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## *Social Justice and the City: some observations from 'the periphery'*

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### ABSTRACT

This commentary seeks to explain the indifferent reaction to *Social Justice and The City (SJTC)* among the radical/Marxist denizens of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) campus in the mid-1970s. It explores what was considered useful about the book, but also why, in part because of its European and North American focus and emphasis upon the revolutionary potential of the city rather than the countryside, it arguably did not resonate as much as it might have done. When later rethinking the contribution made by *SJTC*, Harvey himself offers important reformulations reflecting something of the kinds of radical/Marxist ideas already present in earlier years on the UDSM campus.

### ARTICLE HISTORY



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David Harvey; marxist; urbanism; University of Dar es Salaam; Ujamaa; Nyerere; Tanzania

Late one sweltering evening in September 1973 our customary weekly 'kickabout' on the University of Dar es Salaam's (UDSM) football pitch was interrupted by the sociologist Aidan Foster-Carter. Newly returned from a visit to the UK, an animated Aidan came bounding across the grass clutching a book, exclaiming 'Have you seen this?' The book was *Social Justice and the City (SJTC)*. As I recall Aidan was quite (even very) protective of his copy, and it was not until January 1974 – the date scrawled inside the cover – that I managed to obtain my own copy through the good offices of Marjorie Oludhe, the remarkable UDSM bookshop manager.<sup>1</sup> Marjorie ordered two copies. I purchased one, the other remained on the bookshop shelf for several more months before finally being bought (or removed) by some unseen hand.

Belying Aidan's enthusiasm, UDSM academic interest in *SJTC* was shared by only a small coterie of geographers and a few other social scientists. For the most part it hardly registered with the wider academic community. The lack of easy access to the book was one but not the only – or indeed the main – reason for indifference. This reception contrasts with the more appreciative response to *SJTC* in the US and Britain (see Harvey's interview 'Reinventing Geography' in the *New Left Review* 2000, pp. 82–83). However, intriguingly, according to Harvey's own account, *The Limits to Capital*, in which he had intended to make good on *SJTC*'s 'tentative' and 'erroneous formulations'

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(Harvey, 1982, p. xiii), was also initially ignored by the western based Marxist 'establishment'.

Even within the UDSM geography department, interest in *SJTC* was at best muted. Geography research and teaching in 1970s Tanzania had a decided empiricist alignment and focused predominately on environmental issues; a focus reinforced by the department's close association with the Bureau of Resource Assessment and Land Use Planning (BRALUP)<sup>2</sup> established in 1967 with a remit to investigate resource use and environmental management.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly much valuable work on environmental vulnerabilities in rural communities was completed under this arrangement. The work of Adolfo Mascarenhas (BRALUP's director) and Phil Porter comes to mind, along with that of the serial research squads of visiting Scandinavians – mostly from Sweden – who used the geography department as the base for their upcountry field work.<sup>4</sup>

Among the geographers who engaged with *SJTC* were Milton Santos and David Slater, as well as Mike McCall, Kwesi Darkoh, Wilfred Mlay and Paul Maro and the peripatetic Phil O'Keeffe and Ben Wisner – both (ir)regular visitors to 'Dar' when taking breaks from their PhD field work in Kenya. However, to my knowledge, at that time *SJTC* did not figure in their teaching or research.<sup>5</sup> My own involvement with *SJTC* was a bit, but not much, deeper. My 1974 copy of *SJTC* is certainly festooned with marginal notes, most now indecipherable due to age-fading, poor handwriting or cryptic notation. I taught a course rather quaintly (with hindsight) entitled 'Third World Urbanism'. Regrettably I lacked sufficient wit or imagination for anything other than fleeting engagement with *SJTC*. *SJTC*, compiled and written in the heartland of advanced capitalism, understandably has a very 'developed world' flavour analysing historical and contemporary processes which are for the most part European and North American.<sup>6</sup> Translating these matters into an African context was beyond my competence. Over 50 years memory can be hazy, but as I recall sections of Chapter 6 on the production and circulation of surplus and the notion of parasitic and generative cities, linked in *SJTC* to the work of Gunder Frank on dependency, provided at least one substantive point of contact, and had some resonance with the message of two of the course texts, Gordon Childe's 'Urban Revolution' (Childe, 1950) and Basil Davidson's *Lost Cities of Africa* (Davidson, 1959). I do, however, have a clearer memory of framing an examination question round *SJTC*'s upbeat final paragraph which calls for a 'genuinely humanising [revolutionary] urbanism' (Harvey, 1973, p. 314) – my memory is aided in this instance by the fact that not a single student attempted an answer.<sup>7</sup> My research at the time, such as it was, on the location of rural health centres and an assessment of Tanzanian post-independence urban planning did little more than acknowledge *SJTC* with passing citations (Doherty, 1973, 1977).

More puzzling perhaps than UDSM geography's limited engagement was the indifference to *SJTC* within the wider academic community. Dar es Salaam University and Tanzania more generally during the decade or so spanning the mid-1960s to the late-1970s was widely recognised as a centre for 'radical thought'. It was a magnet for academics with 'revolutionary' aspirations and a haven for activists – here agents of Frelimo and MLPA<sup>8</sup> mixed freely with dissidents from Uganda and South Africa and with academics (social scientists, physical scientists and medics) of varying leftwing hues from across the world. Here on 'The Hill'<sup>9</sup> the language of Marx was commonplace (though not universal). This should have been a welcoming and nurturing environment for *SJTC*. The

rollcall of marxist, radical and left wing academics who visited or had academic jobs at the university is long and impressive: Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank were among the many visitors; Giovani Arrighi<sup>10</sup> was in post in the late-1960s; John Saul, Arrighi's sometime collaborator, was there in 1973, as was Lionel Cliff, John Loxley, Helge Kjekshus, Marjorie Mbilinyi, Dave Wield, Phil Raikes, Marc Wuyts, Henry Bernstein, Michaela von Freyhold, Andrew Coulson, Debbie Bryce-son, Aidan Foster-Carter and host of others.<sup>11</sup> What need was there of David Harvey – in 1973 'the new kid on the [radical] block'<sup>12</sup> – when Clive Thomas (*Dependence and Transformation: The Economics of the Transition to Socialism*), Walter Rodney (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*) and Issa Shivji (*Class Struggle in Tanzania*) were on hand.<sup>13</sup>

The wider context for this amassing of talent was of course the translation of President Julius Nyerere's 'Ujamaa'<sup>14</sup> conception of African Socialism from an idea (ideology) into a policy programme. Following independence, Nyerere reorganised the trade unions, restructured the army and introduced a one-party governing structure.<sup>15</sup> With the publication of the 'Arusha Declaration' in 1967, there was a step change in central state control with the nationalisation of banks, larger plantations, trading companies and some factories, and a general expansion of parastatal activities across all sectors of the economy. Education and health care were contemporaneously vastly expanded. The unique feature, however, of the Ujamaa programme – generally translated as 'family-hood' – was the move towards the restoration and consolidation of assumed traditional modes of rural production based on a family and communal ethos; it was designed through the planned production of food and cash crops to increase individual and national self-reliance – effectively to break the mould of colonial and neo-colonial dependency.<sup>16</sup> Ujamaa was operationalised through the villagisation of a scattered rural population and the adoption of communal methods of farming. Initially a voluntary movement, in the early-1970s, because of slow progress villagisation was made compulsory. It is estimated that as a consequence well over 50 percent of peasants were relocated from traditional and historic farmlands to centralised 'socialist' villages. The configuration of rural population distribution was massively altered with a disrupting effect on agricultural production (see Maro, 1990).

A corollary of Ujamaa's identification of the rural masses as the agents of change was a critique of urbanisation. It was seen as the product of European colonialism which had been instrumental in disrupting the traditional social and organisational structures of precolonial African (specifically Tanzanian) society.<sup>17</sup> Harvey's analysis in *SJTC*, citing Marx and Engels, concurred with this premise of urban exploitation and disruption, but also envisaged – based on developed world history – the 'solution' emanating from urban-based proletarian political and social protest and insurgence. In this respect *SJTC*'s analysis ran counter to Tanzania's official rural-based ideology and, to the extent that UDSM's academia embrace Ujamaa's anti-urbanism, here was further cause for misgivings about and neglect of *SJTC*.

Thirty-five years after its first publication, the University Georgia Press reissued *SJTC* with the addition of a further chapter, 'The right to the city', a paper published a year earlier in *New Left Review* (Harvey, 2008). Here Harvey, following a theoretical introduction, drew in examples from China, India and Korea alongside those from New York and Paris, adding a global reach to his work which already had been demonstrably manifest in *The New Imperialism* (Harvey, 2003) and in *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a*

*Theory of Uneven Development* (Harvey, 2006).<sup>18</sup> Among the acknowledgments recorded in the Preface to *The New Imperialism* is a special thanks to Giovanni Arrighi, the Dar es Salaam stalwart of the late-1960s (see endnote 10):

The initial idea for some sort of intervention along the lines I here [i.e. in *The New Imperialism*] construct first vaguely occurred to me in a joint seminar I taught with Giovanni Arrighi at Johns Hopkins. I owe Giovanni a special debt. (Harvey, 2008, p. viii)

My links with Tanzania have long been severed but I strongly suspect that the academic environment of 1970s no longer exists and, if Harvey's more recent work has any purchase now on the UDSM campus, it will be among a much smaller audience. The aspiring Socialist Tanzania so eloquently articulated in Nyerere's writings (e.g. Nyerere, 1971) is long gone, and with it that extraordinary collection of academic revolutionary-inclined talent. As early as the mid-1970s the contours of a form of State Capitalism were appearing in Tanzania. With the emergence of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie as a 'state class' (cf. Mueller, 1980) and from the mid-1980s under the influence of the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programmes and Policy Support Instruments, Tanzania has fully succumbed to the embrace of global capitalism.

## Notes

1. The trenchant writing and committed social activism of Marjorie Oludhe [Macgoye] is recorded at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/31/marjorie-oludhe-macgoye>.
2. Rebranded and restructured in 1982 as 'The Institute of Resource Assessment'.
3. For contesting views, see the exchange in the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* between Briggs and Gray (1982) and Doherty (1982).
4. See *Geografiska Annaler. Series A, Physical Geography*, Vol. 54, No. 3/4, 1972.
5. Dave Slater (1973) has a footnote of acknowledgment to Harvey in his earlier article on 'Geography and underdevelopment'.
6. A characteristic of Harvey's early work identified by more than one commentator, see for example Derek Gregory in Castree and Gregory (2006, pp. 21–22).
7. My attempt to include another question quoting Harvey's enigmatic dedication of *SJTC* to 'all good committed journalists everywhere' (Harvey, 1973, p. 19) was, probably rightly, vetoed by the department examination board.
8. Frelimo: Liberation Front for Mozambique; MPLA: People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola.
9. So called because of the University's elevated position on the north-western outskirts of Dar es Salaam, the 'richest village in the country', according to Julius Nyerere.
10. In 1998 Arrighi joined John Hopkins University and befriended Harvey. A transcript of Harvey's interview with Arrighi (2009), 'The winding paths of capitalism', was published in the *New Left Review*; the same year that Arrighi died.
11. This is a 'rollcall' predominantly of social scientists; an honourable mention should also be given to those medics based at Dar es Salaam's Muhimbili Hospital who organised the 'Blood for Frelimo' campaign of the mid-1970s. Additionally, though unlikely, there may well have been other cadres of radicalism on campus unknown to me – after all, someone had acquired that second copy of *SJTC* from the USDM bookshop.
12. Being labelled 'a Geographer' – a subject at that time not known for its radicalism – would not have advanced Harvey's recognition. Yet, see Akatiff (2016).
13. See Thomas (1974), Rodney (1972, 1974) and Shivji (1976). Thomas, in retirement, has abandoned his radical politics; Rodney was assassinated in 1980 in Guyana, his home country; Shivji remains a committed marxist, one of Tanzania's most well know academics.
14. A useful introduction is Coulson (1982/2017).

15. TANU, the ‘Tanganyika African National Union. ‘Renamed ‘Chama Cha Mapinduzi’ (The Party of Revolution) in 1977 when TANU merged with Zanzibar’s Afro-Shirazi party.
16. See Rweyemamu (1973) and Darkoh (1984) for commentary on industrial strategy.
17. The decentralisation of population and enterprise from a rapidly growing Dar es Salaam to eight upcountry growth centres and the relocation of the capital city functions inland to the new city of Dodoma were all part of the Ujamaa programme. See also Briggs and Mwamfupe (1999).
18. For an example of the application of Harvey’s work in an African context, see Zajontz and Taylor (2021).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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