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Book Reviews

(Subscriptions on a per volume calendar year basis.)

This is the first volume of the biannual *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, which lays claim to being the only US Journal using a “progressive framework to examine political, professional and personal issues in the human services”.

The Journal was published just before the demise of East European Socialism. Leonard, in one of the articles “Contesting the Welfare State in a Neo Conservative Era,” examines the growing dilemma of the left as how to remain critical of the Liberal Welfare State without giving further support to the Right in confronting for example, a neo conservative era in UK and the advent of glasnot. Thus Leonard argues that some who belong to the Left have begun to look more sceptically at the highly centralized socialist state as opposed to the rights of the individual, decentralisation and participation as well as pluralism. He sees the analysis of past problems of the old welfare state and an understanding of the ideological successes of the right (increased attention to the rights of the individual and expanding real individual choice) as providing one basis for a new progressive politics of social welfare.

Despite the Journal’s determination to be “progressive” at all costs and the therefore somewhat restrictive choice of material reflecting the jargon and ideology of the so called “Left”, I found it made interesting reading, covering a number of topics even within its ideological limitations.

The Journal itself is a successor to *Catylyst - the socialist Journal of the Social Services* which was started in 1978 by a group of radical social workers in New York City, on a voluntary basis. Its aim is to develop knowledge that reflects and responds to progressive concerns and it incorporates in this volume six articles, including those from Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, Peter Leonard (as mentioned), and others on “Rethinking Empowerment”, “Culturally Transmitted traumatic Stress in an Appalachian Community”, “Social Control and Community Care” and “Labour Negotiations in Battered Wives’ Programmes”.

The Journal also features a column “from the Archives” which “preserves the progressive heritage by featuring reprints of significant articles and documents from the past”. Lastly there is a selection of Book Reviews.
Freire’s article, “A Critical Understanding of Social Work”, a paper delivered at the IFSW Conference in 1988, discusses the qualities of (again) a progressive social worker, learnt, Freire claims, from his social work students and colleagues in Recife, Rio and Sao Paulo at the end of the 40’s and early 50’s. His theoretical contribution in any case remains a strong one with Freire, himself an educator, reminding us that social work practice is substantively educational, “pedagogical” and political with the social worker not just a technical neutral agent, compartmentalized from the wider social context.

Levy Simon re-examines the concept of empowerment in another useful article. Empowerment has become one of the most popularly evoked concepts in social work theory and practice in the 80s but often fails to fully address the dilemma of how professional help can aid in another’s independence especially over the issues of official authority and dependency.

Levy draws an ontological distinction between “empowering people” and “helping people empower themselves”, one possibility of which he sees as through a “collaborative alliance” with the social work professional. Compatibility of interests between client and worker cannot always, however, be assumed.

Another paper by Cattell-Gordon which starts off as a case study of one of his former students who committed suicide, explores the Appalachian inheritance where distinct patterns of exploitation are seen as having shaped cultural tendencies similar to clinical manifestations of groups experiencing traumatic stress.

Labour and Trade Union negotiations in collectively orientated workplaces (20 Battered Wives Programmes in US and Canada), is the subject of the next paper, where “consensual bargaining” is seen as offering a model for unionization of other small “feminized” service organisations.

A final article takes issue with the traditional view of community mental health as a self determinate system characterized by care, treatment and control based in the community, as opposed to more segregative forms of treatment/ control prevailing since World War 2.

An historical and political analysis is made of the process of social control identifying processes that link community mental health in the post war period to “basic tendencies of US capitalist formation”. Nevertheless the authors say it is a mistake not to recognise that the practice still contains the possibility of real care and change as well as regulation and control, and sees some possibility of collective action in the face of decaying services and increasing social control.

“From the Archives” features Jacob Fisher in the 1930’s describing the development of the social work movement called the “rank and file”, whose 15,000
membership emerged as a response to social and economic conditions in the US during the depression. Fisher, himself a Jewish social worker from New York, went on to become the first editor of their journal, *Social Work Today*.


While the Journal is well presented and discusses some issues of real concern, personally I found a lot of it to be rather "old hat" and almost more of historical interest, despite its relentless claim to be "progressive".

Reviewed by Norma Hall, CONNECf - Zimbabwe Institute of Systemic Therapy (formerly Family Counselling Unit), Harare, Zimbabwe.


This is a collection of four rousing, polemical speeches by Fidel Castro to mark the 30th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. There is an introduction by Mary-Alice Waters. The English translations were originally published in *Granma Weekly Review*. The speeches were delivered to different audiences in Cuba between December 5th 1988 and January 1989.

The titles of the speeches indicate their orientation: "As long as the empire exists we will never lower our guard"; "The Cuban people will always remain loyal to the principles of socialism"; "Thirty years of the Cuban Revolution;" and "The young generation must improve and defend socialism".

Castro describes both the revolutionary nationalist war to overthrow the Batista regime, and the subsequent economic revolution to transform the capitalist economy. He fully acknowledges the difficulties faced en route, in the face of imperialist aggression and antagonism, and, in particular, the continuing US blockade. He exhibits the ferve, charisma and moral principle that have characterised his leadership.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the speeches do not give any detailed analysis of the problems facing Cuba, including bureaucracy, corruption, technoc
racy, nepotism and disillusionment. Castrol exhorts his audiences to support the rectification process, to learn from the mistakes of the past, and to build and improve the socialism that has already been developed.

Celebratory speeches on thirty years of the revolution, despite the US embargo, may not be the appropriate forum for a detailed critique. However, this reviewer, in the hope of possibly gaining insights into the Cuban revolution, would have valued a more critical analysis based on the daily realities of people's lives and the very concrete problems inherent in transforming both an economy, and a people's political consciousness.

Considering the subsequent break up of the Soviet Union, plugging Cuba further into crisis, the rhetoric, and the lack of critical analysis, become all the more stark and anachronistic. At the same time, in the light of the global crisis of socialism, it is in some ways revitalising to be reminded of the intensity of conviction of one of the world's greatest revolutionary leaders.

Reviewed by Helen Jackson, Director of Research, School of Social Work, Harare, Zimbabwe.

A monograph published simultaneously as Drugs and Society, Vol 5 Nos 1 and 2.

This short book (97 pages) contains seven articles addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS and substance abuse in the USA. Two articles focus on ethnic issues, two on intravenous drug use in Alaska, one on gay men, one on procedures in "shooting galleries", and one on the role of health psychologists in AIDS education amongst drug injectors (IVDUs). They present material that will be of use primarily to professionals in the field in the USA.

Several articles are reviews of existing literature, and give an overview of the current situation. Others provide some original research findings.

Fisher et al stress that drug injecting in Alaska is a major problem that needs much wider study. The mean age of first cocaine use in females was reported to be 12.5 years, indicating the urgent need for intervention with adolescents.

Leoutsakas reports that the scale of drug injecting in Alaska is not well documented, and more research is needed into who injects, what is injected, and how behaviours can be modified. Rowell reports that American Indian/Alaskan
native people have high levels of alcohol consumption and high levels of sexually transmitted diseases. HIV/AIDS is still low in Alaska but likely to rise. He concurs with Leoutsakas that much more data is needed on the extent and role of drug injecting.

Des Jarlais et al warn of the expectation of racial prejudice by Blacks and Hispanics/Latinos and other minorities with respect to interventions to make drug injecting safer. They see a lose-lose situation in which interventions targeting at risk minorities will be seen as racist, while non-intervention will be seen as neglect. Blacks and Hispanics have double the reported rate of AIDS of the Whites in the USA, with intravenous drug use reported to be the major primary risk factor. It is linked with high levels of heterosexual and perinatal transmission. The authors’ stance is best illustrated by their quoting of Primm of the Presidential Commission on the HIV Epidemic (P6): “If you do something now, you will be accused of racism, but if you do nothing now, in the future you will be accused of genocide”.

An article by Martin and Hasin examines the link between alcohol consumption and sexual behaviour among gay men. They report on earlier studies that show a complex relationship between the two. Their own study finds that fairly low risk sexual behaviour (oral sex) increases with reported alcohol consumption, but that high risk activity (anal-sex) does not. However, their study only measures rates of alcohol consumption, and not alcohol use specifically during sexual activity.

Insight into risk behaviours at the time of injection is given by Page et al. They observed first hand the process of selling injectibles and providing needles in a private house used as a “shooting gallery”. They confirm that sustained interventions with the proprietors of the “shooting galleries” may potentially reduce risk of HIV. The authors point out that proprietors do not want to see their clientele die of AIDS. The article provides valuable insights into the specific behaviours and risks involved.

In the final article of the book Sorensen advocates the role of health psychologists in HIV/AIDS prevention. He gives a brief overview of the scale of the epidemic among drug injectors, and of the risk factors for HIV/AIDS: needle transmission, sex, drug weakened immunity, disinhibition when “high” and perinatal transmission.

He cites estimates that between 83,800 and 119,100 new cases of AIDS will occur among drug users, presumably in the USA, between 1989 and 1993. Health psychologists have an important role to play. Sorensen supports Rosenshock’s (1974) health belief mode, which suggests that knowledge, perceived
personal risk, belief in health care guidelines, belief in personal ability to keep to guidelines, and social support to keep to guidelines, are critical factors in achieving health behaviour change. Sorensen's well written overview could usefully have come at the start of the book and provided a framework for the other articles.

Overall, the collection is worth reading although, with a few exceptions, the articles stress the need for further data and research rather than presenting in depth findings of their own. The content is considerably better than the general presentation of the book itself, which rates very low on attractiveness and originality. This is a great pity. Sorensen's three photographs of awareness campaign media enliven the final pages of the book, but for the most part the layout and presentation are dull. This detracts from the articles themselves, and is a contradiction of the oft-repeated message within the book of the need for appropriate, engaging strategies to break the HIV - drug injecting link.

Reviewed by Helen Jackson, Director of Research, School of Social Work, Harare, Zimbabwe.


This book is written for societies where there is racism, and where women are treated as second or third class citizens or worse, not only because they are women but also because of their skin colour. The book acknowledges that some of the issues discussed as the specific struggles of 'women of colour' are also experienced by white women and men. These issues include powerlessness in an elitist society, where people are seen as lower grade persons because they belong to a different race, culture, are poor, unemployed and lack education.

This book will be valued by feminist therapists and people who work with women in development. Therapists who use psychoanalysis may find the book particularly interesting and challenging, especially the section on Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Feminism. This section challenges Freudian ideas concerning women's sexuality and motherhood.

How applicable will this book be to Zimbabwe and other African countries? First, our women do not experience the same problems that women of colour in the USA, experience as a group. Even if a few do, there are strong traditional and cultural ways of dealing with most of the problems that women
might be experiencing. In some cases governments have developed policies to protect all women despite their colour.

Second, psychoanalysis is expensive, and if taken up would not be for those people who most need the service.

Third, it is slowly becoming obvious that the systemic approach to counselling, and engaging clients in brief therapy, leads to the best results from therapy.

However, having said this, non feminist therapists and non psychoanalysts could still benefit from reading this book, if it is read with a view to gaining a different perspective on therapy with women, despite their colour. As the book is emotionally charged (dealing with the emotive issues of politics, race and gender), those who want to benefit from it must remain objective.

Reviewed by Eunice R Muzenda, Executive Tutor, Family Counselling Unit, Harare, Zimbabwe.


This book might better have been titled Women, crisis and survival, as the examples given show women reacting to forces which work against development - repressive fundamentalism in Iran, the American destabilisation crisis in Nicaragua, and the economic and political crises of Nigeria. Women are shown to be affected as consumers, as workers and most seriously as the ones on whose shoulders falls the increasingly heavy burden of maintaining the family unit. At best, as in Mary Stead’s Nicaraguan example, gendered needs and concerns such as childcare policies and contraception have been put on hold by the state because they are seen as potentially divisive in the context of a national emergency; at worst, as Carolyne Dennis shows in Nigeria, the social problems created by a deteriorating economy are off-loaded from the state to women, who are forced to “manage” the crisis at the household level.

The differential impact of national crises on women because of their special role as household managers is not news. Where this volume is more innovative, however, is in those contributions which discuss programmes and policies that are more truly developmental, ie deliberately conceived and carried out to advance the national good, rather than as a response to disaster. The most interesting such discussion is Delia Davin’s study of China, which describes the impact of “development” of the sort being widely touted after the recent turmoils
and reforms in the socialist world; namely, the promotion of the free market as the prime mover of economic life and the withdrawal of the state from many fields. Davin has the advantage of a historical perspective on this process as she examines the decollectivisation of Chinese agriculture begun in 1978. As she relates it, the replacement of the commune with household as the main productive unit in the rural areas was meant to promote entrepreneurship and invigorate economic life.

Unfortunately for women, control of productive forces and of the social environment of production was removed from the state-sponsored commune leadership and reinvested in the traditional family head. Many rural women, accustomed to personal recognition and remuneration for their labour as part of a work team and to the camaraderie of collective work, now found the profit generated by their labour was claimed by their father or husband, in the name of the family.

This gave rise to the inaccurate perception that the only real economic actors are men - a perception says Davin, which was reinforced by the tendency towards sex discrimination in the new free market China on the grounds that education and employment are for men, while home and family are for women.

This same perceptual problem is also found closer to home, according to Anne Akeroyd’s study of SADDC women farmers. She describes government policies in, among other areas, Musengezi and Mount Darwin, which seem to assume that the only active peasant farmers are men.

Despite official commitments to successful resettlement and the promotion of household entrepreneurship in the peasant agricultural sector, women are refused access to credit and denied land tenure under both governmental and customary procedures. As in China, although the household unit as a whole may seem to prosper, women’s status within the household deteriorates as men are tacitly encouraged to appropriate the fruits of women’s labour. Akeroyd mentions malnutrition, stress, isolation, the abuse of polygamy (in order to provide more workers for one man) and the replacement of women’s traditional subsistence crops by “men’s” cash crops as gendered results of ill-designed rural development schemes.

Similar patterns are observed by Cecelia Ng in Malaysia, where the state has encouraged modernisation and mechanisation of agriculture. Control and ownership of technical innovations has become a male preserve, and the development of skills and training has been defined as male knowledge. Women are thus locked out of this particular form of development, and are regarded largely as “housewives”, a process which Ng calls “the masculinisation of agriculture” (p 195). Interestingly, she reports that both men and women
see lack of involvement in "modern" agriculture as an elevation of women's status, and that as a family's wealth increases, female participation in crop production decreases. Le Thi Nam Thuyet, from Vietnam, describes the opposite process - movement away from the household as the main rural economic unit and towards the collectivisation of agriculture - and associates it with benefits to women ranging from increased age at marriage to the eradication of illiteracy. Unfortunately, Thuyet's piece is uncritically adulatory of the Vietnamese government which makes it difficult to objectively compare the experience of Vietnamese women with that of their counterparts under different rural development models. A more up-to-date article, dealing with the impact of doi moi (new thinking), the Vietnamese perestroika, would probably have been more interesting.

The book concludes with a collection of articles on India. These accounts come closer to embodying the title of the book as they depict women actively trying to create a good life for themselves and their families rather than as objects acted on by ideological and economic forces. Contributions include pieces on women in trade union struggles and on the efforts of the traditionally outcast devdasi women, with the support of sympathetic civil servants, to create for themselves an economic base other than prostitution. Of particular interest is Jana Everett and Mina Savara's discussion of the utilisation of lower-value credit by women small-commodities producers, with suggestions on how the delivery of credit could be redesigned to improve women's economic autonomy, and help them avoid the invisibility and impotence that plague their farmer sisters in the SADCC and elsewhere.

This volume is not without faults. The arrangement and selection of articles is sometimes inscrutable - for example, a rather abstract discussion of Western misconceptions about Third World women appears in the middle of the book rather than at the beginning, where it might have provided a theoretical framework. Some of the articles are only tangentially relevant to the theme of the book, such as Bina Agarwal's very technical discussion of mechanical wheat cultivation in Punjab which devotes only three short descriptive paragraphs to the impact on women. Similarly, Dennis's account suffers from an abundance of information on recent Nigerian history and a relative dearth of non-impressionistic information on the daily struggles of Yoruba women. Haleh Afshar's account of nineteenth and early twentieth century Iranian fighters for women's emancipation, while inspiring in its own right, contributes little to empirical knowledge of the lives of women in Iran today.

Despite its shortcomings, this book is a useful contribution to the study of gender and development, largely because it enables comparisons to be made
and similarities to be observed between societies as disparate as Nigeria, Malaysia and Nicaragua. I hope that the empirical data contained here can nourish some future, more theoretical work which may produce some useful generalisations about the differential impact of both crises and development policies on Third World women.

Reviewed by Amy Kaler, Chindunduma GHS, Shamva, Zimbabwe.


This ambitious book sets out to locate the position of women in the world economy and to examine how changes in international relations over the past 40 years have affected women in the developing world.

The book is divided into four parts, which examine women’s position in a changing world, as well as changes in trade patterns, financial market activities and technology and their impact on women. It also looks at employment trends for women in agriculture, industry and services.

Part four summarises the emerging trends in the international economy, as they affect women. It incorporates an annex highlighting excerpts on women in development from the International Development Strategy for the Third UN Development Decade.

In a broad sense, international exchanges have been favourable to women’s economic position, the book contends. Particularly in industry, there has been an increase in the gainful employment of women. Thus women have advanced most, economically, in countries that have developed as successful exporters of manufactured goods, mostly in East Asia.

But recent protectionist barriers in industrialised countries, deep international recession and the debt crisis have brought economic devastation in some areas of the developing world and now threaten the economic advances of women over the past 40 years.

The book concludes that the present international economic climate is
“fundamentally inimical to development” and points out that employment prospects, particularly for the younger generation and for women, have fallen markedly since 1980.

The book puts forward a number of proposals aimed at redressing these negative trends by promoting women’s economic participation, including measures to improve women’s position in these activities. It recommends implementation of the "Forward-Looking Strategies" adopted at the 1985 Nairobi conference to mark the end of the UN Decade for Women. The breath and scope of the topic, it is necessarily a collection of generalisations, or pointers, rather than a conclusive study of the economic advancement of women in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The book is strengthened by a historical perspective which traces how the Great Depression of the 1930s deepened trade restrictions as developed countries erected trade barriers to protect their fledgeling industries. The impact of the Post-World War II Marshall Plan in stimulating the fastest growth of industrial output in 80 years and creating job opportunities for women is explored.

But the work is spoilt by a number of irritating generalisations and a reluctance to present firm conclusions or offer any kind of theory to advance the study of women’s work. Many of the more irksome assumptions are related to women’s domestic role.

In her introduction, Susan Jokkes describes, convincingly, how the introduction of capitalism led to intensification of the division of labour between the sexes, identifying men with the productive sphere and women with the reproductive sphere.

She notes the resurgence during the 1980s of traditional values and the notion of the home as the “proper place” for women, even in the developed world. But apart from noting that women’s identification with domestic work leads to their limited contribution to material progress, Jokkes appears to accept as given women’s domestic role, which she qualifies as “of central value to society”.

To illustrate this, one would have liked at least to see some attempt at evaluating the economic development. But instead Jokkes focuses entirely on the more visible wage employment, which she argues, correctly, is the first step towards economic emancipation.

In discussing women’s longevity, she cites “more moderate female consumption patterns” as a factor in women’s resistance to certain diseases associated with smoking and dietary habits in more affluent societies. Without supporting this view with statistics, she appears to subscribe to notions of women as the “fairer” or “weaker” sex. There is no mention of how women have been
socialised into certain behaviour patterns.

In another example of generalisation, she highlights the success of Asia in bringing down birth rates without anywhere mentioning that in China, the most populous Asian country, government policy under Mao Zedong forced the restriction of births to one per couple - a highly unpopular policy with no parallels elsewhere in Asia.

Despite such flaws, the book is a valuable attempt to chart the influence of international economic factors on women in the developing world. In helping to set agenda issues, it will be of particular interest for women’s groups and policymakers.

Reviewed by Dede-Esi Amanor, Inter Press Service (Third World News Agency), Harare, Zimbabwe.


The provision of low income housing is a problem that has confronted the Government of Zimbabwe since independence and remains largely unresolved. This book by Christopher Mafico is an interesting historical perspective to the provision of urban low income housing in Zimbabwe. It is divided into eight chapters. Mafico begins by giving a brief literature review of literature Zimbabwe’s low income housing and also by examining some perspectives. Although he attempts to review literature on Zimbabwe’s low income housing this is, however, done very superficially as the author simply identifies previous research without stating the conclusions of these studies.

In Chapter 2 the author examines the beginning of urban low income housing as a consequence of the process of urbanisation. The author also examines the measures taken by the colonial settlers to weaken African agriculture and therefore force the Africans to migrate to urban areas in search of employment. These measures included the Hut Tax, Native locations Ordinance Act of 1906, Land Apportionment Act of 1930, Industrial Conciliation Act 1930, Native Registration Act of 1936 and the Vagrancy Act of 1936. The author argues that African workers were considered temporary visitors to urban areas, who were therefore expected to go back to their rural homes at old age or at the cessation of employment.

Consequently, the provision of housing for African workers was never taken seriously and as the author observes “the lack of a clearly defined housing
policy that housing lagged behind demand and overcrowding was a common feature.” The common practice was for employers to accommodate their domestic workers within their premises and for industrial workers to receive tied accommodation.

In an effort to help us understand the problems surrounding low cost housing in Zimbabwe the author attempts to answer the question “What is housing?” He adopts the definition of the Government of Zimbabwe that housing is "a stock of shells for the provision of shelter against the weather and alternately process by which that stock is created". He condedes that housing goes beyond the physical structure and that it has a social and economic meaning. This is a very pertinent point that the author makes for the form and structure of housing is largely dependent on the meaning put to housing. The author makes a very interesting analysis of traditional housing in Zimbabwe and makes an equally interesting conclusion that “the traditional housing system of housing is very much a process intimately related to the users’ needs and very much in the user’s control”. There was therefore no housing backlog in traditional society, the author observes.

The author is quite forthright in his evaluation of government policy on low income housing. He argues that government has not been as innovative and committed as it should have been to low income housing and that the question of affordability has not been sufficiently addressed, hence the mushrooming of housing projects which low income groups can not participate in.

He goes on to criticise government’s policy of demolishing squatter settlements and thus, "merely disguising the problem and giving it time to become bigger and more complicated".

The author writes very convincingly and is able to articulate the weakness of Zimbabwe’s policy on low income housing. One cannot help but agree with him that urban low income housing cannot be realised unless there is a major overhaul of the housing policy. The housing standards adopted are artificial and do not take cognisance of the social, political and economic realities of Zimbabwe. What need is needed therefore is an appropriate response to the problem of low income housing. Christopher Mafico’s book exposes in a brilliant manner, the problem of urban low income housing in Zimbabwe and thus challenges policy makers to be more innovative in addressing this problem. This book therefore provides useful reference material for policy makers and social policy students interested in urban

Reviewed by Edwin Kaseke, Principal, School of Social Work, Harare, Zimbabwe.

On the whole the book is very informative. I have some reservations, but these could be misleading as I am unsure of who the target readership is. First the lack of a clear definition of rural transformation in the various papers. This shortcoming makes it difficult to follow some discussions and a clear definition would assist the reader to focus and digest the information presented.

Second, the lack of an in-depth analysis of the topic. Most papers tend to provide facts and information. An in depth analysis of some factors would have been more stimulating and would have promoted understanding of the issues in rural transformation, for example, an historical background would have put some of the issues and constraints into perspective; as would a discussion of the role of extraneous factors such as drought, the world recession, the politics of reconciliation, reliance on donor aid tied to capital equipment and technical expertise/expatriates, the process of industrialisation, the effects of the mass media, a lack of education on the part of policy makers, implementers and recipients, cultural inequalities, etc.

Third, rural transformation is said to be different from rural development, but I had difficulty in identifying the major differences between the two concepts. However, having said this, rural transformation appears to call for adaption socially, politically, economically and culturally. According to who the target readership is, recommendations for ways in which this adaptation could be encaused could have been given by each author.

Fourth, I wonder if the various authors, as academics suffer from what Chambers has called “The Rural Tourist Syndrome”, ie people who do not reside in rural areas but visit them to carry out studies and prescribe solutions to problems. There is a ‘them and us’ gap. Solutions and prescriptions suitable for urban areas differ from those of rural areas both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Fifth, I would have appreciated the inclusion of a chapter on the human resource development necessary to effect social, economic, political and cultural change. Transformation takes place in people who are the active participants. Human resource development should be aimed at policy makers, donors, change agents and consumers. They must be prepared for technological change through education.

I have enjoyed reading this publication and would recommend it to
students of economics, adult education and rural development, with my views taken into consideration.

Reviewed by E Matenga, Masters in Adult Education Student, University of Zimbabwe, Harare.

Reference


Although written before the fall and ultimate demise of state socialism in much of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union — indeed before the political restructuring of that entire region — this book provides a useful and important reference in helping students of Geography and Urban Studies better understand the nature and characteristics of urban areas rarely studied by Western scholars. Comprehensive, concisely written and complete with detailed maps of many of the study areas, it relies primarily on geographical perspective. Drawing on secondary research sources (including some by the author) of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, the bulk of the book is devoted to the Soviet and Polish city case studies. With a focus on the spatial distribution of indicators of inequality, it is strangely prophetic of the events which have transpired in the two years since the book was published. Particularly haunting is the concluding paragraph of the book, referring to the case of Poland: “the disaffection of the masses has at least some of its origin in the inequality of urban life...”.

Nonetheless, the changing geopolitical realities of the region do not by any means render the book irrelevant or even out of date. As students of urbanism are well aware, the built form of any city tends to be very enduring. In this way, just as the socialist cities of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union inherited an urban form from the previous capitalist era, so will the emergent regimes — however they eventually define themselves — inherit certain physical realities from the socialist period.

With the collapse, both literal and symbolic, of the barriers dividing East and West, what the author describes as the “relative inaccessibility of some of the countries concerned” along with the “difficulty which Western scholars and teachers often have in dealing with socialism dispassionately and objectively if at all” may dissolve as well.
This will, perhaps, open a new door to more extensive study of some of these cities in the years to come; thus the book will continue to be a major source of information.

What relevance does the book have for Zimbabwe or Africa in general? Many African countries have adopted socialism as the ideological force driving planning and policy formulation in all sectors and have, throughout the political transformation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, claimed that their form of socialism is distinct from that found in other continents. Whether this is true is not debated here. There is room, however, for careful investigation of the flaws revealed in the practice of socialist urban planning as it is described in this book, particularly given that we are now aware of the possible consequences of these flaws.

The author begins the book with an attempt to define the ideal socialist city. Quoting from Demko and Regulska (1987: 290), he refers to such attributes as “non-discriminatory, non-spacially differentiated housing” and “public services of all kinds, including transportation ... of equal quality, availability and accessibility” as those which distinguish the socialist from other types of cities. It is against these general yardsticks that the measures of inequality are later made.

Following a brief description of the population growth patterns and historical development of many of the major urban areas in Eastern Europe and the USSR, the author launches into the case study of Moscow as the “showpiece of the socialist city”. Since pre-revolutionary Moscow was limited in size, most of the city is representative of the socialist period. Smith’s review of the research literature concludes that although less pronounced and more complex a pattern than that found in typical capitalist cities, there is evidence of inequality in living standards in Moscow, with the better services and higher-quality housing found in the central part of the city, the area more heavily inhabited by the intelligentsia and other members of the Soviet elite. Smith attributes some of this inequality to the “hierarchical structure of service provision”, which refers to the need for some central services to be located where population densities are highest, and thus further away from lower-density populations. The spatial differentiation of housing, often associated with residential groupings by occupation, is related primarily to period of construction, according to Smith. These patterns are more or less reinforced in the descriptions of the case studies of three other Soviet cities: Ufa, a city of over a million east of Moscow and west of the Urals; Kazan, roughly the same size and located almost halfway between Moscow and Ufa; and finally, Akademgorodok, the site of the Siberian Branch of the Soviet Academy of
Sciences and largely an academic town.

In the Czechoslovakian capital Prague, housing is described as the source of the greatest differentiation. Although partly attributable to the built form inherited from the capitalist era, Smith identifies housing tenure as the factor most responsible for this, the four types being state, enterprise, co-operative and private. Since co-operative and private housing tend to be more expensive, it is these types of housing tenure which attract the urban elite. The situation is similar in the three Hungarian cities described in the book: Pécs, Szeged and Budapest. However, the distinguishing factor in Hungarian cities, according to Smith, is that up to three-quarters of the housing stock is privately owned, much higher than in most other socialist countries. Nonetheless, the pattern which emerges, like the other countries, is one where “the higher-status groups received the better housing, with the highest subsidies”.

Warsaw provides an example of a city which had to be largely rebuilt after World War 2, having lost two-thirds of its population and 85% of its buildings. Once again, the research reveals that the co-operative housing, which is of higher quality and is more expensive, tends to be occupied by the professional groups. Data available on ten other Polish cities confirms this pattern. Although residential grouping by socio-occupational status is strongly demonstrated in the research literature, the spatial character is described as that of a mosaic rather than the strong segregational patterns typical of western capitalist cities.

The final chapters in the book are devoted to an attempt to explain the processes behind the patterns of inequality presented in the previous chapters. Briefly, the most important of these are: socio-economic disparities arising from the division of labour; variabilities in housing stock as determined by period of construction and tenure (the co-operative was consistently identified as a source of differentiation); and housing shortages. As a way of synthesising all of this information, Smith proposes a systems model which incorporates all of the component factors contributing to urban inequality.

What is not described in any detail is the political process by which members of the elite manage to procure the better quality housing and services. This is one of the ironies arising out of the research reviewed in the book: that the allocation of housing, which is supposed to be an equalising factor in socialist societies, appears to create and reinforce inequalities. Particularly relevant for African countries is the tendency of co-operative housing, involving heavy government technical support and subsidies, to be provided not to the lower-income sectors of the population, but rather to the professional groups. Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya are among the African nations promoting housing
co-operatives as a means of improving the access and quality of housing to poor people. The lesson of the Eastern European and Soviet cities described in this book seems to imply that governments may not be the appropriate institutions to administer this process.

The concluding section of the book predicts the “future of the socialist city”, describing the growing materialism evident in urban life and the increasing tendency of “Soviet and other socialist citizens...to ape their Western counterparts”. Although the author acknowledges a “convergence” between the Soviet and the Western city, his prediction that “the socialist city, its past as well as the distinctive nature of its own changing society will ensure that it remains different”, now seems questionable. Nonetheless, his book, along with its very useful bibliography, is a must for those interested in urban life in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the height of the socialist era.

Reviewed by Anna Vakil, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.


Coups have become part of Africa’s crisis. While some coups have been condemned by the world in general, others have been celebrated by the citizens and in some cases the international community has been happy to see regimes fall. When Sankara came to power, the whole world took little attention of what had happened in Upper Volta. Sankara was virtually unknown outside West Africa hence the indifference he was greeted with. However, after a year “revolutionary minded people started to follow what was happening there (Burkina Faso)...a deep revolution was unfolding”. The preface of the book tells us The August 4 coup was not just one of the numerous coups experienced by the impoverished nation during the year.

As the title says, _Thomas Sankara Speaks_ is a compilation of 25 speeches and interviews which were delivered by Sankara between 1983 to 1987 just before he was assassinated. The first speech is a fiery attack by Prime Minister Sankara, on the enemies of the people both at home and abroad. He identified the enemies as the bourgeois, men in politics, people who keep the people in ignorance under the guise of spiritual guidance and tradition - all who are seen as furthering the interests of the imperialists. “When the people stand up, imperialism trembles” he
told the audience (this was to be his slogan/trademark later). Two months later he was arrested and freed on August 4 by troops loyal to Compaore after demonstrations which rocked Ouagadougou. Sankara emerged more powerful than ever. He took over power and became President. The deep revolution began to unfold. Committees for the Defence of the Revolution were created and these were to penetrate through all social facets of Burkina Faso. The August 4 speech is followed by another compelling speech, in which he warned the 1300 delegates against corruption and abuse of power, condemning those who glorified the President to cover up for their corrupt practices.

Sankara’s commitment to honesty and integrity is reflected in several speeches. Speaking to his country-men he warns that “Honest citizens have no fear even if you own 1000 villas. But you the dishonest, even if you own a two-roomed place in a rundown part of town... Start to tremble...”. On the international arena he criticised the hypocrisy of many leaders who only paid lip service to the fight against apartheid, thus endangering the lives of the oppressed blacks in South Africa and the Frontline States. He asked the leaders at the Non-Aligned Movement 8th Summit in Harare, “Is it not criminal to exacerbate a struggle in which we cannot participate?” (p188) A month later Samora Machel of Mozambique was killed in a mysterious air crash inside South Africa.

Oppression of women by men in his country was a thing of the past, he reminded his fellow countrymen on the commemoration of International Women’s Day. So wide were Captain Sankara’s interests that he also attended the First International Tree and Forest Conference in Paris, where he outlined his government’s strategy in the fight against desertification. The conscientization process of the fight against desertification was reinforced by the fact that all happy events in Burkina Faso were celebrated by a tree planting ceremony - marriages, christening services, awards presentations, visits by well known dignitaries. At the same conference he briefly outlined the achievements of the Revolution. (Burkina Faso was a French colony. Several economic measures were used by the French to frustrate the Revolution.)

The book helps the reader to know and understand Sankara the man better. Some of his critics said he was mad, to which Sankara answered with a retort on page 144, that this was a necessary ingredient for revolution - “for no fundamental change can be carried out without a certain amount of madness...”. He saw himself “as a Third World youth, an African youth, a youth of Burkina Faso” (p 68). Sankara gives statistics to tell the world who this Burkinabe youth is (p118), he is one of the lucky survivors of the 500 children out of 1000 who survived during the first three months, one of the 10 children out of 100 who went to school and 18
out of a 100 who completed high school and one of the two soldiers out of 100 who are priviledged army officers. Probably this self-image and that of his country explains why he chose to receive diplomat’s credentials out in the villages where he introduced them to the marginalized, for they were the people they were serving.

The all revealing “Dare To Invent the Future” interview is probably the most informative of all. He covers the achievements and hurdles met by the revolution, and states his country’s position on international matters. He explains, albeit briefly, that he turned down the Soviet Union because it did not meet Burkina Faso’s expectations. He adds, “we have our dignity to protect”. He also explains the huge sacrifices the people had to make to improve the economy. Some of which he says helped to reduce government expenditure. Sankara was aware that he could come to a violent end (or end up as an old man somewhere in a library reading books). Knowing he had enemies he had accepted the reality of having to end violently. “It will happen today or tomorrow.” All his major speeches ended with an emphatic :”Homeland or death, we will triumph”.

Thomas Sankara Speaks in an interesting book for the reader who is prepared to labour through some of his long speeches. The cover is quite attractive and so are the pictures inside. The man had the image and charisma which African youths identified with, to such an extent that when he died students of the University of Zimbabwe joined the progressive world in condemning his assassination. The CDRs were dissolved immediately. He was buried in a mass grave which the people of Burkina Faso turned into a shrine, much to the chagrin of the coup leaders. Probably as the imperialists read his speeches they tremble... even in death Sankara triumphs.

Reviewed by Tasara Tuturu, School of Social Work (BSW Student).