

## StreetNet News no.21

### Book Review: "A Bridge Between Trade Unions and Social Movements in Contemporary South Africa" by Ercüment Celik

by Pat Horn

Ercüment Celik's book is based on his study of street vendors in South Africa (with a focus on Durban) which he conducted between 2006 and 2008. It is a unique record, comprising both an analytic and nuanced record of political dynamics as well as a chapter of well-researched survey and statistical information (Chapter VII) – accomplished with impressive accuracy and grasp of the complicated dynamics in this sector, and between the sectors of street vendors, trade unions and social movements.

Chapter I is a theoretical chapter about the concept of social movement unionism, and Chapter VIII at the end comes back to theoretical reflections about social movements in South Africa and integrating street vendors into the social movement unionism approach.

Chapter II reviews South Africa from Apartheid to post-Apartheid from the perspective of the trade union movement, and the emergence of social movements in post-Apartheid South Africa. This is followed by an excellent and comprehensive analysis of what has happened with street trading from Apartheid to post-Apartheid South Africa. Chapter III is a detailed record of the reorganising and mobilisation of street vendors in Durban, focussing on the independent street vendors' organisations which were emerging as a reaction against the municipal-created structures which the eThekweni Municipality preferred to deal with exclusively. This is probably the first full written record of the protracted struggles of Durban street vendors for freedom of association and independence in collective negotiations which only succeeded after raging street battles during May and June 2007 – and indeed it makes fascinating reading.

Chapters IV and V look in more detail of the roles of three strategic organisations involved in different ways with the street vendors in support of their struggles – StreetNet International, the SAC P (South African Communist Party) and the shackdwellers' social movement AbM (Abahlali baseMjondolo).

Chapter VI on the first two years of the WCCA (World Class Cities for All) campaign of StreetNet International is again a unique written record of the process of alliance-building which was so important in making the South African WCCA campaign effective during the last 18 months before the FIFA World Cup in June and July 2010.

The empirical Chapter VII has reflected the class situation of street vendors in 6 areas of Durban, both from the perspective of their incomes, type of work and living standards as well as their own reflections on their class position and their aspirations. This is new and unique among all the empirical studies done about street vendors over the past 20 years, providing an interesting counter to the common tendency of researchers to collapse the class position of all street vendors with the petty bourgeois class of small business owners.

This book has broken new ground, and needs to be read by all activists who want to have a nuanced understand the street vendors' constituency and its activist potential.