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Uneven development and scale politics in Southern Africa: what we learn from Neil Smith

Patrick Bond and Greg Ruiters

Abstract:
Southern Africa is probably the most unevenly developed region on earth, combining the most modern technologies and an advanced working class with the world's extremes of inequality and social militancy. The two most extreme countries, both with settler–colonial populations and accumulation processes that created durable class/race/gender distortions and extreme environmental degradation, are South Africa and Zimbabwe—both of which Neil Smith visited in 1995. His contribution to our understanding of political economy, before and after, was exemplary. We consider in this article how Smith's theory assisted in the understanding of crisis-ridden financial markets within the framework of capital overaccumulation and intensified spatial unevenness; the politics of scale, difference and community; and the ways that class apartheid and durable racism in the two countries together fit within contemporary geopolitical economy.

Introduction

Southern Africa was an ideal site for Neil Smith to visit, if even just once. In 1995, he was in both South Africa (when Durban hosted the International Geographical Union) and Zimbabwe (the Bvumba mountains straddling Mozambique, where he illegally jumped a mine-infested border trail on a bird-watching quest). Periodically from the early 1980s until his death, he encouraged our application of the core Marxist ideas about uneven development here. Those ideas affected our research and contestation of financial markets (Bond), urban processes and regional dynamics (Ruiters) and geopolitical strategy (both of us), in a context of durable yet ever-shifting class–race–gender oppressions and environmental degradations. The most important theoretical contributions from Smith come from his earlier works, which we have drawn upon most in the pages that follow.

We knew Smith personally thanks to doctoral studies in geography at Johns Hopkins University in the 1980s–1990s and occasional suppers at David Harvey's Baltimore residence. What we permanently value from Smith's remarkably hard-line yet also nuanced revolutionary Marxist project, is not only the unstinting conviction for which he was world famous, but a sense that without the rigour, creativity and eloquence he epitomised, we are all bound to live in an intellectual ghetto.

Patrick.bond@wits.ac.za

Southern Africa is the last place, however, one would expect to ghettoise historical geographical materialism given how many attempts there have been at neo-Marxist (albeit sometimes un-Marxist) political-economic theorisation (Bond and Desai 2006). Until the last decade's attempts by the likes of Samantha Ashman, Richard Ballard, Sharad Chari, Ashwin Desai, Ben Fine, Gill Hart, Susan Newman, Melanie Samson, Trevor Ngwane and ourselves, no one here tried to pull together the perspective on uneven development Smith pointed to from 1984 onwards. No one here properly specified the structured character of divergences in production, reproduction and society–nature relations under global capitalism, in spite of Southern Africa being the most unevenly developed region on earth.

Smith warned that uneven development in capitalism is "structural not statistical" (Smith 1990:xiii). Still, some simple data offer a starting point that makes this abundantly evident (Bond 2014):

- Gini income inequality coefficients for South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia are the world's four highest, with South Africa's measured by the World Bank at 0.77.
- In polls (of business leaders) regarding worker militancy within national working classes, those in South Africa and Angola are, respectively, the least and the fourth least cooperative, according to the World Economic Forum.
- South Africa can boast amongst the highest levels of protests (counted by police reports) per person in the world that we know of (nearly 2300 ended in violence in Bond 2014).
- From the top down, Johannesburg hosts the most corrupt capitalist class anywhere (as measured by PricewaterhouseCoopers), with its settler– colonial cultural forms and brutal orientation to accumulation through extractive dispossession.
- The region suffers life-long political leaders whose patronage-based rule is tied to crony capitalism in Swaziland (Africa's last feudal monarchy under King Mswati), Zimbabwe (where Robert Mugabe persists at age 91, in his 35th year in power, as we write), Angola (the most extreme kleptocracy, where José Eduardo dos Santos has ruled since 1979) and the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo (a Kabila family kingdom following Mobutu's 1965–1997 dictatorship).

Finally, some of the most important ideological and strategic lessons we learned from Smith, once a leader in a small revolutionary political party, are urgently needed in our politically turbulent region. Smith had what (he often confessed) was a formulaic approach to Trotskyism during the 1980s but his departure from the fold due to a dispute over whether feminist socialists should have the space to organise a caucus within the International Socialism tradition, showed how genuinely concerned he was to avoid the most rigid kind of vanguardist Leninist party in search of something more appropriate to the context.

That openness is the sensibility required to penetrate the politics of uneven development in Southern Africa at a conjuncture in which Smith would, as do we, celebrate the dissolution of old alliances that are no longer in the interests of the broad phalanx of the

oppressed: poor and working-class people, women, youth, the elderly, the LGBTI community, and environmentalists. But it is in making the new that the challenges arise—especially resurgent xenophobia amongst the lowest income urban residents—and here, Smith's ideas about uneven development inform our own sense of capitalism's limits. Indeed it is in the depraved character of capitalist crisis, Smith would agree, that amplified uneven development and financialisation are most obvious. In turn, the most grounded revolutionary strategies must now consciously link class, race and scale politics.

Uneven Zimbabwe and South Africa (Patrick Bond)

My first mentor was, in retrospect, not hard to find. It was a moment of considerable frustration, in the society and for me personally, immersed as I was in classical guitar studies during winter–spring 1982. The season was a cold one for the left, as Reaganism gathered pace. Warmed considerably at the Johns Hopkins University Grad Club, which Smith had established for conviviality's sake—so necessary at that staid institution—there was an unending series of informal seminars on Marxism. Thanks to Smith, I found myself shaking off the musty tradition of Kennedy liberalism along with my training in neoclassical economics received up the highway at Swarthmore College. My junior-year semester sojourn was at the Peabody Conservatory, a few miles down Charles Street from the Hopkins Homewood Campus protests, pubs and polemics where Smith was a constant presence. More than any period, those were the formative weeks for my personal politics. I had not met David Harvey at that stage. But after many hours learning from Smith and his mates, and nearly joining the International Socialist Organisation under his tutelage, I drifted back to finish my BA Economics in Philadelphia. After graduation and a (repay-the-student-debt) job at the Federal Reserve augmented by finance studies with Edward Herman at the Wharton School, by 1985 it was time to move on. I took very seriously Smith's suggestion that I start my PhD with Harvey, a stroke of great luck. Smith's life-changing advice is something that so many others can also testify to.

He made one vital intervention as I thought through research topics for the doctorate. Smith remarked on how much theoretical work on capital's spatial, sectoral and scalar unevenness was now accomplished, what with Limits to Capital placing these matters so centrally within political economy. The era of globalised financialisation was gaining unstoppable momentum, and Smith motivated an empirical study of the phenomenon using a particular place that was comprehensible as a country unit within a fast-changing world context: the uneven development of Zimbabwe.

That led to my permanent move to Southern Africa in 1989 where over the past quarter century, Smith's ideas came to serve with a force as great only as Harvey's. Since then, I have spent most of my time cataloguing the unevenness of neoliberal public policy, capital accumulation and social struggles in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Zimbabwe was especially important because a century of colonial power could be traced, from 1890 to 1990, with a national specificity rare in doctoral case studies. There were, of course, both imported and organic forms of capital accumulation, as the dynamic of class formation corresponded

tosettler–colonial economic interests. For these reasons, Smith's work has been vital to my analysis, and grows ever more so the more capitalism teeters.

The core transferable insight from Smith (1990:149), in my view, is that uneven development represents "the geographical contradiction between development and underdevelopment where the overaccumulation of capital at one pole is matched by the overaccumulation of labour at the other". Drawing upon Harvey's (1982) Limits to Capital framing, there are two core dynamics of a geographical nature here. First, the fulcrum of geographical unevenness is the differentiated return on investment that creation and/or destruction of entire built environments—and the social structures that accompany them—offer to different kinds of investors with different time horizons. Meanwhile, different places compete endlessly with one another to attract investment and in the process they tend to amplify unevenness, allowing capital to play one local or regional or national class configuration off against others. The territorial power blocs that emerge are the subject of geopolitical analysis, in a formulation that works well at various scales. Understanding the defence of territory against devalorisation of overaccumulated capital helps identify causality in geopolitics.

Smith's (1998) later argument stressed the continual, if never permanent, resolution of opposing tendencies toward the geographical equalisation and differentiation of the conditions and levels of production. The search for a spatial fix is continually frustrated, never realised, creating distinct patterns of geographical unevenness through the continued see-saw of capital. How well does Smith's sense of see-saw unevenness relate to societies where capitalist and non-capitalist relations are in such constant tension as in this region? Others within the Western Marxist tradition had already noted capitalism's unevenness in Africa (Arrighi and Saul 1973). But after noting the obvious, few investigated the dynamic underlying it.

One was Ian Phimister (1992), who telescoped out to the global scale at the critical moment in the colonial-capitalist era, the late 19th century. The Scramble for Africa was codified in the 1885 Berlin Conference continent-carving of borders, an outcome of overaccumulation, financialisation and shifting geopolitical power that ebbed and flowed according to both metropol and settler–colonial relations. Reflecting Smith's mode of argument, Phimister (1992:1) showed how the Scramble occurred because of "capitalism's markedly uneven development" which led "France, and to a lesser extent, Britain, to embark on programmes of colonial expansion. British intervention, however, invariably reactive and reluctant, was crucially shaped by City interests encapsulated in the policy of Free Trade".

The organisation of this region's capitalist space by settler–colonial regimes intensified following the discovery of diamonds (1860s in Kimberley) and gold (1880s in the Witwatersrand area better known as Johannesburg). From the 1890s, the anticipated gold finds in Zimbabwe led to a similar settler–capitalist invasion, one described by Giovanni Arrighi (1973:336) as "the most important single element determining the

nature of economic and political development". Overestimating the potential for gold finds near what are now the country's second and third largest cities (Bulawayo and Masvingo) meant that Cecil Rhodes had to recoup his railroad and telegraph infrastructure expenditures by importing more than 20,000 English settlers with the promise of free land and a future in farming—with all that this entailed for displacement and dispossession. Rhodes, who gained his fortune consolidating the diamond industry by hook or by crook in the 1870s–1880s, had completely missed the mid-1880s gold finds that made Johannesburg Africa's richest city. This made him more desperate to find the next seam, taking the unprofitable risk with the British South Africa Company invasion of Zimbabwe.

But as Arnold Sibanda (1990) then showed, it was not Rhodes' mistake, but the inexorability of mining capital's imposition of wage relations—formal capitalism—that would cement its extreme uneven development. I recall Smith agreeing with this bigger-picture argument, stressing the necessity of capital's outreach rather than the contingency—no matter how compelling a personal story—of Rhodes' outsized ego. (That ego, in turn, meant the University of Cape Town, received its original bequest from Rhodes' ill-begotten fortune, but in 2015, his dominating statue there briefly became the national focal point for #RhodesMustFall activism—which began with a black student hurling a bucket of excrement on Rhodes and ended a month later with the statue's eviction—thus symbolising how little of the "elite transition" had trickled down even at the country's main tertiary education site of elite reproduction.)

How was this unevenness expressed in terms of the space economy of production relations? In South Africa, the phenomenon of apartheid-era unevenness was considered a case of "articulations of modes of production", as the exiled lawyer-sociologist Harold Wolpe (1980) theorised in the early 1970s, based on Claude Meillassoux's (1975) study of articulations between capitalist and non-capitalist relations of agricultural production in the Ivory Coast. Smith (1990:156), however, explained it in more abstract theoretical terms:

The logic of uneven development is theoretically prior to the problematic of articulation of modes of production. The point is that today the "articulation of modes of production" is a product of the developments and limits of capital, not vice versa. More concretely, it is the logic of uneven development which structures the context for this articulation.

The settler–colonial and minerals-based power of those who accumulated most capital in the period prior to national independence—Zimbabwe in 1980, South Africa in 1994—led to such structured unevenness, that the phenomenon was not reversed after liberation but instead amplified when conjoined with neoliberalism. Indeed, Smith's ideas were vital to us understanding the process by which capital worked through the inherited spatial form and abused it further, for example, after 1994 in the extension of migrant labour for South Africa's new platinum mines and lowering of prevailing wage rates; ubiquitous suburban sprawl; rampant property speculation (with a small amount of central city

gentrification in Cape Town and Johannesburg); and perhaps most importantly, the region's deepened insertion into a world system intent on debt peonage, reversion to primary commodity export orientation and the deindustrialisation of manufacturing.

Finance was central to both the neoliberal policy regime and to the amplification of unevenness. Both Harvey and Smith showed how, theoretically, the tendency to overaccumulation crisis affects capital's search for geographical differentiation and how space then becomes a much more crucial means of production (Smith 1990:85–87). As overaccumulation sets in, productive investment meets gluts and is redirected into financial circuits. In turn, the public policy of finance remains state neoliberalism, and in both Zimbabwe and South Africa this policy frame was utterly dominant over the past quarter century (Bond 1998, 2014). It was a despairing time, with no obvious countervailing forces on the horizon aside from internal capitalist contradictions.

All this we agreed on. However, there was not a complete overlap in our perspectives, notwithstanding common roots. As one example, the relationship between finance and uneven spatial development was, at least initially, inadequately conceptualised by Smith (1990:150). He situated the origins of uneven development in "the constant necessary movement from fixed to circulating capital and back to fixed. At an even more basic level, it is the geographical manifestation of the equally constant and necessary movement from use-value to exchange-value and back to use-value".

But because the movement from exchange-value to use-value and back depends on money as a medium of exchange and store of value, with credit amplifying these roles, the dynamism of uneven development relates at least to some degree to the exercise of financial power, a point Smith observed empirically with anecdotes in his Uneven Development, but one he simply neglected to theorise (as Arrighi [1994] did later, for example, in The Long Twentieth Century). During the prior century's epoch of imperialism, entire currency blocs battled each other for trading dominance. This sort of totalising process was one through which finance seemed to level local dynamics of uneven development, in the course of imposing similar conditions drawing closer the various components of the global space economy into a universal law of value.

But in this respect, scale differentiation proved a vital ingredient in understanding unevenness over time in a case study site like Southern Africa. Again, we have Smith (1990:134) to thank for this insight, for scale is a "crucial window on the uneven development of capital, because it is difficult to comprehend the real meaning of 'dispersal', 'decentralisation', 'spatial restructuring' and so forth, without a clear understanding of geographical scale".

Thinking this through during my own study of Zimbabwe's financial deepening and periodic crisis formation over the course of a century, it became evident that power established and exercised at the highest scales was also subject to challenge and then to decay, depending on how that power related to the accumulation process. The "uneven

development of scale" meant that at some points in time— the 1930s–1940s and 1960s–1970s most obviously—there was much greater national determination (what is today termed "policy space") while at other points (the 1920s and 1980s–1990s) an overarching logic of global capital came to bear, and scale power shifted to world financial circuitries (Bond 1998). Again, it is interesting to assess minor disagreements, for Smith, relying on production-bound understandings of scale derived from the division of labour, apparently considered the uneven power of finance at different scales a contingent (and relatively unimportant) feature of capitalist development. My objective, in contrast, was to theorise it as a function of the tendency to overaccumulate in the productive sector, switching capital into the financial sector, and then in the process discovering vital policy power shifts from national to global sites. Instead, for Smith (1990:123), the key to uneven development was the changing basis of the centralisation and dispersal of productive capital across international, national and urban scales: "Certainly the spatial centralisation of money capital can be considerably enhanced by the centralisation of social capital as a whole, but in itself the spatial centralisation of money capital is of little significance". To make his case, Smith originally (his 1982 thesis) referred to the accommodating role and lubricating function of finance within capitalism, not factoring in the power of finance to remake economic policy.

But as overaccumulation becomes generalised and financial power rises, the spatial centralisation of money capital (e.g. in the 1970s from petroleum consumers to the New York bank accounts of Arab rulers) is typically the proximate catalyst and facilitator for the subsequent amplification of uneven development. During the 1970s, the flood of Petrodollars to Third World dictators was a central cause in the restructuring of the international division of labour and dependency relations of peripheral regions, especially once the Debt Crisis broke in 1982 when Mexico defaulted. After all, in contemporary times the main way in which spatially centralised financial power is experienced is through the determination of national-level policies by the Washington, DC-based international financial institutions acting on behalf of the commercial and investment banks. By the time of the 1990 edition of Uneven Development, Smith delighted in recounting the view of Wall Street's Thomas Johnson, describing the contradictions behind the power of world finance over the Third World: "There is a possibility of a nightmarish domino effect, as every creditor ransacks the globe attempting to locate his collateral" (Smith 1990:161).

In other respects, Smith understood the determination of scale not by productive relations but by financial power. Uneven development of the built environment at the urban scale, for example, intensifies principally because the land rent structure becomes one in a set of portfolio options for financiers. Smith (1990:148) confirmed: "To the extent that ground rent becomes an expression of the interest rate with the historical development of capital, the ground rent structure is tied to the determination of value in the system as a whole". Rent as an integrative lever—in this case, a means of universalising capitalist space relations—is hence integrated into the broader capitalist economy by another lever of financial power, interest. The rate of interest in turn reflects a combination of factors, of

which the most important are the demand for money and the concomitant balance of power relations between creditors and debtors of various sorts.

The financial accentuation of an underlying boom-bust phenomenon is what Smith and I discussed when we occasionally met during the 1990s, as I sought clarity on Zimbabwe's uneven socio-spatial structure. As Phimister was most effective in proving at the outset of settler colonialism's birth, the power of finance profoundly affected the subsequent articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, generating the basis for disarticulated development. And much earlier, drawing upon secondary research material from South Africa, Namibia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rosa Luxemburg's 1913 text Accumulation of Capital has very similar insights about overaccumulation, financial bubbling and extreme tendencies towards accumulation by dispossession (Luxemburg 1968). Smith's argument that the logic of uneven development (at the global scale) is "prior to the problematic of articulation of modes of production" helps put these insights into perspective.

The Politics of Uneven Development, Scale, Difference, Strategy, and Agency (Greg Ruiters)

"Uneven development … thy name is war", wrote Smith (1990:154). He implored us to connect with a "political treatment of uneven development". What were the kinds of politico-strategic questions and silences that propelled Smith to develop a theory of the construction and politics of scale? And, how might this inform applying his theory of uneven development and scale to collective action and political solidarity, given the vast differences among poor and working people across the globe and on the African continent?

Smith's work on spatialised politics is increasingly relevant in the context of extremely serious challenges (localism, fragmentation, public space, land dispossession or homelessness, gated communities, migration and devastating xenophobia against black foreign nationals in South Africa) facing social and political movements in Southern Africa and beyond. It is also relevant in the context of the sustained scholarly bias against thoroughly incorporating space in theories of social change, social movements and social theory more generally.

Smith insisted that we need to be fully aware that scale defines our politics, our loyalties and the place where we stand. Trained in a Marxist-Trotskyist approach, Smith's work might be seen as an extended conversation with Trotsky (1977) and further refutation of crude forms of mechanical marxism such as is found in Stalinism. Hence, he argues, our spatial ideologies are fundamental to what makes politics progressive (Smith 1990:172–175; Smith 1992). Capital organises uneven development at various scales (Smith 1990:136) with national and urban scales acting as the main forms of organising accumulation and difference, and the international scale pre-eminently driven by the tendency to equalisation (Smith 1990:139). Capitalism "produces real spatial scales which give uneven development its coherence" (Smith 1990: xv). National borders, passports, xenophobic and racist attacks and securitised gentrified gated urban "communities" make scale very real, reflecting the

various material dimensions of how the bourgeoisie institutionally territorialises and carves up the world.

We owe a great debt to Smith for further developing a conceptual vocabulary for exploring scale by defining specific scales: the body, home, community, urban, region, nation, global and by identifying four dimensions for each scale. The latter were (1) what are the features that render each scale coherent; (2) internal differences within scales; (3) borders with other scales; and (4) political possibilities for resistance inherent in the production of specific scales, the abrogation of boundaries, the "jumping of scales".

Simply put, "scale" determines how we formulate problems, and implicit in such formulations is how we attribute causes to problems and how we look for solutions. Feminists working at the scale of the body/personal have long argued that the personal is also public-political. By redefining the scale of issues, feminists have succeeded in presenting radically new insights and strategies for overcoming oppression. How we think about, act and try to solve problems is critical in who is part of the solution. Smith in many ways takes up where Marx left off. Marx offered strong scalar arguments with his formulation that "workers have no country" and that capital was global from the beginning (also see Harvey's recounting of globalisation as formulated in the Communist Manifesto). But for Marx scale also defined the communist vision—scale was a political project.

Avoiding the rigid separation of spatial scales, Smith insisted that these were nested spheres of social activity that were not hierarchical (Smith 1992:66). Nesting of scales requires human agency and plays out in very different ways in different places for different social groups and it is implied that there is no one way traffic from the local to global and vice versa. But this kind of question can only be dealt with empirically in concrete situations. Racism might be "nested" at various scales in different contexts as a "minority issue" of a black community to be resolved at local levels or as a majority issue of national dimensions.

"Racism", Smith argued, "is every bit a global construct of the financial markets and cultural privilege, encapsulated in the reality of the 'third world'". Smith (1993:105) suggests:

the community is properly conceived as the site of social reproduction, but the activities involved in social reproduction are so pervasive that the identity and spatial boundaries of community are often indistinct … Community is therefore the least defined of spatial scales, and the consequent vague yet generally affirmative nurturing meaning attached to "community" makes it one of the most ideologically appropriated metaphors in contemporary public discourse.

At the community scale, Smith supported the broadening of the black power movement in the UK:

Afro-Caribbeans and many Asians began to call themselves "black," in a clear act of solidarity expressing their own experience of racism. Despite opposition from whites, who feared the consequent racial unity, the broadened label stuck … the scale of black identity was thereby expanded (Smith 1992:71).

With strong echoes of Biko and Fanon, and like Trotsky who argued in the 1930s that the "black republic" slogan in South Africa was a fundamental issue even though it had no apparent "class content", Smith promoted a non-reductionist form of Marxism. Trotsky had argued (in a mode that even Biko or Fanon might have accepted) that white workers could never act as class-conscious fighters until they shed their racism against black workers (see Drew 1996:149 for Trotsky's 1934 letter). Shocking his South African workerist supporters, Trotsky vehemently put the race/native question as the determinant class question arguing that we cannot make even the "smallest concession to the privileges and prejudices of the white workers" (quoted in Drew 1996:150). Hence, race was not merely a supplementary feature of South Africa's capitalism, but fundamental.

I strongly suspect that Smith's support for the cogency of the idea of "black community" drew on this kind of non-dogmatic Marxism. Yet Smith might agree that blacks might not want to be seen as belonging to "affective communities" where whites are seen as free-floating rational persons. The black person projected as member of a black community is a double edged sword since the term black community is used by neoliberals as an external projection of white power (see Harvey 1996:352 for a brilliant critique of identity politics). The important point to stress is the "relationality" of scales, where the socially constructed interconnections between scales provide a pivot for up-scaling.

Smith went on to argue that social life in general cannot be understood from a singular scalar view, and different abstractions (race, gender, class) and forces are constructed at different scales with very different and contradictory political projects. Smith (like Harvey) remained wary of the fetishism of the local scale of community identity. Hence he aphoristically wrote: "the conquest of scale is the central political goal" (Smith 2002:205). For Harvey (1996:325) there is an ugly side to place-based politics found in a number of forms (notions of organic face-to-face communities, xenophobia, racism and bourgeois exclusionary communitarianism). Smith argued for a "critical internationalism", insisting that although "capital might for now make the world in its own image, it does not control the global or any other scale". The bourgeoisie are able to command global space unlike locally contained social movements of the poor and the working class. The question of scale was simultaneously a methodological, political and organisational one.

Harvey (1989) uses the terms community and neighbourhood, grounding them in the production of class strata and as part of residential differentiation based on reproducing certain gradations of labour power. Our sense of our place (be it the household, townships, suburbs or nation) plays a role in the "relationality of politics".

South Africa uniquely has the strongest trade unions in Africa and among the most militant in the global South (Silver 2013; World Economic Forum 2015). The problem is that although "upscaling" and broadening solidarities and identities is posited as a desirable goal for social movements, Smith remains tantalisingly vague on the organisational methods, coalitions and modalities and agencies for such upscaling.

For example, Smith does not appear to have sufficiently explored scalar debates around the site of production versus the site of reproduction/community (an important theme in the history of South Africa's progressive trade unions, where during the 1980s workerists/syndicalists clashed with community-based nationalists and the Black Consciousness movement). Harvey (1996:22–23) explored the limits of factory politics versus community politics, concluding that for genuine class solidarity to occur, abstraction from the immediacy of place and actual people was essential. The successes and failures of scalar ideologies in South African populism, workerism, the Black Consciousness movement and PanAfricanism might also be usefully engaged using Smith's theory combined with Harvey's insights. Smith's later work on national scale would also have benefitted from more engagement with progressive nationalists, anti-colonial movements and issues around national self-determination and the national public sphere, e.g. his later discussion on the public sphere as essentially an urban scale phenomenon (Low and Smith 2006:3).

Most urgently, still, the "national question" continues to raise analytical problems of decolonisation and neo-colonialism, self-determination of a people and territorial sovereignty. In South Africa, struggles for de-colonisation, to create a new South African nation are at the heart of contemporary uprisings. The importance of national politics of the black public sphere became an area of interest in Smith's book co-edited with Setha Low (Low and Smith 2006). Likewise, Thandika Mkandawire (2009) argues:

the national question has always been closely associated with the history of oppressed or colonised peoples. For much of the twentieth century, the national question involved first, simply asserting one's humanity or the presence africaine … second, the acquisition of independence, and third, maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of the new state.

Fanon's critique of the pitfalls of (bourgeois) national consciousness was premised on an alternative standpoint, but is still located within a nationalist frame. The issue at stake was what combination of class forces would lead the nationalist struggle?

Uneven Development, Scale, and Spatio-Temporal Politics

Marx argued that with the rise of capitalism, "in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations …". (Marx and Engels 2012:39). In his 1906 book Results and Prospects, Trotsky (2005) emphasised deepening interdependence between countries and urban centres, given that imperialism uses "such tiger-leaps, and such raids upon backward countries and areas that

the leveling of world economy is upset by it even more violently and convulsively than in the preceding epochs".

Smith's idea of nested scales emphasises the interdependence of these political-economic processes. More difficult to work out is the relative balance of equalisation/levelling and differentiation. Along these lines, Smith issued a number of caveats about uneven development: first, many tend to neglect equalisation as an aspect of uneven development (Smith 1990:xii) preferring to look at only differences (inequality, etc.). Yet, equalisation, as Smith argues, is the overriding imperative of working class politics and indeed its "political future lies in the equalisation of conditions and levels of development of production … laying the basis for socialism" (Smith 1990:153).

On the other hand, Marx might have overemphasised capital's levelling and universalising tendencies, argued Smith (1990:94–95), and while not oblivious to differentiation, he saw the former as primary. In retrospect Marx's prediction that India would equalise if not overtake Britain rings more true even though this development has taken much longer than Marx anticipated. Smith used the awkward and somewhat mechanical metaphor of a see-saw to describe the "development of underdevelopment", arguing that this is central to uneven development at the urban scale as well as globally. He believed (wrongly if Arrighi [2009] is right) that the basic global pattern of development centred on US dominance and that underdevelopment in the periphery would remain constant with perhaps only a "handful of so-called newly industrialising countries" emerging to disrupt that pattern (Smith 1990:151–158).

What then can we learn from Smith's method about understanding complex changes that drive the production of difference and implications for solidarity within the broad working class? And secondly, what levers might be built to "jump scales"—a difficult task that involves talking across scales, understanding differences, and building organised coalitions and united fronts between sections of the class in different places and countries (see Ashman et al. 2010; Ashman and Pons-Vignon 2014; Bond et al. 2013; Ruiters 2014).

Differences across national capitalisms (or the scale of the nation state) might be dismissed as epiphenomena, mere "warts on the face" of capitalism. Similarity of neoliberal conditions across the global working class (regional or international) in this view is what makes international working class action more possible. This, however, is a doubly flawed idea, and one that does not consistently link to a Marxist methodology. What makes common politics possible and concrete is an understanding of the real peculiarities (or "recombinations of places and events", as Smith 1990:ix called it). Moreover, Smith earlier had grasped that differentiation is not an epiphenomenon but is rooted in sites including the household and the bodily scales (Marston and Smith 2001).

Where Smith wrote of "differentiation and equalisation", Trotsky used the formulation "combined development" which refers to the multifarious ways in which spaces and historical stages are fused in novel ways. The notion of less developed areas (or countries)

"leapfrogging" intermediate stages of development under the "whip of competition" seems crucial in understanding why some places might be more volatile than others.

The importance of context and specificity of time and space in both Trotsky and Smith cannot be overstated. Similarly, as noted by Smith it is not about the abstract primacy of class but in different places, gender or race could be the decisive issue for that working class as combined and novel social forms take root. To illustrate, Smith's (1990:174) own writings on Lower Manhattan's Tomkins Square Park conflict suggest that progressive and potentially revolutionary struggles can start anywhere at any scale. He shows enormous sensitivity to the role of agency in deciding strategically how to place and define the geography of particular struggles. This is an "open" form of Marxism which Smith keenly promoted, especially in more recent work.

Smith reasserted the spatial but did not pay as much attention to the temporal as a co-element of uneven development. But, space and time, as Harvey shows, are inseparable, leading him to fashion the term spatio-temporal scales (Harvey 1996:353):

The relational view of space holds there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it. This very formulation implies that, as in the case of relative space, it is impossible to disentangle space from time. We must therefore focus on the relationality of space-time rather than of space in isolation.

Here the idea of spatial unevenness has been combined with temporal unevenness in a fashion developed by Trotsky. Smith's central work on scale has significant implications for political strategy and for socialist internationalism. But there is a danger of a one-sided focus on equalisation and differentiation as separate dynamics, and consequently a neglect of the ways in different parts and scales of the globe are related, connected to form an organic whole. The crucial political point is that similarity cannot be a foundation for class politics within a highly differentiated global working class, with each national working class facing distinct contexts.

Smith and Harvey spent years arguing for a dialectical, relational method. Applied to the world, their focus has been the relatedness of parts and the ways in which parts and scales are determined by the whole and do not exist as original entities. Harvey (1996:290), for example, argues that without seeing relations between places, identities and processes we run the risk of worshipping the condition that produced difference. "Discovering the nature of [such] connections and learning to translate politically between them is a problem for detailed research". For Harvey, like Trotsky, historical time and periods are compressed under capitalism—a mode of production ceaselessly "searching out new organisational forms, new technologies, new lifestyles…" (Harvey 1996:240). Where Trotsky explored the wider socio-political strategic implication of time–space compressions for working-class power (struggles for democracy and socialism), using the terms "uneven and combined development", Harvey's focus remains largely on cultural and populist reactions to time–space compressions (people clinging onto national and local identities).

There is enormous relevance, as we write, to a South Africa today terribly divided by xenophobia by the poorer sections of the working class, themselves facing persistent unemployment of more than a third of the working-age population.

Smith's mentor, Harvey, goes on to argue for an epistemology that permits a deeper understanding of the distinction between the "significant" and "insignificant othernesses" (Harvey 1996:363). Harvey believes that the "mere pursuit of identity as an end in itself" that is focusing single-mindedly on difference does not help to overcome the conditions that produce difference in the first place. Here it is to a "critical re-engagement with political economy" that we must turn to discover how commodities, money, market exchange and capital accumulation creates a shared and interdependent world (Harvey 1996:360). However, such a view would need to take into account the multiple institutional and scalar fragmentations of the working class, blacks, women, nationalities—in short political forms of uneven and combined development that make us different. The approach adopted by Chandra Mohanty (2003:226) on third world feminism, like Harvey, emphasises that in:

knowing differences and particularities we can better see the connections and commonalities because no boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining … Specifying difference allows us to theorise universal concerns more fully … it is this intellectual move that allows for women of different identities to build coalitions and solidarities.

Iris Marion Young (2011) in her classic discussion of difference and multiculturalism argues for "differentiated solidarity" where difference not sameness of experience became the lodestone of universality/internationalism/solidarity. Yet we cannot fetishise difference since both sameness and difference have to be explored not theoretically but in practical ways of knowing.

As already noted, the common conceptual error—the mistaken search for only sameness of class experience as the basis of social solidarity—has significant strategic implications. The basis of class solidarity, however, may not be mechanical sameness but interdependency and mutual understanding of particularities and context. These interdependencies are best approached through the prism of uneven and combined development.

Theories of uneven development fall apart when they presume that the particularity of each country or region is merely of supplementary significance and simply needs to be seen as an added factor to be taken into account when thinking about progressive politics. This is much like those for whom national, racial or gender oppressions are mere residual factors that deserve airtime after more primary class oppression. In this respect, it is instructive to revisit the Trotsky–Stalin debate on uneven development and to indicate why the combined aspect is so crucial. Stalin argued that:

the foundation of the activities of every Communist party … must be the general features of capitalism, which are the same for all countries, and not its specific features in any given country.

It is precisely on this that the internationalism rests. The specific features are merely supplementary to the general features.

Trotsky (2005:126), in contrast, argued that:

it is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type. It is false that the specific features are "merely supplementary to the general features", like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original combination of the basic features of the world process. This originality can be of decisive significance for revolutionary strategy over a span of many years … it is absolutely wrong to base the activity of the Communist parties on some "general features", that is, on an abstract type of national capitalism … National capitalism cannot be even understood, let alone reconstructed, except as a part of world economy.

South Africa's Politics of Scale

Smith's ideas navigate a number of difficult terrains we trek on today when confronting race, class and space in "post-apartheid" South Africa. For South Africa even after official apartheid was abolished in 1994–1995 still actively produces racialised inequality through new mechanisms as well as durable systems such as migrant labour. South African "national capital" has, especially since 1999, rapidly globalised both by shifting financial headquarters to London and expanding into the rest of Africa through mining, construction, supermarkets and shopping malls, banking, weapons commerce, tourism, cellphones and other services.

At the same time, millions of economically desperate refugees and migrant workers from the continent have come to South Africa, mostly illegally under desperate conditions, often because of extreme political stresses in at home. They have taken up precarious non-unionised jobs at low pay, jammed male migrants into scarce urban housing (hence raising rental rates), and outcompeted local household-scale retailers ("spaza shops") because they combine resources and buy in bulk. In each such case, the immigrants have generated tensions with South African residents and workers over production and reproduction that have had tragic results, as violent xenophobia regularly pulses through South African working-class townships. Scores of deaths and hundreds of attacks on foreign blacks have torn apart solidaristic politics.

The alliance between the African National Congress (ANC) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) also began to fray after 2009 when anticipated changes in economic policy—away from post-apartheid neoliberalism—failed to materialise. The 2012 massacre of 34 platinum mineworkers at Lonmin's Marikana mine was a gory reflection of the ANC's obedience to multinational capital. In late 2013, the biggest trade union in Africa (the National Union of Metalworkers) withdrew support for the ANC and called for an independent working class party based on the united front tactic. The rise of a left parliamentary force—the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) won more than a million votes in the 2014 national election—plus widespread student uprisings in 2015 added to the

ferment. There are new possibilities for combining this deep unhappiness with the failed nationalist project so as to address deep-rooted problems of inequality, regional chauvinism, localism and a divided labour movement, ultimately leading to a regional socialist movement.

But to learn these lessons requires a brief overview of 1970s debates. In apartheid South Africa, the key political debates on the Left were framed around the primacy of race or class, leading to a split between those who wanted to build a class-conscious socialist orientated movement centred on the massive South African black proletariat, versus those who wanted a broad alliance of all classes opposed to racial domination. The scalar debates have been intense as workerists saw the factory as the key site for developing a class consciousness, uncontaminated by petit-bourgeois community/nationalist politics. The contest over strategies—a two-stage versus a socialist revolution—was the dominant theme. For the "populists" the democratic/national/community issues would be solved by the nationalist movement with strong support from the working class, but based on building a black bourgeoisie. As ANC intellectual and later president Thabo Mbeki insisted in 1984: "The ANC is not a socialist party. It has never pretended to be one, it has never said it was, and it is not trying to be" (Mbeki 1984:609).

The ANC-UDF tradition came head to head with workerism in the late 1970s and was able to decisively defeat the workerist/socialist impulse. But this divide has fundamentally resurfaced and shaped the debates even after the Marikana massacre, the breakup of COSATU after 2014, and the rise of EFF. However, what makes these dramatic shifts difficult to sustain is something Smith would quickly recognise: increased tensions between places (e.g. provinces and cities competing for investment, tourists, skilled labour, universities, etc.). For example, xenophobia against African foreign workers and migrants and fear of internal migrants are important aspects of South Africa's scalar politics and urbanisation. At the urban scale we also see gated communities: mini-suburbs of mainly rich whites that act as separate mini-states protected by private armies of men employed by mostly foreign companies which have more fire power than the police (Ashman et al. 2010; Lemanski 2004; Miraftab 2007). Drawing on seminal work by Smith, scholars have documented the rise of revanchism (see Smith 1998) in South African cities whose managers have declared a low-level war on the poor and the homeless in the city.

Provinces receiving internal migrant labour seek to blame various problems on the donor province. The Western Cape government, for example, has sought compensation from the central government for the inflow of low-income black Eastern Cape migrants, whom the provincial governor—an upper-class white—controversially termed "refugees". This provincial chauvinism shows how militant particularism in the name of job creation and better services can have devastating results and feed into larger social tendencies such as xenophobia. In the Western Cape, coloured workers vote for the neoliberal party (the Democratic Alliance), endorsing the idea that the Western Cape has to look after its "own people" first.

Since 1994 when South African corporations started to dramatically increase investments in the rest of Africa, millions of refugees from other African countries have come the other way. By 2014 about one third of all South African exports went to African buyers and about 12% of company profits came from African operations. Not only economic but also cultural expansion (mostly of the downward sort) has happened as SA exports its racism, bad television shows, malls and taxis to the continent. Yet African immigrants have faced bleak prospects in assimilating into South African society, not least because of the extremely high unemployment rate. Their critics (and competitors) are mainly lower-income black South Africans. Other (white) immigrants from other continents such as Europe have not encountered such problems.

Yet with South African capital moving north, South African trade unions have seen opportunities to build external links of solidarity. Many social movements also have begun to operate continently. The leading voice of South African labour, Zwelinzima Vavi, made the suggestion in a 2014 speech that:

[f]or African trade unions the most important principles to defend are continent-wide minimum standards of workers' rights: to form and join unions, to have the same labour protection under the law, and the same minimum wages and conditions, regardless of national origin.

As Smith would have explained, the first premise of progressive working-class politics must be overcoming localism, racism and chauvinism within the class, and ensuring its organisational and physical survival. Nik Heynen et al. (2011) provide a trenchant account of Smith's dialectics of survival and political possibility. The politics of scale, or scale jumping as Heynen et al. (2011:242) suggest, is "how we can think about people's ability to organise against the exploitative ramifications of capitalism in important ways not previously theorised within political economic theory".

All this must be understood in the context of the region's "racial capitalism": a durable white ruling business class aided by a tiny comprador elite, racially segmented working class, migrant labour and enduring apartheid spatial legacy. The specificity of South African capitalism makes it exceptionally volatile and imparts a special responsibility to working-class leadership, given the tendency for reactionary working-class and poor people's organisations (including the ANC on various occasions) to blame foreigners for stealing their jobs, occupying their housing or undercutting their township spaza shops through predatory pricing.

The specificity of South African capitalism and its deepening African connectedness immediately give the events now unfolding a larger scalar character, and help introduce the possibility for a continental socialist politics. As the most advanced proletariat in Africa, South African workers have a special role to play continentally. To paraphrase Trotsky, this does not mean Nigerian or Algerian workers must await the signal from the large organised working class formations, or that Mozambique workers patiently wait for the proletariat of

the South Africa to free them. On the contrary, "workers must develop the revolutionary struggle in every country, where favourable conditions have been established, and through this set an example for the workers of other countries".

In the early 1970s the Mozambique revolution led by Samora Machel became the signal for the South African revolution and the Black Consciousness movement as well as the 1976 uprising. Zimbabwe's struggles similarly inspired South Africans. Simultaneously, leadership in small towns such as Cradock—guided by Matthew Goniwe during the 1980s—became beacons for the South Africa freedom struggle (Ruiters 2011). Uneven development leaves open many surprises. A bold approach is needed that includes decisive efforts to organise foreign workers in South Africa (legal or not) into unions and into social movements (Hlatshwayo 2013:243–246).

Conclusion

Smith's conceptual apparatus addresses a basic error of revolutionary politics, one which has significant strategic implications, namely the mistaken search for universality or mechanical sameness of class experience as the basis of political solidarity. Smith's reformulation of uneven and combined development and his politics of scale and place (nested scales from the body to the global) together assist us in understanding specific social formations (class, race and gender and place) and particularities at different geographical scales, as well as the particularities of concrete politics, especially following from his classic work on the "conquest of scale". Like Harvey, Smith emphasises a dialectic of the social and spatial—a politics of place—and of scalar identities that need to be both affirming and transcendent. The working class, after all, must both constitute itself nationally as the dominant/hegemonic class and abolish itself as a national class through internationalism, while finally liquidating itself in a new classless global society. These challenges, we shall suggest, are best approached through the prism of uneven and combined development—an approach that allows for paradoxes rather than simplifications.

The crux of class solidarity lies not in sameness but interdependencies. The prism of uneven and combined development provides powerful ways to think about interconnectedness. The political and material basis of class solidarity implodes when it is assumed that the particularity of each country or region is simply of additional importance and merely should be factored into progressive politics. Racism, gender and oppressions are not secondary features or by-products of class as the mechanical base-superstructure method would have it.

As old ideological and historical allegiances to the ANC melt away aided by the icy hand of neoliberalism, new solidarities develop among the working class (including the poor, the youth, women and unemployed). Uneven development of class awareness and internal divisions plays out across various terrains: casuals versus permanents, skilled versus unskilled, those in large versus small firms, local versus foreign workers and so on. The uneven development of the working class (both its objective and subjective dimensions) and the localism of much protest is a major hurdle but even if it had a halting start, a new

United Front politics inaugurated by the National Union of Metalworkers and anti-government union allies could yet become a national and regional beacon for up-scaling struggles.

One crucial test of this new, unifying politics within the conjuncture of South Africa in 2016 is the way xenophobia is addressed. Smith's critique of segregatory unevenness within the urban process is of enormous importance to a new internationalist activism. The challenge will be a scale-jump of activists of the working class (not middle-class moralisers): from the shack settlements, inner cities, migrant labour hostels and smaller villages where attacks on African and South Asian immigrants are recorded, to the sub-regional and continental sites of struggle against artificial borders carved in 1885 in a Berlin conference hall.

Those borders are, in turn, reflective of the geopolitical balance of forces during the prevailing global overaccumulation crisis, in which centralised finance set the context for the Scramble for Africa back in 1885, cementing in so many colonial political-economic processes that divide Africans today. For a long time progressive left internationalists will continue to look to Smith for insights into why unevenness born of that process is still the defining territorial expression of capital. With his sensitivity to the nuances of revolutionary politics, it is Smith's critique of the myriad socio-political, ecological and economic features of uneven and combined development that we can return to, in search of ideas and action by the oppressed.

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