Of Faustian Pacts and Mega-Projects: The Politics and Economics of the Port Expansion in the South Basin of Durban, South Africa[i]

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> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away: and the sea is no more.
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> - Revelations v.1.

The 1980s was a time of incredible political ferment in South Africa. Student protests, consumer boycotts of white businesses in small towns across the hinterland and consolidation of the union movement raised the specter of not only the defeat of apartheid but the radical re-structuring of the South African economy. As Colin Bundy reflected:

> Between the Durban strikes of 1973 and the Mass Democratic Movement's (MDM) defiance campaign of 1989, a long wave of popular protest surged across the South African political landscape. It eroded familiar landmarks and opened new channels, it lapped on the beachheads of white power, and its high tide left a residue of aspirations and expectations (Bundy 2000, 26).

For many, the un-banning of the liberation movements and the release of Nelson Mandela was a sign that these expectations were closer than ever. The first utterances of Mandela and his policy pronouncements stimulated the sense that the aspirations that fueled the rebellion against apartheid were on course. Mandela's first speech on his release from prison paid allegiance to the fundamental tenets of the Freedom Charter (Sampson 1999). But, with Mandela's stirring words on his release from prison still ringing in our ears, a counter-move was already gaining ground.

The African National Congress (ANC) came to power when the global terrain had changed dramatically. Most significantly, the Soviet Union had collapsed and historians were heralding the "end of history", with capitalism as the only viable alternative (Fukuyama 1992). This was the position taken by those wielding power in post-apartheid South Africa. Mandela returned from Davos in Switzerland in 1992 to announce to his closest aides: "Chaps, we have to choose. We either keep nationalization and get no investment, or we modify our own attitude and get investment" (Sampson 1999, 435). In 1994, Mandela in a speech to the joint session of the Houses of Congress in Washington, spoke of the free market as a "magic elixir" (Saul 2011: 8). It was a magical turnaround for both its speed and commitment to the new road.

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These developments were hailed as a ‘miracle’. As John Saul laconically reflects, “Entirely submissive and market-friendly initiatives” were written about “as novel and daring departures” (Saul 2002, 43-44).

The rump of the hegemonic narrative was that all ideological questions had been settled in history. The success of nations now rested on how they positioned themselves to lap up the flows of foreign investment. Would they be capitalist tigers or protectionist dodos? South Africa chose to be a capitalist tiger released from the iron cage of apartheid and ready to do battle on the global market.

A high-ranking former member of Mandela’s first cabinet, Ronnie Kasrils, recently reflected on ANC economic policy in Faustian terms.

> What I call our Faustian moment came when [South Africa] took an IMF loan on the eve of our first democratic election. That loan, with strings attached that precluded a radical economic agenda, was considered a necessary evil (Kasrils 2013).

What Kasrils refers to are the huge debts that the apartheid government had run up and the need for cash to tide the new government over while it settled into office. Although not formally in power, the ANC was consulted about the terms of government borrowing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It consented and signed off.

> Doubt had come to reign supreme: we believed, wrongly, there was no other option; that we had to be cautious, since by 1991 our once powerful ally, the Soviet Union, bankrupted by the arms race, had collapsed. Inexcusably, we had lost faith in the ability of our own revolutionary masses to overcome all obstacles (Kasrils 2013).

These words by Kasrils, former Minister of Intelligence in the ANC post-apartheid government, were penned in June 2013. While there had already been strident critiques of the ANC government, these words, coming from the ultimate insider, were a revelation to many.

The parable of Faust is exactly that, selling your soul to attain short-term satisfaction; riches, fame, pleasure. However, the devil always comes to collect at some point down the line and the price is terrible and eternal.

At first, the concessions that Kasrils points to did not seem to be dramatic. It was just one loan. It came in useful and the markets were satisfied that the ANC was not going to renege on paying the odious debt of the previous government. The ANC duly swept to power in 1994 and with the world watching, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first President of a democratic South Africa. It was expected that democracy would bring its own dividends to be shared fairly among all South Africa's people. But, as time would show, this loan was the beginning, not only of the acceptance, but the embrace of a very damaging economic logic.

Before the elections, the ANC unveiled the *Reconstruction and Development Programme*or RDP (ANC 1994). Whatever its shortcomings, the RDP was caucused among its Alliance partners, COSATU and the SACP. It proposed a different and ambitious ideology of development to the top-down approach of the apartheid era. At the centre of this approach was a 'people-driven' process:

> …. The RDP integrates growth, development, reconstruction and redistribution into a unified programme. The key to this link is an infrastructural programme that will provide access to modern and effective services like electricity, water, telecommunications, transport, health, education, and training for all our people (ANC 1994, 6).

However, the twinning of infrastructural development with reconstruction and redistribution was soon to run into problems. The waterpipes could be laid in areas that had never enjoyed water before, but who was going to pay for those services thereafter? The user of course. The user-pay idea was, in turn, connected to the need to service debt. At the same time, the amount of development of infrastructure that could take place was limited by the injunctions of the Washington Consensus: place emphasis onfiscal discipline and good things will automatically happen to your economy.

With the imposition of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR),the compromises that Kasrils talked about became much more apparent. Although posing as a continuation of the RDP, GEAR's neo-liberal underpinnings as proposed by the IMF in its structural adjustment programs were quite obvious (MacDonald, 2004). While the RDP put at its centre the creation of jobs as the catalyst for restructuring the economy and delivering development, GEAR placed growth as the ruling mantra, the 'trickle-down approach.' Key strategies became to curtail inflation, improve competitiveness, encourage investment and drastically reduce the budget deficit.

Crucially, the RDP talked about "the full participation of civil society, together with Government, in order to find ways to take down the barriers which emerge during the course of the RDP" (1994, 41). But as MacDonald points out:

> ...because GEAR was suspected to be anathema to core ANC constituencies, it had to be imposed summarily and peremptorily, as Mbeki and Mandela had done.And because it could not be sustained consensually and democratically...Civil society had to be kept at bay, and unresponsive party apparatuses had to be maintained. Paradoxically, popular dissatisfaction with GEAR favours more centralisation and less accountability (2004, 645).

Modernization takes hold

> The first economy is the modern industrial, mining, agricultural, financial, and services sector of our economy that, everyday, become ever more integrated in the global economy. Many of the major interventions made by our government over the years have sought to address this ‘first world economy’, to ensure that it develops in the right direction, at the right pace... the successes we have scored with regard to the ‘first world economy’ also give us the possibility to attend to the problems posed by the ‘third world economy’, which exists side by side with the modern ‘first world economy’… Of central and strategic importance is the fact that they are structurally disconnected from our country’s ‘first world economy’. Accordingly, the interventions we make with regard to this latter economy do not necessarily impact on these areas, the ‘third world economy’, in a beneficial manner’ (Mbeki 2003).

Former President Thabo Mbeki defined South Africa in terms of a first and second economy. Mbeki argued that the solution depended upon tweaking the neoliberal approach. For Mbeki, “those who benefit from the growth and development of the ‘first world economy’ will benefit even more from its expansion, resulting from the development of the ‘third world economy’ to the point that its loses its ‘third world’ character and becomes part of the ‘first world economy’”.

Inscribed in the idea of the second economy being absorbed by the first is, simply, old-fashioned modernization theory. Instead of distributing social goods by means other than the market (or imposing the sort of serious social and regulatory constraints on the profit motive that even Adam Smith had in mind) so as to integrate the two economies, Mbeki’s apparent task was simply to complete the modernization process.

But this is a version of the old Rostowian model in which Europe was what Africa should be judged by. Europe was the future (1960). For Mbeki, this Rostowian model was repackaged, giving South Africa an internal modernization project of a special type, in which the first economy (Europe) is the ideal. However, this idea lacks any understanding of how the first economy is predicated on the underdevelopment of the second.

Economist SampieTerreblanche holds that Mbeki’s admission that there was no staircase between the first and second economy grants

> that the ‘trickle down’ effect is nothing but a myth…The acknowledgement that the government will have to play an entrepreneurial role in the ‘second economy’ is rather promising. Unfortunately, the government’s ability to intervene in the ‘second economy’ is very much hampered by the lack of capacity in the public sector. But what is perhaps

> of greater importance, is that it will become contra-productive to intervene in the 'second economy' while the 'structure', the macroeconomic policy and the neo-liberal privileges granted to the corporate sector remain intact in the 'first economy'. It is highly necessary to move towards a *truly developmental state system* in South Africa. But this cannot be created in the second economy only. It will have to be created in the South African economy as an undivided entity (2010, 10).

For Andries du Toit, the idea of two economies existing alongside each other

> does not capture the complex actual relationships that do exist between the wealthy core of the South African economy and its underdeveloped and impoverished periphery. Shack dwellers in Khayelitsha, seasonal workers in Ceres and villagers in Mount Frere cannot be meaningfully described as being 'disconnected' from the South African economy. Their impoverishment, on the contrary, is directly related to the dynamics of 150 or more years of forcible incorporation into racialised capitalism; on disadvantageous terms. Indeed, it may well be that many of the obstacles to accumulation from below among poor people are at present linked to the depth of corporate penetration of the South African economy as a whole. The issue is not that there are 'not enough linkages' but the nature of those linkages, and the extent to which they serve either to empower poor people or simply to allow money to be squeezed out of them (2004, 29-30).

These critiques were overwhelmed by the idea of a headlong dash into the first economy and the first world. One is reminded here of Plekhanov's assurance: "We, indeed, know our way and are seated in that historical train which at full speed takes us to our goal" (in Leslie 2000, 174).

It is a matter of history that Mbeki, accused by opponents within the ANC and SACP of advancing a pro-capitalist class project, did not serve out his second term as President (Gevisser, 2009). He was replaced by a man, Jacob Zuma, who had all the form of being a man of the people. But Mbeki's economic substance went unchanged. Government's role in bringing about change was to create an environment for jobs. With the world financial crisis causing a coyness in employers hiring staff, the state had to take the lead. This did not mean that nationalization was flirted with again. Rather, it meant state funding and huge infrastructure projects with the private sector being engaged to complete them. A private sector, it is necessary to point out, that had to show a commitment to 'transformation' to win these giant tenders. In practice, this meant the inclusion of an essentially parasitic consortium of black influence peddlers dressed up as business partners attached to white capital with the networks to price fix where they could not monopolize tenders.

So we had the Gautrain, 2010 World Cup stadia, the industrial complex at Coega, the world's third and fourth-largest coal-fired electricity generators (Kusile and Medupi), mega-dams, and expansions to airports, ports, roads, and pipelines.

More recently, the National Development Plan named South Durban as its second highest-priority mega-project (after the Waterberg-Richards Bay coal infrastructure expansion). This project will put tens of thousands on the move and change the landscape of the city dramatically. This project falls under the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission (PICC) projects.

President Jacob Zuma (2014) offered this rationale for the projects:

> At the close of the second decade of our democracy, it is clear that we need to change gear. All South Africans need to work together in a concerted effort to improve service delivery, bolster job creation and expedite economic transformation. In South Africa, joblessness is still unacceptably high even with recent growth in job numbers. Global economic prospects remain fragile. In response, the Government of the Republic of South Africa has taken a bold decision. We have chosen a path of counter-cyclical spending driven by catalytic infrastructure investment. We are striking a fine balance between protecting our sovereign integrity while leveraging the multiplier impact of fixed capital formation. Valuable lessons have been learned from our most recent building programmes, such as the 2010 World Cup stadiums, King Shaka International Airport, Medupi Power Station and Gautrain(Zuma 2014).

In the run-up to the May 2014 national elections, then Public Enterprise Minister MalusiGigaba held that infrastructure investment of $380 billion would be the catalyst of “radical socioeconomic transformation”, de-racialising and broadening ownership, heralding “inclusive and equitable growth” and “millions of sustainable and decent jobs” (Gigaba 2014).

As is the case in these top-down projects, there are no details provided as to how the expansion of the Port will translate into a “radical socioeconomic transformation.” What is important to note is that state investment will be used to ‘de-racialise’ ownership through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), what MacDonald has called “racial nationalist empowerment” which represents a marked shift from the orientation of the RDP:

> Where the RDP implied skepticism towards business, BEE implied cooperation; where the RDP pursued economic equality as its objective, BEE valued racial empowerment; and where the RDP took economic interests as axes of organisation, BEE used racial identities to stabilize capitalism. By the logic of BEE, the bourgeoisie legitimated itself as a class through its African faction, a valuable contribution to tendencies in the ANC that celebrate capitalism (MacDonald 2004, 649).

It is against the backdrop of the turn from RDP to GEAR, the rise of BEE hanging onto the coat-tails of white capital, the emphasis on the first economy and the idea of mega-projects imposed from the top that one needs to take cognizance of in understanding the arrival of Faustian development to the South Basin.

‘All Things New’

> The space of capital accumulation thus gradually came to life, and began to be fitted out (Lefebvre1991, 275).

The landscape of the city of Durban is set to change dramatically by 2040. The government has set in motion plans for $25 billion in new port and petrochemical investments. The end result will mean that Sub-Saharan Africa’s largest port in South Durban, which in 2012 handled 2.5 million containers, will increase its load to 20 million containers annually.

It is here that Kasrils notion of the Faustian bargain, hammered out between 1990 and 1994, meets Faustian development.

Goethe’s *Faust*, written at the beginning of the 19th century, is one of those timeless classics. Faust is famous for making a pact with the Devil; “a life of limitless wealth and pleasure” in return for his soul for eternity. What this means in real terms is revealed in the fascinating and tragic story of Faust’s drive to capture the high seas, because they spread barrenness. Faust became obsessed with trying to wage war against the sea, to “lock the imperious ocean from the coast”(Goethe 1986, 10233).[2]

In this quest, he simply turned his eyes away from the odious results. With his project of grabbing from the sea ‘hospitable’ land completed, Faust remained unhappy. An old couple, Philemon and Baucis’s small piece of land, blocked the view of his accomplishment. Faust was angry because “the linden grove, its old brown cottage and the dilapidated chapel are not mine”(11157-58). They refused to yield to Faust even though he offered them money and a mansion elsewhere. Faust, like the modern day proponents of consultation and due process, felt he had done enough: “Resistance and obstinacy/ Thwart the most glorious success, / Till in the end, to one's disgust, /One soon grows tired of being just”(11269-72).

Mephisto stepped in and goaded: “Why scruple at this late hour?” Faust responded by instructing Mephisto to “clear them out of my way” (11275).Mephisto swept down upon the old couple’s house. When Faust inquired what happened, he was told that the house had burned down and the couple had perished in the fire.

[2]The numbers refer to the lines in Goethe’s Faust.

Faust was aghast. But he soon recovered. He had many more projects to prosecute. He could hardly be expected to allow an old couple's shack to stand in his way.

In June 2014, I went to the Clairwood Racecoursein the South Basin and thought about the Faustian pact that raises so many questions about development; about the destruction of nature, ecosystems and ways of living without any form of accounting. Development for developmentsake. Unlike the new high-tech racecourses, Clairwoodretains much of the architecture and feel of a by-gone era. In the centre and all around is a beautiful wetland which stands in visceral contrast to the smoke-laden air that engulfs the valley on the other side of the Freeway.

I wondered whether the race-goers knew that the racecourse would soon be part of history. The area has been sold to developers who are planning a logistics park. It is part of a R250 billion development that will see a gigantic dug-out port envelop the area.

The Racecourse is a vital green lung in an area that has been referred to as 'Cancer Alley'. As the South Durban Community EnvironmentalAlliance (SDCEA) points out, theracecourseis home to rare bird species such as crowned cranes and black storks and importantly, it is the only home to the Racecourse Lily (Kniphofiapauciflora). They will all be no more once the thousands of trucks,forklifts and warehouses make their appearance in and around the logistics park (SDCEA 2014).

In this quest, thousands of people will be uprooted from their homes and put on the move. The sandbanks that give protection and the mangrove swamps will disappear and so will the natural filters that allow some breathing space in South Durban.

'We need the new dug out port' is the mantra of government and big capital. But the figures that emanate from Transnet itself do nothing to substantiate this argument. As it stands, Durban's processing cost per container is the highest in the world. How will investing R250 billion make the port more competitive? In fact, if one factors in paying the interest on money borrowed and all the new expenditure, the prognosis is that Durban will price itself out of the market (Dyer 2014). Once more, like King Shaka airport, Moses Mabhida stadium and the International Convention Centre, ratepayers will have to make up the shortfall for massively under-utilized, vanity infrastructure whose chief benefit is to those who get the contracts to build them and the political class who serve as 'business partners'.

Journalist Terry Hutson(2014) has pointed out that not long ago, the port dropped approximately 200 00 TEU (a TEU being the equivalent of a 6m container) in a year and there has not been much growth since. Small changes like upgrading rail infrastructure, for example, would make a huge difference to facilitate cargo through the congestion. The commitment to make a more efficient existing port would also enable Durban to meet changing needs. In the context of the upgrading and competitiveness of African ports, there is a serious danger of overcapacity in all the new berths.Figures from 2012 cited that Durban was the most expensive port in the world with costs per average container ship nearlyfive times higher than the world average(Dyer 2014).The risk is real. Durban’s dug-out port could easily be, like Coega in the Eastern Cape, another ghost port of call.

Transnet has responded with the argument that this development will create 130 000 permanent jobs (SDCEA 2014). We know in the era of global economic volatility that this is a thumb-suck. Even if this fantastical figure were reached, it turns on capital investment of R1.9m per job. With this kind of investment, all manner of other job creation projects could just as well be funded.

Ronnie Kasrils tells us that the ANC lived through a Faustian moment in 1994 and that it has haunted South Africa’s post-apartheid social policy formulation ever since. The ANC wagered everything on putting in place economic policies that would appeal to distant investors. It paid back immoral debts run up by the tyranny before it. It kept social spending tight and taxes low. When it did spend, it did so more to satisfy the rich than the poor. In return, they wagered on foreign direct investment pouring in. What these policies actually garnered was insubstantial. For as long as it lasted, the new government was patronized as running a rare, African country with ‘sound’ economic policies. The foreign direct investment never came.

Since the ANC’s Faustian pact, the world economic crisis of 2008 has come and threatens constantly to come again. Events have revealed that the Devil is, in fact, unable to reward governments for the sacrifice of their principles in the form of slow upliftment for the entire nation. The pact that the generation of Mandela and Kasrils made is no longer on offer. The age of developmental ‘tiger’ economies is over. Now the terms of the pact with the devil are more focused.

Individual politicians are individually rewarded for swinging contracts the way of diabolical corporations. Everyone knows that the Devil does not keep long-term promises of general upliftment in exchange for national sacrifice. All that may be safely exchanged these days is enormous personal wealth for enormous personal corruption. And this is what lies behind these hugely profitable but unnecessary construction projects under President Zuma. It is not a macro-economic gamble, nor even a toying with the terms of neo-liberalism itself. It is a way of diverting public funds into private hands. Construction for construction sake.Written up as being in the national interest and for the greater good of course.

It is this that Kasrils points to in his reflections on the Faustian Moment:

> Whatever the threats to isolate a radicalizing South Africa, the world could not have done without our vast reserves of minerals. To lose our nerve was not necessary or inevitable. The ANC leadership needed to remain determined, united and free of corruption – and, above all, to hold on to its revolutionary will. Instead, we chickened out. The ANC leadership needed to remain steadfast in its commitment to serve the people. This would have given it the hegemony required not only over the entrenched capitalist class but over emergent elitists, many of whom would seek wealth through black economic empowerment, corrupt practices and the sale of political influence.

Another victim of the 2008 financial crisis is the 'science' of economics. Revealed to have lacked any predictive power as well as any secure foundational principles, economics has entered a new age. It is a New Age of magical thinking, the equivalent of arranging crystals around a sick person in the hopeofdrawing in positive energies.

This kind of thinking reaches its apogee in the words of Johan Van Zyl, CEO of Toyota:

> Durban as a brand is not strong enough to simply say 'come and invest in Durban'. What it needs to attract investors is big projects. China is building ports they do not even know they will use. If return on investment is the line of thinking we may never see the infrastructure (The Mercury 8 Feb 2012).

What Van Zyl does not ask, is who invests in a bankrupt, rioting city, albeit full of deep harbors and five lane highways? The Chinese model only has a chance of working when such a government runs a massive balance of payments surplus with the rest of the world. If it does not, then the only option is to maintain a clampdown on the discontent created by governmental neglect, the likes of which South Africa's constitution and national character does not permit.

Many of us grew up in households where we were warned that the 'devil never sleeps, the devil's work is never done.' And that is the essence of Faustian development. The climactic clause in Faust's pact with the devil, as Marshall Berman (1988, 78) points out, is that if ever he stops and says to the moment, "Verweiledoch, du bistsoschoen," (linger a while, you are so beautiful),he will be destroyed. This is played out to the bitter end in millions of lives every day, one mega-project raises the need for yet another:

> In the daytime noisy workmen
> Hacked and shovelled, all in vain;
> Where, at night, small fires flickered,
> There was a dam the following day.
> Human lives were sacrificed,
> Groans of torment filled the darkness (11123–8).

Digging the Ground From Beneath Their Feet

> The idea of development stands today like a ruin in theintellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment,failures and crimes have been the steady companions ofdevelopment and they tell a common story: it did notwork.... It is time to dismantle this mental structure (Sachs 1995, 1).

In Thabo Mbeki's world, these mega-projects, like stadiums, will suture the disconnection between the first and second economy. But the opposite seems to be happening. Resources are drained upwards with the promise that they will eventually trickle downwards.

Sachs puts forward an ideological challenge. How does one start to see the economics of things differently?

In this context, the SDCEA comments on the deepening, lengthening and widening of Berth 203 to 205, Pier 2, Container Terminal, and Port of Durban are very powerful in raising how

> Existing and new developments within the catchment of the Bay have cumulative impacts on the bay ecosystem, which are increasingly compromising the integrity of the bay and pushing it to the brink of collapse…

SDCEA also raises the issues of the impact of rising sea levels. They quote Mather et al.:

> Within harbors, the extra water depth will result in less freeboard along the quayside resulting in more frequent wave wash/overspray onto the working area with increased down-time and loss of productivity. With the increased wave energy, ships moored alongside the quays will not be as stable as required for the offloading of cargo. This will result in longer off-loading times, longer ship turn-around times, inefficiency at the berth-side and extra costs (SDCEA 2014).

Patrick Bond has raised a number of further pertinent issues that Transnet has not factored into its EIA assessments:

> • by expanding the shipping capacity of Durban harbour to super post-Panamax scale container vessels, will Transnet take up excessive amountsof South Africa's carbon budget and therefore ruin the government's pledgeto peak and then decrease emissions after 2020;
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> • expanding the shipping capacity also requires expanding the freightcapacity, the danger is that more emissions, congestion, and truckingrelatedaccidents will occur in an area demonstrably unsuitable given lackof road transport and inadequate shifting of freight to

> rail, so it is criticalto know the amount of the new freight capacity being built to handle themuch larger shipping capacity – i.e., what proportion of this is beinganticipated for freight haulage by rail and by trucking respectively?
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> • has the recommendation by the Academy of Sciences of South Africa, inits 2011 book *Towards a Low Carbon City*, commissioned by the city,been incorporated? “The transport sector is pivotal to the transition to allow carbon city... The top priority was identified as the need to reduce thevehicle kilometers travelled in the road freight sector as this provided thegreatest opportunity to simultaneously reduce emissions of GreenHouseGases and traditional air pollutants.”
>
> • how much additional CO2 will be emitted by the bunker fuel that isconsumed by ships en route to and from Durban as a result of the vast newcapacity associated with super post-Panamax ships soon capable of enteringthe Durban harbor, and how much additional CO2 will be emitted by thetrucks that will haul the new freight, assuming this expansion is the cruciallink in raising capacity to 5 million containers annually? (Bond 2014, 486).

In these times when mega-projects linger over us, as Marx put it, “like the fate of the ancients, and with an invisible hand allots fortune and misfortune to men”, the only way it can be checked is through organized political action (Marx 1978, 162). What the mobilization of SDCEA seeks is a Benjaminesque interruption, “the grasp for the emergency brake” to halt the helter-skelter that mega-projects seek to bring into train (Leslie 2000, 174).

SDCEA has achieved some success in the South Basin, namely the closing down of two landfills which were toxic minefields, but the battle against the dug-out port is a whole new ball game that requires sustained political mobilization.

The real test is whether SDCEA will be able to translate its scientific and human challenges to port extension into power on the ground. To escape the mental cage of our given economics that Sachs alludes to is only half the problem. On what basis does one resist the deleterious effects on one’s own life and livelihoods that flow from the bargains other people have made? Here, SDCEA faces major challenges.

The challenge for those opposing the harbor expansion is how to organize on a terrain where the belief that mega-projects are the only way to create jobs and fire-up the economy runs deep? A popular beer in South Africa has branded itself as the working man’s brew. Their adverts show the solidarity of big industry: muscular men welding, building, saving the day through the sweat of their brow. There is a certain common-sense feel to this narrative. If only people (men?) could be put to work, society would thrive. Resistance to a big project will run into these subjective headwinds.

The pull of the narrative is less strong even than the pull of the pay-check. Many people living in the South Basin are skilled but desperately unemployed artisans, sure to pick up work, however temporary, on the metalwork, plumbing and engineering that will go into a port expansion.

The communities of the South Basin are tightly woven around racial identities. This is what makes them strong, but because of the tendency to insularity, also weak when it comes to confronting the social dislocations that will emerge with the dug-out port. How to keep the strength of community, the local networks, while building alliances that cross the old racial boundaries is a central challenge for activists. Then there are class interests that range from shack-dwellers who see relocation as a chance to jump the huge queue for houses, to owners of residential properties in Clairwood who have seen their market value deteriorate but are now faced with a once-off opportunity to cash-in. The area is further, to put it mildly, known for gangsterism. Any corporate interest with enough money to invest in such a project would be able to find ready foot-soldiers to cut-across community mobilization with violence. Remember Faust's words:

> Make payments, offer bonuses, conscript them!(11554-6)

The option of calling for financial sanctions so that Transnet cannot raise the necessary funds could be a very crucial strategy (Bond 2014).But there are also negatives. It could fire up the racial nationalists who see this move as unpatriotic and use it to create a fifth column among its constituency in the South Basin. These sorts of contestations do not always get settled in boardrooms, but often physically. A call for sanctions could also serve to demobilize people as they see sanctions rather than their own power to prevent the development from spreading across the South Basin and drowning out their lives.

There is also the issue of the "reds" and the "greens" (Death 2014). This division was highlighted in November 2015 when, over the same weekend, SDCEA called a meeting of environmentalists that stretched across class and race divides, while the National Union of Metalworkers (NUMSA) across town called a meeting of community movements to discuss the building of a United Front. Despite appeals to SDCEA to postpone their meeting, they decided to go ahead. How to bridge this divide without submerging the highly technical work and cross class building of SDCEA?

In June 2014, the US petroleum giant ExxonMobil arrived in the South Basin to 'consult' with the community about hunting for oil and gas off the coast of South Africa, including KwaZulu-Natal. It unveiled plans to start a three-year exploration in a massive 50 000km search area stretching from Port St. Johns in the Eastern Cape to Richards Bay in the north of KZN, at sea water depths of up to 3.6km. The exploration area is about 50km off the coastline and extends almost 400km out to sea. I was at the first meeting. ExxonMobil arrived with a massive document prepared by the Environmental ResourcesProgramme (ERM), touted on their front cover as ‘The world’s leading sustainability consultancy.’

In heated community meetings, they were sent packing. But ExxonMobil can afford to be smug. They knew that they simply had to show a genuine commitment to consult:

> Postapartheid governance regards societal pluralism and popular participation as assets only when they can be harnessed in institutionalised interactions aimed at building consensus…The government’s claim to objectivity is embodied in its stated mission to ascertain “what works,” whereas conflicting social forces are allegedly bound by their narrow self-interest and ideological royalties….The governmental profession of nonideological, solution-oriented approaches facilitates a managerial relationship with consumers in opposition to a political one with citizens (Barchiesi 2011, 72).

ExxonMobil know that they are on a good wicket. President Zuma, in July 2014, spoke at the launch of Operation Phakisa Big Fast Results Implementation Methodology in Durban abouthowSouth Africa’s Oceans

> …has a potential to contribute between eight hundred and one million direct jobs….The workstream on Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration takes forward issues that government has previously tackled.Recent developments have included…the establishment of Petroleum Agency SA, and the introduction of enabling legislation such as the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act, Royalties Act and schedule 10 of the Income Tax Act.These developments were a major step forward and contributed to increasing South Africa’s attractiveness as an investment destination for international oil and gas companies.The aspiration of this workstream are to further enhance the enabling environment for exploration of oil and gas wells, resulting in an increased number of exploration wells drilled, while simultaneously maximising the value captured for South Africa (Zuma2014).

The government, as the pronouncements of President Zuma and Minister Gigaba indicate,remains obsessed with driving an economy that always requires one more mega-project, on more mega-event to facilitate the Rostowian take-off into the flight-path of the Northern economies:

> He’d ransack heaven for its brightest star
> And earth for every last delight that’s to be found;
> Nor all that’s near nor all that’s far
> Can satisfy a heart so restless and profound(Faust304–7).

The Port is touted by government as the solution to the poverty and degradation that is the lives of so many in the South Basin. To protest is to go against the national interest: “A thornin the eyes, a thorn in the soles of the feet” (11161). The people must be expelled because development is for the people. The plans can brook no dissent as the set piece participation process gets ticked off by the consultants. There is no time for morality and sentiment.

Meanwhile, to live in the South Basin is to be on a constant war footing, trying to build resistance on a terrain slippery with developmentalism, where the old obstacles of race division and job hunger still loom large. But it is here too that activists have fought against de-regulation, climate change and inequality. In the present context, organizations like SDCEA are highlighting how the construction of mega-projects and the devastation of the environment are combined and indivisible, seeking to edge from a ‘politics of the environment’ to a ‘politicizing the environment’(Swyngedouw 2011).

Worryingly, Bobby Peek has recently shown how the gains made through the democratic transition in the broad sphere of the environment and climate change have been progressively rolled back. The local eThekwini Municipality which is tasked to monitor air quality in the South Basin has witnessed “the dismantling of the...pollution monitoring and enforcement capacity” (Peek 2014, 24). Alongside this, while

> Local and provincial governments remain without capacity, capacity in the national department is allowed to decay and there is no visible effort to build capacity at any level. The corporates, such as Shell and BP, claim confidentiality for information and pollution and have refused access to their Atmospheric Emission Licenses. They clearly intend to restore a regime of purposeful ignorance where information is not available or not produced in the first place. What is not measured cannot end in liability...The future looks bleak (Peek 2014, 25-26).

The plans for the dug-out port have created uncertainty and exacerbated people’s sense of precariousness. There has been a profusion of protests, pamphlets and petitions. But the machine grinds on. The sea must be captured and controlled, for it’s a national treasure the government says. As we chase after the West, a game where there are no limits to growth, one thinks of the blind man who mistakes lemurs digging his grave for the sound of spades hurrying development: “The traces of my days on earth / will survive into eternity!” (11583) and Mephisto’s response:

> All of your kind are doomed already; –
> the elements have sworn to help us;
> the end will be annihilation (11548–50).

With the proposed Infrastructure Development Bill, the government wants to speed up approvals for mines, oil pipelines, refineries, ports and airports.The struggle in the South Basin is to slow down time, to control time, instead of surrendering to it. Its’ success depends on the ability of people to forge coalitions of resistance that cut across class and race, place and space to both expose the flawed thinking behind the dug-out port and the "slow violence", to borrow Rob Nixon's phrase, that is everyday eating away at people's lives (2011). It is worth remembering that "the risk of contracting cancer in south Durban is 250 times the norm" and that the local primary school has some of the highest asthma rates in the world (Euripidou 2014, 44).

In this context,President Jacob Zuma's assertion that the ANC will rule till Jesus comes, must be remembered. Will that be the time that Faust's bargain with the devil will come to pass? And in the meantime, must Faust be allowed to get on with his work?

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[i] People in the South Basin of Durban share space with a major industrial zone (Mobeni, Jacobs and Prospecton), oil refineries (Engen, owned by Malaysian Petronas, and SAPREF, a joint venture of Shell South Africa and British Petroleum South Africa) and a huge pulp and paper mill, Mondi Paper. It takes in the residential areas of Bluff, Clairwood, Isipingo, Lamontville, Merebank and Wentworth.