

Book Review

Problematizing Resistance

Alexander, Amanda & Mbali, Mandisa (eds.) 2005.

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Problematizing Resistance is a collection of research and analytical papers that reflect on new social movements in post-apartheid South Africa. The editors also seek to capture the global dimensions of the new social movements by including papers on the Ogoni movement in Nigeria and on international peasant solidarity. The point of departure is that these movements are reactions to neo-liberal policies. The editors therefore contend that this collection will contribute to the emerging literature on resistance to neo-liberalism.

The first paper, by Sanya Osha, on the Ogoni protest movement in the Niger Delta of Nigeria sets the pace. Underpinning his analysis is the theory of internal colonialism, which in essence revolves around the structural, political and cultural alienation of minority communities in post-colonial African states. Such alienation is a reality for Ogoni, Ijaw and other minorities that live in the Niger Delta.

The oil and natural gas produced in the Niger Delta accounts for 80% of the Nigerian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 95% of the federal budget, and the region has produced wealth worth 10 trillion naira over the last 40 years. Yet, communities in the Niger Delta live in conditions of neglect, squalor and

crushing poverty. Compounding this problem is environmental degradation under the oppression of an oligarchic military class in cohorts with civilian associates and multinational petroleum concerns. Nothing captures this better than the oil revenue sharing formula which has changed from 50:50 between the federal state and oil-producing states in the 1960s to 70:20 in the late 1970s, 98:2 in the early 1980s and 97:3 in the early 1990s.

This alienation has attracted a militant Ogoni opposition, which faults the contradictory nature of Nigerian federalism and undermines Nigeria's moral basis vis-à-vis the post-modern democratisation process that entails respect for minority rights. Indeed, it is this question that broke down the national conference earlier this year, and is haunting Nigeria as it seeks to claim continental leadership.

The second report is written by Andile Mingxhitama and focuses on the challenges facing land rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Africa. The author analyses the crisis around the National Land Committee (NLC), a network of land rights civil society organisations with a long history of advocating for pro-poor land reforms, and the crisis around the land reform programme.

The land reform crisis arises from the failure of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to meet the set target of 30% to be redistributed to the majority black South African population in the first five years (1994-1999) of democracy. To date, only 3% of the land has been redistributed. This problem is accentuated by the emergence of new patterns of dispossessions and land alienation, and the state's protection of corporate land owners and white farmers.

After discussing the land question historically, the author opines that the resolution of the land question is fundamental to redressing the historical injustices. The failure to break with apartheid relations of oppression, exploitation and indignity in matters of land has ignited a sense of disillusionment. This disillusionment has caused a crisis within the NLC, and gave rise to a militant social movement, the Landless People's Movement (LPM).

The author traces NLC's challenges from the 'struggle era', through the freedom and consultation era, to the 'realism' era after the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy in 1996, and argues

that three factors have undermined NLC's capacity to respond to GEAR. These factors are the environment in which NLC existed in the previous decade, disagreements over NLC's vision, and civil society's internal contradictions. As a result, questions abound on the effectiveness of NGO form and structure as a vehicle for challenging forces which defend colonially-constructed society.

The next chapter, by Raj Patel, details the political economy of the international agrarian order, and the solidarity resistance it has spawned across the world. The analysis takes the reader through the international agrarian order in various epochs, from the pre-industrial revolution era, through the inter-war period, the post-war era, up to the present. This evolution has seen the emergence of the new international food system.

But this new agrarian order has emerged at the expense of peasants in the developing world who now face famine simply because they lack money to purchase food. For this reason, the new order is challenged by an international social movement, Via Campesina, which brings together peasant solidarities from across the world. Through narrating its high and low points as it manoeuvres itself in the new order, the author shows how this movement is challenging the new order whose faces include the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and major western powers.

Chapter four is a report on political mobilisation in the context of neo-liberal policies in post-apartheid Cape Town. The research was conducted in three townships, Driftsands, Tafelsig and Vrygrond, by Peter van Heusden and Rebecca Pointer. Postulating their role as 'researchers within social movements' and not as 'objective outsiders', the researchers employed structured questionnaires and key informants as research methodologies, which were reinforced by discussion workshops.

The chosen areas had a history of resistance to neo-liberal policies between 2000 and 2003, and a variety of histories in terms of their evolution and demographics. The three townships did not only differ in terms of community history and trajectory, but especially in terms of the forms of subjectivity with regard to citizenship and the notions of community, as well as the uses to which these were put for developing life strategies and political mobilisation.

In Driftsands, the notion of community arose out of two decades of violent struggle, in which the right to belong and to lead the community emerging

were hotly contested issues. This, in turn, influenced their engagement with institutions of the state. In Tafelsig, residents have established neighbourhood networks and life strategies that attempt to mitigate the poverty in which they live. The gender factor is quite strong here. Although women hardly engage as full-time activists, it is indeed women who mobilise in this township. In Vrygrond, on the other hand, the geographic and ethnic roots of the residents have undermined a sense of communal solidarity. The bottom line, however, is that the imposition of neo-liberal policies has threatened these townships, a threat that has attracted solidarity and violent resistance by residents.

The next chapter is written by Mithetho Xali of the International Labour Resource and Information Group (ILRIG). It focuses on the social movements in the Cape Town metropolitan area, which came to the limelight in August 2002 during the World Summit for Sustainable Development, when they staged a protest march under the banner of Social Movements United (SMU). Focusing on the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the Western Cape Anti Eviction Campaign (AEC), the author explores the linkage between these movements and organised labour.

AEC arose in 2000 as a grouping of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) that were campaigning against evictions of residents for defaulting payments owed to the city council. As a regional structure, it aimed to coordinate struggles in the local communities. Both AEC and SAMWU draw their membership from the working class communities. But little synergy exists between the two organisations, which differ in both the conceptions of the issues and in their approaches and methodologies.

After highlighting their struggles and links with other institutions such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), the author draws from similar movements in South Korea and Brazil. He concludes with the view that there is a need to establish linkages between the emergent social movements and organised labour in order to solidify their action.

In the sixth paper, Teresa Barnes of the Centre for Higher Education, University of Western Cape, analyses discourse shifts on how to reform higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa. The dilemma facing reformers, however, reflected itself through discourse shifts, which saw the code

word 'redress' acquire 'different implications at different times for different reasons'. From 'rectifying a wrong', the concept was variously interpreted to mean 'reparation', 'restoring equality' and finally 'empowerment'.

The reform process ended up with the merger of institutions as recommended by the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001. The author shares the tribulations of these institutions as the conceptualisation of the reform schema shifted from political to financial but surprisingly not to educational terms. Perhaps the editors could have added another paper to either corroborate or contradict her analysis.

The last chapter focuses on contestations of the 'new capitalism'. Written by a Marxian political economist, Greg Albo, of York University, the paper argues that neo-liberalism is a new form of capitalism with its own logic of reproduction. He concludes with the view that the 'new capitalism' can be seen as a two-fold project within the Marxian political economy. On the one hand, there are the determinant patterns of exploitation, distribution and reproduction. On the other, there are specific histories, places and class conflicts which exist as concrete cases of modalities, social relations and class struggles of the new capitalism. This paper reaffirms the Marxist tradition as an appropriate theoretical model on which new social movements could be analysed.

In the end, the book succeeds in 'problematising' the question of the new social movements. It fails, however, to respond to the pitfalls of their methodologies. Indeed, one feels inclined to question the return to yesteryear forms of organisation with their inevitable consequences.