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In a recent essay titled “A New Cosmopolitanism,” Paul Gilroy has argued for the centrality of South Africa in defining a contemporary politics of global cosmopolitanism and democratic humanism. “Critical consideration of South Africa’s democratic transition can inspire new responses to the current geo-political situation,” he insists in his opening paragraph. More specifically, South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 “can be used to challenge the idea that civilizations are closed and finished cultural units which must be preserved at all costs. . . . [its] blend of diversity and solidarity yields a special lesson for a world where we are increasingly told that diversity and solidarity cannot mix.”¹ Yet despite this sense of opportunity, South Africa has “dropped out of debates” regarding the linkages between multiculturalism, democracy, and cosmopolitan governance.² This “disappearance,” in Gilroy’s view, can be attributed to an ongoing failure on the part of political leaders and intellectuals to address the connections between racism and sovereignty in a persistent, nuanced fashion. Although South Africa once represented the apex of such connections—with a global antiapartheid movement marking this
recognition — its political revolution has not generated a sufficient level of inquiry or reflection to reshape global conversations over race, citizenship, and their meanings in the present.

Gilroy’s remarks are significant for this issue of Radical History Review in that they evince a new set of questions regarding the interchange between the Black Atlantic paradigm and more recent discussions of cosmopolitanism as a new global ethic. Furthermore, they suggest the need for a new configuration of diasporic politics vis-à-vis contemporary dilemmas of postcolonial sovereignty and neoliberal globalization. Indeed, the following interview implicitly interrogates the possibilities of an emergent postdiasporic political order in this rapidly evolving present. The invocation of “postdiasporic” must be understood in a specific political sense given the foundational and ongoing roles diasporas have played in prefiguring and constituting current patterns of global migration and cultural change. Furthermore, as with cases elsewhere, the prefix post- suggests as much a dialectic with the past as it is forward-looking. What is intentionally observed here is a gradual shift from an early to mid-twentieth-century politics of transcontinental black social movements to a new set of politics based on the achievement of postcolonial independence across sub-Saharan Africa, beginning with Ghana in 1957 and culminating with the end of apartheid in 1994. To what extent does African sovereignty change the dynamics and qualitative meaning of diasporic politics? Does it represent a decisive end point, one that fundamentally relocates political concern away from the Black Atlantic metropoles of Kingston, Fort-de-France, New York, and Paris to capitals like Pretoria, Accra, and Nairobi? To what degree are conventionally understood uses of “the diaspora” fixed to a twentieth-century political project—encompassing pan-Africanism, negritude, and other forms of black internationalism—whose time and goals have largely been surpassed and are now to be replaced by a new, twenty-first-century political agenda as identified in part by Gilroy, but also including such challenges as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, neoliberal globalization, and ethnic violence that have preoccupied Africa’s sovereign states?

Further dialogue is consequently needed to explore the interplay between postcoloniality as a political condition and the chronology of the Black Atlantic to determine if the rubric “postdiaspora” may be politically or analytically useful for understanding current political concerns and engagements found on the continent. Postdiaspora therefore does not signal an end to the Black Atlantic paradigm as such, but instead seeks to articulate its temporal and geographic boundaries by historicizing specific discursive and political shifts within it. Some initial distinctions can be readily drawn. For example, although questions of sovereignty can be traced to figures such as Edward Blyden and C. L. R. James, postcolonial African intellectuals ranging from A. M. Babu and Mahmood Mamdani to Ruth First and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o have tackled more forcefully its acute lived predicaments, often based on personal experiences of political marginalization, imprisonment, and exile.
separate vein, the pan-Africanism embodied in the African Union today and its identification of the diaspora as a “Sixth Region” within its structure must be viewed as vital changes, reflecting a practice of autonomy and a regional hierarchy that emphasize the centrality of the continent. The post-1957 political order that has unfolded across sub-Saharan Africa accordingly marks a tentative disjuncture in the worlds of the Black Atlantic, a relocation of meaning that remains to be fully explored. David Scott’s timely engagements in *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (1999), which follow the earlier concerns of Walter Rodney, are a crucial, connective intervention in this regard, offering a set of considerations for rethinking the value and exchange between postcolonial and Black Atlantic criticism. *The Black Atlantic* (1993) itself has been widely critiqued for the absence of Africa—serving more as a geographic backdrop than an active location of history—and Gilroy’s more recent intervention can be viewed as an attempt at making amends within this new political sphere.

However, the mere inclusion of Africa presents its own issues. Gilroy’s observations can be balanced with the parallel predicament of African modes of self-writing as identified by Achille Mbembe, a scholar based at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Mbembe provides an internal perspective on the dilemmas of politics and academic knowledge in postapartheid South Africa, though his thoughts also transcend this context. His critique addresses what he has discerned as the prevalent practices for constituting African identities, namely, Afro-radicalism and nativism. Afro-radicalism is limited by its instrumentality and subsequent political opportunism. In Mbembe’s words, this approach has “used Marxist and nationalist categories to develop an imaginaire of culture and politics in which a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse” (240–41). On the other hand, the prose of nativism has “promoted the idea of a unique African identity founded on membership of the black race” (241). Mbembe finds the reduction of African identities to “blood, race, or geography” problematic (272). In both cases, the histories of slavery, colonization, and apartheid in South Africa proved pivotal, not only denying more diverse and holistic senses of African selfhood from taking hold, but also disabling the very perspective for acknowledging such possibilities. “Not only is the [African] self no longer recognized by the Other,” Mbembe writes, but “the self no longer recognizes itself” (241). With the end of apartheid, a renewed opportunity to move beyond these two approaches and their intrinsic limits has been presented. Mbembe consequently advocates a repositioning beyond the practice of equating identity with geography and race—what might be perceived as a diasporic determinism—to unlock what he calls the possibility of a wider range of African self-styling.

This interview is situated amid these political and conceptual perspectives.
Following Gilroy, it is concerned with South Africa’s new global role, politically and intellectually, and with the manner in which such recent political shifts provide a new research valence beyond more culturally fixated definitions of the African diaspora. Like Mbembe, it also seeks to locate the formation of new political subjectivities in Africa beyond those previously identified. However, it has equally sought to unearth a pragmatic perspective: the day-to-day views, experiences, and outlooks of activist-intellectuals currently teaching, administrating, and conducting critical research in the South African academy. If the politics of the antiapartheid struggle were easy to identify with given the transparent racial dynamics involved, the current political ferment has been far more complex to interpret and engage. South Africa’s postapartheid civil society is still very much in the making, with many members of the academy and beyond being forced to negotiate the multifaceted legacies of apartheid — racism, poverty, class inequality, limited social services, and the claims and meaning of citizenship prominently among them. Intersecting with these enduring concerns are new developments connected to global capital and neoliberal policies embraced by the African National Congress (ANC) government, which mark a sharp contrast with its socialist principles held during the antiapartheid struggle. Such issues have undermined the romance of what former president Thabo Mbeki once referred to as the “African Renaissance.” 13

Yet despite persistent problems with the slow growth of student and staff diversity, the university landscape of postapartheid South Africa has witnessed a remarkable expansion in certain quarters, creating a new horizon for collaborative intellectual ventures. WISER in Johannesburg and the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape have provided novel intersections for a range of issues including citizenship, HIV/AIDS, contemporary urban life, South African cultural theory, public memory, and the practice and meanings of heritage. The Centre for Civil Society (CCS) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Durban, is situated amid this intellectual ferment and is arguably the most politically driven. Headed by Patrick Bond — a political economist trained by David Harvey at Johns Hopkins University — the center has provided a forum and base of activity for scholars and activists from around South Africa and Africa generally. Ashwin Desai, author of the acclaimed We Are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-apartheid South Africa (2002), is perhaps the best-known activist to have been affiliated with CCS. 14 However, residents have also included Dennis Brutus — the antiapartheid activist, poet, and former inmate on Robben Island — Joel Kovel, editor of the journal Capitalism Nature Socialism, and a host of other scholars. I spoke with Bond, Desai, and Molefi Mafereka ka Ndlovu, a student and activist, about their various projects and how grassroots politics of the apartheid years have since transformed into new social movements addressing national, regional, and global issues urgent in the present.
Christopher J. Lee (CJL): Let’s start with you, Patrick. How long have you been at the Centre for Civil Society, and what is your vision for it within UKZN and South Africa generally?

Patrick Bond (PB): CCS was founded by Adam Habib, a political scientist, in 2001. Since then, aside from following the interests of staff and associates—for me, personally, those would be in political economy and political ecology—we have mainly been strengthening an existing trajectory. From the early 2000s, work at CCS has reflected the rise of oppositional civil society activity in South Africa in relation to state and capital, to patriarchy and durable racism, and to ecological destruction. With ten thousand protests a year according to the police, South Africa has possibly the highest per capita protest rate in the world—organized labor produced a record 13 million strike days (more than 650,000 workers striking approximately twenty days each) in 2007, for example. CCS has therefore reflected upon this society’s huge class, gender, race, and environmental contradictions. Overall the center’s objective, decided in 2005, is “to advance socio-economic and environmental justice by developing critical knowledge about, for, and in dialogue with civil society through teaching, research, and publishing.”

My sense is that we have achieved a critical mass of research about the kinds of struggles for justice engaged in by South Africans, and we should be turning our attention more to the continent and world. We have begun that through the World Social Forum and its various affiliates—locally, the closest is the Social Movements Indaba, albeit without the direct input of labor, church, and health care activists as of yet. With Eunice Sahle of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, we are working on a book about contemporary African social movements. Within UKZN itself, we have a quadruple function of, first, relating intellectual work on social justice to the broader community through several dozen public events each year, including major lectures as well as tailored courses for activists, all of which are free of charge. Second, we do broad-based dissemination of our research in creative ways such as a DVD set with three dozen video documentaries thus far, as well as our Web-based library. Third, we offer rigorous postgraduate courses—one on civil society and the other on the political economy of the welfare state. And fourth, by publishing up a storm, to ensure the research is considered viable in peer-reviewed periodicals and in books. In the process, what we hope we are contributing to is an epistemological commitment to praxis. We think we are demonstrating to fellow intellectuals that knowledge is produced at sites of social conflict, as struggle teaches us about the give-and-take of structure and agency in a way you simply cannot learn by sitting in the academic armchair.

CJL: What is your take, Ashwin? How would you describe its balance between activism versus producing academic knowledge, if one can make that distinction?
Ashwin Desai (AD): I think you are getting to the heart of an important debate because there has been a burst of writing on social movements by activist academics who have squabbled among themselves about who has the right to write about struggles and who has the mandate of this or that organization. What they have not questioned is their authority to be the people to write on movements and the relationship between knowledge production and political commitments. Because of their need to keep close to the movements to ensure access, what is written and passed off as serious ethnographic research must be carefully scrutinized, for much of it is really a romanticization of what the movements are really about. We need to take seriously the issue of establishing evidence and justifying interpretations, constantly interrogating the relationship between activism and producing academic knowledge. At the moment, the quality of research is generally superficial, impressionistic, and provides very few clues to what drives movements, what are their future trajectories, and how they could link into a broader radical challenge to neoliberal South Africa. Generally, those of a more Marxist bent and those with more Fanonian and autonomist leanings have vied for influence in social movements. There is an overlap of these approaches—all put their own twist on developments to fit their ideological dispositions and vie to outpublish each other in staid academic journals, while purporting to want the poor to represent themselves.

I expect the academic machine needs to be oiled, while forms of gatekeeping are unfortunately allowing research territories to be carved up and monopolized. A localized version of the scramble for Africa made all the more stark by the fact that almost all these academics happen to be white.

CJL: So, you are suggesting that a current need exists for critical self-reflection regarding the relationship between these two practices.

AD: Yes. Broadly two positions have emerged. One sees the poor as the embodiment of “truth,” and therefore the poor do not need any theory or any forms of knowledge from the outside. The role of the “involved” academic is to record “voices” and to tell the world the necessary story to be told. Meanwhile, their own authenticity and authority ostensibly come from the fact that they are members of the movement, even though they continue to be ensconced in middle-class neighborhoods and in the academy. There is little self-reflection of the contradictory locations they occupy, and what this means for knowledge production.

A second approach at the center has been to situate contemporary struggles within an a priori framework of Marxist categories and reading contemporary political struggles found in South Africa as more globally oriented, like “IMF riots,” when in reality they are often more locally based and inward looking. This approach says nothing to the lived experience of those protesting, but such work is littered with the necessary code words of accumulation through dispossession and the like.
Both approaches and their poors have their own form of pigeonholing and duplicity. While there is a commitment to be involved in organic struggles, the form and nature of those interventions and commitments is in itself a highly contested terrain.

CJL: Molefi, your personal trajectory speaks to these issues. Can you discuss your intellectual and activist background?

Molefi Mafereka ka Ndlovu (MN): I was born in 1982 in Soweto, Johannesburg, and raised by a single parent and my extended family on my mother’s side. I completed my high school education in 1999 with a distinction in economics and got involved in student politics since finishing. I originally registered at the Pretoria College of Engineering in 2000, where I studied engineering and was the branch secretary of the South African Students’ Congress. However, at the beginning of 2001, I registered at the University of the Witwatersrand for a degree in constitutional law and African literature. While at Wits, I got involved with the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and joined comrades for a march at the UN World Conference Against Racism that took place in Durban in 2001. That is where I got interested in alternative media and activist journalism. From 2001 to the present, I have remained an active member of the Independent Media Center. In 2002, I also joined Research, Education, and Development, where I worked on popular community workshops to build the media capacities of mostly APF-affiliated organizations as well as other groups such as the Landless People’s Movement. For example, I have participated in building RASA FM, a radio project intended to instigate community control and access to low-power radio as a means of democratizing media production and dissemination. We ran the station from February 2005, involving youth activists and unemployed neighborhood youth from around Soweto. Through this project, we were able to build links with similar groups in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, along with a network all over the globe, particularly in the United States.

My research has primarily focused on assessing major problems faced by township schools. I’ve worked with comrades to develop research questions and set up focus group discussions on aspects of the research process for primary and secondary schools in Soweto and the Sebokeng Township in the Sedibeng area of Gauteng. Currently, I am registered at UKZN, where I am completing a degree in community development, media, and comparative literature. CCS has been a natural base given the work it does in the area of civil society. I am also presently involved in the energy project at CCS. Some key points of interest are developing a strategy to integrate existing research on community responses to the commercialization of energy sources (mainly electricity), and how this has affected poor communities’ access to these resources. The idea is to find linkages between problems of access and the environmental impact of climate change, along with the consequent
implications of adaptation strategies on the cost of these basic utilities, especially to poor communities.

CJL: How would you describe the current intellectual climate in South Africa today, and how would you characterize the current pace of institutional change from a racial perspective? Are black intellectuals finding new spaces within the South African academy?

MN: It has been thirteen long years of waiting in anticipation for a revolution that never happened. The South African political climate is caught in a time warp. The transition deal from apartheid to democracy happened largely above the heads of the primary protagonists — the people. A liberal democratic state was sanctioned, and the people were told the climax to struggle was to put a cross on a piece of paper and expect “delivery.” On reflection thirteen years later, it seems all spheres of power — including the academy — were at best complacent, at worst active perpetrators of building a myth of the “Rainbow Nation” and superficial reconciliation. The current intellectual climate of the country needs to be read in light of the role that centers of production and reproduction of social knowledge — that is, academic institutions like universities and the agents of these institutions, academic intellectuals — have played in producing the knowledge and legitimating arguments that have resulted in these neoliberal conditions of postcolonial South Africa.

My point is that there is a need to reflect on intellectual agency rather than leave this to the phrase of “climate.” Southern Africa is potentially gearing itself for a serious meltdown: the instability in Lesotho, the Zimbabwe insurgence, Swaziland . . . the list is extensive. For me these tensions are just the tip of the iceberg, a signal of what is yet to take shape in this country. Within the boundaries of the republic, the picture is somewhat more disconcerting. The ruling black elite has finally taken their gloves off, each cabal sabotaging its rivals using the media, the law, the church, the mall, and just about any circus act of socialism, nationalism, and/or modernity. The whole situation is very sad indeed. On the other hand, 2007 has seen the revival of mass protest comparable to the P. W. Botha regime of the 1980s.

CJL: Do you think the concerns and predicaments of black intellectuals in South Africa are the same, then, as those among black intellectuals in the diaspora? Or do you find that the set of politics found on the continent is fundamentally different?

MN: I think the concerns of Africans on the mainland and those of their descendants outside of the continent are connected in profound ways. I cannot speak for intellectuals as a group, but certainly those who use the academy not as an end in and of itself, but rather those that use the academic idiom as part of a broader emancipatory project to free our world from servitude and exploitation: I can identify
with that. Africans share a proud history of resistance against white supremacy, and hegemony bonds our blood ties and spiritual oneness. However, for as long as the academy remains an important leg on which capitalist hegemony stands, then these institutions remain not ours. Thus it would be ridiculous for a black progressive to demarcate their subject position as tied only to the academy, since to do that would reduce that individual to an energetic tool for the further perpetuation of blaxploitation. Such a strata of subjects does exist; indeed this remains the dominant layer of the black bodies that occupy academic posts.

My interactions with black intellectuals from the U.S. have not been with university professors as much as it has been with conscious souls actively building networks throughout the diaspora highlighting common conditions that face the black subject: poverty, dependency, hopelessness, incarceration, and a loss of identity. These intellectuals occupy a space beyond the academy. To be fair to purely academic intellectuals, we have them to thank for the mainstreaming of African/black studies in university faculties and departments.

CJL: Building upon this, can you all elaborate on the status of CCS amidst the Left in South Africa? How would you characterize and situate the Left in South Africa’s political landscape today?

PB: In what we might term the “independent Left” within South Africa—in other words, outside the center-left Tripartite Alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the Communist Party (SACP)—CCS sits as possibly the one place, aside from a couple of sociology departments, where a critical mass of formal academics devote themselves to social change. Most universities here will not give space to more than one or two such scholar-activists, so we are fortunate that our milieu has an exciting buzz and enough resources—though these are dwindling as donor fashions shift—to hold events and generate ideas that profile and justify social justice advocacy. In this regard, we fit well into a network of organic intellectuals of the independent Left, with their small NGOs, the struggling alternative media, the Listservs, the various writing projects, and the devotion to these new movements that have arisen to take the antiapartheid spirit further and deeper. It is not just through understanding the grievances that lead to protest, but also having critical intellectual engagements with the mass-based and community-based activists whom we admire but also regularly challenge.

Within Africa, we are just beginning to explore the ways an academic site can prove useful. Our staff and students include people from nearly every southern African country, so this work will proceed much more durably in coming years, we hope, in alliance with like-minded centers and academics on the continent. South Africa’s subimperialist posture on many fronts—especially economic—makes this a profound responsibility.
Globally, our networks include the leading progressive think tanks in every part of the world, and we have developed a small reputation for analysis, strategy, and alliances that are relevant to global justice movements. Like-minded institutions whose leading staff we have hosted recently include Focus on the Global South, the Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Research, the Transnational Institute, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, and the Institute for Policy Studies, and we’re also working with the Institute for Social Science at Gyeongsang National University in South Korea on political economic analysis.

**AD:** There is a Left tendency in the ANC-led alliance that centers on the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. The dominant tendency here has put a lot of energy into getting Jacob Zuma elected president of the ANC. However, this has also led to a residue of SACP branches criticizing this move, and their position is now very difficult. Where do they go and what constituency can they carry with them is still to be seen.

The really interesting developments on the Left have taken place outside the alliance. And these have revolved around community movements who have challenged electricity disconnections, evictions, land redistribution programs, and so on. There is no central ideology that runs through these movements, and some have celebrated this, while others have pointed to a need for a clear anticapitalist program. The debate continues.

In terms of CCS, a debate has emerged around the relationship of the academy and movements. As I mentioned before, we need to problematize the relationship between knowledge production and resistance and keep asking how is knowledge developed, how is it disseminated, and what are the relations of power that steer and trespass on its journey. This is important because history is replete with how those with academic capital have used this to try and control movements, thus compounding problems rather than alleviating them. Now more than ever, given the experiences of CCS in their involvement with community movements, we need to inspire a conversation between academic activists and community movements around the practical implications of how and to what ends knowledge is produced and how theory forms a part of political practice.

**CJL:** So, given this context, are there continuities or differences in being an intellectual today vis-à-vis the apartheid period?

**PB:** A good question worthy of deep reflection, which I will leave to those who spent more time in struggles then. Except, at the risk of being flippant, let me make the point about loyalties. In 1997, a special issue of the journal *Debate* entitled “Intellectuals in Retreat” tackled the lack of continuity in a particular generation during the transition from racial apartheid to class apartheid. Ashwin and Heinrich Bohmke were especially scathing in their article “Death of the Intellectual, Birth
Quite a few antiapartheid intellectuals’ groundings came a bit loose.

AD: When I wrote *We Are the Poors*, I was intensely aware that we were caught up in the Mandela mania and so on, and I wanted to show the other side of the Mandela period: the deepening poverty, the crony capitalism, and the genuflection to organizations and ideas of the World Bank. But as I began to think through the underside of the transition, I saw a developing militant response from community movements. In wanting to develop a countermania, I suspended a critical eye. Given the way these movements rise and fall, their tendency to be parochial and even be co-opted, I think we need to bring to bear a more critical response. It does the movements a disservice not to open debate on the strengths and weaknesses of these movements by referring to other times and places where movements have arisen and why they failed. The conversations we are having with activist-intellectuals outside of South Africa have been a tremendous asset in this regard.

We are at a particular postapartheid moment, and how we read this conjuncture is crucial. If you asked me what the objectives of “the struggle” during the apartheid period were, it was easy: defeat the apartheid state. And maybe in the easy answer lies the heart of the problem—an intellectual and political laziness among antiapartheid intellectuals revolving around the overlooked possibility of a nonracial capitalism consolidating itself. We have to learn the lessons of the fight against apartheid and why things went so horribly wrong.

Today the liberators are in power, nationalism continues to be a powerful mobilizer, while at the same time there is a realization that the ability to wield the state and even nationalism as a weapon of redistribution contends with a globalized capitalist world and is often found wanting. The tensions between sovereignty and global free markets are pretty stark. It is not a time for intellectual and political laziness or for simply espousing the usual mantras of left programs like nationalization without interrogating the effect of the revenge of credit agencies and the like on the local economy. Often left programs read like revamped versions of “socialism in one country,” and history has shown us the perils of that journey.

The conjuncture has changed. The social forces let loose globally are different, the locations where power and counterpower lie, the possibilities of new radical subjectivities, the experiments with new forms of organizing; these factors must influence where we research, what we research, and where we throw our activism. Various intellectuals and activists are saying we must settle scores with our own bourgeoisie, but already our bourgeoisie is integrated into the global rhythms of capital with headquarters in London and New York. It is a mobile force. At least we are debating the broader issues of state power and how it can be used as a progressive force and not simply seeing it as an inevitable poisoned chalice or an inevitable good.

Through struggle we have destroyed the idea of the “Rainbow Nation,”
which, in truth, actually naturalized and legitimized apartheid categories for the postapartheid era. A new radical subjectivity of “the poors” that transcends such apartheid racial designations is still struggling to grow, spread its wings, and capture the imagination. South Africa is still revolting, and people are once again realizing that it is them that can make history, even if it is against their own leaders who come with liberation credentials. For me, that is the most significant development—the ability of the poor to see the betrayal of the ideals of the liberation struggle and to be increasingly prepared to take to the streets to challenge the new ruling class. I love the way the ruling class at marches is mocked and often put on the run.

The coming to power of Mandela and Mbeki was not, then, the end of extra-parliamentary politics—it was the beginning of a new phase that is reimagining new forms of struggle and identities. The exciting thing is that while there is always the danger of a lurch back into parochialism and insularity, there is also an impulse to cross national borders and make global linkages.

**MN:** In my view, the “intellectual” needs to be problematized. It is my contention that the neoliberal agenda is not just an economic matter: it finds its conceptualization and refinement in the desks and seminar rooms of academic conferences. Over thirteen years, we have seen the disappearance of critical discourse in the academy. Due to the imperatives of “world class citizenry,” universities have unilaterally adopted a market orientation in terms of their priorities. Most institutions, including UKZN, were subject to mergers that saw schools and departments being reconfigured for market viability and commercial conformity. Many subjects in the humanities were trashed because they were not desirable in the open market and industry. The number of black students able to complete their degrees continues to dwindle, and the emphasis on commerce and industry has meant that even fewer black students engage in humanities or the social sciences, opting for more secure degrees in the natural sciences and finance. The academy is seen as the terminal for a prosperous future on the job market. It has ceased to be the site for contesting ideas and producing perspectives that would inform radical social change. But perhaps the white academy has always played this role, and the above expectations I express are a reflection of my own ignorance and blind idealism.

**CJL:** To bring together several points of discussion, then, what is to be done, intellectually and politically? How do we position ourselves in a context that is shaped by the obvious legacies of the past that in turn are being reinforced by a neoliberal present?

**AD:** At the moment South African intellectual life is sterile with many old neo-Marxists espousing neoliberalism, many younger intellectuals espousing a kind of social history that simply wants to record the voices of the poor devoid of any theory, and Marxists, while waiting for the next global economic crisis to defeat capital-
ism, who are caught in the quagmire of their global anticapitalist commitments and their fascination with capturing state power. It is only when the minor skirmishes that characterize the challenge of movements in South Africa become generalized that I think we will see a development of new ideas and the emergence of a stratum of radical intellectuals whose theory will form a part of political practice. In the interim, we must return to the intellectual craft of serious research with the express purpose of getting a sense of cracks in the ruling class and the potential of new radical subjectivities to exacerbate and take advantage of those cracks. This entails at one level an understanding of the wave of violent upsurges in communities across the country and at another the researching and debating of the organizational forms and languages that can unite labor and community struggles.

I think one of the directions that this research will take us is the debunking of the idea of civil society as a radical space, and perhaps the idea that a center for civil society can only lend itself to an emasculation of struggle and its channeling into constitutionalism. What we need to build, I think, is the idea of an “uncivil” society that challenges ideas of human rights, rule of law, and multiculturalism. It is my belief that to build an effective radical challenge to capitalist globalization that is sustainable locally and reaches globally, we need — rather than using these code words — to build movements to confront them.

We must also put race more firmly on the agenda. It was quite stark during the antiapartheid struggle that antiapartheid intellectuals occupying the academy were overwhelmingly white. Besides the privilege enjoyed at white universities and by northern contacts in the academy, white intellectuals — unlike black intellectuals, because of where they lived — enjoyed a relative autonomy from the everyday organizing and action of the struggle. One only needs to look at university knowledge production to see this dominance, and this continuing dominance needs a concerted challenge. It must be done in a way, though, that learns lessons from that period of the late 1970s and 1980s when white left intellectuals espoused an unimaginative structuralist neo-Marxism and with embarrassing haste became ideologues of neoliberalism, cashing in their antiapartheid kudos to wield significant influence in the policy-making organs of the liberation movement. Black intellectuals are not immune to those same slides.

It is also important to take cognizance that with the opening up of South Africa, a clutch of northern academics have since zoomed into the country, in what I have called the “three-day phenomenon,” to “study” social movements and then publish in journals back home in the North and quickly set themselves up as “experts.” They contribute little to the debates within South Africa and in the building of a black radical intelligentsia. Although there are political and analytic risks in essentializing the expressions “North” and “South,” we do need to debate the relationship between northern and southern scholar-activists, for there seems to be an unequal exchange so far that smacks of intellectual imperialism.
PB: The independent Left has been very active, producing more than a dozen major books — Martin Legassick’s new tome, *Towards Socialist Democracy* (2007), is exemplary — devoted to critique. The center-left of the Tripartite Alliance has fewer than half a dozen, so the main disappointment is the lack of ongoing engagement by intellectuals within the power structures. The critique of the old Left in academia is that too many took up consultancy careers — or academic careerism — from the early 1990s as more opportunities emerged. They went from the grassroots to their class roots, as the saying goes, especially those in the generation now in their fifties.

One of the major projects we have embarked on at CCS is a rereading of the traditions in South Africa and Africa which once inspired radical intellectual work, especially the “articulation of modes of production” debate with Harold Wolpe, who died in 1996, and the regional problems associated with dependency theory, which Malawian economist Guy Mhone worked on so fruitfully to solve through the theory of “enclavity” until his death in 2005. Another great theorist who has helped us consolidate theories of capitalist crisis, superexploitation, and imperialism is Rosa Luxemburg, because of her concern about capitalist/noncapitalist systemic expropriation. Frantz Fanon is obviously a very inspiring figure, along with many other African scholars who have tackled neocolonial power relations. Another influential intellectual current comes from the dialectical way that Michael Burroway has played off the ideas of [Antonio] Gramsci and [Karl] Polanyi: one stressing the slow, gradual building of counterhegemony in the trenches of civil society; the other providing inspiration that a double movement of social activists can counter excessively intrusive market forces.

All of this has generated a sense that where neoliberal capitalism has commodified everything under the sun — including the air, through the new carbon-trading mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol — we are seeing vigorous contestations from below. A huge challenge is to work with the excellent organic intellectual critiques of capitalism that have emerged, *issue by issue*, and assist in their linkage, not from above in an overarching theoretical sense (though we keep track of efforts such as David Harvey’s “accumulation by dispossession”), but from below via interlocking, overlapping struggles. In most of these struggles — for example, access to AIDS medicines, antiprivatization on the water and electricity fronts, landlessness and homelessness, free education, rights to employment, domestic violence, and so on — we have superb intellectuals allied to social movements. But there is not enough work across the silos. You find the same problem in the World Social Forum. So, we probably will devote more resources in coming years to getting these bottom-up linkages more clearly articulated so as to establish genuine programmatic work that’s well grounded in campaigns for justice.
CJL: What, then, are your summary views of the Mbeki era? What are the future prospects for the ANC and South Africa generally?

MN: The closing of the Mbeki era marks a new phase in the development of radical alternatives. All the noise about a “renaissance” has revealed itself for what it is. Mbeki himself boasts the knighthood of the British Empire. Truly, this facade that has been trumpeted as liberation has shown itself for what it is. The ANC power alliance will not endure the next ten years, and this is to be generous. Already it is obvious to even the blindest of observers that this ANC-negotiated settlement was nothing more than a handful of the black and ambitious agreeing to run the Boer republic essentially unchanged. Democracy and a progressive constitution written in collaboration with our exploiters were bound to hit a solid wall in time — both could not guarantee liberation from the site of exploitation, namely, white-owned companies and factories. Neither could they set the majority of the black population on the path to self-reliance and true realization. The heat has only just begun: either the state will reveal its true oppressive nature by unleashing violence, or a population tired of being spectators will take new, dramatic steps in the shaping of their own destiny.

PB: Mbeki-ism, as Ashwin calls it, mixes straightforwardly pro-business public policy with nationalist rhetoric, so that we often witness the problem of “talk left, walk right.” The latest major collection of political economy articles we’ve gathered — for the journal *Africanus* in the November 2007 edition, but free for download on our Web site [www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs7] — is devoted to the question of how “two economies,” the “developmental state,” and the “national democratic revolution” are deployed as ideas to confuse the broad public. So, you’ll often hear middle-of-the-road intellectuals lulled into satisfied tributes to South African social democracy under construction, with AIDS medicines finally available, free basic water and electricity, higher welfare payments, and a renewed state commitment to industrial policy. Our efforts seek out the devil in the details, with a view to exploring the grievances so many still have in all these areas of public policy.

Our overall view is that a harsh neoliberal project remains, though the expansion of existing welfare payments may disguise some of the most virulent poverty and a bubbling consumer-credit market lets some of the working class enjoy higher levels of consumption. Most of the free basic service delivery is sabotaged by bureaucrats whose first recourse is disconnection, followed by evictions. The commitment to AIDS treatment is obviously not yet solid, given Mbeki’s firing of deputy health minister Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge in August. Industrial policy is erratic and oriented to corporate welfare. As Mbeki himself once told journalists as he unveiled the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) macroeconomic policy in 1996, “Just call me a Thatcherite.” GEAR’s replacement, the Accelerated
and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) established in 2004, is not fundamentally different. If Jacob Zuma, former deputy president of South Africa and current president of the ANC, has influence post-Mbeki, we would not expect any changes, as he has already advised. The business community’s candidates, Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale, would not likely change course either. It seems that only protest of the sort the Treatment Action Campaign, COSATU, and independent left groups engage in so often is the only language the politicians will understand.

CJL: Building upon your last comments, how does South Africa then fit into the politics of antiglobalization today? Are there specific social movements that you feel are particularly significant?

PB: South Africa is a leading site for people to contest the globalization of capital. The most powerful example, the Treatment Action Campaign, achieved what none of us thought possible: decommodification and deglobalization of AIDS medicine production. To get that the activists defeated Big Pharma, as well as a government whose policies have been called genocidal by leading medical authorities. The key drugs are now produced in South Africa on a generic, not branded, basis and are sufficiently affordable that more than 450,000 people now have access when only a few hundred did a decade ago.

In the field of water, the big, Paris-based private firm Suez has been kicked out of Johannesburg and Nkonkobe, where the University of Fort Hare is, and others are afraid to enter. The Jubilee Movement to cancel “third world” debt, prior to a major split, was strong enough to force Mbeki into declaring the South African state’s allegiance to U.S. capital during a 2003 court case—a move prompted by then U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell’s intervention, which showed clearly which side of the globalization divide Mbeki comes down on. There are countless other cases of trade unions, social movements, and NGOs using anticapitalist networks and internationalist strategies to build new kinds of power. The most spectacular protests associated with our local chapter of the global justice movement, if you will, were here in Durban in 2001 at the World Conference Against Racism and a year later at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

CJL: You just mentioned water as an issue, and your most recent work has turned directly to the environment. How has this concern intersected with more familiar issues of unemployment, housing, and so forth?

PB: From around 1995, it was apparent that the major battles of the urban social movements—and I used to work with the South African National Civic Organisation—would no longer be on housing. Civic demands in the Reconstruction and Development Programme were decisively rejected by then-minister Joe Slovo, who took World Bank advice instead. So from 1997 onwards, municipal services
like water and electricity were the main sites of social movement struggles, with riots breaking out across Gauteng, the Eastern Cape, and many other places. Soon enough these turned into major social movement mobilizations, featuring a new, independent Left’s emergence in 1999 in Chatsworth, a township in Durban, followed by Soweto and Cape Town.

Around then it was increasingly important for activists and allied researchers to trace why the costs of water were so high in townships, and, of course, the answer was Lesotho’s dams, the largest in Africa. They had just come on line and, ironically, that huge overdose of supply with its vast and adverse ecological implications led to dramatic increases in disconnections for poor people forced to shoulder an extremely high proportion of the bill. We found the same process at work within Eskom, South Africa’s leading electricity provider, as the government pushed it toward commercialization and cost-reflective pricing. The end of excess capacity meant higher disconnection rates for poor people, while large commercial smelters got ridiculously cheap electricity because they argued the marginal cost of supply was much lower as they bought in bulk. That of course helps explain South Africa’s contribution to CO₂ emissions, which is currently at a level twenty times that of the United States per person per unit of economic output.

So, what we found, soon enough, was that it would be fruitful to blend red and green politics and establish higher levels of consciousness — especially for those of us who are frequent-flyer petit bourgeois internationalists! — regarding the links between environment and development. Then all of this came to a head at the WSSD, which represented the global and local elites’ best effort to “privatize nature.” That in turn allowed tremendous struggles to surface and link across borders, such as the international Water Warriors network and the Durban Group for Climate Justice, which opposes carbon trading. It turns out that Durban is one of the world’s leading sites of eco-injustice, especially with respect to respiratory problems associated with the petro-chemical works near the airport, as well as a methane-electricity project the World Bank wanted to fund. In both cases, courageous activists have pushed and pulled, so that the commodification of the environment has not gone according to plan.

These are also gendered struggles and fights against environmental racism so that, to return where we started, the processes of accumulation by dispossession that link class, race, gender, and ecology all come together. There are plenty of hurdles and shows of disunity, but the most important elements of a radical politics are moving into place. One day these forces will unite the South African Left across the single-issue divides and generate more durable links between organized labor and communities. Perhaps this will occur, as activist and intellectual Fatima Meer advocates, via a “South African Social Forum,” and maybe as well, after the 2009 presidential election, in a new left political party.
Notes
I thank Sean Jacobs, Eunice Sahle, Emily Burrill, and Lisa Lindsay for comments and encouragement.

2. Ibid., 291.
8. The other five regions are East, West, Central, North, and Southern Africa. It should be noted as well that this recent inclusion of the diaspora within the African Union is motivated not only by historical connections with the Western hemisphere and elsewhere but also by contemporary patterns of migration and new diasporas in the making. The potential financial benefits of this sixth region have been a key incentive. See African Union, *Statutes of the Economic, Social, and Cultural Council of the African Union* (Addis Ababa, 2004); African Union, *Report of the African Civil Society Organizations’ Consultation on AU/EU Joint Strategy for Africa’s Development* (Accra, 2007).
9. For one examination of this relocation of meaning with its continuities and discontinuities with the diaspora, see Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
10. David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999). Walter Rodney, like Scott a Caribbean intellectual, addressed the limitations of postcolonial autonomy most vividly in his political economic study, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1974). Other scholars, such as Appiah and Laura Chrisman, have also worked at the intersection of Black Atlantic and postcolonial criticism. However, Scott, like other postcolonial critics who have recently turned to address globalization rather than past imperialism, has focused primarily on the challenges of the political present.
11. See, for example, Ntongela Masilela, “The ‘Black Atlantic’ and African Modernity in South

14. It is important to note that after the publication of *We Are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-apartheid South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002), Desai was forced out of the center for political reasons by university authorities, and despite petitions and protests by faculty and students, the ban is still in place.