

WHY GLOBAL POVERTY?

**A Companion Guide
to the Film *The End of Poverty?***

by Clifford W. Cobb and Philippe Diaz

**with contributions
by Beth Portello and Richard Castro**

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Why Global Poverty?

A Companion Guide to the Film *The End of Poverty?*

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Director's Narrative: How this Film Came into Being

Part I: Introduction

The End of Poverty? is a feature-length documentary that explores some of the root causes of global poverty today. This is the story of how and why it was made and of some challenges we faced making it.

Initially, I explain the origins of this project, how I came to be involved in it, and a little bit about how it was made. In the following sections of this chapter, I describe our experiences and some of the lessons we learned in the developing countries where we filmed: Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Kenya and Tanzania.

My Background

I have lived in the US many years, arriving from France where I was a relatively successful movie producer specializing in what we call *le cinéma d'auteurs*. I started making movies at the age of thirteen. When I later studied philosophy of art and political philosophy at *La Sorbonne*, I came to believe that movies could make a difference in the world. Most of the films that I had produced in France tackled world issues in one way or another. Once I moved to the United States, I created a company named Cinema Libre Studio, meaning "liberation films," which specializes in producing and distributing socio-political documentaries and independent features.

In France, I began my career as a director. Later, I produced many feature films, as well as several documentaries. In 1999, I had a chance to return to my work as a director, by making a film in war-torn Sierra Leone. I had contacted Action Against Hunger, an international nonprofit organization, about making a film to explain that famine and hunger are not natural phenomena, as many people believe, but political. Sierra Leone had been torn by civil war for nine years because of the involvement of European and North American countries in the conflict.

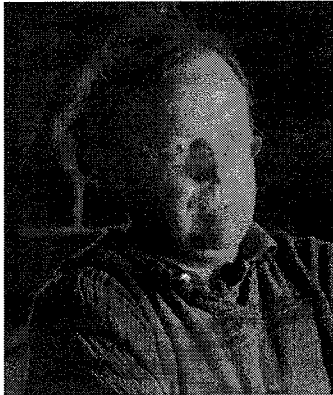
This became the feature-length documentary *Nouvel Ordre Mondial (Quelque Part en Afrique)*—"The Empire in Africa." It ended up being one of

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the most difficult experiences of my life, but one which certainly prepared me for the future challenge of making a film on poverty around the world. The success and impact of the film, which premiered during Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000, and the awards we received around the world, encouraged me to use documentaries as tools to make a difference.

Origins of this Project

One day my wife, Beth Portello (who co-founded Cinema Libre Studio), received a phone call from Matthew Stillman, asking us if we would



Philippe Diaz

be interested in producing a movie on the true causes of poverty. He was on the board of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation of New York, which seeks to promote the ideas of Henry George, a self-taught American economist and contemporary of Karl Marx. In his classic tome, *Progress and Poverty*, George proposed that progress does not alleviate poverty, but rather creates it.

We immediately researched Henry George and understood that his basic concept was as follows: Originally a community owns and controls its natural resources, such as timber, water, and so on, but with land being the most significant. Once progress arrives, it shifts the control and ownership of these resources into the hands of a very few individuals or corporations. This "progress" pushes away, in a literal and not so literal sense, the people of this community, who are forced out from the economic center by increased rents and are marginalized from any future economic development. Now they have to pay for these resources, which were once shared.

We soon met with Stillman who flew in from New York and the then-president of the foundation, Cliff Cobb. Although I was indeed very impressed by Henry George's analysis of his time, I was by no means ready to do a biopic or Georgist monograph. After months of research, discussions and several proposals, the Foundation allowed me to expand the scope of the film beyond a narrowly Georgist perspective, in order to explain the true historical and political causes of poverty in the world. They agreed to finance the majority of the budget for the film with the balance brought in by our company through reduced salaries, production resources, equipment,

and post-production services. These reduced salaries for writing/directing and producing were, in fact, used to keep our company going while we were in production and we ended up making the film for no salaries at all, which was always the idea.

The budget was barely adequate for a feature-length documentary that would eventually entail over one hundred hours of interviews filmed in eight countries on four continents: South America (Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia), Africa (Kenya and Tanzania), Europe (France and England) and North America. When we combined the financial realities with the complexities of the issue of poverty, we realized that we would have to limit our investigation to a few specific topics.

Cinematic Choices

We also decided to make the film with a small crew since we would be going into slums and the homes of poor people which we knew to be small and crowded. Our itinerary was punishing and we planned to move fast and visit multiple cities in several countries, which required mobility. To cut expenses and keep the crew mobile, I decided to operate the camera myself, and Beth, who was producing the film, would do the sound. All of the equipment would have to be contained in four, large-wheeled suitcases filled with production gear: lighting equipment, tripod, tapes, camera accessories, and sound equipment. I hand-carried the camera in a bag that was larger than aviation regulations and which, therefore, required an elaborate explanation at every airport x-ray machine. Beth always carried the tapes on board to ensure that they did not get lost in the luggage, which would have been disastrous.



Beth Portello

The content of the film, which we hoped would change people's perception of the true causes of poverty, was our highest concern. However, the form of the documentary was also very important to me. I have seen many documentaries ruined either by too little or too much investment in the form of the film. I knew also that I could not turn the subject of poverty into "cinema"—in which the craft of filmmaking would overshadow the content. I would, therefore, have to refrain from using zooms and any other

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kinds of effects unless they were absolutely necessary to the context of the scene. The camera would be mostly fixed on a tripod or handheld when the subject necessitated such. I had decided from day one that I wanted to distinguish visually between the experts who would be interviewed in nice settings and the poor who would be interviewed in their normal surroundings. It is one thing to fight poverty from a comfortable office in a university or an international organization—which does not diminish the importance of those who do—but it is another to live it on a day-to-day basis. To wake up hungry every day, without knowing where one can find enough money to feed one's family, is simply not the same thing.

I decided very early on that the light would be my ally in this complex cinematic question. I would install my experts in a comfortable setting and light them with three to four lamps, ultimately using diffusion and colored gels. When filming those living in poverty we would use natural light which very often was almost none. I also decided to film our impoverished subjects with a handheld camera in their neighborhoods and in their homes, unless the subject was sitting facing the camera. The experts were invariably shot with a fixed and immobile camera.

Audio was a struggle throughout the shoot. I was never a fan of the wireless microphones that most television or documentary crews use, because it obliges the interviewee to strip in order to pass the wire under his or her clothing. Not only does this create an awkward beginning for everyone, but most of the time, you can see the mics in the shot. On top of that, those mics cut off all the ambient sound around the interviewee making it less natural. I decided to use a shotgun microphone instead, either affixed to a tripod or handheld by Beth in case of any on-the-fly interviews. Our goal was to create a natural environment for the interviews; I know from experience that a very comfortable interviewee will share a lot more than one made uncomfortable by the setting.

In each country we visited, the crew would be completed with a "fixer" to organize the local shoots and some additional local helpers to facilitate our production schedule in order to avoid wasting time. Cliff joined us for the majority of our travels and was an indispensable part of the process. He was always self-reliant and flexible, but also remained aware of our agreement, giving me total freedom. At the same time, his deep knowledge of this subject matter coupled with the fact that he has spent his life working to understand the issues at the deepest level made him the best critic of my work. Throughout the process, when I would get tired and ready to accept

a simplistic explanation of a complex problem, he would always be there to challenge me and bring me back to the uncompromising track.

Originally I wanted to show both sides of the poverty debate. We even filmed some experts who were proponents of the mindset that “progress and technology will solve everything”—that mosquito nets and bags of fertilizer could solve the poverty conundrum. This is the theory that Bono’s economic sidekick, Jeffrey Sachs, has touted in his best-selling book, *The End of Poverty*, as have the opponents of Latin America’s new progressive leaders. But the first cut of the film was more than three hours long, so these interviews were left on the hard drive of the editing system.

Additionally, with a limited travel budget, we chose countries with two criteria: first, countries with governments that were open to acknowledging and talking about the poverty challenges they faced; and second, countries that represented a specific issue in the thesis we were trying to develop, such as land rights in Kenya. As absurd as it sounds, many governments that face dire poverty still deny their condition despite the fact that one can see evidence of it on every street. (One could easily say the same of the United States.)

We discussed possible titles for the film all the way through development, production and well into post-production. We determined that “The End of Poverty?” would be the best title because it challenges the concept that we can end poverty within the current economic system. For me, it is also a direct challenge to Jeffrey Sachs and his book, *The End of Poverty*, no question mark. Sachs has become “Mr. Poverty” in the United States and has convinced millions of people that mosquito nets and bags of fertilizer are the solution. In his book, Sachs reflects on the role that he played in Bolivia in 1985 when he was an economic advisor to the government that was struggling with hyperinflation. Some credit him with turning the Bolivian economy around through “shock therapy” and liberalizing the markets. Others believe he destroyed the Bolivian economy for generations to come. Sachs devotes a chapter to reflect upon his Bolivian experience and opines that, with distance, he has discovered the true reason for which Bolivia is the poorest country in South America: because it is too high in altitude! (Does this absurd idea really merit a response?)

The biggest challenge of all was distilling the 100 hours of footage. To make the film appealing to a large audience, we decided to cut out over an hour. Moreover, we had to leave out many fascinating experts and equally fascinating poor people who spoke candidly about the reasons for their situations. This is why we decided to spend the time and energy to recount this

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adventure and include those voices in this book. We had to give back a little bit of what they had given us. It should be noted that the ideas and comments included in this presentation are specifically those of the author; not of the experts or people who have collaborated on this book.

Part II: Venezuela

We landed in Caracas late at night on December 1, 2006, two days before the historic re-election of Venezuelan President, Hugo Chávez, which would definitely be the first shock of our trip. Caracas is a hodge-podge of an almost-modern city in the developed world coupled with the chaos of a Third World city that developed too fast. Throughout the day, every day, traffic jams clog the streets, since there is only one major artery going through the entire city. Honking horns provide the background music.

In most of the world's cities, the poor are hidden as far away as possible from the city center, provided that the distance is not so great as to prevent them from going to work by bus or bike or on foot. Today more than one billion people live in the slums of the global South and their conditions have deteriorated in the last fifty years.

Caracas has one unusual characteristic: the most populated barrios are not located in the outskirts of the city. They are, instead, located very close to the city center along the hillsides. Because Caracas was settled in the narrow valley of the *Cordillera de la Costa*, the barrios were built into these steep ravines. Where else would the poor get access to free land but on unstable hillsides, which could potentially slide with the next heavy rain? In Caracas the flat, stable lands are reserved for the rich. The presence of many steep ravines encircling the city center explains why so many barrios have survived that would otherwise have been considered unacceptable to the development of tourism.

As it turns out, this situation would literally save Chávez on several occasions. The Miraflores Palace—the White House of Caracas—is located within walking distance of one of the largest barrios, 23 de Enero. During the coup in 2002, when Chávez was illegally detained by a coalition supported by right-wing television stations and the U.S. government, more than one million people poured down from the barrios demanding the return of their president. His safety was actually ensured by his loyal guard during that crisis, but those million people surrounding Miraflores and paralyzing the city for days showed popular support for the deposed president and reinforced such support within the military.

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The election took place on the second day of our arrival and the streets were alive with political banners and pro-Chávez supporters, or *Chavistas* whose slogan was *Diez Millones de Votos*. Their goal was to secure ten million favorable votes. All over the city, red-shirted Chávez supporters flashed ten fingers to show their support.

On the day of the election, lines started to form by 3:00 a.m. in front of each barrio's polling station with people who wanted to vote before they went to work. By noon, the line would wind all the way up that hill as far as we could see; probably a mile long. When we raised the question of transparency and accountability, we were shown the Venezuelan system. The voters would first register at a table, then go inside the polling booth where a touch-screen, direct-response electronic (DRE) voting machine was installed. The computers were protected by cardboard walls to guarantee privacy. After they voted, paper ballots were generated, inspected by the voters, and then deposited into a ballot box for possible recount. The voters would check-out by making a thumb print in ink in a book. This process was monitored by many international observers.

In the barrios, the voting process itself was a revolution. Previous to Chávez, the barrio inhabitants had the right to vote but there were often "technical difficulties." During the U.S.-dominated regimes which preceded Chávez, in order to vote you needed an ID card, which is still required. But before Chávez came to power, in order to get the ID card, you were required to have a permanent address, but the majority of barrio addresses were not recognized as permanent. Therefore, the barrio dwellers were prevented from voting. By legitimizing the barrios, Chávez gave these people a voice for the first time and won their fervent support.

Interviewing people on the streets, we were struck by how hopeful they were. For the first time their votes were being counted. But voting was just one of several changes. What quickly became the most striking thing was that all of these people were in school. From the youth to the senior citizens, everyone was engaged in the process of learning. Even more notable was that in order for the poorest parents to avoid the temptation to put their children to work, a monetary incentive was given to those parents who kept their children in school with regular attendance. That was, of course, another major innovation and mini-revolution. All over the Third World, children work, not because they are exploited by bad people, but because most poor parents are not able to earn enough money to support their families and, therefore, must send their children out to make money.

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Throughout the day, we visited several barrios and were shown the *misiones* that were part of the *Barrio Adentro* program. In each barrio, we saw several small buildings, shaped like a pentagon, one every five to ten blocks. These were new medical centers, staffed by Cuban doctors. Early in his presidency, Chávez made a deal with the Cuban regime to exchange Venezuelan oil for Cuban teachers and doctors. For many barrio-dwellers, this would be the first doctor they had ever seen. There were two reasons they lacked medical care previously: 1) healthcare was not available and 2) the doctors, traditionally from the upper-middle class, would not agree to go into the barrios because they were afraid of the dangers and because they assumed they would never get paid. Next to these health centers we could usually find a *mercado*, a subsidized supermarket. They were usually located next to another interesting innovation: a small communication center where anyone could have access to the internet for free. In the supermarkets, organized by the Venezuelan state, staple foods were sold at prices usually discounted by 40%. On the package of each type of food, a different paragraph of the Venezuelan constitution would be printed alongside a comic or illustration, which explained to the Venezuelans, in simple terms, how their constitution was there to protect them.

Not all of these improvements radically changed the lives of barrio dwellers. They still suffer from extreme violence and many decades of neglect. Our interview with a poor woman, featured in the film, who had lost two of her sons in eruptions of violence, made plain how pervasive that violence remains. Despite that, the changes are giving them a voice in the political process and easing their situation significantly.

Later that night, we wanted to see how the results were reported on television—specifically by the international media. Around 9:00 p.m., the official results came down: 61% vote for Chávez, with a 75% turnout. The opposition party of Manuel Rosales put out its first press release claiming fraud and voter coercion. The first bulletin on CNN International did not report the official result but only the claim of fraud by the opposition. Two hours later, the opposition dropped its claim and recognized the election results. We did not see any further claims of fraud broadcast on CNN, but, notably, neither were there any reports of the election's results.

We went outside of Caracas to Vargas State, to see a relocation program of poor farmers to whom idle land on top of steep hills had been given. The three farmers or families we visited, one of whom describes his life in the film, were clearly happy with the land provided by the government. As the

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last interviewee explained, small farmers have been persecuted for decades. Their land had been seized many times: expropriated for the benefit of large export plantations or "development" projects. They had been forced to stop growing food, sometimes after having spent years in jail, and were forced to learn another trade like construction. This time they were not only given the land with the appropriate title but also tools and fertilizers to grow the crops of their choice. This small group of people—around twenty families—reflects the number one problem of poverty we saw throughout our travels: the land issue.

Land was confiscated during colonial times, as it was then the number one resource, to constitute what became known as *latifundios* in Latin America or large land tenures. Such giant estates created a class of local elite of landowners, mostly *mestizos*—of mixed ancestry—who were devoted to the European power from which they obtained both land and political power. In return, they supplied the needs of the colonial power. Usually, upon the country's independence, these *latifundios* remained the property of the original owner's heirs or were transferred to the local elite if they were still in foreign hands. In the vast majority of Third World countries, the descendants of the original inhabitants never got their land back, sometimes not even after violent revolutions. Political freedom sounded important at the time but it disguised the fact that, without economic freedom, the level of poverty would worsen. In most of these countries, land became not only an economic tool but a speculative one, with large land owners preferring not to grow anything on their land while waiting for its value to increase. It will take many agrarian reforms by strong-handed governments to break the de facto monopoly of land ownership. In some countries 80% of the arable land is in the hands of less than a dozen families.

Another one of the highlights of our Venezuelan journey was our visit to Maracaibo, a major area for oil exploitation. Everything there revolves around oil, which has historically been in the hands of Chavez's opposition, an upper class that has always served foreign powers. Their control of oil production made them rich, leaving the country poorer.

The upper class not only seized control of the economy but also political power. This substantiates one of Henry George's theories, which has been proven right over and over again: progress not only concentrates riches in the hands of the few but, as a direct consequence, political power, as well. When people depend on the "favors" of those who hold the keys to the economy, it is easy to understand how they will put in power the ones on

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whom they depend.

The key expert interviews, which would close the Venezuelan chapter and open our minds, were the ones with Edgardo Lander, professor of Social Sciences at the *Universidad Central de Venezuela* in Caracas and with Nora Castañeda, president of the Women's Bank.

We chose to interview Edgardo Lander because of his ability to explain the historical causes of the situation in South American countries today. Right away we found a common ground, as we were both great fans of Eduardo Galeano's book, *Open Veins of Latin America*. Edgardo was able eloquently to put into perspective the historical and socio-economic situations of countries like Venezuela. Moreover, he articulated the relationship between the consumption of resources and the state of the world today. He advocated radical change in consumption patterns to avoid the destruction of our planet, a point of view that became a central theme in the film.

The Women's Bank was created to answer one of the major problems in all of Latin America: that only men have access to credit, while many experiences—like those of Mohammed Yunus in Asia—have proven that giving credit to women helps sustainable development in a very efficient way. Nora Castañeda explained Venezuela's colonial historical development—from producing food exports like coffee and cacao during the Spanish colonial period to exporting oil under British, and then US, power. It is interesting to note that one of the primary methods of preventing Third World countries from developing is to force them to produce raw materials like agricultural products or mineral ones, while preventing them from refining such products and then selling them in the marketplace. The international market has long made certain that refining, packaging, and marketing of a final product increases its value far above the value of the raw material itself. That allows developed countries to obtain most of the profit. Until very recently, Venezuela was prevented from refining oil in its own refineries, in much the same way that Kenya, as we saw later, was prevented from processing and marketing its own tea.

Nora continued by explaining the disastrous effects that the twentieth century's economic tools like the IMF and the World Bank had upon her country, clearly blaming such institutions for creating poverty on a large scale. This became a central theme of the film.

Part III: Brazil

Brazil is a totally different country than Venezuela. Its size (almost as

large as the United States), its multi-ethnic population, and its diverse regions in terms of geography, weather or economic development make it an extremely hard country to manage. On the other hand, Brazil shares a similar colonial history with Venezuela. It was, in 1494, a territory given by the pope to the kingdom of Portugal and became a grower of coffee, cacao and sugar cane produce, a situation that still plagues the people of Brazil five hundred years later.

The city of Sao Paulo was the first part of the journey. It is such a gigantic metropolis with so many high-rises next to each other, that we had to go to the top of one of these buildings to truly comprehend the scope of such an area. It is a city that attracts tens of thousands of new rural poor people every year who constitute the labor reserve that companies mercilessly exploit. Visiting the *favelas*, we heard stories of people living on less than one dollar a day, families sleeping in the streets, and children dying of curable illnesses. But we also encountered a lot of hope and a lot of resilience. Hope lies primarily in their new government. Many find Lula, the former worker and now president, to be more moderate than they would like. Yet they all know that he, like his counterpart in Venezuela, created reforms and programs for the poor, including one to eradicate hunger in the short term called "Fome Zero." Some experts believe that Lula came to power with a very ambitious agenda but that the international financial institutions made very clear to him how easily they could destroy the Brazilian currency and the Brazilian economy, if they so desired. With Brazil still totally dependent on the international market, Lula was forced to compromise and since then, he has implemented rather moderate policies. The minister in charge of *Fome Zero*, Patrus Ananias de Sousa, explained the numerous programs that were implemented to reduce poverty and eliminate hunger, which only substantiated their moderate status. Although a tough decision, he did not make it into the final cut of the film!

Our visit to Brasilia, where we interviewed Ananias de Sousa and other government officials, showed us a great example of the policies created for the poor in the last century. Built over many decades by, among others, the famous architect Oscar Niemeyer, Brasilia is an ultra-modern city protected by from any outside interference by being in the middle of nowhere. The poor are kept a minimum of 10 miles from the city, hidden from any major roads. The result is a city that resembles a museum of modern art but one that is totally soulless, inspiring one to leave it as soon as possible.

Another interesting interview was with Raquel Rolnik, National Secre-

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tary of Urban Programs. She told us that poor people have been forced to live on unstable hillsides or on riverbanks that flood during the rainy season because those are the only lands available and because the middle class does not want the poor living near them and lowering their property values.

We also met with a Senator, a leader of the opposition, who told us what we heard many times—that poverty can be resolved through education. That was almost the only thing he had to say during a one-hour interview. That idea is dangerous. Of course, education is essential to pull individual people out of misery and poverty. But, to generalize that that is the solution for everyone implies that the poor, as individuals, are the ones responsible for their situation. This conveniently allows the theorist to avoid questioning the system that is actually responsible.

From Brasilia, we decided to visit the area which was, as much as the mines of Potosí in Bolivia, one of the major sources of wealth obtained by the powers of the North: the gold mines of Ouro Preto. The plundering of Brazil's gold and Bolivia's silver and tin gave enormous financial power to the North. Such power, while it allowed the northern countries to finance economic development and industrial revolutions, created in the southern countries a situation which inextricably binds them centuries later.*

Hundreds of years later in Ouro Preto you can still see the deserted mines, but more importantly, you can see the palaces that the new oligarchy built with the profits generated by such tremendous transfer of resources. This episode is also discussed in Galeano's book, *Open Veins of Latin America*.

The exploitation of underground resources by the colonizers was always coupled with an exploitation of the land itself. The colonizers profited from the exploitation of what they called "precious vegetables": tea, coffee, cocoa and sugar cane, which were grown on huge tracts of land. The original peasants were simply dispossessed and forced to work for their new masters in slave-like conditions. Millions of indigenous people died from European illnesses, horrible treatment, forced labor, and massacres. As a

* In the North, the Spanish and the Portuguese did not benefit as much as the British and the Dutch because, at the time, the former were largely indebted to the latter. The gold of Brazil and the silver of Bolivia transformed small countries with little or no resources like Holland and England into powerful empires, which went on to dominate the globe for centuries. The theory, derived from Max Weber's "Protestant ethic" thesis, which conveniently credits the religious system of these countries for their economic development, has long since been debunked.

result, the local population was insufficient to perform the tasks demanded by the colonizers. Thus, we can credit the system of economic exploitation with engendering the slave trade, which brought from Africa tens of millions of people—around half of whom did not survive their treatment in Africa and the voyage to South America.

Today after hundreds of years of aborted agrarian reforms, many of the lands in these countries are still organized as *latifundios* and are still controlled by only a few families from the upper class. The rural poverty that we can see today all over South America is definitely the result of such a system. Today, the large tracts of land are in the hands of agribusiness, which continues to grow products for export instead of local markets, thus forcing these countries to import the staple foods they need to survive. This unbelievable trap was first revealed to us by Joao Pedro Stedile, the national leader of the MST, the *Movimento Sem Terra*, or landless workers' movement.

The MST has been making headlines for the past decade by legally (or in some cases, illegally) seizing idle land and giving it back to landless farmers. They have also made headlines whenever their coordinators are tortured or shot by landowners. Stedile explained that a gigantic country like Brazil, with some of the best arable land in the world, still has to import rice, milk and other staple foods from other countries because most of its land is still in the hands of a few owners who work for the giant food industries which grow products for export. The ecological consequences of such international trade are devastating to the planet. It also forces millions of people to exist below the poverty line—all to satisfy the demand by the North for cheap food and other raw materials from the South. The economic tools established during the time of unrestrained neoliberalism ensure that this system of exploitation will not be easily defeated.

Today, one of the key components of this system in Brazil is sugar cane—the same “precious vegetable” that enslaved the country centuries ago. Sugar is not the only problem. The Amazon faces massive deforestation for soy farming. But sugar cane remains even more important, because ethanol can be produced from it, and that is something the international market craves today. Growing sugar cane is cheap provided that men working in slave-like conditions harvest it.

To film the harvesting of cane, we flew to to the northeast of Brazil, the state of Pernambuco. The first thing that hits you is the size of the properties, or *haciendas*, on which sugar cane is grown. They extend as far as the eye can see. Now, if you venture deeper down the tiny, dirt roads you

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will arrive in one of the makeshift camps built for the sugar cane cutters. These camps are not much better than the shantytowns in the poorest parts of Africa or India. The workers live sometimes in one room made from scraps of wood with a blue tarp covering and no electricity, running water, or sanitation. The good part is that some of these camps have been "taken over" by the MST which is working to relocate these landless people to a small plot of farmland.

To interview one of the local leaders of the MST, we had to undertake an epic journey. We went to a small town in the middle of nowhere. Once we arrived, we were sent by locals from one area of town to another, up and down unnamed streets, without finding him. We did this for hours. We were just about ready to give up when finally we reached a very tiny street on which sat a small concrete building surrounded by a heavy metal gate with a buzzer that did not work. After ringing for quite some time and engaging in "negotiations" with several people, we were finally ushered in. To be honest, by the time we were allowed inside, we were quite exasperated, by the whole endeavor, but things quickly made sense upon meeting the occupant, Jaime de Amorim. The reason for all of this hassle stemmed from fear. He was living in hiding, afraid of being ambushed and shot by landowners in retaliation for his work with MST. His fear was justified. During the three days that we stayed in the region, three of his fellow-organizers were shot to death by landowners.

The interview with Jaime was extremely interesting. Not only did he explain to us the horrible details of how the workers live, but also how they are exploited by most of the growers. Workers come from very poor areas after having their farms seized by landowners whose actions are usually supported by corrupt local judges. The workers migrate looking for work and end up in one of these makeshift camps. The growers bring a truck into these camps very early in the morning—usually at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m.—and drive them to the fields that need to be cut. They work eight to twelve hours under the scorching sun for \$2.00 to \$7.00 a day, provided they have cut an immense amount of cane. If they do not reach the daily quota, they risk ending up with nothing. Sometimes, instead of money, they receive coupons redeemable for overpriced food at the shop owned by the grower. Other times, equipment rental will be deducted from this meager pay.

Jaime explained that the workers cannot survive on these wages, much less feed their families. Therefore, they have to take a second and sometimes even a third job in the cities at night and also have to force their children to

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work, as well, selling trinkets or, as Jaime puts it, "going into prostitution." They have no other alternatives with the region being entirely devoted to growing sugar cane, nor do they have the money to travel farther to find different work.

A few days later, we went into the fields looking for some cutters who would agree to speak to us about their conditions. That was not an easy task, as we were crossing onto private property, patrolled by armed guards. On top of that, there was a very palpable fear of retaliation on the part of the workers combined with the awareness that any time spent talking to us could possibly prevent them from making their quotas. All in all, they were very reluctant to speak to us. Finally, however, we found a group from which two men were more than happy to "explain their situation to the world" and in doing so, confirmed what Jaime had explained to us the day before. Most of these men had been cane cutters for decades, working in horrible conditions, some even barefooted because the boots they had been promised had never been sent. They told us that typically they were paid half of what had been promised to them, giving them no possibility at all to send any money to their families. The only solution was to starve themselves by eating corn or beans in order to at least bring home something at the end of the season. They had an understanding of world politics and of the enormous profits that growers were making on their backs. They concluded the interview with a pessimistic outlook, noting that the condition of people living as they do is the reason why today's world is infested with criminals.

On a more positive note, we did visit several villages built on idle land seized from speculative growers and given back to landless farmers by MST. Each farmer had a small house built of concrete with running water, electricity, and sanitation and most of all, a small plot of land on which to grow vegetables which could be sold at the local market. The striking difference about these villages was the relative peace of the people. Children were playing in the dirt streets looking properly nourished, women were attending the needs of their households, and men were ready to chat with us. That said, even if they were happy with this new living situation, they knew it would only last until the former landowner had secured a "friendly" judge who would issue a decree forcing them to vacate. And at that point they would be thrown out onto the road to once again look for a hacienda where they could go back to cutting cane.

After our visit to the northeast of Brazil, we flew back to Sao Paolo, and then on to Bolivia.

Part IV: Bolivia

We landed in La Paz after a hectic flight from Sao Paulo in an American plane from a small private company used to carry troops in Africa! The plane was rented by the Bolivian government for international flights. Bolivia once had a very good airline, but it was privatized like everything else, per the advice of none other than Jeffrey Sachs. It has since been almost totally dismantled. The pilot clearly had no concern for the comfort of his passengers and flew right through the worst storms, causing the plane to bump along through the air for hours.

La Paz airport is located in El Alto, the gigantic shantytown built on one of the high plateaus above La Paz, which is the capital city with the highest altitude in the world. El Alto is where all the poor people end up when they come from the countryside to find work. It is comprised of many square miles of makeshift housing with unpaved roads and, quite often, no sanitation. The first glimpse of the capital was no more pleasant. La Paz is an extremely polluted city where traffic jams are the way of life.

Our first interview was with Abel Mamani, the water minister. Evo Morales, when he came to power, felt the need to create a water ministry, not to control water quality, but to prevent water privatization, which had been the subject of an ongoing fight in the country for the last ten years. Mamani confirmed that the pro-US governments which had previously been in power, allied with the IMF and the World Bank, had privatized everything in the country: natural gas and oil, the electricity system, the airline, railways, TV stations, phone companies, etc. He noted that such private enterprise did not "modernize" or make these companies "profitable" as the proponents of the free market system had claimed would happen. Instead, the new owners plundered these companies, sold their assets, and left the country with no infrastructure whatsoever. Railway workers are often unpaid for months and most of the lines are no longer even serviced. His conclusion was that "privatization has destroyed the country."

That prepared us for our next stop: Cochabamba, a city deep in the country, which was the location of the siege now known as "the water war." In 2001, the government, in desperate need of a loan from the World Bank, was told that it would not receive such a loan unless its water system was privatized. This has been a common practice by the World Bank and the IMF for the last 30 years. They say, "We will help you if you open your

market to foreign companies and agree to privatize your public companies.” These practices have come to be known throughout the Third World by the now infamous name of “structural adjustment programs,” which have ruined the economies of many of these countries, while at the same time, making northern corporations extremely wealthy.

In Cochabamba, the water was transferred to a US company: Bechtel Corporation. Bechtel promised to modernize the existing water system and bring water to those who did not have it. Within the first six months, the government and local authorities provided them with free buildings to house their operations and free equipment for their offices. But Bechtel did not keep any of its promises. Instead it started to raise the water fee by 50 to 300%, plunging some of the poorest people there into a desperate situation. Oscar Olivera and his sister, who was also involved in organizing people during the water war, told us in horrible detail how the lives of people were affected by the water laws, which even put rain and other natural sources of water into the hands of Bechtel! Led by several activists and local organizers, including Oscar Olivera, who has become a heroic figure around the world, the people refused to pay their water bills and went into the streets to protest for months, thus paralyzing the city. The government sent police reinforcements and the army to quell the revolt, but to no avail. After many months of protest and several lives lost, the government had to back down and terminate the agreement with Bechtel. Bechtel sued the government in international court for damages, despite not having spent a penny in the country, but withdrew their lawsuit once Morales was elected, realizing that they had no chance to get paid. The main reason this fight even started is because Bechtel took over a practically sacred resource in Bolivia. The appropriation of this resource, part of the *Pachamama* or mother earth, was like stepping on the culture of the indigenous people. That makes a powerful comment about the fight between modern, unrestrained capitalism and traditional cultures and values.

We met afterwards with Jim Shultz, an American writer based in Cochabamba who heads The Democracy Center, a non-profit organization. He explained to us that since the sixties, Bolivia has been the “lab rat” for the unrestrained, capitalist experiment of total privatization and, as he put it, “market fundamentalism.” It is interesting to note that Milton Friedman and the Chicago school of economics, which were first to establish these theories of “market fundamentalism,” used Chile under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet to test this policy. The short term success of this policy

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(based on the massive influx of capital from the initial sale of state assets) encouraged them to expand to other Latin American countries, where other US-supported dictators had already been installed.

John Perkins, who joined us in Bolivia, told us a very interesting story that confirmed all of the above. After Perkins served a long stint as an “economic hit man,” the Leucadia Corporation, then in control of the privatized Bolivian power system, asked him to head this profitable activity. He would be relocated to Bolivia with his family and would be provided with several cars, chauffeurs, chefs and other luxurious amenities. His job was also a key political one, because in the event of an insurrection, he would be the one to literally cut off the power of the insurgents while ensuring that the other side, the keepers of US interests, received all the power they needed. When he presented his idea of developing the Bolivian grid so as to bring electricity to poor people all around the country, he was told that the policy of the company was not to help poor people, but to make money. Isn't this the same policy that Bechtel tried to implement 30 years later?

In a small village in the suburbs of Cochabamba, a place where the main activity consists of women making bricks on the side of the road, we interviewed a very interesting man: Eduardo Yssa. Eduardo is part of the Aymara people, a community organizer, and supposedly, a distant cousin of the president. He chose to focus the interview on the subject of colonialism, but put it in very personal terms. He explained that for the Aymara people, the arrival of Christopher Columbus was not a discovery but the worst disaster in their history. He said that Columbus's arrival was the moment that they lost their land and their livelihoods. More importantly, in his opinion, they lost their culture, their religion and, therefore, their dignity. He explained to us that they were forced to convert to Catholicism and to speak Spanish. Before that, the Aymaras had their own spoken and written language—the *Kipus*. However, Eduardo confirmed in a choked voice, today this language has completely disappeared.

We witnessed, involuntarily, a scene that could not have better illustrated Eduardo's painful explanation. We arrived in Sucre, the former Bolivian capital, on Christmas Eve and found an old city preparing for a celebration. On Christmas Day, we wandered into the main city square where a large number of people were preparing to enter the cathedral for mass. We tagged along to see that the large majority of the people inside were *mestizos* (of mixed blood from Spanish ancestors) and all were very well dressed. However, very few indigenous people were actually inside the cathedral. When I

asked our fixer why, he explained that in the back of the Cathedral, a small chapel had been built during the time of colonization for the indigenous people and that they were still accustomed to practicing their new religion there. That said, a couple of old indigenous women entered the cathedral and signed themselves before they went to listen to the sermon. But to my surprise, they sat down on the ground in the aisles instead of in the pews! We proceeded to the "indigenous chapel" far in the back, which was full of people celebrating the same kind of mass, bringing very sophisticated offerings to a statue of the baby Jesus. The only difference was that the music was partly classical and partly local with a live band of young people chanting traditional indigenous songs.

On our way from Sucre to Potosí—the highest city in the world, with mines above 18,000 feet—we passed sumptuous palaces built during colonial times as well as miserable villages where extreme poverty was everywhere. It took several hours of travel through deserted land to get to the high plateau and the city of Potosí. The city was a mix of old, decadent palaces and decrepit streets and buildings. It is clear that the splendor of Potosí was long gone. During colonial times, it had become an almost mythical place, which attracted large numbers of conquistadors. The origin of the myth was the largest silver deposit ever known. The indigenous people said that *Cerro Rico* (rich mountain) was crying silver tears. Potosí, like Ouro Preto in Brazil, soon became the major source of wealth for Spain and Portugal. It created gigantic fortunes for the mother land as well as for the colonizers who had permanently established themselves to exploit these riches.

A former miner organized a visit for us through some of the tunnels that were still in use. The silver is long gone, but tin and other second grade minerals can still be exploited. We walked through these very narrow corridors—some not larger than 4x4 feet -- deep into the mountain. I should probably say that, with the high altitude and lack of oxygen, we struggled just to put one foot in front of the other. On top of that, we had to continually jump to the side of the track whenever we heard the all too recognizable sound of a cart coming toward us at full speed.

Millions of laborers died in the mines of Potosí and it is easy to understand why. Laws were created to force the indigenous people to work inside the mines for up to six months at a time. Besides being overworked and malnourished, the lack of oxygen, the dust, and the chemical process used at the time to separate silver from rocks wreaked havoc with their health. This was never of particular concern for the *conquistadors* because, according to

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the church, the indigenous people were inferior creatures, given by God to serve as slaves for the white man. The only thing that helped the people to cope were the coca leaves that they constantly chewed (and still do), which alleviate their hunger and boost their resistance. During colonial times, the church carved out for itself a monopoly on coca leaf sales, imposing a large tax on each transaction!

Deep inside the mine, the miners of Potosí have established a museum that retraces their history from the very beginning of the conquest. In this museum, there is a figure of a black slave, reminding us that when the conquistadors ran out of local labor, they found more on another continent, thus creating the largest population transfer ever known. The African slaves that were shipped to Bolivia died rapidly because they were unable to cope with the altitude and the cold.

The silver and tin extracted from Bolivia and the gold extracted from Brazil at that time represented the value of the European reserves many times over. Despite this, the riches from these mines did not directly benefit the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, but their northern creditors, instead. Both kingdoms were so indebted because of the holy wars and other crusades in which they had engaged that their creditors, mainly England and Holland, were the first beneficiaries of these transfers of wealth. In the meantime, however, Potosí became the largest city in the world—larger than Paris or London.

To make sure that we truly understood the level of wealth that had been created, our miner guide took us to visit *La Casa de la Moneda* – the house where all the money of the old continent was now manufactured. It is still the largest colonial building ever built in South America. Not far from there, we visited the colonial governor's house where we were shown the underground caves in which the slaves were piled up at night and chained to the walls. Displayed in a glass case were the torture tools used to keep these "inferior creatures" under control!

Outside the mine, we conducted several interviews with miners, many of whom were no more than teenagers. They told us that they were working in the mines to supplement their families' incomes or to be able to later afford school. Others were there because their fathers, usually miners, too, had either suffered accidents which prevented them from working, or they had died prematurely from silicosis. They were usually making between five and ten dollars a day and when pressed about their future, they had really no hope that they could ever do anything better.

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Upon our return to La Paz, we interviewed Miriam Campos from the ministry for indigenous people, who completed our visit to the past. For her, as for Eduardo Yssa, the arrival of the conquistadors was the beginning of the decline of Bolivian culture and the start of massive poverty. As she phrases it, "they came with a gun in one hand and a bible in the other." This is a formula that was used in other parts of the world, as well. In Bolivia, inequality was perpetuated by *latifundios*, large tracts of land that were transferred from generation to generation. The slaves, who worked on the land, carried with them the "debts" of their ancestors, thus preventing them from ever leaving the plantations. The laws that protected *latifundios* from any type of land reform are still in place. Under these laws, for example, each landowner is granted 50 hectares of land per head of cattle, while most peasants remain landless.

Campos described to us the horrific conditions in which the workers (descendants of the slaves) still live on these plantations. Most of the time they do not receive a salary for their work—only food and shelter. Children do not receive an education, and when the workers get sick, they have to find solutions on their own; the landowners never pay for any kind of health care. Campos is passionate about these issues and fights for agrarian reform. John Perkins, who conducted the interview with me, asked her what gives her such energy and courage. She answered that she will do everything to make sure that her own children never have to go through the same things that she has, and as she explained this, she started to cry.

We conducted several other interviews with government officials like Raul Manjon Ramirez, director at the planning ministry. After a very long and technical expose, Ramirez concluded by saying that the result of many decades of a free market economy, structural adjustment programs, and privatization, was that every child born in Bolivia today was already carrying a bigger part of his country's international debt than he or she could ever repay—even with an entire lifetime's salary. After handing over all state assets to foreign powers and pledging the future revenues of the nation's resources, Bolivia is now compelled to borrow more and more money from international financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank or from international bankers. But, as John Perkins points out — that was the goal in the first place.

It is now clear why many people in Bolivia blame Jeffrey Sachs for having ruined their economy. I always wondered how such a brilliant economist could genuinely believe that the privatization of a state's assets could ulti-

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mately be the best solution. The most amazing part is that after all these years of “let-the-market-decide-everything” and then having seen the disastrous consequences of doing so, many politicians still believe in this solution.

We went to interview Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga, the former prime minister of Bolivia and the main opponent to Evo Morales. He is in his fifties, is Harvard educated, speaks perfect English, and dresses like our US politicians. He tried to convince us that he would change the country if elected President, and more specifically—knowing that we were making a movie on poverty—that he would change the situation of the poorest people. When I asked him why he did not make these changes while he was in power the first time, he replied that the market was then too low and, therefore, he could not do anything to help. Although I was expecting a whole slew of explanations, this was not one of them. So, I asked how he would proceed now. His answer was even more interesting: now he would not take any action because the market had once again risen and, therefore, it would solve the problem all by itself! Simply put: he would not do anything either way!

A man on the opposite side of the spectrum and one who was ready to do everything was the Bolivian Vice President, Alvaro Garcia Linaera. Linaera was a former *guerillero* who had spent many years in jail and an intellectual who could quote Karl Marx, Rosa Luxembourgh and Jean-Paul Sartre at will. He explained to us how colonialism had forced countries like Bolivia to adopt a global system, forcing them to be exporters of financial wealth. It was clear to him that the capitalist system was now coming to an end and that, together, these countries must now create a post-capitalist society in which everyone will at least have access to the most basic necessities. He concluded by warning that in a global economy, the stability that we think we have in Northern countries is actually very fragile. As long as there are people in other parts of the world who do not even have water to drink, then we should not take our own stability for granted.

Part V: Kenya

We chose to arrive in Kenya at the beginning of the World Social Forum (WSF) in January 2007. We knew the difficulty of accomplishing anything there, but we had lined up some interviews. At the WSF, we met not only experts but activists from all around the world. Among them was Miloon Kothari, the UN special *rappporteur* on housing. For a UN official, he uses very radical language to explain how our chosen economic system will lead to the death of many people, either directly or through what he calls “real

estate violence," his term for land dispossession and forced evictions.

We were also able to interview John Christensen from the Tax Justice Network, a former off-shore banker. Since he realized the unfairness and artificial manipulation of the financial system, Christensen has been fighting for an international tax system that would not penalize the poor countries, but empower their people. He explained to us how the IMF and the World Bank, pushed by the international bankers and Northern governments, decided to liberalize short-term capital flows, which allows capital to be taken from poor countries overnight and put into off-shore bank accounts in order to avoid taxes. This massive transfer of funds—John provided us with astronomical numbers—deprive southern countries of the taxes they desperately need, while they enrich the international bankers and encourage corruption.

At the World Social Forum, we also met Eric Toussaint who became one of the main speakers in the film. Eric is the founder and President of the CADTM, the Belgian Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt. Over the years he has become an expert on this issue and is now advising presidents and governments of poor countries which have to deal with this infamous financial tool. At the beginning I asked Eric if he would be willing to talk not only about the debt but about its historical causes, which have brought us to the point in which we find ourselves today. To my surprise, he was quite willing to give us an historical analysis that dated back to colonialism. This analysis was the perfect introduction to the reason for which we were in Kenya: to examine the consequences of colonialism in a country with only one major resource—its land.

We were helped with this task by two men: Mashengu Wa Mwachofi, a Kenyan historian and former parliamentarian, and Gitu Wa Kahengeri, a former general in the *Mau Mau* rebellion which had driven the British out of the country. Mashengu gave us a bleak account of the land dispossession in colonial times, which benefited the large number of white settlers brought there to live permanently. The natives were not recognized as human beings, but were regarded as slaves by colonial laws that required them to work on the plantations. Every male was forced to start work at the age of sixteen. To ensure that they would not escape, they were moved from one side of the country to the other, cutting them from their families, the land of their ancestors, and of course, their traditional culture. This was strikingly similar to the stories we had heard of the treatment of the indigenous people in Bolivia. Our *Mau Mau* general, a man in his eighties and admired by many,

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completed the overview by explaining that the *Man Man* movement started as a land revolt. Their main goal was to recover the stolen land because, as he put it, “we could not any more let our people starve to death.” The second goal was to throw the oppressive British out of the country, which they finally succeeded in doing after many deaths and much destruction. But as Gitu was quick to add, unfortunately they did not get their land back. Upon their independence, the land was transferred from the white settlers to blacks who had been close to the colonial power. This was done in order to perpetuate the same export culture. Much of the arable land ended up in the hands of the first president, Jomo Kenyatta—whom many in the North perceived as being a liberator!—and in the hands of his family and other cronies. Gitu concluded by saying that to this day, the *Man Man* have still not recovered their land and are still struggling for their daily bread.

Nairobi looks a little bit like Caracas, a mix of modern buildings and housing for the poor where traffic jams are a permanent part of life. The main difference is that the shantytowns are not in the city but in the nearby suburbs. On the way to Kibera, the biggest slum in East Africa, we passed a beautiful polo field, well-watered and perfectly manicured—a remnant of British colonialism. Right behind the field, we drove down a small road and discovered a gigantic area where a million people live, practically piled one upon the other—most of them without electricity, running water or sanitation. When they need to go to the toilet, they use what they call the “flying toilets” which are small, plastic grocery bags that end up piled in the streets. All over Kibera, one can see mountains of plastic bags containing human excrement.

The pessimistic estimate places the rate of people with HIV at 70%. The people living here are mainly landless or displaced farmers—jobless people who came to the capital searching for work. We met a very interesting group of women there called STAWI. They are all infected with AIDS and although most of them lost their husbands, they decided to fight the consequences of this disease. With absolutely no money—not an exaggeration—they created a myriad of programs to help the people in the community: programs for feeding AIDS orphans, pre-HIV test support, post-HIV test support. We were so incredibly moved by these women that as soon as we got back to the United States, we created a small fundraising operation called “The Filmanthropy Project” to help them as much as we could. Since then, we have financed the orphans feeding program and, through micro-credits, created dozens of jobs.

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We asked the STAWI women to take us to their homes and show us their lives. Apart from the founder of STAWI, who has a stable job, they all live in rooms usually no larger than 10 feet by 10 feet, sometimes with other members of their families. They survive by doing menial jobs like “going to wash clothes for richer people” or selling trinkets in the streets. They make an average of \$1.00 per day, with rent for their miserable housing costing around \$100 per month! In the heart of Kibera the two most common professions are prostitution and drug dealing. We visited a young man named Joseph who shares two small rooms with seven other members of his family. Most of his siblings are handicapped and only he and his mother can, as he says, “do something” to feed the family. He cannot go to school because, beyond primary education, one must pay to be educated in Kenya. This, thanks to another World Bank imposition. The good part of this story—where we see that movies can make a difference, even if on a small scale—is that a friend of mine has been sending Joseph \$100 a month, as a result of watching the film. He also sent him a laptop computer to use for school. Joseph has finished school and is now a web designer with a stable job.

To understand how the inhabitants of Kibera were first displaced from their land, we interviewed H. W. O. Okoth-Ogendo, a professor who specializes in land law.* He gave us an account of how the colonizers took control of the land. It was very simple: they decided that Kenya did not have a “settled form of government.” In this case, British law gave the land to the Queen of England. All land was appropriated by the British administration and handed over to white settlers. Okoth-Ogendo denounced this kind of manipulation because Kenya already had a “settled form of government” based on tribal laws, which the British conveniently failed to acknowledge!

Okoth-Ogendo also discussed the situation in Zimbabwe. The international politicians and media have held the president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, entirely responsible for the condition of his country, which is stricken by extreme poverty and hyper-inflation. However, rather than vilifying Mugabe, we in the North should recognize that the blame for what has happened in Zimbabwe can and should be traced back to the constitution the British imposed on that country, which prevented peaceful land reform. Okoth-Ogendo explained to us the history that our politicians and media have forgotten. When the British granted independence to the country, they attached a provision in the constitution that land redistribution could not

* Prof. Okoth-Ogendo died in April 2009 at the age of 64.

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be implemented unless it received unanimity in parliament. But they also attached a provision saying that 20% of the seats in parliament would be reserved for white landowners. In exchange, they promised to give the new government enough money during the following ten years (!) to indemnify the white landowners for the land that was to be redistributed. Zimbabwe waited for ten years and nothing came: They waited another ten and still nothing. These essential facts about the conflict are never mentioned, not even by the serious media and even less by our favorite politicians.

Okoth-Ogendo also explained that the concept of private property was unknown to Kenyans until the British arrived. Land was available to all members of a community to use as they saw fit. Moreover, a person's children and grandchildren were guaranteed the same usage as long as they remained members of the community. This unfamiliarity with the concept of "private property" was the same throughout Africa, as well as South America and even Europe of long ago. The land was part of the "commons," meaning it was owned by all and available to all. No one could appropriate such land, and, in most instances, whatever was produced from the land was shared by everyone in the community. This prevented anyone from going hungry. If a member of a community was sick or unable to provide for himself, the community would help. And such a system was not restricted to just land. As a group of Maasai people we visited explained, when a member of the group kills one of his cows, the meat will be shared by all members of the community.

Many experts believe—as Cliff Cobb explains in the film—that the concept of private property defines not only modern times but the start of a new system called capitalism. Okoth-Ogendo told us that he has sat on many commissions at the UN and the World Bank which have begun to realize that the management of land, as it was done before by communities, is much more efficient and sustainable and that these commissions may now encourage a return to such practices!

The other side of the coin was explained by the minister of agriculture, Kipruto Arap Kirwa, who told us that his people still battle the consequences of the colonial period. Kenya is one of the best examples of the imposition of a monoculture. This imposition stems from the larger scheme of preventing the countries of the south from ever developing, as Cliff Cobb, Eric Toussaint, and Serge Latouche explain in the film. The British in India, the Dutch in Indonesia, the Belgians and the French in Africa, and the Spanish and Portuguese in South America all systematically destroyed

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any industry or craftsmanship that the local people mastered—even if local products were of superior quality to those made in factories of the colonial powers. Several hundred years ago, the fate of the southern countries was already established through colonization: they became the providers of agricultural or mineral raw materials. The refining and manufacturing was left to the Northern countries. The farmers of the South were prevented from making their own tools, clothes or even from growing their own food. The Europeans wanted to make sure that not only would there be no competition to their own industries, but they could also create a market for their products. By preventing the people of the South from being self-sufficient, as they had been for centuries, the Europeans forced them to become commodity buyers.

This is what happened in Kenya and it still prevents this country from developing in a sustainable way. Kenya was assigned the function of growing mainly tea and coffee for export. When the colonizers left the country, they took with them technically and legally the exclusive right to refine and sell the finished products. To this day, Kenya is not allowed to dry and package its own tea nor roast its own coffee, which is astounding in a supposedly free market world. Of course, such a practice could not still flourish without the full support of the local government which exemplifies the endemic level of corruption in a country like Kenya.

Next, we flew to Kisumu, a region in the western part of Kenya. We were brought by local NGOs to small villages on the shore of Lake Victoria which had been devastated by the arrival of the Dominion Group, a company based in Oklahoma. This company, in collusion with local officials, was given a large tract of arable land on which to grow crops for export. Intending to take control of the entire area, Dominion attempted to buy all of the land of the local farmers at an extremely low price. Most of them refused. So, Dominion built a dam which flooded the entire area and destroyed not only the culture of the local farmers, but their houses as well, forcing them to relocate to higher ground. The company sprayed pesticides by plane—as our local guide explained, “especially when people are working in their fields”—which killed most of the livestock of the communities, as well as many children. These communities have been fighting for years to be able to keep their land and to be compensated for their losses, but to no avail. Our local guide concluded his interview by lamenting the fact that his people are not even allowed to buy the produce from the crops that Dominion is growing on “their own land.” The produce is instead sent directly to America!

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This illustrates how the same practices, which started during colonial times, are still used today—and for the same purposes.

We also visited an island on Lake Victoria, home of several communities of fishermen. Here we found the same desolation, the same destruction. For most, their livelihoods have been destroyed by commercial fisheries which export the fish they catch, thus preventing these people from making a living. In addition, AIDS runs rampant there and with no health care of any kind, these people are left to die a slow death. Eric Mgende of Action Aid confirmed that Kenya was, in fact, ordered by the World Bank to stop giving free healthcare to all, which has resulted in such devastation.

We decided to go to the heart of the problem by traveling to the Rift Valley, the location of the best arable land in Kenya, to see the tea plantations. On these rolling hills, there are tea plants in every direction as far as the eye can see. The owners of the plantations do not look as wealthy as the owners of the sugar cane plantations in Brazil, but the workers definitely look just as poor. A group of tea pickers agreed to be interviewed provided that it was not done on the plantation, but down the road. Their stories were the same as those of the sugar cane cutters: they have been tea pickers for many years, working an average of four to five months per year during the harvest, provided there is sufficient rain. If not, then they are out of a job until the rain comes. They are paid an average of \$5.00 per day. During the dry season, they have to borrow food from the local store in order to survive until it rains. This store is also usually owned by the tea grower for whom they work. As soon as they get their first pay, they have to immediately reimburse the shopkeeper which leaves them with no money at all. Grace, one of the pickers interviewed, explained that it is why their stomachs are very small. They do not have food every day, but still they work an average of fourteen hours a day when they can find work.

Part VI: Tanzania

When we arrived in Tanzania from Kenya, and more specifically to Arusha, the closest city from the border, we were surprised by the difference. Even if they are neighbors and have had similar colonial history, it is clear that Kenya and Tanzania developed totally differently. The poverty was evident in Arusha compared to Kenyan cities, where it is mostly hidden in the slums. Tanzania, 50% larger than Kenya, has many mineral resources that Kenya does not have. So what happened?

Upon independence, Kenya continued policies that had been put in

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place by the British, mainly transferring land and political power from a white minority to a black one. Economically they continued to exploit people to grow agricultural products for export. Tanzania took a totally different turn under the leadership of Julius Nyerere, one of the fathers of the pan-africanist movement. Nyerere was a socialist who wanted the resources of his country to stay in the hands of his people. He believed that Africa would develop only if it were independent of the economic control of colonial powers. For a while the pan-africanists were definitely the best hope for Africa. But, as John Perkins and Chalmers Johnson explain in the film, the powers of the North did not let go of the resources in their former colonies. Therefore Tanzania and all other countries supporting the pan-africanist policies were ostracized and cut off from the capitalist world. So, Tanzania (like many other countries) had to turn to the USSR or China for trade and other economic help. The collapse of the Soviet Union forced Tanzania to turn to the IMF and the World Bank for help. At that point, foreign companies gained control of the resources under structural adjustment programs and other privatization policies. Twenty years later, it is clear that Tanzania is not in better shape and that development passed it by, creating major corruption and other ills.

We decided to visit Merelani, a village in the region where all the tanzanite gems come from, a couple of hours drive from Arusha. The drive took us through small, crumbling villages, stricken by extreme poverty. On the unpaved roads, it took a lot of the driver's talent to not make this several hour trip unbearable. There we found extreme poverty, coupled with rampant AIDS, malnutrition and a total lack of development. How can that be possible in a village that is among the few to mine tanzanite, which has been called the "gem of the 20th century?"

We went to interview many miners and their families. We also interviewed people in organizations that were created to defend these miners. Until the 1980s, mining was in the hands of small miners. They just had to pay a small fee to obtain a permit from the government, and they could mine wherever they wanted. It attracted a lot of people and Merelani became a prosperous town. But in the 1980s, the government was in desperate need of one of those deadly loans from an international institution. The IMF and the World Bank forced the government to open their markets to foreign corporations, which would supposedly create jobs and participate in the development of the country. Part of that opening meant transferring ownership of the tanzanite mines. Many foreign firms ar-

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rived in Merelani with powerful high-tech equipment. Little by little, legally or illegally, they took away the work from small-scale miners. As one of them pointed out: all the tanzanite veins in the ground are connected to each other, so when a company arrives at a vein that a small-scale miner is exploiting, the small miner will have to leave or "be shot." The main consequence has been extreme poverty in a previously prosperous area. As Nimrod Arachka, the president of the Tanzanian Mine Workers Development Organization made clear, the arrival of the big companies did not create jobs in the area. It impoverished the locals, and a huge amount of money has been "siphoned out of the country." Merelani provides one more proof of the results of the open-markets policies. It seems that, even if some of his policies were badly implemented, Nyerere was right. Kwame Nkrumah the first president of Ghana, and partner of Nyerere in his quest for a united Africa, freed from foreign domination, faced the same battles. Unfortunately these men were fighting against countries and corporations, which were ready to use any tools at their disposal to gain access to Africa's mineral resources, including the removal or assassination of leaders who opposed their designs. (According to William Blum, in our interview with him, Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 by a coup that was instigated by the CIA, but carried out by the Ghanaian army. The coup was blamed publicly on the Soviet Union.)

This sad journey into African poverty did not get better when we came back to the border with Kenya. We were besieged by dozens of women and children, mainly from the Maasai tribe, trying to sell small carvings or bead necklaces. Some men were trying to sell their world famous dance to survive. Looking at them, I wondered how they feel when tourists spend a fortune in the safari lodges and give them a couple of dollars to watch them jump in the air.

Part VII: Conclusion

All of our travels and the production of the film did not answer all of our questions. I had many questions that cannot be answered apart from a global systemic analysis. For example: Why are large numbers of people in both the North and the South denied access to basic necessities, when major corporations make fortunes exploiting their natural resources? Why do shareholders pocket the profits of a company in both good times and bad? In other words, when a company becomes insolvent, why do the workers have to pay for the mistakes of managers? Why do taxpayers have to rescue

banks and other financial institutions which made billions of dollars in the past? I could continue the list forever. Although the movie did not answer all of these questions, it put the global economy in perspective by ordering it from the beginning of modern times to the present. The global expansion of Europe, starting in the 15th century, saw the birth of a system that is financed by the poor. Of course, it was not that radical or simple, but we had to frame it that way to draw a simple picture.

First the poor had to give up their land and therefore their livelihood. Why? Because someone else in another country had decided that it would be so! Then they had to give up all other natural resources. Then they had to give up their personal independence and become the slaves of their new masters. They had to give up their culture, religion and identity. Little by little the guns used to control them were replaced by economic tools called open markets, monopolies, monoculture, debt, and privatization, although these policies were often implemented with violence. Gigantic inequalities were created between continents, between countries, and between the people within each country. Our ancestors thought that the best way to move forward was to separate the world between a small minority of "haves" and a large majority of "have nots." The small minority would have the land, the natural resources, the wealth and the financial and political power. Conveniently they assumed that some of the wealth in the hands of a minority would—according to a magical concept—trickle down to the majority and make everybody happy. This idea, that the poor should be grateful to eat the crumbs from the tables of the rich, was used to justify privilege and degradation for centuries, as if they arose from natural forces. But extreme inequality is not caused by nature. It is a product of laws and the exercise of power. The solution is not "trickle-down economics" but new methods of sharing the wealth.

The need to share the earth's resources has been intensified in recent decades by the realization that our present course will lead to environmental disaster. If it was ever possible to imagine that the poor could live on what was left over after the rich took what they wanted, Serge Latouche reminds us that that is pure fantasy. As he explains in the film, we are consuming 30% more than what the planet can regenerate, which means that every year we are digging a hole a little bit bigger under our feet. It also means that when we in the northern countries maintain our level of consumption, more people must plunge below the poverty line. That is why Serge Latouche became the advocate of "de-growth" or "a-growth,"

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because “like atheism, it means exiting the religion of growth.”

This no doubt will not be a very popular solution in the North. Who wants to give up the three cars in his garage or the abundance of good food. As Serge Latouche points out, we have a choice: de-growth, or finding at least 6 new planets with the same resources, so the bottom billion people can develop while we maintain our lifestyle. Let us hope we are more intelligent than to choose the latter. But the choice of de-growth probably makes the vice-president of Bolivia right. It means that we have to invent a new system, a post-capitalist system, which would sustain the current population, but not destroy the planet with pollution or resource depletion.

The current economic crisis also reveals another fundamental flaw of capitalism and endless growth. Our system is based on over-production, based in part on artificial financial tools, like mortgage-based derivatives and credit default swaps. We have reached the limits of the existing system. The only way to continue to grow or at least to maintain ourselves, at this economic level is by lifting the bottom billion out of poverty, so they can buy our products and eat the food we grow that gets wasted every year. There is no alternative, from either a capitalist or a post-capitalist point of view. We will not find any solutions without taking care of the poor.

Of course redirecting the economy cannot be achieved all at once. It will take decades, perhaps centuries. But there are steps that can be taken, as Cliff Cobb explains in the film: agrarian reform, giving back—finally!—the land to the ones who work on it; ending monopolies over natural resources; canceling unconditionally Third World debt; ending unjust taxes on the poor. Beyond that, it means changing the mentality and the culture that cause us to conceive everything in individualistic terms of profits. It means re-discovering the concept of the commons, the concept of community where the resources benefit all and are shared by all, not only a few. As such, we should be able, first, to comprehend the idea of de-growth and then to implement it.

If I had to dedicate the film to some people, I would dedicate it to the innocent children of the world who suffer unjustly every day in order for other people to have a great life. I wish that the proponents of unrestrained capitalism could see the children of Kibera or El Alto, of Merelani or Recife. They are all the same, begging for some coins or for some solutions, with a desperate look in their eyes. It is why I placed them all over the film, for people to look at them. It is also why I used at the end of the film, what

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we could call a cheap technical effect: I slowed down the little boy holding his hand out to all of the cars who drive by on a street in Cochabamba. I want people to really look at him and try to figure out what his life is or what he is thinking and feeling, having to beg every day of his life. Nothing moves me more in the film than this little boy begging in the street and the one we see immediately before that, who carries a bag of cans twice his size. We have to understand, as John Perkins says at the end of the film, that we will never have a sane world unless every child born in Ethiopia or in Bolivia can expect to have all of the basic necessities like water and food, shelter and health care. Is it too much to ask in a world with so much wealth? The answer is in our hands.

— *Philippe Diaz*
October, 2009