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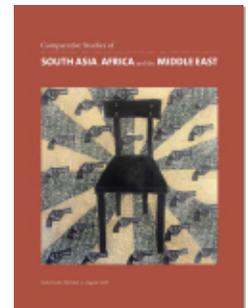
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Southern Futures: Thinking through Emerging Markets Ravinder  
Kaur in Conversation with Keith Hart and John Comaroff

Ravinder Kaur

Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume 38,  
Number 2, August 2018, pp. 365-376 (Article)

Published by Duke University Press



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## Southern Futures

### *Thinking through Emerging Markets*

### *Ravinder Kaur in Conversation with Keith Hart and John Comaroff*

Ravinder Kaur

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**W**hen did the South—also known as the Orient, third world, developing world, periphery, or the postcolony—become an “emerging market” in the eyes of the world? And what might this dramatic moment of its emergence stand for within global history? The ongoing transformation of the decolonized world into an attractive investment destination and its celebration within global finance and trade policy circles invites us to rethink these major shifts along the still unfolding history of capitalism. Consider commonplace descriptions like “India Shining,” “Mexico on the Rise,” “Africa Rising,” “China: Buying up the World,” and “Brazil Takes Off” that dramatically frame and mediate the third world as the economic engine of the twenty-first-century world economy. The postcolonial nations are described here in an uplifting language of acceleration and momentum, buoyed by the promise of economic growth. The old pessimism and dystopic visions now appear to have faded. The third world is instead projected as a place of hope and optimism, the new seductive economic frontier of global capital. Dressed up as an emerging market, the South disentangled from its postcolonial traces is said to have arrived on the global stage.

To emerge is to make oneself visible and be seen by others. It also means moving places and perceptions, and leaving one’s prior position to attain another one on an upward scale. The event of emergence of the South, its spectacular ascent as a valuable market, has clearly unsettled a familiar worldview in which the rich North and poor South have long performed stable tasks in social theory.<sup>1</sup> The decolonized South, the container of human misery, deprivation, and debt, has not always been seen as central to the global economy. Its role has been restricted to providing raw material and/or receiving development aid from the rich north. As the Chinese bid to become the world’s factory or India’s makeover as the techno-hub of frugal innovation redistributes global productive forces, it is rearranging the South within as well as in relation to the north. In fact, the South appears increasingly as an object of speculation, both in the market sense and as a harbinger of the future. The southward acceleration

This conversation emerged from a number of critical discussions that opened up in the research workshop “Southern Futures” in September 2014, University of Copenhagen. We want to acknowledge valuable contributions made to this project by David Goldberg, Sharad Chari, Bruno

Carvalho, Felix Padel, Samrendra Das, Emma Mawdsely, Jamie Cross, Steffen Jensen, Lars Højer, Christian Lund, Claudio Lisandro, and Simona Vittorini.

1. Kaur, “World as Commodity.”

of global economy intricately knits Africa together with Asia in terms of resource extraction and wealth generation. Far from being bypassed in history, Africa is increasingly drawn in, and drawing the world toward it.

In an as yet unpublished book “Africa 2100: A History of the Future,” Keith Hart draws our attention to the ongoing historic demographic and economic changes in Africa, which, he argues, are too enormous to be ignored in the task of contemporary theory making. In a similar vein, Jean and John Comaroff have argued in their *Theory from the South* that as modes of producing value move southward, the established patterns of core/periphery in world-historical processes are being disrupted and radically altered. The change in the sign of “the South,” then, opens up a range of new situations, not all of which can yet be fully anticipated. But what is already evident is that the South can no longer be overlooked in the history of the present and future. We explore here the effects of the large-scale political economic transformations, both legitimate and illicit, reconfiguring the South and how those might anticipate the new incarnations of global capitalism.

*RK:* The 2013 Human Development Report titled “The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World” offered an optimistic account of the rise of the Southern nations long seen as “lagging behind” the Northern industrialized nations. Celebrating this rise as “unprecedented in its scale and speed,” the uplifting narrative pitched Asia, Africa, and Latin America as having “move(d) up the development ladder” at a moment when the “developed economies [had] stopped growing during the 2008–9 financial crisis.”<sup>2</sup> Thinking through, and against, this narrative, how can we critically theorize the notion of rise that has become shorthand for this dramatic transformation in the sign of the South?

*Keith Hart:* For some time now I have been writing a book, *Africa 2100*. It began as a critique of Afro-pessimism a decade ago. Since then “Africa

rising” has become a commonplace of media and even some academic discourse. I believe that Africa could now overcome historic handicaps that were both endogenous and externally imposed. But this will entail prolonged struggle to replace fifty-four nation-states with federated political units employing economic strategies conducive to that end. I locate Africa’s historical trajectory as a play in three acts from 1800 to 2100, a period when world society is being formed. If it is not, there will be no twenty-second century. In the nineteenth century this process was driven by European imperialism fueled by a European population explosion from 1830 to 1930. By 1900, Europeans controlled 80 percent of the inhabited land surface. Europe itself then had 25 percent of the world population, three times Africa’s. Today, Asia accounts for 60 percent of the world’s population, Africa 15 percent, and the Americas, Europe, Russia, Australasia, and Oceania 25 percent.

The projections for the end of this century are quite extraordinary. The UN projects that Africa will then account for 40 percent of the world’s population; Asia, 42 percent; and the rest just 18 percent. And Europe will have only 6 percent of the world’s population. So in the space of a couple of hundred years, Europe will have gone from 25 percent to 6 percent of the world’s population, and Africa from 7.5 percent to a projected 40 percent.

If world society was formed in the nineteenth century by European imperialism, the principal event of the twentieth century was the anticolonial revolution, whereby peoples coerced into a European-dominated world society now sought their own independent relationship to it. In the case of Asia, one can argue that this anticolonial revolution was completed, but not in Africa. The question then arises, what can we expect in the twenty-first century given these extraordinary demographic shifts and the likely changes in the balance of regional power? I’m not proposing Africa rising or suggesting that their demographic preponderance, which is so recent and so large, adds up to anything positive or negative. I do, however, argue that the world will have to come to terms with the fact that two out of five human beings will

2. “Human Development Report 2013,” 11.

live in Africa by the end of this century, and that this will pose a challenge to the racialized world order that has evolved over centuries in which Africans have consistently been classified on the bottom rung. The question that I've been posing since I was a graduate student in the 1960s is whether and how Africa might be able to establish a more equal relationship to the rest of the world on the basis of these developments. My other question concerns the political forms that will dominate the coming century. Some of the largest countries are already federal—Russia, the United States, India, China, Brazil, and so on—and I would argue that one of the features of our world has already been established as a movement toward regional trade federations. So, could Africa make a move in that direction and under what circumstances? It's not as if Africa doesn't have regional trade federations already, in the form of ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], SADC [Southern African Development Community], and others, but it's a question of how effective they might be in renegotiating relations with the world economy. The main obstacle that Africans face in improving their situation under these conditions is the political system that predominates there at this time. In most cases African countries are governed by political elites who depend far more on foreign powers than on their own people for their political economy and even legitimacy.

At the core of my book is a concern with the possible forms for the development of markets in Africa in the coming century. My basic assumption is that Africa is now laboring under structures that are analogous to the old regime before the French Revolution, and that African economic progress will depend on a series of liberal revolutions there; so we have to understand how the classical liberal revolutions overthrew old regimes in the United States, Germany, Italy, France, and elsewhere. I've spent a good deal of my time analyzing the dynamics of these revolutions, and I've concluded that, in every case, a major component was the participation of significant sections of capital—for example, the shippers of Nantes and Bordeaux in the French Revolution and the industrialists of Milan and Turin in the Italian revolution. Some elements of capital, along with political powers, such as the Prussians in the case of German unification, are

essential to establish forms of market integration from which Africans, I imagine, would benefit.

These conditions should release African political energies in a piecemeal way, not immediately at the continental level. Of course parties such as the United States, China, France, and other countries will also influence these outcomes. But the fundamental question I raise is: What political means, based on various historical analogies as well as on knowledge of Africa today, might be available for Africans to derive some benefit from this demographic explosion and its likely economic consequences?

*John Comaroff:* As always, with his characteristic critical flair, Keith provokes us to think on a very broad canvas across both space and time—which I appreciate alike for political and intellectual reasons. Let me start with a couple of your questions and provocations, Ravinder, and work back to some of the issues that Keith has raised. First of all, I believe that we are living at a historical juncture of rupture, recalibration, and reconfiguration. This is a moment in the global history of capital fraught with contradiction and indeterminacy, with violence and inequality—with a counterpoint, that is, of violent inequality and an inequality of violence—whose effect has been to bring the human condition itself into question: as ever more humans become disposable, as the material well-being of ordinary people is increasingly chipped away by falling real incomes and rising debt, as the environment is damaged beyond repair, as infrastructure erodes, as the public sphere and the commonweal are cut back in order to make ever more safe space for the market and its forms of privateering, the social reproduction of the world we once knew is anything but certain. One might infer that all this calls for a radical reanalysis of the history of the present and of the futures that it portends. But ours is an age in which it is very difficult to talk about solutions to anything—or, at least solutions that go beyond technical patches, beyond fixes of the very short run—a situation exacerbated by a fear of dominant narratives, of historical explanation writ large, of theorizing the Big Picture. The flight of the social sciences in the global North from theory tout court underscores the importance of the sort of challenge Keith is

confronting us with. Our own discipline, anthropology, has fallen into a form of neoempiricism that romances the local and the contingent and ignores the structural and the global; sociology has been suffering its own, parallel crises of identity, epistemology, and representation; and economics stands accused of taking flight into ever more abstract, ever more abstruse mathematical modeling, detached from anything that resembles the living world. All of which makes it plain that the Courage to Theorize, upper case, to ask the Big Questions, is in short supply right now, at a time when it is as critically necessary as it has ever been. Perhaps even more so.

One advantage of looking at the world over a three-hundred-year span is that it enables us to see that we may have entered an Age of Revolution not unlike the one between 1789 and 1848, the one that gave us much of what we have come to think of as the modern social sciences and their conceptual repertoire(s), the one that put us on the path to liberal democracy, the one that eventuated in the modernist nation-state. This second Age of Revolution began, symbolically—historically, its roots go back a good while—in 1989, with the end of the Cold War, 11/9, and the coming into visibility of a New World Order. Notoriously, for some, this heralded the End of History, the Triumph of Global Capitalism over any other imaginable social-economic order; it was also a time when the global South appeared to be democratizing, when global optimism was on the rise, when 11/9 had not yet given way to 9/11 and the de-democratization of the global North under the sign of security. Whatever else that moment marks, it also heralded a new chapter in the history of social critique—named in the various “post-s”—and in a crisis of representation for the social sciences, which discovered, even though some of its practitioners refused to admit it, that most of their analytical concepts, concepts that derived from modernity and its disciplines, from the disciplining of modernity, worked no longer. To be sure, we can no longer think of concepts like culture, society, economy, or nationality in the ways that we have done for the past two hundred years. Little has been put in its place. We have largely evacuated our analytical repertoire as we retreat into neoempiricism. This, I think, is a direct product of fear of master narratives, a fear

of big theories, big determinations. The great utility in critique resides precisely in taking risks. The courage to do so, of course, means accepting that history will surely prove us wrong in the long run. Yet we need to ask the big questions: What does this new age of revolution consist of? Thus far it has accumulated a language, albeit not a theoretically driven one, a language speaks of market fundamentalism, of neoliberalism, and the like, terms that hover with very clear denotation but almost no connotation. We have a real problem in social science of the relationship, the rupturing, between sign and referent. We use terms that we refer to generally by fiat and by caveat. We invariably put concrete abstractions like “neoliberalism” and teleological assertions like “Africa Rising” in scare quotes, because we are not actually sure what we’re talking about when we speak of them—precisely because their conception remains murky, multivalent, ideological.

The point about theorizing from the South—theorizing from Africa, or India, or Brazil—is not because “better” theory comes from there, but because the South experiences global forces in a particularly edgy way. In fact, in this Age of the Global, all theory is authored in North-South collaborations. Every one of us is, in one or another personified sense, a North-South collaboration. There are no theorists sitting comfortably in the Punjab or in Cape Town who are uncontaminated by, or uninformed of, the North. We’re all collaborations. The question, though, is what does a perspective from the South direct us to by way of questions?

Take the question of “Africa Rising?” It is not, although it is often thought to be, an issue of Afro-optimism or pessimism, negativity or positivity. It is about understanding the global economy. Experientially speaking, that understanding is entirely perspectival. If you’re a banker sitting in New York who wants to invest in property and get a 60 percent return on your capital, and you happen to figure out that this is more likely if you buy real estate in Luanda or on Victoria Island, Lagos—whose markets are currently more buoyant than that of Manhattan—Africa is indeed rising. Utopically so. From the perspective of those who suffer capital, however, the current “scramble for Africa” calls to mind Walter Rodney’s *How*

*Europe Underdeveloped Africa.* For all the profit to be made from real estate and agribusiness in Africa, more people appear to be dying of starvation, more to go hungry; this in spite of a report put out a couple of years ago by the World Health Organization pointing to the fact that the agricultural return on world agribusiness the year before was enough to feed the planet 2.4 times. In other words, we haven't even begun to address the issues of redistribution that might make the planet a livable place for much of its population. More immediately, from the perspective of those Africans who are excess to the requirements of global capital, those who are disposable and effectively excluded from its economies, Africa is not rising at all. For them it is a darkly dystopic place. Concomitantly, from an analytic perspective, it is the relationship between the utopic and the dystopic that ought to be entertaining us—and detaining us as a theoretical problem at the very core of the New Global Order, of its long future.

It is this long story, I think, that Keith wants us to pay attention to. Now, I'm not sure whether we are in the midst of an agrarian revolution or not, I haven't thought about it enough to pass judgment on the point. But it seems to me that, in effect, what has occurred in the global South—and this, as I was trying to say, is what Theory from the South is about—is that it has become a harbinger of the history of capital at large. If we think about the current moment in that history as “neoliberal”—again, the scare quotes, the admission of uncertainty about what we may mean by this, beyond an emphasis on the market, on the retraction of the state in favor of the private sector, on the displacement of risk and responsibility from government to citizen, and so on—Africa only fits in part. But what it does point to is that, as an economic ideology-in-formation, “neoliberalism” requires negations, exceptions, non-neoliberal spaces in its midst in order to realize itself. Take the USA: in order to sustain the myth of the market and the success of a form of capitalism that prioritizes finance, the service sector, and entrepreneurialism over manufacture, it has created the fantasy of low unemployment, now officially under 6 percent. But this doesn't count its enormous carceral population nor those huge numbers in inner cities, most of them people of color, who have given up on job-

seeking entirely. When one adds these figures, the USA has more or less the unemployment rate of your average African country. What is more, it lives with the illusion that a job yields an income; many jobs, even those paid at or marginally above minimum, do not pay sufficient to live on, leaving those who have them requiring two or more to survive. (Which means, ironically, that the USA would require a job rate of well over 100 percent to have a population that is adequately incomeed.) In other words, America can only be neoliberal, viably, to the degree that it sustains a structured universe in which many people are disposable, many permanently underemployed. Only that sort of sociology supports an economy based on finance capital and the global outsourcing of production. America believes it's a classless society. In a sense that is true: its working class is in Cambodia, in Johannesburg, in Mexico City, and its (classless?) lumpen proletariat is incarcerated, either in prisons or in the ghetto gulags of its inner cities. So we've created a sociology “at home,” again, that we only dimly understand, that we barely see. In the global South these things become extremely visible. You can't live in Johannesburg or in Cape Town without confronting, every day, the dystopic and the utopic. They live closely together, inseparably intertwined. South Africa is simultaneously neoliberal, preliberal, liberal, and postliberal, all rolled up, in very odd proportions, into one [formation]. It is not alone in this, of course. The utopic ideal of our times uses the terms of market fundamentalism and deregulation to describe itself. Which it does so to produce effects—and those effects, in turn, create a sociology. That sociology, just like the sociology of modernization theory, is both a model for and a model of “reality,” at once an analytic epistemology and an ideological aspiration. As a model of, it provides a pseudo-scientific lexicon to describe the world that it has created in its image; as a model for, it renders that world normative, and departures from it as pathological, deviant, subversive. The same is true of the other social sciences. Neoliberal economics is not science. It is an ideologically-founded re-description of the world, as it ought to be according to the Chicago School, in quasi-technical and mathematical terms. The broader point here is that, if we are to understand “Africa Rising,” we have to take on Keith's issue.

What kind of world is a changing Africa producing, what kind of Africa? We already see the emergence of different legal systems, heavily inscribed in what is now being called “the new governance”; governance, that is, in major part outsourced from the state into labile collaborations of the private, the public, and the interstitial sectors between—of which there are many. It has also produced a *doppelgänger* economy, an economy that hovers in the domain the alegal, of the il/legal, that we don’t yet fully understand. An enormous proportion of the value production of Africa does not occur in the licit economy at all. It occurs in illicit economies. Organized crime, after all, is the shadow of the contemporary state, and it’s more powerful in Africa than we often appreciate. Indeed, in many African contexts, “the” state is merely a client of organized crime. All of which is to note that, in speaking of “Africa Rising?” we stress the question mark—and avoid the declarative voice.

A few things are to be said about the question of hope and euphoria in the narrative of “Africa Rising?” My daughter was a homeless activist in the US for a long time. A Marxist, she would come home in tears because the people she was trying to radicalize—often Vietnam veterans, people who had not worked for a long time and were absolutely without hope of employment or any sort of future—would say to her, “You know, really, I’m down on my luck. All I need is a suit, all I need is a break, and it will be fine. America is the best country in the world.” The Emersonian dream situates itself deeply even amongst the poorest of Americans, the most hopeless Americans. Hope is a very complex phenomenon: it doesn’t reside in opportunity. In fact, often, the inverse. Hence millennial capitalism and its promise of salvation for all: if we get it right, if we allow the market to develop a strong national economy, all will be well. This is exactly what is being fed by market fundamentalism: if we only open up markets, everybody in the end is going to be better off. And, of course, any number of statisticians in the US will tell you that this is what has actually happened—despite the fact that, all the while, Gini coefficients are rising and real incomes for most people are falling. So much for the discourse of hope. It tends to be largely a petty bourgeois and bourgeois discourse. If you talk to kids with guns in South Africa, they

talk about extraction. Hope for many of them lies in the brute power of a weapon. Why wait for a job that isn’t coming when there are much more direct ways of extracting value in a market where violence and crime pay, in which the market in violence is just another market, and criminals are merely rational actors optimising their interests in the most effective possible way. To be sure, crime, including white collar crime, is one of the more profitable spheres of activity in the South African economy at all its levels. Nor, once more, only the South African economy. Which is why understanding it is so fundamental to understanding the emerging global order—and “neoliberalism.”

*RK:* The recent push to reimagine the South in its commodity form—emerging markets—allows us to witness the yet unfolding history of capitalism. If this hints at the mobility of capital and its capacity to transmutate in ever new forms in its search for cheap labor and resources, then it also discloses the underbelly of millennial capitalism that is as much predicated on the discourse of hope and optimism as on the invisibility of the poor and the marginalized. In what ways might we rethink the critical concepts of sovereignty, security, territory, and even revolution in the world of markets?

*KH:* The twentieth century generated a contrast between reform and revolution which often led to extreme political conflict. In my own work I have often rejected the notion of an abrupt change between opposite versions of society, focusing rather on how what people are already doing in the cracks, as it were, might be given a new direction and emphasis. But the events of 2011–12 (the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street) led me to question this line and to take revolution seriously again. I never bought the idea that the 1960s and 1970s were a revolutionary moment, but the world began to move in the 1980s and this movement is far from finished, as John pointed out earlier. Revolutions, however, are inseparable from war. Each of the major revolutions involved their societies in decades of war, and the world wars of last century were catalytic of the anticolonial revolution, for example. The question is whether and how the current crisis will unleash another world war. If it does, all our assumptions about market

dominance will go out of the window, the world economy will shrink, countries like China would go fast into reverse and could even break up. The decades of financial imperialism and global migration from the 1880s led to a very different version of world society after 1914. The Russian economy grew by an average 10 percent a year from 1890 to 1913. It was the China of its day, but look what happened next.

Related to this, we talk glibly about capitalism, but it's not obvious to me that capitalism exists anymore, if it ever did. Society before the bourgeois revolution was based on particular political forms of property, in which power came from rights of distribution. In fact, it's from this system that the phrase "if you want to get ahead, get a gun" comes. The whole point of the bourgeoisie revolution was that it was supposed to shift the sources of wealth and power away from property, politically protected access to rents, to profits based on making stuff in markets cheaper and more effectively than your competitors. For some decades now the chief source of accumulation, revenue to capital if you like, is no longer production for profit; for example, Big Pharma in the United States derives from patents granted by Congress a sum in excess of the total value of Medicare. Goldman Sachs was able to use its influence in the White House and the Treasury to get back 100 percent on what it lost through AIG, plus all the other transfers of taxes to the banks. Sony, which you might think makes its income from selling entertainment machines, gets 75 percent of its revenue from DVDs, which is a form of intellectual property and must be enforced. Of course, it's also the case that militarism is on the rise, in support of accumulation. So one of the questions that I pursue in my book is whether capitalism, especially in Europe and North America, has reverted to a system of rent-seeking that preexisted the bourgeois revolution itself, and as we know, capitalism in its traditional sense has been relocated, especially to Asia, so that what you now have in Brazil and China and India, is something very similar to les trente glorieuses of the postwar period when European and North American countries essentially built welfare states to try and provide some kind of security for the people who'd been drawn into wage employment. Each of these BRICS in its own

way, whether you want to call it a welfare state or not, is in the process of trying to do something to secure the livelihoods and interests of the people who've been drawn so rapidly into urban commodity production. So the notion of capitalism in its traditional sense only exists in these countries; it no longer exists in the United States or most European countries, and it's within that framework that I ask, what are the forces lining up against each other in a continent like Africa? This leads us back to the notion of revolution. All the classical revolutions involved their countries in wars for three or four decades. The Russian Revolution also provoked a massive series of invasions and extended wars. The Haitian Revolution that my mentor, C. L. R. James, wrote about provoked invasions by all the world's powers. The British sent an army of 60,000 men to Haiti to put down the slave revolution, and every one of them died there. This was in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars. Its loss set back the war effort in Europe for five years when the Duke of Wellington eventually assembled an army of that size. I agree with John, we would probably have different periodizations. I have looked at the whole period from 1776 to the present, and it is clear that there are periods of three or four decades each that consist essentially of war and revolution, 1776 to 1815, and 1914 to 1945. It is worth raising the point that we may well be, and there are good historical grounds for suggesting it, on the edge of such a period ourselves now. It sounds like scaremongering to say it just like that, but most people here have never been anywhere near a war. I actually was born in one. The houses around me were blasted into smithereens; one in three houses had been demolished where I lived after the war. The British economy only reached the level of 1939 in 1956 (1939 was the Great Depression) and the place was devastated. Nobody was doing anything about it, there was no money, and I couldn't wait to get out. We often ask now if the problem is: are we going back to the 1930s? We should rather ask, are we going back to 1914? The Americans and the Europeans are being pushed by the BRICs, and the only means of competition and resistance they have is military. I was speaking at the World Bank in 2006, and an air force colonel from the Pentagon asked me out for a coffee. He said: "You Europeans have stolen our moral high ground. The

Chinese have stolen our manufactures. All we've got left is the weapons. I guess it's double or quits."

*JC:* Let me return here to the question of grand narratives of history. There is no longer a grand narrative, but there ought to be critical space for creating multiple grand narratives that argue with one another. It is what we lost with the end of the Cold War and the de-Marxification of the Western academy. Before then, the scholarly world was redolent with argumentation, almost to the point of cacophony. Some of it was noise, but much of it was productive. It didn't matter which positions were right or wrong; of course, none were either in any simple, absolute sense. But the fact of argumentation itself was fundamental to understanding the world, its contradictions and its forms of violence, the value it was capable of producing and the destruction it often wrought. I think that what Keith is saying is that we have to have that sort of argument again, one over the nature and future directions of world history. It doesn't matter if we differ over the details. It matters that we take on the question. After all, one of the features of the "neoliberal" moment, whatever else it is, is its tendency to dehistoricize history, to live entirely in the continuing present. Presentism becomes, as it were, the only tense of contemporary thought. Market fundamentalism has no real long run, only short runs. Which has all sorts of implications.

*KH:* I think that one of my original contributions is to revive the notion of liberal revolution as a form of insurgency and emancipation. Liberal revolutions are not the kind of revolution that dominated the twentieth century, which were worker, peasant, and socialist revolutions in the main. A lot of contemporary discourse to some extent addresses the notion of freedom and it is clearly connected to markets, a particular notion of democracy, and so on. The United States still stands as the global symbol for this successful, liberal revolution.

*JC:* You're absolutely right to raise this possibility, to think about decolonizing the hegemonic idea of revolution that prevailed during the twentieth century. The answer is very difficult. There are certainly parts of Africa in which there is still as-

pirational talk about social redistribution under a social democratic regime; in which it is commonly said that rampant neoliberalism—and yes, the term is commonly invoked in many parts of the continent—has produced many more problems than it solved. If it [i.e., neoliberalism] were to work its putative magic, we would all like to be bankers. And we would all be successful entrepreneurs. But it has not. Hence the widespread desire for the return of the state—in its uncorrupted form. But there is also another capitalism-as-fantasy that takes its symbolic imagery not from America, but from the likes of Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew has reappeared as a powerful trope after 9/11 and the USA Patriot Act. This is when suddenly, in the US and in parts of Africa, one heard voices that said: "Well, America has become every bit as authoritarian as Singapore, but without the benefits; in Singapore at least you're probably going to get a job, health care, and housing, none of which is guaranteed in America." There are now African chiefs who regularly go to Singapore with the intention of rebuilding their chiefdoms on the Singaporean model. This is where, I think, if I may say, Keith, the issue that you have raised [implicitly], and have glossed over, is "What kind of politics goes with the form of capitalism brought about by liberal revolution?" This is a big question. I am less hopeful for a liberal revolution . . .

*KH:* No, I am not optimistically predicting a liberal revolution. I am saying that the antidote to the old regime is a liberal revolution. I have absolutely no idea if or how it would take place. That's why I'm not saying anything about Africa Rising either.

*JC:* I take your point. What I was trying to say, though, is that we have not addressed the various political alternatives that are seeking to forge relations with [neoliberal] capitalism. Nor are these merely political models. Because politics is relocating itself in law all over the place, they are also legal regimes. We have to analyze contemporary capitalism not merely as economy, but as politico-legal economy, and understand the possibility of liberal social revolutions in those terms.

*RK:* So how can we possibly recover the political in this particular form of capitalism of which techno-

friendly, authoritarian Singapore has become a popular sign?

*KH:* Our first task is to question the usefulness of terms like capitalism and neoliberalism; the questions we want answers to are basically political and require a nuanced approach to history. I find it convenient to juxtapose African societies today with some that go under the omnibus label of an Old Regime. In the course of examining what liberal revolutions were supposed to be and have become, I have been led both to interrogate blanket usage of a term like *capitalism* and to select elements that I find useful for thinking about what lies ahead for Africans. John has provided some stimulating images of how we might think of developments in the US, South Africa, etcetera, with an emphasis on crime. I have recently published an article called “How the Informal Economy Took over the World” that focuses on how neoliberal deregulation has led to the criminalization of corporate capitalism. These are all rather partial analyses offering much overlap between us. But I do not equate the United States today with its eighteenth-century origins even if its own myth of itself does. Georg Simmel in “The Metropolis and Mental Life” offers a brilliant commentary on how notions of freedom had evolved from the eighteenth century to around 1900. I will just mention, however, that the original driver of liberal revolutions was freedom of movement and trade. Our current disposition makes the same claim, but it is false. Then the mass of ordinary people were pegged down into the ground, impeded in their everyday lives and in their movement, so that they could be leached off of. These conditions are not universal now, but my bet is that they describe how many Africans suffer today. In Africa not only are there fifty-four states trying to get what they can off travelers across their borders, but everywhere you move, you are subject to predation from local thugs. A car produced in China costs 5,000 dollars to make and ship to Tanzania. That same car costs 4,000 dollars to get from Tanzania to Kampala (under 1,000 km). And if you look at all those revolutions, the Italian, German, American, and so on, what they were most concerned about was expanding and freeing up a home market that could then be protected from some of the larger players

in the world at the time. Many Africans traveling over paths that they have used for centuries are routinely criminalized and harassed not only at national borders, but also at many other points in between. At some stage I’m assuming some kind of political movement will tap into that sense of humiliation and restriction that Africans routinely have to endure. For any notion of revolution, we need a theory of what is likely to get people to move and fight on an effective scale. I can’t claim to know that now, but I do believe that the present situation is intolerable, and I will take my chances on whether what I have to say resonates with that.

I earlier hinted that Africa’s demographic expansion in the coming century has only one precedent: Europeans in the nineteenth century (although Asia in the twentieth century might be another). I also pointed out how Europe’s population has collapsed since. The idea that the game is up for Europe is not usually discussed at conferences there. Europe is on the way down; it can’t reproduce itself, it can’t even defend itself, and it hasn’t got a coherent economic strategy. They hate the people who come there to work for their pensions. In an article for *Economic and Political Weekly* called “The Rise and Fall of Nations,” I reminded readers that the Europeans launched two world wars, and they could easily drag us into another or at least into a global equity meltdown when their currency collapses. I’m not interested in radical solutions as such, but I think that how China, India, and Brazil handle this particular moment in their own political economy, and whether it leads to a significant breakdown or to a more positive way forward, is of immense significance for the rest of the world. The other important question is whether the Americans can be prevented from unleashing a Third World War.

*JC:* Can I pick up the question? I think there are two pieces to it. One is basically an activist issue, which is how one creates a politics appropriate to the historical moment. The other is a political-sociological one, that is, what is actually emerging in the global South under the impact of the various forms of economy that are taking shape in that part of the world. This latter question is complicated because so much of ordinary political life has shifted away from the conventional structures

and processes, away from elections, away from political parties, into various forms of people's movements. I don't only mean new social movements but a very wide range of forms of social action and association. This takes us back to the eternal question of sovereignty: what has occurred across the global South is a radical shift in the nature of sovereignty. We are used to sovereignty being vertically structured, emanating from and centered monopolistically in the state. Across much of Africa, sovereignty has lateralized: states control part of the landscape, but other parts are controlled by organized religion, by organized crime, by enclaved corporate structures, by ethnic groups, and so on, all of which mimic the state to a greater or lesser degree. We live in an age that inverts Charles Tilly's famous thesis that the modern state arises out of organized crime, mimicking its forms as it legitimizes its authority over the use of force and the extraction of taxes. Nowadays organized crime, organized religion, ethnic groups, and the like mimic the state and create simulacra of it. They create simulacral legal systems, creating administrative systems, systems of extraction (a.k.a. taxation), and so on. Where this happens, a patchwork of sovereign domains emerges. These tend to become the sites in and through which local politics are vectored, in which social movements demand basic services, in which people demand jobs, in which they speak the language of redistribution. The precise terms vary, depending on context. For example, in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they're about access to the proceeds of extraction; in parts of Tanzania, about piracy as a mode of redistributing wealth. As demands for rights and redistribution vary, so they create different species and spaces of politics. Now, the big question for activists is: Can those politics be mobilized? How exactly? For what? Ultimately, an antipolitics directed against the state makes no sense in most places, because it is not in the state where power is actually concentrated. If power is deflected into the corporate world, into organized crime or religion or ethnicity—and especially when these things are transnational—fighting the state is futile. And even when the struggle is directed at the state, it is often best fought by legal rather than conventional political means, since they are more likely to be effective. Not always, of course,

and maybe not even often. But sometimes. Those fights, though, are a very complicated business, because lawfare, to have any chance of succeeding, involves difficult strategic decisions; decisions about, for one thing, jurisdictions, since geolegal regimes are not all alike for purposes of fighting one's battles; decisions also about what species of the law to which to appeal in making claims and righting wrongs—tort law, say, or constitutional protections for minorities, or intellectual property statutes, or human rights jurisprudence, although this last, despite popular stereotypes, is usually a very weak instrument with which to fight for anything much. To complicate matters, these various legal instruments have different purchase in different jurisdictions, globally speaking. In fact, the emerging maps of political struggle these days are not usefully orientated around the international systems of nation-states, but around legal jurisdictions. So, for example—this is an example that actually happened—[if] you happen to be an indigenous (“Indio”) group in Nicaragua whose land is being taken away from you by a Korean lumber company under an agreement with the Nicaraguan government, appeal to a Nicaraguan court would be less effective than appeal to the Inter-American court. (The indigenous group, which deployed a very subtle legal argument in the effort to regain their territory, won their action in that court.) This is where the judicialization of politics becomes complicated. But it is becoming more and more ubiquitous, as people's movements of various sorts across the world are turning to lawfare to fight their causes.

*KH:* That's excellent, John. If we could merge your knowledge of law with mine of economy, we might have something. I was too glib in my initial responses. I have drawn a lot, personally and collectively, from political forms and movements coming out of Latin America, including from the World Social Forum in 2001, which I've been part of for fifteen years, developing alternative approaches to research and activism. But there's a particular label that came out of the 1990s, after the lost decade in Latin America, called popular economy, and the idea of popular economy is important, because first of all, it involves, normatively, alliances between urban informal workers, peasants, and so

on, but also elements from large-scale organized political life, including progressive regimes, the unions, and so forth. So these are coalitions that crosscut the state and capital and organized labor, peasantries and informal workers, and so on, and they have been implemented, I think, quite successfully in various countries, including Brazil and Bolivia. So I think that Latin America is still a very powerful source of creative insurrection, new political ideas and organizations. Certainly, I have learned a great deal from them. Indeed the whole alter-globalization movement, the idea of mobilizing globally for a different vision of the world, has been developed most effectively in Latin America.

Insurgency or insurrection is not revolution, and Tahrir Square is the best recent example of that. On the other hand, C. L. R. James wrote about and studied revolution all his life, and I agree, obviously we can't, as Heraclitus said, step into the same river twice, but I think we can profitably study the history of revolutions. For example, "Marxism and Insurrection," which is on marxists.org, is a letter written by V. I. Lenin to the party in September 1917, where he explains why he was now urging the Bolsheviks to support a general revolutionary movement, and in July he had opposed the idea. It's an extraordinary letter because he also lays out there the general conditions, in his view, for taking this step. Of course, what happened in between was that the Russians had pulled out of the war and there were all these people coming back from the front, mixing with the Soviets in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and he thought this was a good time to go. In fact by October the revolution was a done deal. This was someone who in January in Zurich addressed the Swiss young comrades and said he did not expect a revolution in his lifetime. Or read [Leon] Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*, which is 1,300 pages and takes place over nine months, from February to October. Some meetings, in which he took part, take [up] forty pages. So, I can't imagine any other way of thinking about revolution than by engaging in historical analysis. The power of contingency is too great for us to rely only on abstract analysis. James used to say that, in any country, there are only ever maybe 40,000 activists, that is, people who dedicate their lives to political change. Everyone else just wants to keep what they've got. And he said that's a good

thing: we don't want a society where everyone is like me, living to turn everything upside down all the time. But he also argued that there are revolutionary moments that he had studied closely, when people who before would do anything not to jeopardize what they're trying to hold on to suddenly discover that they've lost most of it, and at that point, people in general begin to move and accept coordination by the activists. So, I agree with you on your general issue about neoempiricism, John. I have taken the view, which is a Braudel line, that the way to go is to be empirical, but to expand the range of what you're writing about. As for whether or not this can be sustained, I'm sure that nobody in his right mind would ever consider my book to be adequately researched and supported . . . but it's like [Immanuel] Kant said in his anthropology, what we need is horizon thinking, backed up by vivid anecdotes that are nearer to the lives of our audience. And this is not a question of finding either theoretical or empirical proofs for a general idea or an expanded empirical account. Since this is probably going to be the last time that I have the floor today, I would like to say how rewarding it has been to be in your company. ■■■■

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