MAY 18 – JUNE 7, 2011

THE INDYPENDENT

MAY 24
7:15pm • Free
Screening: HIGH FEAKS, LOW COAL.
Join local group New York Loves Mountains for an evening of film, dis-

MAY 25
6:30pm – 10$ – Sugg.
PANEL: A FORUM ON FRACKING.
Spend the evening learning more about the con-

THU MAY 26
10am-4pm • Free
FUNDRAISER: FREEDOM HALL.
FABULOUS SPRING RUMMAGE SALE.
Clean out your closets and help support the rummage sale to

SAT MAY 28
10am-4pm • Free
FUNDRAISER: VEGAN CHICKEN LADY.
BINGO NIGHT.
Come to the Metropolitan Community Church of New York to eat a
delicious vegan meal, play some bingo and raise money for MCHNY’s various
community charities including the Homeless Youth Services Sylva’s Place and
the Sylvia Rivers Food Pantry.
MCHNY Art Gallery, 446 W 30th St.
212-629-7440 • mchny.org

JUNE 3–12
$9/$10
FESTIVAL: 2011 BROOKLYN FILM
FESTIVAL.
More than 100 films will premiere this year at the Brooklyn Film
Festival, whose mission is to bring the power of independent filmmaking to
allover New York City.
The films will tackle issues ranging from corporate
takeovers and wars to abusive relationships and the role of
government in modern society. Films will be screened at both Brooklyn
His Cinemas (20 Henry St., Brooklyn) and
indecisive Screen (289 Kent Ave, Brooklyn).
718-388-4036 • brooklynfilmfestival.org

FRI JUNE 3
7:30pm – 8:30
FUNDRAISER: VEGAN CHICKEN LADY.
BINGO NIGHT.
Come to the Metropolitan Community Church of New York to eat a
delicious vegan meal, play some bingo and raise money for MCHNY’s various
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MAY – JUNE
THE BREATHE FORUM
BUILDING A MOVEMENT THAT MOVES
451 West street (btwn Bank and Beekman)

THU JUNE 9
3pm • Free
FILM: BATTLE FOR BROOKLYN.
Enjoy documentary cinema in the great out-
doors with Rooftop Films, a Brooklyn-
based film program screening movies throughout the summer.
Battle for Brooklyn follows the struggles of Bruc-
lyn community members fighting the massive development project, Atlantic
Yards, and the company behind it, Forest
City Ratner. This screening is in partner-
ship with the Brooklyn Film Festival.
Fort Greene Park
718-472-7302 • rooftopfilms.com

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE OUR WEEKLY CALENDAR VIA EMAIL AT INDYPENDENT.ORG.

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Thanks, Ryan!

More than eight years and 130 issues later, Ryan Dunsmuir is stepping down as one of The Independent’s key designers. Dunsmuir first joined the newspaper in 2003 after previously doing design work for newspapers in California. Since then, The Independent has won six awards from the New York Community Media Alliance for outstanding design, all in 1st or 2nd place.

“When I went to the first Indy meeting, I was impressed with how smart everyone was, and the quality of the content, but it was also pretty obvious the paper could use a little design love,” Dunsmuir says.

Arun Gupta, who currently serves as the newspaper’s General Manager and is one of the newspaper’s founding editors, notes Dunsmuir’s design skills and work ethic.

“Ryan was a terrific designer as evidenced by her many awards, a pleasure to work with and an incredibly hard worker. She would often stay up all night, helping put an issue of The Independent to bed, and then, without going to bed herself, put in a full day at her regular job,” Gupta says.

Another Independent designer, Anna Gold, took a break from design work in December 2010, and she and Sam Alcoff welcomed a new addition to their family, Arthur Lawrence Bayano Alcoff, in early February.

Music for Healing

Steven Arnerich and Mikael Tarkela, a recent addition to the design team, are currently the force behind designing each issue of the newspaper. Arnerich, who has been doing design work with The Independent for the past four years, greatly enjoyed working with Dunsmuir.

“She worked with more designers than I can count—Ryan is that rare one that always has a clear and direct expression; her solutions rest on deep aesthetic principle. And she is such a good soul,” Arnerich says.

John Tarleton, who worked as the General Coordinator at The Independent from 2001 to 2009, credits Dunsmuir’s patience with getting the staff through many stressful closing nights.

“Ryan’s fortitude and her grace under pressure always kept us on track. Her skills as a designer made the paper beautiful,” Tarleton says.

While Dunsmuir looks forward to having more time to focus on her own work, she will always remember her time at The Indy-pendent and her grace under pressure always kept us on track. Her skills as a designer made the paper beautiful,” Tarleton says.

Thanks, Ryan!
New Yorkers Unite to Fight the Rich

By John Tarleton

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has carried out $5.4 billion in budget cuts since the economic crisis hit in 2008. The victims of our mayor’s bean counting have been among the city’s most vulnerable residents: homebound seniors, children at risk of being abused or neglected, summer job participants, immigrants taking English classes.

When Bloomberg proposes his budget cuts, public sector unions, community-based organizations and advocacy groups are typically drawn into a zero-sum game in which each group lobbies its City Council allies to protect its interests from cuts when a final budget deal is struck with the mayor. Holding a press conference on the steps of City Hall or a noisy rally on the sidewalk just outside of City Hall is an almost obligatory ritual.

On May 12, several unions and scores of community-based organizations and advocacy groups broke with the usual script. In doing so, they provided a tantalizing glimpse into the possibilities for building a broad-based resistance movement against the mayor’s drive to impose austerity on ordinary New Yorkers.

Facing another, deeper round of budget cuts in the mayor’s proposed budget (see sidebar), the coalition mobilized 20,000 demonstrators who poured into the financial district in a swirly, carnivalesque protest that targeted Wall Street and the nation’s six biggest banks. Three years after crashing the economy, the Big 6 (Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, Bank of America and Wells Fargo) are taking in combined profits of over $199 million per day.

“Give the money back, and create some decent fucking jobs,” said Jacob Macall, 29, of Astoria, Queens. “How the fuck are people supposed to live off of $9 an hour or $7 an hour in a city that is this expensive?”

The May 12 mobilization was the largest and most militant to date in a growing series of actions (see timeline) in New York against economic policies that redistribute wealth upward to the super-rich while punishing the poor and working classes. Among the protesteis’ demands was that Bloomberg support a campaign to have New York state renew a tax surcharge on the top 3 percent of income earners, which would bring hundreds of millions of dollars into city coffers.

The protest was composed of eight feeder marches organized around themes such as education, housing, human services, jobs and immigration. The marches began at various locations in Lower Manhattan, converging at Wall and Water Streets at the bottom of the financial district. Seven of the eight marches did not have permits though the largest one — led by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) — did. For New Yorkers who have chafed for years at being herded into protest pens by the NYPD, the sense of liberation was palpable.

“It was great,” said Marcia Newfield, an adjunct lecturer at the Borough of Manhattan Community College. “You would be marching down one street in the financial district, turn a corner and be joined by another march. You could feel the crowd getting larger and the solidarity growing stronger.”

“When you pen people in, you confine and you squash their militancy. And what you need to do is the opposite,” said Mark Torres, a public school teacher and parent activist from Harlem. “You’ve got to unleash . . . people’s creativity and unleash the power for us to take the streets and make a change in the city.”

The demonstration featured open-air teach-ins about the economy, stilt walkers and stirring musical scores from the Rude Mechanical Orchestra marching band. A team of artists produced hundreds of colorful handmade flags, banners and placards. For many, it was their first encounter with the freewheeling style of mass protest that last came to prominence at the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) demonstrations and became a signature of the alter-globalization movement that flourished briefly a decade ago. This escalation in tactics was not a coincidence as two of the

RESISTING AUSTERITY

Feb. 26: 2,000 union members rally at City Hall Park in support of Wisconsin State Capital occupation.

March 23: 33 faculty, staff and students from the City University of New York make headlines across the state after they are arrested for blocking the entrance to Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s office in the State Capitol.

March 30–31: More than 500 protesters from several NYC community groups occupy the State Capitol in Albany while legislators rush behind locked doors to pass a budget that mandates billions in cuts for vital social programs while allowing the millionaire’s tax, a surcharge on high-income earners to expire.

April 9: 10,000 union members hold a “We Are One” rally in Times Square in support of worker rights. On the same day, several thousand antiwar protesters gather in Union Square and connect the cost of fighting three wars in the Middle East to budget cuts at home.

May 1: Thousands of immigrants and union members rally and march in Manhattan for worker and immigrant rights.

May 12: 20,000 people march on Wall Street.

WIELDING THE BUDGET AXE

Mayor Bloomberg unveiled his proposed executive budget on May 6. The measures he called for include:

* Eliminating 6,166 teacher positions; more than 4,100 by layoffs and another 2,000 through attrition.
* Closing 20 fire companies and four swimming pools.
* $40 million in cuts for libraries; critics say branches would only be able to open three days per week.
* $63.1 million in cuts for CUNY community colleges.
* A 30 percent cut in the Department of Aging’s funds to provide seniors with services such as meal delivery and at-home care.
* Reducing the daily ration of bread for city inmates.

Source: Office of the Mayor

BY THE NUMBERS

Percentage of Income Earned by the Top 1%

U.S. (1976): 9%
NY State (2007): 35%
NY City (2007): 44%

Sources: Fiscal Policy Institute, State

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: David Solnit (second from right), co-founder of Art & Revolution, consults with local artists he teamed up with to produce hundreds of handmade visuals for the May 12 demonstration. (Top) A woman dances at the march. May 12: 20,000 people march on Wall Street.
main Seattle WTO organizers, Lisa Fithian and David Solnit, were brought in by unions to help catalyze the event.

So, now what?

Inspired in part by recent uprisings in Wisconsin, Egypt and Tunisia, the May 12 action suggested new possibilities for building massive opposition to Bloomberg’s austerity agenda. But, will it turn out to be a one-off event? Or is May 12 something that its organizers will build on? And if so, to what end?

Another coalition, New Yorkers Against the Budget Cuts (NYABC), which led a smaller march on Wall Street on March 24, is calling for a mobilization that will be held at City Hall on either June 25 or June 26, days before the July 1 deadline for concluding a budget. NYABC also plans to hold community forums in June in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn as a part of a citywide outreach effort.

“We want to be in a position to sway the vote or stop it,” said Yotam Marom of the Organization for a Free Society, one of a number of small left groups that make up NYABC. “It’s going to be a real showdown. We want to have a critical mass of people from different backgrounds be strong enough to say, ‘We’re not leaving until this budget is dead.’”

Assuming the May 12 coalition remains intact — the UFT has a long history of opportunism and could always cut a separate deal with the mayor — there’s no indication yet that the member groups are planning to step out of well-worn grooves. Staging a spirited fightback against Bloomberg’s budget cuts or engaging in targeted corporate campaigns against bad actors such as JPMorgan Chase and Walmart is one thing. Building a broad-based, truly independent mass movement that breaks with both the Democrats and the Republicans and presses fundamental demands about how power is exercised in New York and in whose interest is quite another.

For now, said Marom, who also has organized with the May 12 coalition, the overriding priority is to stop Bloomberg’s budget cuts and the damage they could do to communities across the city. However, he noted, building the grassroots power to win the budget battle could have longer-term benefits as well.

“If we can win on this budget, we can be in a position in the future to make demands for things we haven’t had yet . . . But if we lose on the budget, then we’re in the same place.”

Jaisal Noor contributed to this report. For more information, see onmay12.org and nocutsny.wordpress.com.

FIVE WAYS TO AVOID BUDGET CUTS

- Restore the state’s millionaire’s tax and hundreds of millions of dollars would flow into city coffers.
- Tap into the city’s projected $3.2 billion surplus
- End three property tax exemption programs that cost the city $2 billion a year. Two of these exemptions are up for renewal in Albany this year.
- Reduce police overtime, currently clocking in at $538 million a year, or almost 12 percent of the NYPD’s 2011 budget.
- Reduce expenses in the central office of the Department of Education, which is slated to add 218 positions and spend more than $75 million on contracts for computer services and administrative personnel services.

Sources: Strong Economy For All, Independent Budget Office

GO WHERE THE MONEY IS: (Above) Scores of community groups joined the demonstration in the financial district.

NET LOSSES: (Top Left) Police use orange netting to push back protesters who try to occupy the intersection at Wall and Water Streets.
**Youth in Revolt**

*By Costas Panayotakis*

One great irony of the youth-led revolt in the Arab world is that the two shining successes, Tunisia and Egypt, were previously sterile examples of neoliberal policy. Egypt had made the World Bank’s top 10 “Reformers” list for four of the last five years. IMF Director (and former investment banker) Dominique Strauss-Kahn praised Tunisia in 2008 as a “good example for emerging countries.”

But the inability of an economic model based on privatization, deregulation and liberalization of capital to provide for youth and the population in general has only been magnified by the global economic crisis. Neoliberalism thus created the very agents of social revolution that toppled Western-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt.

So while the Arab Spring of peaceful mass protests has given way to a bloody summer, youth protest is not likely to subside any time soon or remain confined to the Arab world. That’s because capital liberalization today cannot provide young people with the kind of bright future they want and deserve. Adding to the pain is the lack of even a semblance of democratic institutions in most countries. According to the International Labor Organization, official unemployment rates of the world hovers around 20 percent with “young people... nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.” In Tunisia, 46 percent of college degree holders lack jobs in their field. In Egypt, the Ministry of Investment was reduced to advertising to foreign capital the availability of 325,000 university graduates who enter the job market every year. In Nigeria, the youth unemployment rate is estimated at 49 percent, leading one journalist there to call it “a time bomb waiting to explode.” In Italy, the unemployment rate among youth is 28 percent, in France 25 percent and in Spain 40 percent. In the United States, the official unemployment rate among youth aged 16 to 24 is 19 percent, but the real rate is at least 25 percent.

Having caused widespread youth unemployment, neoliberalism’s architects then use it as a pretext for “reforms” that gut labor protections and rights, ensuring that young people who do find some work will be faced with intensified exploitation. The New York Times offers the case of Southern Europe, where businesses “are loath to hire new workers on a fulltime basis, so young people are increasingly offered unpaid or low-paying internships, traineeships or temporary contracts that do not offer the same benefits and protections.”

Many unemployed and underemployed youth are highly educated, and not only in Arab countries and Southern Europe, where the most highly educated generation in the history of the Mediterranean hits one of its worst job markets,” according to the Times. Even in dynamic capitalist economies like China, the number of college graduates has been growing much faster than the labor market can absorb them. With numbers of young people feeling left out of their own future, youth protest is on the rise in Europe and the United States. Reporter Peter Coy writes in BusinessWeek that the specter of such protest haunted the 2011 World Economic Forum. The conference halls were filled with “can-do talk about improving employment opportunities for the young,” but Coy soberly admits, “There’s no youth unemployment may not be fixable.”

Another factor in youth protest in the West, beyond the systemic lack of work, is the question of access to and quality of higher education. Coy writes, “In the most developed nations, the job market has split between high-paying jobs that many workers could do in the future for and low-paying jobs that they can’t live on.” More funding and opportunities for higher education might be the government’s priority, but unemployment among young workers and the population in general has only been magnified by the global economic crisis. Neoliberalism thus created the very agents of social revolution that toppled Western-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt.

Across Europe free higher education is becoming a thing of the past even as student enrollment has surged in the last decade. Last December, Conservatives in England tripled the cap on tuition, while Italy’s right-wing Berlusconi government cut $452 million from the university system, which students protested by occupying the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Colosseum in Rome. Many other European countries are initiating the same process of gradual privatization that has been unfolding in the United States for decades.

The creeping privatization of higher education in the United States has led to record student loan debt levels of $830 billion, exceeding total credit card debt. Writing at CommonDreams.org, researchers Alan Nasser and Kelly Norman note the debt is “growing at the rate of $90 billion a year” and only “40 percent of that debt is actively being repaid.” They warn student loan debt may become the next bubble to burst, further complicating any economic recovery.

As Americans lose their jobs and see their income decline, they find that public college is far too expensive even as they continue to increase tuition. Many students turn to for-profit colleges that often prey on students from minority backgrounds, charging high tuition rates for programs that often lead to low-paying jobs than those available to public college graduates. As a result, students attending for-profit colleges are far more likely to default on student loans than those attending public higher education institutions.

The first major protests against the economic crisis in the United States involved University of California students resisting austerity policies. In September 2009 students, faculty and staff organized walkouts and strikes at the 10-campus system after being hit with layoffs, cuts and 32 percent tuition hikes. In Wisconsin, it was a student walkout in Madison that sparked the massive worker resistance there and around the country. Remarkably, students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison were the first in a 66-day occupation against cuts and fee increases to the state system before being evicted May 7.

Dramatic battles have taken place in Pueeto Rico, where public university students protesting austerity shut down 10 of the 11 campuses last year. Right-wing Gov. Luis Fortuño upped the ante last December by imposing a tuition increase of more than 50 percent and sending in police to occupy the main campus in San Juan. This led to more occupations, a faculty and staff strike, and a public protest of more than 15,000 that led to the police withdrawal in February.

The solidarity among young people, students and workers has been central to growing movements in Europe, the Arab world and North America. Faced with a bleak future, young people the world over are debunking the myth that they are apathetic and politically immature.

Costas Panayotakis teaches Sociology at CUNY’s New York City College of Technology and is the author of *Remaking Scarcity: From Capitalist Inefficiency to Economic Democracy*, which will be published by Pluto Press in September 2011.

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**TIME BOMB:** High youth unemployment is a major factor in the current wave of protests and revolts across the world.

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READING: WILL POTTER, GREEN IS THE NEW RED

Join journalist and blogger Will Potter for a conversation about environmental and political issues. Bluestockings welcomes the Land is Life delegation from Indigenous communities about climate change.

**MON, JUNE 6, 7PM • FREE**

READING: LINDA STOUT, COLLECTIVE VISION: CONVERSATIONS WITH THE EARTH

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The Zapatistas Return Amid Failed Drug War

BY MICHAEL MCCAUGHAN

SAN CRISTOBAL, Mexico—This nation is caught in the grip of an escalating drug war that has cost 40,000 lives in the past five years. The daily body count varies but is usually measured in the dozens. Methods of extermination range from decapitation and mutilation to asphyxiation and a bullet in the head. Most Mexicans have become numb to the extreme cruelty and hope they don't get swept up in the river of blood.

Once in a while, however, a single incident can trigger a powerful reaction. Juan Francisco Sicilia was one of seven friends bound and murdered on March 28 in southeast Mexico, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) answered the call and announced their plan to march into San Cristobal de las Casas on May 7, the town where the Zapatistas first appeared in January 1994. It has been five years since the Zapatistas last mobilized in this manner, and many people remember the movement as a noble insurrection that inspired millions but ultimately fizzled out, victim of a bitter debate over the pitfalls and possibilities of electoral politics.

The return of the Zapatistas to San Cristobal thus seemed like a reckoning. Could the Zapatistas match the years when they could gather more than 10,000 masked rebels to occupy the city, watched by nervous local elite who pulled the shutters down and could gather more than 10,000 masked rebels to occupy the city, watched by nervous local elite who pulled the shutters down and held their breath till the individual leading a march of the indignant andOURSE as gifts and money were left behind.

When May 7 arrived, San Cristobal was drenched in warm sunshine and an air of expectancy filled the main square where TV crews jostled for position in front of an improvised stage. The Zapatistas arrived in formation, sharply with the impotent in Mexico City, contrasted like a march of the indignant and impotent in Mexico City, contrasted sharply with Zapatismo. The rebels moved as one, arriving and leaving in formation, sharing transport and territory. This cohesion is amplified by the shared “means of production,” the milpa or cornfield that forms the basis for survival across regional and linguistic boundaries.

continued on page 13
South Sudan and the African Experience

THE QUEST FOR A NEW POLITICAL ORDER

By Mahmood Mamdani

Editor’s Note: Named as one of the “Top 20 Public Intellectuals” by both Foreign Policy (U.S.) and Prospect (UK) magazines in 2010. Mahmood Mamdani writes on the intersection between politics and culture, colonialism, the colonization of Africa, the Cold War and the African Diaspora, and the history and theory of human rights.

In this article, focusing on a talk at Uganda’s Makerere University in March, Professor Mamdani explores many of the key issues in Africa’s current political scene and identifies the struggle for self-determination as a key driver for the future of the continent.

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WHY?

Part of the answer lies in the orientation of the political leadership, especially after the death of Garang. The SPLA was a movement with a strong leader — the weaker the organization, the more difference the death of one individual makes. The history of liberation movements in this region testifies to this fact. It should also remind us that it is not unusual for strong leaders to be eliminated towards the close of an armed struggle. Remember the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the killing of Josiah Tongogara in 1979 on the eve of its victory; The African National Congress (ANC) and the SPLA included key cadre from the Arab population, such as Joe Slovo and Ronnie Kasrill. Similarly, the SPLA included key cadre from the Arab population like Mansour Khaled and Yassir Arman. The difference between them is also important: Whereas the line that called for unity, for a non-racial South Africa, won in the ANC, the line that called for a New Sudan was defeated in the SPLA.

In both cases the forces representing unity and those representing separation contended each other throughout the history of the struggles. In South Africa this was the difference between the ANC and the Pan-African Congress of Azania. In the case of South Sudan, the two lines were represented by the SPLA and Anya Nya El, a successor to a rebel group from Sudan’s first civil war. The first called for a New Sudan, the latter for an independent South Sudan.

The first letter, S, in SPLA does not stand for South Sudan, but for Sudan. The second letter, P, stands for the people of Sudan, not peoples of Sudan. It is singular, not plural, as in many peoples inside one Sudan. The SPLA was founded as a nationalist project, an alternative to other kinds of nationalism, to Arabism, to Islamism, but also to a separate South Sudan nationalism. The SPLA was a project to reform the state, not to create a new state.

Garang’s speech at Koka Dam in 1986 was the most explicit statement of why the future of the South and the North lay together, why political salvation lay not in the formation of a new state but in the reform of the existing state.

Today, the line calling for independence has emerged triumphant. How did we get to this point?

Part of the answer lies in the nature of political leadership. Another part of the answer lies in ongoing political developments. The key development was the experience of power-sharing.

The first power-sharing agreement in Sudan was forged in 1972 as a result of the Addis Ababa Agreement. It lasted 10 years and broke down when it was no longer convenient for the regime in the North. It also collapsed because the agreement had little popular support in the North. Why? Because the 1972 agreement reformed the state in the South but not in the North.

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement was built on lessons of the 1972 accord. The key lesson was that power-sharing had been too narrow. As a result, the CPA called for a broader sharing of powers ranging from political power to wealth to arms. Still, it remained a sharing of power between elites, between two ruling groups, the National Congress Party in the North and the SPLA. It left out the opposition in both the North and the South. It was power-sharing without democratization.

DEMOCRATIZATION AND VIOLENCE

What would democratization mean in the present context? Is there a link between democratization and violence? If so, what is that link?

I want to begin with two observations, one on political order, and the other on political violence. The first has to do with the link between organization of the state and maintenance of civil peace in a civil-war situation.

Think of Uganda, 1986, which had just come out of a civil war. The terrain was marked by multiple armed militias, the best known being the Uganda Freedom Movement and the Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda. The Ugandan solution to this problem was known as the broad base. Rival militias were invited to join the new political order, but on two conditions: first you could keep your political objectives, whether monarchist or militarist, provided you gave up your arms; second, you could have a share in political power — a geçme to reflekti rot — provided you gave up control over your militia.

South Sudan, too, is attempting to create a broad base. But in South Sudan, different members of the broad base have kept not only their arms but also command over their respective militias. Every important political leader in the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) has his own militia, so that one has to ask: What happens if a leader loses his position within the SPLM or loses an election? The obvious answer is that commander leaves with his militia.

Take the example of Gen. George Athor, who rebelled after losing the April 2010 election for governor of Jonglei state. He led his militia into rebellion — attacking Malakal in the oil-producing state of Upper Nile. Gen. Athor had contested the election as an independent candidate. But what is to prevent a general who contests as an SPLM candidate and loses the election from withdrawing with his militia?

Most discussion on the question of violence in South Sudan today focuses on the specter of North-South violence. There is hardly any discussion on violence within the South. Even when internal violence in the South is discussed, it is seen as a consequence of North-South tensions.

We need to look at both internal and external violence, violence within state boundaries and violence between states. Political violence in African states is not between states, but within states. The exception is where one state was created from within the womb of another — like Eritrea out of Ethiopia — or where one political class was nurtured in the womb of another, like the relationship between the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, the Eritrean and Ethiopian armed movements, or the Rwandan Patriotic Army in Rwanda and the National Resistance Army in Uganda.

The first kind of violence abound in post-colonial Africa, such as in the Rift Valley in Kenya, Darfur, the Ivory Coast and Eastern Congo. It is common to refer to all types of internal violence as “ethnic violence.”

All these cases have one thing in common. All have reformed the central state by introducing elections to a multi-party system. But elections seem to lead to violence rather than stability. Why? One clue is another similarity between these cases of internal violence. None has managed to reform the local state — the local authority — the District Authority that the British used to call Native Authority.

As a form of power, the Native Authority is of colonial origin. Colonialism spread a fiction: that Africans have a herd mentality
and tend to stay in one place, so Africans have a territorial identity. This was the colonialists' justification for administering every colony as a patchwork of tribal homelands.

**BLOOD IDENTITY**

In actual fact, colonial administrations created homelands and Native Authorities. My research suggests that colonialism began with a program of ethnic cleansing. Take the case of Buganda, Uganda's south-central region, where the national capital Kampala is located. All the Catholics were moved from Buganda to Masaka. Meanwhile, Mongo, located within Kampala, was considered a Protestant homeland. Administrative counties were designated as Protestant or Catholic, and in a few cases, Muslim. The tribe or region of the chief designated the nature of the homeland it administered. The ethnic cleansing in Buganda was religious, it was tribal elsewhere.

The Native Authority made an administrative distinction between those who were born or lived in the administrative area and those who were descended from its so-called original inhabitants. The distinction, in today's political language, was between natives and bafuruki (immigrants). The system privileged natives over all others.

The colonial tribe was not the same as a pre-colonial ethnic group. The pre-colonial ethnic group was not an administrative but a cultural group. You could become a Buganda or a Munyankole or a Langi or a Dinka in the pre-colonial period. But you could not change your tribe officially in the colonial administration. Colonialism transformed tribe from a cultural identity to an administrative identity that claims to be based on descent, not just culture. It became a blood identity. Tribe became a sub-set of a Dinka in the pre-colonial period. But you could not change your tribe officially in the colonial administration. Colonialism transformed tribe from a cultural identity to an administrative identity that claims to be based on descent, not just culture. It became a blood identity. Tribe became a sub-set of.

Wherever the colonial notion of Native Authority was imposed, authorities there define the population on the basis of descent, not residence.

**RACE AND TRIBE**

Colonialism was based on two sets of discriminations: one based on race, the other on tribe. The former was not universal. Only in a few areas were all peoples classified as natives in urban areas. Tribe divided natives from bafuruki in the rural areas, inside each tribal homeland. The difference was that whereas natives in urban areas were discriminated against racially, natives in the tribal homelands were privileged.

This administrative structure inevitably generated inter-tribal conflicts. To begin with, every administrative area is multi-ethnic, yet, in every multi-ethnic area official administration discriminated against ethnic minorities, especially when it came to access to land and appointment of chiefs, that is, participation in local governance.

As the market system developed, more and more people migrated, either in search of jobs or land, and every administrative area was not necessarily inhabited by a single tribe. In general, a situation where the population was multi-ethnic and power mono-ethnic, the result was that more and more people were disenfranchised, whether not being native to the area or even if they were born in the area. Ethnic conflict was the inevitable outcome.

Africa is littered with examples of this kind of conflict. It is the dynamic that gives ongoing civil wars around the continent such as in Darfur.

Will South Sudan be an exception? Will South Sudan create a new kind of state, or will it reproduce a reformed colonial state? One indication can be found in the period before CPA was signed in 2005. Before the signing, there were liberated areas, while afterwards the whole of South Sudan became a liberated area. The fact is South Sudan became independent six years ago, in 2005.

Compare liberated SPLA-held areas in Sudan with Sudanese government-held areas, also in South Sudan before 2005. The initial trends are not encouraging. Structures of power in both areas are the same. Both areas are ruled by administrative chiefs who implement customary law as defined in the colonial period, which systematically privileges natives over bafuruki, men over women, and old over young. From this point of view, there is no difference between how local power is organized in the North and in the South. Because the local power discriminates actively and legally between different kinds of citizens of South Sudan, it is bound to generate tensions and conflict over time.

**NORTH-SOUTH TENSIONS**

The second type of violence, that between states, is specific to cases like Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Uganda and Rwanda. Will South Sudan and North Sudan be an exception?

This depends on the sources of North-South tensions. First, there are the border states that lie within the North or the South but which have populations that historically came from both. This is the case in Blue Nile, Nuba Mountains and Southern Korofin. The border states were politically the most receptive to Garang's call for a New Sudan. The border states also felt betrayed by the decision to create an independent South Sudan. At the same time, the political class in the border states is exposed to retaliation from the Northern political elite, one reason why it may turn to the SPLA for protection.

The second source of tension is the population of internally displaced persons (IDPs): the population of refugees from the southern war who lived in the North. Has the war still to continue in the North? We do not know, but at the low end it is estimated at hundreds of thousands of people. Are they citizens of where they live, Sudan, or of the new state in which they have historically resided, South Sudan? Like Eritreans in Ethiopia, they will most likely be the victims of a failure to think through the citizenship question.

The third source of tension is in the area of Abeyi, along the North-South border, where the Misseriya of Darfur and the Ngok Dinka have shared livelihoods and political struggles for more than a thousand years. Historically, African societies had no fixed borders; the borders were porous, flexible and mobile. But the new borders are fixed and rigid; you either belong or you do not. You cannot belong to both sides of the border. Will the new political arrangement for Abeyi reflect this reality? In Nyala and the Ngok Dinka against one another?

Should the populations of border regions, pastoralists who cross the North-South border in search of better grazing, or during the rainy season, the IDPs who have settled in their new homes — should they have dual citizenship?

In sum, then, there are two major sources of political violence after independence. First, there is possible violence between North and South, which has three likely origins: populatons with roots on both sides of the new border, IDPs, and peasants and pastoralists with shared livelihoods.

The second possible source of violence is within the state. It arises from the persistence of the Native Authority as the form of local power that turns cultural difference into a source of political and legal discrimination.

The solution for the first problem is dual nationality for border and migrant populations in the near future, which could possibly lead to a confederation in the distant future.

The solution for the second problem is to reform the Native Authority. If South Sudan is organized as a federation, how will citizenship be defined in each state in the federation: as ethnic or territorial? A territorial federation gives equal rights to all citizens who live within a state, whereas an ethnic federation distinguishes legally and politically between different kinds of residents, depending on their ethnic origin.

The basic question that faces South Sudan is not very different from the one that faces most African countries. Will South Sudan learn from the African experience — of ongoing civil war and ethnic conflict — and rethink political citizenship and the political state in order to create a new political order?

The future of South Sudan and its people rides on the answer to this question.

Mahmood Mamdani is the director of the Makere Institute of Social Research in Kampala, Uganda, and Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at Columbia University. He is the author of Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror.

**REFERENCE GUIDE**

By Arun Gupta

Chris Hani – A charismatic leader of the African National Congress, Hani was also commissioner of its military wing and took over as head of the South African Communist Party in 1981 from Joe Slovo. He was popular among youth in the townships, building a large base for the SACP, and was considered the leading candidate to succeed a Nelson Mandela presidency, but was assassinated by an extremist close to the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Resistance Movement in April 1993.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement – A series of agreements reached from 2002 to 2005 between the government of Sudan and the SPLA/M, which established accords for a cease-fire, power- and wealth-sharing, resolutions of various conflicts and the right of the people of South Sudan for self-determination.

Derg – A committee of security services that was founded in 1974, deposing Emperor Haile Selassie the same year. It assumed control of Ethiopia by 1977 with Mengistu Haile Mariam as the undisputed leader.

Dinka and the Spirit of the Deng – The Dinka are a Nilotic people who traverse the North-South divide. Their traditional economy is based on cattle herding and millet farming. The Deng is an important entity in the Dinka religion, responsible for rain and fertility.

Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) – Founded in 1989 as an umbrella group for various national fronts, it is currently the ruling coalition in Ethiopia.

Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) – Founded in the early 1970s, the EPLF was by the 1980s the main guerrilla organization fighting the Soviet-backed Ethiopian state. It was allied with similar movements such as the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), formed in 1975, which overthrew the Ethiopian state in May 1991. Under U.N. supervision, a referendum was held in 1993, creating the state of Eritrea. The next year the new government declared a party, the Peo- ple's Front for Democracy and Justice, which has been Eritrea's sole party since then.

John Garang – As a Sudanese military officer, Garang was sent to quell a mutiny by hundreds of soldiers in Southern Sudan and instead encouraged the uprising, founding in the process the Sudan People's Liberation Army in 1983. In the 1980s Garang had been involved in the Southern Anya Nya insurgency. He earned a Ph.D. in agricultural economics at Iowa State University and received officer's training at Fort Benning, Georgia. He signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Sudanese government in January 2005. Garang returned to Khartoum in July as a vice president but died three weeks later in a helicopter crash.

Josiah Tongogara – Known as Zimbabwe's Che Guevara for his magnetic presence, Tongogara led the main guerilla army in the liberation struggle. He was also a central figure at the Lancaster House Conference that led to Zimbabwe's independence. He died in a car accident in Mozambique days after the peace deal was signed in December 1979.

Koka Dam Speech – John Garang delivered a speech at the Koka Dam peace talks in Ethiopia in 1986, saying the SPLA/M view is that “both Arabism and Islam, among others, are components inextricably woven into the fabric of Sudan's unique and singular identity.”

The Lindi (a松acco) of South Africa as a non-racial political identity and that Arab is a cultural assertion and is present all over Sudan.

Mahdiyya/Mohamed Abdulla – In Shi'ism the Mahdi is an important figure, akin to a Christian Messiah. In 1881, Mohammed Ahmed-Ibn-Seyyid Abdulla declared himself the Mahdi and led a successful uprising against the British-Ottoman rule over Sudan, briefly establishing the first modern state.

Robert Mugabe – Secretary general of the Zimbabwe African National Union since the 1960s, Mugabe has headed the government in one position or another since being elected Prime Minister of the new capital of Harare in December 1979, supportive crowds following the Lancaster House Agreement.

SPLM/A – The Sudan People's Liberation Army was founded in 1983 and quickly established the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the political wing. John Garang was elected to head both in 1983.
In Canada the Center No Longer Holds

By Judy Rebick

TORONTO, Canada—By winning a majority in the 308-seat House of Commons in Canada’s May 2 election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party seem to be consolidating a political shift to the right, but appearances can be deceiving. Harper now has 167 members of parliament to push the right’s agenda of militarization, attacks on public-sector unions, criminalization of poverty and dissent, ecologically devastating energy policy and the smothering of democratic space.

But the same election propelled the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP) into the position of Official Opposition for the first time ever. The NDP increased its parliamentary bloc from 37 to 102 seats, coming at the expense of the once-mighty Liberal Party (Canada’s equivalent of the Democratic Party), which dropped to 34 seats in the sovereignist Bloc Quebecois, which shrank from 49 seats to four. Both Harper and Jack Layton, leader of the social-democratic NDP, got the results they were aiming for. Harper got his majority and Layton replaced the Liberal Party as not just the opposition but possibly as the only federal alternative to the Harperites.

Because of Canada’s first-past-the-post system, a candidate can win with well under 50 percent if the vote is split multiple ways, Harper’s party won only 39.6 percent of the national vote. This means more than 60 percent of the electorate rejected the Conservatives, so there has not really been a shift to the right. The political and economic line was already in place since the late 1980s, when Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney — also opposed by some 60 percent of Canadians — replaced the free-trade pacts with the United States, culminating in the North American Free Trade Agreement that went into effect in 1994; public opinion on most critical issues, meanwhile, has remained progressive.

POLARIZED ELECTORATE

This election signified foremost a polarization: for and against Stephen Harper, whose vote increased by only 2 percent over the 2008 election. He faces a minority to the first majority Conservative government since 1988 by focusing on key ridings (as electoral districts are known) in Ontario provinces, where he could beat the Liberals. What no one expected was for Jack Layton to become the alternative to Harper.

Harper is a traditional Christian but social conservatism has never been his priority. Since he came to power in 2003 as head of the Conservatives, which unified the populist, socially conservative Reform Party with the fiscally conservative Progressive Conservative Party, Harper’s goal has been to fashion a new middle in Canadian politics further to the right.

To keep this alliance intact and maintain the support of the corporate media, Harper will be limited in his ability to restrict reproductive rights and LGBT rights. The Religious Right here is losing steam. A recent study by Environics, a top polling firm, found that 75 percent of Canadians support a woman’s right to abortion and 70 percent support gay marriage, both increases over the last 10 years. The vast majority support single-payer public healthcare and think between “good” and “bad” immigrants by criminalizing refugees and other marginal immigrants.

In the battle against Harper, many progressives called for “uniting the left” either by creating a Liberal-NDP coalition or by voting for whichever candidate could defeat the Conservative in a specific race. As Canada is a parliamentary democracy, indivisible parties choose their slate, including the prime minister, prior to the election and whichever party wins the most seats gets to form the government.

THE QUEBEC FACTOR

In Quebec, always more progressive than the rest of the country, voters swung behind the NDP as a way to defeat Harper. Voters were also fatigued with the sovereignty Bloc Quebecois, which has had a majority in Quebec since 1993, and increased the NDP caucus from one to 58 seats in the French-speaking province.

With polls showing broad support for the federal NDP, the Liberal Party and the Bloc Quebecois in New England Canada, counterposing the Conservatives to the NDP as an alternative to the Liberals and the NDP. Having an NDP caucus that is half Quebcois can bring together the concerns of progressives in Quebec and English Canada, which is a positive sign, as they often have little to do with each other.

An NDP opposition also means a greater voice for social movements in Parliament. Layton and most of his caucus are strong feminists and supporters of LGBT rights, and he has already called for a federal inquiry into the G20 repression. Layton has opposed the continued military intervention in Afghanistan but pledged during the election to maintain military spending, returning Canadian troops to more of a peacekeeping role.

NDP AS ALTERNATIVE

It remains to be seen whether the Liberal Party will rebuild itself or Layton will succeed in positioning the NDP as the alternative to the Conservatives. For progressives, what is most important is to ensure that the NDP, which has accepted neoliberal economic policies, is pushed to stand up for progressive issues. In power, the NDP has always moved to the right under the pressure of governing a capitalist state, but Jack Layton has moved in this direction to get into a position to take over the Liberals. However, what really changed was that while the NDP remains second, Jack Layton has clearly stated that he supports the aspirations of the people of Quebec to protect their language, culture and autonomy.

What the NDP does in parliament hinges on whether grassroots movements can pressure the party through a broad mobilization, which they did during the election. State funding is no longer available for movements that directly challenge the government. For too long, progressive social groups and unions have relied on old tactics and old methods, and mainly talked to each other. They need to link up with vulnerable sectors, especially communities of color in and around big cities like Toronto.

How trade unions will react to the Harper majority is an open question. Despite political attacks on public-sector unions, as well as deindustrialization, which has weakened private-sector unions and driven wages and benefits down, union militancy has not disappeared. Union density in Canada has declined in recent years, but it remains at 31.4 percent of the workforce, and even higher among public workers. Harper is likely to attack public-sector unions through privatization, perhaps beginning with the postal workers, one of the most militant unions in the country.

Building broader support for an environmental justice movement against the tar sands, mining and clear cutting is another component of the resistance to Harper’s government, which is trying to undermine national and international agreements to address global warming.

Finally, many of the youth who mobilized during the election organized a National Day of Action for Electoral Reform. They say the main reason for electoral reform is to prevent this type of election result from happening again.

Judy Rebick is a long-time feminist activist, journalist and writer living in Toronto.
Zapatistas

Continued from page 7

The 30 comandantes of the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee who formed a guard of honor on the stage melted into the crowd after the event, their faces unknown, their words attributable to no one. Nonetheless, the situation is fragile as the Zapatista communities struggle to survive and withstand the twin pressures of army and paramilitary aggression and state funds used to tempt rebels away from the Zapatista ranks.

Meanwhile, the next day in Mexico City, at least 70 victims of violence took turns to speak out, including Patricia Duarte, whose infant son was burned to death in a creche in Sonora along with 47 other children. In Mexico today, the state of insecurity covers everything from the village of San Juan Copala, Oaxaca, whose inhabitants were forced to flee en masse last year due to state-sponsored violence and the parents of those children who died in the nursery. San Juan Copala declared an autonomous zone, Zapatista-style, on Jan. 1, 2007 and was immediately besieged by paramilitaries with close links to the state governor. Unlike the Chiapan rebels they had no weapons to back up their claims.

Mexican President Felipe Calderon responded to the march with a televised address in which he equated the call for an end to state violence with surrender to the drug cartels. “We have might, right and the law on our side,” said a belligerent Calderon, insisting that the army would remain on the streets and at the center of his national security strategy.

Mere days after the march, Amnesty International released a report accusing Mexican security forces of torture, disappearances and murder, including charges of disguising innocent victims of army violence as members of drug gangs. Amnesty also criticized Mexico’s justice system for failing to charge a single member of the armed forces with criminal activity despite dozens of well-documented cases.

Juan Sicilia countered, “We are not trying to overthrow the government. We want to rebuild the social fabric of this nation.” Sicilia said that the Mexican people were paying an intolerable price for an unwinnable war that no one asked for, the course of which is determined by politicians “in upscale restaurants and offices paid for by us.” By the end of the three-day march Sicilia’s tone had hardened, recognizing perhaps that Calderon had no intention of paying him any heed. Sicilia called for civil disobedience should the government ignore their demands. “It takes balls to strike back, to refuse to pay taxes, and it will take all of us..."
The Last of the Bohemians

In April, a Lower East Side salon hosted a multimedia art opening titled “I feel so sorry for myself.” I wondered if the salon’s proprietor, Steve Cannon, wasn’t feeling that way himself right about now. Cannon, 76, has lived in the townhouse at 285 East 3rd Street for the past forty years, for half of which time he’s been running A Gathering of the Tribes, a salon and art gallery. Cannon, who is blind, found ning A Gathering of the Tribes, a salon and art gallery. Cannon, who is blind, found in March that the building was for sale when a visiting friend asked him about the realtor’s sign out front.

At the opening, which featured the paint-
ings and drawings of eight artists from the Netherlands, a hundred visitors wandered the apartment’s three main rooms while a band played in the garden. A silent gramophone sat prominently in one corner; a piano was on the opposite side of the room. Occasionally someone tapped out a tune on the piano while watching a video installation on the adjacent wall.

Visitors gather in the backyard of 285 E. 3rd St at the opening of “I feel so sorry for myself.”

Ofﬁcially, A Gathering of the Tribes is a for Tribes. Officially, A Gathering of the Tribes is a nonprofit arts organization that hosts poetry readings and musical performances, exhibits visual art and publishes a semiannual magazine. Unofﬁcially, it’s an incubator for emerging artists of all types.

Exavier Wardlaw, 63, a playwright and long-time friend of Cannon, describes it as the last of the Harlem Renaissance. Tribes’ goal is to be a space for young artists to gather and express themselves, and especially to promote cross-pollination between writers, visual, and performance artists. As a multi-cultural and multi-generational art space, “there’s no similar place in New York,” says Jeff Grunthauer, 29, who is a grant writer.

MOUNTING DEBTS

“My problem is, I can’t say no,” Cannon explains. We’re sitting in his living room with Grunthauer and Wardlaw, who’s here today to audition actors for his new play, Angels, Giants, and Monsters. During our conversation, actors ﬁled in and out of the room behind us. Friends and well-wishers dropping by to see Steve went directly to the living room couch, which was conveniently placed across from the piano.

“If someone comes in and says Steve, can I have an art show, can I read some poetry here — in spite of what it’s gonna cost, I always say yes,” Cannon, who was a humanities professor at Medgar Evers College and Hunter College as well as a poet and novelist, retired from CUNY in 1989, around the same time he began losing his sight. Tribes was incorporated as a non-profit in 1990.

Financing Tribes got Cannon into signiﬁcant debt, and he sold the building in 2004 for $590,000. His goal was to carry on the organization’s work without the stress of managing the building. Out of more than 20 potential buyers, Cannon says Zhang “was the only one who seemed like she was going to be square with me.” According to the agreement they signed at closing, Cannon would be able to live in his current second-floor apartment for five years, paying $1,000 a month, with the option to renew for an additional ﬁve years at $2,200 a month (which he has been paying since 2009).

It seems Zhang, too, has been plagued with ﬁnancial trouble ever since she took over. She told me she spent about $500,000 to renovate the building and bring it up to code. Despite incurring higher-rent tenants in the other three apartments, she still spends about $2,000 a month on the building. Cannon’s is the only apartment that’s been continuously occupied since he sold the building; other units were vacant for several months to over two years.

“I have two kids to raise — am I supposed to be a charity?” Zhang asked when I called her. She says that she’s selling the building because she’s losing money. She claims Cannon is only staying in his apartment through his good graces: “he never extended the agreement, but I still let him stay here,” she says.

Cannon is looking for allies “with some deep pockets” to buy back the building and maintain Tribes in its current state, only charging artists an amount that would cover the maintenance costs, which he estimates at $7,000 to $7,500. Tribes’ building is listed for $2.9 million; Tribes’ annual budget is approximately $150,000. He’s had some inter est, he says, but no solid offers.

“If he wants to get someone to buy the house, go ahead. I’m not stopping him,” says Zhang. She wouldn’t comment on Cannon’s tenancy, saying it will be up to the next owner to negotiate with the tenants, and that the building is being sold “as is.”

Cannon counts such art world luminaries as the Jay Tilton gallery, Salon 94 and the artist Steve Hammons among his supporters, and it seems like every other day a visitor spontaneously donates $200 to $1,000. While Cannon would like to regain ownership of the building, if he can’t his main concern is staying in his home and being able to continue Tribe’s work.

A COUNTER-CULTURAL TRADITION

The story of how Cannon came to buy the townhouse may explain why he’s been so generous with other young artists with uncertain prospects. In 1970, he was homeless, and at a friend’s suggestion called up West Village realtor Arnold Warwick to ask if he could stay a month in his building. Warwick offered to sell him the building instead, and gave him ten years to pay off the mortgage.

Deanna Choice, a self-taught painter, met Cannon when she was living in a shelter on East 4th Street years ago. In 2004, Choice’s paintings were shown in “Art Around the Park” an annual show Tribes organizes in Tompkins Square Park, which led to a scholarship at the New York Studio School. She drops in on Steve now to see how he’s doing. Phil Harman, the owner of Two Boots Pizzeria, who has collaborated with Cannon on the Howl! Festival, recently hosted a “Save The Tribes” day, donating the entire day’s proceeds at Two Boots’ seven Manhattan locations — over $7,000 — to Tribes. “Tribes is one of the last places left that carries on the great counter-cultural tradition of the East Village/Lower East Side,” he says. There will be another fundraiser May 29 hosted by the jazz pianist Jason Moran.

Even if Zhang or the future owner honors Cannon’s agreement, it only covers his tenancy through 2014. But supporters, though low on funds, are optimistic. Grunthauer says, “I’m conﬁdent Tribes will survive” regardless of the building’s fate. Choice echoes: “This kind of place doesn’t exist in the United States for emerging artist. It’s needed.”

—Irina Ivanova
City of Life and Death
City of Life and Death (2009)
Directed by Lu Chuan
Released by Kino International
Playing at Film Forum through May 14

City of Life and Death, Lu Chuan’s third feature film, details the unspeakable atrocities that occurred during the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, when Japanese forces captured the former capital of the Republic of China, killing an estimated 300,000 civilians and raping 80,000 women over a six-week period.

The film opens with recollections of the massacre’s onset from first-hand accounts written on postcards and a powerful evocation of the otherworldly setting through the eyes of Japanese officer Kadokawa (Hideo Nakazumi). Once the narrative unfolds, however, it abandons historical consciousness and devolves into an obvious morality play. After reading Japanese soldiers’ accounts of events, Chuan decided to attempt to humanize their brutality. As a numbing sequence of rape, murder and violence crushes the survivors’ spirits, the film fails to convincingly integrate the struggles of individual characters with the overall banality of evil. Instead of challenging Japan’s stubborn reluctance to officially acknowledge the specificity of the Nanjing tragedy, City of Life and Death channels the national, political and ethnic dimensions of this shameful episode into a universal parable of abuse of power.

The “good” characters stand out because their values, a heroic bond between a Japanese officer Kadokawa and a Japanese prostitute and his spiritual bond with Tang’s sister-in-law, Miss Jiang (Gao Yuanyuan), who gives him her rosary, when he reveals he attended a Christian school. Geared to express airy religiosity over anyadorned humanity of Eastwood’s Letters From Iwo Jima, this final note would have been closer to the contemplative nuance of Malick’s The Thin Red Line, or even the black-and-white cinematography that portentous musical score. Carefully wrought compositions appear as clean and detached as the black-and-white cinematography that gives them shape.

“Life is more difficult than death,” Kadokawa ruminates in conclusion, after freeing two Chinese prisoners of war. If the filmmaker’s exercise in Hollywood grandiloquence was closer to the contemplative music of Malick’s The Thin Red Line, or even the unadorned humanity of Eastwood’s Letters from Iwo Jima, this final note would have sounded less complacent.

—KENNETH CRAB

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