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ALEXANDER COCKBURN AND JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

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Now It's Rio's Turn

Why the Olympic Games Are Always Wars on the Poor

By Michael Volpe

Let's start with the baneful consequences for poor people of *City of God*, a searing film set in Rio de Janeiro. The 2002 film was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Foreign Film and Best Cinematography. It depicted life in one of the most violent favelas in Rio, *City of God*. Now, nearly a decade later, the film has had grim, even if unintended consequences. Its portrayal of violence, poverty, and despair in the favela has led to a negative

perception of life in those working-class neighborhoods and made it easier for the Brazilian government to move and evict residents in anticipation of the upcoming World Cup and Olympics held in 2014 and 2016 in Rio.

"It's just a movie," says Theresa Williamson, an activist with Catalytic Communities in Rio de Janeiro. That movie, Williamson says, has helped to foment negative stereotypes of life in favelas. That's because for millions of people

around the world the only impression of favelas comes from that movie. While the movie derives from a true story, Williamson points out that it's based on a book from the Sixties. Williamson acknowledges that drug dealing exists in many favelas; she also points out they're mistakenly referred to as slums, full of dirt, crime, and hopelessness. The truth, she says, is far more complicated. For instance, unemployment in favelas normally hovers around 5 per cent, and more than half of favela residents are homeowners.

"Favelas are overwhelmingly occupied by hard-working, law-abiding citizens trying to improve their lives. The vast majority of homes are solidly built, with long-term materials (brick, concrete, rebar). Through solidarity and hard work,

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From the Angle of Farm Workers and Farm Work

The Rise and Fall of Cesar Chavez and the UFW

By Bill Hatch

Frank Bardacke, *Trampling out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers*. Verso, 2011, 848 pp.

I left Yuma, AZ, one cool spring morning in 1993, after listening to a local newspaperwoman describe the scene surrounding the *Bruce Church Inc. v. United Farm Workers* trial during which Cesar Chavez died. On my way out I stopped by the town's great historical site, the Yuma Territorial Penitentiary, and did my penance to the history we all live on this harsh and painful border, standing before a mug shot of Ricardo Flores Magon, father of the Mexican Revolution and one-time inmate of the penitentiary.

Chavez had died in his sleep after two

days of grilling on the stand by plaintiff attorneys out to make a huge noise to distract attention from the obvious problem, not ignored by the Arizona appellate court that reversed the lower court many months after Chavez died: even if Yuma is the headquarters of the plaintiff second largest lettuce company in the world, a Superior court in Yuma has no jurisdiction over a boycott in California.

To add salt to the wound of the Yuma trial, my local source told me, the ranch along the nearby Gila River, where Chavez had been born and which his father had lost, was owned by the plaintiff, Bruce Church Inc.

Standing outside the penitentiary ruins, looking south across a bend in the Colorado River, I remembered the story

Arizona Farm Worker Union Director Lupe Sanchez had told about the "Yuma Wet Line" in 1974. It is an ugly story, completely at odds with the beatific image of the near saint, Cesar Chavez. The story of the wet line – armed union pickets stationed on the border to drive back illegal immigrants looking for work in nearby Yuma – is well told by Frank Bardacke in his monumental, gripping and beautifully written *Trampling out the Vintage*. After reading Bardacke's book, I have a far, far better idea of what it was I lived in California agriculture then and live now.

Bardacke writes the story of Chavez from the angle of farm work and farm workers. The effect is to give Chavez his full stature, weight and substance, brilliance and flaws, while avoiding hagiography or its opposite. The drama of the periodic waves of farm worker revolt in the 20th century have been rendered into religious icons by still photography, from Dorothea Lange's Okie mothers to Paul Fusco's Mexican mothers, all owing perhaps more than we are conscious of to the great muralists of the Mexican Revolution. Bardacke blasts through the

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people have been able to accomplish quite a lot in a system and economy that did not support them. The movie *City of God* and related images imply that the exception is the rule and create strong general perceptions of these communities as violent and marginal, perceptions which are now making it easy for the City government to act in authoritarian and unparticipatory ways toward these communities, thus risking decades of their hard-won development," says Williamson in an interview with *CounterPunch*.

City of God isn't alone in perpetuating negative stereotypes of life in favelas. For instance, immediately after Rio was awarded the Olympics, the *New York Times* ran a story headlined "Violence in the Newest Olympic City Rattles Brazil." The story read in part, "The images of the downed police helicopter 'really shocked Brazilians, and now everyone is worried about what will happen with the Games,' said Nadine Matos, 21, who works at a hair salon a block from Copacabana Beach. 'We need to tell the world where we stand, so that people outside Brazil understand what measures we are taking and are not so worried when planning to come down here.'

"For years, the police essentially aban-

doned the shantytowns, or favelas, that ring the city's wealthier neighborhoods, following a policy that resembled containment more than enforcement. That allowed drug traffickers to create strongholds where violence is pervasive. And, as the downing of the helicopter illustrated, the police have not done enough to slow the flow of weapons into the favelas."

Another feature from *Al Jazeera* detailed the capture of one of Brazil's most violent drug dealers. This one was entitled, "Police capture the most-wanted

In Seoul, 720,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes. In Barcelona, housing became so unaffordable as a result of the Olympic Games that low-income earners were forced to leave the city. In Atlanta, approximately 30,000 people were displaced and 1.25 million in Beijing.

drug trafficker as they prepare to occupy the Brazilian city's largest slum."

In a media culture which values the notion "if it bleeds it leads," Williamson says that the real story often gets missed.

"The mainstream media for the most part don't look for depth and don't get deeply involved in a city like Rio. As a result, they go with the visible stories like violence or the canned press releases by the city. As a result, the story that's been told is one predominantly of these communities as violent and the city and state as innovative. In other words, the favelas are the problem.

"Yet what we find is the exact opposite. The favelas are the solution. They were the solution to the lack of affordable housing for over 100 years. Residents built solid homes, solid neighborhoods, solid communities with networks of solidarity and mutual support. They have provided their own public services, from daycare to sewerage, asphalt to health care. It is the public sector (including

utilities, urbanization, education, security and other services) that has been missing and that is largely responsible for the problems associated with these communities."

Williamson says favelas have been erroneously been referred to as slums or shantytowns, but such terms are unfair and belie the true nature of life in these neighborhoods. Working-class neighborhoods, she says, are a much better description. "In a city with absolutely no history of affordable housing, the working class had to form their own neighborhoods. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 recognizes this historic issue, which is why adverse possession [i.e., rights acquired by irregular residents], according to the Brazilian Constitution, kicks in after 5 years in Brazilian cities."

On the ground, Williamson says, a mass round of evictions of residents of favelas is in progress. Dozens of new sports facilities and housing complexes are being built, and the residents of these favelas become easy targets for evictions to make room for these facilities because of the negative portrayal of favelas.

Members of No Games Chicago, the group that fought Chicago's bid to host the games in 2016, aren't surprised by such stories. "In nearly every Olympics, we see displacement," Tom Tresser tells *CounterPunch*.

Tresser drew a distinction between the displacement plans in Chicago and what he sees in Rio. "In Chicago, no one ever talked about outright evictions," said Tresser, "instead, what we would have seen had we won the games was gentrification." Tresser explained that properties near all of the proposed stadium sites were already being gobbled up by well-connected real estate developers. That dynamic would have caused property values to balloon and force low- and moderate-income folks out of those neighborhoods.

Tresser and Bob Quellos both say that Olympics preparations always favor the wealthy while dismissing the needs of the poor. In Chicago, they cite the case of Michael Reese Hospital. That hospital was closed down in the 1990s. According to City planners, the hospital site would have been torn down and turned into the Olympic Village, to house the athletes. "You can bet it would have been sold to some connected developer and turned into condos," said Tresser. As he

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says, if the city had the money to build the Olympic Village, why couldn't the city spend that money to fix the hospital?

Tresser points out that what is happening in Rio and what would have happened in Chicago is not unique. He cited a study by the Center for Housing Rights and Evictions, called "Fair Play for Housing." That 2007 study looked at displacement effects of Olympic Games in Athens, Seoul, Atlanta, Vancouver, and others cities.

The conclusion was stark:

"In Seoul, 720,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes in preparation for the Olympic Games in 1988. In Barcelona, housing became so unaffordable as a result of the Olympic Games that low-income earners were forced to leave the city. In Atlanta, 9,000 arrest citations were issued to homeless people (mostly African Americans) as part of an Olympics-inspired campaign to 'clean the streets, and approximately 30,000 people were displaced by Olympics-related gentrification and development.' In Athens, hundreds of Roma were displaced under the pretext of Olympics-related preparations. In the lead-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, COHRE estimates that over 1.25 million people already have been displaced due to Olympics-related urban redevelopment, with at least another quarter of a million displacements expected in the year prior to the staging of the event. In London, housing for 1,000 people is already under threat of demolition, over five years before the Olympic Games are due to be held.

"COHRE research has established that the Olympic Games and other mega-events are often catalysts for redevelopment entailing massive displacements and reductions in low cost and social housing stock, all of which result in a significant decrease in housing affordability. In addition, specific legislation is often concurrently introduced, for example to allow for speedy expropriations of property or to criminalize homelessness. These factors all give rise to housing impacts, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and marginalized members of the community."

Tresser is not surprised by the results. "When you (the host city) get the games, your entire city is privatized." Tresser says the International Olympic Committee Contract, which every host city must sign, demands that the IOC have final

say on all construction and city planning. Because the IOC is only concerned with having the Olympics go off without a hitch, issues like displacement become nearly irrelevant.

On the ground in Rio, says Williamson, that's exactly what's happening. In a presentation to activists in Chicago, Williamson showed video of government workers going door to door, gathering personal information about favela residents to be used for upcoming eviction notices. In one case, a family that had lived in the same home in a favela for nearly 30 years received an eviction notice.

Many are forced out of their homes and into condominiums, where they no longer own their unit. Her group, Catalytic Communities, produced a three-part report on some of these evictions. "Six months after 190 families from Guaratiba had their lives chaotically uprooted, we visited the public housing unit in Cosmos where they were sent. Their greatest complaint is that no one has yet been given title for their new apartments.

"What do I even own? Do I have some kind of document?" one bewildered resident asks. Further, there are great doubts among residents about who exactly is going to pay for the apartment, and worse, how much is to be paid. 'We're not sure if we're going to have to pay for the apartment, or if City government is going to pay,' says another resident."

Williamson is facing an uphill battle. Thanks in part to the efforts of No Games Chicago, the residents of Chicago disapproved of hosting the Olympics by the time the IOC made its decision in 2009. In Rio, the approval rate was nearly 100 per cent. The city billed it as an opportunity to transform a city and country on the rise. Short of China, no economy has grown more than Brazil's. Hosting the World Cup and Olympics is all part of the continuing cosmopolitan transformation, say officials.

The residents of the favelas become collateral damage in this plan, called Plan for Accelerating Growth. According to a report by the Comitês Populares da Copa (the People's World Cup Committees), between 150,000 and 170,000 people will be evicted or otherwise displaced in preparation for these events. With perceptions cemented by their portrayal in *City of God* and newspapers like the *New York Times*, it's a tough job getting the

world to notice the ramifications of preparations for these mega-events.

Williamson says the media has, in general, simply swallowed what the government has said on the matter; "Instead of looking for subtlety and diving into these communities to understand their true nature, the media have been relaying the traditional Rio governing class perspective for decades." She adds this hopeful note, "Now, these communities are beginning to express themselves and have their voices heard through alternative channels and social networks, so the story is starting to be told differently." CP

Michael Volpe is based out of Chicago. After spending more than a decade in finance, both in investments and in real estate, he has been a freelance journalist since 2010.

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frozen image of farm work brilliantly in his second chapter, called "The Work Itself," a testament to the velocity and skill required to make a living in the vegetable fields of Salinas, written by one who did it long enough to gain lifelong respect for it and has been able here to honor that work, as few writers or artists have ever done. Having done perhaps more farm work than the author has, I believe he has chosen the best approach – the real root and the route to the deepest themes in this history – and I believe he has fully realized the design such a radical approach requires.

Bardacke does not alienate farm work from the rest of the types of work necessary for him to describe, in order to tell the tale of Cesar Chavez and the UFW. Even more complete and detailed than his description of the work of a celery-harvest crew is his presentation of the work of community and labor organizing. Making clear distinctions between the two tasks is essential to the book's thesis, providing us with concrete reasons to explain why, after a brilliant beginning, the UFW made so many self-destructive decisions that it finally destroyed its place in the fields. That and its connected problem, the flood of undocumented Mexican workers across the border in the years immediately following the termination of the U.S.-Mexico guest-worker program (the Bracero Program), were

two of the main conflicts Chavez and the UFW faced after the heroic days of the first Delano table-grape strike, the March to Sacramento (La Peregrinacion, or “pilgrimage,” as Chavez named it), and the very successful international boycott against table grapes that made the union and its leader international household names.

Yet, even in the glory days of 1966 in Delano, if you were there (I was, organizing a voter registration drive), the first thing you became aware of was what Bardacke presents with the deepest understanding: Mexican farm workers had a long, living tradition of union organization going back, just in the U.S., to the previous great juncture of worker history, the Arizona mine strikes led by Anglo Wobblies and Mexican *magonistas* in the decade before WWI. When those organizations were destroyed by federal troops, some of the workers followed the cotton harvests west through Arizona to the Imperial and Coachella valleys and into the Great Central Valley of California, where 50,000 cotton pickers – mainly Mexican – struck in 1933.

But, even lacking the historical in-

formation, attending meetings in Kern, Kings and Tulare counties to recruit voter registrars, I listened to enough political rhetoric to understand that their entire political vocabulary was revolutionary and quite unlike the dominant idiom of U.S. unionism of the time, which focused on wage and benefit hikes and anti-communism. In the organization Chavez started, called the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), which, after it joined the AFL-CIO, became the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) and finally the United Farm Workers (UFW), the Catholic Church line on anti-communism was followed, as laid down in papal encyclicals on social action in the late 19th century. Yet, in conflict with godly community organizing of the poor *bar-*

Even more complete and detailed than Bardacke’s description of the work of a celery-harvest crew is his presentation of the work of community and labor organizing.

rios – which Chavez began doing under the influence of the Catholic Community Service Organization and also a group within the Church called the *cursillos* – was godless unionism that could, if not watched carefully and purged periodically, turn to communism.

Chavez never seemed to understand that the moment he formed a viable farm worker union, he was going to be called a communist and worse by all growers and by most Democrats in agricultural California. In fact, as Bardacke indicates, whenever farm workers in California were organized, they practiced slowdowns, short strikes and other techniques that had been designed and practiced by wobbly *magonista* anarchists since the beginnings of the peculiar form of southwest agriculture, large-scale agribusiness. The workers were ready to strike, and they led Chavez into being a labor leader at the front of the march rather than being the community organizer in the background. He had trained for more than a decade with teachers as expert as Saul Alinsky and

Fred Ross, who taught him, among other techniques, the value of one-on-one and small group conversations. Bardacke emphasizes this point. People involved in any form of political organization will appreciate how the book deals with this inexhaustible topic.

Perhaps the best single expression at that time of the impulse to revolt, which was being felt across Mexican-American communities throughout the Southwest, was a play that Luis Valdez wrote at San Jose State University, *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, which featured the shrunken head buried in a closet, but which had come back to life, howling for justice. Luis, whose Teatro Campesino was a delightful mainstay on a flatbed truck at picket lines until he was purged, went on to a successful career in film (*Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*), and his theater now has a permanent residence in San Juan Bautista.

The notion of the word as a form of action permeates *Trampling out the Vintage*. Listening and speaking preceded all the activities that caused change to the fields, promoting enough change so rapidly that we could believe for a few seasons in the possibility of a firm foundation from which to struggle for labor justice in Southwestern agribusiness. False rumors, spawned by internal power struggles in the UFW, did fatal damage to that possibility.

Since the last 55 years of my life has been associated with California agriculture in one way or another, I have a lifetime storehouse full of experience and rumors about it, its workers, Cesar Chavez and the UFW. I vouch for Bardacke’s presentation of the rise and fall of Chavez and the UFW, based on a lifetime of rumors. My favorite part of how Bardacke tells the story is his constant stitching together of oral accounts of events, the only way of keeping the history rooted in worker experience. Do oral history informants tell the truth? I have heard different versions of almost every major event Bardacke covers, but what he’s heard and distilled from different voices is a very complete, satisfying version of the story.

I’ll put Bardacke’s *Trampling Out The Vintage* on a very short shelf along with Carey McWilliams’ *Factories in the Fields*, Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, Ernesto Galarza’s *Merchants of Labor*, Rodolfo

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Little Country – Big U.S. Embassy Tunisia – Friendly Piece On Uncle Sam’s Chessboard?

By Rob Prince

If I had a bit more energy, I would have spent my last day in Tunisia walking down Ave. de la Liberté. I’d walk past the central synagogue which, in June 1967, I watched angry crowds trash, along with Jewish shops on the same street. Then I’d say one last good bye to ‘Bourguiba School’ – “L’Institut Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes,” where I taught with a group of other Peace Corps volunteers. And, finally, I’d walk past the radio station to what used to be the old U.S. Embassy. There, I would permit myself a few moments of nostalgia. It was also in the garden there that I first demonstrated against American foreign policy. It’s hard to forget one’s first love, one’s first protest demonstration (against the Vietnam War and Hubert Humphrey’s presence).

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Acuna’s *Corridors of Migration*, William Dubofsky’s *We Shall Be All* (a history of the IWW), and a widely read book among the protagonists in *Trampling Out The Vintage*, Saul Alinsky’s biography of John L. Lewis.

To finish the list, I’d add Thucydides, out of respect for the dialectical way Bardacke handles opposing themes: grower vs. worker in Western agribusiness; democracy and autocracy in the UFW; citizens and green cards vs. undocumented immigrants; conflicting forms of the organization of work between the different agricultural regions – Arizona, Imperial and Coachella valleys, south San Joaquin Valley, north San Joaquin Valley, Salinas and Pajaro valleys, and Napa and Sonoma counties’ wine-grape deal; hand work and mechanization; the clash of Hispanic and Anglo cultures; truth and rumor; Catholic anti-communism vs. secular labor organizing; etc. Bardacke has not only a grasp of the issues large and small in this conflict, he has done a superb job of organizing the material into a book to be read and then studied. **CP**

Bill Hatch lives in Merced, CA.

The U.S. diplomatic community here hasn’t changed much in half a century – minus a few career diplomats who have learned Arabic and know how to use the Internet. They’re a boring group on the whole who live in their own insulated world, mostly living in the same plush and guarded neighborhoods, sending their kids to an American school, going to the same restaurants and bars, socializing with the same people, with perhaps a Frenchman or Brit or two, and maybe even a Tunisian!

They could be living anywhere in the world and really not know much about what is going on around them. They might as well be living on Long Island or Los Angeles. This might help explain why the intelligence gathered is often of such low quality.

Still, there are some curious developments even in this sterile world.

For example, here, in Tunisia, one American described the State Department staff as having “one of its ass cheeks in the Defense Department.” Oftentimes it is the military attaché and not someone from the ambassador’s staff, or State Department who makes the strategic diplomatic rounds, showing up at receptions and parties representing the Stars and Stripes.

A part of a whole post-September 11 militarization of U.S. foreign policy?

A new push to use NGOs and the U.S. Agency for International Development for intelligence because they are “on the ground” rather than the diplomatic corps living in Lalaland?

The United States has built a new embassy in Tunisia, a real monstrosity. Super-duper modern, and heavily guarded, it is some way from the center where the former one was located. Something is out of whack. Even viewed from a distance, the American Embassy gives the impression of being a major communication center for U.S. foreign policy in the region, the region being North Africa – the Maghreb, or Arab West. Its size and electronic sophistication seem out of proportion with the embassy’s needs. It

begs the question: why such a sprawling, technically sophisticated structure for a country – a major communication center – where both U.S. strategic and military interests are somewhat modest at best?

Looking strictly at U.S.-Tunisian relations, such an important embassy doesn’t especially make sense. Thinking regionally, however, a pattern begins to emerge connecting Tunisia to its neighbors, Libya and Algeria.

Compared with other North African countries, Tunis is a safer place for the United States whence to watch the probable further implosion of Libya, and to monitor developments in nearby Algeria and the Sahara to the south.

Tunisians look at Libya with both genuine sympathy for what the Libyans have endured, but also with the prospect of Tunisian dinars in their eyes. Tunisians are, among other things, the ultimate entrepreneurs. They see an opportunity in Libya’s situation; Tunisians talk about both the problems at the border, but also about the great economic opportunities that could come from helping Libya – or “Libyas” – get back on its “or their” feet.

But ask about Tunisia’s relations with their western neighbor Algeria, and silence reigns. It’s the only subject about which people either seemed genuinely ignorant, or about which they did not particularly want to talk. Some say they just don’t know. That is possible: there is very little news here about Algeria. Others make byzantine statements, like “ahhh, Algeria that’s a tough one,” or, “Algeria remains a closed society,” as if speaking about it could land one in hot water. Follow-up questions are usually brushed aside.

Relations between Tunisia and Algeria have long been tense. They remain limited in nature. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians take their summer vacations in Tunisia every year because the tourist services at the beaches are much better and the political environment more open. Tunisians living near the Algerian border cross over frequently.

There is little doubt though that the Algerian government felt threatened both by the uprising here, in Tunisia, that swept away Ben Ali and also by the toppling of Gaddafi. If relations between the Algerian military and Ben Ali were not close, still they had worked out a kind of *modus vivendi* between them. Algeria would have preferred it if Ben Ali re-

mained in power. If change could come to Tunisia and Libya, Algiers reasoned, Algeria might be next in line. Although diplomatic relations between Algeria and Tunisia have recently been re-established, they remain cool.

There were also reports of Algerian security forces actively helping Gaddafi, of Algerian diplomatic efforts in Europe to defend him, and of some of the 250,000 security force of Ben Ali being folded into the Algerian security force. But one thing for sure, the Algerians were preoccupied with Tunisia and refining their approach. Unlike many others in this region, the folks in control of Algeria are strategic thinkers.

Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, had repercussions in Algeria. People took to the streets of Algiers and other major cities, calling for political reforms, jobs, housing, and an end to the state of siege, which had been in place in the country for twenty years, since 1991.

Already in January and February of 2011, as the regional uprising against poverty and repression spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, the Algerian government was quick to engage in a form of damage control that others would essentially imitate: combining repression with the promise of massive state socio-economic programs and with a slight loosening of the screws on repression and freedom of expression. The government threw billions of dollars in promises of jobs and social programs at the protesters to dampen the revolutionary fires. For the moment, it seems to have worked.

There is a curious parallel between how Algeria managed to dampen its social unrest and how the Saudis are doing it: same, same ... "kif kif" as they say here – they throw billions at jobs and social programs. Both countries seem to be utilizing a similar if not identical mass containment strategy and that, possibly, is not accidental: make economic concessions as a means of maintaining political power at all costs. If the people continue to demonstrate, offer even more. If the demonstrations persist, crush the movement in a manner which they will never forget, the goal being to make the price of freedom so high that it will not be worth the cost in human suffering and pain.

The threat of a blood bath is not far from the surface in both countries. The

memory of Algeria's horrific Civil War in the 1990s is still very much alive. It was a factor in the social movement's caution. In Saudi Arabia, it is enough to remind the people that a government, which would cut off someone's hand for robbery or stone a woman for marriage infidelity, would not hesitate to crush a social movement that challenges the free ride the Saudi royal family has so long enjoyed at the expense of the Saudi people. Imagine the body parts they would cut off for political subversion!

In North Africa, Tunisia is not the kingpin of U.S. strategy. Although it is hardly publicized here in the U.S.A. that honor falls to Algeria, "the Maghreb's Prussia." The strategic alliances between the Algerian government – especially its military and security apparatus – and the

The strategic alliances between the Algerian government – most especially its military and security apparatus – and the United States have been growing over the past decade.

United States (through AFRICOM/U.S. Special Forces) have been growing over the past decade, although the exact nature of the arrangement remains hidden in the deep fog of the war on terrorism.

Improvement of relations with Algeria started in Washington sometime around the turn of the millennium, after it was clear that the Algerian military-security apparatus there had survived the civil war, in the 1990s, both intact and in power. A key figure in building the relationship on the U.S. side has been Daniel Benjamin, coordinator for counterterrorism at the Department of State. A closed regional conference on combating terrorism in mid-November of last year cemented the relations.

What lies at the heart of this quiet but growing alliance?

Each side gets something a little different from the relationship. Algerian natural gas supplies to the U.S.A. have increased, and that is a part of the equation. But it is the strategic cooperation which is even more important and is, for the United States, nothing short of

a strategic bonanza. Improved relations offer the prospect of access and/or control of strategic resources from Algeria to Nigeria – two key African oil-producing countries (although more than oil and natural gas is involved). As the United States struggles with China, India and many of its supposed allies to corner the market on these resources, this access is indispensable to U.S. interests and its continued role as a hegemonic (if weakened) power.

For the Algerian military-security apparatus, its power base is strengthened by having the U.S. as a regional military ally. What it seems to want most of all is high-tech toys – drones, advanced listening devices – the kind of stuff that makes militaries the world over drool. Beyond that, improved relations with the United States give the Algerian government a bit more leverage in its dealing with the two other power bases, whose interests it must take into account – France in specific and the European Community in general (which have slightly different if overlapping agendas).

This U.S.-Algerian relationship is also the key to understanding U.S.-Tunisian relations as well.

Although contacts with Algeria are far more important to the U.S. than its Tunisian ties, a high-tech U.S. Embassy in Algiers might not be such a good idea, in part because it could become a very good target for terrorist attacks. Nor is a major U.S. military presence in Algeria good for Algeria's "radical" image. Too many risks – better the friendship be more subtle for all concerned: not secret necessarily, just low keyed and downplayed.

There is a certain comparison between how the U.S.A. deals with Saudi Arabia, an old strategic ally, and Algeria, a new one. A large military U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia did not turn out to be a good idea. In the 1990s, after the first Gulf War, the U.S.A. tried a quiet, unostentatious military buildup in Saudi Arabia but was forced out by several Al Qaeda bombings (and subsequent exposure) of U.S. military headquarters.

Being flexible and listening carefully to Washington's good friends, the Saudi royal family, the United States moved its operational and communications base to nearby Qatar, which has worked out much better. Think of Tunisia as essentially being The Qatar of the Maghreb. Tunisia, for all its problems (collapsing

economy, political instability), is still more stable than Libya, and an embassy has a less explosive presence in Tunisia than it would in Algeria. Voila! Build a bigger embassy but move it out of the more vulnerable downtown area just in case.

In a world of satellites and advanced electronics, which can not only follow a person's actions but almost read their minds (to say nothing of their emails), what can't be done in Algiers – a super sophisticated U.S. Embassy including a massive regional listening post – can more than likely be accomplished in Tunis.

The political forces that have come to power in Tunisia since the collapse of the Ben Ali government are glad to have improved relations with the United States, and believe they have nothing to lose in such an arrangement. Tunisia wants

closer ties with the U.S.A., to balance off French and Italian influences (that have yielded very little).

The Tunisians hope for trade and investment. I am not so sure much will come on that front. It may, but the global economic crisis and growing weakness of the U.S. financial sector suggests progress might be slow. Finally, from a security point of view, it is a plus for the new government. Should the Salafist offensive (Islamic fundamentalist movement) now in Tunisia grow beyond a certain point and threaten state power, one can imagine that the United States will not idly sit by. It appears the Obama administration is already "advising" Rachid Ghannouchi and his Ennahdha Party on that score. That is what I read into the award Ghannouchi received in Washington, D.C., and his quick post-election visit to the U.S.A.

As the roles of Qatar and Tunisia are evolving along parallel lines vis-à-vis the United States at least, cooperation between the two countries is expanding. Qatar has promised Tunisia billions in economic aid. The Qataris are far more likely to deliver on their promises than other countries. Finally, there is the curious connection between the two in terms of freedom of speech. Whatever else Tunisians might not get from their revolution, they have, through their blood and tears, won a freedom of speech and created a social movement to defend it, that will, I believe, endure for quite a while into the future. It runs deep. In Qatar, there is *Al Jazeera*. CP

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Factory Farms as Reality and Metaphor

Terror, Domination and Meat

By Rob Urie

In 2006, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) was passed by Congress to crush any public expression of horror or disapprobation toward the factory-farm system in America. Depending on one's view of animals, the factory-farm system is either an efficient mode of capitalist food production or a system of mass torture and exploitation of animals.

Those familiar with the practices of meat production in America could be forgiven for assuming that any law relating animal enterprises to terrorism was intended to keep factory farmers from terrorizing animals. But, in fact, the law takes the side of the factory farmers' right to terrorize animals as they see fit and redefines terrorism as nonviolent protest against this system of terrorizing animals. And for readers who are thinking that they are on the safe side in this legal reasoning because they are human, the line is more ethereal than you imagine.

In his book *Free Trade Doesn't Work: What Should Replace It and Why* Ian Fletcher spends a bit of time on the trade economics of agricultural production. On Fletcher's account, international trade has driven relentless price competition in agriculture. This has, in turn, led

to the growing prominence of low cost agricultural producers, who (my argument here) also happen to be those with the facilities that most effectively constrain, restrain and subdue animals to maximize the exact aspects of their being that are sent to market. In this world, efficient capitalist production of animals has two components: (1) the limitation through restraint of any aspect of the animals' life that doesn't (2) promote growth of the animals' marketable parts.

In this system, the animals' lives are made "modular," and the aspects that are suppressed or facilitated result from the capitalist calculus of what will make the most money for the "producer." Producer is here in quotes to make the point that the product in this circumstance is in fact the ultimate producer.

Put another way, without the factory farm there is some reasonable likelihood that animals that are born will grow to "produce" what to the capitalist are marketable parts in the context of fuller lives. Without the animals, there is no possibility that the factory farm would exist, and with it the factory farm capitalist.

Without a broader economic system of domination and exploitation, there would also be no factory-farm capitalist.

There undeniably exists a long history of people using animals in a wide variety of ways, including killing and eating them. There is also a long history of people killing animals for entertainment. But the modern factory farms take domination, control, and, to those who see it this way, systematic murder into the context of global capitalist domination and control in a way that raises fundamental questions about that system.

To most who eat meat, the social ontology that says animals are not them assures that the cultural disgust with cannibalism is based on some metaphysical dividing line, with people on the side of the line that says that animals aren't us and that we are not to be eaten. But what if that dividing line is in reality a mere cultural preference as opposed to metaphysical fact? Put another way: show me the metaphysical dividing line. Where does it reside?

AETA was put together by agribusiness lobbyists and was received by the legal graft recipients in Congress to eliminate a purported economic threat to the factory-farm system posed by people who don't share the view that animals are commodities. Most of the dissenters aren't necessarily anti-capitalist, as evidenced by the narrow concerns expressed in written and spoken statements.

And, as capitalists, even the dullest factory farmers know that animal rights

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protesters pose a small economic threat compared with the diseases produced by the high concentration of animals resulting from the system, compared with international competitors, and with input producers through rising input prices.

Protesters pose little economic threat to the entire factory-farm system, unless they can convince enough people that animals aren't commodities to be exploited. And success there would render the factory-farm system the moral abomination that it is, rather than as an industry deserving of protection. AETA is ultimately an argument over the status of animals.

While capitalist production has become very efficient at delivering increasingly specific products, the specificity of meat as sold in retail stores requires a leap that is at the heart of capitalist fears over the question of the status of animals. Many people have relationships with animals that they would never consider as "meat." Eating meat requires the commodification of what is intuitively to many not a commodity, if it wasn't for the radical dissociation created by the factory-farm system. And once considered,

the process of commodifying animals calls into question the process of commodification more broadly. How exactly is a prospective friend converted into the commodity "meat" to be eaten?

Without a concrete social ontology that (externally) defines the social struc-

Eating meat requires the commodification of what is intuitively to many not a commodity if it was not for the radical dissociation created by the factory farm system.

ture of the world, the distinction between people and animals (and everything else that can be inferred to be in the purview of this argument) is historically and culturally contingent. This neither diminishes historical and cultural contingency, nor does it put forward the absurdity that there is such an external social ontology

from which meat eaters can derive assurance that (1) they aren't cannibals and (2) that they aren't what's next for dinner.

Now back to the factory-farm system. This is a system of capitalist domination, exploitation and control. Without the ability to dominate, exploit and control, there would be no factory-farm system regardless of the status of animals. But neither would there be need for the (historically and culturally contingent) social hierarchy that in this epic places people, depending on their social power, on a spectrum from animals, fodder by degree for economic exploitation, to the ruling class.

The dividing line between people and animals posited in the domination, exploitation and killing of animals ultimately reflects alienation, a separation that hides the fact of connectedness that many of us experience toward animals. The presentation of meat as commodity is one guide to this alienation, and the implementation of absurd legislation like AETA is another. **CP**

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