

# The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

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## **Collective Anti-Capitalism: *Learning from Anti-Racism Struggles***

**Nafsi ya Jamii  
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Don't be fooled by biased economist's rhetoric. *Capitalism* is largely a social psychological phenomenon *similar to racism*. It is a set of beliefs about human nature that channel human interactions in specific directions, based on insubstantial information. Capitalism functions through many of the same cultural elements (memes) as does racism.

Capitalism's impacts on Greece are an illuminating demonstration. Most economists and capitalists in the world disparage Greece and the "failure" of the Greek economy. They blame the Grecian people and the Greek government by making statements like "they were living beyond their means." The Tea Party and the Right Wing in the U.S. use Greece as the "bugaboo" to scare the uninformed about government expenditure and - *horror of horrors* - the high debt to GDP ratio. Economists no longer talk about the *Greek economic miracle* that took place after World War II (1950-1973) when the economy grew an average of 7% a year, second in the world only to Japan during that period. This growth was tied to tourism, European trade, and global capitalism with a modest dose of support and benefit for the Grecian people who were spending more hours toiling in their work sites than almost any other people on the European Continent. Greece joined the European Union in 1981 and gave up its national currency, the Drachma, in 2001, losing control of its economy to the European capitalists and centralized bankers. Other than that, Greeks have done nothing significantly different since 1973. The Grecian people drank deep of capitalism's toxic elixir of consumerism.

The huge contributions to Greece's failure by capitalists and bankers, *both inside and outside of Greece*, are only whispered about behind obscuring hands. The memes of capitalism (self-righteous greed, arrogance, exceptionalism, and fend-for-your-individual-selfishness) remain unexamined. Western minds imbued with capitalist beliefs resist self criticism. Therefore a true appraisal of the Greek financial failure has never happened. There is little exposure of the fact "that through the assistance of Goldman Sachs, J. P. Morgan Chase and numerous other capitalist investment banks, financial products were developed which enabled the governments of Greece...to hide their borrowing. This [encouraged] Greek governments to spend beyond their means, while meeting the deficit targets [dictated by] the European Union and the monetary union guidelines." (Wikipedia) Thus Greece boldly employed capitalism's essential essence: **get the most that you can get out of the "market" with no other considerations**. Economists and bankers liberally use blame-the-victim memes. This means blaming the "suckers" for anything that goes wrong. These false capitalist memes which are "interwoven" throughout Greek society (and throughout U.S. society) are now tearing Greece apart.

The imposition of "austerity" measures - which siphon off desperately needed public funds to pay the bankers that facilitated the Grecian downfall - is pushing much of the Greek middle-class into poverty and intensifying the generational lethality of circumstances for those already in poverty. The Greek healthcare system is collapsing to the detriment of children, women, and seniors. The Greek people are turning on each other and losing their focus which was on the bankers and unadulterated-capitalism-believing-government officials who were the cause of their predicament. The racist Golden Dawn Party is rapidly growing and perpetrating vicious attacks against helpless African immigrants - blaming the wrong people for the problem. And the local police are either in cahoots or are helpless in the face of this injustice. Racism and capitalism produce many of the same tragic individual and community wounds.

However, be clear, there *is not* an orchestrated conspiracy and there need not be one when these toxic cultural bits are so thoroughly interwoven into societies' institutions and individual human understandings. *Here* are some lessons for all of us about the fallacy of armed struggle to "occupy" the state (government). Note that some of Greece's governments during this period called themselves democratic socialists, trying to deny their acquiescence to capitalism; liberals who are unselfconsciously imbedded in racist systems also try the same

self-naming denials. Armed struggle, however, is not a viable solution to toxic memes that are in folk's heads and hearts.

The U.S. Tea Party is a "rag tag" collection of people who hold the same false supremacy memes that underlie the capitalism and racism in Greece and these memes similarly confuse and obscure their view of reality. Many economists around the world now have to admit that the relative health of the U.S. economy is due to the fact that the U.S. has not instituted severe "austerity" programs targeted at the victims of capitalism's' global economic crisis. Yet Tea Party activists are trumpeting this misdiagnosis and manipulating the undemocratic mechanisms in our political system to bring about such "austerity" programs. Integrity, humanity, and morality are lacking.

To his credit, Alan Greenspan, former Chairperson of the Federal Reserve and the architect of the housing bubble that burst to precipitate this disaster, publicly recognized and named the immorality of the capitalists and the bankers as "irrational exuberance." Yet Tea Party activists and Tea Party Congresspersons are irrationally exuberant in their support for "American exceptionalism," blame-the-victim attacks, and unmitigated selfish individualism. It is not a coincidence that some of the most blatant expressions of public racism in recent memory have occurred at Tea Party rallies. Neither should it be surprising that the growth of the Tea Party is paralleled by "record levels" of growth in the number of domestic hate and extremist groups, led by a surge in anti-government (anti-black-President) radicalism, according to a report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center. In 2000 there were just 602 hate crimes by these groups nationally; the FBI counted 6,624 hate crimes in 2010.

However, again, it would be a mistake to believe that there is a core of people "pulling strings," either in government or the private sector, which could be physically defeated to turn things around even by the judicious use of the Marxist' "dictatorship of the proletariat." Capitalist memes (firmly stuck in all of our heads) channel us towards hyper-perceptions of individualistic causes and individualistic sources of agency (power) while deemphasizing systemic causes and community (collective) sources of agency. Memes cannot be changed through the actions of authoritarian control centers no matter who is "in charge." *Memes are changed by direct, honest, respectful engagement where folks go deep enough to discover our collective human common ground* and build from there; they are changed when we practice our humanity rather than our xenophobic mythologies.

In her book *Getting Past Capitalism: History, Vision, Hope*, Cynthia Kaufman brilliantly lays out the framework and the path to realistic, effective, collective anti-capitalism actions in an inspiring way! She describes how movement issues can be linked and she updates and translates political philosophy that we (progressives) have all been grasping to better understand and implement. She takes on these false memes that are the true culprits for the destruction of our lives and the planet. It is more the falsehoods and misperceptions that we all cling to in our heads than it is any person or group of persons who must be erased.

To start with, John Locke *was wrong*: capitalism and democracy **do** conflict. Capitalism and democracy do not enhance each other or produce each other. Vladimir Lenin *was wrong*: there is **no need** for a "vanguard." Ms. Kaufman writes "If capitalism isn't a monolithic system that must be overthrown by a revolutionary working class smashing the state, how can we understand its nature and develop strategies for challenging it? Capitalism is made up of a variety of interrelated practices, from the enclosure of the commons at the dawn of capitalism to today's exploitation of native lands; from our dependency on shopping to feel cool to our dependency on wage labor to survive; from the commercialization of our electoral processes to the commercialization of ways medicine is delivered. Once we begin to understand the ways that the practices that constitute capitalism come together, what the forces for their reproduction are, and where the vulnerabilities in that reproduction lie, we can then begin to develop realistic strategies for working to get past capitalism." She hints at further research and analysis that must be done on capitalist child rearing practices, general public education, familial relations counseling, personal relations counseling, and mechanisms to build local community economic solidarity. Her book takes the real life lessons **learned** as we overcome racism and applies them to the similarly meme-based system of capitalism. We are - in fact - talking about many of the same false supremacist memes.

*Getting Past Capitalism* is a book that marks a historical phase-shift in the progressive movement in the U.S. The author, Cynthia Kaufman, speaks from extensive direct experience. She is the director of the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement at De Anza College, where she also teaches philosophy. She is the author of *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* (South End Press, 2003). She is a lifelong activist, having been involved with Central America Solidarity work, union organizing, work against police abuse, housing rights and most recently, work to prevent climatic destruction of our

world. The eight page bibliography at the end of the book is testimony to the depth and breadth of her political philosophical scholarship. *Fail to read this book at your own peril.* The capitalist publishing system has currently caused the book to be expensive, retarding its distribution. It is available, however, in hard cover from Lexington books, or you can find an [electronic copy](#). Read it and join the struggle for the survival of humanity wherever and whomsoever you might be.

*[Note: Nafsi ya Jamii is the Swahili phrase that translates in English to "The Soul Community"]*

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