

advocacies and mobilize a concerted program for addressing perceived inconsistencies and injustices in today's public sphere.

Sidney Tarrow carefully balances his theoretically fertile analysis of transnational activist formations by identifying some problematic areas. He particularly points out the increasing risk of "representing" some sectors of society in public advocacies. As the frame of reference gets bigger and transactions become more complicated, advocacy groups have to reassess the actual relationship that they still want to maintain with the sectors whose interests they are willing to uphold and fight for. Extended networks and transactions generate a new wave of social control and repressive apparatuses. The increasing inability of national "agents of public order" to confront such contentions may prompt the formation of international alliances. One would find increasing attempts to regulate the flow of information using state-of-the-art technologies like the Internet and other online transactions.

The processes involved in "transnational activism," its implications, and the social forces that alter the ways and means by which interest groups exert their influence in the public sphere, is a promising domain for research. Social scientists may find the preliminary explorations of the author worthy of closer investigation. For example, it would be interesting to assess the impact and effects of cooperation and conflict between different nation-states in the formation of transnational activist networks. It would also be profitable to apply, if not validate, the ideas offered in the book in studying the different forms of resistance, struggle, and coalition building in the Philippines.—**MANUEL VICTOR J. SAPITULA**, INSTRUCTOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN.

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Mike Davis. 2006. *Planet of Slums*. London: Verso. 228 pp.

The sporadic, ubiquitous existence of slums in cities highlights one of the many facets of poverty in human history. With an estimate of more than 200,000 slums on earth ranging in population from a few hundred to more than a million, this phenomenon is seen as "the most significant and politically explosive problem of the next century" (20). Although mostly confined in Third World countries, countries generally regarded as First World—the United States of America and

England—are nonetheless affected by this phenomenon. Informal settlements and urban poverty, as Mike Davis demonstrates, are global phenomena.

Planet of Slums is a bold attempt to chronicle the entrenchment of poor families in shantytowns and the development of the world's megacities as converging point of poverty, disease, human and food insecurity. It tries to define the structural base of our urban existence and puts meaning into the different perspectives of slum prevalence.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Each chapter talks of the synergistic relationship and interlinkage of urbanization, the state, corruption in government, and other contributing factors to our world's slum problem. More than just a technical analysis of the slum prevalence, the book also discusses the human side of this phenomenon. The book caricatures the living conditions of people in slum areas and talks of a "slum ecology" that any person given a chance would not want to be subjected into. Further, the book gives names and faces to the discourse of urban poverty, compelling us as readers to reexamine our personal or commonly held notions of hardship, struggle, and poverty.

The first chapter presents the swelling urban poverty, a global phenomenon that has developed together with the sprawl of cities and population growth. Urbanization has led to the migration of rural-based workers to urban centers, where these migrants get to be garbage collectors, beggars, and, ultimately, informal settlers. In all aspects of their lives, they are portrayed herein as victims of contingencies brought about by the hardships of an unequal society. The book continues to confirm the age-old myth of the city that promises greener pastures but in reality brings hostility to the lives of its inhabitants.

The theme of state abandonment is argued as one of the contributing factors in slum prevalence, even in Third World countries that are committed to socialism. Davis unleashes an almost blatant exposition of the state's inability to counter the rising number of informal settlers that has already become a trend. As the author puts it, "In the rest of the Third World, the idea of an interventionist state strongly committed to social housing and job development seems either a hallucination or a bad joke because the governments long ago abdicated any serious effort to combat slums and redress urban migration" (62). The author extends this argument by showing that state abandonment is not just centered on socialized housing. In the case of Nairobi, the state does not even provide access to clean water, schools, roads, and hospitals.

One of the unique features of this book is the framing of the analysis of slums in a humanistic perspective. In an extensive examination of the lives of people in slums, the reader is engaged in the grounded realities of slum ecology. Natural and man-made hazards pervade: most of the time, the areas where slums are built used to be an industrial waste dumpsite, swampland, floodplain, volcano slope, or a combination of these. The lack of access to basic human needs in slum areas aggravates the situation. In its extreme form, as in the case of India, “480,000 families in 110 slum settlements had access to only 160 toilet seats and 110 mobile vans” (140). Women are most vulnerable to such threats. In order to relieve themselves, they have to wait for dawn or dusk to avoid harassment from other members of society. Reconciling all the data regarding these hazards, both natural and man-made, the author opens up the grim predicament of diseases and epidemics in the years to come. The unsanitary, subsistent conditions in today’s mega slums make these places incubators of accidents and diseases waiting to happen. And with more than one billion people in today’s mega slums, the prospects of a humane future seem unrealizable.

The author’s analysis of the central roles of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other financial institutions brings us to the effects of structural adjustment programs to address the slum problem. Instead of a “top-down structural reform,” the World Bank and the IMF advocate “slum improvement” through privatized means. The author contends that the World Bank’s call for privatization ironically exacerbates the proliferation of urban poor households.

The author further portrays a grim picture of the urban poor, with the availability of land and access to it becoming increasingly restricted. Private companies and developers are the main problem: they assemble and develop these lands mostly for the benefit of those who can afford their service. The displacement of people and lack of access to new urban settlements turn these dwellers into nomads whose luck is to be absorbed by another slum community.

The subsistence lifestyle of slum dwellers all over the world, termed “surplus humanity” by the author, creates new dimensions to their social existence. An informal economy emerges out of necessity in these areas, including prostitution, organ market, and child labor. In the case of India, at least one in every family, a woman member of the household, had sold their kidneys to raise money to support themselves and their children. The author takes this slice of everyday life as the Western attempt to annihilate people they deem as barriers to

development. According to the author, the continuous marginalization of the poor has set the battleground for an unending cycle of ideological clash. So long as ideologies born out of these communities continue to be suppressed, society's stability will continue to be threatened.

Despite such sympathetic excursion into the plight of the informal settlers, readers are assured that objectivity is maintained throughout the book. What makes this an engaging read is the eloquent rendering of claims and assertions that are firmly grounded on empirical data. The multidimensional systematic inquiry and well-explained technical terms make the book accessible for a general readership.

The book promises a heightened awareness that ours is indeed a "planet of slums." Ultimately, what Davis asks of us is to harness this awareness and look to ways of transforming it into positive action.—

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Ronald Bruce St John. 2006. *Revolution, Reform and Regionalism in Southeast Asia: Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon. 281 pp.

No other subregion in Southeast Asia came as "prepared" for the age of regional integration as the three former French colonies in the mainland. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were once constituted as "French Indochina" not by their own populations' volition, but as the consequence of a European power's anxiety to avoid being left out of the nineteenth century race for overseas conquest. Locked into a geopolitical construct that made sense only insofar as the Mekong waterway that irrigated all three territories imperiously placed under the French flag, the trio found themselves committed to each other—for better or for worse—in what might charitably be called an arranged marriage, and what this book calls "fiction." But the French-Indochinese arrangement did not survive the tumultuous twentieth century; all three constituent members went on to become communist states, a development that went against the grain of Southeast Asian history and