention. The South African government’s arrogance in dismissing and then sabotaging the reparations campaigning can partly be explained by disunity amongst campaigners. There are three major splits worth recording, as they diverted the reparations drive and made it far more difficult to achieve the mass public support Eizenstat warned might emerge. The most important split involved different plaintiffs who lined up either with or against a high-profile ‘cowboy lawyer,’ Edward F. Fagan. Fagan had promoted the Holocaust case, but was accused of being ‘a destructive opportunist’ and ‘carpetbagger’ by South African Dumiso Ntsebeza. According to labour journalist Terry Bell,

> Fagan promised funding and the prospect of getting matters moving in double-quick time. He also seemed to have behind him a large and reputable New Jersey law firm.

---


\(^{24}\) Jubilee South Africa (2005), ‘Strike Against Corporate Greed!’, Johannesburg, 23 September.
Many of the campaigners felt they had already wasted too much time; that Fagan could act as a catalyst to get cases moving. Others were unsure. But the talk of apartheid claims had also seen another US personal injury lawyer step forward. Michael Hausfeld, who had garnered a solid reputation for himself in the Holocaust cases, offered his services. The South African reparations drive was split...

Fagan decreed that 16 June 2002, the 26th anniversary of the Soweto student uprising, should be the day the apartheid claims would be launched. From a publicity viewpoint, this made sense. But Pagan had neither organised, nor done the necessary legal preparation. His draft claim for the court in New York was a mishmash of inaccuracies which he presented for revision little more than 48 hours before the matter was to go to court. While others were left to handle what amounted to a hurried, and basically inadequate rewrite, Fagan flew to Geneva. With him was Dorothy Molefi, a claimant and the mother of Hector Petersen, one of the first students killed in the Soweto student uprising in 1976 and whose photograph is an icon of the uprising. Fagan made much of the first multibillion-dollar apartheid case, listing prominent companies. But the documents delivered to the court gave scant details of the charges. At least his original draft had been amended to remove wild claims about genocide and slavery that had no historic or legal basis.

But this was the beginning of the end. There was a great deal of television, magazine and newspaper coverage around the world, much of it generated by Fagan, but the legal team was becoming increasingly frustrated. The team was not consulted before Fagan made often extravagant claims to the media and he refused to take instructions from the South African lawyers who had gathered together thousands of individual claimants. Obviously feeling in need of more publicity, Fagan announced that he, on behalf of Dorothy Molefi and other unnamed clients, was launching a new court case - suing former President Nelson Mandela and the present South Africa government for apartheid reparations, because the present government was the ‘legal successor to the previous, apartheid government’. Members of the government such as President Thabo Mbeki, who had been concerned about the apartheid claims, were outraged. But so too were the South African and US legal teams.

‘He has tarnished and complicated cases that have great merit,’ says Ntsebeza. But while Fagan is now uncharacteristically silent and out of sight, the apartheid claims cases have been damaged and a division, a legacy of Fagan’s intervention, remains between two major claims.\textsuperscript{25}

Even without Fagan, enough conflict existed between plaintiffs to adversely affect the broader reparations agenda, and it is only in 2008 that the various groups have found it necessary and feasible to come together against their corporate and state opponents.

Between the Khulumani Support Group and Jubilee, severe tensions arose over claims to ownership of the case and over direction of strategy. Between Jubilee’s former Johannesburg staff on the one hand, and on the other, board members and several provincial chapters, a dispute erupted that destroyed the organisation from early 2006 until its revival in August 2008.

\textbf{Linking broad-based reparations issues}

But the story is not only one of division, but of unity, for Jubilee has also done an exceptionally good job of linking issues so that its apartheid debt campaign launched in

1998 soon connected dots across a variety of related issues and constituencies. As M.P. Giyose explains of the organisation’s apartheid debt work,

Of necessity, this campaign was a regional Southern African affaire because the political interconnections of the Apartheid Debts could not be confined within the borders of this country. The wider ramifications of the Apartheid Debt question included the problem of Apartheid-caused debt. Further, it was impossible at this formative date already to extricate the question of debt from those of the basic organisation of the South African economy, the issue of reparations and the related problems of human and social rights. The logic of these broad imperatives lying behind the campaign immediately dictated a broad alliance of forces that would be able to develop policy and generate social action...

In addition to the projection on the new debts arena, foreshadowed by the proposed World Bank Health loan of this time and the new debts being incurred in the arms deal, the Reparations Campaign became focused on the prospects for a lawsuit involving any parties our researches might suggest. The road was now wide open to a broad strategy involving large sections of the working classes and the faith movements broken up into several Task Team areas. It was at this time that the Apartheid Debt and Reparations (ADR) Task Team came to take the ascendancy. This also meant the rise of Khulumani Support Group as a leading organ in the work of the ADR campaign. Further sharpening of functions and roles occurred within that campaign inside South Africa and on the International arena. The Khulumani vs Barclays et al Lawsuit has now entered a critical phase at the Southern District court of the USA. In this regard, it is necessary to say that it is obligatory for this lawsuit to arrive at an even closer modus operandi with the sister lawsuits led by the Lungisile Ntsebeza et al group.

The ‘debt cancellation’ schemes that have been paraded by the G8 leaders ever since the HIPC and PRSP frauds have been followed by a multilateral debt reductions strategy which has been at large on the continent ever since 2005. These have been followed or become concurrent with the Norwegian Government Project, the Nigerian Government Agreement with the Paris Club and the debt legislation led by Maxine Waters in the USA. These features that intertwine debt with finance and trade have only been put into sharper relief by the sub-prime crisis embroiling the banks and the Real Estate Economy in the USA and the western world.

Nearer home, the older question of ecological debt that originally developed in Latin America has engulfed the political economy of mining finance throughout the economies of Southern Countries. In South Africa, the fury of the mining companies has taken its vengeance in the sector of gold mining and spent renewed vigour in the sector of platinum mining as well as coal mining. However, the question has to be posed. Why has mining finance developed such an exclusively predatory character at the present time?

Finally, in the realm of Debt and Finance, further researches need to be undertaken today designating all the areas of debt in globalised capitalism which integrates National Debt and Social Debt with streams of Private and Personal Debt. The factor of Finance in Debt will build Jubilee South Africa into a Mass Movement uniting larger and larger forces among the dominated classes. Whereas all other social movements existing presently tend to be single-issue and/or sectoral in their struggle against capitalism (resolving themselves into struggles against capital in particular), debt integrates into a position that stridently strikes out against capital in
How easy will it be to link the issues given how much resistance there is from the South African government to the core campaign? But Jubilee strategists believe they can leapfrog Mbeki to appeal to a much richer strand of African nationalism, than one that relies simply upon an appeal to sovereignty. For as as Gerald Lenoir and William Minter recall,

In 1993, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) spelled out Africa’s case for reparations. The Abuja Proclamation declares that the injury caused by slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism ‘is not a thing of the past, but is painfully manifest in the damaged lives of contemporary Africans from Harlem to Harare, in the damaged economies of the black world from Guinea to Guyana, from Somalia to Surinam.’ The proclamation states that a moral debt is owed to African peoples and calls for ‘full monetary payment through capital transfer and debt cancellation.’

Indeed, there is growing pressure for corporations to make monetary payment to their victims in cases of extreme ecological damage. In June 2008, a network called the African Civil Society Organisations coalition addressed the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment in Johannesburg, demanding that northern states and corporations provide resources for affordable renewable energy, prevent biofuel threats to food security in Africa, and compensate Africa for an estimated $50 billion required to adapt to climate change damage caused nearly entirely by industrialised countries’ historic accumulation of capital.

More generally, public support appears to be growing for Third World environmental reparations. The ‘ecological debt’ that the North owes the South, for example, is invoked by Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa, in part for his initiative to ‘keep the oil in the soil’ so as to help preserve the Yasuni National Park and slow climate change. But $5 billion in ecological debt repayment by the North to Ecuador would, he argues, be a reasonable offset for Ecuador’s revenue losses.

In Nigeria, demands by the Ogoni people relate not only to the massive destruction of their Delta habitat, but also to the looting of their natural wealth by Big Oil. According to Sam Olukoya,

Reparations is a crucial issue in the struggle for environmental justice in Nigeria. Many of the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta have drawn up various demands. A key document is the Ogoni Bill of Rights which seeks reparations from Shell for environmental pollution, devastation and ecological degradation of the Ogoni area. Shell’s abuses in Ogoniland were made infamous by the late playwright and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed by the Nigerian government.

By June 2008, women protesters, local NGOs and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) had won enough power that Nigerian president Umaru Musa Yar’Adua

unilaterally announced the end of the company’s Ogoniland operations: ‘There is a total loss of confidence between Shell and the Ogoni people. So, another operator acceptable to the Ogonis will take over.’30 MOSOP held a victory march in Port Harcourt, and its information officer, Bari-ara Kpalap, thanked Yar’Adua, yet also promised more agitation in the Niger Delta ‘until the government took more practical and sincere steps to genuinely address the problems of the area’.

From South Africa, the demand for reparations from apartheid’s financiers is a crucial precedent for wider campaigns aimed at reversing the outflow of resources from Africa and correcting historic wrongs, as well as addressing contemporary crisis conditions. As Giyose remarks,

The work on ecological debt is persistently raising the need to develop a clear approach to the land question. The international context of rising commodity prices highlights the need to link this question to food security. The debt, finance and broader economic context of poverty and unemployment underpinning the recent wave of xenophobia also demand attention. All of these are burning matters for the people of this country and its neighbours.31

How far might the reparations movement travel? Another nervous twitch can be discerned from those fearing that the revival of apartheid reparations claims could boomerang to the United States where slavery-related profits became more visible in recent years. Representative John Conyers, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee, ‘is reportedly waiting for Obama to be elected so Conyers can rush a reparations law through Congress’, according to a reliable source.32

But rather than depend upon courts and members of congress, the most important ingredient is a well-functioning, militant civil society. A variety of organisations emerged during the 2000s to fight for reparations in the broadest sense, linking back to slavery, colonialism, apartheid and environment destruction, including not just the South Africans and the Jubilee South movement, but the Reparations Movement (for Africa and the African Diaspora); Africa Reparations Movement; All for Reparations and Emancipation; Reparations Central; Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation; National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America; New World Reparations; and Sons of Afrika. The challenge is to take a diverse civil society and find those intersections in national law and through national states which will permit the issue of reparations to not only be raised with some prospect for success, but to keep the linkages growing so, as Giyose indicates, the struggle becomes a broader and wider critique of economic justice at its roots.

30 correo.oilwatch.org/pipermail/alert/2008-June/000522.html
Part Two
From Sustainable Development to Ecosocial Justice
Chapter 9
From WCAR to the WSSD

By Prishani Naidoo

As the United Nations (UN)’s World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) conference looms in our backyard, we all scramble for our space in the picture... our space to ‘influence the process’, a process and system into which we have moved as members of ‘civil society’, completely unquestioning of the UN and its role in late capitalist society, convinced that we will speak and be heard.

The UN legitimises neoliberalism

With the expansion of capitalism in the form of globalisation, the UN has increasingly begun to provide the supranational framework into which nation-states have been drawn in a changed role as the local mediators of global capital. Structural adjustment policies (SAPs) imposed on third world countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) have provided the mechanism by which this role has been assumed. In international conferences and summits, heads of state sit to determine, by consensus, approaches and commitments to various issues.

While ‘civil society’ is largely excluded from decision-making in this international financial architecture, it is allowed into separate streams of discussion around various issues, such as racism, gender and sustainable development. Before the gatherings of the Heads of States a meeting of a global ‘civil society’ comes together, and determines, by consensus, a joint submission to the main heads of state meeting. This submission by ‘civil society’ is then supposed to be considered by the Heads of States. The process is a long, complicated and confusing one that does not challenge the overarching economic framework of neo-liberalism.

The ‘civil society’ conferences, however, create the impression that ‘civil society’ has a lot of influence on the deliberations of the Heads of States, and that a ‘global partnership’ exists between nation-states, global capital and a global ‘civil society’ which can benefit us all. In this way, it masks the fact that such a partnership is framed within capitalism and works towards the ends of capitalism. The UN system prevents any critical engagement by ‘civil society’ with economic policy formulation, yet allows ‘civil society’ to engage in discussions that end with commitments to fighting inequality and poverty. In most cases the implementation and realisation of these commitments is determined by economic policy.

For example, governments might have committed to ensuring greater access to education for girl children in the Beijing process (the UN conferences on gender), yet neo-liberal policies make the realisation of this goal impossible for many developing countries in which school fees are introduced, forcing many families to make choices about which children go to school. In most cases, it is boy children who are prioritised over girls. Similar examples could be made with regard to commitments made in such conferences to increased clean water provision, improved access to health care and so on. In this way, the UN becomes the means by which ‘civil society’ accepts and gives legitimacy to the continued exploitation of the poor and marginalised.

Civil society alliances and strategies
Beyond the constraining framework into which the UN draws ‘civil society’, it also influences the ways in which ‘civil society’ represents itself, and the way ‘civil society’ decides its priorities in terms of issues and strategies for ‘change’. The World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), held in Durban last year, provides a clear example of this influence of the UN on ‘civil society’ in South Africa. While the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) took the lead in the official UN Secretariat responsible for ensuring the success of the WCAR Global NGO Forum, several community based organisations organised under the Concerned Citizens Forum (CCF), the Landless People’s Movement (LPM), and the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) were critical of participation in the process.

SANGOCO established a local ‘civil society’ process called the Asinamali Civil Society Initiative (ACSI), which became critical of some of the official NGO Secretariat’s positions in relation to the NGO Forum discussions. The CSI had also taken a decision to use the WCAR to highlight the link between poverty and racism. As such, many of the issues prioritised by the ACSI, such as the privatisation of basic services, had resonance for organisations fighting poverty.

These organisations, however, were critical of the WCAR process. While such organisations wanted to demonstrate at the WCAR in order to highlight the problems resulting from the implementation of South Africa’s neoliberal economic framework, GEAR (the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy), few had the resources to get to Durban. SANGOCO, on the other hand, had an interest in mobilising local ‘civil society’ for support within the Global NGO Forum. The CCF decided to put aside its problems with the NGO Forum in order to secure money for transport to the protest action. The APF decided (after much debate) to join the Forum purely to ‘win progressives out onto the streets’.

The subsequent declaration of the Durban Social Forum (DSF), the umbrella structure of all South African organisations protesting at the WCAR, did not advance any critique of the UN, the WCAR, and the Global NGO Forum. This compromise was due to the inclusion of SANGOCO as a leading organisation in DSF, and so the DSF brought together those protesting the entire framework of the WCAR and those with a political interest in the Global NGO Forum. This mixture of conflicting political positions is what made it possible for SANGOCO to welcome President Thabo Mbeki with open arms at the opening session of the Global NGO Forum at WCAR, and to march against him a few days later.

The joint programme spoke to the various issues and causes represented within the DSF, but it did so within the political perspectives and framework of the UN, the WCAR and Global NGO Forum. It addressed the issues within the accepted tone and register of ‘rational discourse’, suppressing emotion, and channelling anger, dissent and differences into a language of calm, considerability, compromise and co-option. The ability of the DSF to present a thoroughgoing critique of neoliberalism and of the Mbeki government was therefore compromised.

The emergence of the DSF, itself prompted by the UN process, was not an organic process. No discussion happened within individual organisations constituting the DSF (apart from the CCF and possibly AIDC) about its formation prior to its appearance on a left e-mail list. In a context in which the emergence of many self-organised groups in communities is a characteristic of struggles around which the DSF was formed, the absence of their participation in the very constitution of the DSF speaks to the tendency of NGOs and structures involved in the DSF to direct, lead and mediate the struggles of emerging movements rather than allowing them to determine their own unfolding.

When the DSF marched, however, on the 31 August 2001, none of the above problems were visible. Over twenty thousand people marched in Durban, for many causes and against many enemies: Israel, the ‘apartheid state’; capitalism; ‘corporate globalisation’; neoliberalism; the ANC government; Thabo Mbeki; landlessness; poverty; racism; the plight of
the Dalits. The march was a vibrant gathering of diverse groupings and individuals, including established NGOs under the banner of SANGOCO, community organisations such as the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC) and rastas, anarchists, religious, student, youth and civic organisations. Drums, trumpets, painted faces, toyi-toyis and new songs, banners and slogans, reflecting new and diverse struggles, characterised the march. For South Africa and the world it was the first significant demonstration post-1990 outside of the tripartite alliance.

In addition to outnumbering the official march of the alliance held on 1 September, and the COSATU marches during the preceding stayaway, the DSF march showed the potential amongst South African communities to imagine new and different ways of struggling. In front of the international community, it dealt the first symbolic blow in exploding the image of the ANC government as the deliverer of salvation to the African continent. The changing role of the nation-state into a local mediator of global capital took centre stage in South Africa’s first protest organised independently, and critical of neo-liberalism and the ‘rainbow nation’. The headbands produced by the CCF and worn by the marchers, which read ‘Pansi GEAR’, sent a clear message to the ANC. The potential for difference, creativity and resistance to the constraining institutional frameworks of the UN and capital, reflected in the march, was in the end undermined by the delegated leaders and marshals of the march.

At the end of the march, when it became clear to the crowds that neither Thabo Mbeki nor Kofi Annan were going to accept the memorandum, there were motions from the crowd to push through the police line and enter the International Convention Centre (ICC). Although the leadership of the march voiced their disapproval at the absence of any high level delegation to collect the memorandum, it declared the march successful and peaceful, and urged the masses to regroup at Hoy Park for a rally. While a group of protesters made their way towards the police, DSF marshals urged the waiting crowd to disperse. The Landless People’s Movement (LPM) refused to hand over its memorandum, debating whether to storm the ICC and demand Thabo Mbeki’s attention – despite strong arguments in favour of this, a decision was taken not to storm the ICC in order to prevent organisational splits at such an early stage in the development of the movement. While the march was impressive, and we had made a statement at a symbolic level, the statement had been made within the constraining framework of the UN and the WCAR.

The discourse of sustainable development

The next year, the WSSD introduced the discourse of ‘sustainable development’, and South African ‘civil society’ began to explain every issue and cause through the lens of sustainable development. Through the framework of the UN, ‘civil society’ has been drawn in to a ‘partnership’ with nation-states and global capital to ensure that ‘we are able to meet the needs of present generations without jeopardising the meeting of future needs’.

What such a ‘partnership’ does is to draw ‘civil society’ into a process of consensus-making around the achievement of certain ‘targets’. These targets, however, are unattainable under a neo-liberal economic order, which is governed by a separate stream of decision-making, in which the interests of global capital are given priority and from which ‘civil society’ is excluded.

Unlike with the WCAR, however, political lines have already been clearly drawn between differing sectors in ‘civil society’. Community organisations and NGOs, now organised in the Social Movements Indaba, learnt the hard way the illegitimacy of the process by first participating and being outmanoeuvred by the COSATU, SACC, SANGOCO alliance. The Indaba has now criticised the NGO Forum (called the Global Forum) for being
a government-influenced process rather than a fully independent one, and will be organising an alternative programme of events and protest actions around the WSSD. The Global Forum will again stage a march against joblessness and poverty. However, this year, the Tripartite Alliance (the ANC, COSATU, and the SACP) seems to have recognised the importance of this space and will be leading the march alongside SANGOCO. Unlike during the DSF march at the WCAR, there will be no space for criticism of government policy.

In such a context it becomes, not only more possible, but imperative that those of us outside of the Global Forum unleash our individual and collective potential for creativity and resistance against the present constraining frameworks of capitalism embodied in the UN. We need to protest this WSSD in a manner that distinguishes us from the calm, rational, patient, compromising discourse of the Global Forum – the discourse of co-option.

**Resisting neoliberal ‘partnerships’**

The perspective of ‘partnership’ and cooption is not restricted to the UN and its processes. It is evident at the level of the continent (Africa) in the form of New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad). It is also evident at the level of the nationstate. In South Africa, the unemployed and poor people have been urged to volunteer their services and become ‘partners’ in the delivery of jobs and social services. This ‘partnership’, however, is to take place within and through a neo-liberal framework, GEAR, and through a public sector that has undergone neoliberal restructuring.

We need to show that there is no ‘partnership’, that we feel the effects of neo-liberal policies directly when our water and electricity is cut off, when we are evicted and removed from homes we’ve lived in for years, when we cannot afford to send our children to school, and when we die because we cannot afford basic treatment or food. We don’t have the luxury of having the time to sit in prolonged discussions and forums to debate how best we can implement capitalism in a humane way. Our delegated representatives are constrained by the framework in which their debate is housed in the UN context. We are no longer content for others to speak on our behalf, and our statement needs to be bold and creative. We need to resist the framework imposed by the UN and its processes.
Chapter 10
The World Summit on Sustainable Development

By Ashwin Desai and Peter Dwyer

The WCAR was a dress rehearsal for the drama that was to unfold in the province of Gauteng in 2002. The WSSD, held in Johannesburg in August-September, was to be a moment in the history of South African politics that highlighted the state of civil society in South Africa, eight years after the election of the African National Congress to government. These were eight years in which civil society came to be characterised by the divisions and differences so evident around the WSSD, as well as the demobilisation and reorientation of civil society described in the first part of this chapter. These changes have occurred within the sphere of the play for the re-presentation of civil society to different ends, and in a context of the changing functions and powers of the major players of civil society locally and globally.

It is important to look at these changes in terms of the commonly held notion of a ‘global civil society’, embodied in the very institutional arrangements established and enforced by the UN system, of which the WSSD was a part; in the different understandings of the role of civil society and how this is changing, and the division of South African civil society according to these differences; in the different positions assumed locally within and in relation to civil society around the WSSD; and in the different strategies and tactics employed by different players in civil society with regard to the WSSD. What is also necessary to examine is the role that South Africa has come to play in terms of the way that this global civil society is able to be represented (and the purpose that the WSSD was to serve both the ANC government and the UN in the legitimisation of their policies). Key to this is a discussion of the various views in South African civil society about the UN and the ends to which the WSSD worked within the UN system.

It should, however, be remembered that the state of civil society relations by the time of the WSSD was also the accumulation of a number of related events and occurrences preceding it. It is also significant to note that no sector of civil society is homogenous i.e. the differences with regard to engagement with the democratic state, tactics, the UN, etc. manifest amongst and within NGOs, amongst and within new social movements, and so on. By the time of the WSSD, actors of civil society had already been introduced to the major debates and issues of concern a year earlier at the WCAR. Unlike the WCAR then, where there was much confusion and the forging of false unities and consensuses, by the time of the WSSD components of civil society had adopted clear positions and lines had been drawn.

In the words of Nhlanhla Ndlovu,

Many organisations were attending an international conference for the first time at the time of the WCAR. You had excitement to show that we’re hosting, and also we must show that we’re on top of issues. We must also understand the process well. We must get involved and make an impact in the NGO Forum. So most organisations saw their roles as getting on top of the game, learning rules how to negotiate, how to lobby, and just how things will be structured. On the other hand, even now there’s a lot of good faith. I worked hours on end on the DSF manifesto and the guys who I worked with were there on the basis of strong demands from across all participants, because, in our heads, we were working in good faith that something big will emerge out of this. Others
were already critical of things here and there. In WCAR, there was a sense in which we were naive, driven by good faith... Participants in the WSSD knew the limits of the UN, knew the limits of the WSSD Forum, and there was no issue of good faith. It was really about ensuring that you'll make an impact on the agenda that you represent. (Interview with Nhlanhla Ndlovu).

Exclusion and representation in civil society

The WCAR had highlighted divisions within South African civil society internally – divisions with regard to attitudes to the ANC-government and attitudes to the UN system. While these divisions were not allowed to take center stage at the WCAR, they would manifest themselves more clearly and overtly in the run-up to and during the WSSD – within and between new social movements, within and between NGOs, within SANGOCO and between SANGOCO and other movements, and between the Alliance and others.

Unlike the WCAR, a great deal more was invested in the WSSD process by organisations – possibly a result of the presence of the few environmental NGOs that had participated in UNCED in 1992 which had several specific issues to tackle e.g. the Kyoto Protocol, and debate within South African civil society about sustainable development and the need for poverty and social issues to be addressed together with issues of the ‘environment’. The experience of the WCAR had also heightened interest and interaction with the UN system within civil society. Differences in South African civil society did not, then, surface around approaches to the UN or participation in the WSSD process. Critiques of the UN were, in fact, only to appear in mainstream discourse much later. However, differences did surface around the representation of South African civil society within the formal UN process, and around the positions that South African civil society would adopt in relation to sustainable development and the summit.

Interestingly, the majority of civil society (including new social movements, such as the APF, AEC and CCF began their work around the WSSD by participating in its formal processes. As early as 2000, mainly environmental NGOs (Environmental Justice Networking Forum - EJNF, Group For Environmental Monitoring - GEM, Environmental Monitoring Group - EMG, Rural Development Services Network - RDSN, National Land Committee - NLC, SANGOCO and Earthlife Africa) were brought together (initially by the Heinrich Boell Foundation-HBF, a political foundation allied to the German Green Party, with a regional office in Johannesburg) in a series of meetings to discuss the WSSD. The result was the formation of a task team, that later became the Interim Advisory Council (IAC), that facilitated early South African NGO participation in the UN processes towards the WSSD. The IAC secured funding from HBF for an interim co-ordinator and proceeded with workshops to raise awareness about the WSSD. SANGOCO did not participate fully in these processes due to their organisation of the WCAR, neither did RDSN (which was experiencing its own internal organisational problems at the time. The NLC had separate plans with the LPM for a separate event altogether. The IAC represented itself to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) on 15 March 2001 with the following objectives:

- To articulate an African/Southern vision of sustainable development based on a new set of human, spiritual and economic values that address the central issues of poverty and inequality;
- To reinvigorate the process, conventions and programs adopted at UNCED, aiming also to level the South-North playing fields;
- To give voice to grassroots people to provide development solutions; and
To put poverty and environmental justice on the Summit agenda. (Munnik and Wilson 2003)

The IAC saw itself clearly as a participant in the UN system, attempting to enhance South African civil society’s participation in the WSSD and its preparatory committees and sessions. From the start, the relationships between SANGOCO, RDSN and the IAC were unclear. With the IAC being represented by mainly white environmental activists and NGO staff, and SANGOCO and RDSN mainly Black activists and NGO staff working around ‘brown’ issues, this lack of clarity soon became a source of tension.

After joint participation by members of these groups in Prepcom 1 and a ‘study tour’ to Rio, funded and organised by HBF, all 3 groups met to decide on a final structure for the civil society process – SANGOCO as host of the WSSD’s civil society process, RDSN as the organisation that SANGOCO had given the responsibility to organise the preparatory civil society process, and the IAC – on 8 June 2001.

The result was the formation of the Civil Society Indaba (CSI), whose mandate would be to facilitate the participation of South African civil society in the formal process of the WSSD i.e. to build common civil society positions around key WSSD debates and discussions to input into the international NGO forum of the summit. While SANGOCO would hold political responsibility for the CSI, the daily management and administration of the CSI was outsourced to the RDSN. RDSN was given this responsibility with the thinking that it would give the civil society process the necessary framework of poverty and rural issues for its approach to sustainable development. RDSN formed the Civil Society Secretariat (CSS) and appointed a number of highly paid staff and consultants to drive the participation of South African civil society in the WSSD.

Consultant and adviser to the CSI, Oupa Lehulere, confirmed that the CSI process was dominated by NGOs, stating that new social movements, such as the APF and CCF, did not seem to take the formal process seriously. Instead, the process saw the participation of some ‘extraordinary NGOs’ (Interview with Eddie Cottle), such as EJNF, which were using their role as NGOs to take forward the progressive agendas and interests of communities and new social movements within the UN framework. However, contributions from South African civil society to the discussions within the WSSD process were short-lived when discussions became bogged down in issues related to its own structure and representation on it.

In this quarrel about representation, differences in approach and attitude to the ANC-government surfaced, with lines being drawn between those wanting to overtly criticise the ANC-government (APF, CCF, AEC, Jubilee South Africa, EJNF, RDSN) and those wanting to use the WSSD to celebrate the ANC’s time in government and project it as spokesperson for the South against the richer, Northern interests represented in the UN system (interviews with Simon Boshelo and Donovan Williams).

Very simply put, it was a fight over whether the government operating in the person of the ANC and the person of the Alliance, whether they’d be able to dictate a civil society agenda. There was a core of forces in that civil society process that felt that the aim or the outcome of the process must be greater unity with government, and forces that defended in the first instance the independence of civil society to take positions. This was true even of people who felt that government was doing a positive job, who recoiled at the idea of the levels of interference. And that became more evident as the WSSD came nearer. That was the basic source of the split, and as the process unfolded, the split did take on programmatic political overtones of attitudes to neoliberalism, questions of attitude to the environment, the performance of the state, off course issues
of the capacity of civil society in the South African context to influence decisions. We have to bear in mind that all this comes on the background of a fairly extended GEAR debate within civil society, and to that extent, the government framework or platform at the WSSD was framed to be consistent with GEAR. Many civil society actors, in the first instance NGOs as the process began and later social movements, could not reconcile themselves to a position that was consistent with a GEAR platform. (Interview with Oupa Lehulere).

It’s a split mainly from a grouping that actually sees the ANC or the government as a strategic opponent, and we in the trade union movement, as Cosatu, we see the ANC as a partner. Because on a range of policies, the ANC agrees with the agenda of civil society because the ANC is an organisation of the south and the government is a government of the south. (Interview with Simon Boshielo).

When the CSI became clearly critical of the ANC, Cosatu and SANCO began to call into question their exclusion from the CSI. When they were invited, they participated only to argue for a complete change in the structure of the CSI from one based on the sectors of faith, labour, youth, women, urban communities, rural communities, NGOs and indigenous people, to the sectors of NGOs, labour, faith, women, the disabled, youth and civics. They also laid allegations of corruption at the door of the Civil Society Secretariat (CSS). With the legitimacy of the CSS in question, its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was suspended, and the latter structure won, with support from Cosatu, SANCO, SACC and SANGOCO. EJNF, APF, CCF, AEC, Jubilee South Africa and others broke away to form the SMI. The Alliance-backed structure would go on to organise the Global People’s Forum (GPF), the official South African civil society voice in the WSSD. The SMI went on to plan a march for 31 August 2002 to highlight the inability for the neoliberal policies of the ANC-government and the international financial institutions (part of the UN system) to deliver sustainable development. It was at this point that the voices quiet until now in the SMI (in particular the APF) came alive, taking the reigns of the SMI. At this point, a voice much more critical of the UN system became vocal, in addition to the anti-ANC one.

The LPM, able to secure its own independent funding, chose to stay out of any civil society processes. Instead, it organised its own assembly at a place called Shareworld, south west of Johannesburg. A Landless People’s Camp was to be the setting for an international assembly of the landless at which the slogan ‘landlessness=racism’ was to dominate.

State repression of social movements and the forging of unity

The LPM’s plans were disrupted by arrests of about a hundred leaders and members during protests in central Johannesburg against forced removals from eight informal settlements around Johannesburg. In addition, the camp was riddled with in-fighting with alleged attempts by members of the ANC to ‘infiltrate’ the LPM. LPM and NLC members interviewed also spoke of police harassment and interrogation by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) (Interviews with Zakes Hlatshwayo and Andile Mngxitama). The LPM was planning a march for 31 August 2002 to highlight the lack of land reform and redistribution in South Africa.

The SMI also came under fire when it arranged a candle-light march from Wits University to Johannesburg Central police station (where LPM members were being held) to highlight the violation of the right to freedom of expression at a time when the South African government is supposedly celebrating democracy through the WSSD. The march was stopped by armed police, and stun grenades just five meters outside of the University.
The violence of the South African police appeared on television screens all over the world, and the WSSD was no longer the South African government’s opportunity to show off its gains since the end of apartheid. It had to do some quick remedying of the situation.

With increased repression from the state, as well as the contributions made by international movements like Via Campesina and the Movement of Landless Workers, the LPM and SMI came together as the Social Movements United (SMU) to organise a joint march for 31 August. After the candlelight march, this march was declared legal (after previous refusal from the police to declare either march of the LPM or SMI legal), and over 20 000 people marched under the banner of the SMU on 31 August 2002. Their message was clear – sustainable development is not possible within the system of capitalism. Some of these marchers had participated in the GPF, some had not. Some were even members of SANGOCO. Marching from Alexandra to Soweto was also significant in marking the stark reality of the different worlds we live in just meters away from each other in the same city.1

The Global People’s Forum split

The split in South African civil society played itself out in the GPF when international participants in the GPF heard about the SMU march. The GPF was split down the middle when international participants were given the opportunity to choose between marching with the SMU or marching with the Alliance (which held a march of about 5 000 just after the SMU march). SANGOCO also did not take a position with regard to the Alliance. Instead, individual members and staff made their own choices about which banner to march under.

On 31 August 2002, unlike just a year before, the divisions in civil society were much clearer – there was the GPF (ANC-Alliance groupings and international NGOs within the UN system), and the SMU (LPM and SMI, as well as international activists and organisations, forces clearly against the neoliberal policies of the ANC-government, and the international financial institutions). Unlike the WCAR, there was no attempt at unity and clear allegiance to different positions. But across all divisions, the relationship with the UN system remained unclear with differing positions being taken up across other differences.

Within new social movements, for example, there were (and are) activists wanting to work within the UN system and those completely opposed to it. There is still debate amongst civil society organisations about the nature of the UN and the value of engaging with it. However, interviews suggest that a large part of South African civil society (across the split) has lost faith in the UN as an institution, citing the increasing powers the USA and the complete powerlessness of the UN with regard to the war in Iraq as evidence. Many activists interviewed lamented the lack of any discussion post-WSSD amongst civil society to properly engage with its substantive issues. Many, however, also point to the complete lack of any civil society participation in the substantive issues being discussed during the WSSD. For many participants in the CSI, the process of contributing to a civil society input into the WSSD came to a halt when the crisis around representation arose.

For many of the SMI activists interviewed, entry of Cosatu and SANCO into the CSI was purely to protect the image of the ANC. These activists argued that the lack of any substantive program around the WSSD from these organisations is evidence of this (Interviews with Eddie Cottle, Oupa Lehulere, Nhlanhla Ndlovu). Similarly, Cosatu and SANCO argued that the SMI had no real role in the WSSD but to ‘embarrass the state’ (Interviews with Simon Boshielo and Donovan Williams).

1. Marching from Alexandra to Sandton drew attention to the fact that widespread poverty still exists in South Africa in places like Alexandra despite the opulence of places like Sandton, in which the WSSD was being held.
Civil society and the formal WSSD processes

According to Oupa Lehulere of Khanya College,

The Summit in the first instance had reflected the drift within the UN and its different agencies away from a kind of Keynesian, social democratic civil society – inclusive regime – to a regime that has been narrowing since the 1990s. The first thing was that there was a shift within the UN itself, reflecting the hegemony of neoliberal forces. Secondly, the UN process reflected increasingly the insulations of the UN system from any project from without. To that extent, many civil society forces – and this clearly included the big global NGOs fairly connected to the UN system like Greenpeace, Oxfam International, Friends of the Earth – the feeling among them was their marginalisation from the UN system. Thirdly, this particular WSSD had a very strong corporate image. You only had to go to Sandton and see the BMWs and Mercedes, and all the big corporations at their stalls peddling so-called clean energy by way of sustainable development… What this particular WSSD marked was a major inroad – of course one that did not start with this WSSD – the elements are already there in Rio – that aligns the sustainable development paradigm to a neoliberal project for the WTO … this particular Summit was defined, in particular, by the deepening of the hegemony of the international financial institutions and the WTO into areas that had historically been dominated by UNCTAD, the UNDP and such.

While the majority of South African civil society participated in the UN processes, investing somewhat in the space of global consensus-making, this was not without criticism of the imbalances of power within the UN as well as the declining power of the UN as an institution in the face of the growing dominance of the USA. While members of the SMI responded to the crisis of representation of civil society within the UN system by highlighting the crisis as a flaw within the system itself, members of the Alliance and broader participants of the GPF pursued their engagement with the system over specific issues. But there were problems in the way the formal processes unfolded, a point highlighted by Martin Khor of Third World Network:

The last preparatory meeting at Bali ended without a draft declaration, and the Preparatory Committee chairman, Emil Salim of Indonesia, issued a draft of elements paper under his own authority after the Bali meeting. Even that document was not discussed in Johannesburg. There was no process or meeting held at Jo’burg on the declaration. The host country, South Africa, distributed a first draft only on the night of 1 September, three days before the Summit was to conclude. That draft was received with a lot of criticism from many countries. No meeting was held to discuss it.

On the night of 3 September, when the Main Committee met to discuss the Implementation Plan, a few delegations led by Malta asked what happened to the declaration process and when a meeting would be held to discuss it. South African foreign minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, replied that there were as many proposals for amendments to the first draft as there were people in the hall (about 300 delegates). She said a second draft would be ready on 4 September. WSSD secretary-general, Nitin Desai, indicated that a meeting of the Main Committee would be called that morning to discuss it. However, when pressed by delegates, neither could answer when the meeting would be convened.

On the summit’s last day, 4 September, delegations were eagerly awaiting the new
declaration draft and the opportunity to discuss it, neither the draft nor the meeting materialised. The final official plenary chaired by President Mbeki started after 3 p.m. without delegates having had the chance to see the new draft for a declaration. It was circulated after the plenary started, with the heading, ‘Draft political declaration submitted by the President of the Summit’.

With several delegations, and NGOs, informally indicating their displeasure at the new draft... Mbeki announced the meeting would be suspended for ten minutes. But the break stretched to almost two hours as several delegations were seen in intense discussion among themselves and with senior South African and UN officials. After the plenary resumed, a document with four new points or amendments was circulated, and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development was adopted.

The manner in which the declaration was introduced ... was way out of line with the normal procedure of UN conferences, in which many drafts of such an important document would have gone through months of negotiations at various stages of the preparatory committee and at the Summit. (Khor 2002)

Members of the SMI also argue that an agreement favorable to the interests of the international financial institutions was already pushed through in the consensus being built amongst heads of state in the run-up to the Summit. According to Oupa Lehulere,

Up to the meeting in Bali there were major gaps in reaching consensus. What happened was that a certain small group of countries (South Africa quite important in that process) went around in what was called the ‘capitals process’, and they basically hammered an agreement out, one that was basically favorable and consistent with international financial institutions, the World Bank, the Fund and the WTO. One reads through the declaration adopted there and it reads consistently with shifts to a neoliberal hegemony. And that, in a sense, was the central process of the UN that was identified from the top.

In general, interviewees felt that the outcomes of the WSSD were futile in trying to advance an environmental or anti-poverty agenda against neoliberalism.

Conclusion

While the overwhelming feeling in South African civil society is that the WCAR and WSSD have had significant effects, these effects are not to be found in influencing the UN process and system in any meaningful way towards advancing a progressive civil society agenda against the narrow interests of international capital. Rather, the WCAR and WSSD have raised the level of debate and discussion within civil society to that of issues of global governance, and brought into the open several differences and divisions within South African civil society regarding the nature of engagement with the South African state as well as the UN system.
Chapter 11
Civil society at an uncivil summit

By Patrick Bond

As a host country the successful outcome of the Johannesburg World Summit places a special responsibility on us to be - in our own habits and practices - among the global leaders in sustainable development. Just as South Africa provided the leadership required of it at the Summit and just as South Africans hosted with widely acclaimed success the biggest-ever multilateral event, so too must South Africa serve as a shining example in putting into action the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. - South African president Thabo Mbeki

South African civil society was simultaneously enervated and debilitated by the experience of hosting the World Summit on Sustainable Development, not least because the broader problems of environment and development that were under discussion in Sandton, the Nasrec complex and the various other summit sites are amplified enormously in South Africa. There are many examples of correlations between the WSSD agenda and that of South African civil society. How deep, however, was the critique of status quo environmental and development management - and how successful were initiatives to change course both globally and locally?

South African president Thabo Mbeki was ultimately prohibited by Northern delegations from using the phrase ‘global apartheid’ in the WSSD’s final communique - and this has led to an upsurge of resentment and radical rhetoric since the WSSD by government and ruling party officials.

Likewise, during August-September 2002, many Johannesburg civil society protests - against the WSSD, its Africa chapter Nepad, and SA government policies - were repressed by the government’s security forces. The attempt by Mbeki and his allies to disguise many homegrown environment and development crises also generated a subsequent post-WSSD round of intense criticism, national strikes, periodic community protests, and civil disobedience campaigns around issues that were, likewise, unresolved at the global scale within the WSSD.

Hence although South African civil society groups’ engagement with the WSSD - including hosting crucial functions and organising two competing marches on the Summit - can be described as highly divisive, fragmented and often ineffective, nevertheless there were benefits. These included some exceptionally empowering processes - not least conscientisation, educational opportunities, platforms for local grievances to be aired and international networking - that ultimately marked the WSSD as a net gain for nearly all factions of South African civil society, although its benefits were somewhat ambiguous from the standpoint of the South African government.

Indeed, for the world at large, South African civil society critics joined their counterparts in expressing disappointment:

- Vandana Shiva described the outcome simply: ‘What happened in Jo’burg amounts to a privatisation of the Earth, an auction house in which the rights of the poor were given away.’
- Friends of the Earth cited backsliding on the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- Complained the NGO Energy and Climate Caucus, ‘The agreement on energy is an

outright disaster, with the dropping of all targets and timetables.’

- The Gaia Foundation called the final summit document ‘an incredibly weak agreement.’
- Australian Green Party senator Bob Brown concluded, ‘Like ostriches, the wealthy nations have stuck their heads into the sand and have let down the next generation in an appalling way.’
- Oxfam called the WSSD ‘a triumph for greed and self-interest, a tragedy for the poor and environment’.
- In the five key fields of water, energy, healthcare, agriculture and biodiversity, the Geneva-based WTO considers essential state services to be typical commodities, and the WSSD’s Type 2 Agreements codify privatisation, as a replacement for intergovernmental agreements and actions - which have been extremely scarce in any case since Rio in 1992.

In all these regards, South African civil society critics of the WSSD and homegrown neoliberalism are both at the cutting edge and the mainstream of the international movements for social and environmental justice. This chapter provides a broad outline - and many telling details - of this story.

**Fragmentation of world civil society**

The WSSD was a site of global-scale conflict within and between states, businesses and civil society. One report documented:

- ... a split among civil society actors still aimed at influencing the intergovernmental text, and those who were dedicating their energies toward shared civil society vision and analysis...
- This experience of fragmentation and isolation of civil society from the official process was also because of the lack or inadequacy of mechanisms that could have facilitated access, transparency and participation. The unique dynamics of South African civil society-government relations also contributed to the difficulty of global civil society finding unity in its engagement with the official process in Johannesburg...
- Even the terminology of civil society, or of the idea of sustainable development, and the strategic questions of how and when to engage in international governmental arenas became an important backdrop to the various stages of the drama that unfolded on the way to Johannesburg. The relative quality of government-civil society relations took on particular importance when the context of host countries Indonesia and South Africa are taken into account. In retrospect, the wider challenges to the legitimacy and inclusiveness in processes in both of these countries, including how social movements and marginalised groups outside of the official process would be treated, had much to do with the outcomes...
- Civil society participation in the WSSD suffered because of the inadequacy of the mechanisms that were put into place to facilitate official interaction between governments and civil society...
- Common elements in these successes on specific issues are: early organisation (beginning the work at least in Bali if not the earlier preparatory meetings), effective communication in between official meetings and strategic focus (i.e., specific texts they wanted to influence). Civil society organisations working on these issues succeeded when at least two or all of these elements were present...
- Success in civil society engagement in the WSSD should also be recognised in the
extent to which civil society was able to influence or to effect change in their respective countries or regions and also to the extent that the WSSD processes resulted in empowering civil society constituencies at both the national and international level.³

The most important impact of the WSSD upon South African civil was to reveal a deep-seated split between the centre-left groups allied to the ruling part and the independent left groups which believe the government is excessively neoliberal. In the former camp, the African National Congress (ANC) and its ‘Alliance’ partners - the SA Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) - formed the core of a political bloc that, alongside many church leaders, NGO officials and a section of the community/residents movement, sought to use the WSSD in order to both reform Africa-wide and global-scale processes, and to search for local solutions to sustainable development problems.

In contrast, the ‘Social Movements Indaba’ (SMI) was formed in August 2002 to draw together leftist critics of government from civil society groups across a variety of activities. For this bloc, the WSSD was used to a) link global ‘neoliberalism’ to a variety of local manifestations; b) blame and shame the South African government for their grievances; and c) network and unite with international critics of the WSSD - and global neoliberalism - to delegitimise the Africa-wide and global-scale reform process.

On 31 August 2002, the two mutually antagonistic blocs narrowly avoided meeting in the streets of Alexandra Township as they marched up to Sandton for protests: the latter against what they termed the ‘W$$D’, and the former for global-scale UN-mandated reforms. The WSSD opponents gathered, according to the BBC, 20,000 participants; while most observers put the pro-WSSD, pro-Pretoria bloc at around 1/10th the size by the time their march began.

Did the experience herald a new stage of global reform-fatigue by the cutting edge movements within local/international civil society, and the successful use of WSSD issues by South African leftists to contest state policies? Or was this, the climactic event of local civil society mobilisations, merely just theatre, leaving untouched the more durable aspects of civil society advocacy in relation to the local state and global political economy?

The two distinct poles described above disguise, of course, a myriad of civil society activity inbetween. Prior to exploring aspects of the political conflagration that occurred in late August - and ever since - it is useful to simply point out two features of South Africa’s ‘positionality’ on WSSD issues since 1994.

The first point is that the South African government stands extremely tall - and ‘punches above its weight’ as is often remarked - in international governance circuits. From 1994-2002, extremely talented South African officials have presided over

• the board of governors of the IMF and World Bank,
• the Non-Aligned Movement,
• the UN Conference on Trade and Development,
• the Commonwealth,
• the World Conference Against Racism,
• the World Summit on Sustainable Development,
• the Organisation of African Unity, African Union, and Southern African Development Community,
• the International Conference on AIDS,
• the World Commission on Dams, and

The second point is that South Africa’s own problems of sustainable development are not only as bad as any in the world thanks to the apartheid legacy, but are actually getting worse. For each problem listed, there have been intense advocacy efforts - and militant protests - underway since liberation in 1994 by civil society groups. The WSSD allowed many of these to come to the world’s attention:

- South Africa witnessed the replacement of racial apartheid for what is widely being described as ‘class apartheid’, for since 1994 the Gini Coefficient raced ahead of Brazil’s to become the world’s worst for a major country. Statistics South Africa released a report in October 2002 confirming that in real terms, average African household income had declined 19% from 1995-2000, while white household income was up 15%. The average black household earned 1/6 as much as the average white household in 2000, down from 1/4 in 1995. Households with less than R670/month income - mainly black African, coloured and of Asian descent - increased from 20% of the population in 1995 to 28% in 2000. Across the racial divides, the poorest half of all South Africans earn just 9.7% of national income, down from 11.4% in 1995. The richest 20% earn 65% of all income. The official measure of unemployment rose from 15% in 1995 to 30% in 2000, and adding to that figure frustrated job-seekers brings the percentage of unemployed people to 43%. These statistics reveal worsening poverty; one symptom is that ten million people reported having had their water cut off in one national government survey, and ten million were also victims of electricity disconnections, mainly due to unaffordability. In addition, two million people have been evicted from their homes or land since liberation in 1994.4

- Alienation and discontent are obviously increasing. Shockingly, ‘the number of black people who believe life was better under South Africa’s apartheid regime is growing’, according to a September-October 2002 nationwide survey conducted by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa: ‘More than 60 per cent of all South Africans polled said the country was better run during white minority rule... Only one in 10 people believed their elected representatives were interested in their needs and fewer than one in three felt today’s government was more trustworthy than the apartheid regime. Black people were only slightly more positive than white and mixed-race groups about the government, with 38% deeming it more trustworthy than before.’5

- South Africa is water scarce, but suffers extreme inequality in its distribution, in the location of natural surface and groundwater (due to apartheid land dispossession), and in consumption norms, with wealthy urban (white) families enjoying swimming pools and english gardens, and rural (black) women queueing at communal taps in the parched ex-‘bantustan’ areas for hours.

- South Africa has the world’s greatest number of HIV-positive residents (approximately five million), but suffers the most reluctant government in the world, when it comes to making available safe anti-retroviral medicinal treatment.

- South Africa contributes more to global warming than nearly any other society in the world, if CO2 emissions are corrected for both income and population size (20 times worse than even the United States). Yet renewable energy is desperately underfunded notwithstanding good solar, wind and tides potential, and instead vast resources are devoted to nuclear energy R&D and construction of hydropower facilities, including

Africa’s largest dams.

- South Africa boasts extraordinary natural biodiversity, but also enormous controversies and conflicts over natural land reserves (including ongoing displacement of indigenous people), over the impacts of industrialisation on biodiversity, over the protection of endangered species, over intellectual property rights (especially for indigenous knowledge and organic flora/fauna), and over genetic modification for commercial agricultural purposes.

- South Africa’s marine regulatory systems are overstressed and hotly contested, given the desire of Black Economic Empowerment entrepreneurs to access fishing quotas during a period of invasion by European and East Asian fishing trawlers.

- South Africa’s use of exotic timber plantations (mainly gum and pine) has been extremely damaging, in light not only of grassland and organic forest destruction, and worse flood damage simultaneous, but also with respect to spreading of alien-invasive plants into water catchments across the country.

- South African commercial agriculture is extremely reliant upon fertilisers and pesticides, paying virtually no attention to potential organic farming markets.

- South Africa’s failure to prevent toxic dumping and incineration has led to a nascent but portentous group of mass tort (class action) lawsuits that may move from asbestos victims to those subject to persistent pollution in several extreme toxic pockets (South Durban, Sasolburg, Steel Valley).

If the South African government’s challenge to global environmental and developmental degradation aims high internationally but achieves little at home, what, then, can we anticipate that a much more conscientised post-WSSD South African civil society will do, by way of analysis, strategies, tactics and alliances?

In this chapter, we consider four topics. First, we consider the ways that South African civil society emerged during 2001-02, partly in relation to the WSSD’s Civil Society Secretariat hosting function, but also in the vacuum of a legitimate national sustainable development plan (for which a 1994 ANC campaign platform ‘stood in’). Second, we survey some of the key parallel events, both specialised and technical in form, and highly politicised in character. Third, we contemplate the ways that South African civil society groups affected specific WSSD outcomes; the case of water/sanitation is most important, and post-WSSD follow-up also deserves our attention. Fourth, we take a mirror-image perspective by enquiring as to how the WSSD affected South African civil society. These include matters of consciousness, alliances, strategies and tactics.

One crucial feature of this story relates to the manner in which the South African government subsequently, post-WSSD, understood the threat now posed by an active, empowered civil society. In turn, civil society forces have considered various options for a way forward. These range from ongoing (non-electoral) advocacy work, to joining in some way the terrain of party politics in coming months/years. The conclusion of the chapter is an overall evaluation of the costs and benefits to civil society as a whole, of South Africa’s hosting of the WSSD.

**South African civil society in the formal WSSD process**

In general, the diverse movements have this in common: they promote the globalisation of people and halt or at minimum radically modify the globalisation of capital. Their demands, campaigns and programmes reflect the work of organisations with decades of experience. Their activists were schooled in social, community, women’s, labour, democracy, disarmament, human rights, consumer, public health and Aids-activist, political, progressive-religious, environmental, and
youth traditions, spanning an enormous variety of issues, organisational forms, and styles. In the Third World, high-profile justice movements at the turn of the 21st century include Jubilee South in various locations, Mexico’s Zapatistas, Brazil’s Movement of the Landless, India’s National Alliance of People’s Movements, Thailand’s Forum of the Poor and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.

The most dynamic forces within the movements have arrived at this formula not only because of high-profile battles between protesters and the police protecting elites in London and Seattle (1999); Washington, Melbourne, Prague and Nice (2000); Quebec City, Genoa and Brussels (2001); and New York, Barcelona, Johannesburg and Washington (2002). In addition, conditions remain that gave rise to ‘IMF Riots’ and massive anti-neoliberal protests across virtually the entire Third World over the past two decades. For many Southern social and labour movements, Seattle was a catalyst to transcend the IMF Riot as knee-jerk protest against neoliberalism. Subsequently, mass-democratic activist responses characterised the Third World demonstrations, which have increasingly featured anti-neoliberal programmatic demands. In some instances, particularly in Latin America (Bolivia and Ecuador), the activism reached a near-insurgent stage; in other sites (South Africa, Nigeria and India), many millions of workers became involved in mass strikes against neoliberalism; in yet other protests (South Korea, Argentina, Turkey), tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in waves of militancy. South Africa has certainly been one of the key sites of Global Justice Movement activism, especially in the run-up to the WSSD.

Yet intra-civil society ideological conflicts became obvious during the 2001-02 fragmentation of the various hosting committees: the UN Civil Society Secretariat, the South African Civil Society Forum set up by pro-government trade union and church leaders, the Civil Society Indaba of groups tossed out of the function in early 2002, and some resource-scarce independent-left social movements and intellectuals. The tensions in hosting the diverse official WSSD civil society events symbolised why power relations remain so skewed. On the other important matters of administrative competence and the arrangement of an appropriate venue and access to the official summit, the local hosting committee can also be severely criticised.

Some background is necessary, especially in describing the political milieu in which the WSSD was held, dating back roughly one year before summit. The largest trade union federation, Cosatu, went on strike against state privatisation policy for two days just prior to the August-September 2001 World Conference Against Racism (WCAR). That strike, the threats of several more general strikes during 2002, and extremely harsh rhetoric from ANC politicians, meant that possibilities would emerge for using the WSSD in August 2002 as a site of more protest and leverage.

To illustrate the point, just prior to Cosatu’s August 2001 strike, conflicts within the Alliance reached a boil and several senior ANC members began using the characterisation ‘ultra-left’ to discredit the trade union leaders. According to one report,

Cabinet ministers were subsequently dispatched to influential radio and television programmes first to ‘clarify’ government positions, but also to ‘show Cosatu members they are being urged to committing suicide’, according to an official involved in the spin-doctoring offensive. Also part of the strategy - championed by Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin, Transport Minister Dullah Omar and Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe - was to seek to caution Cosatu members against the possible hijacking of their strike by outside elements such as those protesting at World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings.6

6. Business Day, 27 August 2001. Johannesburg’s main newspaper demonstrated the underlying rationale in a report on the following day: ‘SA needs to cut import tariffs aggressively, privatise faster
'Those protesting' against neoliberal globalisation included the ‘Durban Social Forum’ (DSF) of activists: a broad coalition ranging from local ‘Concerned Community Forum’ groups to the rural landless to the Jubilee movement (and likeminded ‘anti-globalisation’ activists) to the substantial Muslim-associated Palestinian solidarity groups across South Africa. On the Alliance side, frustration had built up in the trade union movement to the point that the national leadership called a two-day national strike just as WCAR delegates were arriving. More than four million workers heeded the call.

Tensions simmered and then cooled within the ANC-SACP-Cosatu Alliance in the subsequent weeks. Leaders of Cosatu joined the 3000-member SA NGO Coalition (Sangoco), the SA Council of Churches (SACC) and the SA National Civic Organisation (Sanco) to take over the WSSD Civil Society Secretariat (CSS) in early 2002. The previous group that had run the secretariat - known as the Civil Society Indaba - included think-tank and NGO administrators with very radical ideological orientations, as well as others drawn more generally from the NGO movement. The Indaba was removed because, according to Cosatu:

- The structures of the Indaba give disproportionate power to small and unrepresentative NGOs. This occurs by giving NGOs three-fold representation: through the so-called provincial representatives, the NGO constituency, and the votes given NGOs under the heading of ‘rural and urban communities’. In contrast, key groups of civil society - notably the disabled and civics - have no seats at all.
- The financial management of the Secretariat to the Indaba remains open to question. Remuneration is extraordinarily high for non-profit civil society - initially topping out at over R40,000 a month, including car allowance, although this figure was reduced somewhat this January, following our protests. In addition, we have some evidence of alleged misappropriation of funds, which we can provide on request. The audit commissioned by the CSS has proven to be superficial and inadequate.

The ‘First Nations’ of indigenous South Africans disagreed with the Cosatu-led purge of the Indaba group, and resisted subsequent attempts to draw them back. Parallel to the broad anti-neoliberal politics that emerged at the Durban WCAR, another angle was also evident, as reported in the *Mail & Guardian*: 'The New Partnership for Africa’s Development appears to be key to the divisions in this sector ... The Civil Society Indaba has a leftist, anti-globalisation focus. It has claimed there is big brother interference from the government in the new, mainstream South African Civil Society Forum set up by Cosatu and its allies'.

During the first six months of 2002, virtually all African civil society groups formally rejected the Nepad on both procedural and content grounds.

and more extensively, promote small business effectively and change labour laws to achieve far faster growth and job creation. This is according to a World Bank report that will soon be released publicly and has been circulating in government. It stresses ‘the overarching need to improve the investment climate’ in SA for faster growth and job creation.’ (*Business Day*, 28 August 2001.)

7. Cosatu, the SA Council of Churches, South African Youth Council, Disability Sector and Sanco (2002), ‘Statement on Civil Society Participation in the WSSD’, Johannesburg, 17 January. It should be noted that the director of the Indaba, Jacqui Brown, was cleared of charges and in a July 2002 labour arbitration hearing, won the right to reclaim her job. In early 2002, R40 000 was equivalent to about US$3,500, but given purchasing power parity differences, it is roughly one and a half times more than what an equivalent full-time NGO administrator would have received for a monthly salary plus benefits.


politicians finally began to intervene in the civil society debate over Nepad (beginning in April 2002), it was possible to criticise Nepad’s form, content and process, yet still agree to ‘engage’ African leaders in demanding a rewrite.

At one level, this fracturing of civil society could be seen in the two ideological camps: anti-neoliberalism versus loyalty to the ANC government. The latter perspective won not only control of the CSS after an embarrassing public spat, but also enjoyed most of the mass-organisational resources that would permit membership education. The constituencies involved were enormous, especially if Cosatu unions, SACC churches, Sangoco NGOs and Sanco civic/resident associations were to pull all their members onto the streets. In Johannesburg alone, there are probably in excess of two million people who are followers of the four major groups, not to mention those who would vote for the ANC.

From ideology to activism to networking

However, at another level, the overall balance of forces was not necessarily easy to ascertain. If we scan the South African landscape of civil society activism in the early twenty-first century, several other prominent features come into view. The most impressive examples are the national ‘stayaway’ strikes of millions of workers, which were called annually against neoliberal policies beginning in 1995. Sometimes Cosatu rallies in major urban centres included mass marches that stretch for kilometres. Allied with Cosatu, the TAC did exceptionally powerful advocacy work to gain access to Aids medicines beginning in 1999, resulting in formidable pressure against government policies which had begun to be labeled ‘genocidal’ by responsible health practitioners such as the heads of the Medical Research Council and the SA Medical Association. TAC’s other notable allies included the other trade union federations and especially the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union, Sangoco, the SACP, the SACC, the Aids Law Project, the Aids Consortium and various orphanages and hospices.

Other extremely effective alliances emerged around other issues, and although they had a lower profile than economic justice and Aids medicines, several key areas of activism deserve mention:

• The Jubilee movement put the apartheid debt on the agenda, and progressive church groups helped form advocacy coalitions for reparations from apartheid profiteering. A 2002 lawsuit against US and European companies and banks was only one of the many activities underway to raise consciousness about the historical legacy of injustice. The Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, did particularly high-profile advocacy.
• A Basic Income Grant was supported by a Cape Town-based coalition with strong church and labour backing, with support by the South African New Economics Foundation.
• Prohibitions on Genetically Modified food by groups such as the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, Sangoco, BioWatch, Safe Age, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Earthlife Africa.
• Many organisations demanded the cancellation of the R60 billion arms deal, and received technical backing from Economists Allied for Arms Reduction and the Ceasefire Campaign.
• The Landless People’s Movement marched and occupied land periodically.

Information and Development Centre.
• The Environmental Justice Networking Forum included strong community-based campaigns, as well as national issue development ranging from leaded petrol to global warming. Other important players included the Sustainable Energy and Climate Change Partnership, South African Climate Action Network, the Minerals and Energy Policy Center, the Greenhouse Project, the Group for Environmental Monitoring and the Environmental Monitoring Group.

• Students regularly fought expulsions from universities on grounds of affordability, and in 2002 joined eight organisations - including NGOs and education-sector trade unions - which mobilised to demand free education for all, including expanded Adult Basic Education.

• Women’s rights were pushed strongly by leading individuals, although without a sense of a broader feminist movement emerging (aside from within the journal Agenda, which continued to provide extremely valuable analytical material about the racial and economic justice intersections with women’s empowerment).

• There are, in addition, people’s NGOs and ‘service organisations’ (training/research agencies) that work with and through the militant grassroots and labour movements, including Khanya College, the International Labour Resource and Information Group and the Alternative Information and Development Centre.

Many of the more activist oriented civil society groups used the WSSD process as a means of outreach and issue-linkage. In that sense there was a feeling similar to that of the World Social Forum (WSF), in which the 2001, 2002 and 2003 Porto Alegre meetings attracted increasing numbers of South Africans aiming to network internationally, continentally, nationally and locally. According to a report on the spirit behind South African representation at the WSF by Jacqueline Cock,

Many of the new social movements in South Africa suggest a rich and mutually stimulating relationship between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’. Several of them achieved a high level of visibility in the World Summit for Sustainable Development process and their multiple voices were heard in what Manuel Castells as termed, in another context, a ‘creative cacophony’. Do they also represent a new form of social activism? Are they ‘militant particularisms’, ephemeral eruptions of the urban poor, the rural landless and other marginalised groups, or components of the emerging Global Justice Movement?

Many of these recent grassroots initiatives are struggles around ‘social citizenship’. A key aspect of social citizenship is the right to a ‘healthy environment’, which implies access to adequate housing, water, sanitation and electricity which many South Africans lack. At a local level, the prescriptions of GEAR have witnessed a shift away from the ‘statist’ service delivery models of the past where the state subsidised and delivered municipal services (albeit in a racially-biased manner), towards a ‘neo-liberal’ service delivery model where the private sector dominates and the emphasis is on profit rather than meeting basic human needs. These developments have seen the costs of basic services escalate and increasing disconnections of water and electricity.

The poor and the marginalised are not responding passively to these changes in material conditions and state policy. A number of mass-based initiatives have arisen to challenge the water and electricity cut-offs, the lack of access to sanitation, proper housing and health facilities, aids treatment, reparations in terms of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process, popular justice, the evictions from informal settlements and lack of land redistribution. These have involved a diverse repertoire of resistance strategies including organised marches and petitions to parliament and local
The three crucial kinds of processes related to civil society’s alternative vision and political strategy thus ranged from militant activism on sector-specific grounds within South Africa, to networking of the sort symbolised by the WSF, to engagement with national and global sustainable development policy debates through the WSSD. Notably, a fourth category missing from South African civil society’s own repertoire of activities was something that has become important in other countries, namely a national sustainable development plan. The gap is a problem worth discussing.

The lack of an SA national sustainable development processes

According to DEAT’s director-general, Chippy Olver, the ‘Reconstruction and Development Programme’ (RDP) was South Africa’s substitute for a national sustainable development plan. Olver made this comment repeatedly beginning in December 2002, when it became apparent that DEAT did not have the capacity to meet the 1992 Rio commitment for a broad-based inclusive planning process.

The RDP had become official ANC policy in January 1994 due in large part to the initiative of Cosatu, which was then led by Jay Naidoo, who was later to become the minister without portfolio responsible for the RDP in Nelson Mandela’s first cabinet. Naidoo was supported by key figures of the SACP, the broad ANC Left and ANC-oriented social movements and NGOs - the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). To illustrate, in a deal brokered between Mandela and civic movement leader Moses Mayekiso in November 1993, Sanco endorsed the ANC for the 1994 election in exchange for the integration of the Sanco housing and economic development policy into the RDP. The final draft of the RDP booklet appeared in early March, and as a result of having no other articulated set of policies, the ANC unreservedly adopted the document as its most substantive set of campaign promises. It must be noted, however, that the document was never ‘greened,’ although the Environmental Justice Networking Forum did make submissions about ‘Greening the RDP’.

Immediately after the April 1994 election, the RDP took on a mythical tone, as Mandela himself - at the ANC election victory celebration on May 2 - elevated the document to a lofty status:

> We have emerged as the majority party on the basis of the programme which is contained in the Reconstruction and Development book. That is going to be the cornerstone, the foundation, upon which the Government of National Unity is going to be based. I appeal to all leaders who are going to serve in this government to honour this programme.

In nearly every sector, some of the best technical experts of the ANC and MDM debated the merits of detailed RDP policy directives. In most cases the more visionary, ambitious arguments about how to meet basic needs won the day. The five-year targets were quite

feasible: a million new low-cost houses available to even the poorest South Africans, electrification of 2.5 million houses, hundreds of thousands of new jobs, redistribution of 30% of good agricultural land, clean water and sanitation for all, a cleaner environment, full reproductive rights for women, universal primary health care and social welfare, a massive educational initiative, and more.

The motor force behind such expansive promises was the legacy of concrete struggles which were waged over several decades to win basic needs demands. Progressives in civil society also recognised that such struggles could never relax, and for this reason the RDP also gave high priority to maintaining the fighting capacity of civil society. The RDP promised: ‘Social movements and Community-Based Organisations are a major asset in the effort to democratise and develop our society. Attention must be given to enhancing the capacity of such formations to adapt to partially changed roles. Attention must also be given to extending social-movement and CBO structures into areas and sectors where they are weak or non-existent.’

Second, progressives aimed to build upon several specific foundations which might one day form the basis for deeper socio-economic transformation. These included a new Housing Bank to blend state subsidies with workers’ pension funds (protected against repayment risk) so as to ensure loans were affordable (in addition to permitting the blended subsidies to be ‘socialised’ through social housing mechanisms); a call to change (by law) the directors of the major mutually-owned insurance companies, Old Mutual and Sanlam; the decisive commitment to reproductive rights (the RDP was generally very strong in pointing out women’s existing oppression, and fair-to-middling on proposed solutions); potential anti-trust attacks on corporate power; and other challenges to the commanding heights of capitalism, racism and patriarchy.

Finally, progressives looked forward to what was often termed ‘a strong but slim state’ which would continually empower civil society through not only capacity-building but also opportunities to input into major decisions. In the RDP chapter on ‘Democratising State and Society,’ the phrase ‘deepening democracy’ took on more substantive content through explicit endorsement of direct democracy (‘people-driven development,’ ‘community control,’ etc).

What actually transpired in the name of the RDP was tragic, as civil society was systematically demobilised, for example through funding cuts that devastated NGO budgets and the progressive media. Moreover, the charge that the ANC had abandoned the RDP was indeed true in many crucial areas of social policy. Many of the key expectations of progressives were dashed: widespread land reform, massive employment creation through public works, housing and municipal services, enhanced social welfare, community development, shake-up of the financial sector commanding heights, Southern African integration, and youth programmes.15

On the one hand, there was partial disintegration of the social movements which wrote the document. And the decay of development was confirmed not only by the variety of neoliberal policy documents subsequently produced, but by the sudden, ill-considered and undebated closure of the RDP Ministry in the Office of the President in March 1996.

Nevertheless the RDP lived, not only because DEAT’s Olver used it as the excuse for not generating a participatory, national sustainable development plan in 2001-02. It lived on rhetorically, for example in the ANC’s 1999 re-election campaign Manifesto, which - because it lacked any detail of its own about government’s second-term strategic orientation - called the RDP ‘the only relevant detailed programme to carry SA to freedom and social justice.’ Moreover, at the 1998 SACP Congress, then deputy president Thabo Mbeki called the RDP ‘the combat orders of our movement as we continue the struggle for the genuine liberation of our

15. Bond, Elite Transition, Chapter Three.
people. Hence like most versions of sustainable speak, it is easy to be cynical about the use and abuse of RDP rhetoric.

Nevertheless, even if it had become something of a political football, perhaps kicked to death by ANC leaders, the RDP also lived in the unmet demands of its authors in the social movements, and in periodic critiques of particular ministers for rejecting RDP mandates. Some of the key themes in the RDP that reflected the role of progressive civil society advocates during apartheid and in the more recent period of anti-class-apartheid activism included attempts to ‘decommodify’ (remove from the market) and ‘destratify’ (make universal) basic needs goods, in addition to other radical reforms. These have been noted above, and deserve more consideration when they took the form of protest initiatives during the course of the WSSD.

Parallel WSSD events

A variety of SA civil society groups were involved in the four main organised parallel summits: Global Peoples Forum (Nasrec), Landless Summit (Shareworld), IUCN Environmental Centre (Sandton), and the People’s Environment Summit (St.Stithians School). These parallel events are discussed in greater detail by other commentators. Of greatest interest to us - from the standpoint of evaluating the impact of the WSSD on South African civil society and vice versa - is the way in which local groups networked with likeminded activists in more specialised events, and how the various conflicts between civil society groups unfolded during the run-up to the WSSD.

To some extent, the networking occurred through highly specialised sectoral groups. Aside from the major parallel summits, local South African interests were reflected in events such as:

- the local NGO ‘groundWork’ worked closely with Corpwatch on a Corporate Accountability workshop held in Sandton the week before the WSSD;
- South African intellectuals and activists became involved in the International Forum on Globalisation and follow-up workshops (Wits University); and
- several other sector-specific meetings occurred which allowed local civil society groups to meet international delegations of fisherfolk, farmers, community forestry activists and indigenous peoples, amongst others.

South African civil society gained a much higher international profile, however, through the conflict mentioned at the outset, when the two major civil society camps faced off against one another at the August 31 march from Alexandra to the Sandton Convention Centre.

South African civil society conflicts

The most revealing aspects of the WSSD’s specific impact on South African civil society continued to surface in the varied conflicts over positioning, control of resources and ideological orientation. Some of these issues were discussed in the context of the earlier run-up period where WSSD hosting responsibilities were debate. At this stage, however, it is useful to turn to the organisation which sets the tone for political debates in South Africa: the ruling party. When the ANC addressed the Global Civil Society Forum - by then the WSSD civil society secretariat - in July 2002, its official greeting was extraordinarily radical in tenor:

17. One of the best overviews is Munnik, V. and J.Wilson (2003), The World Comes to One Country, Johannesburg, Heinrich Boell Stiftung.
The Johannesburg Summit convenes against the backdrop of a city visibly scarred by the profound contradictions of its history. Wealth and poverty lie cheek by jowl, a stone’s throw from the central venue of the intergovernmental conference. And Jo’burg’s landscape is strewn with the waste of one hundred years of resource extraction; in the service of which South Africa’s racial hierarchy was constructed with violent determination. The city’s contemporary social and environmental panorama is an ever-present reminder of our country’s painful past. This divided geography also reflects the state of the world as we enter the twenty-first century: a globalised world built on the foundation of imperial conquest and colonial domination, which continues to define the contours of privilege and underdevelopment ...

In the developed capitalist countries it is monopoly companies, particularly transnational corporations, which set the globalisation agenda. These corporations have the potential to determine economic, social and environmental policy of governments throughout the world. Already, the content and form of globalisation of trade, investment and capital flows, and the operation of some of the critical multilateral institutions reflect in large measure the wishes of these corporations. Combined with these forces, the nation states of the North have also continued to drive and shape the process of globalisation in a manner that suits their national interests.\(^{18}\)

That this argument is not drawn from the ANC’s leftwing opposition, but rather from the party’s own formal statement to civil society, reflects how far left the South African political-ecological narrative had shifted by the time of the WSSD. In other societies, a proud ruling party would hardly denigrate the country’s largest city (and commercial/financial centre), and then blame potential foreign investors for having too much power, i.e., for maintaining ‘the contours of privilege and underdevelopment’. The ANC as a political party also spoke in robust anti-neoliberal language when drawing out support for the Alexandra stadium rally and protest march it led on 31 August ‘against world poverty’ and in favour of the WSSD.

However, the ANC is often accused of ‘talking left, acting right’. The resort to leftist rhetoric coincided both with community attacks on the ANC’s management of the city of Johannesburg,\(^ {19}\) and a growing concern that national policies favoured capital. The international landless people and the Social Movements Indaba would attempt, as at Durban the previous year, to draw larger and more militant crowds to their march (the same day), with a strongly anti-Mbeki message. The Landless People’s Movement (LPM) made clear their desire to distance themselves in a July press statement:

The March of the Landless on 31 August, 2002 will not include organisations which are part of the Tripartite Alliance whose record of governance has ensured the failure of land reform in South Africa. The March of the Landless will be led by the LPM on the same day in alliance with other civil society organisations. The march will be the culmination of an alternative Week of the Landless that will take place decisively outside of the formal UN processes of the WSSD.

The purpose of the March of the Landless will not be to support the World Summit on Sustainable Development, or to make vague calls for ‘sustainable development’ through unsustainable policies like Nepad or Gear. Instead, the purpose of the March of the Landless will be to denounce the unsustainable policies being fortified by the world’s

---

elite in the Sandton Convention Centre; to focus world attention on the failure of South Africa’s World Bank-style land reform programme; and to forward the demands of the 19-million poor and landless rural South Africans and 7-million poor and landless urban South Africans. That demand is: ‘End Poverty: Land! Food! Jobs!’ 20

The logic of fighting back against neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, ecological degradation and many other ills could unite progressive South Africans, one day - even though the manoeuvres associated with long-held ANC-Alliance loyalties, and the bitter leftwing anger at multiple betrayals, would together prevent that clarity from emerging at the WSSD itself. Instead, a dramatic confrontation occurred on 31 August. Further contextual background and a description of the march itself is required to understand the magnitude of the dispute. 21

Marching on Sandton

For ninety years, since Alexandra Township was settled by black people in 1912, Johannesburg residents have wondered about the combined geographical and political implications of locating an urban bantustan in a small block of land in northeast Johannesburg. Finally, on a sunny, hot spring day - 31 August 2002 - 20,000 people (as estimated by BBC’s correspondent) marched along a 12 km route to the site of the WSSD. Class/community struggle had finally physically crossed the highway separating the country’s richest suburb, Sandton, from one of the poorest. Even at the mid-1980s height of revolutionary anti-apartheid fervor, the idea that tens of thousands of people could walk westward from Alexandra over the 8-lane motorway and into the wealthiest suburb in the Third World was considered unthinkable.

From 9am, crowds gathered for the United Social Movements march. Red and green, urban and rural, local and global, autonomist and socialist mixed comfortably. Looming on the horizon across a valley was the glistening Sandton skyline, mainly constructed during the 1990s flight of white capital from the Central Business District. The Convention Centre where 6,000 WSSD delegates were working sits next to Citibank’s Africa headquarters, in the shadow of the Michaelangelo Hotel and the opulent Sandton City skyscraper and shopping mall.

What relationship do Alexandrans have with their wealthy neighbours? Sandton’s financial firms, hotels and exclusive retail outlets draw in workers for long, low-paid shifts in the security, cleaning and clerical trades. Once they clock out, Alexandrans are quickly repelled from consumption due to high prices, blatant class hostility and intensive surveillance. They return to shacks and broken sewage systems. For many tens of thousands, a single yard watertap sometimes serves 40 families in overcrowded filth.

Materially, very little had changed since democracy arrived 1994, aside from new but tiny houses on the township’s eastern hill, and a slum-clearance programme which began in earnest in 2001, along the filthy Jukskei River - a stream coursing through the slum - when city officials used a cholera outbreak as an excuse for apartheid-style displacement. The country’s leading elite paper protested that incident as ‘bureaucratic know-it-allism and disregard for individuals and indeed communities. Sadly the events in Alex have all the elements of the worst of apartheid-style thinking and action.’ 22

Just as important as the symbolic route of the march were the battles of numbers and of passion: the independent left surprised itself by outdrawing the mass-based organisations. The Global Civil Society Forum - supported by Cosatu, the SACC and the ANC itself attracted only

21. Some of the paragraphs below were filed later that evening by the author and appeared at http://www.zmag.org as a ZNet Commentary, 1 September 2002.
roughly 5,000 to the Alexandra soccer stadium to hear Mbeki two hours later. At stake in this contest were both prestige in South African politics and the ability of government officials to disguise deep dissent from world leaders. Sangoco had pulled out of the Forum march the day before, claiming the ANC was manipulating the gathering. Fewer than 1,000 Civil Society Forum marchers left the stadium for the long trek to Sandton, and many of these (especially Palestinians) had been locked in earlier when they tried to exit, as the larger march passed nearby.

In a township which had been relatively unorganised, due to myriad splits in community politics over the past decade, the attraction of Alexandrans to the United Social Movements instead of the pro-government group was revealing. The SMI had claimed the week before, ‘We will take Sandton!’, and compared to Mbeki’s march the next day, genuinely did. With more than twenty times as many people on the Social Movements United march, and with a mostly empty stadium as his audience, Mbeki was not convincing in his critique of the new movements as ‘ultra-left’, and his own refusal to grant a permit to march until the last second reflected the kind of paranoia that made him so deeply unpopular even within his own ruling party.

Global and local, repression and permission

The previous weekend, outside the main entrance to the University of the Witwatersrand, a phalanx of riot police blocked a peaceful march of roughly 700 people carrying nothing more provocative than candles. They had been conferencing all day with the International Forum on Globalisation (IFG), when at sunset, Soweto leader Trevor Ngwane informed the gathering that SMI activists wanted to march in solidarity with hundreds of people who had recently been arrested by police in pre-WSSD intimidation raids. The crowd grabbed candles and followed, with the IFG intellectuals’ blessing.

But within 200 metres of leaving the academic setting, the group was ambushed and dispersed by eight stun grenades. Vandana Shiva, Maude Barlow, Tony Clarke, Naomi Klein and many other luminaries of the global Left were on the front line, dodging the police attack. After a regroupment, the march dispersed when police vans arrived for a mass arrest, something the social movements could not then afford. The subsequent Mail and Guardian newspaper carried an unprecedented semi-apology from the South African National Intelligence Agency for police ‘overreaction,’ but enormous damage was done to Mbeki’s status as a democrat.23

There were also other crucial implications for global-scale civil society solidarity and alliances. BBC television and other outlets ran the story as lead for 14 hours on 24-25 August. Reflecting the new relationship between local and international civil society activists, SABC reported in its nightly news a few days later that ‘a group called Global Resistance would protest outside the South African embassy in London while a couple of hundred protesters would picket the South African embassy in Paris. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, an unemployed workers movement plans to protest in solidarity with the arrested South African activists and against the summit. In Canada, a small group organised by the Ontario Coalition against Poverty would protest outside the South African embassy in Toronto.’24 Finally, late that week, after labour leaders intervened with authorities, the 31 August march was granted the permission that Pretoria had wanted to continue denying.

A new movement?

The Social Movements United march gathered together the Landless People’s Movement and the SMI: the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Jubilee SA, the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, the Rural Development Services Network, Friends of the Earth, First People, the World Bank Bonds Boycott, Indymedia and the Palestinian Solidarity Committee. In the words of SMI march leader Ngwane,

The SMI march represented the coming of age of the ‘new’ anti-capitalist movements in South Africa and claimed a direct link with the international mobilisations such as those that took place in Seattle and Genoa. Some have honored the event by calling it the A31 mobilisation. The day was a great success even though it did not ‘shut down’ the WSSD as had been threatened by organisers. That this march took place at all was a victory after the South African government had initially banned it fearing that it would expose Mbeki’s feet of clay on his homeground.

The red march revealed Mbeki’s Achilles heel: his lack of support at home. Can he speak for Africa when social movements in his own country march against him? How is Nepad good for Africa when South Africans do not support it? This paradox was not lost on Mbeki, and he initially tried everything to stop the anti-WSSD march. The application for the march was formally turned down and the government suggested that it would only allow a strictly controlled march in a pre-determined route on a 1.8 km stretch in Sandton. Initially, the ANC decided that no one must march from Alexandra because that is where the working class that Mbeki betrays lives. The Minister of Police and SACP chairperson Charles Nqakula appeared on national TV banging his fist on the table saying the police would clamp down on those who posed a security risk to international guests and heads of state. Everyone wondered why the marchers had to be kept away from Alexandra but allowed to Sandton where the VIPs were going to be. The SMI coalition did not waver and insisted that it would march from Alexandra to Sandton with or without the authorities’ permission.

The Social Movements United march was a success, with a high level of publicity for the demonstrators, and no injuries. By no means, however, was the new alliance of left social movements without its own internal contradictions. At the opening of the final rally at Speaker’s Corner in Sandton, a spokesperson from the Landless People’s Movement called out, ‘Viva Robert Mugabe, Viva! - Viva ZanuPF, Viva!’, to strong applause from the large rural delegation. The South African landless leaders had attracted thousands from across the country. They had creatively transformed their own convergence centre near Nasrec from an abandoned, surreal 1960s entertainment centre to a site where debates raged and small workshops were provided for rural folk. However, the landless gathering was full of promise but also pitfalls, as witnessed in the movement’s positive reaction to Mugabe’s repressive regime. Ngwane took the microphone soon after the Zimbabwean ruler’s name was uttered: ‘While we are happy to have unity with the landless, we respectfully disagree on the matter of Mugabe. He is a dictator and he has killed many Zimbabweans.’ Roars of approval followed from, amongst others, the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development which had travelled a full day by bus to attend.

Notwithstanding such division on a matter of such importance, the SMI could rightfully claim victory to the low-income black constituencies over which civil society fights most vigorously for hearts and minds. The failure of the liberation movement’s left flank in the SACP and Congress of SA Trade Unions to anticipate and outrun the new social movements’

radicalism was codified in the events of A31. ‘The new movements have arrived,’ Ngwane announced, and everyone has subsequently acknowledged this as South Africa’s ‘Seattle’.

This is where robust analysis is most important, because during the same period as international civil society protest emerged at major international events, starting in November 1999 at Seattle, so too were South African government officials emerging as the most important Third World voices for reforming the world economy. By the time of the Social Movements United march, several major events over the prior 12 months had put Mbeki and key cabinet colleagues at the very cutting edge of debates. It is in these global-local conflicts that we perhaps most obviously find civil society affecting the WSSD, and in doing so affecting the way the South African government positioned itself in relation to civil society, both globally and locally.

Civil society impact on specific WSSD outcomes

What about civil society’s impact? First, consider the two major international conferences on trade and finance leading up to the WSSD: the World Trade Organisation’s Doha ministerial (November 2001); and the UN’s Monterrey Financing for Development Conference (March 2002).

Others that were also important for Pretoria’s international stature over the same period include the launch of the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad) at Abuja in October 2001; the New York World Economic Forum in February 2002; the Kananaskis G8 Summit in June 2002; and the Durban launch of the Africa Union in July 2002. These latter four, however, did not have the international importance of the two multilateral economic conferences. The myriad attempts to reform global governance through these events all influenced South African civil society in the run-up to the WSSD, largely because of a growing realisation about the difficulties and failures associated with both non-governmental and South African governmental efforts.

In the wake of the Seattle debacle, South African government officials—especially trade minister Erwin—were cautious about their relations with both civil society and African governments. At Seattle, not only were civil society concerns about democracy, environment, labour conditions, indigenous people’s rights and other social struggles not taken seriously, so too were Third World negotiators virtually all alienated from the high-level ‘Green Room’ negotiations conducted with a select group of influential delegates (from the US, EU, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Singapore, India and South Africa), and disrespectful treatment of especially the African delegation led to both unprecedented disruptions in the form of street demonstrations, and a formal denial of consensus by African and other Third World negotiators.26

The tension between Erwin and both African negotiators and civil society activists continued through the 2000-01 run-up to Doha. As one of the most rigorous South African civil society analysts of international trade, Dot Keet, put it, Pretoria

failed, within and after Seattle, to use its political/moral weight and democratic kudos to actively prioritise real institutional reforms as an essential pre-condition to any other discussions in or on the WTO. And this political failure has been reflected, too, in the acceptance by South Africa of a special role for itself as a ‘Friend of the Chair’ in the more recent and even more flagrantly inequitable and undemocratic processes in the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha.28

As that conference’s agenda emerged, civil society critics united with some African delegations. Erwin viewed these with disdain: Africans and other Third World delegates ‘merely articulate extremely basic positions and very seldom get beyond that.’29 In contrast, Erwin achieved what WTO director-general Mike Moore termed ‘very useful African leadership’30 even though there were vigorous complaints by African state and civil society groups about the draft text to be considered at the ministerial summit.31 For Erwin, however, ‘Our overall approach was to defend the overall balance in the draft text’.32 Erwin was made a Friend of the Chair for this purpose, in charge of the negotiations over WTO Rules; he was labeled one of the five ‘Green Men’ by civil society critics, since the alleged function of the WTO’s ‘friends’ was to take the place of the Green Rooms. But making friends with some necessarily entailed conflict with others. Even though the final text contained many objectionable features, Keet reports that Erwin met the African, ACP and LDC country group on the final day of the Doha negotiations, where he

advised them that they had no choice but to accept the text, which was ‘the best possible outcome for them in the circumstances’. According to participants and eyewitnesses, there were a number of angry responses to the South African minister, some even asking rhetorically who he represented and whose interests he was serving... The joint meeting dissolved in disarray. This was the final maneuver that dissipated the resistance of a major grouping of developing countries that many had hoped would repeat in Doha their role in Seattle. This was not to be. But all the pressures and persuasions, manipulations and maneuvers only managed to secure what one European MEP characterised as ‘a resentful acquiescence’.

Erwin, meanwhile, described the ‘Doha Developmental Agenda’—for all practical purposes the ‘new round’ so strongly opposed by African and civil society critics of the WTO—as a ‘fantastic achievement’.33 This meant, according to Business Day newspaper, that ‘South Africa is now part of the Big Five of global trade’34 (alongside the US, EU, Japan and Canada), leading Keet to conclude, ‘South Africa’s role is not so much a bridge between the developed and developing countries, but rather as a bridge for the transmission of influences from the developed to the developing countries’.35

What did civil society learn, as a result? Whereas some labour and non-governmental representatives had joined the South African government delegation in occasional summits (such as Seattle), ‘there is extremely limited scope for real and effective alternative inputs’ and progressive influence under the circumstances, according to Keet:

35. Keet, South Africa’s Official Role and Position in Promoting the World Trade Organisation, p.44.
Such civil society participation in government delegations also suggests an inadequate recognition of the extent to which the main strategic thrust of the South African government’s positions have been determined by fundamental political decisions well in advance of specific meetings and well before the ‘consultation’ and integration of people’s organisations... [which in turn] can be severely compromising to the international image and reputation of such people’s organisations... South African people’s organisations have a real need and obligation to join with other African organisations in the growing international people’s alliances against the WTO. The expanding alliances of a vast array of developmental, social and environmental movements, trade unions and other labour organisations, women’s networks, professional and faith-based bodies, and community-based campaigns and community-service NGOs are still working, as they did in Seattle, for a ‘No New Round and A Turn Around’.

Much the same concerns were raised four months later in Monterrey, Mexico, at the United Nations’ Development Financing Conference, where a ‘Monterrey Consensus’ was declared. Former IMF managing director Camdessus and South African finance minister Manuel were cochairs of the conference. The Monterrey final report contained pleasing rhetoric, but only status quo strategies. The report observed ‘dramatic shortfalls in resources required to achieve the internationally agreed development goals.’ But it endorsed the failed Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative as ‘an opportunity to strengthen the economic prospects and poverty reduction efforts of its beneficiary countries... Future reviews of debt sustainability should also bear in mind the impact of debt relief on progress towards the achievement of the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration.’

Moreover, the report requested signatories to ‘encourage policy and programme coordination of international institutions and coherence at the operational and international levels’, which is a potentially dangerous mode of introducing cross-conditionality that has been opposed by many Third World negotiators at the WTO.

All things considered, the underlying double problems in the Monterrey Consensus were first, the lack of political will to ensure sufficient financial flows, and second, the failure to grapple with the contradictions intrinsic to orthodox development financing systems, including hard-currency liabilities and opposition to cross-subsidisation of public goods. These are profound flaws, which reflect how little in the way of power relations had changed notwithstanding having Manuel in the chair.

If the failure of the conferences at Doha and Monterrey were any indication, civil society forces across the world had relatively low expectations for finding economic and environmental justice in Johannesburg. One reason for the WSSD’s failure, as many soon came to understand, was the role of the South African government.

37. Many civil society critics argued that the FFD conference was tainted from the outset, in 2000, given that Mexico’s ex-president Ernesto Zedillo was effectively the key manager of the process, in the wake of a five-year rule characterised by repression, failed neoliberalism and the end of his notoriously corrupt party’s 85-year rule. More controversially, Zedillo appointed as his main advisor (and document author) John Williamson of the Institute for International Finance, which is funded by the world’s largest banks. Williamson is considered to be one of the Washington insider community’s most vigorous of neoliberal ideologues, and indeed takes credit for coining the term ‘Washington Consensus’ in 1990. His 1995 visit to South Africa included strong advocacy of Washington’s agenda.
Civil society critiques of Pretoria’s WSSD role

Was the handling of the WSSD as ‘way out of line with the normal procedure of UN conferences’ as critics suggest? For example, according to Third World Network director Martin Khor, ‘the extended six-hour final plenary was held up halfway as delegates haggled over a second draft of the political declaration that was released only after the plenary had started’. Khor provides a detailed account, worth citing at length, of a deadly combination that many civil society critics charge is typical of Pretoria’s overall strategy and accomplishments, namely skullduggery associated with manipulating the text, and a meaningless outcome that ultimately reinforces the status quo:

The last preparatory meeting at Bali ended without a draft declaration, and the Preparatory Committee chairman, Emil Salim of Indonesia, issued a draft of elements paper under his own authority after the Bali meeting.

Even that document was not discussed at all in Johannesburg. Indeed, there was no process or meeting held at Joburg on the declaration. The host country, South Africa, distributed a first draft only on the night of 1 September, just three days before the Summit was to conclude.

That draft was received with a lot of criticism from many countries. No meeting was held to discuss it. On the night of 3 September, when the Main Committee met to discuss the Implementation Plan, a few delegations led by Malta asked what had happened to the declaration process and when a meeting would be held to discuss it.

The South African Foreign Minister, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, replied that there were as many proposals for amendments to the first draft as there were people in the hall (which was packed with about 300 delegates). She said a second draft would be ready on 4 September morning and the WSSD secretary-general Nitin Desai indicated that a meeting of the Main Committee would be called that morning to discuss it.

However, when pressed by delegates, neither of them could answer when the meeting would be convened.

On the Summit’s last day, 4 September, delegations were eagerly awaiting the new declaration draft and the opportunity to discuss it, but neither the draft nor the meeting materialised.

Thus, the final official plenary chaired by President Mbeki started after 3 pm without delegates having had the chance to see the new draft for a declaration. It was finally circulated after the plenary started, with the heading, ‘Draft political declaration submitted by the President of the Summit’.

With several delegations, and NGOs, informally indicating their displeasure at the new draft, particularly over some text in the first draft that was now omitted, Mbeki announced the meeting would be suspended for ten minutes. But the break stretched to almost two hours as several delegations was seen in intense discussion among themselves and with senior South African and UN officials.

After the plenary resumed, a document with four new points or amendments was circulated, and with these, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development was adopted.

The manner in which the declaration was introduced, so late in the process and on almost a take-it-or-leave-it basis, was way out of line with the normal procedure of UN conferences, in which many drafts of such an important document would have gone through months of negotiations at various stages of the preparatory committee and at the Summit.

Instead, the Johannesburg Declaration and process of its introduction and adoption was reminiscent of the way the WTO Ministerial Declaration was drawn up in its two final drafts at the WTO’s Doha meeting of November 2001. Up to now, it is unclear who did the drafting of that final Doha text, which was circulated by the WTO Secretariat on the extended final day on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

Even then, the Doha text had gone through two drafts in Geneva and the final two more drafts at Doha. For the WSSD, there were only two drafts of the Johannesburg Declaration, and no opportunity for the delegations to go through it as an informal group or in a committee.

A great deal of disquiet was expressed by many delegations on the utter lack of transparency and procedure of the political declaration process, and some delegates, familiar with the WTO, remarked in frustration that the infamous WTO ‘Green Room’ process had now crossed over to the usually open and participatory UN system.

In the end, the delegates all accepted the Johannesburg Declaration, despite the frustration of many, probably because there was nothing of significance in the text that anyone would be concerned or unhappy about.

It was, as many delegates were heard to say, a ‘harmless text’. By which was meant that the declaration contained general statements of goodwill and ‘motherhood’ that did not entail any meaningful commitments for anyone, and thus did not have the potential to harm the interests of any country.

That, perhaps, is an appropriate description of the WSSD as well.

As Khor concluded, ‘With such small results for such a heavy expense in personnel, time and resources, it will be quite a long time before a convincing case is made for another world summit of this type.’

One line of defense of the WSSD is in the field of water and sanitation, so before accepting the critique of the South African government here, it is appropriate to examine the local debate on water, ranging from mega-dams to rural household supply projects. Were lessons learned by civil society forces in the water sector put to good use, as reflected by Pretoria’s own posture at the Waterdome?

**WSSD-related debates over water/sanitation**

One of the highest-profile and most active sectors at the WSSD was water. One of Johannesburg’s major venues, the MTN Sundome, was hired by DWAF and renamed the Waterdome for the period of the WSSD. Dozens of major institutions rented display space, and there were ongoing events devoted to promoting water and sanitation issues. The Waterdome was, ultimately, one of the main WSSD sites to host an intractable conflict between civil society groups and governments, water companies and international agencies. While the main issue under debate was privatisation, a variety of other struggles over water and sanitation had emerged in previous years, both in South Africa and internationally.40

On the eve of the WSSD, South African water minister Ronnie Kasrils invited the South African Civil Society Water Caucus to discuss a variety of problems associated with water/sanitation policy, programmes and projects. The Caucus had formed in July 2003 explicitly for the WSSD, but many of its members were extremely active in national and local advocacy work on water. With 40 organisations as members, the Caucus steering committee members are the premier civil society advocacy groups in the water sector: Earthlife Africa, Environmental Monitoring Group, Network for Advocacy on Water in Southern Africa, the

---

Anti-Eviction Campaign, Rural Development Support Services, Mvula Trust, the Youth Caucus and the South African Municipal Services Union. In addition, a representative of the WSSD Civil Society Secretariat was also involved in the steering committee prior to the WSSD. The Caucus tackles a variety of water issues, in its own description of objectives: sanitation, ecosystems, human rights, privatisation and commodification of water, anti-evictions and water cut-offs, rural water supply, urban water issues, the large dam debate, water conservation and demand management, regional and transboundary water issues, labour and the promotion of public services.

At the meeting, which was the first such session with a collective grouping of civil society water advocates since Kasrils assumed office in June 1999, the Caucus’ Points of Consensus were presented to Kasrils:

• Water and sanitation are human rights. All people are entitled to have access to water to meet their basic human needs, and rural communities are entitled to water for productive use to sustain their livelihoods.
• Water management must be accountable to communities at a local level.
• We respect the integrity of ecosystems as the basis for all life - both human and nature - with an emphasis on maintaining river ecosystems and groundwater resources.
• We reject the commodification and privatisation of water services and sanitation, and water resources.
• Further, we reject the role of the USA, the other G8 countries and Trans-National Corporations for their role in pushing privatisation and commodification.
• We reject the UN WSSD process and outcomes so far, as nothing more than structural adjustment of the South. We therefore resolve to work together with social movements to realise an alternative vision.
• We reject Nepad and the plans for water in Nepad as not being sustainable. It is structural adjustment by Africa for Africa. In particular we reject the privatisation of water and the hydropower focus. We commit ourselves to building a mass movement for the reconstruction and sustainable development of Africa.
• We undertake to educate and raise awareness and to mobilise communities towards the WSSD.

In receiving this list alongside a variety of critical comments on his own Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), Kasrils was extremely affable and humble. (He was unwilling to concede ground on critiques of hydropower, however.) Most importantly, he commented that the point of his meeting was not to simply show a surface-level consultation with NGOs just prior to the WSSD. The Caucus was not convinced, however, and their press statement noted, Of particular importance are the issues of Nepad, water cut-offs and evictions, and it is expected that a number of meetings will be held with the Ministry in the near future to resolve these issues. While the civil society representatives that were present at this meeting were happy with the spirit of openness of the meeting, there is some concern that this should be the beginning of an ongoing dialogue and not just a short-term strategy to appease civil society before the Summit.41

The civil society groups have raised many explicit concerns about DWAF, and suggestions for improvements. These date to the birth of democracy in 1994. At that stage, water minister Kader Asmal adopted several policies that conflicted with civil society groups. The SA Municipal Workers Union opposed the private-sector and NGO-oriented rural water

programme and the promotion of public-private partnerships in municipal water delivery. Some representative community organisations, social movements and NGOs - mainly affiliated to the National Land Committee and Rural Development Services Network - complained that the majority of the new taps installed after 1994 quickly broke, and that hence millions of South Africans remained without water. Moreover, environmentalists in the Group for Environmental Monitoring, Environmental Monitoring Group, Earthlife and the Soweto and Alexandra civic associations complained that the ministry stubbornly championed the unneeded Lesotho Highlands Water Project expansion. Many civic groups also protested intensifying municipal water cut-offs, with especially fierce demonstrations in the townships of Gauteng (Soweto, Alexandra, Thembisa, KwaThema), Durban (Chatsworth and Mpumalanga), Cape Town (Khayelitsha and Tafelsig) and several smaller towns. A national network of anti-evictions and anti-privatisation organisations subsequently emerged from 2001. Criticism also continued against low infrastructure standards, such as mass pit latrines in urban areas.

Protest at the Waterdome

The sophistication of civil society on these issues - in identifying local, catchment-area, national, regional and international problems, but also potential solutions - was matched by a militancy that reflected the durable tensions with Pretoria. Parallel to the organising of the Social Movements Indaba, many Caucus members - joined by the Anti-Privatisation Forum and a group of displaced people called Survivors of the Lesotho Dams - planned a protest at the Waterdome on September 3, the final day of deliberations. In a meeting on private participation in the water sector, attended by more than one hundred mainly corporate representatives, thirty activists chanted slogans for ten minutes at the beginning of the session. As the Social Movements Indaba press statement recorded, the demonstrators chose a presentation by South African Water Affairs Minister, Ronnie Kasrils, to drive home the point that millions of South Africans, and close to two billion people worldwide, still have no access to water. The message was clear - there can be no sustainable development as long as capitalist market forces dominate the ownership and distribution of water - water is a human right, not a capitalist privilege to be enjoyed only by those who can afford to pay. Minister Kasrils chose to ignore the legitimate issues raised by the activists, instead labelling the activists, ‘thugs’ and ‘anti-democratic’... The simple fact is that the voices of the poor have been marginalised, replaced by those who simply see development as a means to make more money and to gain favour with the rich and powerful.

The SMI is not alone in its denunciation and rejection of the corporate agenda of the W$$D. Yesterday, members of the World Coalition against Water Privatisation and Commodification (a global umbrella body representing many different social movements and progressive NGOs) announced their withdrawal from the W$$D. They noted that, ‘the summit has been hijacked by corporate and national interests and market-driven jargon’, and denounced the ‘lack of courage and human vision’ that has characterised the W$$D.

No amount of name-calling, suppression of dissent, disingenuous claims of progress or intentional ignorance of the real issues at the centre of meaningful human development will now detract from the absolute failure of the W$$D for the majority of both South Africans and humanity. If water, the most essential of all human needs, is confirmed as a commodity to be bought and sold, then there is no hope that any other ‘outcome’ of the W$$D will have concrete meaning for the majority of people who are
The impact of the WSSD on civil society movements

As should already be evident, the WSSD helped to repoliticise South Africa, after a period of eight years of relative political predictability in the wake of the painful but ultimately successful transition to non-racial democracy. One obvious outcome was the heightened consciousness of civil society groups with respect to issues, alliances, strategies and tactics. The South African government, and the ANC as a ruling party, were also conscientised, as demonstrated in a variety of tough arguments leveled against the apparently strong new ‘ultraleft’ social movements.

The extraordinary emergence of a network of social movements deserves more space and detailed consideration than is possible here. Fortunately, there are two primary sources which trace the roots of this movement from the WSSD to preliminary challenges to power: a brief book by Victor Munnik and Jessica Wilson (*The World Comes to One Country: An Insider History of the World Summit on Sustainable Development*) and the *Khanya Journal for Activists* (#2, December 2002) entitled ‘South African Social Movements after August 31’. Their analyses of the impact of the WSSD generally conform to those this author has witnessed, notwithstanding some debate surrounding a potentially ‘autonomist’ reading of the disjunctures associated with the August 31 anti-WSSD protest. One critic, Franco Barchiesi, accused new social movement leaders of attempting to ‘domesticate’ the anger of grassroots activists:

> From their offices at Cosatu House stacked with Trotsky’s books, within the palace plots of the ANC and the SACP, behind comfortable armchairs in the academia or entertaining foreign funders at Sangoco meetings, this official ‘left’ has systematically tried to recruit social movements’ politics for the pursuit of political agendas that developed entirely above their heads: national liberation, the party of the working class, sustainable development, international workshops. These agendas are coming into increasing conflict with the daily practices of movements on the ground when these movements assume peculiar features that are not available any longer to be delegated to distant vanguards and cadreships.

Barchiesi’s critique was especially tough on dogmas articulated by the civil society left - ‘The ritualism and conventionality of the Leaders’ speeches (together with the banality of the slogans suggested from the bloody truck)’ - during the August 31 protest. Nevertheless, as complex as the question of consciousness-raising and protest tactics appeared at the time of the WSSD, there was no denying that the moment came as a breath of fresh air, given the existing practices within the ANC and its closest allies. A few months earlier, one of South Africa’s leading progressive intellectuals, Jeremy Cronin - an ANC member of parliament and deputy secretary of the SA Communist Party - offered his frank thoughts on the ruling party’s agenda in relation to civil society:

> I think there are tendencies now of what some of us refer to as the zanufication of the ANC. You can see features of that, of a bureaucratisation of the struggle: Thanks very much. It was important that you were mobilised then, but now we are in power, in power on your behalf. Relax and we’ll deliver. The struggle now is counter-productive. Mass mobilisation gets in the way. Don’t worry. We’ve got a plan. Yes, it’ll be slow, but

---

be patient and so on. That kind of message has come through.⁴⁴

Cronin continued by describing the adverse impact on civil society organisations formerly supportive of the ANC:

They’ve been dispersed. They’re confused. Often they get suppressed by the very forces that they aligned themselves with originally, the broad ANC and so on, but it bubbles through a great deal. I think therefore there’s a lot of fluidity still in the situation, which should be neither underrated nor exaggerated. There are levels of disorganisation, demobilisation, disappointment, demoralisation. I personally don’t think it’s all played out at all.

Although the week before the WSSD began, Cronin subsequently apologised to the ANC National Executive for these statements (in the wake of race-baiting by senior colleagues and a threat to be expelled from ANC leadership), his points resonated very clearly and added credibility to the consciousness of those who felt betrayed by the ANC. That sense is captured in the *Khanya Journal*, including an article by Anti-Privatisation Forum chairperson - and leading Gauteng trade unionist - John Appolis:

By consistently highlighting the central role of the ANC government in driving the neoliberal agenda many international movements were won over to the side of the SMI... What was very instructive was the use of repression by the ANC government to further its political agenda - a method reminiscent of the apartheid regime... The fact that the ANC government had to resort to such repressive tactics in order to bloc or reverse the political inroads made by the new movements has dented the image of the ANC as the champion of democracy and the poor.

Important alliances and connections were made during the WSSD. These have laid the basis for the broadening of the mass base of our struggles. Our struggles in South Africa at this point are largely defensive in nature. They are not yet underscored by a coherent political programme for social change. Organised labour and students are not yet drawn into these struggles. These weaknesses of our struggles could be seen in the march against the WSSD. One of the key challenges facing us is to broaden the mass base of the new movement.⁴⁵

The single most important event in the immediate post-WSSD period was the attempt by the Congress of SA Trade Unions to hold a two-day anti-privatisation strike in early October. Amidst more than a million jobs lost since the ANC took power in 1994, more than 100 000 were due to privatisation.⁴⁶ Cosatu’s strike call to prevent further losses at Telkom, Transnet and Eskom due to inclement commercialisation and privatisation had been delayed for six months following Alliance negotiations. But the lull in hostilities between the trade unions and government over privatisation ended just before the WSSD. Cosatu’s general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi announced in late July, ‘Privatisation of basic services has continued unabated. The bloodbath of job losses has intensified despite millions protesting against this attack on the working-class living standards since 1999. It is against this background that

Cosatu decided to lift the suspension and continue its programme of mass mobilisation.\textsuperscript{47}

Hence, as Apollis described the large (40,000-worker) march through central Johannesburg in early October,

\begin{quote}
The mood was a more militant anti-ANC government one. Symbolically, workers burned posters of Mbhazima Shilowa, the premier of Gauteng and former general secretary of Cosatu... The ANC government feared that the deep-seated discontent amongst the people will spill over into an organic link-up between organised workers and communities. The strike, following hot on the heels of the August 31 march, had the potential of developing the links between these two spheres of struggle.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Yet the links were not made in subsequent months, leaving most of the post-WSSD civil society activists without strong labour allies. Nevertheless, the movements did not fade. One influential review of the post-WSSD social movement landscape, by the \textit{Mail and Guardian}'s senior reporter Drew Forrest in February 2003, is worth citing in full:

\begin{quote}
Depending on one’s viewpoint, they are the embryo of a ‘global citizens’ movement’ in South Africa, or President Thabo Mbeki’s ultra-left nightmare. They include the ‘loony’ organisations Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry Ronnie Kasrils has accused the labour movement of befriending.

They are an extremely loose constellation of left-leaning, community-based social movements that vary enormously in focus, size and influence. Most are minuscule. What unites them is a shared desire to help the poor and downtrodden, and, in varying degrees, a common antagonism to hierarchies and bureaucracies, the profit motive, the unfettered market and corporate power.

They are, at the very least, independent of the government and the ruling African National Congress. Some, like the Treatment Action Campaign, are not necessarily anti-ANC, but have clashed with the government. A hard core see themselves as ideological opponents of the post-1994 South African state, which they regard as anti-poor and subservient to domestic and international business interests.

Most would be opposed to corporate globalisation and emotionally partisan to the countries of the South. Some view themselves as part of what the ANC calls ‘the Seattle Movement’ and have links with grassroots activists in Third World countries like Brazil.

Under the umbrella of the Social Movements Indaba, the latter made their presence felt during the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

The movements focus on townships, squatter camps and rural settlements, generally organising around discrete issues of concern to the poor - HIV / Aids, evictions, power and water cut-offs, land and jobs/privatisation. This often brings them into conflict with the authorities, particularly local councils.

Loose-knit and fluid, many have overlapping leadership structures, with the same names cropping up in different contexts. The leading lights include Marxist unionists or ex-unionists associated with the ‘workerist’ rather than ‘nationalist’ union factions in the 1980s, and radical anti-apartheid activists disenchanted with the ANC and its partner, the South African Communist Party.

An almost universal feature is a tactical attitude to the law - the movements will use it if it is to their advantage; flout it if they consider it unjust. Forms of defiance range from calls for the repudiation of apartheid debt and peaceful civil disobedience, through to violent protest and the invasion of land.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Business Report}, 23 July 2002.

\textsuperscript{48} Apollis, ‘The Political Significance of August 31.’
In this respect, they can be seen as the offspring of the anti-apartheid resistance of the 1980s. The taste for ‘direct action’ further links them with the Seattle anti-globalisation campaigners.

Given the small size of most social movements in South Africa, Mbeki’s attempt to demonise them seems odd. In part, it may flow from resentment at the moral sanctimony of much left opposition, exacerbated by the fact that many of its shrillest ideologues are non-Africans.

The ANC justly complains that the demand for instant economic justice, given the apartheid legacy, is droompoliteik. It has a point when it says some of the activism is opportunistic and self-defeating. Blocking the relocation of chronic bond defaulters, for example, merely fuels ‘redlining’ by banks.

But ‘vanguardist’ pretensions are also a factor: the ANC seems outraged by a competing claim to its poor black constituency. It has reacted in two ways: by calling for ‘ultra-leftists’ to be isolated and defeated; and by suggesting that the new movements should be brought under its ‘leadership’. Hence the moves to breathe life into its moribund ally, the South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco).

One can see the movements in another way - at worst they are a minor nuisance, at best an attempt to give ordinary people a voice and some control over their daily lives.

With the ANC now the political establishment, Sanco an empty shell, and NGOs weakened by the state grip on funding, politics for most South Africans increasingly boils down to making their cross every five years.49

The sample of organisations and movements profiled by Forrest and his colleagues were the Treatment Action Campaign, Johannesburg Anti-Privatisation Forum, National Land Committee, Education Rights Project, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, Landless People’s Movement, Jubilee South Africa, Durban Concerned Citizens Forum, Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, National Association of People Living with HIV/Aids, and Palestine Solidarity Committee. These are only several of the highest profile organisations with national media connections, and many hundreds of other similar organisational challenges to the ruling party are made on a daily basis across South Africa.

Post-WSSD SA government - reactions to ‘ultra-left’ civil society

The civil society opposition to the ANC government is, hence, making dramatic inroads into domestic politics, and on WSSD issues which Pretoria had wanted to highlight as successes in 2002, not as ongoing (and in many cases, like AIDS, worsening) failures. Even more so, however, to understand the extreme hostility which ANC leaders viewed critics in civil society in the wake of the WSSD requires consideration of the ANC’s own international approach, as expressed, for example, in the new December 2002 preface to the party’s ‘Strategy and Tactics’ statement:

Since the adoption of the Strategy and Tactics document in 1997, new opportunities have emerged in the global arena to pursue the interests of the poor and marginalised. These include the formation of the African Union and adoption of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and increased articulation by a number of multilateral bodies of the developmental interests of the South.

This has not happened by accident. It confirms the optimism in the Strategy and Tactics which informed the injunction that ‘it is the task of revolutionary democrats and

49. Forrest, ‘Social Movements.’
humanists everywhere to recognise dangers; but more critically, to identify opportunities in the search for a just, humane and equitable world order’. We should not underestimate the difficulties posed by a unipolar world. Nor should we exaggerate these difficulties and miss the opportunities. It is in this context that the standing of South Africa has been enhanced, at the core of the efforts of developing countries and Africa in particular to reverse the unequal power relations that define global politics and economics today. In the midst of this, the system of global capitalism has witnessed many crises, exposing its incapacity to address in a lasting and comprehensive way, the plight of the world’s poor. The recent period has also witnessed attempts by leading circles in some developed countries to heighten international tension and insecurity. This includes unilateralism and the pursuit of a militarised global agenda that detracts from the key challenges of sustainable development, and fudges the real fault lines in global society.50

How did Pretoria react to the emergence at the WSSD of a powerful leftist critique of its domestic and foreign agenda, joined by strong international allies in the kinds of civil society groups which formerly were supportive of the ANC’s liberation struggle? The answer is complex, requiring an examination of the unique mixture of arrogance and humility that is characteristic of the ruling party’s official discourse. In the latter category, humility, consider Mbeki’s address to the ANC’s December 2002 51st National Conference in Stellenbosch:

The matter of the revitalisation of the mass democratic movement, and the improvement of our links with the non-governmental development community, or the so-called civil society organisations, also relates to the need for us not to allow the emergence and consolidation of a rift between genuine mass and transformation organisations and our organisation. We must admit that some of the negative developments with regard to both these sectors have arisen from our own failure to maintain the necessary continuous contact with them as well as the weakened participation of our members in these various structures. We have to attend to this deficiency.

In his Political Report to our 50th National Conference, Comrade Nelson Mandela drew attention to this danger. In the period since then, the effort has continued to turn some of individual formations of both the MDM and CSO’s, into so-called ‘watchdogs’ over both our movement and government. We must make the point in this regard, that this does not refer to all organisations of the mass democratic movement and civil society organisations. There are many activists in these organised sectors who are working honestly and selflessly to make a contribution to the national goals of pushing back the frontiers of poverty, and expanding access to a better life for all.51

One logical strategy, hence, was to divide-and-conquer between those civil society groups that were ‘watchdogging’ the government, versus those others, ‘honest’ and ‘selfless’, working towards not against ‘national goals.’ A leader of the SA Communist Party, Blade Nzimande, expanded upon this theme in his apparently respectful analysis of how the baton of global popular mobilisation and of anti-systemic politics has swung powerfully (and one-sidedly) towards social movement and NGO politics - what

Foreign Policy Bottom Up

A report by the Centre for Civil Society

is sometimes called the ‘new left’ (but which properly belongs to an old tradition - anarcho-syndicalism, cooperative socialism, etc etc), as opposed to the so-called ‘old left’ (communism, social democracy, trade unions, and third world national liberation movements). Some of the main tendencies (found in varying measures) of this social movement/NGO current include:

a. an inclination towards anti-politics politics - a mistrust of institutionalised politics (parliament, the state, multilateral inter-state formations);

b. a focus on single-issue campaigns;

c. the use of informal networking, rather than more formalised institutional structures;

d. a preference for direct action tactics, or oppositionist lobbying;

e. an imaginative and creative use of media, and also the new internet possibilities.

As the ‘old left’, we need to understand and appreciate the many positive features of this significant global current. Often better than other political/left traditions, this global wave of social movement mobilisation has punctured the myth of ‘benign globalisation’ (with Seattle, Genoa, etc. being key moments). Its strength is, in many ways, a symptom of the 1990s crisis and strategic uncertainty of the other major left traditions. Much of the activism it has mobilised has often been around areas where there are institutional failures, prevarication, inertia by otherwise progressive governments (eg. HIV/AIDS treatment in SA).

But it also has characteristic negative tendencies:

a. While its diffuse pluralism has enabled it to emerge organically and spontaneously in the midst of the complex 1990s, its diffuseness is also a strategic weakness. What unites many of these forces is often a negative single-issue (‘anti-globalisation’, or, to apply this kind of politics to a local reality, ‘anti-Mugabism’), and its ability to advance a positive, strategic programme of transformation is often very limited. Anti-globalisation forces might include workers from the developed north wanting more protectionism for ageing, non competitive industrial sectors and third-world rural movements struggling for more equitable global trade and the dismantling of protectionism in the North. They might all march at Seattle, but their shared strategic objectives, beyond protesting against current realities, is often very limited, or non-existent. (Similar contradictions would apply to the forces making up the largely social movement originated MDC in Zimbabwe).

b. The tendency to renounce formal politics often means that bourgeois state power is left largely uncontested - (Marx’s old complaint against anarchism). Relatively vibrant and progressive, but dispersed, social movement politics have long been a feature of US politics, while corporation driven politics occupies the commanding heights of institutional politics, largely unchallenged (in the US the pluralistic social movement traditions are more a symptom than a cause of this capitalist monopoly of the formal institutions.)

c. The social movement/NGO popular movements are, by and large, left-leaning and progressive. However, their orientation and political agendas are contested, including by imperialist circles, and also by an ‘old’, i.e. sometimes very sectarian, ultra-left. There are many examples where their overall strategic role has been reactionary or negatively divisive.52

---

Nzimande continues with appeals ‘for both North-South ‘partnerships’ (an important social democratic theme, dating back to at least Willie Brandt and Olaf Palme - and taken up in Nepad) and consistent anti-imperialism (a centre-piece of Leninism)’ - and, likewise, that ‘We need to assert the need for unity between progressive governments (our own in the first place) and progressive social movements.’ Civil society critics would reply that Nepad is not social democratic in character, but rather neoliberal (in view of its promotion of the Washington Consensus, privatisation and integration into unreformed international markets), and that ‘unity’ with the South African government should not be sought in view of the many political, economic, social, health, development and security policies that are considered so objectionable.

Hence the ‘negatively divisive’ charge is often made by those in the ANC-Alliance against civil society in the wake of the WSSD. A few years ago, it seemed that relations between state and civil society might have taken a far different form, had both the advocacy movements and state bureaucrats heeded the view of ANC intellectual Joel Netshitenzhe. Writing in an African National Congress discussion document, he insisted, in view of ‘counter-action by those opposed to change,’

Mass involvement is therefore both a spear of rapid advance and a shield against resistance. Such involvement should be planned to serve the strategic purpose, proceeding from the premise that revolutionaries deployed in various areas of activity at least try to pull in the same direction. When ‘pressure from below’ is exerted, it should aim at complementing the work of those who are exerting ‘pressure’ against the old order ‘from above.’

In the event, the opposite happened: instead of civil society activists complementing the ruling party’s project from below, they soon appeared anxious to contest and even derail Pretoria’s hosting of the WSSD and other top-down initiatives. In a statement to an ANC policy conference in September 2002, Mbeki made clear how deeply he had been shaken by the militancy of August 31 and by the international solidarity with South African demonstrators witnessed during the WSSD:

Our movement and its policies are also under sustained attack from domestic and foreign left sectarian factions that claim to be the best representatives of the workers and the poor of our country. They accuse our movement of having abandoned the working people, saying that we have adopted and are implementing neoliberal policies. These factions claim to be pursuing a socialist agenda. They assert that, on the contrary, we are acting as agents of the domestic and international capitalist class and such multilateral organisations as the World Bank and the IMF, against the interests of the working people.

The latter allegation of WSSD protesters - that Mbeki’s international agenda did not coincide with those of poor and working people - must have been particularly galling because in the same speech, Mbeki made a veiled reference to the Bush Administration’s unilateralism: ‘The authority of the United Nations is being questioned and undermined, together with the principle and practice of multilateralism, even as everything else emphasises the critical importance of establishing a democratic system of global governance.’

---

Hence the Global Justice Movements and the Resurgent Rightwing were, implicitly, acting in parallel. This was also the message Mbeki provided immediately after the Cosatu anti-privatisation strike, in his regular column in the ANC electronic newsletter on 4 October:

They did this to drag the workers and the working people into a struggle against both their organisation, the ANC, and the government they elected in 1999. Thus they presented these masses with the extraordinary and strange challenge to fight against and defeat themselves, apparently in their own interest... The question cannot be avoided for too long - whose interests do they serve?55

A similar theme was taken up again in an October 2002 paper by the ANC’s Political Education Unit, which conceded that ‘The charge of neo-liberalism constitutes the most consistent platform presented by the ‘left’ opposition in its fight against the ANC and our government. This South African ‘left’ has also sought to mobilise other groups, globally, to join in the campaign against the ANC and our government.’ Yet that ultraleft - suffused with ‘foreigners in our midst’ - was also, allegedly, working with local representatives of the Washington Consensus ideology:

In our country, it is represented by important factions in the SA Communist Party and Cosatu, as well as the Anti-Privatisation Forum, the local chapter of Jubilee 2000, and other groups and individuals. All of these maintain links with their like-minded counterparts internationally and work to mobilise these to act in solidarity with them in support of the anti-neoliberal campaign in our country... These specific anti-neoliberal formations define our efforts to contribute to the victory of the African Renaissance as an expression of subimperialism. They assert that the ANC and our government are acting as the representative and instrument of the South African bourgeoisie, which they say seeks to dominate the African continent. They go further to say that the soul of the ANC has been captured by a pro-capitalist, and therefore neoliberal faction... The anti-neoliberal coalition hopes that it will trample over the fallen colossus, the ANC, and march on to a victorious socialist revolution, however defined. Better still, it hopes that by engaging in all manner of manoeuvre, including conspiring about who its leaders should be, it can capture control of the ANC and use it for its purposes. To achieve these objectives, the anti-neoliberal coalition is ready to treat the forces of neoliberalism as its ally. Therefore it joins forces with them, together to open fire on the ANC and our government.56

Much of the above analysis is correct, aside from the xenophobia57 and the preposterous smear that the independent left was working with the neoliberal right. Perhaps of greatest importance, here, was the perception that in the wake of the WSSD, international solidarity had become a meaningful political variable. As a leading ANC ideologue, Dumisani Makhaye, put it in the official ANC web-zine in November 2002, the ultraleftists ‘have worked to turn the international forces that worked to defeat the apartheid regime, into opponents of our movement. They do this through a sustained campaign to discredit the efforts of both the ANC and the democratic state... This confirms the global experience of the progressive movement for a period that extends over a century, that left factionalists end up working as allies of right-

56. As reported in the Mail and Guardian, 18 October 2002.
57. See Cronin’s internal rebuttal highlighting this point, which was published by the Mail and Guardian on 11 October 2002.
What, explicitly, did the phrase ‘ultra-left’ refer to in the context of post-apartheid South Africa? A 2002 ‘Strategy and Tactics’ update ratified at the ruling party National Conference provides a critique of the ‘adventurism’ with which the ANC associated the WSSD protesters:

A common feature of ultra-leftist tendencies is subjectivism: a confusion of what is ‘desirable’ with what is actually and immediately possible. This results in all manner of voluntaristic adventures, including the advocacy of impossible and dangerous great leaps forward, which reflects a systematic inability to understand the dynamic complexity of objective factors. In our South African conditions, ultraleftism has historically been impatient with the national grievance of the oppressed and dismissive of the national democratic struggle and of the ANC-led Alliance. It fails to understand the national question as being a profoundly objective reality, shaped by centuries of colonial domination. As such, it advocates a working class struggle that should be waged purely and only in direct pursuit of a system without exploitation. This would be achieved in a simplistic and dramatic abolition of the capitalist market with the state seizing the means of production.

This is at the core of the ideology of ultra-leftism which relates to the democratic state as the main target of its critique and action. The ANC rejects both approaches. In our situation, positions that either advance the dictates of rapacious global social relations, or propagate the irrelevance of the national question and an adventuristic struggle against these global relations, are a sure recipe for the defeat of the National Democratic Revolution.69

Mbeki contested the idea that Pretoria had already succumbed to ‘rapacious global social relations’. In one interview, he explained,

One should look at the positions of the ultra-left, globally - not just in South Africa. They define themselves variously, in all that I’ve read, as anarchists, socialists, fourth international and so on, and they have a common platform which is: let us unite to defeat globalisation and let us unite to defeat neoliberalism, which is a manifestation of that globalisation process.

These are the basic positions and in that context, then, there would be the particular matters - for instance neoliberalism would refer to issues of privatisation of state assets, how you handle public finances with regard to issues like budget deficits. It is actually a global platform. It is not peculiarly South African. What you then get is an interpretation of ANC and government policies which defines them within that context, so when we say ‘restructuring of state assets’ that is read as ‘privatisation’, as implementation of this neoliberal agenda, accommodation with globalisation. So the demand then becomes ‘change government policies on a whole variety of matters so as to be consistent with an anti-neoliberalism position, an anti©globalisation position.’ That is what we are discussing.60

ANC general secretary Kgaleme Motlanthe was soon thereafter asked by a journalist whether the ‘attack by the ANC on the ultra-left was an attempt by the organisation to try to divert attention from the real issues facing the country’. Motlanthe replied, ‘To the left of the left you

60. Sunday Times, 8 October 2002.
will find the ultra-left. They confuse reality. They proceed as though whatever you like and regard as the most ideal should be decreed. The real left, on the other hand, knows that nothing happens instantly. Everything is a process and requires painstaking effort to build.’ Yet asked about potential changes in the macroeconomic policies adopted by the ANC at the behest of the World Bank and IMF, Motlanthe replied, ‘There will be no major shift of policy. We believe that macro-economic elements and fundamentals are in place. We however remain concerned about job creation. That is the only issue that is often cited to criticise the country’s economic policies.’

Mbeki also refrained from any ‘major shift of policy’ in his own interpretation of the WSSD’s implications for South Africa. Asked by an opposition leader in parliament whether follow-up would include a national conference to involve civil society in establishing a sustainable development plan, Mbeki replied that there would not:

Government is developing a detailed response to the Johannesburg decisions. It has already been decided that all departments will integrate the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation into their own work. Sustainable development cannot be seen as an ‘add-on’ extra, something for limited action. It is an organic part of what we do. It is a vast cross-cutting issue. It is decidedly not the responsibility of one organ of state. If it is to be sustainable, it must be part and parcel of our whole system of integrated governance.

Some of the governance challenges logically included stemming the legitimacy crisis. At one level this would occur in the post-WSSD period with even more intense smears, especially as the trade union movement prepared for its (only partially-successful) national anti-privatisation strike. For ANC Youth League president Malusi Gigaba, ‘The ANC has a responsibility to salvage Cosatu. We also believe that workers must save Cosatu from the claws of the ultra-left.’ As for Cosatu, itself, thanks to its leaders, ‘It has lost meaning. Workers don’t respect it anymore. We cannot but be saddened by that fact. There are comrades who need to be worked on, politically.’ Gigaba also argued that (in the words of a journalist), ‘Cosatu statements blaming privatisation for unemployment were incorrect. Retrenchments were an apartheid legacy.’

A future, inevitable split of great magnitude would logically result from the growing tensions between the ANC and its Alliance partners. The way forward after such a split was not obvious. However, the influential civil society activist Trevor Ngwane argued firmly that the ANC and Alliance offered no future, but neither did autonomist politics that shunned the challenge of state power:

Some social movements are hostile to all political parties, to state power and are likely to call for a boycott of the 2004 South African national elections. This is a very serious shortcoming because it shows that the movements are trapped in a politics of defence. There is no real vision for a different kind of society, or at least a strategy for reaching it. In the APF the matter is hotly debated but a telling argument was the question of: if we don’t want privatisation, what do we want? The answer was: nationalisation. Then the further question was asked: who will re-nationalise all the privatised entities? Which government? I hope this illustrates the utter limitedness of views which reject the struggle for state power on principle...

With the elections, an unthought out knee-jerk hostility to elections is understandable after the betrayal by the ANC government and the limitations of bourgeois democracy. But what is the alternative to this type of democracy? Questions of democracy, elections and state power can allow the social movements, and the trade unions where we have succeeded to make connections, to address the question of workers power, of a different kind of social power, of soviets, of socialism. An abstentionist position must be fought vigorously as a dead-end for the social movements and the working class.

There is also the question of what kind of party or organisational vehicle should be formed to wrest power. Social movements tend to see themselves as an alternative to political parties. This should not be agreed to because it fudges many issues, encourages lack of clarity and leads to wrong strategy. A clear distinction needs to be made, at least in theory, between different forms of organisation such the trade union, the civic, the campaign and the political party. Each one has its strengths and its uses. Where there is overlap in functions and in form we should be able to identify this clearly. If, as some comrades argue in the APF, we need ‘new forms’ of organisation, then all the better if we know the existing forms so that we can create something new.

In South Africa both the left and the right are opposed to a new mass workers party which I personally support. The ANC-SACP-Cosatu leadership opposes it because of its potential threat to its political hegemony. Some on the left oppose it because the time is not ripe or because of a desire to find new forms. Others want to build a ‘vanguard’ party as if this is opposed to a mass party. Vanguard is not a medal you get when you have great Marxist politics, rather it is a job of putting the strongest politics in the hands of the mass movement of workers fighting behind demands to satisfy their needs. There cannot really be a true vanguard without a mass movement because the vanguard must stand in front of something. But neither can a mass movement, or social movement of the masses, achieve much without a clear politics which solves the problems of today while pointing to a new society.

The millions and millions of ordinary workers, employed and unemployed, who have seen with their own eyes the ANC government betray them cannot be easily wrested from their misplaced loyalty to the ANC, or be rescued from the iron grip of the politics of class collaboration of the Cosatu leaders, nor be shaken from their stupor of hopelessness unless clear answers, strategies and alternatives are put in front of them. It seems to me the time is now ripe for a call for a mass workers party in South Africa and perhaps in other countries. Such a mass workers party should be a party of millions and millions, a party which will lead and put together all struggles, a party which will point to necessity and the method of grabbing power. A party of socialism.64

Conclusion: Civil society and WSSD engagement

Any conclusion to a topic as broad as civil society relations to the WSSD (and the South African state) is impossible, given subjectivities and the fluid character of local politics. Still, several questions should be posed and answered by way of concluding.

- How international were SA civil society’s variety of side events, and what domestic-international interactions altered the participants understanding and planning on the issues?
- Are there aspects of what transpired that are unique to the South African context, or to

How international were SA civil society’s variety of side events, and what domestic-international interactions altered the participants understanding and planning on the issues? The international component was, for SA civil society, decisive. Of enormous importance was the development of, simultaneously, sophistication in relation to particular issues and confidence/militance in relation to contesting the legitimacy of the WSSD, South African state and the rest of the established power bloc that negotiated deals that progressive activists found unsatisfying and even insulting. The international relationships developed by South African civil society were profound in areas such as land, water, biodiversity, energy, corporate accountability, forestry, indigenous people’s needs, and health. The diversity of experiences that civil society activists can recount include the divisions of labour that had some experts inside monitoring negotiations, and others fully engaged in the delegitimisation of the event itself. In the events of August 31, notwithstanding the split involving the ANC and its allies, most of the civil society participants who wanted to make their voices heard through marching ultimately had an unforgettable opportunity to do so. It was precisely the international attraction of the South African civil society critics of the WSSD that bothered ANC leaders, to the extent that xenophobia began to become apparent in ruling party documents and speeches.

Were the events unique to the South African context, or to the African? Insofar as the WSSD represented a culmination of pressures that allowed a much more serious analysis of the neoliberal ‘threat’ to sustainable development, yes. However, South African civil society became quickly acclimated to the internationalist challenges through several other parallel processes preceding the WSSD, such as the World Conference Against Racism, Doha, Monterrey and the AU (and Nepad), not to mention sector-specific events (such as, in the water sector, the World Commission on Dams). All these gave South African civil society, and some of their better-connected African allies, the confidence to engage with great seriousness, without fear that unveiling contradictions with their own government would derail their agenda.

How can we best measure these other impacts? Political processes such as the rise of new social movements in South Africa can rarely be measured, but it is apparent from both participants and objective observers (e.g., Mail and Guardian reports) that something new and extremely important surfaced at the WSSD. What is probably useful is a mapping of the manner in which local relations between states and civil society compare, in large-scale events of this sort, in a new, much more politicised context, i.e., post-December 1999 in Seattle. Similar large UN events - such as Rio, Beijing, or Copenhagen - would not have witnessed anything like the high level of politicisation that captured the spirits of most civil society participants at Johannesburg. The intervening protests against ‘corporate globalisation’ and the emergence of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre together combined the anti-establishment politics with
the sense that ‘another world is possible’, making Johannesburg the first logical site for intense civil society militancy that was, in large part, directed against what was ostensibly a constructive, United Nations initiative. The fact that the WSSD occurred in the wake of September 11, and hence in a context in which the United States government was for all effective purposes retreating from multilateralism in diplomacy, environmental responsibilities and fair trade/finance, gave additional scope for civil society activism. (The final plenary protest against Colin Powell occurred not because of his attack on Zimbabwe’s land reform, but because of civil society anger, which was shared by most government delegates.\textsuperscript{65}

\textbf{How did inside and outside processes interact or share strategy?} The fact that SMI activists largely rejected the WSSD as the commodification of nature and society reflects the lack of progress made through inside/outside strategies. There were, naturally, exceptions (e.g., in defensive approaches to prevent WTO-style wording from being adopted in the WSSD). Overall, however, the insider civil society lobbyists did not make much headway on the key issues of the day, and nor did the SMI militants who had aimed to ‘shut down the summit!’ succeed. Sharing of strategy was uncommon, especially in relation to South African civil society, as both the case of water (the Waterdome protest against privatisation) and the broader conflict between the social movements and the ANC Alliance demonstrated.

\textbf{What meaningful connections can be drawn between the other civil society processes, such as the World Social Forum (Porto Alegre) and with the momentum surrounding the anti-globalisation campaigns and the WTO?} The rise of what we can term Global Justice Movements (GJMs) as the world’s first-ever multi-issue movement was profoundly important, and the WSSD was a crucial and productive step for these movements’ development. The period following the WSSD has included an extremely impressive alliance between the various forces - mainly GJM but also some insider civil society groups - represented in the World Social Forum, with the aim of protesting the US-led war against Iraq. The degree to which the movements for justice and peace have found common cause suggests that it is only a matter of time before other GJMs - including environmentalists and those concerned with more microdevelopmental issues - also rally large numbers of people, and recruit them to their causes. The merits of the various causes coming together, as they did in the WSSD, will be reflected to some extent in wideranging protests at the Cancun WTO and, in Latin America, through campaigns against the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Similar linkage on WSSD-related issues (water, global warming, biodiversity, land, health) are also evident in the preparations for the June G8 meeting in France. The strength of the linkages depends, in future, in part upon more national-level civil societies having the chance to learn and experience the sorts of political dynamics that were on display, in many ways, at the WSSD.

\textbf{What differences did the international NGOs and the social movement representatives}

\textsuperscript{65} The main protest organiser, Deborah James of the San Francisco-based Global Exchange, explained how confusion over timing might have arisen in the immediate wake of a scuffle involving protesters and conference security staff:

The anger at the US delegation was so strong that the other people in the room and even the delegates from other countries joined in and began interrupting Powell. This anger has been building over the four preparatory meetings (over the last year), as well as the last two weeks here in South Africa. Nevertheless, it is unfathomable that the delegates from other countries did that. That doesn’t happen at the UN. It was unbelievably amazing. The delegates from other countries (these are senior government officials, heads of state) booed and jeered him throughout his speech - specifically when he discussed how ‘healthy GMOs are for the rest of the world’ and [spoke of] ‘the US’s leadership on climate change’... Many papers erroneously covered the situation as a response to Powell’s comments about Zimbabwe. The protest started (with my group raising our banner ‘Bush: People and Planet, Not Big Business’) as soon as Powell finished his Thank-You’s. But the chanting started after our banners were taken - which happened to be at the same time as the Zim comment (James, D. (2002), E-mail exchange, <lbo-talk@lists.panix.com>, 10 September).
perceive that prevented them from collaborating better? There were, without doubt, a good many insider development NGOs, labour movements and environmentalists who had realistic ambitions for making an impact upon the WSSD. By and large they were disappointed by the extremely weak outcomes. The international GJM organisations and individuals were, by and large, delighted that the South African social movements were powerful and undaunted, when it came to both challenging their own government and the legitimacy of neoliberal strategies. Better collaboration would have occurred if, firstly, the split within South African civil society was not so sharp and durable, and secondly if logistics had been easier. But given that the whole WSSD experience was one of fragmentation, the collaborations at key events described in the pages above was admirable.

Are the tensions between Northern and Southern NGOs, or between development vs. environment groups increasing, or becoming more complex, better described in other terms? The best terms to describe the various NGOs and other civil society groups at such conferences are probably not ‘North’ and ‘South’, and not even ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ (to make allowance for uneven development within societies). Instead, the two main competing ideologies of civil society - GJMs and what might be best termed a ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ (PWC) orientation - seem to have settled in as the more permanent and important divisions. (There are also some NGOs that work closely with Third World states, and also some NGOs that advocate specifically Washington Consensus policies, but it is likely that neither group will profoundly influence future relationships between civil societies of the North and South.) The differences between the GJM and the PWC approaches are getting stronger in some regards (e.g., the GJMs often advocating more forceful ‘nixing’ of institutions which the PWC would rather ‘fix’, including the WSSD itself). It is not inconceivable that a global-Keynesian approach emphasising national sovereignty, genuine wealth/income transfers to poor people, and ecologically sound industrialisation may emerge as a philosophy that unites the PWC and GJM approaches in future. Opposition to US unilateralism in the military/diplomatic, economic and environmental spheres would be an important basis for pulling such a broad-based alliance together (much as it was during World War II against the Axis powers). However, the WSSD suggests that there are debilitating differences between, especially, the GJM on the one hand, and the PWC advocates on the other.

Is sustainable development governance something we can clearly envision civil society roles within, and at what scale, under what conditions? The importance of empowering the local/national ‘affiliates’ of the GJM, such as the South African social movements, cannot be emphasised enough. My sense is that this process will occur unevenly in coming years via the World Social Forum decentralisation initiatives now being established. In South Africa, given the split between Cosatu and most social movements, it is not likely that a ‘social forum’ branding exercise will be successful until a wider-ranging challenge to the ruling party occurs (perhaps along the lines of precedents from trade unions in Zambia and Zimbabwe over the past 15 years). The rise of national and regional Social Forums in most parts of the world bode well for more coordinated civil society inputs into global governance. My sense is that nation-state priorities will be seen as overriding, because the balance of forces at the international scale simply does not offer progressive social movements any real scope for satisfying reforms, as efforts on debt, trade, environment, militarism and so many other examples continually prove. Hence for the coming years, caution would be the logical manner in which progressive civil society engages with WSSD-type initiatives. Quite intense protests will continue at not only WTO, World Bank, IMF, G8, Davos and similar elite meetings, but also at UN events if the WSSD is a precedent. However, if sustainable development is to be anything more than pleasing rhetoric, it will necessarily come from the hard work of local, then national, then regional and finally global-scale organising. Skipping any of these steps through enlightened top-down interventions will never make more than a momentary dent, and may divert these
new and enthusiastic forms of organising into a technicist cul-de-sac. Hence, in sum, the approach of the South African social movements - thinking globally and acting locally first, while changing the balance of forces nationally and internationally, so that acting globally might one day generate something meaningful - is a wise route towards genuinely sustainable development, which is better termed ecosocial justice.
Chapter 12
The WSSD’s internecine civil society struggles

By Victor Munnik and Jessica Wilson

Usually, the spaces of global governance and of national civil society remain quite distinct. However, for two weeks in August and September 2002 these spaces merged. We take up the story on Saturday, 31 August 2002, when the choice between two South African civil society solidarity marches forced activists from all over the world to be part of civil society struggles in one country.

Which side are you on?

The morning had a tense, ecstatic quality. In our circle the choices had been made and we were driving with members of the water caucus to the dense, apartheid-created suburb of Alexandra.

This would be the starting place for the two solidarity marches, both headed for Sandton, where the World Summit on Sustainable Development was taking place. Both were intended to illustrate, to South Africans and non-South Africans alike, the obscene difference between poverty-stricken Alexandra and luxurious Sandton. Both were solidarity marches.

That there were two marches was the result of months of bitter division and the failure of last minute attempts at solidarity.

A mass of red t-shirts of the Landless People’s Movement saying ‘Food! Land! Jobs!’ along with affiliates of the Anti-Privatisation Forum made it clear where our starting point was. They were surrounded by police vans, cars, armoured vehicles. Helicopters circled over-head, reminding many of us of the days of anti-apartheid struggle. The driver of one of the armoured vehicles was surprised when Noel Oettle, an agriculture activist, confronted him about his running engine. It was unnecessary to run the engine, burning fossil fuel and emitting greenhouse gases. ‘Orders’, was the answer from the policeman.

Security is a serious business. A third of the WSSD budget went on security. All the deaths at the summit – five of them – were of military personnel killed in a fire while training for the summit. The powers that had been ruling South Africa for eight years were determined to prevent professional protesters taking over as had happened in Seattle in 1999.

‘The landless people will lead the march’, came the instruction. ‘Comrades please move to the back.’ The police, who insisted that the march turn around, complicated this manoeuvre. They wanted to avoid, at all costs, this march meeting face to face with the other march – which started with a rally in Alexandra addressed by South African State President, Thabo Mbeki. Reports filtered through that Mbeki, already striking an imposing presence as statesman of the African Renaissance and, it is whispered increasingly, brooking no internal opposition within the ANC, had monopolised the proceedings. He had started his speech by asking the assembled crowd which cap he should wear for the gathering: president of South Africa, chairperson of the WSSD or president of the African Union?

The APF and LPM

The two marches revealed a deep split running through South African civil society. At the
core of one side were those who wanted to register, to the entire world, their rejection of the ANC government’s neoliberal policies. Their ranks were filled by the victims of exactly those policies: the survivors of electricity cut-offs in major cities, of water cut-offs and house evictions for all those who could not pay. Supporting them and providing analysis was a vanguard of left intellectuals who had developed their skills in the struggle against apartheid. Their issues were clear and they met the ANC government’s claims to be on the side of the poor with derision.

Marching with them – in an agreement reached in the last 24 hours before the march – was the Landless People’s Movement (LPM). A movement made up of rural communities frustrated by the slow pace of land reform (with less than three percent of land transferred in the first eight years of democracy against a promise by the ANC government of 30 percent in 15 years). The LPM was supported by the National Land Committee, (NLC) a well-established NGO network that had, in the years of apartheid, defended black communities against forced removals through organisation, legal challenge and mass mobilisation. Faced with the slow pace of government’s land reform programme the NLC has returned to these activities, combining them with advocacy on policy development, new legislation and implementation. For years, these activists had debated the need to support a social movement of the landless to change the situation, since policy advocacy made little headway against the much stronger influence of (white) commercial agriculture – a stable export earner – and the interests of the growing number of commercial black farmers.

Bobbing between the red t-shirts were South African and international activists marching in solidarity. Some were in clear agreement with the two South African social movements; others were adamant that they would only march in an autonomous civil society formation. A post-WSSD essay by veteran anti-apartheid commentator John Saul showed that the aim of exposing the new ANC to the world was achieved. He expressed shock that, with many others, he had come to see that the ANC had changed since moving from the liberation struggle into government.

The ANC government, its allies and the moral high ground

But was this perspective correct, and was it fair on the South African government and its alliance partners? Was it the whole story? Certainly not, thought the leaders of the trade unions, churches and civic organisations that had fought the apartheid struggle with the ANC government, and were still in an official alliance with it. And how could they allow the ANC to be severed from the international anti-apartheid network it had built up over decades? What is more it was from this same corner that the ANC Alliance feared that the radical ultra-left might launch physical attacks like those in Seattle. Intelligence knew, too, that the racist rightwing had plans to disrupt the summit.

The government saw itself as playing a progressive role in the United Nations – one that was implicitly endorsed when a number of nations asked it to host the WSSD so that it could happen away from New York (the scene of the disappointing Rio +5 gathering). In this role, the South African government was determined to move the focus of the summit away from an environmental perspective to a poverty-centred approach to sustainable development. After all, the ANC carried the mantle of the liberation struggle that had defeated apartheid. Its next task was to defeat global apartheid.

The South African government set about its task with the youthful exuberance of the ‘new kids on the block’ ready to question everything and attempt anything. What it attempted – and it is convinced it worked – was to balance the triangle of the United States, the European Union and the G77 in order to achieve a plan of action for Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and to get its own plans for Africa included as a
special chapter. Indeed, the WSSD is understood in South African government circles as a turning point in the relationships between North and South – part of yet another triangle including the Doha ‘development’ round of the WTO and the Monterrey Consensus that emerged from the Financing for Development Conference.

South African foreign policy is based on the moral high ground won in the struggle against apartheid and the negotiated settlement that brought it to a peaceful end, and cemented by its unilateral abandonment of nuclear weapons. But now this moral high ground was threatened on home ground… Coming to the defence of the ANC in the alternative march were its big allies from the alliance built in the struggle against apartheid. They had taken charge of civil society. Not only history, but also millions of workers, church people and the members of 3000 ANC branches across the country were on their side. The behaviour of this alliance had left some in civil society, especially in NGOs, very concerned about the principle of the autonomy of civil society from government.

The response to these concerns, clearly expressed in Marxist theory, was that the autonomy of civil society is a liberal fiction aimed at undermining strong states in the South, and therefore at undermining the power of the ANC government to achieve real transformation in South Africa.

**Long march**

The crowd turned around. It took a long time for us to start marching. And the march would be long – looping through Alexandra, and then nine kilometres to the Sandton Convention Centre.

Peace caucus drummers kept us on course.

Massive security deployment provided a dramatic background for intense international media coverage. In the end both marches went off peacefully. Both marches went right up to the Sandton Convention Centre, where the text of the WSSD had been all but finalised. Comrades on cell phones kept in touch with the march.

From the inside the verdict was that the WSSD had narrowly averted undermining some of the most important principles of Agenda 21 – and that the corporate world had strengthened their hold on the United Nations, which would remain weaker than the World Trade Organisation. On the platform outside Sandton, the LPM and the Anti-Privatisation Forum had a difference of opinion on President Mugabe and his land reform programme in Zimbabwe. Here, too, allegiances could split.

But things could and should have been very different. South African civil society should have pulled together its three sources of strength.

**One:** a layer of environmental NGOs familiar with the substance and process of the Summit and well integrated into international networks.

**Two:** a growing force of new social movements responding to the sharp edge of neoliberal policies in housing, water and electricity supported by the strategic analysis of thinkers in touch with the growing world social movement. And three: solid, mass based and experienced formations in the trade unions and the churches with the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid behind them. Together they would have illustrated the solidarity that is possible in civil society, and how best the civil society partners of an erstwhile liberation movement could hold their comrades in government to a progressive path: in resisting the unfair demands of globalisation; in introducing a programme for African renaissance based on the will and the resources of the people; in decisively shifting power from the North to the South; and in leading the way in combining meeting the needs of the people with respect for nature.

The South African government could have shown that it welcomes internal criticism,
which can only strengthen its course, and that part of the moral high ground in foreign policy is acting beyond its own interests and beyond realpolitik. The mantle of the struggle against apartheid could have been used to tackle global apartheid. To do so, South Africa established an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on the WSSD as the highest decision making body, and it appointed the South African Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), and Foreign Affairs (DFA) as joint lead agents.

**Reviewing Agenda 21 and talking to civil society**

DEAT commissioned an analytical review of Agenda 21. The intention was to identify key cross-cutting themes, and to evaluate progress towards and obstacles to sustainable development since Rio (effectively since South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994), rather than an Agenda 21 chapter-by-chapter check-list approach. South Africa’s own national policies – the Bill of Rights and the National Environmental Management Act – were used to complement the Rio Principles as the basis for evaluation. The review was intended to inform South Africa’s negotiating position at the WSSD, and provide the basis for a national strategy for sustainable development (NSSD). An NSSD process had been initiated earlier and was intended to run parallel to the WSSD preparations.

However, it had been poorly thought through and after numerous false starts and resignations of officials it was downgraded to an outcome of the Agenda 21 review and eventually postponed until after the Summit. Part of the review process included a series of multistakeholder roundtable discussions aimed at building intellectual capacity in government (and outside), and informing departmental decisions. The roundtables took place in the first half of 2001 when the UN agenda was still very unformed. The themes – trade, finance, energy, poverty and water – were chosen because they were complex, cross-cutting or contentious. Although not ‘representative’, the roundtables drew in a cross-section of participants, including many from civil society organisations.

Most included an international resource person to bring a broader perspective to the debate and discussion. The Agenda 21 review process culminated in a national workshop in January 2002, but the review results were never officially made public and it remained unclear how and if they informed the WSSD or NSSD processes.

Two other mechanisms were used to draw in civil society: the Multistakeholder Advisory Committee (MAC) and the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (Nedlac). The MAC was a useful forum to exchange information – often about logistics – but not much more.

It had no decision making ability and limited political clout. Running parallel to MAC, Nedlac is a statutory body set up in 1995 to provide a formal structure for dialogue between business, labour, government and community on social and economic policy. Inevitably the WSSD was raised in Nedlac and it became a space to debate content and strategy. Unfortunately Nedlac has never been a viable forum for the participation of civil society groups apart from labour, partly because of the difficulty of establishing representation, a Nedlac requirement. Civil society is diverse and draws its strength from that diversity. NGOs resented the fact that important contentious issues shifted from the MAC to Nedlac where they had no status. Labour saw little purpose in the MAC and weakened it by not taking it seriously.

They argued that Nedlac should be used, and expanded if necessary, to bring in the other major groups more formally. Environmental activists were still arguing for the Minister to set up the National Environmental Advisory Forum (NEAF), which had been
established in the NEMA, and which they saw as the most appropriate body to bring civil society concerns into the WSSD preparatory process.

The way in which government set up relations with civil society was indicative of their view of the role of non-government actors. The African National Congress (ANC) sees itself as the leader in the social transformation of South Africa, its legitimacy derived from decades of struggle and as the party of overwhelming choice in national democratic elections. Its closest allies, and often harshest critics, are the trade unions, whose legitimacy and motivation for a united, non-racial, pro-poor, democratic state are unquestioned. Business too has a key role to play and it would be foolish to exclude them in any discussions on the economy. But NGOs and community based organisations that are not affiliated to the ANC or its partners are another story.

There is genuine concern that NGOs represent donor interests, and are thus suspect, with no real legitimacy or national support. The issues raised – particularly by environmental NGOs – are often seen as tainted by Europe’s interests.

Yet NGOs do fulfil a useful role for government as service providers and sources of information, knowledge and analysis. Within these boundaries, they are supported. An indication of whom government believes it is important to consult when drawing up policies is provided in the Nepad process where five major groups are engaged in discussions with government: big business, black business, commercial farmers, trade unions and churches. The prime intention of three of these five is to make money, while all other areas of defining a people-centred ecologically sensitive development path is left to organised workers and faith-based groups. While these may be broadly sympathetic and able to speak to certain aspects of sustainable development, they do not cover the broad range of voices and experiences that others in civil society can bring.

NGOs have unique insights and knowledge from their work, which often combines policy level thinking with community-based implementation.

Special interest groups can bring in-depth understanding of issues that are critical to shifting towards a development path that is sustainable.
Part Three
Civil Society meets Multilateral Neoliberalism
Chapter 13
Why I protested at the World Bank

By Dennis Brutus

After being shot by apartheid’s police, imprisoned with Nelson Mandela on Robben Island, and driven into exile for my efforts to liberate South Africa from the tyranny of minority rule, I have found on returning home that the triumphs of the last decade are threatened by a new kind of tyranny, that of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is that threat—plus the damage already done in the rest of Africa—that motivated me to go to Washington for the massive demonstrations on April 16, 2000 calling for an end to the abuses of these institutions.

The presence of so large and diverse a group of people from around the US and around the world (and yes, there were many from Africa, Latin America, and Asia who managed to make the trip) convinces me that we are witnessing the birth of a new kind of international social movement, one which will reshape the global economy. South Africa’s economy is strong enough that it need not submit to IMF and World Bank ‘recommendations’ the way the other countries of Africa have, yet our politicians seem vulnerable to the pressure mounted by the US Treasury Department and multinational corporations to comply with the ‘Washington Consensus’—government austerity, allowing apartheid-era wealth to flee, and other pro-corporate policies.

On April 16, the US public and the bureaucrats at the IMF and World Bank finally heard some of the anger and rejection of the global economic system that is welling up every day in much of the world. A philosopher once remarked that the great ideas of history are first dismissed as ludicrous, then castigated as subversive, and ultimately regarded as self-evident. The demonstrations in Washington fill me with hope that for the second time in my life, I will see that progression come full circle.

Before long, I trust, it will be commonplace to observe that twenty-plus years of the IMF and World Bank’s ‘structural adjustment programs’ have brought only more debt and increasing poverty for some ninety countries, and, not coincidentally, more profits for multinational corporations. Those who insist—backed up by economic theory but not economic reality—that it is mere coincidence that the IMF and World Bank have been present at (and presiding over) catastrophe after catastrophe will finally fall silent.

Most vital to the movement that has called the IMF and World Bank’s bluff is whether these institutions continue to be granted coercive power over the economic policies that govern the lives of most of the world’s people. The IMF’s own review of structural adjustment and the World Bank’s own assessment of its forest policies are just two recent examples of their own acknowledgement of failure. As the statements of support that were issued just before our demonstrations at the Havana summit of the leaders of 133 less wealthy countries confirm, this is not news to the people of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

We are not talking about ‘fixing’ these institutions, but finally freeing the countries they have dominated from their failed economic philosophy. Of course, even massive displays of opposition on their home turf are unlikely to persuade the IMF and World Bank to change their ways. The Jubilee 2000 movement, which has mobilised hundreds of thousands in repeated actions over the last five years to demand cancellation of the most impoverished countries’ debts, has extracted concessions from the heads of the G7 countries but not yet managed to move the IMF and World Bank away from their insistence that any relief from
debts owed them must be paid for by someone else and accompanied by more structural adjustment.

Fortunately, in the case of the World Bank, we have a viable weapon: on April 10, I helped launch a boycott of the bonds that finance 80 percent of the Bank’s loans. These bonds are bought by institutions like churches, universities, pension funds, and municipalities. The movement that came to life on the streets of Washington will now replicate the success of the divestment movement that helped end apartheid. Students, workers, and others, learning about the impact of the Bank’s policies, will apply pressure to their sources of support, make them unattractive to investors, and ultimately defund them. We will be stopped only when the Bank finally meets the people’s condition: an irrevocable end to structural adjustment.
Chapter 14
Beyond Nepad’s peer review

By Eduard Jordaan and Ian Taylor

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development or Nepad has been enthusiastically pushed by a select number of elites in Africa, as well as by the G-8, as a means to stimulate what has been termed the ‘African Renaissance’. Nepad was launched in Abuja, Nigeria, in October 2001; it arose from the mandate granted to five African heads of state (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa) by the then Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to work out a development program to spearhead Africa’s renewal.

Nepad has arguably succeeded in placing the question of Africa’s development onto the international table and has managed to obtain a fairly high profile and awareness (Taylor, 2005). In doing this, Nepad has claimed to be a political and economic program aimed at promoting democracy, stability, good governance, human rights, and economic development on the continent. Nepad has been essentially sold as a bargain: Through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) African countries will police standards of good government across the continent, respect for human rights and the advancement of democracy, in return for increased aid flows, private investment and a lowering of obstacles to trade by the West. An extra inflow of $64 billion from the developed world has been touted as the ‘reward’ for following approved neo-liberal policies on governance and economics, even though, in a recent press statement, Nepad has sought to disconnect a positive review from the promise of more aid (Nepad Secretariat, 2005d) (below).

In a tacit acknowledgement of the damage African leaders have inflicted on their own countries, the Nepad project places Africa’s presidents at the heart of the quest for the continent’s renewal. Indeed, Paragraph 1 of Nepad opens with the statement that ‘This New Partnership for Africa’s Development is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development’. Paragraph 6 follows with the assertion that ‘What is required…is bold and imaginative leadership that is genuinely committed to a sustained human development effort and poverty eradication’.

A great deal of expectation has been raised about the possibilities opened up by Nepad, particularly with regard to the promise to develop a credible peer review process to advance democracy and good government in Africa. Much of this, we would argue, is unrealistic as the logic and modus operandi of neo-patrimonial rule, as well as the dependent relationship Africa has with the global capitalist system, means that Nepad’s promise is highly constrained. In particular, Nepad’s strictures on good governance and democracy cannot be implemented without eroding the very nature of the post-colonial African state and undermining the positions of incumbent elites—an unlikely possibility. Such realities, we argue, will derail the APRM, the cornerstone of the whole project in the eyes of many observers.

What is argued is that Nepad and its promoters fundamentally ignore the reality that power in African politics must be understood as the utilisation of patronage and clientelism and operates within neo-patrimonial modes of governance—the antithesis of Nepad’s own vision for Africa. While there are limits to and problems with the concept of neo-patrimonialism (Erdmann and Engel, 2006; Therkildsen, 2005), it does succeed in capturing the hybridity of African states, in which patrimonial practices coexist with and subvert
modern state bureaucracies (Van de Walle, 2001: 51). Ruling elites effectively base their authority on their distribution of resources to clients, instead of the legal-rational mechanisms of a Weberian modern state, such as meritocracy, impartial legal structures and political accountability. Clientelism, rent-seeking and corruption are intrinsic to such systems and have become internalised to such an extent that they constitute ‘essential operating codes for politics’ (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997: 63). This is ‘accepted as normal behaviour, condemned only in so far as it benefits someone else rather than oneself’ (Clapham, 1985: 49).

The irony is that the type of solutions advanced by Nepad would, if successfully implemented, deprive rulers of the means to maintain their patronage networks. For one thing, the carrying out of Nepad objectives such as ‘sound, transparent and predictable government economic policies’ and ‘sound public finance management’, as expressed in the APRM questionnaire, would dry up much of the material resources needed to lubricate the clientelistic networks upon which the neopatrimonial state depends, even though one should not underestimate the demonstrated ability of African elites to adapt their patronage in the face of stricter financial controls (Van de Walle, 2002).

What is more, Section 80 of the Nepad document states that ‘The purpose of the Democracy and Political Governance Initiative is to contribute to strengthening the political and administrative framework of participating countries, in line with the principles of democracy, transparency, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights and promotion of the rule of law’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2001: 26). However, transparency and accountability in decision-making would undermine the very nature of neo-patrimonial modes of governance, as would the rule of law. In other words, Nepad seems to expect that the very same African elites who benefit from the neo-patrimonial state will now commit a form of class suicide. The possibility seems improbable. As Chabal and Daloz (1999: 15) point out:

If political domination becomes embodied in the recognised juridical universe of the bureaucratic state (as Nepad’s strictures on good governance demands) political elites would no longer have to justify their prominence through the fulfillment of their patrimonial duties. What this would mean however is that they would have to accept both the supremacy of institutions over individuals and the temporary nature of their political eminence.

With very few exceptions, the majority of the heads of state involved in Nepad are quintessentially leaders of neo-patrimonial regimes and certainly do not think of their rule as ‘temporary’ or that institutional law should constrain their pre-eminence or that their rule be transparent and accountable. In other words, most African presidents behave in ways that are the exact opposite of what Nepad understands by good governance. What this means is that the commitment to the APRM that state elites have thus far shown needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

After all, the countries that have so far signed on are: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. Sao Tomé and Principe, Sudan and Zambia have expressed their intent to accede to the APRM. Of these, only two would probably pass Nepad’s own strictures on clean government and democracy (Mauritius and South Africa), whilst perhaps two others (Ghana and Mali) might—as this is written—be given the benefit of the doubt regarding efforts towards moving forward to universal standards of governance and democracy. Others are highly dubious. Accepting such scepticism, we move to discuss the fate of the much-vaunted African Peer Review Mechanism.
The African Peer Review Mechanism

The APRM is scheduled to be a succession of country reviews conducted by a Country Review Team consisting of at least one member from the Panel of Eminent Persons and one specialist for each of the four governance areas under the APRM remit. These four areas are democracy and good political governance; economic governance and management; corporate governance; and socio-economic development. A ‘base review’ has to take place within eighteen months of a state’s accession to the APRM. After this has been undertaken, the APRM will then engage in periodic reviews of a country’s performance every two to four years. A further review may be inaugurated if there are early warning signs of a looming political or economic crisis (although note that this can only be initiated by the state’s ruling leader). In addition to such exceptional circumstances, a country can ‘for its own reasons, ask for a review that is not part of the periodically mandated reviews’, although it is not clear what the rationale behind or reasons for this type of could be.

Most of the focus on Nepad has been aimed at the section on Political Governance. As a Scandinavian ambassador commented, ‘It was this that captured our imagination and made Nepad that much easier to sell’ (Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) November 8, 2002). This was because it appeared to suggest a qualitatively different approach to Africa’s problems than previous plans and declarations. The Heads of State Implementation Committee (HSIC) in Abuja in March 2002 approved the Draft Report on Good Governance and Democracy and the African Peer Review Mechanism (UNECA, 2002) and Nepad’s promoters have forcefully argued that the APRM is a positive and demonstrable effort to encourage African states’ commitment to ‘good governance’ (Akinrinade, 2002: 3). It was in this context that Nepad staked its claim to being a different document from previous African declarations. Here, perhaps for the first time, was a promise to self-police African leaders: ‘the most significant initiative ever advocated for moving the African continent from crisis to renewal’, as one commentary claimed (Hope, 2002: 397).

The APRM will proceed through five stages. Stage one will see studies commenced to measure the progress that various African countries have made so far towards democracy and good governance (ill-defined, it should be noted). Based on an eighty-eight page questionnaire, the country to be reviewed is required to write a report in which it assesses its performance in the political, economic, corporate governance, and development spheres in the country. In so far as the self-assessments process brings problems and shortcomings of governance to the fore, the country under review is to devise of ‘Programme of Action’ to address these inadequacies. It is further required that ‘all stakeholders’ be included in the self-assessment exercise. Once completed, the self-assessment report is presented to the APR Secretariat and the APR Panel.

Stage two of the APRM will see an Eminent Persons Review Team visit the country under review to carry out ‘consultations’ with ‘government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, the business community, representatives of civil society (including media, academia, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations), rural communities and representatives of international organisations’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2003). The APRM Panel of Eminent Persons comprises the following: Adebayo Adedeji representing West Africa; Bethuel Kiplagat for East Africa; Graça Machel, Southern Africa; Mohammed Seghir Babès, North Africa; Dorothy Njeuma, Central Africa; Marie-Angelique Savané, West Africa; and Chris Stals, Southern Africa. The credentials of these Eminent Persons will be discussed below. It must be said that judging by the three completed Country Review Reports (for Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda), the Country Review Missions did meet a wide range of ‘stakeholders’. However, the usefulness of a fleeting visit
by select elites from within Africa to a country, in order to conduct a ‘Country Review Visit’, remains doubtful, to say the least.

Stage three will see the Review Team finalising its report on the basis of its discussions and research in stage two and the findings of the studies undertaken during stage one. The material and findings of the Review Team’s report will be evaluated against the pointers contained in the UNECA’s Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. The recommendations of the Review Team’s report is to focus on how the Programme of Action of the country can be improved to accelerate the ‘best practice’ standards. These recommendations should state specific measures the country has to include in its Programme of Action. Be that as it may, the report will be considered with the government under evaluation and revisions made. Indeed, ‘The Team’s draft country review report is first discussed with the Government of the country in order to ‘ensure the accuracy of the information’. This process is also designed to ‘provide the Government with an opportunity both to react to the accuracy of the information and the Team’s findings and to put forward their own views on how to address the identified shortcomings, including modifying the draft Programme of Action. The responses of the Government will be appended to the APR Team’s report’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2003: 15). It is very alarming that at this point all non-state actors are excluded and only the government concerned will be involved. In other words, state elites will be given the opportunity, free of civil society oversight, to comment on the ‘accuracy’ of the report as they see fit. The only limits placed on their activities will, presumably, be those placed by the Eminent Persons. This follows a by now well-worn path pursued by Nepad: limited, if not minimal, engagement with civil society. After all, ‘until April 2002, no trade union, civil society, church, women’s, youth, political-party, parliamentary, or other potentially democratic or progressive forces in Africa were formally consulted by the politicians or technocrats involved in constructing Nepad’ (Bond, 2003: 9).

During stage four the revised and final country review report will be presented to the APR Panel. The APR Panel meets to review the report in accordance with its mandate and submits its recommendations on the report to the APR Forum, which meets to consider the report. Upon its adoption the Country Report will then be publicised through African Union institutions. As part of stage five, the Final APRM Report is tabled formally and publicly in key regional and sub-regional structures such as the Summit of the African Union, the Pan-African Parliament, the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the Peace and Security Council and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOC) of the African Union, as well as the Regional Economic Community of the region of which the country reviewed is a member (Nepad Secretariat, 2003). The completion of these five stages would conclude the ‘base review’, after which periodic reviews will take place at two to four year intervals. As noted above, there are instances whereby the APRM may be called upon in the future. Of note, the country reviewed will be left to implement the advice put forward by the Eminent Persons.

However, due to the voluntary nature of the whole process, states do not actually have to implement the APRM panel’s advice or even the Country Report. Thus if state elites go back on the recommendations of the Review Team there are no mechanisms or teeth to do anything about this. Even civil society is excluded at this point, which increasingly points to the APRM becoming little more ‘than a window-dressing exercise between governments’ (Verwey, 2005: 11). According to Nepad’s position, ‘the participating states should first do everything practicable to engage (the noncompliant government) in constructive dialogue, offering in the process technical and other appropriate assistance. If dialogue proves unavailing, the participating Heads of State and Government may wish to put the government on notice of their collective intention to proceed with appropriate measures by
a given date' (Nepad Secretariat, 2002: 11). But these ‘appropriate measures’ continue to be indeterminate and obscure. Indeed, ‘these vague measures neither penalise a country for an unfavourable review nor provide it with incentives to undertake the recommendations of the review or take steps to avoid an unfavourable review’ (Bekoe, 2003: 5). We agree with the sentiments of a Zimbabwean commentator who argues that ‘this mechanism will fail in its task if reviews happen only periodically and rigorous criteria—and the consequences for deviant governments—are not spelled out. It seems that African heads of state will be left to judge their own performance. The proposed peer review shows that Nepad leaders do not yet recognise accountable governance as a relationship between governments and citizens’ (Zimbabwe Independent (Harare), May 24, 2002).

If a country does comply with the Review Team’s recommendations, then it will, according to Nepad process, were eventually to be given a grade: ‘Nepad Compliant’, ‘Aspiring to Nepad Compliance, but in need of assistance’, ‘Wilfully non-compliant’, and ‘Post-conflict countries requiring special reconciliation and reconstruction’ (Business Day (Johannesburg), November 4, 2002). According to the logic within Nepad, this is then supposed to facilitate increased aid and foreign investment into the country, depending on the grade achieved. Yet, in a recent press statement, Nepad has sought to break the link between a country’s performance in the peer review and its score, and between a country’s performance and the promise of more aid.

Being a peer learning and experience sharing, (the APRM) should not be interpreted as a score card of pass or fail or, a conditionality for donor assistance. It may be that some donors and development partners could use the results of the APRM assessments or reviews to make decisions on aid and development assistance, but this is not the primary purpose of the APRM not its intention (Nepad Secretariat, 2005d).

Whatever the connection between a country’s performance in the peer review and increased aid, it should be noted that when Nepad was thought up, global aid levels had never rebounded to the levels it had reached immediately after the Cold War, which would have made African states more willing to satisfy the international demands for reform in exchange for more aid. However, the current aid environment is much different than it was during the period before the creation of Nepad. During the period 1993-2002, ODA never rose to above the US$60 billion mark. In contrast, the preliminary figure for total ODA during 2005 is more than US$106 billion, double what it was as recently as 2002 (http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/24/1894385.xls). The implication is that an environment awash with aid money undermines the incentive to conform to principles of good governance in order to obtain aid controlled by Nepad.

Before discussing the APRM in more detail it should be noted that no budget has actually been set for the APRM. Indeed, the proposed plan at the moment calls for the APRM to gather its resources primarily from those states that have volunteered to participate in the review process—countries have to pay at least $100,000 to take part. While the APRM (commendably) emphasises the need to keep foreign financial assistance low, in order to avoid charges that it is not African-owned, the financing scheme raises deep concerns that the APRM will end up underfunded and devoid of any real political independence (although the per diems for the Eminent Persons are no doubt secure). Firstly, states with no real commitment to Nepad principles can cite the lack of funds as an excuse to duck out of the review process. In addition, ‘resources from African states can also be used to bias the peer review. A participating state may refuse to contribute its levy, as a means of protesting an unfavourable review—holding the APRM hostage’ (Bekoe, 2003: 6). Certainly, given the historical failure of African states to meet their financial commitments to previous
African initiatives, such as paying their dues for membership of first the Organisation of African Unity and now, the African Union, serious questions need to be asked vis-à-vis the financing of the APRM and the implications that this has. After all, when the OAU wound down, to be replaced by the AU, the outgoing OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim indicated that only four countries had paid their dues on time. This improved somewhat by the time of the transformation into the AU: of the 53 OAU members, 16 had settled their dues. This still meant however that the AU inherited multi-million dollar debt. And as it stands, the African Union recently reported arrears of nearly $39.9 million out of an operating budget of $43 million. ‘Moreover, since the funding of the APRM will come from participating countries only and not all the 54 states in Africa, the levy will be disproportionately borne’ (Bekoe, 2003: 6).

Prevarication over the political

As it was originally conceived (and certainly how it was sold to partners in the G-8) the peer review mechanism pledged to offer a disciplinary device to secure compliance with agreed values and norms in Africa. This was cast as a way to improve the legitimacy of African states in their dealings with outside actors and bolster the possibility of improving governance in Africa in order to reverse Africa’s marginalisation. The very concept of peer review was portrayed as the examination and appraisal of the functioning of a state by other states (peers), by mandated institutions, or by a combination of these (Economic Commission for Africa, 2002: 2). The end objective was cast as assisting the reviewed state’s progress in its adoption of approved best practices and to ensure it fulfilled agreed-upon principles and values.

Indeed, initially the review mechanism was sold as having enough muscle to rein in malefactors. Such a review process, Nepad promoters originally insisted, had to include measures to ensure compliance. This was because, according to Obasanjo ‘African leaders could no longer remain silent about the shortcomings or abuses of other African leaders’ (quoted in Africa Recovery, vol. 15, no. 4, December 2001: 10). Indeed, Mbeki ‘repeatedly stressed the importance of establishing a credible and effective African Peer Review Mechanism to help decide which countries benefit, and to what extent, from membership of Nepad. Peer review is vital to his vision for Africa’ (Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) May 10, 2002). This meant, Mbeki claimed, that the Nepad peer review process should support ‘certain standards of behaviour, which are agreed, which are clear, which are capable of enforcement (emphasis added)’ (South African Press Agency (Cape Town), February 12, 2002).

However, the whole question over what peer review implied quickly led to a somewhat ignominious retreat to a voluntary process with no measures to ensure compliance. Governance review was eventually retained as a watered-down voluntary process. The retreat to a purely voluntary review might be seen as a belated realisation by Nepad’s promoters that an intrusive review process would never be bought by the bulk of Africa’s leaders. In fact, Mbeki quickly realised that if a credible peer review process had been endorsed, then Pretoria would have rapidly been elevated (by the donor countries) to being the de facto policeman of good governance in Africa, a duty that Mbeki—as the debacle surrounding his policies towards Mugabe has shown—is not willing to perform. In addition pan-African elite solidarity and the historic reluctance of criticising fellow presidents on the continent meant that any review mechanism that sought to enforce best practices and/or judge the performance of others was bound to falter. Furthermore, the volte-face threw into focus the over-selling of Nepad by its promoters and the too easy acceptance by the G-8 of the initial plan—note the comment by one Western diplomat in Pretoria that ‘Perhaps we
were naïve, but we were very taken by Mbeki going where very few other leaders—and certainly no Africans has dared. It was this that captured our imagination’ (quoted in Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) November 8, 2002). But, the type of intrusive peer review system initially sold by Mbeki in the run up to the launch of Nepad was ahead of even the sophisticated and long-standing OECD process, while the European Union has not even tried to introduce such a mechanism. As a result, looking at the current situation in Africa, a political peer review system of the type originally sold by Mbeki would only have called attention to wholesale malgovernance and corruption on the continent, thus immediately sabotaging Mbeki’s rhetoric that the ‘African Renaissance’ was already underway. Yet, at the same time, a process with no sanctions or counter-measures against those countries that fail to pass muster means that the review mechanism will have no teeth.

Certainly, the suspicion remains that the evaluation panel will restrict itself to rubber-stamping governance reports and so endow countries that have undergone peer review with a veneer of legitimacy, openness and commitment to reform. While twenty-three countries have signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the APRM, only three countries have completed all five stages (Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda), with South Africa the only other country to progress to the second stage. And while the reports on Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda contain some surprisingly critical comments (below), it is ominous to watch the external reviewers cower and cringe before the Rwandan government (and similarly before the Ghanian government (Nepad Secretariat, 2005a: 11)). For example, in paragraphs 67 and 68 of the Country Review Report of the Republic of Rwanda, the Nepad reviewers write, It must be stated that it was not a function of the CRM or Panel to make its own assessments of the situation in Rwanda. The task of the CRM in the APR process is indeed clearly defined in the AU Documentation the African Peer Review Mechanism Organisation and Procedures: ‘The visit is an opportunity for the APRM Team to discuss the draft Programme of Action that the country has drawn up to improve their governance and socio-economic development, to provide positive reinforcement for the sound aspects, and to address identified weaknesses and shortcomings in the various areas of governance and development.’ The main emphasis in the process rests with what the country itself is prepared and able to produce. The APRM is, after all, structured on the non-negotiable principles of national ownership and leadership, and self-assessment.

What is more, the ability of the Eminent Persons panel to deliver independent assessments of the countries under review remains highly questionable. As noted above, the Eminent Persons panel (appointed in May 2003) is made up of seven members. All of these panelists are intimately linked to the elite classes of Africa and brings into question any notion of real independence and objectivity. Certainly it puts into question Marie-Angelique Savané’s assertion that ‘We are controversial people back at home and we cannot be manipulated’ (quoted by Reuters (Kigali) March 11, 2004). The six are: Adebayo Adedeji (Nigeria) ex-head of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and ex-minister in one of Nigeria’s military-run, coup-generated governments; Bethuel Kiplagat (Kenya), ex-ambassador under Daniel arap Moi; Graça Machel (Mozambique), the wife of Nelson Mandela; Mohammed Seghir Babès, former Chairperson of the National Economic and Social Council of Algeria; Dorothy Njeuma, ex-minister of education in Cameroon; Marie-Angelique Savané (Senegal), former head of the UN Population Fund’s Africa Bureau; and Chris Stals (South Africa), ex-head of the South African Reserve Bank.1 Cynics have noted

1. What is interesting here of course is the fact that before being recruited onto the well-paid and high-profile Eminent Persons committee, Adedeji was a prominent critic of the Nepad, denouncing it for ignoring his own Lagos Plan of Action and AAF-SAP. In fact, according to Adedeji, the Nepad was fundamentally flawed because it sought to make Africa ‘march towards its future hand-in-hand with its colonial mono-cultural, low productivity and excessively dependent and open economy’ (sic)
that this line-up will no doubt satisfy those elites in Africa who were quick to assert that ‘Nepad should not be used as a political tool to demand human rights, democracy and other unnecessary conditions’ (Namibian Agriculture Minister Helmut Angula, (quoted in The Namibian (Windhoek), April 15, 2003).

Indeed, the Eminent Persons panel is somewhat devoid of credibility if independence from extant elites is a serious criterion. Take for instance one member, Dorothy Njeuma. In September 2004 during the Cameroonian election, Njeuma told a campaign rally that, ‘with Biya, there is progress, stability and development…if we want more development, we have to show him our support’. She also stated that the people should vote for Biya, ‘on behalf of their sons’, because if they do not support Biya, ‘their sons may not have the opportunity to be where they are’ (Post (Buea) September 29, 2004). Njeuma, it should be noted, is a member of the political bureau of President Paul Biya’s governing party. And yet, the Eminent Persons panel is supposed to be independent, free-thinking and willing to critique recalcitrant governments. How does this square with one of its members actively campaigning for a politician who is routinely held up by observers as being one of the worst examples of a corrupt, neo-patrimonial Big Man? (Mehler, 1998; Van de Walle, 1994). To Njeuma’s questionable independence, one should add the proclivity of Eminent Persons to prejudge country self-assessments in favour of government, as Graca Machel had done upon arrival in Nairobi, where she proclaimed that Kenya’s self-assessment report was ‘candid’ (Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) October 9, 2005), while Adebayo Adedeji, as leader of the recent Country Review Mission to South Africa, had heaped such praise on South Africa’s sanitised and government-controlled self-assessment report that it left commentators to conclude that Adedeji had ‘prejudged the issues in favour of the SA government’ (Southern Africa Report, July 21, 2006).

Certainly, from the perspective of the international community, for the reviews to be considered credible, they should not diverge too much from what international opinion knows and thinks about a country already. But this is an important point: what added value will the APRM process provide to potential investors, which is not already offered by the Economist Intelligence Unit, Standard and Poors credit ratings, Human Rights Watch Africa’s reports, Amnesty International’s overviews, the US Department of State’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices; indeed general knowledge garnered from the media and first-hand experiences? The answer seems to be that the APRM is ‘Africa-owned’. But this may not be so much of a plus point. After all, any repetition of the Zimbabwe debacle or the situation in Rwanda where African elites rushed to give the presidential elections of 2003 an unrealistically favorable endorsement of the polls, in contrast with the negative opinions of grassroots activists within Zimbabwe, will instantly undermine the APRM’s worth:

If the reviews are not credible then it will depend on what alternative, consistent and transparent monitoring process is applied by the partner countries. To the extent that the developed countries end up paying lip service to superficial or cosmetic reviews, they will simply be helping to entrench an ineffectual political ritual. Therefore the G-8 and other developed democracies…have to try to make sure that the ‘reviews’ do not simply create a smokescreen behind which corrupt but influential African governments continue with their old habits, confirming the worst fears expressed by the international NGO movement (Schlemmer, 2002:13).

After all, ‘The G-8 supporters of Nepad insist that the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is the jewel in Nepad’s crown and have clearly predicated the amount and quality of their financial support on it. Nepad’s political difficulties in Western circles have not been

(Adedeji, 2002: 6).
helped by how the prognosis of the APRM has become entangled with the controversies over Zimbabwe’ (Graham, 2002: 3).

To be sure, the findings of the Country Review Missions that have been published thus far (on Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda) have some credibility, for they do pick up on much that is wrong in these countries. With regard to Ghana, ‘an oasis of peace and tranquillity’, political problems are summarised as the ‘fractious and, at times, explosive’ competition for political power; the inadequate ‘human, financial and logistic capacity of the Electoral Commission’; a shortage of democracy within political parties; the ‘low representation of women in politics’; and ‘high levels of corruption’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2005a: xii). For its part, Kenya, ‘a bastion of stability’, is marked by ‘strong ethnic divisions, polarised political issues, political manipulation, rampant violence, socio-economic disparities, deepening levels of poverty and endemic corruption’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2005b: 14). Finally, Rwanda is faced by political problems that include the spectre of regional conflict; divisions along ethnic and religious lines; illegal arms trafficking; drug trafficking; poverty and inequality; interference with the judiciary; a closing down of political space; a lack of trust in the government; a constitution ‘fraught with major problems’; and so on. (Nepad Secretariat, 2005c).

However, grave these problems may be, the Country Review Reports carefully avoid laying the blame too specifically and typically point to capacity constraints and the absence of specific laws to explain poor governance. What is more, in the countries they analyse, these reports, and the Kenya report in particular, (unwittingly?) identify many of the characteristics of neo-patrimonial societies, such as an overbearing presidency, the failure to respect a separation of powers, pervasive corruption, ethnic and regional patronage, a widespread inability/unwillingness to enforce the rule of law, debilitating red tape, poor public sector service delivery, and political instability as a result of efforts to prosecute corrupt public officials. But, although the Country Review Reports identify many of the symptoms of neo-patrimonialism, the analyses remain rather superficial, while suggested remedies tend toward the legalistic and technocratic. But, while the Country Review Missions may have acquired some credibility through their willingness to criticise, they hardly tell us anything we did not already know about governance problems in these countries and also do not make recommendations of any great originality. Yet, the worst part is that the peer review does not offer African and international outsiders increased leverage to ensure that reforms and ‘programmes of action’ are implemented, as was once the intention.

Whilst defenders of the retreat from the original premise of Nepad argue that volunteering for a review will put pressure on those that do not, this is somewhat unconvincing. Wary of imposing itself and interfering in the domestic politics of African countries, the APRM has reduced itself to a ‘peer learning and experience sharing process.’ It therefore seems as though Nepad, the APRM, and the AU are walking the path of the AU’s predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, which generally declined to pay attention to matters of good political governance, leaving such matters sacrificed to the pan-African principle of ‘non-interference’ in domestic affairs and, effectively, elite solidarity (Van Walraven, 1999). Why the promoters of Nepad now claim that the AU will be qualitatively different from the OAU when the very same African elites are in power and when the nature of the African state remains largely unaltered is unclear. After all, as Adeleke notes, any renewal project for the continent ‘cannot be meaningful if it is spearheaded and guided by the current African political leadership, those directly responsible for undermining the very foundation upon which a viable pan-African tradition could have been built’ (Adeleke, 1998: 533).

Perhaps the main motive for the Nepad’s retreat to a toothless APRM is the fear that
Nepad would actually result in a split in Africa. If it was to be implemented as a compulsory and credible review process then one would see emerging various clusters of ‘winners and losers’ within the continent. The main political (and perhaps, economic) beneficiaries would almost certainly be the economically stronger African territories and/or the few leaders on the continent perceived as being serious (i.e. pro-reform liberalisers with an ‘approved’ record on human rights and democracy) by the West. Deviants from this norm and those states with tainted leaders i.e. ‘non-acceptable’ to the West, would be set aside—unless of course their value as guardians of resources warranted a tactical ‘blind eye’. Yet such a scenario would strike at the heart of one of the very few things the African Union actually stands for: pan-African unity amongst its elites. Increased polarisation between these elites is not what Nepad was supposed to be about, even if the logical outcome of its governance agenda would have certainly led to such a scenario. Indeed, the APRM reflects an undeniable contradiction within the whole recovery plan: on the one hand it must be as inclusive as possible, in order to obtain pan-African ‘buy-in’ whilst on the other hand it has to be as exclusive as possible in order to obtain credibility with the West. Furthermore, the APRM as it was initially sold, created what Van der Westhuizen (2003: 389) called the ‘dual dilemma’ of Nepad:

First, a mechanism to provide a ‘seal of approval’ is required to assure wary foreign investors, but such a mechanism is vulnerable to being perceived by critics as an extension of ‘Western imperialism’… The second… is the difficulty of relating to sovereignty and non-interference, which prohibits fellow African states from interfering in one another’s domestic affairs. A retreat from such a problematic scenario was thus perhaps inevitable. We have depicted Nepad and the APRM as confronted by a tension between the desire to see improved governance in African countries and an increasingly unwillingness to insist upon it. It is this conflict that has led to Nepad’s greatest proponent, Thabo Mbeki, into making some rather contradictory statements. On the one hand, Mbeki has claimed that ‘I’ve been saying to the leadership of the developed world that they need to respond positively…to challenge us, to say ‘this is what you say but we want to see practical action from you consistent with what you are saying’’ (Mbeki, 2002c: 204). Yet, when Commonwealth leaders discussed Zimbabwe and demanded that Mbeki and other African leaders demonstrate ‘practical action…consistent with what (they had been) saying’ regarding democracy and human rights, Mbeki labelled them racists who were merely ‘inspired by notions of White supremacy’ and who felt uneasy at their ‘repugnant position imposed by inferior Blacks’ (Mbeki, 2002d). In recent statements, and as quoted previously, Nepad has been at pains to stress that ‘the main emphasis in the (APRM) process rests with what the country itself is prepared and able to produce’ (Nepad Secretariat, 2005c: 27), which makes one wonder about the point of the APRM, as it stands reduced to little more than a pan-African research initiative.

Concluding remarks

One of the most fundamental challenges facing the continent is the ability of governance and development initiatives such as Nepad to successfully operate in the context of neo-patrimonialism, Big Men politics, and a hostile world order. The magnitude of this challenge makes it difficult to be optimistic about Nepad’s chances, for, as Chabal (2002) notes, any cool evaluation of the political situation on the continent undermines the potency of the renewal project as a means towards better governance.

It should be clear that our argument is not that Africa’s regeneration is simply a matter of advancing ‘good leadership’ or ‘good government’ or an endorsement of a voluntarist approach to Africa’s economic development because one must also take into account, for
example, structural impediments to African trade and the nature of Africa’s relation with the international system. Nevertheless, it can be said that without the construction of transparent and accountable government, Nepad’s ambitious economic plans, whatever their own manifest weaknesses and the wider structural impediments of the global economy (Bond, 2002; Taylor and Nel, 2002) are profoundly compromised. Indeed, the failure to act thus far in any meaningful way regarding governance and human rights as situations have presented themselves indicates that Nepad will have a rather muted impact. After all, the leaders of Nepad did not need to wait for the APRM to be fully functional before talking out about misrule in places such as Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Malawi, Sudan, Gabon, etc. (Taylor, 2002). Whilst one is fully aware of the historical legacies that mean that pan-African elite solidarity reigns, the question that needs to be asked is, for how long will this solidarity trump all else? And can it ever be used to justify inaction and nod-and-wink postures towards malevolent dictators? As Robert Rotberg notes:

African leaders are expected to demonstrate that they are ‘fully aware of the responsibilities and obligations to their peoples, and are genuinely prepared to engage and relate to the rest of the world on the basis of integrity and world respect’. This is a tall order. Neither Presidents Mbeki nor Obasanjo have employed peer pressure to halt the growing trend toward dictatorship in today’s Africa. Neither leader has publicly condemned electoral theft in Zimbabwe or attempts to breach the constitutions of Malawi, Namibia, or Zambia. Neither they nor many of their contemporaries have criticised denials of media freedom in neighboring countries, corruption, misappropriation or squandering of foreign assistance funds, or said much about the leadership causes of the famine now engulfing 13 million people in southern Africa (quoted in Christian Science Monitor (Boston), June 19, 2002).

According to Kanbur there is a ‘growing need in this globalising world to have a strong and credible Africa-wide voice, a voice that draws its legitimacy and authority from being rooted in democratic principles. There are two directions in which this voice needs to speak—internally, to African nations, and externally, to the court of world opinion. Internally, there is a need to show the way, and to persuade and if necessary to sanction, African nations who stray from democracy and basic human rights, and this can best be done by other African nations, through an organisation that is founded on these principles’ (Kanbur, 2003).

Unfortunately, Nepad is unlikely to match the heady expectations that greeted its launch and the APRM certainly will not. This is because to do so involves trying to enlist the support of elites who are expected to undermine their own positions and the positions of their clients, which, as the Rwandan journalist Shyaka Kanuwa notes, ‘brings us to the question, or rather the dilemma: how can rulers who are themselves clearly the problem be part of the solution?...These men are not troubled by niceties such as respect for human rights, concern for their populations’ material welfare or consensual decision-making. Most preside over decaying military or police states. They benefit from a hybrid of African patronage and farcical parliamentary, judicial and other institutional procedures that contrive invariably to act in the big man’s interests’ (quoted in Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg) July 12, 2002).

In addition, to do so would call into question the manner by which Africa interacts with the global economy (Bond, 2002). It is naïve to expect elites, whose very modus operandi is based on privatised patronage (in Western eyes, malgovernance) and the obstruction and erosion of democracy, to begin implementing and operating by the rubric of ‘good governance’. To do so would not only damage their own holds on power but also reduce their ability to maintain lucrative linkages with the external world. That is why we have
little confidence that the commitments to democracy and good government by members of the HSIC—which includes such models as Omar Bongo of Gabon, Paul Biya of Cameroon or Denis Sassou-Nguesso of Congo-Brazzaville goes beyond anything more than rhetoric, or that the involvement of the likes of Adedeji or Njeuma on the Eminent Persons panel amounts to anything. When questioned about this contradiction between rhetoric and reality, former chairman of Nepad’s steering committee, Wiseman Nkuhlu, was apparently ‘not bothered by the criticism’ as he had ‘a simple answer for the critics’. This answer was that ‘all leaders’ involved in Nepad ‘were democratically elected. So they represented ruling parties from their own countries’ (quoted in Mkhondo, 2004: 19). We would beg to differ.

This skepticism regarding the democratic credentials of a good number of Nepad’s signatories is shared by others, including the policy-making community. Stephen Morrison, a former United States State Department adviser and currently director of the African program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies has commented:

No one is going to stand up and say Nepad is a bad thing. But people are talking about it less and less because they don’t believe it will amount to much. The US administration agrees in principle with Nepad’s goals. But the inaction over Zimbabwe’s persistent breaches of human rights, the inclusion of some very strange people on the Nepad steering committee and Mbeki’s statement that political criteria are not part of the peer review system give rise to skepticism. The interest level in Nepad wanes as its credibility drops (Mail and Guardian (Johannesburg), November 8, 2002).

Thus it remains that in Africa, a small elite group places self-preservation over and above policies that would benefit the majority of the population. What Schraeder wrote more than a decade ago still holds true today: ‘In case after case, ruling elites continue to impede the process of sharing political and economic power more broadly’ (Schraeder, 1994: 85). This has not deterred the designers of Nepad from sidelining civil society and making African elites responsible for both driving and refereeing the quest for better governance and deeper democracy. On a deeper level, our skepticism about the feasibility of the APRM is founded on the view that it will not be able to subjugate the powerful patrimonial tendencies that pervade Africa’s neopatrimonial polities. The most likely outcome will see Nepad and the APRM absorbed and disarmed by the formal layer of Africa’s hybrid governance systems, rather than defeating or even challenging the informal clientelistic networks where, away from outside scrutiny, real power will continue to be exercised. Consequently, there is a real likelihood that Nepad and the APRM’s numerous declarations, memorandums, meetings, action plans, workshops and reports will act to dress participating governments with a cloak of respectability and seriousness that they do not deserve.

References


Schraeder, P., 1994, ‘Elites as Facilitators or Impediments to Political Development? Some
Chapter 15
Nepad, the APRM and SA subimperialism: Civil society cooption or resistance?

By Patrick Bond

Should civil society groups be skeptical about participation in exercises such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) or any other aspect of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (Nepad)? Do the APRM and Nepad provide Pretoria a kind of legitimacy for facilitating neoliberalism in Africa? Is there an alternative approach to building regional and international civil society solidarity against neoliberalism and militarism?

The answer is yes to each. Other commentators can document how the 2006 APRM process failed to adequately reflect the turmoil and social unrest underway in contemporary South Africa, as illustrated for example by police reports of an average 16 protests each day in 2005. As for the APRM, Pretoria’s ‘sanitised, self-assessment report’, in the words of the Sunday Times (15 July 2006), removed ‘specific references to past scandals’ and offered ‘no fundamentally original proposals on how to give the people a better voice.’ As Paul Graham from the Institute for Democracy in SA put it, the APRM document released in mid-2006 ‘shows substantial alteration from the report discussed in Kliptown (in front of 1700 delegates) and, as a result, a substantial amount of the texture of the debates has been lost.’ Whether participation in such efforts is worth the time and effort when so many other tasks are undone is a matter of debate.

What should and could have been in a South African APRM report need not detain us, for words are merely words. More importantly, focusing instead on the structural functions of Nepad on the one hand, and African anti-neoliberal activism on the other, this article considers several troubling, contradictory processes that have gathered pace over the past couple of years, which I have documented at some length elsewhere (Bond 2005a, Bond 2005b, Bond 2006a, Bond 2006b).

In short, the South African government’s global reform proposals have been utterly, thoroughly frustrated, especially in the cases of the UN, World Bank, IMF and WTO where Pretoria politicians have begun retreating noticeably from the scene. It makes little sense for civil society to promote reforms along these lines when it is evident that President Thabo Mbeki has failed in every initiative against what he terms ‘global apartheid’. Simultaneously, Pretoria’s own subimperial project has also begun to falter, as peace deals in Africa proved unreliable, as embarrassing dictators solidified power and as Johannesburg capital ran out of room to accumulate.

Nepad and the APRM are whitewashing mechanisms – like the old apartheid-era ‘Sullivan Principles’ – to lend dignity to an unjust project of regional domination. The choice to participate in global apartheid’s Nepad, APRM and similar gambits is not unlike an earlier choice – whether to participate in tricameral parliaments and Black Local Authorities, which did little more than prop up the apartheid system by giving it legitimacy and a longer lease on life.

A new Bantusan elite

To be sure, successful service as homeland rulers in the context of global apartheid requires the appearance of occasional dissent. Prior to 1994, Bantustan elites like Buthelezi, Matanzima, Mangope and the like clustered periodically about apartheid – while they benefited from a high
standing in that very system. But their essential function was unmistakable: to persistently legitimise a non-existent reform process, and make life very unpleasant for more serious anti-apartheid radicals.

Likewise today, Pretoria offers periodic anti-imperialist rhetoric. Greg Mills, then director of the SA Institute of International Affairs, described this as superficial: ‘I think there was a bluster by the South African government, or those associated near or around it, prior to the American invasion of Iraq in March last year (2003), but that was toned down fairly quickly by the South African government and most notably, president Mbeki. Really, there has not been much in the way of condemnation of the American position since March last year’ (cited in Williams 2004).

Indeed in May 2004, Nelson Mandela retracted his January 2003 attack on the warmonger George W. Bush, ‘because the United States can play a very important role in promoting peace in the world, and this is the role which we would like the United States to play.’ (Mail & Guardian, 24 May 2004.)

Just over a year later, Mbeki visited Bush and told him, ‘I appreciate it very much the commitment you have demonstrated now for some years with regard to helping us to meet our own domestic South African challenges, as well as the challenges on the African continent.’ At that point, US majority public opinion had shifted to oppose the presence of Washington’s troops in Iraq. With memories of the defeated US mission in Somalia, Mbeki assisted Bush enormously by offering African – not US – soldiers to police the continent: ‘We’ve got the people to do this - military, police, other - so long as we get this necessary logistical support. I think that’s what’s critically important’ (Williams 2004). Bush agreed wholeheartedly, although opening bases in crucial African sites will be one exception.

US military aid was a sensitive issue, because to get the ‘critically important’ logistical support, Bush had demanded a particularly onerous quid pro quo: denuding the International Criminal Court. In 2003, South Africa was one of the countries which had supposedly lost a few million dollars worth of US military aid, because it agreed to cooperate in future with the Court against US citizens – e.g. the Pentagon’s and State Department’s war criminals - if and when they are brought to trial. In 2005, however, it was revealed that instead of Pretoria being blacklisted for US military aid, Washington ‘had simply re-routed military funding for South Africa through its European Command in Stuttgart’ so that two additional battalions could be made available for African missions. That, in turn, would relieve Washington’s own imperial burden for policing Africa (Schmidt 2004).

In exchange, Mbeki desired a seat on the UN Security Council. During the most serious campaign, in August 2005, he did not get his way in part because of opposition to his Bantustan-leader role by the African Union (AU), which rejected a compromise entailing two African seats without veto rights, as well as seats for Germany, Japan, India and Brazil. In effect, Mbeki offered the AU a global neo-apartheid solution by which the new members would sit at the table but have infinitely less power than the five standing permanent members, who can exercise a veto on Security Council matters. It was not unlike the apartheid reform strategy proposed by PW Botha in 1983 (and rejected by the ANC, United Democratic Front and other activists) to dilute the power of the majority with differential citizenship rights.

To have put any faith in the UN as a site of progressive advocacy – or even as friction to US power – was by that point delusional in any case. A formidable bloc of neoconservative and neoliberal men (and occasional women) had taken the helm of key multilateral institutions. The European Union’s choice of the Spanish neoconservative Rodrigo Rato as International Monetary Fund managing director in mid-2004 was followed in January 2005 by the new head of UNICEF, Bush’s agriculture minister Ann Veneman (even though the USA and Somalia are the only two out of 191 countries which refused to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). A month later, for another key UN post, the
outgoing neoliberal head of the World Trade Organisation, Supachai Panitchpakdi from Thailand (who served US and EU interests from 2003-05), was chosen to lead the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

In Bush’s biggest coup, Paul Wolfowitz – a veritable war criminal – was chosen to head the World Bank in March 2005, in the wake of a consultative phone call from Bush to Mbeki and a few other national rulers. By the time of the April 2005 meetings, World Bank development committee chair (and SA finance minister) Trevor Manuel was reduced to an endorsement of the new leaders: ‘… both Rodrigo here and Paul Wolfowitz are wonderful individuals, perfectly capable’ (World Bank 2005). The European Union’s hardline trade negotiator Pascal Lamy won the directorship of the World Trade Organisation a few weeks after that. Finally, to ensure that Washington’s directives to Kofi Annan continued to be as explicit as possible, Bush appointed John Bolton as US Ambassador to the UN. But Washington also counted on its friends in Pretoria for assistance.

The subimperial posture

What are US planners up to in Africa? The period during the 1990s after the failed Somali intervention, when Washington’s armchair warriors let Africa slide out of view, may have come to an end with September 11. One of the most acute critics of US Africa policy, Bill Martin (2004), argues that ‘The discourse of internal and international terrorism is thus not simply substituting for the ideology of the Cold War, but is forging new military and ideological networks as capable of repressing internal dissent as pursuing ‘foreign’ terrorists.’

The US has developed an Africa Contingency Operations and Assistance Programme to strengthen favoured militaries. Army General Charles Wald, who controls the Africa Programme of the European Command, told the BBC in early 2004 that he aims to have five brigades with 15,000 men working in cooperation with regional partners including South Africa (Plaut 2004).

Africa remains an important site in Washington’s campaigns against militant Islamic networks, especially in Algeria and Nigeria in the northwest, Tanzania and Kenya in the east, and South Africa. Control of African immigration to the US and Europe is crucial, in part through the expansion of US-style incarceration via private sector firms like Wackenhut, which has invested in South African privatised prison management, along with the notorious Lindela extradition camp for ‘illegal immigrants’. The development of a highly racialized global detention and identification system is proceeding apace.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon’s military relations with Pretoria were fully ‘normalised’ by July 2004, in the words of SA deputy minister Aziz Pahad. In partnership with General Dynamics Land Systems, State-owned Denel immediately began marketing 105 mm artillery alongside a turret and light armoured vehicle hull, in support of innovative Stryker Brigade Combat Teams (‘a 3500-personnel formation that puts infantry, armour and artillery in different versions of the same 8x8 light armoured vehicle’). Given Pretoria’s 1998 decision to invest $6 billion in mainly offensive weaponry such as fighter jets and submarines, there are growing fears that peacekeeping is a cover for a more expansive geopolitical agenda, and that Mbeki is tacitly permitting a far stronger US role in Africa - from the oil rich Gulf of Guinea and Horn of Africa, to training bases in the South and North - than is necessary (Black 2004).

To be sure, South Africa can claim one intervention worthy of its human rights rhetoric: leadership of the 1997 movement to ban landmines (and hence a major mine-clearing role for South African businesses which helped lay the mines in the first place). But the new government in Pretoria showed its more durable orientation by recognising the Myanmar military junta as a legitimate government in 1994; gave the country’s highest official award to
Indonesian dictator Suharto three months before his 1998 demise (in the process extracting $25 million in donations for the ANC); sold arms to countries which practiced mass violence, such as Algeria, Colombia, Peru and Turkey; and closer to home nurtured repressive regimes in Zimbabwe and Swaziland.

On the surface, Pretoria’s senior roles in the mediation of conflicts in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during 2003 appeared positive. However, closer to the ground, the agreements more closely resemble the style of elite deals which lock in place ‘low-intensity democracy’ and neoliberal economic regimes. Moreover, because some of the belligerent forces were explicitly left out, the subsequent weeks and months after declarations of peace witnessed periodic massacres of civilians in both countries and a near-coup in the DRC. The DRC was especially victimised by the South African government when it came to repaying Mobuto’s vast foreign debt, a point returned to below.

**Pretoria’s world leadership?**

Once the South African government showed its willingness to put self-interest above principles, the international political power centres invested increasing trust in Mandela, Mbeki, Manuel and Erwin, giving them insider access to many international elite fora. As global-establishment institutions came under attack, they sometimes attempted to reinvent themselves with a dose of New South African legitimacy; witness Mandela’s 1998 caressing of the IMF during the East Asian crisis, and of Clinton during the Lewinsky sex scandal. Indeed, Pretoria’s lead politicians were allowed, during the late 1990s, to preside over the UN Security Council, the board of governors of the IMF and Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Commonwealth, the World Commission on Dams and many other important global and continential bodies. Simultaneously taking Third World leadership, Pretoria also headed the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organisation of African Unity and the Southern African Development Community.

But this was just the warm up period. During a frenetic four years beginning in September 2001, Mbeki and his colleagues hosted, led, or played instrumental roles at the following major international events: the World Conference Against Racism in Durban (September 2001); the launch of Nepad in Abuja, Nigeria (October 2001); the Doha, Qatar ministerial summit of the World Trade Organisation (November 2001); the UN’s Financing for Development conference in Monterrey, Mexico (March 2002); G8 summits in Kananaskis, Canada (June 2002), Evian, France (June 2003), Sea Island, Georgia (June 2004) and Gleneagles, Scotland (July 2005); the African Union launch in Durban (July 2002); the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg (August-September 2002); the Davos World Economic Forum (January 2003 and occasionally thereafter); George W. Bush’s first trip to Africa (July 2003); the Cancun WTO ministerial (September 2003); World Bank/IMF annual meetings in Dubai (September 2003) and Washington (September 2004 and 2005); the UN Millennium Development Summit (September 2005); and the Hong Kong WTO ministerial (December 2005).

In spite of increasing opportunities for participation in the corridors of power by NGOs, Virtually nothing was actually accomplished through the 2001-05 opportunities:

- at the UN racism conference, Mbeki colluded with the EU to reject the demand of NGOs and African leaders for slavery /colonialism/apartheid reparations;
- Nepad provided merely a homegrown version of the Washington Consensus;
- at Doha, trade minister Alec Erwin split the African delegation so as to prevent a repeat of the denial of consensus that had foiled the Seattle ministerial in December 1999;
• at Monterrey, Manuel was summit co-leader (with former IMF managing director Michel Camdessus and disgraced Mexican ex-president Ernesto Zedillo), and legitimised all ongoing IMF/Bank strategies;
• from Kananaskis, Mbeki departed with only an additional $1 billion commitment for Africa (aside from funds already pledged at Monterrey), and none of the subsequent G8 Summits – Evian, Sea Island and Gleneagles – represented genuine progress;
• the African Union supported both Nepad and the Zimbabwean regime of president Robert Mugabe, hence further delegitimising the self-defensive political project of Africa’s elite;
• at the Johannesburg WSSD, Mbeki undermined UN democratic procedure, facilitated the privatisation of nature, and did nothing to address the plight of the world’s poor majority;
• in Davos, global elites ignored Africa, in 2003 and subsequently;
• for hosting a leg of Bush’s Africa trip, Mbeki merely became the US ‘point man’ on Zimbabwe, and he avoided any conflict over Iraq’s recolonisation;
• in Cancun, the collapse of trade negotiations – again, catalysed by a walkout by Africans – left Erwin ‘disappointed’;
• at World Bank and IMF annual meetings from 2001-05, with Manuel leading the Development Committee, there was no Bretton Woods democratisation, new debt relief or Post-Washington policy reform; and
• the UN Millennium Review Summit provided Mbeki (2005) grounds for heart-break, leaving him to bemoan, ‘We should not be surprised when these billions do not acclaim us as heroes and heroines.’

Further failures were evident in 2006 during the Doha round negotiations which collapsed in July (to the applause of progressives in the Global South), and with respect to aid and debt promise-keeping by the G8 a year after their Gleneagles Summit. As a result of the void of genuine word-scale reform possibilities, attention has shifted to the continental scale, where a few countries – including South Africa – have grudgingly undergone a sharply delimited peer review. It is here that the West’s ongoing conquest of Africa – in political, military and ideological terms – requires not only the reproduction of neoliberalism but also good governance and anti-corruption gimmicks under the guise of Nepad.

Staking claims on Africa

By early 2001, in Davos, Mbeki made clear whose interests Nepad would serve: ‘It is significant that in a sense the first formal briefing on the progress in developing this programme is taking place at the World Economic Forum meeting. The success of its implementation would require the buy in from members of this exciting and vibrant forum!’ International capital would benefit from large infrastructure construction opportunities on the public-private partnership model, privatised state services, ongoing structural adjustment, intensified rule of international property law and various of Nepad’s sectoral plans, all coordinated from a South African office staffed with neoliberals and open to economic and geopolitical gatekeeping (Adesina 2002, Bond 2005b, Nabudere 2002, Olukoshi 2002). The actual Nepad document was publicly launched in Abuja, Nigeria, by African heads of state on October 23, 2001. Within 18 months, Nepad was described as ‘philosophically spot-on’ by the White House’s main Africa official (Gopinath 2003).

Who benefits most from Nepad? Johannesburg-based corporations were lining up as ‘new imperialists’, a problem of ‘great concern’ to Pretoria’s then public enterprises minister Jeff Radebe in early 2004: ‘There are strong perceptions that many South African companies working elsewhere in Africa come across as arrogant, disrespectful, aloof and careless in
their attitude towards local business communities, work seekers and even governments’ (SAPA 2004).

Given this background, the African left has expressed deep scepticism over Nepad’s main strategies. A succinct critique emerged from a conference of the Council for Development and Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria 2002) and Third World Network-Africa in April 2002. According to the meeting’s resolution:

The most fundamental flaws of Nepad, which reproduce the central elements of the World Bank’s Can Africa Claim the Twenty-first Century? and the UN Economic Commission on Africa’s Compact for African Recovery, include:

(a) the neoliberal economic policy framework at the heart of the plan, and which repeats the structural adjustment policy packages of the preceding two decades and overlooks the disastrous effects of those policies;
(b) the fact that in spite of its proclaimed recognition of the central role of the African people to the plan, the African people have not played any part in the conception, design and formulation of the Nepad;
(c) notwithstanding its stated concerns for social and gender equity, it adopts the social and economic measures that have contributed to the marginalisation of women;
(d) that in spite of claims of African origins, its main targets are foreign donors, particularly in the G8;
(e) its vision of democracy is defined by the needs of creating a functional market;
(f) it under-emphasises the external conditions fundamental to Africa’s developmental crisis, and thereby does not promote any meaningful measure to manage and restrict the effects of this environment on Africa development efforts. On the contrary, the engagement that is seeks with institutions and processes like the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, the United States Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, the Cotonou Agreement, will further lock Africa’s economies disadvantageously into this environment;
(g) the means for mobilisation of resources will further the disintegration of African economies that we have witnessed at the hands of structural adjustment and WTO rules.

African critiques of neoliberalism are not limited to globalisation, ‘Washington Consensus’ macroeconomic policies, debt peonage and unfair terms of trade. (The Africa Trade Network, the Gender and Trade Network and Jubilee Africa’s affiliates are regular intellectual critics – and active protesters – against macroeconomic neoliberalism at the sites of global-scale negotiations and African elite summits.) In addition to Nepad and the APRM, several other processes aimed at African civil society cooption - Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, the Millennium Development Goals and the north-driven Make Poverty History campaign (run in part from Gordon Brown’s office) - are all examples of accepting the broad parameters of neoliberalism and working within the box; all are considered failures even on their own limited terms.

In addition to macro-scale neoliberalism, the micro-developmental and ecological damage done through market-centred policies is now also widely recognised. Some of the most notable recent upsurges of protest have been in areas of localised environmental justice, exemplified by 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai’s struggle, two decades ago, to build Kenya’s Greenbelt Movement against the interests of the corrupt national state and big capital. More recently, women in the oil rich Nigerian Delta regularly conducted sit-ins at the local offices of multinationals. Oil workers have vigorously protested at several Delta
platforms over not only wages but also broader community eco-social demands, even taking corporate managers hostage for a time.

In Botswana, indigenous-rights campaigners lobby the DeBeers diamond corporation, the World Bank and the Botswana government against the displacement of Basarwa/San Bushmen from the central Kalahari. According to the Guardian, the San targeted for relocation away from diamond exploration areas ‘had their water supplies cut off before being dumped in bleak settlements with derisory compensation.’ Solidarity was sufficiently powerful that by August 2002, the Botswana Gazette described the government as a ‘disease-ridden international polecat’. In the same spirit, activists resist large dams that threaten mass displacement in Namibia (Epupa), Lesotho (Highlands Water Project), Uganda (Bujagali) and Mozambique (Mphanda Nkuwa), as well as the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline. Support from northern environmentalists has been crucial.

Efforts to bridge global-local and Northern-African divides are being advanced in many other areas, including (but not limited to) Treatment Action advocates breaking the hold of pharmaceutical corporations on monopoly antiretroviral patents; activists fighting Monsanto’s GM drive from the US to South Africa to several African countries; blood-diamonds victims from Sierra Leone and Angola generating a partially-successful global deal at Kimberley; a growing network questioning Liberia’s long exploitation by Firestone Rubber; Oil Watch linkages of Nigerian Delta and many other Gulf of Guinea communities; and Ghanaian, South African and Dutch activists opposing water privatisation.

Solidarity has also been a feature of reparations campaigners, led by South Africa’s Jubilee and Khulumani, who reacted to 2004 court defeats with pledges to campaign yet harder. They, in turn, were inspired by the work of Nigerian church and debt activists who several years ago focused attention on the role of British and Swiss banks in Sani Abacha’s 1990s looting spree, and won significant concessions that will deter illicit capital flight (still amongst Africa’s most debilitating economic problems).

There are ongoing civil society campaigns underway elsewhere in Africa against environmental racism, toxic dumping, asbestos damage, incinerators, biopiracy, genetically modified food, carbon trading and air pollution. Movements against privatisation of Africa’s basic services - mainly water and electricity, but also municipal waste, health and education - began in Accra and Johannesburg in 2000 and quickly attracted global solidarity. A PanAfrican Treatment network of AIDS activists is taking forward the work of South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign, to challenge unfair monopoly patents on life-saving medicines.

Can such efforts become more coherently aligned, and will they persuade those in the traditional lineage to take up more serious social-change activism, in contrast to dead-end APRM consultations? If so, it is possible that the African Social Forum (ASF) will be the source of such coordination and consensus-building. The ASF’s (2002) original Bamako Declaration insisted that ‘the values, practices, structures and institutions of the currently dominant neoliberal order are inimical to and incompatible with the realisation of Africa’s dignity, values and aspirations.’ Of particular concern was Nepad:

The Forum rejected neoliberal globalisation and further integration of Africa into an unjust system as a basis for its growth and development. In this context, there was a strong consensus that initiatives such as Nepad that are inspired by the IMF-WB strategies of Structural Adjustment Programs, trade liberalisation that continues to subject Africa to an unequal exchange, and strictures on governance borrowed from the practices of Western countries, are not rooted in the culture and history of the peoples of Africa.

What merit, then, is APRM participation, Nepad legitimation and the generation of
confusion amongst civil society constituents, on behalf of Johannesburg capital, Pretoria’s subimperial agenda, and the US State Department and Pentagon?

References


Part Four
South Africa and the World Social Forum:
Towards the globalisation of popular solidarity
Chapter 16

Transnational topographies of power: Beyond ‘the State’ and ‘Civil Society’

By James Ferguson

If there is to be an anthropology of ‘globalisation’, it is evident that it will require analytical tools, concepts that will enable critical analysis and open new understandings. As is so often the case, however, in the anthropological study of modernity, the analytical tools closest to hand are themselves part of the social and cultural reality we seek to grasp. There can be no neat separation of analytic categories from ‘folk’ categories when the folk categories in question include such key items of the social scientific lexicon as ‘culture’, ‘transnational’, ‘diversity’, ‘flows’, ‘hybridity’, ‘network’, and so on. Such a situation calls for a heightened level of reflexive scrutiny of our categories of analysis, if we are to gain critical purchase on the emerging ideologies and worldviews of our era, rather than simply (re)producing them.

This is an issue that arises immediately when one looks at the recent literature on ‘democratisation’ in Africa. Here, the idea of ‘civil society’ has emerged as a keyword, ubiquitous in both scholarly analyses of ‘democratisation’ and the ‘real-world’ practices they seek to describe and explain. The fad for ‘civil society’ has been perhaps most in evidence among political scientists, who have been understandably eager to leave behind their cold-war paradigms for livelier topics such as democratisation, social movements, and what they call ‘state/society relations’. But anthropologists, too, have been bitten by the bug, finding in ‘civil society’ a new and improved incarnation of their old disciplinary trademark, ‘the local.’ Rising numbers of anthropology dissertation students, it seems, are nowadays heading out to ‘the field’ in search not of an intriguing culture or a promising village, but an interesting NGO. But if such anthropological engagements are to be fruitful, it will be necessary to devote some critical scrutiny to the common-sense mapping of political and social space that the state/civil society opposition takes for granted. Beginning with the category ‘civil society’ itself, I will try to show how the state/civil society opposition forms part of an even more pervasive way of thinking about the analytic ‘levels’ of local, national, and global – a way of thinking that rests on what I call the vertical topography of power. I will argue that calling into question this vertical topography of power brings into view the transnational character of both ‘state’ and ‘civil society,’ and opens up new ways of thinking about both social movements and states.

I will not attempt a genealogy of the term, ‘civil society,’ but will only note a few aspects of the changes in its meaning. Its origins are customarily traced to 18th century liberal thought, and especially to Scottish Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Ferguson and, later, Adam Smith, in whose thought the term is associated both with the developing conceptualisation of society as a self-regulating mechanism, and with concepts of natural law. Better known to many is the Hegelian usage of the term to denote an intermediary domain between the universal ideal of the state and the concrete particularity of the family, a conception famously critiqued by Marx, and imaginatively reworked by Gramsci. Today, the term most often comes up in discussions of democracy, especially to refer to voluntary or so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which seek to influence, or claim space from, the state.

The term ‘civil society’ still had a rather antique cast to it when I first encountered it in graduate seminars on social theory. But since then, it has gotten a new lease on life, chiefly thanks to the dramatic recent political history of Eastern Europe (Keane 1988, Seligman...
1992). There, of course, communism had promised to lead to the gradual demise of the state. But instead, the state seemed to have swallowed up everything in its path, leaving behind no social force - neither private businesses, nor church, nor political party - capable of checking its monstrous powers. It was not the state, it seemed, but civil society that had ‘withered away.’ In this historically specific context, the old term had a remarkable resonance, and it licensed otherwise unlikely coalitions between actors (from dissident writers to the Catholic Church) who had in common only that they demanded some space, autonomy, and freedom from the totalitarian state.

Coming out of this rather peculiar and particular history, the term ‘civil society’ came for many be almost interchangeable with the concept of democracy itself - nearly reversing the terms of Marx’s famous critique, which had revealed the imaginary freedoms of capitalism’s democratic political realm as an illusion, to be contrasted to the real unfreedom of ‘civil society,’ conceived as the domain of alienation, economic domination, and the slavery of the workplace. But this new conception (of ‘civil society’ as the road to democracy) not only met the political needs of the Eastern European struggle against communist statism, it also found a ready export market - both in the First World (where it was appropriated by conservative Reagan/Thatcher projects for ‘rolling back the state’) and in the Third World (where it seemed to provide leverage both for battling dictatorships and for grounding a post-socialist mass democratic politics). With little regard for historical context or critical genealogy, and in the space of only a few years, ‘civil society’ has thus been universalised. It has been appropriated, for different reasons (if equally uncritically), by both the right and the left. Indeed, it has become one of those things (like development, education, or the environment) that no reasonable person can be against. The only question to be asked of civil society today seems to be: how can we get more of it?

I will argue that the current (often ahistorical and uncritical) use of the concept of ‘civil society’ in the study of African politics obscures more than it reveals, and, indeed, that it often serves to help legitimate a profoundly anti-democratic transnational politics. One of my aims in this essay, then, is to point out the analytic limitations of the state/civil society opposition, and to trace its anti-democratic political and ideological uses.

But I also have a second, and less reactive, aim in exploring the specifically African career of the ‘civil society’ concept. For in the course of criticising the state vs. civil society formula, I hope to arrive at some suggestions about other ways of thinking about contemporary politics in Africa and elsewhere. In particular, I will argue that the ‘state’/‘civil society’ opposition brings along with it a whole topography of power, revealed perhaps most economically in Hegel’s famous conception of ‘civil society’ as, in Mamdani’s phrase, ‘sandwiched between the patriarchal family and the universal state’ (Mamdani 1996:14; cf Gibbon 1993). This conception rests on an imaginary space, with the state up high, the family low, on the ground, and a range of other institutions in between. In what sense is the state ‘above’ society and the family ‘below’ it? Many different meanings characteristically get blurred together in this vertical image. Is it a matter of scale? Abstraction? Generality? Social hierarchy? Distance from nature? The confusion here is a productive one, in the Foucauldian sense, constructing a common-sense state that simply is ‘up there’ somewhere, operating at a ‘higher level’. This common-sense perception has been a crucial part of the way that nation-states have sought (often very successfully) to secure their legitimacy through what Akhil Gupta and I (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) have termed claims of vertical encompassment – claims that naturalise the authority of the state over ‘the local’ by merging three analytically distinct ideas - 1) superior spatial scope; 2) supremacy in a hierarchy of power; and 3) superior generality of interest, knowledge, and moral purpose - into a single figure: the ‘up there’ state that encompasses the local and exists on a ‘higher
level.¹

Such an image, of course, underlies the familiar public-private split, and the idea (of which Habermas makes much) of a ‘public sphere’ that mediates between state and citizen. By imagining the family as a natural ground or base of society, as feminists have pointed out, it leaves the domestic out of the sphere of politics entirely. But this imagined topography also undergirds most of our images of political struggle, which we readily imagine as coming ‘from below’ (as we say), as ‘grounded’ in rooted and authentic ‘lives’, ‘experiences’, and ‘communities’ (cf. Malkki 1992). The state itself, meanwhile, can be imagined as reaching down into communities, intervening, in (as we say) a ‘top down’ manner, to manipulate or plan ‘society’. Civil society, in this vertical topography, may appear as the middle latitude, the zone of contact between the ‘up there’ state and the ‘on the ground’ people, snug in their communities. Whether this contact zone is conceived as the domain of pressure groups and pluralist politics (as in liberal political theory) or of class struggle in a war of position (as in Gramscian Marxism), this imaginary topography of power has been an enormously consequential one.

What would it mean to rethink this? What if we question the self-evident ‘verticality’ of the relation of state to society, displace the primacy of the nation-state frame of analysis, and re-arrange the imaginary space within which civil society can be so automatically ‘interposed between’ higher and lower levels? As we will see, such a move entails rethinking ‘the state’ and looking at transnational apparatuses of governmentality which I will suggest are of special significance in many parts of contemporary Africa, where states are, in significant ways, no longer able to exercise the range of powers we usually associate with a sovereign nation-state, or even (in a few cases) to function at all as states in any conventional sense of the term. But it also, and at the same time, entails rethinking received ideas of ‘community’, ‘grassroots’ and ‘the local’, laden as they are with nostalgia and the aura of a ‘grounded’ authenticity. Using the politics of structural adjustment in Zambia and the South African civic movement as examples, I will try to show that both the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom’ of the vertical picture today operate within a profoundly transnationalised global context that makes the constructed and fictive nature of the vertical topography of power increasingly visible, and opens up new possibilities for both research and political practice. First, however, I wish to continue the interrogation of the contemporary conceptualisation of the problem of ‘state / civil society relations’ by showing how much it shares, at the level of the topographic imagination, with the older ‘nation-building’ paradigm which it has largely replaced.

I will begin by considering two views of African politics which, sometimes in explicit opposition, often in implicit and confused combination, have dominated the intellectual scene in recent decades. The older paradigm sees nation-building as the central political process in post-colonial Africa, with a modernising state in conflict with primordial ethnic loyalties. The newer view recommends the roll-back of an overgrown and suffocating state, and celebrates the resurgence of ‘civil society’, often putatively linked to a process of ‘democratisation’. In deliberately presenting a highly schematic and simplified account of their distinctive features, my purpose is to reveal an underlying set of assumptions that they share.

‘Nation-building’

¹ My analysis here of spatial images of the state should be compared with Hansen and Stepputat’s stimulating volume (2001) on ways of imagining modern postcolonial states (which I encountered only after this article, in its original form, had appeared), especially their illuminating discussion of ‘languages of stateness’ (2001:5-10) and the chapters by Sarah Radcliffe and David Nugent. Compare also the related analysis presented in Ferguson and Gupta 2002.
The key premise of the ‘nation-building’ approach to African politics is the existence of two different levels of political integration, and a necessary and historic movement from one to the other. The first such level, logically and historically prior, is the local or sub-national; this is the level of primordial social and political attachments, left over from the pre-modern past. Originally referred to by such labels as ‘tribal organisation’ or ‘traditional African society’, these supposed ‘givens’ of African political life were thought to include structures of kinship, community, and (in some formulations) ethnicity. Later, Goran Hyden would summarise such local ‘primordial affiliations’ under the singularly unfortunate rubric, ‘the economy of affection’ (Hyden 1983). Indeed, it should be noted that while such ‘primordialist’ approaches to sub-national identities may fairly be described as out of date, they are very far from having vanished from the contemporary scene.2

The second level of integration, in the ‘nation-building’ scheme, is, of course, the national. Emergent, new, modern, nations were understood to be in the process of construction - stepping out, as it were, for the first time onto the stage of world history. With national structures of authority struggling to establish themselves in the face of ‘primordial’ commitments, ‘nation-building’ appeared both an urgent task and a historically inevitable process. Yet the generally hopeful tone of the work in this tradition is shadowed by the phantom that stalks ‘nation-building’ - the specter of pre-modern resurgences such as ‘tribalism’, or such manifestations of the lingering ‘economy of affection’ as nepotism, corruption, and other banes of ‘good government’. Failed nation-building, it follows, can only mean a resurgence of primordial affiliations (still the usual journalistic explanation for civil wars in Africa). State success, on the other hand, means the construction of new bases of authority resting on nation-state citizenship. Above the national level, finally, appears the international, understood largely as 1) a source of ‘aid’, a helping hand in nation-building; and 2) a utopian image of the union of nation-states, with the key symbol of the UN as the promise of the universality of the nation form (cf. Malkki 1994).

‘Development’, in such a view, is the natural reward for successful national integration, just as nation-building is the characteristic rhetoric of the developmental state. The strong, activist state thus naturally becomes the protagonist in the optimistic narratives of ‘national development’ that flourish within this paradigm. This view of the world is perhaps sufficiently familiar as to make it possible to move ahead without further elaboration.

‘State and society’

‘State and society’ - the ‘new paradigm’ in the study of African politics that emerged at the end of the 1980s to rival the old ‘nation-building’ approach3 - regards the state and its projects with new skepticism, and rediscovers ‘the local’ as the site of ‘civil society’, a vigorous, dynamic field of possibilities too long suffocated by the state. In place of a modernising national state bravely struggling against pre-modern ethnic fragmentation, the

---

2. Consider, for instance, that Hyden was able as recently as 1992 to speak (in a widely cited and influential article) of local social structures of kin and community as ‘ascriptive’, ‘part of the natural world over which human beings have limited control’. The term, ‘primordial’, Hyden acknowledges, may be problematic. Instead, therefore, he prefers the term ‘God-given’, ‘indicating that they have a character that does not lend itself to alteration by human beings at will.’ Such ‘god-given’ structures are opposed to state and civic structures that are, in contrast, ‘man-made’ (Hyden 1992:11). The failure to grasp what might be problematic about the term ‘primordial’ here could hardly be more complete, but such views continue to be common in Africanist political science.

image now is of a despotic and overbearing state which monopolises political and economic space, stifling both democracy and economic growth. Instead of the main protagonist of development, the state (now conceived as flabby, bureaucratic, and corrupt) begins to appear as the chief obstacle to it. What are called ‘governance’ reforms are needed to reduce the role of the state, and bring it into ‘balance’ with ‘civil society’. (See, e.g., Hyden and Bratton 1992, Carter Center 1990, World Bank 1989, 1992).

The local level, meanwhile, is no longer understood as necessarily backward, ethnic, or rural. New attention is paid to such non-‘primordial’ manifestations of the local as voluntary associations and ‘grassroots’ organisations through which Africans meet their own needs, and may even press their interests against the state. There is, in much of this newer research, an unmistakable tone of approval and even celebration - not of the nation-building state, but of a liberated and liberatory civil society. Society, left to its own devices, it seems, might make political and economic progress; the problem now is how to induce the state to get out of the way, and to make it more responsive to ‘civil society’s’ demands. Hence the connection, repeatedly asserted in the ‘governance’ literature, between democratisation (conceived as making space for ‘civil society’) and development (conceived as getting the state out of the way of a dynamic non-state sector). It is such a link, too, that accounts for the otherwise peculiar idea of a natural affinity between the draconian and decidedly unpopular measures of ‘structural adjustment’, on the one hand, and populist demands for ‘democratisation’ on the other (a point I will return to shortly).

The ‘new’ state-and-society approach is often posed as a simple opposition to the ‘old’ nation-building (or ‘statist’) model. But the two paradigms are not as different as might at first appear. In particular, the state and society paradigm uses the very same division of politics into analytic ‘levels’ as does the ‘nation-building’ one, altering only the valuation of their roles. The ‘national’ level is now called ‘the state’, the ‘local’ level ‘civil society’. But where the older view had a new, dynamic, progressive national level energising and overcoming an old, stagnant, reactionary local level, the new view reverses these values. Now the national level (the state) is corrupt, patrimonial, stagnant, out of date, and holding back needed change; while the local level (civil society) is understood as neither ethnic nor archaic, but as a dynamic, emerging, bustling assemblage of progressive civic organisations that could bring about democracy and development if only the state would get out of the way.

The international, too, appears in both paradigms, but with largely opposite functions. International agencies, especially financial ones, appear in the state-and-society view less as state benefactors and providers of ‘aid’ than as the policemen of states - regulating their functioning and rolling back their excesses through ‘structural adjustment’. If the nation-building view imagined the international in the form of an idealistic UN, the state and society paradigm pictures a no-nonsense IMF: stern, real-world bankers, speaking what I have called the language of economic correctness.

The implications for ‘development’ are clear, and again nearly the reverse of those of the nation-building approach. For the state and society paradigm sees development not as the project of a developmentalist state, but as a societal process that is held back by the stifling hold of the state; ‘structural adjustment’ is needed to liberate market forces to work their development magic. Where the first paradigm saw the development problem as too much society, not enough state, the second sees it as too much state, not enough society.

The two views, it should by now be clear, bear a remarkable resemblance to one another, even as they are manifestly opposed. Indeed, everything happens as if the second model were, as Lévi-Strauss might say, a very simple transformation of the first. Through a structural inversion more familiar, perhaps, to analysts of myth than of politics, we are left with two paradigms that are simultaneously completely opposed to one another, and almost
identical (Figure 1, below).

(Insert Figure 1 here)

The topography of ‘state and civil society’

It is obvious that there exists a range of phenomena in contemporary Africa that are not captured in the old nation-building optic that saw politics as a battle between a modernising state and primordial ethnic groups - hence the recourse to the idea of ‘civil society’ to encompass a disparate hodge-podge of social groups and institutions that have in common only that they exist in some way outside of or beyond the state. Indeed, while the term, ‘civil society’ is often not defined at all in contemporary Africanist literature, most authors seem to intend the classical Hegelian usage that, as I pointed out, imagines a middle zone of ‘society’ interposed between family and state. Others speak more specifically of civil society as a frontier of contact where a politically organised and self-conscious ‘society’ presses against, and sets the bounds of, ‘the state’.4

But while definitions of ‘civil society’ in this literature are usually broad and vague, in practice writers move quite quickly from definitional generalities to a much more specific vision that is restricted almost entirely to small, grassroots, voluntary organisations, leaving out of the picture some rather important and obvious phenomena. One is never sure: Is the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa part of this ‘civil society’? Is John Garang’s army in Sudan? Is Oxfam? What about ethnic movements that are not so much opposed to or prior to modern states, but (as so much recent scholarship shows) produced by them? Or Christian mission organisations, arguably more important today in Africa than ever, but strangely relegated to the colonial past in the imagination of much contemporary scholarship? All of these phenomena fit uncomfortably in the ‘state’ versus ‘civil society’ grid, and indeed cannot even be coherently labeled as ‘local’, ‘national’ or ‘international’ phenomena. Instead, each of these examples, like much else of interest in contemporary Africa, both embodies a significant local dynamic, and is indisputably a product and expression of powerful forces both national and global.

The state, meanwhile, when apprehended empirically and ethnographically, starts itself to look suspiciously like ‘civil society’. Sometimes, this is literally the case, such as when NGOs are actually run out of government offices as a sort of moonlighting venture (‘An NGO?’ a Zambian informant of mine once remarked, ‘That’s just a bureaucrat with his own letterhead.’) Perhaps more profoundly, as Timothy Mitchell has argued, the very conception of ‘state’ as a set of reified and disembodied structures is an effect of state practices themselves (Mitchell 1991). Instead, recent work on actually-existing state practices (e.g. Gupta 1995) suggests that states may be better viewed not in opposition to something called ‘society’, but as themselves composed of bundles of social practices, every bit as ‘local’ in their social situatedness and materiality as any other.

Such work suggests that to make progress here we will need to break away from the conventional division into ‘vertical’ analytic levels that the old ‘nation-building’ and the new ‘state and society’ paradigms share. In the process, we will manage to break out from the range of questions that such a division imposes (how do states rule, what relations exist - or ought to exist - between state and society, how can civil society obtain room to maneuver from the state, etc.), and open up for view some of the transnational relations that I will suggest are crucial for understanding both ends of the vertical polarity. Let us consider what

---

4. For a range of definitional strategies, see the essays in Harbeson, Rothchild, and Chazan (1994), as well as Bayart 1986. For an illuminating critical review of the uses of the ‘civil society’ concept in African Studies, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2000).
a focus on transnational contexts has to tell us, first about the putative ‘top’ of the vertical topography (‘the state’) and then about the supposed ‘bottom’ (‘grassroots’ civic organisations).

‘The top’

If, as neo-liberal theories of state and society suggest, domination is rooted in state power, then rolling back the power of the state naturally leads to greater freedom, and ultimately to ‘democratisation’. But the argument is revealed to be fallacious if one observes that, particularly in Africa, domination has long been exercised by entities other than the state. Zambia, let us remember, was originally colonised (just a little over a hundred years ago) not by any government, but by the British South Africa Company, a private multi-national corporation directed by Cecil Rhodes. Equipped with its own army, and acting under the terms of a British ‘concession’, it was this private corporation that conquered and ‘pacified’ the territory, and set up the system of private ownership and race privilege that became the colonial system.

Today, Zambia (like most other African nations) continues to be ruled, in significant part, by transnational organisations that are not in themselves governments, but work together with powerful First World states within a global system of nation-states that Frederick Cooper has characterised as ‘internationalised imperialism’.5

Perhaps most familiarly, international agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, together with allied banks and First World governments, today often directly impose policies upon African states. The name for this process in recent years has been ‘structural adjustment’, and it has been made possible by both the general fiscal weakness of African states and the more specific squeeze created by the debt crisis. The new assertiveness of the IMF has been, with some justification, likened to a process of ‘re-colonisation’, implying a serious erosion of the sovereignty of African states (e.g., Saul 1993). It should be noted that direct impositions of policy by banks and international agencies have involved not only such broad, macro-economic interventions as setting currency exchange rates, but also fairly detailed requirements for curtailing social spending, restructuring state bureaucracies, and so on. Rather significant and specific aspects of state policy, in other words, are, for many African countries, being directly formulated in places like New York and Washington.

Such ‘governance’ of African economies from afar represents, as critics have not failed to point out, a kind of transfer of sovereignty away from African states and into the hands of the IMF. Yet since it is African governments that remain nominally in charge, it is easy to see that they are the first to receive the blame when ‘structural adjustment’ policies begin to bite. At that point, democratic elections (another ‘adjustment’ being pressed by international ‘donors’) provide a means whereby one government can be replaced by another. But since the successor government will be locked in the same financial vice-grip as its predecessor, actual policies are unlikely to change. (Indeed, the government that tries can be swiftly brought to its knees by the IMF and its associated capital cartel, as the Zambian case illustrates vividly). In this way, policies that are in fact made and imposed by wholly unelected and unaccountable international bankers may be presented as democratically chosen by popular assent. Thus does ‘democratisation’ ironically serve to simulate popular legitimacy for policies that are in fact made in a way that is less democratic than ever.

5. I borrow this evocative term from remarks made by Cooper at a workshop on ‘Historicising Development’ at Emory University in 1993. It should be noted, however, that I am here connecting the term to larger claims about transnational governmentality that I do not believe Cooper intended to make in his own use of the term.
‘The bottom’

Civil society often appears in African Studies today as a bustle of grassroots, democratic local organisations. What this ignores is, of course, as Jane Guyer has put it ‘the obvious: that civil society is (largely) made up of international organisations’ (Guyer 1994:223). For, indeed, the local voluntary organisations in Africa, so beloved of ‘civil society’ theorists, very often, upon inspection, turn out to be integrally linked with national and transnational-level entities (Simone and Pieterse 1993). One might think, for instance, of the myriad South African ‘community organisations’ that are bankrolled by USAID or European church groups (Mindry 1998); or of the profusion of ‘local’ Christian development NGO’s in Zimbabwe, which may be conceived equally well as the most local, ‘grassroots’ expressions of civil society, or as parts of the vast international bureaucratic organisations that organise and sustain them (Bornstein 2003). When such organisations begin to take over the most basic functions and powers of the state, as they very significantly did, for instance, in Mozambique (Hanlon 1991), it becomes only too clear that ‘NGO’s’ are not as ‘NG’ as they might wish us to believe. Indeed, the World Bank baldly refers to what they call BONGOs (Bank-organised NGOs) and now even GONGOs (Government-organised NGO’s).

That these voluntary organisations come as much from the putative ‘above’ (international organisations) as from the supposed ‘below’ (local communities) is an extremely significant fact about so-called ‘civil society’ in Africa. For at the same time that international organisations (through structural adjustment) are eroding the power of African states (and usurping their sovereignty), they are busy making end runs around these states and directly sponsoring their own programs or interventions via NGOs in a wide range of areas. The role played by NGOs in helping Western ‘development’ agencies to ‘get around’ uncooperative national governments sheds a good deal of light on the current disdain for the state and celebration of ‘civil society’ that one finds in both the theoretical and the policy-oriented literature right now.

But challengers to African states today are not only to be found in international organisations. In the wake of what is widely agreed to be a certain collapse or retreat of the nation-state all across the continent, we find a range of forms of power and authority springing up that have not been well described or analyzed to date. These are usually described as ‘sub-national’, and usually conceived either as essentially ethnic (the old primordialist view, which, as I noted above, is far from dead), or alternatively (and more hopefully) as manifestations of a newly resurgent ‘civil society’, long suppressed by a heavy-handed state. Yet can we really assume that the new political forms that challenge the hegemony of African nation-states are necessarily well-conceived as ‘local’, ‘grassroots’, ‘civil’, or even ‘sub-national’?

Guerrilla insurrections, for instance, not famous for their ‘civility’, are often not strictly ‘local’ or ‘sub-national’, either - armed and funded, as they often are, from abroad. Consider Savimbi’s UNITA army in Angola: long aided by the CIA, originally trained by China, with years of military and logistic support from South Africa, and continuous funding from US right-wing church groups. Is this a ‘sub-national’ organisation? A phenomenon of an emerging ‘civil society’? What about transnational Christian organisations like World Vision

6. Guyer’s insightful discussion of the significance of the international affiliations of African ‘civil society’ parallels my argument here in important ways. The fact that she does not use her observations about the transnational character of Nigerian organisations to question what I have called the vertical topography of power, however, is shown with special clarity in her own definition of ‘civil society’ as ‘those organisations created by nonstate interests within society to reach up to the state and by the state to reach down into society’ (1994:216).
7. I am grateful to Parker Shipton for pointing this out to me.
International, which, as Erica Bornstein has recently pointed out, play an enormous role in many parts of contemporary Africa, organising local affairs and building and operating schools and clinics where states have failed to do so (Bornstein 2003)? Are such giant, transnational organisations to be conceptualised as ‘local’? What of humanitarian organisations such as Oxfam, CARE, or Doctors Without Borders, which perform state-like functions all across Africa?

Such organisations are not states, but are unquestionably state-like in some respects. Yet they are not well described as ‘sub-national’, ‘national’, or even ‘supra-national’. Local and global at the same time, they are trans-national - even, in some ways, a-national; they cannot be located within the familiar vertical division of analytic levels presented above. Not coincidentally, these organisations and movements that fall outside of the received scheme of analytic levels are also conspicuously understudied - indeed, they seem to be largely invisible to theoretical scholarship on African politics, tending to be relegated instead to the level of ‘applied’, problem-oriented studies.

In all of these cases, we are dealing with political entities that may be better conceptualised not as ‘below’ the state, but as integral parts of a new, transnational apparatus of governmentality. This new apparatus does not replace the older system of nation-states (which is - let us be clear - far from being about to disappear), but overlays it and coexists with it. In this optic, it might make sense to think of the new organisations that have sprung up in recent years not as challengers pressing up against the state from below but as horizontal contemporaries of the organs of the state - sometimes rivals, sometimes servants, sometimes watchdogs, sometimes parasites, but in every case operating on the same level, and in the same global space.

Such a reconceptualisation has implications for both research and political practice, insofar as these depend on received ideas of a ‘down-there’ society and an ‘up-there’ state. In particular, I will examine some of these consequences for two sorts of actor with a special stake in the ‘grassroots’: social movements, on the one hand, and anthropologists on the other.

‘Grassroots’ politics without verticality?

What does the critical scrutiny of the vertical topography of power mean for progressive social movements that have long depended on certain taken-for-granted ideas of locality, authenticity, and ‘bottom-up’ struggle? An extremely illuminating example comes out of the practice, and self-criticism, of the South African civic movement. Organised, politically powerful local civic organisations, of course, played a huge role in the struggle for democracy in South Africa. With national political organisations banned, township civics built networks, organised boycotts and demonstrations, educated cadres, and made many townships no-go areas for the white regime’s troops and policemen. Civics took up key government functions, and sometimes developed remarkably democratic internal institutions. At the height of the anti-apartheid movement, the civics were not just protest groups, but something approaching a genuinely revolutionary force - as the apartheid regime itself recognised.

I will here draw on the recent writings of Mzwanele Mayekiso, a township organiser in the Johannesburg neighborhood of Alexandra, and a true heir of Antonio Gramsci (in an age of many pretenders). Mayekiso sees very clearly the shortcomings of much fashionable celebration of ‘civil society’. Simply lumping together everything outside of the state may have had its utility in the struggle against totalitarian rule in Eastern Europe. But in South

8. The concept of ‘governmentality’, and the ways that my use of the concept is linked to various Foucauldian approaches, is discussed in Ferguson and Gupta 2002.
Africa, he insists, it is disastrous; it conceals the diametrically opposed political agendas of distinct and antagonistic social classes. For Mayekiso, the socialist, it makes no sense to allow the Chamber of Mines and the Mineworkers’ Union to be simply thrown together as ‘civil society’, in opposition to ‘the state’. Moreover, the unthinking valorisation of ‘civil society’ for its own sake contains the risk of ‘following the agenda of imperialist development agencies and foreign ministries, namely, to shrink the size and scope of third world governments and to force community organisations to take up state responsibilities with inadequate resources’ (1996:12). Instead, Mayekiso proposes an eminently Gramscian solution: a determination to work for what he calls ‘working-class civil society’. It is this which must be strengthened, developed, and allowed to preserve its autonomy from the state. Mayekiso cites two reasons for this: 1) to build a base for socialism during a period when a socialist state is not yet a realistic expectation; and 2) to serve as watchdog over the state while pressing it to meet community needs in the meantime.

It is useful to keep in mind that Mayekiso is writing from the position of an extraordinarily successful political organiser. The South African civics have been a formidable force to be reckoned with, not only in the anti-apartheid struggle, where their organisation and political energy proved decisive, but also in their post-independence role. The civics have been successfully transformed from agents of all-out resistance to the apartheid state (aiming - among other things - to make the townships ‘ungovernable’), to well-organised autonomous structures ready to lend support to some state campaigns while vigorously attacking and protesting others. A national organisation of civics, SANCO (which Mayekiso headed), is today a major player on the national scene, and serves as an independent advocate for worker and township interests - all of which makes it at least a bit more difficult for the ANC government to sell out its mass base.

But the post-independence era has also presented some profound challenges to Mayekiso’s Gramscian praxis, which he analyzes with remarkable honesty and clear-sightedness. In particular, Mayekiso has come to recognise that the policies of the new South African government are constrained not only by the balance of forces in South Africa, but also by the forces of transnational capital, which ‘denude the ability of nation-states to make their own policy’. Faced with the threat of a capital boycott, there may be limits on how far even the most progressive South African government can go down the road to socialism. The traditional nationalist approach, based on organising the masses to put pressure on the government, has no effective response to this situation. Vertical politics seems to have reached its limits.

Such failures of strictly national politics-from-below lead Mayekiso to a very interesting critical reflection. Recalling the long struggle of the Alexandra Community Organisation during the apartheid years, he acknowledges that its success grew not simply from its strong base in the community but from strategic transnational alliances. In fact, the ACO, he reports, received most of its funds not from the community, or even from within the country, but from international sources. Dutch solidarity groups, US sister city programs, Canadian NGOs, Swedish official aid, even USAID at one point - all were sources of aid and support for Mayekiso’s ‘local organising’, which (we begin to realise) was not quite so ‘local’ after all (also Simone and Pieterse 1993). But Mayekiso does not apologise for this. On the contrary, he uses a reflection on the successful experience of the ACO to begin to develop what he calls ‘a whole new approach, a ‘foreign policy’ of working-class civil society’ (1996: 283). After all, he says ‘there is a growing recognition that poor and working class citizens of different countries now have more in common with each other than they do with their own elites’ (1996: 283), while ‘the ravages of the world economy are demuding the ability of nation states to make their own policy’ (1996: 280). In such circumstances, challenges from below within a vertically-conceived national space cannot succeed; but ‘international civic
politics is a real alternative to weak nation-states across the globe’ (1996: 280).9

Traditional leftist conceptions of progressive politics in the third world (to which many anthropologists, including myself, have long subscribed) have almost always rested on one or another version of the vertical topography of power that I have described. ‘Local’ people in ‘communities’ and their ‘authentic’ leaders and representatives who organise ‘at the grassroots’, in this view, are locked in struggle with a repressive state representing (in some complex combination) both imperial capitalism and the local dominant classes. The familiar themes here are those of resistance from below, and repression from above, always accompanied by the danger of cooptation, as the leaders of today’s struggle become the elites against whom one must struggle tomorrow.

I do not mean to imply that this conception of the world is entirely wrong, or entirely irrelevant. But if, as I have suggested, transnational relations of power are no longer routed so centrally through the state, and if forms of governmentality increasingly exist that bypass states altogether, then political resistance needs to be reconceptualised in a parallel fashion. Many of today’s most successful social movements have done just that (as the example of the South African civics in part illustrates). But academic theory, as so often, here lags behind the world it seeks to account for.

To be sure, the world of academic theory is by now ready to see that the nation-state does not work the way conventional models of African politics suggested. And the idea that transnational networks of governmentality have taken a leading role in the de-facto governance of Africa is also likely to be assented to on reflection. But are we ready to perform a similar shift in the way we think about political resistance? Are we ready to jettison received ideas of ‘local communities’ and ‘authentic leadership’? Critical scholars today celebrate both local resistance to corporate globalisation as well as forms of grassroots international solidarity that some have termed ‘globalisation from below’. But even as we do so, we seem to hang on stubbornly to the very idea of a ‘below’ – the idea that politically subordinate groups are somehow naturally local, rooted, and encompassed by ‘higher level’ entities. For what is involved in the very idea and image of ‘grassroots’ politics, if not precisely the vertical topography of power that I have suggested is the root of our conceptual ills? Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a ‘grassroots’ that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well-connected, and opportunistic? Are we ready for social movements that fight not ‘from below’ but ‘across’, using their ‘foreign policy’ to fight struggles not against ‘the state’ but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies, and market institutions through which contemporary capitalist domination functions?

Consider a news article from the Los Angeles Times on the worldly engagements of the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico.10 The Zapatistas, we learn, have become celebrities, and have been discovered by the jet-set. Oliver Stone was photographed receiving the trademark wool mask and pipe from sub-commander Marcos during a recent visit to the guerillas’ headquarters. Danielle Mitterand (widow of the former French president) recently dropped by. And so on. Most shockingly, Marcos himself has apparently appeared in a fashion spread for the Italian clothing firm, Benetton. The sub-commander appears in camouflage dress, the glossy photo captioned: ‘You have to go to war. But what will you wear? Camouflage visual dynamic: light, photogenic . . . ideal for the soldier who goes from war to war and who doesn’t have time to change’. Benetton even offered to be the official outfitter of the Zapatistas, but here Marcos drew the line. ‘Compañeros,’ he told reporters solemnly

---

9. For a stimulating account of the use of ‘foreign policy’ in support of working class organisation in the US, see Herod (1994).
(through his mask), ‘we have decided that it is not suitable to wear sweaters in the jungle’.

If this strikes us as funny, it is useful to think about exactly what the joke is here. For at least part of the humor in the story comes from its suggestion that a group of supposed peasant revolutionaries have, in their inappropriate appetite for Hollywood celebrity and Italian clothing, revealed themselves as something less than genuine (‘from fighting to fashion’). After all, what would a ‘real revolutionary’ be doing in a Benetton ad, or lunching with Oliver Stone? But this reaction may be misplaced. As Diane Nelson (1999) has recently argued, First World progressives need to rethink our ideas of popular struggle, and to prepare ourselves to learn from third world transnational ‘hackers’ with a sense of media politics, as well as a sense of humor - and from movements that offer us not a pure and centered subject of resistance, but (like the sub-commander) a quite different figure: masked, ambivalent, impure, and canny.

Like the South African civics described by Mayekiso, the Zapatistas present us not with authentic others fighting for a nostalgic past, but with media-savvy, well-connected contemporaries, finding allies horizontally, flexibly, even opportunistically, but effectively. For there is obviously real political acumen in the Zapatista strategy. Celebrity attention and world press coverage may well help to protect Chiapas communities against potential aggression; the cost to the Mexican state of political repression surely rises with the amount of press coverage (and public-relations damage) that it entails. More profoundly, the image of destabilisation through guerrilla warfare, properly circulated, is perhaps the Zapatistas’ most potent political weapon. Capitalism is built on perceptions, and Mexican capitalism is built on an especially precarious set of perceptions - particularly, on the idea that it is an ‘emerging market’ on the path of the ‘tigers’ of East Asia, a carefully-nurtured perception that has supported a huge burst of speculative capital investment in the Mexican economy from the US and elsewhere. The real damage to the Mexican economy (and thus to the Mexican ruling class) may not come so much from the Zapatistas’ actual raids, as from the effect that the fear of such raids has on the Mexican stock market, and on the all-important ‘confidence’ (as they say) of the international bond-holders who have the Mexican economy in their pocket. A guerrilla war conducted in images on the pages of an international fashion magazine, then, may not be so out of place after all. Indeed, it may well be the most tactically effective sort of warfare that the terrain will support.

The globalisation of politics is not a one-way street; if relations of rule and systems of exploitation have become transnational, so have forms of resistance - along lines not only of race and class, which I have emphasised here, but also of gender, sexuality, and so on. Gramsci’s brilliant topographic imagination may be a guide to this new political world, but only if we are willing to update our maps from time to time. The image of civil society as a zone of trench warfare between working people and the capitalist state served the left well enough at one moment in history, just as the vision of a self-regulating zone of ‘society’ that needed protection from a despotic state served the needs of an emergent bourgeoisie in an earlier era. But invoking such topographies today can only obscure the real political issues, which unfold on a very different ground, where familiar territorialisations simply no longer function. Rethinking the taken-for-granted spatial mapping that is invoked not only in such terms as ‘the state’/‘civil society’ but also in the opposition of ‘local’ to ‘global’ (and in all those familiar invocations of ‘grassroots’, ‘community’, etc.), in these times becomes an elementary act of theoretical and political clarification, as well as a way of strategically sharpening – and not, as is sometimes suggested, of undermining – the struggles of subaltern peoples and social movements around the world.

**Toward an ethnography of encompassment**

11. Parts of this section are adapted from a paper co-authored with Akhil Gupta (Ferguson and Gupta...
Just as a rethinking of the vertical topography of power has special consequences for political practices that depend on unexamined tropes of ‘above’ and ‘below’, it also contains special lessons for forms of scholarship that have traditionally found their distinctive objects in vertically conceived analytic ‘levels’. Working through these conceptual issues, I suggest, might well point in the direction of promising new directions for research. For making verticality problematic not only brings into view the profoundly transnational character of both the state ‘level’ and the local ‘level’, it also brings the very image of the ‘level’ into view as a sort of intensively managed fiction.

To say this is to point toward an enormous ethnographic project (which, in collaboration with Akhil Gupta, I have only begun to explore), that of exploring the social and symbolic processes through which state verticality and encompassment are socially established and contested through a host of mundane practices (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). On the one hand, such a project would entail the ethnographic exploration of the processes through which (insofar as state legitimation goes smoothly) the ‘up-there’ state gets to be seen as (naturally and common-sensibly) ‘up there’. The spatialisation of the state has usually been understood through attention to the regulation and surveillance of the boundaries of nations, since the boundary is the primary site where the territoriality of nation-states is made manifest: wars, immigration controls, and customs duties being the most obvious examples. But while this is a rich area of investigation, it is only one mode by which the spatialisation of states takes place. The larger issue has to do with the range of everyday technologies by which the state is spatialised, by which verticality and encompassment become features of social life, commonsensical understandings about the state that are widely shared amongst citizens and scholars. The policing of the border is intimately tied to the policing of Main Street in that they are both rituals that enact the encompassment of the territory of the nation by the state; these acts represent the repressive power of the state as both extensive with the boundaries of the nation and intensively permeating every square inch of that territory; both types of policing often demarcate the racial and cultural boundaries of belonging, and, are often inscribed by bodily violence on the same groups of people. Nor is this simply a matter of repressive state power: state benevolence as well as coercion must make its spatial rounds, as is clear for instance in the ritual touring of disaster sites by aid-dispensing US presidents. It is less in the spectacular rituals of the border than in the multiple, mundane domains of bureaucratic practice that states instantiate their spatiality. Rituals of spatial hierarchy and encompassment are more pervasive than most of us imagine them to be; an ethnographic focus allows these everyday practices to be brought more clearly into focus (also Hansen and Stepputat 2001).

At the same time, however, it is part of my argument that new forms of transnational connection increasingly enable ‘local’ actors to challenge the state’s well-established claims to encompassment and vertical superiority in unexpected ways, as a host of worldly and well-connected ‘grassroots’ organisations today demonstrate. If state officials today can still always be counted on to invoke ‘the national interest’ in ways that seek to encompass (and thereby devalue) the local, canny ‘grassroots’ operators may trump the national ace with appeals to ‘world opinion’ and e-mail links to the international headquarters of such formidably encompassing agents of surveillance as ‘Africa Watch’, ‘World Vision’, or ‘Amnesty International’. Where states could once counter local opposition to, e.g., dam projects by invoking a national-level interest that was self-evidently ‘higher than’ (and superior to) the merely ‘local’ interests of those whose land was about to be flooded, today ‘project-affected people’ are more likely to style themselves as ‘guardians of the planet’, protectors of ‘the lungs of the earth’, or participants in a universal struggle for human rights,
and to link their ‘local’ struggles directly to transnationally distributed fields of interest and power. Such rhetorical and organisational moves directly challenge state claims of vertical encompassment by drawing upon universalist principles and globally-spatialised networks that render the claims of a merely national interest and scope narrow and parochial by comparison. The claims of verticality that I have reviewed here (claims of superior spatial scope, supremacy in a hierarchy of power, and superior generality of interest, knowledge, and moral purpose) have historically been monopolised by the state. But today these claims are increasingly being challenged and undermined by a newly transnationalised ‘local’ which fuses the grassroots and the global in ways that make a hash of the vertical topography of power on which the legitimation of nation-states has so long depended.

What this implies is not simply that it is important to study NGOs and other transnational non-state organisation, or even to trace their inter-relations and zones of contact with ‘the state’. Rather, the implication would be that it is necessary to treat state and non-state governmentality within a common frame, without making unwarranted assumptions about their spatial reach, vertical height, or relation to ‘the local’. What is called for, in other words, is an approach to the state that would treat its verticality and encompassment not as a taken-for-granted fact, but as a precarious achievement – and as an ethnographic problem. Such a project would be misconceived as a study of ‘state-society interactions’, for to put matters thus is to assume the very opposition that requires to be interrogated. Rather, what is needed is an ethnography of processes and practices of encompassment, an ethnographic approach that would center the processes through which the government of the conduct of others (by state and non-state actors) is both legitimated and undermined by reference to claims of superior spatial reach and vertical height.

Such a view might open up a much richer set of questions about the meaning of transnationalism for states than have up to now been asked. For in this perspective, it is not a question of whether a globalising political economy is rendering nation-states weak and irrelevant, as some have suggested, or whether states remain the crucial building blocks of the global system, as others have countered. For the central effect of the new forms of transnational governmentality, if my argument is correct, is not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure the way that states are able to spatialise their authority and stake claims to superior generality and universality. Recognising this process might open up a new line of approach into the ethnographic study of state power in the contemporary world.
Chapter 17
The African Social Forum as site of struggle, 2002-03

By George Dor

The future of the ASF lies in building strong social movements, and in countering careerist tendencies now dominant in the forum. The first World Social Forum (WSF) in Porto Alegre in 2001 included a small number of Africans, who agreed on the need for a more substantial and coordinated presence at future forums. This stimulated the establishment of the African Social Forum (ASF), which met for the first time in Bamako, Mali, in 2002. There has been one further continental forum to date, namely in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2003. There was no African forum prior to the WSF in Mumbai this year.

Approximately 200 people attended each of the forums from some 40 or more countries on the continent. There were large delegations from Senegal and Mali and about 10 people from South Africa. Most countries were represented by perhaps one or two people. These forums represent significant achievements in bringing together people from a variety of sectors and struggles from countries and regions across the continent. They provided a context in which extensive debate could take place and in which more radical perspectives could be shared. They resulted in declarations which express an African voice of condemnation of the prevailing neoliberal global system. The ASF has also been able to meet its objective of ensuring a more consolidated and united African civil society presence at the WSF.

But the development of the African Social Forum has also thrown up various issues, debates, contestations and tensions that need to be addressed.

Social movements and NGOs

One of the recurring issues relates to the type of African Social Forum we should be building. There has been persistent tension around the question of the relationship between social movements and NGOs in the ASF. In the continental forums, agreement has been reached around the need to root the ASF in social movements and to ensure that the ASF plays a role in strengthening these movements. The primacy of social movements, supported by NGOs, is clearly reflected in the Addis Ababa declaration.

Yet, outside of these forums, a significant level of NGO-ism keeps reemerging. Examples include the types of delegates identified to attend the African and world social forums and the recurring argument that individual organisations should finance their own way to preparatory and sub-continental meetings, thus limiting the participation of social movements.

The question of the relationship between social movements and NGOs has also manifested itself in apparent differences between regions - more particularly between Francophone and Anglophone Africa. The Southern Africa region has tended to prioritise social movements. This is reflected to a certain degree in East Africa and a somewhat lesser degree in Central Africa. West African participation in the ASF has been dominated by NGOs. Some have argued that this is because social movements are more developed in Southern Africa and hardly exist in West Africa, but the problem is probably more one of the political orientation of the different regional leaderships.

Programme versus space
Another recurring debate is that of the types of activities the ASF should be organising. There are those who argue that the ASF should be no more than a ‘space’ where people can meet, on the basis that this allows for more diversity of participation and is in keeping with the WSF and its charter. Others contend that the ASF should have a programme to advance our struggle against neoliberalism and the way it manifests itself on our continent.

The African social forums to date have had a substantially different character to that of the WSF. They have been organised as conference-type events, in which people have identified common struggles, perspectives and positions.

For example, in Bamako, agreement was reached on the potentially damaging impact of Nepad on the majority of people of the continent and the importance of us standing together to contest Nepad. This suggests a clear issue around which the ASF should have a strategy. This could include the ASF carrying out certain activities, such as widespread dissemination of information on Nepad or coordination of action against Nepad across different regions. It could also include the ASF assigning tasks to networks such as the African Trade Network to develop a detailed critique of Nepad and trade. This and critiques on other issues could then be shared across sectors and regions.

Social forums as mere ‘spaces’ for exchange will entail a conference at a national level to prepare for a regional forum to prepare for the ASF to prepare for the WSF, with the cycle being repeated every year.

Civil society and government

A third area of difference is around how we should relate to our governments and continental government structures. In Bamako, the secretariat had invited a representative of the Senegalese government’s Omega Plan, one of the constituent elements of Nepad, to participate in the ASF discussions. In Addis Ababa the ASF secretariat had requested representatives of the African Union to open the ASF and set the tone for the days ahead. In both instances the invitations to government institutions led to heated debate, and in Addis this led to a division of the plenary and ultimately the withdrawal of the request for the input.

These incidents reflect underlying differences in approach to struggle. They also signal a deeper concern around the ASF, namely that it can become a stepping stone for those who aspire to sit in committees and conferences with government institutions.

Organisational issues

Perhaps the biggest obstacle facing the ASF relates to its organisational functioning. One of the key issues to emerge at the first ASF in Bamako was that of its structure. Some argued that the ASF should include a secretariat and a loosely structured sounding board open to all. The motivations put forward were that we shouldn’t overbureaucratise the forum and that we shouldn’t introduce hierarchy into the forum.

The counter-argument was that a large, loose body with no clear mandate would not constitute an effective structure. Given limited financial resources, such a body would in all likelihood be unable to meet between forums. As such, it would simply entrench a more dangerous form of hierarchy, that of the secretariat over the forum as a whole. The latter argument seemed to have won the day as a steering committee of some 15 people representing regions and themes was agreed to.

However, in reality the steering committee has never functioned adequately and the secretariat, based at the NGO Enda in Senegal, has attained effective control over the ASF. This has had serious repercussions, and the absence of an effective coordinating structure has allowed the pursuit of narrow ambition in a largely non-transparent and unchecked
manner. In Mumbai it emerged that the next big ambition of this group is the hosting of the World Social Forum in Africa in 2006.

Where to for the ASF?

There are perhaps two distinct and opposed ways in which to respond to these developments. The first is to decide to leave the forum on the basis that the problems outlined above are irresolvable. Many have chosen this route. In West Africa, an African Peoples Forum has been established. Other activists and organisations have joined various international networks in preference to participating in the ASF.

The second is to persist in contesting the issues facing the forum. In Mumbai, the vast majority of South Africans, together with their Southern African counterparts, pursued this option. Unfortunately, the two very different forms of response, following largely regional lines, provided the opportunity for those supporting the current balance of power in the ASF to categorise the Southern Africans and, more specifically, the South Africans, as the source of division in the ASF.

Any continued contestation of the ASF will need to be based on a more systematic building of strong social movements in South Africa, the development of a Southern African Social Forum increasingly representative of the movements in the region and the forging of links with movements in the rest of the continent. But South African social movements also face the urgent need to develop a clear approach as regards the question of Africa hosting the WSF. Those currently dominant in the ASF may well be thinking of Senegal as a venue. Key decision-makers in the WSF are also considering South Africa, and could approach civil society formations here that can at best be described as ambivalent about neoliberalism. Either option represents a very real threat to the integrity of the WSF as a vehicle towards another world beyond neoliberalism.
Chapter 18
Mumbai WSF as festival of the masses, 2004

By Mondli Hlatshwayo and Oupa Lehulere

The World Social Forum (WSF) was held between 16 and 21 of January 2004 in Mumbai, in the Indian state of Maharasta. It is estimated that more than 100 000 people from all over the world participated in various activities of the forum, ranging from discussions and strategy sessions, to marches and demonstrations.

The first three editions of the World Social Forum were held in the city of Porto Alegre, in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. The choice of Porto Alegre as the host city was not only because of the deep-rooted traditions of mobilisation by popular organisations in Brazil, but also because the Workers Party, itself a product of the mobilisation, was in power in both the state and the city. Like Brazil, India has deep-rooted traditions of mass mobilisation against all kinds of injustices. Unlike Porto Alegre, Mumbai, or the state of Maharasta, is not controlled by a left party.

And so for the first time the World Social Forum moved into the belly of the beast – a neoliberal capitalism combined with heavy doses of fascism. Here in Mumbai, the WSF came face to face with extreme poverty and inequality, religious fundamentalism, a violent system of upper and lower castes, a ruling class that is not only very greedy, but one that has grown immune to the poverty around it. The venue at which the forum was held also had a special significance. The venue for the WSF was the large abandoned textile factories not far from shanty-towns. Political discussion and debates were held in rooms and halls that had no air-conditioning, full of dust, and made out of sacks. Besides the political discussions and debates in the sack-made seminar rooms, thousand of people outside the rooms were constantly marching and denouncing imperialism, war, occupation, religious fundamentalism, racism, the caste system and the oppression of the Dalits and Adivasis, in the dusty streets of the WSF.

The significance of the forum’s move to Mumbai was expressed by Jyotsan Tirkey, the President of the Indigenous Women’s Forum, which is an organisation of the Adivasi women. According to her, the WSF’s coming to India was an encouragement for the women’s organisations and all the oppressed castes in India. She further noted that the WSF provides a space for the indigenous peoples of India to speak for themselves. The drums, the shouting of slogans and the artistic work, according to Tirkey, are forms of cultural expression and resistance of the Indian lower castes. Caste at the centre And so one of the major themes of the WSF in India was the issue of caste, racism and social exclusion.

Unlike many of the global forums we have seen, the socially excluded, India’s lower castes, were out in force. The dalits, the adivasis, shit-pickers, rag-pickers and all those trapped in India’s caste based social division of labour made their presence felt, not only in the seminars and conference rooms, but also by huge marches throughout the forum. No space and no moment was spared in the quest to put the issues of the Dalits and Adivasis on the table.

In between meetings, during meal breaks, early in the morning and right into the night, the drums beat non-stop, guerrilla theatre on all manner of themes was all around us, and in a way that Porto Alegre could not be, the WSF became a festival of the oppressed. The Dalits and Adivasis were joined by all strata of the oppressed: industrial workers, those in the informal sector, Buddhist monks marching by candle light, Catholic nuns engaging in discussions with passers-by in the streets, and many others.
Contrary to sentiments of many a ‘northerner’, the din of the drum gave a sense of realism to the proceedings: you knew that the pogroms of Gujarat were a stone-throw away; you knew that you were in the belly of the beast. A forum of popular organisations The WSF has been accused of being a talkshop of academics and professional protesters. The academics were there, and so were the professional protesters who move from one ‘international demonstration’ to the next. But in Mumbai, however, it was the massive mass organisations that set the tone.

One of the key events at the forum was a huge public meeting organised by the National Alliance of Peoples’ Movement (NAPM), a network from India. At the forefront of the NAPM are Dalits, Adivasis, fisherfolk, peasants, agricultural and industrial labourers, women and youth - all sections of Indian society facing the backlash of unsustainable development. The public meeting was prefaced by a sit-in at the offices of the Indian government.

The public meeting was held in one of the main venues, with about 7000 people listening attentively to the speakers. Speaker after speaker launched a scathing attack on the World Bank’s dam project, the imperialist led destruction of Indian farmers, and the general disrespect and disregard of the Dalits and the Adivasis in India. Medhar Patkar, a campaigner against the construction of the Narmada Valley dam, a human rights activist and a leader of the NAPM, was received with jubilation among the participants. Addressing the meeting in the local languages as well as English, she attacked the World Bank and Indian government’s development path, which leads to the dislocation of people. Gender and caste discrimination also came under the hammer.

A space for planning militant action

The WSF is referred to as a jamboree in many accounts: all talk and no strategy or action. Indeed, the superficial observer can be fooled by the hundreds of plenaries, workshops, dialogues, panels, roundtables and seminars. WSF-Mumbai had one major public meeting (plus 20 000 people), 12 conferences (plus 10 000), and 300 workshops everyday! This does not count the thousands of small meetings, chance encounters in the evenings and discussions into the wee hours of the morning.

Many of these meetings, however, are strategy sessions where organisations agree on specific actions to be coordinated over the next years or months. An example of such strategising could be seen in the Global Anti-war Assembly. The anti-war strategy sessions were highly organised because the anti-war movement had preparatory meetings (in Jakarta, Indonesia) and discussions before the Mumbai forum. The strategy session of the anti-war movement had theoretical discussions ranging from imperialism and war to militarism. The Assembly went on to evaluate the anti-war mobilisations in various countries. Suggestions and strategies for consolidating the anti-war movements were proposed, based on conditions in each country. Wars in Africa, and US military bases in Africa were also part of the agenda.

One of the outcomes of the session was an agreement of a meeting in Africa that would develop a plan of action, which would combine struggles against occupation, and wars in Africa, with those in Iraq and Palestine. As part of continuing with the protest action and the consolidation of the movement, it was agreed that the 20th March 2004 would be an international anti-occupation demonstration. Individual countries were given autonomy to decide the kind of action to take.

The activist assembly
Since the second WSF in Porto Alegre a network on social movement has been set up to coordinate international anti-globalisation actions. While the Activist (or Social Movements) Assembly is not a WSF organised event, it sees the WSF as an important event, and as an opportunity to engage other movements. For example, the deliberations of the Global Anti-war Assembly feed into the declarations of the Social Movements Assembly. Although the Assembly experienced difficulties, including the poor attendance by social movements from India, as well as logistical problems with translations and other organisational issues, the Assembly managed to put together a declaration with took up many of the key issues in the Mumbai forum. Among the issues the declaration takes up is to denounce the caste system and all forms of oppression in Indian society, calls for the international day of mobilisation around women’s issues on 8 March 2004, a need for struggle and unity with all peasants on their day, 17th April, 2004, an anti war and anti-occupation demonstration on 20 March 2004, and international support of the Palestinian Land Day on 30 March 2004.

Criticisms of the WSF

About 100 organisations largely from Asia and about 4000 people attended the events organised by the Mumbai Resistance 2004 (MR2004). The venue for the MR2004 was a stone throw away from the WSF site. The MR2004 argued that donors and NGOs dominated the WSF, the WSF discussions are eclectic and have no programme of action and struggle. In a discussion with Darshan Pal, one of the coordinators of the MR2004 and the General Secretary of All India People’s Resistance Forum, he argued that the forces in the WSF are not really against imperialism, and that the WSF doesn’t allow any resolution to be passed to unify the fighting forces and to take up the struggles.

The African Social Forum

The African Social Forum sent a large contingent to Mumbai, and organised activities from 18 to 20 January 2004. A daily newspaper was also produced by the forum, which highlighted the impact of neoliberalism on the African continent. The forum and its activities, however, were caught in a controversy, and this led to heated debate among African delegates. Notwithstanding these disagreements and struggles, there is positive energy in the Southern African Social Forum (SASF). In the run-up to the Mumbai meeting some comrades from Zambia and Zimbabwe launched the SASF.

A new phase in the anti-imperialist struggle?

It would of course be misleading to judge the WSF on the number of ‘global’ campaigns decided at its meeting. The real meaning of the WSF is to be found in the rising wave of resistance to neoliberal globalisation and imperialism in country after country. WSF-Mumbai confirmed a major development in politics that had been in the making over the last 5 years. Not so long ago, the words capitalism, imperialism, and exploitation were rarely heard. Instead, activists mainly spoke of the ‘north and the south’, ‘the poor and marginalised’, and ‘the haves and the have-nots’. A significant development in Mumbai is that ‘imperialism, capitalism, exploitation’ and other concepts like these have made their comeback. In this sense, Mumbai was a major step in the regroupment of progressive and left forces internationally.
Chapter 19
Have the slaves left the master’s house?:
Lusaka Africa Social Forum, 2005

By Amanda Alexander and Mandisa Mbali

The story of the poor goes round and round. But what about the story of the rich? The story not being told is that of the beneficiaries of slavery and colonialism. The story of exploitation that put us into this dispensation, commodified our own life for profit. They divided and ruled. Can we unite and live? Can we unite for the world that will be our world? Let us rise up and begin to tell this story... of why they continue to be rich, continue to plunder.
- Wahu Kaara, Kenyan feminist activist speaking at the ASF opening plenary

At the opening plenary of the Africa Social Forum in Lusaka, Zambia (10-14 December, 2004), delegates from across the continent gave varied testimonies that coalesced around a single truth: recolonisation is worse than slavery.

Activists noted Africa’s history of injustices and oppression through colonialism, slavery and apartheid, but swiftly moved on to the injustices of present-day, post-colonial Africa: privatisation and cost-recovery, wars fought over Africa’s natural resources, heavy debt burdens and conditionalities, unfair trade and disease. Contrary to dominant accounts of the continent as an almost biblically ‘cursed’ ‘basket case’ and Africans as helpless victims, delegate after delegate emphasised that Africa’s poverty, wars and disease pandemics are causally related to a global economic system that is predicated on the poverty of the many.

‘The world, it would seem, friends, is at the end of its imagination’, Corinne Kumar of Tunisia and Indonesia told the assembled plenary. How much further can the tired mechanisms of domination and exploitation be stretched? Though they are continuously re-disguised, masquerading as World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) or Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), the instruments of oppression remain just as blatant for those attempting to access basic services like water, land, education and healthcare – with increasing difficulty.

The ideology of neoliberalism unites these policies and has had an immense impact on African life in recent decades. After achieving independence in the 1960s and 70s, many African countries began to build states with burgeoning infrastructure, including strong universities. In 1970, the average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was about the same for Africa, South Asia, and Pacific Asia (Thompson, 1997). Post-independence progress was reversed in the 1970s and 80s when world prices for African exports such as copper, cotton, peanuts, coffee and sugar fell, combined with the effects of heavy borrowing from international banks, a dramatic rise in interest rates, and a world recession (Ibid). The imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes beginning in the 1980s ensured an increase in the proportion of Africans living in absolute poverty. Through a neoliberal lens, these programmes posited development by means of export-led growth and reduced national spending. SAPs prescribed measures for enhancing exports, trade liberalisation, fiscal restraint in the interests of servicing national debts, incentives to attract multi-national corporations, cuts in social spending, cuts in the public service, and the privatisation of state assets and basic services. This meant that families were now required to pay school fees, that universities were decimated by funding cuts, and that states were pressed to devote more
money to servicing odious debt than to their health budgets.

As Andile Mngxitama writes in his historical sketch of the World Social Forum, the World Bank and IMF spared nothing to promote SAPs ‘in the name of development and democracy’: ‘…even the anti-colonial history and memory was appropriated, as was revolution and socialism. But the African NO! was simply named ‘food riots’; this was a resistance which did not speak for itself and the IMF quickly worked these ‘food riots’ into its four-staged re-colonisation strategy’ (2005, 1).

South African scholar Archie Mafeje holds that the failure to ‘deconstruct old paradigms’ and replace them with new vocabularies has had a devastating effect on African scholarship. African liberation projects have been set back by decades because African scholars were pushed (through neo-colonial intellectual arrogance) into having to navigate their way toward ‘freedom’ using the loaded jargon on ‘good governance,’ ‘democratisation,’ ‘poverty reduction,’ ‘structural adjustment,’ etc. As Mafeje argues, the structural adjustment debates (begun by conservatives in the West) took more than a decade, ‘yet, no real clarity has been reached besides rebutting some of the neo-liberal suppositions of the World Bank’ (2002, 12-13). African activists are often placed in the same position, and look to the Social Forums as opportunities to bolster vocabularies of resistance that are not framed by the demands of Western capital.

Colonialism is a very old game, and is thus forced to maintain itself through substitutions – substitutions that activists are perpetually contesting. Substitutions of NEPAD for economic liberation, of incessant white tutelage for black independent praxis, of ‘efficiency’ that benefits the few rather than the many, of a blameless past for a counter-hegemonic history, of the language of the powerful for localised terminology and stories, of dignity for the flat notion of ‘equality’. Kumar’s assertions were echoed by many activists throughout the forum: it is up to the South – and Africa in particular – to champion notions of democracy that are not intrinsically tied to the market economy; to find new notions of power that facilitate, transform, and enhance; to redefine Africa through a discourse of dissent – one that decentres, disrupts and interrupts all that is dominant.

At the ASF we observed that while African civil society is not uniformly strong across all regions, trade unionists, students, women and young people are increasingly resisting neoliberalism on the continent – against the current of their politicians. At a session on NEPAD, a Zimbabwean delegate argued that African leaders, by attending G8 meetings and producing a policy document endorsed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), are revealing that they ‘fear freedom, as former slaves who walk back to their masters, not yet ready to leave the master’s house’.

Along with their critiques of neo-colonialism and the lack of democracy in international policy-making, African activists were increasingly outraged at the lack of democracy within the forum structure. The ASF often replicated prevailing socio-economic, cultural and political inequalities. In particular, despite the feminist tribunal at the beginning of the forum, women were often not given sufficient space to participate and raise feminist issues throughout the conference. Plenary sessions and panel discussions were largely devoid of meaningful dialogue and debate. The sole exception, which will be discussed later as a promising alternative, was the Feminist Dialogue, where women arranged their chairs in a large circle to form the only space in the entire forum set up for the horizontal movement of knowledge in many directions.

Why the master’s tools will never destroy the master’s house

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon predicted the exhaustion of third world nationalism as espoused by many African leaders (1965). Indeed, without civil society resistance Africa’s bourgeoisie and its nationalist leaders may end up becoming the ‘cheap
‘the master’s tools [neo-liberal policies] will never destroy the master’s house [rich countries’ economic domination of Africa]’. Patrick Bond poses the question even more directly: will Africa aim to ‘fix’ the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO) and IMF or ‘nix’ them (2000)? Or, in terms of the central problematic posed in our report, will Africa merely substitute structural adjustments for ‘homegrown’ structural adjustments such as South Africa’s Growth, Employment and Redistribution programme (GEAR) and NEPAD? Are the foreign overseers such as the Bank and the IMF increasingly confident that they can count on local overseers to carry out their work? Has the logic of ‘fiscal discipline’ become so normalised that Africa’s ruling class has yoked itself with fiscal self-discipline?

The social consequences of structural adjustment programmes have been evident in Africa for over two decades. The very real, human costs were evident as we walked through downtown Lusaka, where crumbling infrastructure includes the broken storm drains, clogged with garbage, that periodically become breeding grounds for cholera. The Lusaka-based Namibian human rights lawyer who showed us around mentioned that as a result of cutbacks espoused in structural adjustments and a high proportion of the country’s budget going toward debt servicing, patients attending the country’s public hospitals must provide their own drips, medicine, bedding and food.

Indeed, IFI-advocated cost recovery is alive and well in Zambia: advertisements on Zambian television announced that cut-offs of electricity were imminent for defaulters over the festive season and that electricity company employees who assisted them to reconnect would be liable for prosecution. Jubilee Zambia, part of the international debt cancellation movement, informed us that this year just shy of a third of Zambia’s budget will go toward servicing odious debt. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that Zambia’s life expectancy has been reduced by AIDS and other preventable and treatable infectious diseases to a mere 35 years of age. The choices facing Africa’s leaders are as stark as the slogan on t-shirts worn by activists from the American Friends Service Committee: ‘LIFE’ or ‘DEBT’.

The very real impacts of neo-liberal policies on ordinary African people’s lives brought debates on how African politicians and civil society organisations should relate to IFIs into sharp relief. African politicians are already engaging with IFIs and G8 countries and it was clear to many delegates that NEPAD can be viewed as the product of such engagements. In this context, an important item on the agenda was African civil society’s engagement with IFIs such as the World Bank and Bank-supported programmes like NEPAD.

On the second day, a session was held on views of ‘Civil Society Engagement with the World Bank’ chaired by Kumi Naidoo of CIVICUS, an international umbrella body of NGOs. Naidoo outlined how CIVICUS’s board had for an eighteen-month period ‘…embarked on a process of canvassing and documenting civil society views on engagement with the Bank’. Naidoo described this as a ‘painful process’ for which CIVICUS had received a great deal of criticism. Nevertheless, according to Naidoo, CIVICUS was powering ahead to host a ‘Global Policy Forum’ in April 2005 bringing together the Bank and civil society, which would mark ‘the end’ of its engagement with the Bank.

When the floor was opened, activists (drawing in many cases from their own past experiences) railed against engagement with the World Bank. Console Tleane from the Freedom of Expression Institute of South Africa argued that CIVICUS was unfairly seeking legitimisation for its engagement with the Bank at the Africa Social Forum. Tleane pointed out that the conversation seemed awkwardly placed in the agenda of the forum – rather than scanning civil society views on working with the Bank, delegates were ready to strategise ‘how to bring about the end of the bank by April 2005’. Kenyan activist Njoki Njehu of 50 Years is Enough, a Washington DC-based NGO, argued that there have been three major civil society attempts to engage with the Bank, including the World Commission on Dams
and the Extractive Industry Review – and they had all failed. The Bank’s primary objective in trying to engage with civil society is to boost its public relations (PR) and lend a veneer of legitimacy and transparency to its opaque and undemocratic operations. Indeed, Njehu stated that the Bank has a PR budget in excess of US$20 million per annum and seventy staff devoted to improving its image. She went on to question who actually funded CIVICUS’s engagement with the Bank and in fact whether the organisation was truly independent of the Bank and those who support its agendas.

A Senegalese trade unionist in the Higher Education sector argued that the World Bank’s policies had destroyed African universities through dramatic budgetary cutbacks and cost recovery. Similarly, a Nigerian activist explained that she had attended a meeting with the Bank on PRSPs as recently as a month before and gained the impression the Bank had already decided on what policies should be adopted in the country and was merely ‘going through the motions’ of holding a meeting with civil society activists. Year in, year out this NGO representative had been to meetings with the Bank and had seen virtually no implementation of progressive civil society organisation’s suggestions, except at the most cosmetic level.

Veteran South African anti-apartheid and social justice activist Dennis Brutus argued that CIVICUS was still actively engaged with the Bank and so it was disingenuous to argue that it was ‘disengaging’ with the Bank, but only after a big meeting in April 2005. Njehu went on to argue that the IMF and World Bank divided NGOs into pliant ‘good’ NGOs like CIVICUS that it could ‘deal with’ and critical ‘bad’ NGOs like 50 Years that it refused to have anything to do with. If the Bank was serious about hearing civil society perspectives it would be prepared to hear very critical perspectives – even those arguing for it to be boycotted by ethical investors on the Bonds market and ultimately closed down.

Those present made it clear that civil society actors did not need intermediaries such as CIVICUS to bring their views to the Bank. They have spent years communicating their desires to the Bank – at times lobbying, but more often gathering by the thousands to protest at Bank meetings. Tleane argued for activists who did not agree with such engagement to protest at the April 2005 meeting and other events in a way similar to the ‘Not in my name’ campaign launched by left-wing South African Jews opposed to Israeli President Ariel Sharon’s policies on Palestine. Mandisa Mbali argued for 50 Years to demonstrate outside the meeting to show that not all civil society actors are in agreement with engagement with the Bank. South African Anti-Privatisation Forum activist Virginia Setshedi then led participating delegates in a protest song against collaborating with neo-colonial forces. Indeed, in an article entitled ‘No to World Bank-Civil Society Relations’ the African Flame, the daily ASF newspaper, reported on the session as follows:

Without a single dissenting voice, participants rejected any dealings with the Bank. The Bank’s bad record on the continent and the tonnes of evidence that indict it for the continued poverty of the African people were cited as the main reasons why any engagement will not be meaningful. The message was clear: there…[was] no way that the ASF would entertain any dealings with the Bank.

Activists in the NEPAD session came to the same conclusions on the potential of neo-liberal institutions and policies. Senegalese economist Demba Dembele’s rejection of NEPAD is based on two fundamental assumptions: that the West will never develop Africa and that most African leaders do not care about the welfare of their citizens. Pointing to the fact that NEPAD is premised on the extraction and export of Africa’s prime resources and the opening of the continent to exploitative foreign direct investment (FDI), a Zimbabwean economist characterised NEPAD as ‘creating a Bill of Rights for trans-national corporations’. Thus, he concluded: ‘our engagement will mean nothing’.
Finding our own tools: Feminist Dialogue

In breaking with the structure of other forum sessions in which two or three panellists (usually male) addressed an audience for roughly two hours and finished by fielding a handful of questions, the feminist dialogue was constructed as an actual conversation – open to dissent and debate and allowing ideas to build off each other. Chairs were arranged in a large circle and, by the end of the session, nearly every woman and man present had spoken their mind. Unfortunately, discussion revolved around gender and feminism in our societies (of women in power having become ‘patriarchs’ and of the need for better, context-specific understandings of gender and feminism in order to avoid negative labelling, for example), but did not touch on feminism and the role of women within our own movements. The participatory form of the conversation embodied a dissent against the structuring of the ASF, and yet the critique must go further.

Although women fuel movements (and more isolated moments of resistance) across Africa, they were in the minority at the Africa Social Forum because the leadership of organisations and movements (i.e. those likely to represent organisations at international forums) are men. Doubtlessly, delegates would go back to their local meetings where some women may not feel free to speak up. This is the case because patriarchy and other forms of dominance are being re-inscribed within movements for resistance.

As Shallo Skaba, an Ethiopian coffee worker stated at the Africa Court of Women, ‘No one is looking for women’s problems. No one considers all that women are doing’. If movements go on as they are, women’s problems will not be looked for, much less effectively organised around. One woman suggested in the dialogue that feminism is a political consciousness around power and power inequalities. Let us, then, apply that critical consciousness to the society we resist against and to the vehicles of resistance that are propelled by our energy, our sacrifices, our limited resources, our courage – but too often not by our decisions and the wisdom of our experiences as women.

Again out of character with much of the forum, several action items were decided upon. These included gathering and sharing feminist literature from across the continent over an email discussion list and in existing publications such as Feminist Africa, the Centre for Civil Society website and research reports, and WeWrite. Feminist dialogue must be wrestled back from the (mostly Northern) academic spaces which have co-opted and subsequently come to define (and confine) debate. The email discussion list has since emerged, with energy and debate centred around the contributions that African women would make at the January 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre.

Those present also strategised ways to hold women who are elected into office accountable. This is gravely needed, as demonstrated in South Africa, where Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang has consistently pushed forward policies that have worsened – and ultimately taken – the lives of poor, black, HIV-positive women. In Tanzania, Fatma Alloo explained, women activists meet with each female politician upon assuming office. From the very beginning of her term – and often beforehand, during her campaigning – women activists attempt to become these politicians’ primary network and base. Since women so often identify with a system that will ‘protect’ them, the moment that they say ‘No’, they are persecuted. Women activists can thus form alternative forms of protection, and women in high office can draw their power not from the prevailing system of patriarchal control, but from those who understand power’s underbelly.

Finally, activists called for further strategising on helping to make women economically independent. As one activist from the Gambia remarked, we must make it possible for women to get a divorce if necessary, to have some measure of financial independence. In a global economy where women produce over 80% of resources, and yet own less than 20% of
them, the battle for economic sovereignty for women will be long and difficult. However, we will work to assure that women are not further exploited by our own movements, and that we create means for economic independence as we can.

Are our tools sharp enough?

Across several sessions, a number of participants asked similar questions: what are we doing to take the debates here back to the grassroots in our own countries? People are dying of AIDS in my country, aggressive cost recovery means that water and electricity are being disconnected, trade negotiations are taking place which may ruin livelihoods, how will this forum take our struggles forward?

When we asked different delegates how the ASF meetings were organised, they could only answer with even more questions. How, for instance, were the meetings financed? How was the organising council constituted?

It should be clarified that when the Social Forum phenomenon began in 2001, there was much celebratory talk about ‘space’, ‘reflections’ and ‘networks of resistance’ (Mngxitama, 3). The World Social Forum and its regional incarnations were spaces where people could share and develop a new language that opposed neoliberalism and sought alternatives to the harsh rule of global capitalism. Such spaces are terribly difficult to come by; even more so are anti-hierarchical and non-vanguardist spaces, which the WSF strove to provide. These spaces are not to be taken for granted, and so it is a sign of how far the existing forums are from these ideals that activists are expressing such disdain for ‘space’. Debating in undemocratic, unrepresentative situations has led activists to frustration, fuelling growing demands for concrete outcomes and declarations. Whether it is actually feasible or desirable to produce a declaration through consensus within the span of four days, this has become the demand of many who feel stifled in a ‘space’ that has little room for them at all.

Activists from South Africa’s Social Movements Indaba (SMI) questioned the structure of the ASF (an un-elected, self-appointed, ‘unrepresentative’ council) and its ‘lack of political direction’. The SMI activists said they viewed the council and the ASF as biased toward NGOs, as membership of the council did not entail representivity and members of the council had to pay their own way to council meetings. A statement issued and circulated by the SMI expanded this critique:

The underrepresentation of social movements in relation to NGOs is reflected in the political content of the forum. It manifests in the persistence of the notion that the Africa Social Forum is nothing other than a space, in contrast to the perspective that it should have a programme to advance our struggle against neoliberalism (1).

The SMI then went on to argue for a plenary to allow for collective decision-making on the structure and functioning of the ASF and develop a declaration and a programme of action.

The problems expressed by activists are not unique to the ASF. Other Social Forums have been critiqued for not culminating in sufficiently concrete political outcomes that would advance the struggles of social movements. For instance, in discussing the Boston Social Forum, Peter Marcuse recently argued that there was insufficient participation of ‘grassroots activists’ (activists who were very poor, on welfare, etc.) (Marcuse, 2005 forthcoming). In general, there was an expressed need to link the BSF and other Social Forums to ‘action’ with ‘concrete results’ (ibid, 3). As Marcuse argues, while such forums might offer the future ‘nucleus’ of a global social movement it is too early to speak of a global social movement focused on limited objectives and dealing with broader issues of power and social justice (ibid).

Similarly, an activist writing for Schnews on the 2004 European Social Forum held in
London argued that: ‘[Activists] came to see if ‘another world is possible’, yet as expected [the ESF] was hijacked by people whose vision seems seriously at odds with many people involved in grassroots politics’. Many ESF activists questioned the wisdom of replacing one set of unaccountable political cronies for another.

**Building our own house: From undemocratic ‘space’ to action?**

In order for the Social Forums to continue to have legitimacy with social movement activists they must cease to be undemocratic ‘spaces’ for stifled debate about ‘other possibilities’ for the world and, instead, move towards forums for sharing experiences and debating strategies, tactics and common campaigns. In essence, there seems to be a struggle for the soul of the Social Forums: will they be ‘talk shops’ or ‘think tanks’ or ‘arenas for planning action’, ‘campaign launch pads’ or ‘strategy and tactics seminars’? As the feminist session of the ASF showed, making sessions more participatory and inclusive could be an important step in allowing legitimate critiques of the Social Forums and their constituent movements to emerge. In turn, this could allow for more focussed political discussions and outcomes at the Forums.

The stakes are high in this debate. As Setschedi argued: ‘people are being disconnected at home, what am I doing here if it doesn’t advance their struggle?’. Or as an HIV-positive feminist activist from Zimbabwe argued, ‘people are dying of AIDS at home, we need to think of a common platform to campaign to improve their access to treatment’. Such activists argued that it takes precious time and resources to attend Social Forums and that they must have something to show for attending such forums.

ASF delegates rejected engagement with the Bank and NEPAD, however, it should not be forgotten that indirect approaches urging such engagement were made through civil society intermediaries. This shows that capturing Social Forums and blunting their impact is a tantalising outcome for the Bank and ‘third-way’ politicians, which only adds a further sense of urgency to debates about the political direction and future of the Social Forums in advancing the aims of social movements for socio-economic justice. It is clear that social movement activists around the world increasingly wish to ‘jealously guard’ (SMI, 2) the Social Forums against de-politicisation and an inching towards irrelevant abstraction. Such activists recognise that if they exhaust themselves attempting to debate in undemocratic ‘space’, they will not seriously threaten the agendas of the Bank or the other IFIs. And the blunter the tools of the Social Forums get, the greater the chance activists will simply dispense with them entirely.

**References**


Chapter 20
Weaknesses at the Bamako WSF, 2006

By Nerisha Baldevu

The polycentric World Social Forum took place from the 19-23 January in Bamako, Mali. This was one of the three polycentric events planned for January 2006. The other two social forum events took place in January 24th to 29th in Caracas (Venezuela), and Karachi (Pakistan), in March.

The Mali statement, arising from the Bamako Forum recognised the WSF was ‘of paramount importance to people in Africa who are victims of the neoliberal system which is itself synonymous with violence, suffering, poverty, and exclusion to over one third of the global population. This meeting was the very first opportunity, following the huge popular resistances during the nineties, to consolidate their alternatives in a global context, to construct a fair world based on solidarity and respect for people’s sovereignty’.

Themes

The themes of Bamako 2006 were shared with the other polycentric forums. They were:
• War and Militarism-Security and Peace
• Globalised liberalism
• Aggressions against the peasantry
• Alliance between patriarchal and neo liberalism systems, and marginalisation of women’s fight
• Culture, Media and Communication
• Destruction of ecosystems, biological diversity, and resources control
• International order
• International trade, debt and economic and social policies
• Social fights, social and human rights, social organisations, and political rights
• Alternatives Political Challenges to the Social Forum Processes

Nationalism

The Bamako PWSF 2006 kicked off with a march of almost 7000 participants, many with placards, posters, puppets, clothes, masks and costumes that brought to the forum the nature of their struggles at home and globally. The messages ranged from cotton farmers and their produce rights, to trade issues, unemployment, globalisation and its effects, to countries still fighting for independence and the right to self-determination. A group of about 100 activists, mostly from the POLISARIO Front, marched through the streets of Bamako carrying a huge flag of the Saharawi Republic (Western Sahara), the only remaining colony in Africa. Western Sahara was a colony of Spain until 1976. In November of 1975 Morocco mobilised over 300,000 civilians to march across the Moroccan border into the territory. Known as the Green March, it was successful in: a. Moving permanent Moroccan residents into the territory; b. Making way for Moroccan troops to enter the country after Spain’s departure; and c. Putting pressure upon Spain to relinquish the territory to Morocco and Mauritania.

Both Morocco and Mauritania laid claim to Western Sahara, basing their claims on former imperial geographic borders. Morocco’s claim was based on the borders of the ‘Almoravid Empire’ of the 11th and 12th centuries, while Mauritania claimed that historic
tribal affiliations to this same empire stretched deep into Mauritania. Mauritania renounced its claims in 1979. The United Nations and the International Court of Justice never recognised either claim. While Western Saharawi brought this issue to the social forum, Moroccans on the march did not support the Saharawi people’s demands. Tensions erupted at the end of the march, at Modibo Keita Stadium where both groups displayed their national flags.

In response to the clashes between these two groups, the organisers of the WSF Bamako called in the Malian army to diffuse the situation and asked both groups to leave the stadium. The organiser’s response raises questions about the commitment of the WSF process to legitimately provide a platform for the creation of another world through open debate and discussion. The struggles of occupied peoples like the Western Saharawis or the Palestinians are legitimate struggles against injustices imposed on them by occupying forces. Such confrontations require political intervention by the WSF rather than a blanket condemnation and punishment.

**Use of the army**

The Malian army was out in full force during the forum at the request of the organisers to help maintain order. They were called in on the first day, in their army trucks and with their weapons, to get WSF participants in orderly lines for the registration process. They were present along the entire route of the Opening March, and they were at the entrances to all the forum venues. Their presence caused much disgruntlement among the activists and changed the dynamics of the forum. The WSF in Mali was a subdued affair, more of a talk shop than activists meeting to make another world happen. While not all activists are antagonistic to their governments, if the WSF rules of participation do not permit the participation of progressive forces such as the Zapatistas of Mexico (because of their violent resistance to oppression), then there needs to be rules on the use of government security forces at the WSF.

**The African agenda**

An ongoing complaint from Africans about the WSF, is the lack of an African focus, even though it was taking place in Africa. Part of the problem is the weakness of the African left and its organisations in different African states. African countries do not go to the WSF with an alternative African perspective, the perspectives are more nationalistic. Two related issues are those of who participated in these events, and who drives the processes. According to organisers, almost 20 000 people from Africa and Europe attended the WSF Mali. With few exceptions, discussions and panels were lead by, chaired or made up of European activists. While African organisations need to take some responsibility for this, the WSF processes need to deal with this. A further point of consideration is the frequency of meetings – national, regional, continental and world forums all take place in the space of a year. With the extreme limited resources of most social movements and community organisations, it is inevitable that the people who participate (and dominate) in the forums tend to be NGOs rather than grassroots activists.

**Accessibility**

According to organisers of the WSF Mali, almost 10 000 Malians were brought to the forum. While there were a few Malians in sessions – the WSF excluded Malians. Mali is the third poorest country in Africa, where trained teachers earn the equivalent of R280 per month. So paying US $4 for the WSF registration fee was more than most Malians could afford.
The women’s world

The forum took place in 11 different venues scattered across Bamako. Taxis were required to travel between most venues. All issues related to women and gender discussions took place in the Palais de la Culture, under the title of Feminist Dialogue. Bamako is a city undergoing reconstruction and the Palais de la Culture was no exception. It was noisy, with hundreds of workmen, construction equipment and cement blocks, littering the area set aside for ‘women’s discussions’. This was besides the general disorganisation of the WSF, the lack of chairs, sound systems, translation equipment and translators.

Conclusion

The WSF Mali was a disappointing, subdued affair. Its organisation, and the challenges that arose, need urgent attention and action from the International Council of the WSF and the African Council if the WSF in Nairobi is to be a success.
Chapter 21

By Maria van Driel

The 3rd Southern African Social Forum (SASF) was held at Civo Stadium in Lilongwe, Malawi, from 13-15 October 2006. 2006 is of historical importance because it was a year of preparation for the first World Social Forum to be held in Africa, in Kenya, in 2007. The SASF drew about 3000 activists of all ages, who travelled in minibus taxes and buses, many spent sixty hours travelling. The activists came from all the countries in the subregion, except for Namibia and Mauritius. Among them were many women, some with children, youth, NGOs, the informal sector, community based organisations, trade unions, the churches and the social movements. The labour movement was very poorly represented.

The SASF was well organised and the main theme was ‘Unite against Poverty and Oppression’, to build solidarity, build organisations and to mobilise all working people. Inside the Stadium ten tents housed the different sub-themes and/or sectors, including gender, the trafficking in women and children, HIV/Aids, illegitimate debt, governance and democracy, and traditional leaders. A defining feature of the SASF was that a significant number of working people, drawn from grassroots organisations and the social movements and with significant representation of women, were vocal in the different activities. The SASF gave one an opportunity to reflect on issues of gender and women’s emancipation.

Putting women’s emancipation back on the agenda

Historically, there have been debates, struggles and expectations in this subregion - although uneven - on issues related to liberation from exploitation and oppression, including the need for women’s liberation. This can be traced to the national liberation struggles in the subregion. Later, under independence, many of these struggles and expectations were ‘sold out’, ‘forgotten’, and watered down. Here and there they were included in Constitutions, laws and UN-aid-related activities. In Southern Africa today, we have more women members of parliament than ever before, including vice-presidents in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Yet these women (and men) in government, have not significantly improved the lives of working people, especially women. Women and children in Southern Africa remain the poorest sections of the population. The re-emergence of the social movements in the latter part of the 1990s, provides a strategic opportunity to rebuild the movements, rooting the emancipation of women once more within the struggle of working people.

There is a growing awareness of the need to integrate women’s emancipation centrally in the struggles of the social movements. This is uneven, however, and is related to movements’ overall perspectives. Thus far organisations and movements are becoming more self-conscious, taking into account the composition of their delegation to ensure that women are included. While this reflects the general composition of the movements, it has to some extent also been assisted by funding-conditionalities. The composition of the SASF comprised women from different sectors, including grassroots organisations and social movements. The women participants were generally very vocal, and participated in the different activities. This is important in the struggle for gender equity, although there is the need to ensure that this does not end with women’s representation. Besides the presentations on ‘women and gender’ by women, there were a number of women who did
Foreign Policy Bottom Up
A report of the Centre for Civil Society

presentations on sovereign debt, on housing and so forth, but we still have a long way to go in this respect.

At one level the SASF reflects the rebuilding of social movements, after a period of some quiet, following the liberation struggles in this region. There are two aspects that are relevant here.

First, the emerging social movements reflect the unevenness in perspectives in the development of a comprehensive understanding of neoliberal capitalism, and women’s oppression today. To a large extent the SASF activities did attempt to make the links and connections of specific issues of neoliberalism, but this link did not always include an integrated understanding of women’s oppression and social class.

For instance, the SASF theme - ‘Unite against Poverty and Oppression’, to build solidarity, build organisations and to mobilise all working people - was a general focus. In the context of Southern Africa, we did not focus on important aspects such as colour, social class and the gendered nature or the feminisation of poverty. That is, that the dominant face of poverty is all too often a black woman, or a black girl child. And the question we must try and understand is why is it that women and children are the most vulnerable, and the most impoverished in society?

The aim here is not to ensure uniformity but to develop diverse perspectives to assist social movements and activists to make sense of the world and to understand the broader picture: the trafficking in women together with sovereign debt, the HIV/aids pandemic and women’s increased labour in the home.

Secondly, to advance the struggle for women’s emancipation, the content of our analysis needs to go beyond the generality of specific issues such as the struggle against the IMF/World Bank debt or the privatisation of water. It is important to illustrate specifically how these issues affect working people, and specifically how they affect men and women differently. This will enable movements, both men and women, to understand and confront patriarchy (male dominance) and the subordinate position of women as a united social force. This will strengthen the social movements’ understanding of the issues, and help to develop strategies and organisational methods to respond to these issues and struggles comprehensively.

A similar shortcoming can be seen in almost all the sectors or subthemes: while all the issues taken up in the subthemes affect women and men differently, we dealt with them in general and we failed to sharpen our understanding of the gendered nature and the gendered aspects of these struggles. This is important as these key sub-themes reflect some level of organisational work in the subregion, and constitute important lessons of the past. We cannot leave the emancipation of women to a second stage, we need to understand it and struggle for it as one struggle with the emancipation of all working people.

Revisiting women’s emancipation

We also need to revisit what we mean by women’s emancipation. Through many of the UN-related activities, aid-related activities, and particularly through some NGOs and project-related activities, the emphasis has been on ‘gender equality’ and ‘gender-mainstreaming’. That is, the gradual changing of men and women’s attitudes through NGO activities. This approach has taken us very far from our initial goal of women’s emancipation.

In one of the key women’s discussions at the SASF, the discussion focused on developing an ‘African approach’ to gender. What become clear is that we need to go back to our history, before the arrival of the colonisers, and to understand previous societies comprehensively, the wealth, the developments, the civilisations, the social divisions and the inequality that existed. This will enable us to appreciate more concretely the debates on an ‘African approach’ to women’s emancipation.
Some women also believed that we should not ‘exclude’ men, and that this was a ‘western approach’. It would seem that the focus and the organisational practices around ‘gender and gender mainstreaming’ has to some extent watered down the initial concept of women’s emancipation.

While the SASF in Malawi had these and other shortcomings with respect to the development of a concept of women’s emancipation in the Southern African context, it was an important step forward in the struggle for women’s emancipation.
Chapter 22
What actually happened in Nairobi, 2007

By Trevor Ngwane

The WSF was smaller than usual. It was dominated by NGOs (the stalls) and the churches (the opening march). Some Christian fundamentalists even protested demanding that a statue depicting a pregnant young woman be removed from the cross it hung upon (the statue was in support of reproductive rights for women). The latter incident prompted some comrades to include in the statement of the social movements that organisations not in line with the WSF politics should not be allowed to attend.

The WSF was visibly commercialised with the cellphone company Celtel doing the registration and linking this to comrades buying a Celtel simcard. Celtel adverts were all over the show. The worst part is that it is more expensive in Kenya to use Celtel than the other cellphone company Safaricom. The restaurants inside the WSF precinct were pretty expensive and there were many vendors selling water that at times cost at least double the usual Kenyan price.

Kenneth Kaunda addressed the beginning of the march and a few hours later he gave an extremely long speech at the opening rally. His line was anti-poverty and reconciliation (between rich and poor, Jew and Palestinian, etc.).

I heard from a comrade that she saw the Organising Committee of the WSF in Kenya having dinner with a minister at the Hilton hotel. But the worst part for many comrades was that many local Kenyans could not attend the WSF because they had either not been informed and/or could not afford the 500 shillings charged at the gate (100 shillings = R12.50, I think). As a consequence some workshop sessions were devoid of any Kenyans, indeed some did not have any Africans, or were dominated by ‘Northerners’, mostly academics who, to be fair to them, mostly support or claim to speak for the movements.

The frustration with the picture painted above, especially entering the WSF gates but leaving locals locked outside, was expressed at a meeting whose aim was to prepare for the Assembly of the Social Movements to be held on the last day of the WSF. This meeting elected four comrades to raise these concerns with the Organising Committee.

During the meeting it emerged that the co-ordinator of the Kenya Social Forum and at least one member of the Organising Committee were also unhappy about this situation. They told the meeting that they had repeatedly raised the issue of entry fees but had been overruled or outvoted by other committee members. In the meeting a Kenyan comrade gave a riveting speech about how they felt left out as they had no money to pay and as a result they had decided to have their own meeting, a ‘people’s parliament’ in a venue nearer to the struggling masses of Kenya.

I was part of the delegation chosen to meet with the Organising Committee but we failed to make contact with them on the same evening. But the following morning I met with two of the committee members including its chairperson Professor Oyugi. I conveyed the meeting’s concerns but both were rushed and promised to look into the matter although Comrade Oduor, the other committee member, was quickly on the defensive.

By the following morning the frustration was high and we decided to storm the gates to allow the Kenyans in for free. About 200 Kenyans got in free this way but later in the day it emerged that the gates were again locked for those who did not have 500 shillings. We also heard that the fee had been reduced to 50 shillings. The South African comrades saw a parallel with the South African government’s indigency policy and together with other
comrades from other countries and movements rejected this.

We eventually secured a meeting with the Organising Committee where three of us met Prof Oyugi and Comrade Taoufik (secretary of the African Social Forum). I was with Comrade Daniella, a Canadian from the Women’s March and Comrade Emily from Benin. Unfortunately the other delegate (from the People’s Parliament) could not make it as they could not get through without the official name tag which you only get if you are registered.

The meeting was really bad with Oyugi raving and accusing us of lack of democracy and basically saying we were coming from the North and South Africa (a kind of northern state in Africa) to undermine Kenyan processes. To be fair to him he confessed that he was flustered and angry because during the day he had been confronted by demonstrators who were raising the same issues with him. Earlier he had half-jokingly accused me of sending ‘my boys’ to deal with him. We left in disgust (and demoralisation) with no clear answer from the Organising Committee.

The next day we again planned to storm the gates but found police and army reinforcements at the gates. Those officers carried very big guns. Comrades decided to block the main road until the people were allowed in for free. This action took about half an hour and then the gates were opened. The crowd than marched to the Organising Committee’s offices to demand a change of policy on the question of entrance. Another demand was added: free water inside the WSF precinct and cheaper food.

The demonstration found no one in the offices and then gatecrashed a press conference where a member of the committee announced under pressure that henceforth all entrance would be free. I did not get clearly how they responded to the other demands (water, food, commercialisation). Comrade Njoki, another member of the Organising Committee, was shouted down by the crowd when she repeated the Oyugi line that northerners were undermining local processes because these were controlled by Africans (which seemed to me like a roundabout way of saying we were racists).

The atmosphere changed for the better inside the WSF with locals being able to come in and out as they please. I attended at least one session by a local movement fighting against evictions that would not have been a success if an entry fee had been demanded from its participants. They simply could not afford it. But comrades were still unhappy as it emerged from a newspaper widely distributed in the WSF that the most expensive restaurant inside the precinct belonged to the Kenyan minister of internal security, known as ‘the crusher’ for his strong arm tactics (which he honed as a servant of the colonists and later as minister of transport when he sorted out the taxi industry and substantially reduced the road accident rate).

A demonstration was organised to occupy his restaurant called Windsor Hotel which had pride of place at the center of the WSF area while other eat-houses were located further away in food courts. As things turned out scores of Kenyan children, many who were street kids, enjoyed a free lunch as the protesters liberated the food and served the hungry children.

These two incidents, storming the gates and expropriating the hotel food, were organised by a minority but somehow spoke for the majority of those participants who felt that their WSF was being hijacked by our class enemies. I met many comrades, including locals, who congratulated the steps taken to rectify matters. Later I was asked to chair the Assembly of the Social Movements and I have no doubt that this was because of being part of the 2 actions. The Assembly approved enthusiastically and supported the demonstrations ex post facto.

My co-chair was Comrade Wa’hu who sits on the Organising Committee. She was apparently driven to support the actions, or at least not oppose them, because on both occasions at the gate she was present and was given a platform to explain the committee’s entrance policy. Her chairing of the Assembly indicated that there was no intention of
rejecting the committee, let alone the WSF, but rather we had taken the necessary action to rectify an injustice which we found intolerable within our space.

In conclusion, I was involved in a debate with Comrade Chico Whitaker and other prominent comrades of the WSF on whether the WSF should be a ‘space or movement’. This was in the context of a discussion of the Bamako Appeal, a document issued by Samir Amin and other comrades suggesting a political way forward for the WSF. My opinion is that the ‘space or movement’ debate in a way is a false debate. Sometimes it looks like one of those debates that start and end in the mid-air preoccupations of the professional middle class, especially if we consider the millions and millions who were absent from the WSF and who know nothing about this debate.

Ordinary working class and poor people need and create and have a movement of resistance and struggle. They also need and create and have spaces for that movement to breathe and develop. The real question is what place will the WSF have in that reality. What space will there be for ordinary working class and poor people? Who will shape and drive and control the movement? Will it be a movement of NGO’s and individual luminaries creating space for themselves to speak of their concern for the poor? Will it be undermined by collaboration with capitalist forces? I think what some of us saw happening in Nairobi posed some of these questions sharply and challenged some of the answers coming from many (but not all) of the prominent NGO’s and luminaries in the WSF.
Is there an ‘other globalisation’ movement that is not merely opposed to neoliberalism, but is also capable of formulating concrete political proposals and programmes? This chapter considers interconnected trends that originate from the mutation of the World Social Forum from an arena of encounter for local social movements into an organised network of experts, academics and NGO practitioners. Such trends transfer the legacy of modes of left politics well established in twentieth century industrialised capitalism to a context marked by the withering away of coherent revolutionary subjects defined on class lines.

First, while building its status and standing on buzzwords and symbolic referents that have been widely circulating after the 1999 Seattle revolt, the cliques of experts and full-time activism vying for hegemony within the WSF aim to elaborate guidelines of social transformation of which they remain the sole wardens and true interpreters. On the one hand, the political discourse of such aspiring leaders is nurtured in a set of metaphors and images, which we define the ‘Seattle canon’, that have come to shape the parlance of anti-globalisation movements. Therefore the continuous insistence on plurality, horizontality, consensus, and the creation of global political spaces that respect the characteristics of local struggles continue to play a decisive role in places where the left once praised unity, organisational discipline, democratic centralism and the respect of the party line.

However, a resilient underlying trope continues to operate underneath these seeming innovations. That is the idea that between the material development of subjectivities at the level of communities, locales and struggles, and the place where they become properly political, capable to embody a universal yearning for change, there is a gap that social subjectivity and conflict by themselves cannot bridge. In this view, the politicisation of local struggles requires a level in which disorderly, spontaneous, often contradictory claims that originate from local struggles are subsumed into neat, clearly defined blueprints and political demands. A central level of organisation would then convey ‘our’ demands into the realm of the properly political (as opposed to confusedly subjectivist) realm in which we face our historical antagonists, be they Capital, the State, or the Market.

The obsession with drafting the blueprint for the Revolution as a process qualitatively different from the material practices of struggle that enable its own emergence is combined with a second important legacy from the twentieth century left: The emphasis on the necessary role of political vanguards. It can be debated to what extent the transformation of the WSF into a conduit for vanguardist politics has advanced, or what the margins to contest it or even to stop it are. But there is no doubt about the vanguardist temptation in the WSF. By vanguardism here we mean an organisational approach that holds that, even if material struggles and conflicts open up spaces of political possibilities, the definition of the ultimate meanings of such possibilities is not self-evident from the standpoint of subjectivity, and their elaboration requires a specialised layer of experts whose knowledge is not ordinarily accessible from the grassroots.

From this point of view, the Bamako Appeal’s hardly naked ambition to articulate the authentic and true meaning of the exchanges that take place in the WSF within a set of clear, ‘positive’ of course, demands is a clear manifestation of vanguardism. It in fact tries to ‘impute’, to use Lukacs’ phrase, a ‘true consciousness’ over the confused desires that motivate real-life, immediate struggles. In a time-honored tradition, it wants to re-establish the role of professional revolutionaries as those in charge of making the housewives of
Lenin’s metaphor truly understand the political significance of their own actions.

It would be difficult to understand the trajectory of the WSF without noticing the role played by the legacy of the twentieth century old left within the rhetorical trappings of the Seattle canon. Nationalism, developmentalism, and third worldism feature prominently among the self-representation devices of the WSF elite. The most publicised statements coming out of the WSF, usually never discussed or approved through processes of grassroots participation, reflect a growing concentration of decision-making and political visibility in the hands of an unaccountable stratum of academics and professional activists. Conversely, endless debates and workshops among less media-heavy, more dispersed social actors have been relegated to the role of innocuous background chatter and a pale semblance of mass mobilisation. The Bamako Appeal is a reflection of the general political method of the WSF, as is its overarching preoccupation with institutionalising the ‘other globalisation movement’, of making it, under the guidance and tutelage of its self-appointed vanguards, a respectable counterpart in the ‘reform’ of international economic architectures, political institutions, media apparatuses. Finally, neo-populist Latin American politicians and governments like those of Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela, have become central political referents for the WSF. As a consequence, those who argue that the effectiveness of social movements is primarily a matter of shaping, or even seizing, power at the level of the nation-state claim to have been vindicated.

The WSF’s drift towards institutionalisation and vanguardism marks the crisis of a political discourse that, following the 1999 ‘battle of Seattle’, had imagined the global movement as the convergence of singular, partial actors and subjectivities. The elaboration of common claims and struggles was then seen as premised on the constitutive autonomy of practices aimed at developing alternatives using methods of horizontality and consensus. Such practices and their autonomy questioned, moreover, the assumption that a central revolutionary subject, as in much working class mythology of the twentieth century Western left, is necessary or indeed desirable to achieve fundamental social change. On the other hand, the ontology of the central revolutionary subject has also been denied on the ground by multifarious conflicts like the Zapatista rebellion, landless movements in Latin America, environmental struggles in India, the struggles of welfare claimants and opposition to gentrification in the USA, migrants’ and precarious workers’ movements in Western Europe, the piquetero movement in Argentina, ‘IMF riots’ in structurally adjusted Africa, and the South African struggles against the privatisation and commodification of basic social services.

The multitude of voices that have rejected the intolerable price imposed by neoliberalism on individual and collective forms of life has not been primarily rooted in a stable waged condition, has not especially come from formally employed and unionised workers, and has expressed no overarching nostalgia for an age in which a waged occupation is the main or even the only condition for a decent life, basic social security, or an income beyond mere poverty. Instead, the politics of ‘the poor’ has contested the mere sociological connotation of this word, recodifying it to rightfully claim a sensuous enjoyment of everyday experience, and forms of life enabled by decommodified access to common goods, in ways that no longer depend on the prospect of becoming factory working class, or on delegating liberation to the revolutionary organisation and its self-proclaimed vanguards.

For these reasons, the official party and union left has often been contemptuous and dismissive of the struggles of the poor, blaming their ‘spontaneity’ or ‘subjectivism’ as ‘ultra-left’, while paying lip service to their dedication, and fondling their constituencies as potential grounds for recruiting. And now we have the Bamako Appeal, which, forgetful of the criticism to established left politics emerging from the very poor who see nonetheless the WSF as an opportunity of encounter and exchange, come up once again with ominous expressions like ‘workers’ united front’. It does not seem, therefore, possible to maintain the
view that the ‘other globalisation movement’ is about ‘changing the world without taking power’ without a head-on confrontation between the material practices of the poors and the current discourse of the WSF expertocracy.

Functional to the WSF expertocracy’s obsession with the institutionalisation of social movement politics, is a view that reifies material, concrete social subjectivities into mechanic abstractions and purely ideological simplifications. The January 2006 Bamako Appeal that was drafted just ahead of the WSF’s polycentric session in Mali, for example, tells us that the ‘other globalisation movement’ is about democratising politics and society. That basically means articulating a discourse of rights and claims to be asserted vis-à-vis the nation state and international organisations. As such, the movement questions hierarchy and authority, but only when they originate outside of it, as the product of corporate domination or state power.

No mention is made of the fact that authoritarian modes of organising are an integral part of the legacy of left vanguardism, and have been as such opposed and contested within social movement politics. Nor can we find anything of the intuitions of, among others, feminist, gay, lesbian and transgender movements, which criticise a right-based politics centered on the nation-state, as the state prerogative to codify rights is precisely what enables the disciplining and fragmentation of social subjectivities. Similarly, nothing is said of the ways in which demands for the decommodification of income and resources that emerge in the struggles of the unemployed and precarious workers (and not only in Western countries) have often nothing to do with ‘job creation’, which is rather intended as the perpetuation of wage slavery. Issues like whether wage labour should be celebrated or transcended, whether the nation state should be reconstituted or subverted, or what are the relations between vanguardism and organisation continue to be a source of separation of left politics from the subjectivities of subaltern communities, rather than issues that can be glossed over under the reassuring mantles of ‘comradely debate’ and ‘unity in action’.

The suppression by the WSF elites of diversity, complexity, and contestation as constitutive features of the globalisation movements operates by virtue of an idealised globalisation movement whose assumptions of unity and coherence are required by the institutional realm the elites themselves aspire to inhabit. It is precisely such a multitude of social subjectivities, and the unsuppressed autonomy of its constituents that we identify as a terrain of engagement and politicisation. We move, moreover, from the premise that social movement politics and its potentialities are validated only by the material practices of the subaltern, and not by the ability of leaders and vanguards to encapsulate such practices in blueprints and guidelines in accordance with pre-existing, static theories. Putting material praxis and subjectivity at the center of social movement politics implies as a preliminary step to recognise the full political potential of struggles that want to shape ‘this’ globalisation, and not delegate the construction of ‘another’ one to a self-styled activist personnel, especially when it emerges from the most discredited left trajectories. A healthy skepticism is therefore needed towards exercises of ideological imperialism that, under the pretense of building a common ground for an assumed global political subject, reorders and disempowers localised, diversified dynamics of insurgency.

It reassures us that documents like the Bamako Appeal will eventually prove totally irrelevant and inessential to struggles of communities in South Africa as elsewhere. Indeed, the WSF elite’s cold institutional and technicist soup, occasionally warmed up by some hints of tired poeticism, can provide little nourishment for local subjectivities whose daily responses to neoliberalism face more urgent needs to turn everyday survival into sustained confrontations with an increasingly repressive state. At the same time, building radical political discourse and imagery to be sustained over the long term requires a recognition of the fundamental ambiguities and contradictions that shape the politics of the poor at all levels, and as such do not lend themselves to facile idealisations.
The permanence of sexism and authoritarianism, retrogressive national and ethnic identities, clientelar relations with state politicians and apparatuses, ideological discourses of populism and developmentalism are as integral to the development of the subjectivity of the subaltern as the desires it originates for a society liberated from the power of the market and the state. The interactions between survival, politicisation, and organisation in the unfolding politics of social movements are much fuzzier and far more problematic than what transpires in the rhetoric and pomp of WSF plenaries. It is, nonetheless, the muddiness of community politics on the ground, and its resilience to ossified institutional discourse, that provides the most powerful critique to the left’s established politics. Unruly and unspecified desires are here, indeed, productive of political potential and praxis. As an alternative to the WSF’s official discourse, therefore, we propose immanence, not mediated institutionalisation, and yet-unsignified desire, not political blueprints and guidelines, as the foundation of social antagonism.

Recognising the power of community struggles as a potential for radical change immanent to their very development, and for which a separate institutional layer is not required, raises important epistemological implications. The transformation of the WSF into a machine for the repressive disciplining of the politics of the poor is not just a matter of ideology, but has to do with knowledge as well. The established left discourse projects a mode of knowledge onto the social subjectivities of the subaltern, which aims to ‘format’ them into desirable, prescribed political behaviors. The imposition of old left modes of analysis on the knowledge that social movement struggles produce of themselves, coupled to the temptation in the official discourse of forums like the WSF to argue for social movements that want to become institutions of state and global governance raises troubling questions.

In South Africa as elsewhere in the global South, for example, states and ruling parties have never abandoned attempts to square their enduring adherence to neoliberal policymaking with rhetorical openings in the direction of state-driven developmentalism. What have the WSF representations, and documents like the Bamako Appeal, have to say in this regard? Are they to endorse struggles to shape the heart and soul of the state, or are they conducive to building, as we advocate, life forms and strategies that conflictually autonomise themselves from the state, capital, and wage labour?

For us the imperative, which lay at the heart of the WSF experience, to build connections between subaltern social subjectivities on a global scale, remains as urgent as ever. The reasons for the WSF’s phenomenal success remain in its ability to provide (however incomplete and often biased) an arena of contestation and politicisation for diverse social subjectivities and practices. In so doing, the WSF itself becomes a potential site of production rather than just a means for the representation or translation of struggles.

In our own interactions in WSF space, we have learnt new ways of understanding and approaching our various struggles against capitalism. Our immediate struggles against the privatisation of basic services, health and education, have found resonance with the struggles of groups all over the world. For us, the most meaningful experiences have been those facilitated through the autonomous spaces within the WSF, in interactions and engagements between activists directly involved in struggles e.g. discussions between the Anti-Eviction Campaign (Cape Town) and members of the piquetero movement in Buenos Aires in 2003. In these encounters, as short-lived as they have been, we have shared and learnt not only about the experiences of survival under neoliberalism, but also about living differently and antagonistically to capitalism. In these encounters, we have discussed and debated the creation of self-reliance - how to make demands of the state and how to live without the state, through the lived experiences of different people fighting neoliberalism in different places. In these encounters, lines between ‘the local’ and ‘the global’ have become blurred, both in a geographical sense and in the ways in which we have come to imagine our
struggles, their interrelatedness, and their ‘impact’.

In these encounters a method of communication between comrades in different struggles against a common enemy has come into operation, that is significantly different from the hierarchical modes of engagement that persist in the formal processes and spaces of the WSF. Outside of panel discussions that frame and shape the nature of an engagement prior to the meeting and long theoretical diatribes delivered by anti-globalisation gurus, spaces such as Intergalactica have provided the means by which activists from all over the world have been able to come together in discussions about struggle that prioritise ‘the encounter’ as a productive means of interaction between people.

In the tradition of Zapatismo, ‘the encounter’ values both participants as equals in struggle who approach their engagement in the spirit of trying to find the answers to their common questions through the encounter itself. ‘Talking-listening’ is prioritised as the means of engagement, with the only commitment prior to the encounter being to ‘walk, asking questions’. In the struggles of movements such as the piqueteros of Argentina, the Zapatistas in Mexico, and for social centres in Italy, this collective acceptance that there is no prior known solution or alternative, but that the alternative is made by us in our common engagement and interaction, is a voice that has begun to resonate within our own struggles.

This embrace of our collective uncertainty in the creation of common alternatives to our common problem of capitalism stands in stark opposition to the certainty with which the Bamako Appeal states its plan for a new world order. In this difference, it allows each of us to be part of the struggle against capitalism as we face it in the here and now, and not as bearers of some future solution that is predetermined outside of our immediate struggles.

What remains a powerful undercurrent of informality in the WSF’s proceedings reveals the persistence of horizontal communication between movements, which is not based on mystical views of the revolutionary subject, or in the official discourse of the leaders, but in the life strategies of their participants. Desires expressed in exchanges that take place at events like the WSF are indeed manifestations of the strategies that antagonistically situate the subjectivities of the subaltern in the circuits through which the social life of communities is reproduced in the age of neoliberalism.

The WSF’s officialdom as it presently stands reveals, however, a different order of priority: The ‘compression’ of the movements’ irreducible diversity, the marginalisation of life strategies, and the channeling of political communication by a distant, unrepresentative organisational vanguard. Such developments will unquestionably be contested in forthcoming editions of the WSF itself. Putting the subjectivity of the subaltern at the centre of political praxis, however, is not merely a matter of reforming or democratising the WSF, or of restoring it to some pristine status of unhindered activist communication. In the final analysis, opposing the resurrection of the twentieth century old left, inside and outside the WSF, is, now more than ever, a matter of liberation of political desire.
Chapter 24
Potentials for the World Social Forum

By Patrick Bond

To fight for alternative solutions and for structural reforms (that is to say, for intermediate objectives) is not to fight for improvements in the capitalist system; it is rather to break it up, to restrict it, to create counter-powers which, instead of creating a new equilibrium, undermine its very foundations.

Andre Gorz, Strategy for Labor

‘Foreign Policy Bottom Up’

The World Social Forum (WSF) relies, ultimately, upon the strength of the component progressive forces grounded in concrete national struggles. The South African example permits us to consider organic internationalism since the turn of the 21st century; the sometimes troubled relationship between intellectuals and movement cadres; differences between reformist reforms and a non-reformist project; and the strategic debates that currently surround the WSF’s future, including programmatic possibilities.

In South Africa, the merits of the WSF have been the subject of fierce debate. The difficulty experienced in establishing a national affiliated social forum is just one reflection of ongoing strategic conflict. The ‘Social Movements Indaba’ network, established in 2002, is the closest to a gathering of independent left organisations approximating the WSF, and meets annually. Unfortunately, several logical constituencies - organised labor, churches and health activists (in the Treatment Action Campaign) - have not been attracted to joining the Indaba, because its leading groups explicitly reject work within the ruling African National Congress and its Alliance with the Congress of SA Trade Unions and the SA Communist Party. Such division may be healed in 2008, depending upon the outcome of the political struggle over ANC succession. Further ANC hostility to labor may generate the long-awaited Alliance breakup.

Meanwhile a few South African scholars are actively involved in WSF monitoring (most notably University of the Witwatersrand sociologist Jackie Cock.) There are also several popular education institutes for progressive internationalist politics that contribute to the WSF, including Khanya College in Johannesburg, the Alternative Information and Development Centre and the International Labor Research and Information Group in Cape Town and in Durban, the Centre for Civil Society (CCS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In some ways, the Mbeki government’s ‘talk left’ strategy - raising Third World nationalist and even anti-imperialist grievances in speeches at major multilateral fora – has made solidarity more difficult (because like Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe he has occasionally persuaded observers his rhetoric may match reality). But the ‘walk right’ that invariably followed outraged and mobilised activists every few months, and unveiled to the world’s progressive activists how important it is to counter the South African ruling party’s actual deeds.

The main missing process for these activists would have been a unifying agenda, in which a process such as the WSF – beginning in Porto Alegre in January 2001, continuing through to an Africa meeting in Nairobi in 2007 – allowed many here and across the Third World to compare notes and develop strategy, sector-by-sector (for example, the 15

February 2003 anti-war mobilisations). We can return to this point to conclude.

However, before considering South African debates about a unifying WSF political programme, we repeatedly ask whether those forces in global civil society striving for social justice have adopted appropriate analysis, strategies, tactics and alliances. Often we answer in the negative, as we assess the extent of democratisation in the movements and whether they have put sufficient efforts into achieving ‘non-reformist reforms’, to borrow the distinction made by the late Andre Gorz in his 1964 book *Strategy for Labor*, as opposed to the ‘reformist reforms’ that are easier to justify to funders and mainstream allies but which do damage instead of good to the cause of social justice. (The latter include the Millennium Development Goals and Make Poverty History campaigns which adopt many of the presumptions of neoliberalism.)

To demonstrate this, we can review some autocritical aspects of praxis – as progressive intellectuals and NGO strategists work with social movements (and their organic intellectuals) in struggles to shape the world – that appear relevant in our circuits today. With that as the base, we can briefly summarise the case against that group of world elites within political society who have entrusted themselves with the duty of global-scale reform, before considering the most recent round of failed reforms, some of which NGOs have uncritically joined. It is only after these exercises that a more durable approach to global social justice can be identified, mainly in the WSF.

**Intellectuals and NGOs in the movement**

One issue discussed in detail at the Nairobi WSF in a vigorous Sociologists Without Borders panel is how to line up the resources of formal academics properly within a social change agenda, to complement rather than negate progressive civil society experiences. This is rarely straightforward. Reflecting on CCS’s own errors, scholar-activist Ashwin Desai expressed concern at the International Sociological Association meeting in 2006, when discussing work with social movements that are militant and well rooted within poor communities. Ironically, the most visible of these movements are known not because of their militant interventions but because they have attracted to them supporters from a largely middle-class background who have broadly left-wing political commitments. In a phrase, they have attracted ‘activists’ who seek to come in from the bitter cold of the post-apartheid struggle landscape to the new fires that are burning in communities. These activists bring a range of important skills, perspectives and, most of all, resources to assist in the development, representation and generalisation of these struggles. Celebratory academic papers are produced, books and newspaper articles are written, court cases fought, money for busses, meetings, rallies and T-shirts raised.

Unfortunately, these activists also bring with them certain infectious political diseases. Sometimes they are out to recruit members for their ultra-left sect or political party. Other times, as NGO workers who need to justify their existence, they insert themselves into struggles that may be written up in the next funding proposal. Still other times, one finds ambitious academics keen to distinguish themselves by getting the inside research track on some or other exotic rebellion, whose nuances they are best placed to enlighten their fellows in the academy about, while ratcheting up publication kudos. And, then lastly, one has the somewhat dated, free-floating, professional revolutionaries who genuinely believe they have something to add to these struggles or, more accurately, that these struggles have something to add to the course of the battles they are already fighting. You see them attending marches, doing political education, writing letters and articles in the press or providing strategic advice to
movements that often need assistance on the legal, logistical or financial fronts.

It is hard to think of any social movement that has lasted longer than six-months in South Africa that does not have quite an impressive support crew made up of the kinds of people I have just described. It is quite startling, then, that while social movements have been studied to death, those outsiders who play such a powerful role have largely escaped serious scrutiny… The actual constituency to which even the most radical academics are beholden are not the Poors. Nor is it the singular middle-class. Rather it is the mass of them gathered in conferences, journals, e-mail lists, universities and other sites of the production of bourgeois knowledge.  

Such concerns are regularly posed by South African activists, in part because of the tendency by academics to patronise and romanticise poor people and their movements (I am as guilty as anyone). Shannon Walsh – who as a CCS scholar was very active with several shackdweller communities - has described ‘uncomfortable collaborations’ between petit-bourgeois intellectuals and social movements:

Bertrand Russell traces the origins of the idea of a ‘superior virtue of the oppressed’ to a certain kind of paternalistic ideology developed by the Left during the French Revolution, remaining there ever since. The adulation for the oppressed, he argues, usually arrives via a hegemonic actor, one who may well be part of the subjugation of the very ‘oppressed’ he so admires… Russell is scathing in his analysis of how idealising the oppressed is useful to the hegemonic classes, both to assuage guilt, but also to refuse the oppressed real power since it is their very subjection that makes them virtuous… Uncomfortable collaborations are one such space to see power at work in the everyday. To transform our notions of the Poor to active, desiring subjectivities means first to destroy the discourse that has been spun around them, yet also to acknowledge that without announcing it, many choose to mobilise these identities to stake claims for material, social and political gain from the state. This is part of how the friction between various forces can often open up the most unlikely spaces for change.

Following Walsh, it is crucial for us all to more self-consciously assess from where the discourses we deploy emanate, particularly in view of the danger of paternalism. For internationalists concerned with strengthening ‘civil society’ ranging from grassroots movements to NGOs (the two particular types of groups I personally am most involved with), we have an important warning from Tanzanian legal scholar and political economist Issa Shivji:

As Amilcar Cabral, one of the foremost leaders of the African liberation movement, put it in his Weapon of Theory, ‘every practice produces a theory, and that if it is true that a revolution can fail even though it be based on perfectly conceived theories, nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory’. What is interesting about that period [1960s-70s] is that the radical intellectual discourse was integrated with militant activism; the two were mutually reinforcing.

The NGO discourse in the current period of apparent imperial ‘triumphalism’ eschews theory, emphasises and privileges activism. In the African setting in particular, whatever is left of critical intellectual discourse, largely located at Universities, runs parallel to and is divorced from NGO activism. The requirements of

funding agencies subtly discourage, if not exhibit outright hostility, to a historical and social theoretical understanding of development, poverty, discrimination etc. Our erstwhile benefactors now tell us, ‘just act, don’t think’ and we shall fund both!  

Mike Davis has amplified the critique and applied it especially to urban NGOs in Third World cities, including those associated with World Bank projects. In the same spirit, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer criticise NGO cadre who fail to properly address global power, for importing neoliberal precepts into social movements, dressing them up in the language of participation and consultation:

The effects of structural adjustment programmes and other [global] interventions have the potential of causing popular discontent. That is where the NGO’s play an important function. They deflect popular discontent away from the powerful [global] institutions towards local micro-projects, apolitical ‘grass roots’ self-exploitation and ‘popular education’ that avoids class analysis of imperialism and capitalism. On the one hand they criticise dictatorships and human rights violations but on the other they compete with radical socio-political movements in an attempt to channel popular movements into collaborative relations with dominant neoliberal elites.

The point, however, is that this Northern-influenced NGO cadre has done very poorly in recent years.

**From reformist reforms to non-reformist global justice?**

For Naomi Klein, the period of global capitalist expansion since the 1970s is punctuated by crucial moments when, to quote Milton Friedman, advisor to Augusto Pinochet after the 9/11/73 coup, ‘only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change’. According to Klein:

[Friedman’s pilot project] was the most extreme capitalist makeover ever attempted anywhere, and it became known as a ‘Chicago School’ revolution, as so many of Pinochet’s economists had studied under Friedman there. Friedman coined a phrase for this painful tactic: economic ‘shock treatment’. In the decades since, whenever governments have imposed sweeping free-market programs, the all-at-once shock treatment, or ‘shock therapy’, has been the method of choice.

While the neoliberal project may have failed to meet its sponsors’ promises, particularly in joining market freedoms with political liberty, nevertheless there is not yet a replacement conceptual framework strong enough to reshape the world. One reason is that a crucial middle ground exists where it appears a ‘Post-Washington Consensus’ ideology gives some hope to those shocked by neoliberalism. The idea here is to fix ‘imperfect markets’, add ‘sustainable development’ to the existing capitalist framework via UN and similar multilateral state-building efforts, promote a degree of global Keynesianism and oppose US unilateralism and militarism. Aside from UN agencies, Post-Washington Consensus

5. Davis 2006.
7. Klein 2007. Her other examples include the Malvinas war of 1982 between Argentina and Britain, China’s Tiananmen Square in 1989, Eastern Europe during the 1990s, 9/11/01, the war on Iraq, the December 2004 tsunami, the August 2005 Katrina hurriance, as well as the happy shock we suffered in South Africa when in removing racial apartheid, the local and global elites brought us a more economically unequal version of class apartheid.
advocates include large international NGOs (e.g., Care, Civicus, IUCN, Oxfam, TI), large environmental groups (e.g., Sierra, the World Wildlife Federation, Greenpeace and the World Conservation Union); big labour (e.g., ICTU and AFL-CIO), liberal foundations (Carnegie, Ford, MacArthur, Mott, Open Society, Rockefeller); the Socialist International, and a few governments (Norway, Italy). There are high-profile intellectuals, NGO leaders and especially rock stars associated with this current (Nancy Birdsall, Bono, Bernard Cassen, Peter Eigen, Bob Geldof, Anthony Giddens, Will Hutton, Paul Krugman, Kumi Naidoo, Dani Rodrik, Jeffrey Sachs, Amartya Sen, Nick Stern, Joseph Stiglitz).

But in recent years, global reforms promoted by the Post-Washington group have nearly invariably failed. Consider intra-elite battles decided mainly by the arrogance of the United States (US) and European Union (EU) in recent years:

- in relation to geopolitical tension, the lack of peace settlements (or indeed prospects) in the Middle East, Gulf, central Asia, central Africa and the Horn of Africa, with a looming war involving the US, Iran and probably Israel and oft-predicted long-term interimperial conflicts between the US and China;
- on United Nations democratisation, the inability to expand the Security Council in recent heads-of-state summits, notwithstanding pressure from aspirant members Japan, Germany, India, Brazil, Nigeria and South Africa;
- on trade, repeated delays in concluding the Doha Round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations;
- in international finance, ongoing contagion of turbulence (including bursting market bubbles, bankruptcies and volatile currencies), extremely high – and growing - current account deficits in the US and other countries (including South Africa), World Bank legitimacy crisis, worsening IMF financial deficits, and US/EU resistance to Bretton Woods reform as witnessed by the leadership appointments in 2007 of two men from the neoconservative/neoliberal power structure, Robert Zoellick (World Bank) and Dominique Strauss-Kahn (IMF);
- environmentally, the failure of the EU and supportive Third World states to defend, much less expand the Kyoto Protocol, in part due to the ‘carbon trading’ distraction and in part due to the alternative alignment promoted by the US and Australian regimes, with Canada, China, India and South Africa joining, as large CO2/per capita emitters lacking commitment to change production structures (with respect to other global ecological management problems arising in freshwater, maritime resources, trade in toxics, species extinction and the like, there has been very little or no progress); and
- an overall ‘global apartheid’ structure in terms of economics, political power, culture, public health and social services, through which most measures of inequality and genuine progress continue worsening, making mockery of the (already relatively unambitious) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to South African president Thabo Mbeki, speaking at the September 2007 UN heads of state summit,

> The cold reality is that it will be difficult for the UN in its present form fully to implement its own decisions and therefore help the poor achieve urgently the MDGs. Indeed, until the ideals of freedom, justice and equality characterise this premier world body, the dominant will forever dictate to the dominated and the interests of the dominated, which are those of the majority of humanity, would be deferred in

Mbeki’s pessimism is a tangible reflection of the lowered expectations the world elite really has for ‘global governance’ and world-scale reforms. Already in 2004, regretted cosmopolitan democracy champion David Held, ‘The value of the UN system has been called into question, the legitimacy of the Security Council has been challenged, and the working practices of multilateral institutions have been eroded.’ These latter three points of Held are, indeed, celebrated by critics of imperialism, and after the UN General Assembly endorsed the US occupation of Iraq in May 2003, Tariq Ali suggested, simply, ‘let it go the way of the League of Nations’.

However, for many well-meaning intellectuals and NGO strategists, the danger of cooption has emerged in the so-called Post-Washington Consensus ideology, which often finds expression in campaigns such as the MDGs, Make Poverty History and the Global Call to Action against Poverty. These efforts rely for credibility upon minor advances within multilateral elite institutions. Activists associated with Post-Washington strategies are sometimes accused of promoting ‘reformist reforms’ which legitimise existing power structures, accumulation dynamics, and political processes, and which might also have the effect of demobilising their own constituents by virtue of gaining a modicum of change on issues such as debt relief or aid promises. ‘Non-reformist reforms,’ in contrast, would open wide the doors for further contestation, would empower the movements not the system, and would identify areas of structural contradiction for more intense struggles ahead.

Reformist reformers include Make Poverty History strategists, unveiled in the British press as under the influence of Gordon Brown’s office via the Oxfam/Treasury/World Bank revolving door. At the end of 2005, writers like Stuart Hodkinson, Noreena Hertz and Maxine Frith analyzed the fatal flaws of Make Poverty History. According to Frith, the problem was that celebrities ‘hijacked’ the campaign. For Hertz, ‘We achieved next to nothing’ because ‘the campaign’s design allowed it to accept inappropriate markers for success that were never real proxies for justice, empowerment or accountability. And also because its demands were never in fact audacious enough.’ Hodkinson was even more critical:

By being too dependent on lobbying, celebrities and the media, by failing to give ownership of the campaign to southern hemisphere social movements, by watering down the demands agreed by grassroots movements at the World Social Forum, and by legitimising the G8 summit, the campaign was doomed from the start.

The idea was to provide relief from crushing debt loads, to double aid and to establish a ‘development round’ of trade. At best, partial critiques of imperial power emerged amidst the cacophony of all-white rock concerts and political grandstanding. At worst, polite public discourse tactfully avoided capital’s blustering violence, from Nigeria’s oil-soaked Delta to northeastern Congo’s gold mines to Botswana’s diamond finds to Sudan’s killing fields. Most of the London charity NGO strategies ensured that core issue areas – debt, aid, trade

---

10. Held 2004; rejoinders (including by me) can be found in Held 2005.
and investment – would be addressed in only the most superficial ways. By 2007, one of the main lobbyists, rock star Bob Geldof, finally became so frustrated that he called those attending the Heiligendamm G8 summit ‘creeps’ and their work a ‘total farce’.\(^{17}\)

Instead, a brighter future lies with those establishing non-reformist strategies that reject neoliberal precepts. At CCS we have seen four positions on how to not just reject but propose an alternative political framework.\(^{18}\) The debate was stimulated in July 2006 by the presence of Samir Amin, who was the key promoter of the ‘Bamako Appeal’, a document drafted five months earlier at the WSF in order to fuse socialism, anti-racism/colonialism, and (national) development. The second position was an argument about ‘Why Bamako does not appeal’ by four CCS associates: Franco Barchiesi, Heinrich Bohmke, Prashani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava. They accused the Appeal and the WSF of degenerating ‘into an organised network of experts, academics and NGO practitioners… The WSF elite’s cold institutional and technicist soup, occasionally warmed up by some hints of tired poeticism, can provide little nourishment for local subjectivities whose daily responses to neoliberalism face more urgent needs to turn everyday survival into sustained confrontations with an increasingly repressive state.’ Third, another very strong tradition in the WSF is represented especially by the International Socialist tendency and Fourth International strand of Trotskyism, which see their role in the Forum movement as establishing socialist consciousness and cadre (as CCS associate Ngwane argues is needed).

A fourth position (which I am partial to) seeks the 21st century’s anti-capitalist ‘manifesto’ in the existing social, labour and environmental movements already engaged in excellent transnational social justice struggles. The WSF’s greatest potential – so far unrealised – is the possibility of linking dozens of radical movements in various sectors. One of their struggles, the liberation of AIDS medicines from tyrannical monopoly patents which had previously prevented their consumption by poor people, has been sufficiently successful to claim both ‘decommodification’ and ‘deglobalisation’ (of capital): these medicines are now free to low-income South Africans getting public health services (where those do exist) and are being produced by generic drug companies in several African sites. There are many other examples drawn from some of the finest networks of social justice activists presently active, in fields such as land (Via Campesino), healthcare (International Peoples Health Movement), free schooling (Global Campaign for Education), water (the People’s World Water Forum), energy/climate change (the Durban Declaration), debt (Jubilee South), and trade (Our World is Not for Sale).

The point, for those of us fortunate to study these movements, is not reification of everything poor people and their advocates do, especially given the kinds of conflicts – often unnecessarily ugly – that we in South Africa have seen emerge between advocates of the four political strategies suggested above. But it is to acknowledge that activists are driving the research forward in a manner that tells us more about the world than any other method, namely praxis in a non-reformist fashion. It behooves us to learn from their victories and failures, to both honor and lovingly criticise these comrades, if we want the most strongly rooted global justice programme possible.

References

Bond, P. 2005a, ‘Globalisation/Commodification or Deglobalisation/Decommodification in

\(^{17}\) Blair 2007.
\(^{18}\) Details can be found in Sen and Kumar 2007.


___ 2006c, Talk Left, Walk Right: South Africa’s Frustrated Global Reforms, Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.


n-vision_reflections/article_1918.jsp


Part Five
Explaining and transcending xenophobia
Chapter 25
Xenophobia in structural and human terms

By Patrick Bond

Introduction

A variety of indicators suggest a mixed story with regard to socio-economic, political and environmental change, especially during the early 2000s when democracy and the ‘developmental state’ strategy were being consolidated. On the one hand, various indicators suggested sustained growth and political optimism lay ahead, as predictable macroeconomic policy and rising world commodity prices maintained confidence in post-liberation state management. An ‘economic boom’ was regularly proclaimed by observers such as the Financial Times,19 thanks to ‘macroeconomic stability’, GDP growth uninterrupted since 1998, and a substantial rise in exports.

Yet at the same time, South Africa began suffering not only economic problems, but also a dramatic increase in social unrest that presaged a deterioration of the integrity of several central liberal political institutions. As one reflection, there were 5813 protests (as defined under the Regulation of Gatherings Act 205 of 1993) recorded by the SA Police Service in 2004-05, and subsequently, an average of 10,000 per annum,20 with higher amounts for the year 2007-08 anticipated as a result of the country’s longest-ever public servants’ strike. This is probably the highest per capita rate of social protest in the world.

By mid-2008, however, it was evident that the protests could as easily be directed against fellow community residents – especially if they hailed from outside South Africa – as against the genuine sources of their problems. Along with rising domestic violence and the AIDS pandemic, the xenophobia wave was perhaps the worst case of the tearing South African social fabric. But there were, in contrast, other more optimistic signs of social grievances channeled through policy advocacy, public conscientisation, international alliance-building and even the court system. These signs correspond to what Karl Polanyi termed a ‘double movement’ in which, initially during the 19th century in Europe, ‘the extension of the market organisation in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction’21 as people defended their land, labour and other resources from excessive commodification. Four areas were illustrative and are discussed in more detail below: the Treatment Action Campaign’s 1998-2008 street pressure and legal strategy of acquiring anti-retroviral drugs for HIV+ people (Box 1); Soweto activists whose protests helped drive the controversial water privatiser Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux out of Johannesburg and whose Johannesburg High Court victory in April 2008 began undoing its commercialised water policies (Box 2); critics of climate change, perhaps the world’s greatest challenge yet (Box 3); and opponents of the apartheid debt who also demanded reparations from international corporations (Box 4).

Whether campaign-oriented or simply momentarily explosive in character, civil society activism was by all accounts a contributing factor in the 2007-08 transfer of power within the

African National Congress, from the man favoured by local and global corporations and the prosperous classes (Thabo Mbeki) to the candidate of trade unions, the youth, organised ANC women and the SA Communist Party (Jacob Zuma). This latter group represented a ‘centre-left’, comprising the Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu), SA Communist Party, SA National Civic Organisation, some churches and NGOs, ANC Youth League and ANC Women’s League.

South Africa’s ‘independent left’, in contrast, is comprised of social and community movements, NGO critics, feminists, internationalists, environmentalists, some in the faith community, and others alienated by the ‘neoliberal’ (market-oriented) economic policies, cronyism, corruption and patriarchal nationalism that represent durable ideologies within the ruling party, including the Zuma camp. They are part of a ‘social justice’ tradition that arose across the world over the past decade and achieved prominence in contesting globalisation’s adverse impacts.

As in Zimbabwe during its 1990s period of failing neoliberal economic management, South African nationalists, especially the black upper- and middle-class, are ascendant, according to one of the most perceptive South African analysts, Gillian Hart. She disputes celebratory claims often bolstered by invocations of Polanyi’s ‘double movement’ of an inevitable, cumulative rising tide of progressive working class and popular opposition springing from below to challenge the devastation wrought by the top-down extension of neoliberal market forces into all forms of life and livelihood. One of the limits of this currently popular ‘optimistic’ reading of Polanyi is its neglect of the possibility if not likelihood that what he called ‘enlightened reactionaries’ may well become major forces in protective counter-movements.22

This warning is apposite, in view not only of xenophobia, but also of a faction within the ascendant political elite associated with Zuma who appear profoundly disrespectful of the gains of liberal democracy against the kind of overarching state apparatus and repressive capacities that characterised apartheid. These issues are all the more important given the major flashpoints now evident in the society, of which eight deserve mention next.

Socio-economic flashpoints

There are eight areas of socio-economic and environmental progress and problems that represent socio-economic flashpoints in the post-apartheid era, that are the result of either post-1994 policy problems or even deeper structural forces:

there was an immediate post-apartheid rise in income inequality, which was slightly tempered after 2001 by increased welfare payments, but which meant the Gini coefficient soared from below 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 by 2006 (0.8 if welfare income is excluded);23

- the official unemployment rate doubled (from 16% in 1994 to around 32% by the early 2000s, falling to 26% by the late 2000s - but by counting those who gave up looking for work, the realistic rate is closer to 40%) as a result of imported East Asian goods in relatively labour-intensive sectors (clothing, textiles, footwear, appliances and electronics) and capital-/intensive production techniques elsewhere (especially mining and metals);

The provision of housing to several million people was marred by the facts that the units produced are far smaller than apartheid ‘matchboxes’, are located further away from jobs and community amenities, are constructed with less durable building materials, come with lower-quality municipal services, and are saddled with higher-priced debt if and when credit is available;

while free water and electricity are now provided to many low-income people, the overall price has risen dramatically since 1994, leading to millions of people facing disconnections each year when they cannot afford the second block of water consumption;

the degeneration of the health system, combined with AIDS, has caused a dramatic decline in life expectancy, from 65 at the time of liberation to 52 a decade later;\(^{24}\)

the education system is still crippled by excessive cost recovery and fiscal austerity, leaving 35% of learners dropping out by Grade 5 (worse than neighbouring Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland) and 48% by Grade 12, and, according to the most recent (2001) survey of schools, leaving 27% without running water, 43% without electricity, and 80% without libraries and computers;\(^{25}\)

ecological problems have become far worse, according to the government’s own commissioned research in the 2006 ‘Environmental Outlook’ report, which according to the leading state official, ‘outlined a general decline in the state of the environment’;\(^{26}\)

the high crime was accompanied by an arms race – private security systems, sophisticated alarms, high walls and razor wire, gated communities, road closures and booms - that left working-class households more vulnerable to robberies, house-breaks, car theft and other petty crime (with increases of more than 1/3 in these categories from 1994-2001),\(^{27}\) as well as epidemic levels of rape and other violent crimes; additional corporate crime (including illicit capital flight) was generally not well policed, or suffered from an apparently organised penetration of the SA Police Service’s highest ranks.

Economic decline

The early 2000s witnessed increasing optimism that the late 1990s emerging markets currency crises – including South Africa – could be overcome, and that the offshore relistings of most of the country’s largest firms would not adversely affect growth. Indeed, by 2001, the rate of profit for large SA capital was restored from an earlier downturn from the 1970s-90s, to 9\(^{th}\) highest


\(^{27}\) http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=3&slink_id=1431&link_type=12&slink_type=12&tmpl_id=3
amongst the world’s major national economies (far ahead of the US and China), according to one British government study.\textsuperscript{28} The reality, though, was that high corporate profits were not a harbinger of sustainable economic economic development, as a result of persistent deep-rooted contradictions:

- with respect to stability, the value of the Rand in fact crashed (against a basket of trading currencies) by more than a quarter in 1996, 1998, 2001, 2006 and 2008, the worst record of any major economy, which in turn reflects how vulnerable SA became to international financial markets thanks to steady exchange control liberalisation starting in 1995;

- SA witnessed GDP growth during the 2000s, but this does not take into account the depletion of non-renewable resources - if this factor plus pollution were considered, SA would have a net \textit{negative} per person rate of national wealth accumulation (of at least $2/year), according to even the World Bank;\textsuperscript{29}

- SA’s economy has become much more oriented to profit-taking from financial markets than production of real products, in part because of extremely high real interest rates, for from March 1995 (when the financial rand exchange control was relaxed), the after-inflation interest rate rose to a record high for a decade’s experience in SA economic history, often reaching double digits (after a recent 3.5% spike during the mid-2000s, consumer and housing credit markets are badly strained by serious arrears and defaults);

- the two most successful major sectors from 1994-2004 were communications (12.2% growth per year) and finance (7.6%) while labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, footwear and gold mining shrunk by 1-5% per year, and overall, manufacturing as a percentage of GDP also declined;

- Government admits that overall employment growth was -0.2% per year from 1994-2004 - but -0.2% is a vast underestimate of the problem, given that the official definition of employment includes such work as ‘begging’ and ‘hunting wild animals for food’ and ‘growing own food’;

- the problem of excessive capital intensity in production - too many machines per worker - will probably get worse, for the Industrial Development Corporation (a state agency) forecasts that the sector with the most investment in the period 2006-2010 will be iron and steel, with a massive 24% rise in fixed investment per year, but sectoral employment expected to fall 1.3% per year, in spite of – or indeed because of - all the new investment;

- overall, the problem of ‘capital strike’ – large-scale firms’ failure to invest - continues, as gross fixed capital formation hovered between 15-17% from 1994-2004, hardly enough to cover wear-and-tear on equipment; and

- businesses did invest their SA profits, but not mainly in SA: dating from the time of political and economic liberalisation, most of the largest Joburg Stock Exchange firms - Anglo American, DeBeers, Old Mutual, SA Breweries, Liberty Life, Gencor (now the core of BHP Billiton), Didata, Mondi and others - shifted their funding flows and even their primary share listings to overseas stock markets;

\textsuperscript{28} http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/economic_trends/ET587_Walton.pdf
\textsuperscript{29} World Bank (2006), \textit{Where is the Wealth of Nations?} Washington, DC, p.66.
the outflow of profits and dividends due these firms is one of two crucial reasons SA’s ‘current account deficit’ has soared to amongst the highest in the world (in mid-2008 exceeded only by New Zealand) and is hence a major danger in the event of currency instability, as was Thailand’s (around 5%) in mid-1997;

the other cause of the current account deficit is the negative trade balance, which can be blamed upon a vast inflow of imports after trade liberalisation, which export growth could not keep up with;

another reason for capital strike is SA’s sustained overproduction problem in existing (highly-monopolised) industry, as manufacturing capacity utilisation fell substantially from the mid 80s% range during the 1970s, to the high 70s% range during the early 2000s;

corporate profits avoided reinvestment in plant, equipment and factories, and instead sought returns from speculative real estate and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange: there was a 50% increase in share prices during the first half of the 2000s, and the property boom which began in 1999 had by 2004 sent house prices up by 200% (in comparison to just 60% in the US market prior to the burst bubble, according to the International Monetary Fund).

It is nowadays common to connect the growing social and economic crises – especially inflation – to the May-June 2008 outbreak of xenophobia. Various theories assert the role of inexpensive labour and joblessness, competition over local markets and entrepreneurial opportunities, inadequate state service delivery and growing economic stress. The incidents in which at least 60 immigrants were killed were, in fact, preceded by prior processes in which local residents blamed ‘the other’ - in ethnic, national, gender or other terms – for problems that are of a more structural nature.

As can be observed in accompanying figures, these economic problems are deep, structural dilemmas, which had their roots not only in the post-apartheid liberalisation, but in long-standing vulnerabilities in the apartheid-era economy. But amplification of these problems has been obvious in recent months.

Because of liberalisation of both trade (August 1994 onwards) and finance (from March 1995), the current account deficit is dangerously high (-9% in June 2008) compared to peer economies (Figure 1). Although overall corporate profits are up against worker wages since the low-point of the late 1980s, a decisive problem is that manufacturing profits have fallen dramatically since the early 1980s in relation to financial and speculative profits (Figure 2). South Africa’s export advantages are in a few areas difficult to maintain, such as auto components, swimming pool filters, wines, coal and base metals (Figure 3). Low fixed investment rates persist, especially by private sector investors (Figure 4), in part because excess idle capacity in existing plant and equipment (Figure 5). That, in turn, helps explain the very low level of Foreign Direct Investment, contrasting with dangerously high inflows of liquid Portfolio Capital attracted by South Africa’s high real interest rate (Figure 6). None of these processes are healthy, and alongside extremely high price inflation in electricity, petrol and food, will generate yet more social unrest. Some of this, in turn, is misdirected into xenophobia.

Xenophobia as state and civil society failure

To illustrate the dangers of not addressing the sorts of issues raised above, consider the nightmare that played out in May-June 2008, and potentially into the future: xenophobia. This aspect of civil society reflects the failure of progressive organisations to adequately
direct social unrest and grievances into effective avenues. The scale of the problem was enormous, with an estimated 100 deaths (mostly of immigrants) and 70 000 people displaced, mainly in Gauteng and Western Cape provinces, followed by KwaZulu-Natal.

The state's failure to assess the threat to immigrants has been the subject of extensive discussion, including ridicule at the idea posed by the intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils that a 'Third Force' comparable to early 1990s state divide-and-rule strategies was in play. When xenophobic tendencies in the society were formally drawn to Mbeki's attention in the African Peer Review Mechanism report - 'xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud' - in December 2007, 'He said the report's assessment that xenophobic tendencies prevailed was 'simply not true'.

But not only had there been multiple reports of especially Somali murders in Western and Eastern Cape townships, as well as police brutality and abuse at the Lindela repatriation centre outsourced by Home Affairs. More generally, socio-economic stress during a period of solid economic growth in the mid-2000s apparently generated xenophobia. A 'FutureFact' survey asked South Africans if they agreed with this statement: 'Most of the problems in South Africa are caused by illegal immigrants or foreigners.' In 2006, 67% percent agreed, a substantial increase on a few years ago, when the figure was 47%. And it is reflected among all population sectors of the country. FutureFact also put this statement to respondents: 'Immigrants are a threat to jobs for South Africans and should not be allowed into South Africa' - with which 69% agreed.

When the violence began in mid-May, the immediate reaction from the state, academics and NGOs was the call for more civic 'education', usually about human rights, the plight of refugees, or the role that neighbouring societies played in hosting South African exiles during apartheid. But beyond platitudes that reflected class privilege, civic education would not be sufficient to address genuine grievances, as the Human Sciences Research Council found in its report on the May-June events:

Settlements that have recently experienced the expression of 'xenophobic' violence have also been the site of violent and other forms of protest around other issues, most notably service delivery... When respondents were probed about the role and/or actions of government in the recent 'xenophobic' attacks, a general sense of dissatisfaction was expressed about government’s handling of the conflict, as well as its indirect role in contributing to the escalation of an unhealthy environment between local citizenry and foreign nationals. The responses generally consisted of three subthemes: the ineffective communication and/or engagement with local citizenry around the violence and its underlying causes; the insufficient pace and processing of service delivery as contributing to tensions; and more directly perceived corruption and impropriety of government officials, especially in the police service, in their dealings with foreign nationals...

Overall, a worrying degree of latent resistance to illegally-resident foreign nationals came through in the focus groups, where although the respondents largely eschewed violent means of articulating their issues about these migrants, otherwise demonstrated that the planned re-integration of foreign migrants into communities will at some stage confront this resistance head-on. Given that findings elsewhere in this report demonstrate that the nature of the resistance to foreign migrants stems mainly from local economic and public resource competition, it is perhaps not surprising that in other respects respondents emphasised the spatial manner in

which foreign migrants have settled in South Africa, i.e. integrated within existing and largely depressed communities... South African citizens literally feel ‘besieged’ by a range of socio-economic challenges. This feeling is particularly acute for men of working age who are struggling to find employment or make a living and feel most directly threatened by the migration of large numbers of ‘working men’ from other parts of the continent.  

There are various ways in which the structural tensions described in Sections 2 and 3 above, are translated into violence against immigrants.

- lack of jobs, as formal sector employment dropped by a million after 1994, and declining wage levels as a result of immigrant willingness to work for low pay on a casualised basis;
- immigrant tenacity in finding informal economic opportunities even when these are illegal, such as streetside trading of fruits, vegetables, cigarettes, toys and other small commodities;
- housing pressures whereby immigrants drive up rentals of a multi-occupant dwelling unit beyond the ability of locals to afford;
- surname identity theft (including fake marriages to South Africans who only learn much later); and
- increases in local crime blamed on immigrants.

Behind some of this tension is the recent expansion of the migrant labour system. In 1994, the choice was made not to rid South Africa’s economy of migrancy, which could have been accomplished by improving wages, maintaining much higher employment, turning single-sex migrant hostels into decent family homes, and compelling the extension of formal employment benefits (health insurance, housing, pensions) to black workers and their families, as is the case with higher-income white workers. Today, hostels remain but with the doubling of the unemployment rate, the buildings are often full of unemployed men, and these were the source of many xenophobic attacks.

Moreover, even if South Africa’s racially-defined geographical areas known as bantustans – Zululand, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Transkei, Ciskei, QwaQwa, etc - have disappeared from apartheid-era Swiss-cheese maps, the economic logic of drawing inexpensive labour from distant sites is even more extreme, now that it no longer is stigmatised by apartheid connotations. Instead of hailing from KwaZulu or Venda or Bophuthatswana or Transkei, the most desperate migrant workers in SA’s major cities are from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia, countries partially deindustrialised by South African business expansion up-continent. In one frank admission of self-interest regarding these workers, First National Bank chief economist Cees Bruggemann told Business Report, ‘They keep the cost of labour down... Their income gets spent here because

32. Human Sciences Research Council (2008), ‘Citizenship, Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa: Perceptions from South African Communities’, Democracy and Governance Programme, Pretoria, June. The HSRC’s recommendations – amongst which that RDP houses not be allowed to be occupied (even for rent or after sale) by immigrants and its call for retention of skilled migrants but extreme measures against unskilled workers - are unconstitutional and counterproductive.
they do not send the money back to their countries. If many immigrants don’t send back remittances (because their wages are low and the cost of living has soared), that in turn reminds us of how apartheid drew cheap labour from Bantustans: for many years women were coerced into supplying unpaid services - child-rearing, healthcare and eldercare for retirees - so as to reproduce fit male workers for the mines, factories and plantations.

And in turn, the need for civil society to think beyond the immediate grievances and find international solidaristic relationships – as did the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union when they refused the April 2008 offloading (from a Chinese ship) of three million bullets destined for Zimbabwe police and army guns – could not be greater. On 24 May, Johannesburg civil society mobilised several thousand people – local supporters and immigrants alike – to march through Hillbrow in solidarity with immigrants. Various other initiatives in townships across South Africa showed that communities could welcome immigrants back, and live in harmony. The provision of resources by churches, NGOs and concerned citizens was impressive, even while the state backtracked from responsibilities, and in some cases including Durban, actively oppressed fearful immigrants who remained homeless and unable to return to communities.

Figure 1: South Africa’s current account deficit in relation to other emerging markets.

(Source: International Monetary Fund Article 4 Consultation, August 2007)
Figure 2: Manufacturing profits decline in relation to financial sector profits

(Source: Dani Rodrik)
Figure 3: SA's export advantages

(Source: International Monetary Fund Article 4 Consultation, August 2005)
Figure 4: Capital strike: Fixed investment and GDP

(Source: Dani Rodrik)
Figure 5: Sustained excess capacity of manufacturing capital

Figure 6: Declining Foreign Direct Investment, rising hot money

(Source: International Monetary Fund, Article 4 Statement, August 2007)
Chapter 26
Xenophobia: A (long) post-apartheid history

By Ashwin Desai

In September 1998, three migrants to South Africa were savaged by a mob on a train: one, a Mozambican, was thrown out while the other two, both Senegalese citizens, were electrocuted as they climbed the roof trying to escape the crowd. This violence was visited by members of a crowd who were returning from a rally in the country’s administrative capital, Pretoria, who had gathered to protest under the banner of an organisation called ‘Unemployed Masses of South Africa’ who proclaimed to represent 32 000 jobless people. (The Pretoria News, 4 September 1998)

The recent xenophobic attacks which killed 61 people were greeted with shock and horror across South Africa. How could this be happening in a country with an international reputation for reconciliation and whose people were dubbed the ‘rainbow nation of god’ in recognition of their seeming ‘miraculous’ ability to overcome racial divides honed over three centuries?

Yet from the birth of the new democracy the danger signals were there.

A context for violence

We must forget the past
Nelson Mandela (quoted in Foner, 2002, 108)

As early as December 1994 and going into January 1995-African foreigners were attacked in Alexandra with many having their accommodation destroyed and others marched to the police station. (Minnaar and Hough, 1995, 165-67)

This was followed by a series of attacks on African foreigners in the last decade and a half. It was accompanied by a heightened language of hysteria and demeaning ‘othering’ of African migrants that came from a variety of sources both inside and outside the state.

Was the surprise at the 2008 violent attacks another case of Mbeki denialism, a forgetfulness by the citizens which has come to characterise the transition and a media that is typically cavalier about its own role in not only reflecting the views of society but also shaping it?

If we take the exclamations of shock and horror seriously it seems, to steal from Stuart Hall, that we live in time of post-apartheid ‘historical forgetfulness…a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression…’ (1978, 25)

It is important to traverse the history of post-apartheid xenophobia for as James Baldwin reminds us, the power of history ‘comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do’ (Quoted in Foner, 2002, cover).

The Police

...police in South Africa arrest more people for violating immigration laws each year then for any other reason. Of those apprehended, most are forcibly repatriated, and many suffer human rights abuses, including physical torture and denial of access to
legal representation...In dealing with what they perceive as the ‘foreign menace’ police on the ground have become simultaneously more corrupt, militarised, and brutal (Murray, 453)

The harsh reality of the brutal and callous way in which law enforcement officers could treat immigrants was brought home to South Africans in November 2000. SABC television showed white police officers setting dogs on three defenceless black men. The men were Mozambicans and were shown being repeatedly attacked and crying out for the police to stop. This was to no avail as the attack lasted nearly an hour (The Star 8 November 2000).

The environment for treating immigrants with impunity was helped by the way senior police officers labelled the majority of African immigrants as criminals. Senior Superintendent Johan Steyn was of the opinion that

‘90 percent of criminals who break into homes, commit armed robbery and rape the women are Zimbabweans’ (The Star, 27 March 1999).

Captain Giacomo Bondesio of the South African Police Service’s Aliens Investigation Unit was of the considered opinion that ‘as many as 90 per cent of the Nigerians who applied for Section 41 permits—which grant temporary residence to political asylum applicants—were drug dealers (The Sunday Independent, 22 June 22 1997).

These comments were not isolated but symptomatic of widespread sentiments and created the conditions for the police to act with impunity. This stereotyping and lack of concern for immigrants rights was exemplified by a police officer who arrested a South African citizen, who was quickly deported because ‘he walked like a Mozambican’ (M&G 21 July 1994).

The media

Media generally reflect social reality and relations within society. I would not blame the media for fanning xenophobia in any way (Mondli Makanya quoted in McDonald and Jacobs, 306).

Makanya went onto bemoan how difficult it was ‘to cover stories about Nigerians migrants as the fact is that a disproportionate number of people from that country, as opposed to migrants from elsewhere, say Congo or Senegal, are involved in crimes’ (quoted in McDonald and Jacobs, 306). When pushed for evidence for his assertions Makanya could not provide any.

Danso and McDonald conducted a rigorous study of the English language South African press coverage of cross-border migration between 1994 and 1998. They found three common stereotypes: ‘migrants as job stealers, migrants as criminals and migrants as ‘illegals’’ (Danso and McDonald, 124) Criminality was almost exclusively linked to African immigrants while ‘there is an almost complete lack of references to crime and illegality on the part of Western Europeans and North Americans in South Africa...When African (and to a lesser extent Asian) migrants are associated with a criminal act the event becomes newsworthy, while the same crime committed by a white foreigner is ignored or given less publicity’ (Danso and McDonald, 127)

The media also they found emphasised the impact of migrants on the state’s resources. So for example they point to the following newspaper articles: ‘The government has to spend about R397, 000 on each illegal alien which translates into about R1, 98 billion being spent on maintaining illegals last year’; and, ‘This year alone it cost more than R210 million—a tenth of the entire programme budgeted for the (Reconstruction and Development Programme)—just to house, educate and police and give medical care to only sector of the
problem: the illegal Mozambicans’ (The Star 18 September 1995; Financial Mail, 9 September 1995). When using figures the media were often simply repeating figures put out by official sources or simply projecting to the country as a whole from provincial estimates (Danso and McDonald, 125).

Danso and McDonald also found that the press used the word illegals and aliens to labels African migrants no matter what their particular status that could run from permanent residents, work permit holders and refugees.

Labeling is important for it often involves questions of power and allow ‘authoritative state actors to serve the interests of some to the exclusion of others’ (Moncrieffe and Eyben, 2007, 7).

McDonald and Jacobs do concede that it is difficult to prove if a ‘xenophobic press is merely a reflection of public sentiment or stems from xenophobia within the press itself...What is clear (though) is that there is a cycle of negative (mis)representation of cross-border migration in the English-language print media in the country and it is likely that public opinion and journalistic opinion simply feed off each other’ (McDonald and Jacobs, 306).

The state apparatus

The Human Rights Report also singled out the Department of Home Affairs, accusing its high-ranking officials of deliberately stalling reform of laws governing refugees and migration. Despite widespread knowledge of ill-treatment of foreigners, many state officials have dragged their feet, partly because of political sensitivity over the rights of foreigners (Murray, 453).

Home affairs spokespersons also, besides using words like ‘aliens’, and pointing to their inability to cope with huge numbers reinforced the idea of South Africa been overwhelmed by African migrants.

Home Affairs looked to the US for ways in which to deal with immigration. In fact there were many a fact finding mission to the United States with home affairs officials equating illegal immigration from Mexico with those faced by South Africa and wanting to learn from their US counterparts how to deal with the issue.

Reflecting on the similarities of language used by the media and government agencies Danso and McDonald held that

‘One could argue that there is a self-reinforcing mechanism at play, with the Department of Home Affairs (as well as the police and defense forces) issuing anti-immigrant statements and statistics and the media uncritically reproducing them. This creates a feedback loop to bureaucrats and policymakers as to the legitimacy and ‘correctness’ of what they are saying. When combined with the highly xenophobic attitudes of the population at large this self-reinforcing mechanism serves to foreclose more progressive policy options and acts to stifle (and even shutdown) more informed public debates on the issues.’ (Danso and McDonald, 132)

Peter Vale has argued how globally and also in post-apartheid South Africa the movement of people across borders has mutated ‘from local issue, to international item and then, to security threat’ (Vale, 2002, 10).

The consequence of this Vale points out that in terms reminiscent of

‘the old South Africa, control and surveillance became overriding policy consideration...solutions initially offered to the ‘problem’ of cross-border movement of people were settled within the disciplining boundaries affirmed by the principle of state
sovereignty, notwithstanding a rhetorical understanding (to use a striking phrase from Francis Wilson) that migration had made the region. South Africa’s government, through the responsible minister, asserted that both refugees and migrants were considered to be a ‘problem’ (Vale, 2002, 12).

In similar fashion to Danso and McDonald Vale argues that the fusion of migration and security has led towards ‘policy closure’ (Vale, 2002, 14).

**Mbeki and denialism**

The Mbeki presidency has been characterised by denialism. There was most famously denialism about AIDS, then denialism about a crisis in Zimbabwe and even denialism about poverty and unemployment. The standard operating procedure has been deny, then deny and when confronted with facts reply with accusations of racism, Afro-pessimism, being ultra-leftist, counter-revolutionary and imperialist fronts.

Now it seems xenophobia is the latest victim of denialism.

Prior to the recent xenophobic violence that erupted in Alex on 11 May 2008 and led to the killing of 61 people, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that emanated in 2007 warned that ‘xenophobia against other Africans is currently on the rise and must be nipped in the bud.’

Mbeki ‘denied that xenophobic tendencies existed in SA, pointing out that the country did not even have refugee camps.’ (Wilson Johwa Business Day 11 July 2006)

This denialism came despite the weight of evidence to indicate otherwise. His intelligence services claim they advised him, and attacks on African migrants had been highlighted in the media.

Comprehensive surveys had also pointed to strong and growing xenophobic attitudes. The South African Migration Project (SAMP) surveys conducted in 1997 and 1998 on the attitudes of South Africans toward immigrants and immigration were particularly instructive given subsequent events.

The surveys were startling in the numbers of South Africans who possess strong anti-immigration feelings both in wanting to strictly limit the number of foreigners allowed into the country and in having negative images of foreigners. These views were held across class and race lines. Some 53% in 1998 wanted a ‘strict limit on the number of foreigners allowed in the country.’ In the 1997 survey ‘people living in neighbouring countries’ were seen by 48% as a criminal threat, 29% thought they bring diseases and 37% believed they were a threat to jobs.

By 2006 the SAMP survey showed a deepening of attitudes.

- Nearly 50% support the deportation of foreign nationals including those living legally in South Africa. Only 18% strongly oppose such a policy.
- Some 74% supporting deporting anyone who is not contributing economically to South Africa
- Some 76% want the borders to be electrified. Up 10% from 1999
- Those supporting refugee protection stood at 47%, those opposed 30%
- Close to 75% are against increasing the number of refugees
- Some 50% would support refugees staying in border camps. Only 6% are opposed
- Just 30% would favour refugees working

**The danger signals**

Martin Murray writing in 2003 was already warning...
That immigrants from other parts of Africa were been stigmatised as ‘dangerous threats to the social order who are typically perceived as supernumerary nuisances, deadly parasites, and hardened criminals…Regardless of their different paths and trajectories, these newcomers are routinely portrayed in an unsavoury light, denounced by locals as job-stealers, ‘woman snatchers’, drug dealers, con artists, and career criminals…The alarmist discourses constructed around unauthorised immigration also employ such naturalistic metaphors as ‘rising tides’, ‘floods’, ‘waves’, deluges’, and ‘swarms’ to suggest catastrophic, unpredictable qualities of unchecked illegal entry into South Africa’ (Murray, 2003, 448)

Mondli Makanya then editor of the M&G offered this opinion in 2004:

I think that most black South Africans understand why black, working class South Africans, feel the way they do. It’s about economics. It’s also about people in transition, about a class of people arriving below them, undercutting them and competing with them in a context where they must scramble, of high unemployment, where the state is absent (quoted in McDonald and Jacobs, 2005, 310)

Through the first decade and half of democracy there has from government, the police and the media a language that defined the African migrant as a problem. South Africans attitudes showed a marked antagonism to African foreigners of all types. Foreigners in turn became increasingly insular as the threats increased. Alan Morris found in his study of Nigerian and Congolese immigrants in Hillbrow that they saw Black South Africans as ‘prejudiced’, ‘parochial’ and the men as ‘violent.’ They tended ‘to accentuate negative representations of black South Africans and to homogenise and essentialise this group.’ (Morris, 1998, 1127-28)

At the same time the promises of a better life met the harsh reality of high unemployment, poverty wages, lack of delivery and growing inequality. Rude wrote of how ‘the levelling instinct of the crowd might as readily be harnessed to an anti-radical as to a radical cause’ (Rude, 1964, 225).

As if to illustrate the efficacy of this assertion the Star newspaper of July 22 2008 on the same page highlighted the killing of Mozambican Francesco Nobunga in a xenophobic attack and a march in Pixley Ka Seme municipality in Mpumalanga. Four houses and a car belonging to local councillors in Vukuzahe township were burnt. Residents were responding to rates increases in which they claimed they were not consulted. (This is not to discount that those involved in service delivery protests would not at the same time carry strong xenophobic views.)

Over the last few years as there have been xenophobic attacks there have been hundred of service delivery protests. What form protests against worsening conditions take often depends on local context because

National trends in unemployment and economic recession are refracted through the prism of locality…However mobile our society, the local spatial dimension is a necessary part of our experience (Parry et al, 1987, 213)

These are certainly broader socio-economic conditions under which scapegoats can come under the cosh in more intense local environments. Sociology does offer some clues as to why African migrants might be convenient scapegoats.

Scapegoats
An important for scapegoating is visibility...

It does not matter whether these differentiating traits are cultural or biological; whether they have been voluntarily retained or because of coercion from without; the resulting visibility is most important in identifying and isolating the scapegoat (Rinder 1958-59, 257)

A second feature is vulnerability. The ‘outsider’ can easily come to play the role of ‘economic villain’:

For the ‘victims of adversity it is at least some comfort to explain their misfortune by attributing it to the evil machinations of villains rather than as a consequence of remote, complex and hardly comprehensible forces’ (Rinder, 1958-59, 257)

Scapegoats often deflect hostility away from those who wield economic and political power...

‘This is the classical function of the scapegoat, to attract and drain off in lightening rod fashion, the hostility which might otherwise be more accurately directed toward different targets (Rinder, 1958-59, 258).

This deflection of hostility onto the people in the gap is facilitated by the fact that they are more accessible unlike those of superior status.

What can be done?

Can we learn to conceive, theoretically and politically, of a ‘grassroots’ that would be not local, communal, and authentic, but worldly, well connected, and opportunistic? Are we ready for social movements that fight not ‘from below’ but ‘across’, using their ‘foreign policy’ to fight struggles not against ‘the state’ but against that hydra-headed transnational apparatus of banks, international agencies, and market institutions through with contemporary capitalist domination functions? (Ferguson 2006:107)

Pronouncements of integrating displaced migrants back into communities in the present hostile environment are a recipe for further disaster. The example of Francisco Nobunga who fled the Ramaphosa shack settlement in Ekurhuleni during the xenophobic attacks is instructive. He returned to his dwelling and his South African born wife, Sylvia Nosento. He lasted three weeks before he was killed. He produced a South African identity document as demanded by his attackers but it had a Mozambican address (The Star 22 July 2008)

It is clear that all migrants in camps must be given full citizenship rights. While there might be a short term backlash in the longer term it is the only way (re) integration can work. As Alan Morris in his study of Congolese and Nigerian migrants shows, non-citizenship meant not only ‘not being able to vote and being denied access to most social benefits, non-citizens are generally more vulnerable to mis-treatment. Thus, the police are more likely to treat non-citizens in an abusive fashion. They know that non-citizens are less likely to lay a complaint and, if they do, are not likely to be given a fair hearing. The lack of citizen status encourages ‘excessive criminalisation’ of the groups in question’ (Morris, 1133).

These rights must also be extended to those displaced into churches and other rudimentary temporary shelters. The state and its armed agents are implicated in the hostile
environment. The merging of migration and security and the defining of migrants needs to be replaced with a different logic and language.

This means also that the emptiness of the notion of an African Renaissance must be replaced by a genuine Pan-Africanism- free movement for all Africans across borders must be a rallying cry and a basis for organising.

In making this call and organising for it one will come up against capital. Migrants with no rights act as a powerful reserve army of labour. In the cities in the service industries, capital is making extensive use of migrants who they have hire and fire at will. The black middle classes inside and outside the state will also mobilise against this demand for not only do they make use of ‘cheap labour’, their mobilising tool is the language of nationalism. The state apparatus also has a default mode of approaching poor black immigrants and migrants because, for decades, it has linked African migration with security and is geared to criminalising and deporting African migrants.

But there is a real basis in which organised labour and social movements can unite around the issue of full citizenship and open borders for all Africans. African migrants must be visibly and centrally involved in this movement. Of course there are issues to be dealt with internal to these movements. Organised labour for example has on the one hand, like at VW, signed away gains won during apartheid on the shopfloor on the altar of international competitiveness and exports. At the same time it has bought into a ‘Buy South Africa campaign’. Under pressure to hold onto jobs the organised working class in South Africa, whose dominant discourse is profoundly nationalist, has come to see African migrants as a threat. Yet because of the lack of rights of African migrants they are fodder for employers wanting to circumvent unions and create casualised jobs. For organised labour to play an effective part in the anti-xenophobia movement would mean breaching some of their own established ways of thinking through their own identity and definition of social good. This is one that primarily reserves redress for those South Africans previously disadvantaged by apartheid, a status that a Nigerian migrant patently would not enjoy. These are just some of the conceptual and political challenges that would Cosatu, for instance be as vocal about the excesses at Lindelani as they are about the Scorpions.

Similarly many of those making up the social movements in an environment of scarce resources also see African migrants as competitors. It is nonsense to suggest that the mere fact of social movement presence in a township acted as a guarantor against xenophobia, as some have done. The overwhelming number of townships in South Africa, over 95%, reported no xenophobic activity during the recent upsurges, whether strong social movements existed there or not. In fact, there is some evidence that even within organisations as radically anti-neo-liberal as the APF, some of its members harbour profound xenophobic attitudes. Social movements are just as captive of the nationalist imagination as the mainstream left.

There are also issues of whether immigrants should maintain their own organisations and seek working relationships and joint campaigns or should there be a concerted effort to form one fighting organisation. These debates need to address concerns that have dogged efforts at non-racial organisation in the past and there is every danger that a migrant essentialism may also arise that, perhaps for good reason, prevents broad fronts developing.

These are tactical and strategic issues that can only be taken forward in the cauldron of debate, discussion and struggle. There are possibilities, in line with the hopes of Ferguson, to not only fight from ‘below’ but also ‘across’, to not only challenge transnational apparatus but also to challenge a neo-liberal and exclusionary sub-imperialist state.

The challenge to commodification of basic services, evictions and proper housing has thrown up radical subjectivities and often pushed back the threat to bare life posed by the neo-liberal transition. This is all laudable and good. What it has not done is to crack the prison house of nationalist language and thinking about our future. In the context of a
continent in severe economic distress, with powerful pull factors into the territory of South Africa of migrants also seeking ‘a better life’ and whose claims to oppression and exploitation are no less stark than those of Black people who happen to have been born within South Africa’s borders, such myopic thinking is bound to lead to trouble.

What the outbreak of xenophobia has shown is that it is not enough to conceptualise the struggle as one for full citizenship and new economic policies for those entitled to a South African identity and a decommodified services and a basic income grant for its people. If we want to avoid repressing those seeking entry to South Africa as a result of exterminities of poverty in other parts of Africa, we need shift of mindset to conceive of the leadership tasks of the revolution to at least being sub-regional in nature. What this means is that programmes that address economic deprivation and development need to have this construct rather than any other as their starting point. Ironocally the only working model of this so far exists in Marthinus van Schalkwyk’s department which has pioneered Trans National Parks.

During the struggle against apartheid, South Africans involved in ANC and PAC activities were wont to remark on the inevitability of the success of the destruction of white minority rule. Not only were demographics on their side, but the sheer desperation of a people fighting for survival and dignity would send cadre after cadre to the breach. In addition this struggle would be marked by history as one for social justice. In twenty years from now, if South Africans persist in their exclusivity, might not organised or unorganised migrants reflect that their struggle too for entry into and inclusion into South Africa bore the marks of inevitability. They had demographics on their side and the desperation of a people fighting for dignity and survival. History too would mark their struggle as one being for social justice and against sub-imperialism and South African minority dominance.

Bibliography


Hall, S (1978) Racism and Reaction in Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain: Talks on Race Relations Broadcast by BBC-TV, Commission of Racial Equality


Murray, M 2003 Alien Strangers in Our Midst: The Dreaded Foreign Invasion and ‘Fortress
South Africa’ Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 37, No. 2/3: 440-466


