

# **Luxemburg's Contemporary Resonances in South Africa: Capital's Renewed Super-Exploitation of People and Nature**

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June 2020

For South Africans, Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* offered a profoundly relevant contribution to the Marxist theory of imperialism partly because she drew on primary accounts of this country's super-exploitation. Those were written during the critical period of primitive accumulation, and as a result, she considered the context for land and natural resource dispossession, migrant labor, and ethno-patriarchal rule. In the process, she described and also theorized how settler colonialism's primitive accumulation was not a once-off affliction. Instead it was, *and remains*, a systematic way to arrange capitalist and non-capitalist relations to the benefit of the former, as a means of addressing internal contradictions within the accumulation process, albeit in a context of growing resistance.

Here is the line of argument. First, Luxemburg's *Accumulation* gives us the basic tools to work through why there is a "ceaseless flow of capital from one branch of production to another, and finally in the periodic and cyclical swings of reproduction between overproduction and crisis" (2003, 76). Second, as the capital flow turns from new sectors to new spaces, imperial power helps capitalist social relations dominate non-capitalist "natural economies." These are not only the terrains of pre-capitalist society (including patriarchal structures as well as proto-feminist reactions) and post-capitalist mutual-aid systems—including varieties of what can be considered "commons"—but also the environmental assets of dominated countries, of which Africans are the most sustained victims.

Third, Luxemburgist politics—which Gunnett Kaaf (in this volume) reminds us still inform the South African left's disputes over strategy—do not necessarily require that all efforts be directed into building a political party at every moment in time. Instead, it is in the uneven defense of non-capitalist spheres of life that more progress has been recorded. "Commoning" is a useful term to describe many of these resistances (Cornell 2012). In South Africa post-1994, these modes of resistance have at least five characteristics: removing vestiges of apartheid; opposing commodification of daily life; attacking late-capitalist investments in Intellectual Property that threatened millions of lives; transforming educational opportunities; and undermining the crony capitalism that Fanon (1963) warned would be an inevitable mode of post-colonial accumulation in his *Wretched of the Earth*. Stitched together properly, these offer broader lessons for socialist, feminist, anti-racist and indeed eco-socialist politics, even if in 2020, too many forces are arrayed against these to express confidence about an imminent left regroupment.

## **Capitalist versus Non-capitalist Relations, in Structural Socio-Political-Economic Terms**

Luxemburg's articulation of the settler-colonial version of imperialism, especially evident in South Africa, still rings true today:

Non-capitalist relations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such relations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up. Historically, the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist

methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates (Luxemburg 2003: 327).

Myriad contradictions arise from the capitalist and non-capitalist “articulations of modes of production,” as Harold Wolpe (1980) described the apartheid form. For example, Annette Kuhn and AnnMarie Wolpe (1982) explained the terribly adverse gender power relations observable in South Africa (as well as all other capitalist-patriarchal societies) during “social reproduction,” or the “second shift.” This typically entails women’s unpaid labor in child-bearing and rearing and female care-giving for ill and elderly family and community members, often in addition contributing to community activities that add to overall social welfare. These functions exist, David Harvey (2017: 14) suggests, alongside Marx’s logic of the capital-labor relationship: “social reproduction as a separate and autonomous sphere of activity providing in effect a free gift to capital in the persona of the laborer who returns to the workplace as fit and ready for work as possible.”

This is true generally across capitalist countries, but in the last century’s evolution of Western social policy—e.g. the “Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism” as analyzed by Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990)—the critical difference with South Africa is that under apartheid, women’s child-rearing, home-based medical care of sick workers, and elder-care of retirees were largely performed in distant “Bantustan” homelands without any supportive state infrastructure (i.e., the standard childcare creches and schools, health systems and retirement funds of advanced capitalism—aside from the sporadic existence of religious missionary schools). This structural feature of apartheid has to some extent persisted, given the state’s extremely weak delivery capacity in rural areas.

The extent to which the wages earned by a laborer cover family reproduction costs helps to assess whether “super-exploitation” is underway. As John Smith (2018) argues, this would be increasingly evident in the “*reduction in the value of labor power by suppressing consumption levels* (or what amounts to the same thing, shifting production to countries where workers’ consumption levels and the value of labor power is much lower)” (original emphasis). The “vast scale” at which this suppression of consumption happens today, he insists, is due to “the suppression of wages below the value of labor power and international variations in the rate of surplus value” (Smith 2018).

Consider two aspects: wages that are below even family poverty levels in South Africa, and local corporate profitability in relation to “international variations.” First, the StatsSA official agency does not provide us sufficient empirical evidence to fruitfully dwell on these two matters, but three superficial indicators of super-exploitation are suggestive of the deprived conditions that now prevail. First, the “Upper Bound Poverty Line” was in mid-2019 calculated by StatsSA as \$83.46/month (\$2.79/day), defined as enough money to buy food sufficient to provide an average person 2100 calories per day plus “an allowance for the consumption of non-food basic necessities (such as clothing, shelter, transportation, education, etc.)” (StatsSA 2018, 6).<sup>1</sup>

It can be deduced that workers within the families comprising the lowest-income two-thirds of South Africans (i.e., that are at or below this line, with many deriving income only from tokenistic social grants) are super-exploited, presuming they enter the labor market. (Indeed, even if they are technically unemployed, they suffer the “reserve-army” function of dragging wages lower. And in any case, StatsSA has a very low bar for the definition of “work.”<sup>2</sup>) Within the labor market, a new national minimum wage was set in 2019 at \$198/month (aside from domestic work, farm labor and state public works jobs, where the

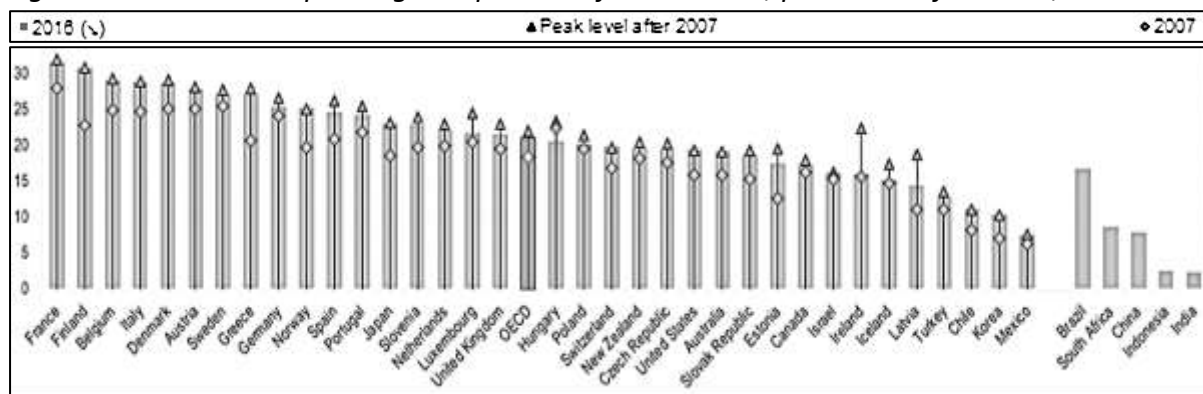
figure drops to \$119/month). For an average household size (3.86 people), a single earner would need \$298/month to keep her/his dependents at the poverty line.

In short, seen from below, there is extreme super-exploitation underway across the economy, with workers unable to maintain their households at the poverty line. A related indicator of super-exploitation through social reproduction is that this poverty line has not been penetrated by state social programs, for the social share of South Africa's fiscal commitment is, contrary to impressions, very low: just eight percent of GDP, which ranks fifth least generous among the world's fifty main economies (Figure 1).

The second superficial indicator of whether South Africa qualifies as super-exploitative is the rate of profit of companies, in relation to those based elsewhere in the world. The most recent comparative data are from the International Monetary Fund's annual Article IV Consultations, which periodically rate South Africa's corporate profits against peers. The South African operations of both local and international firms have recently ranked within the top three (among both high- and middle-income countries) for non-financial corporations' profits, alongside high-profit sites such as Indonesia and India; and also third for financial institutions' profits behind Argentina and Brazil (IMF 2016, 2018) (Figure 2). The relative rates fluctuate in part because the overall rate of profit dropped in South Africa (as nearly everywhere) after 2007, following the 1993-2007 upturn that restored rates of profit to apartheid-era levels (Malikane 2017) (Figure 3).

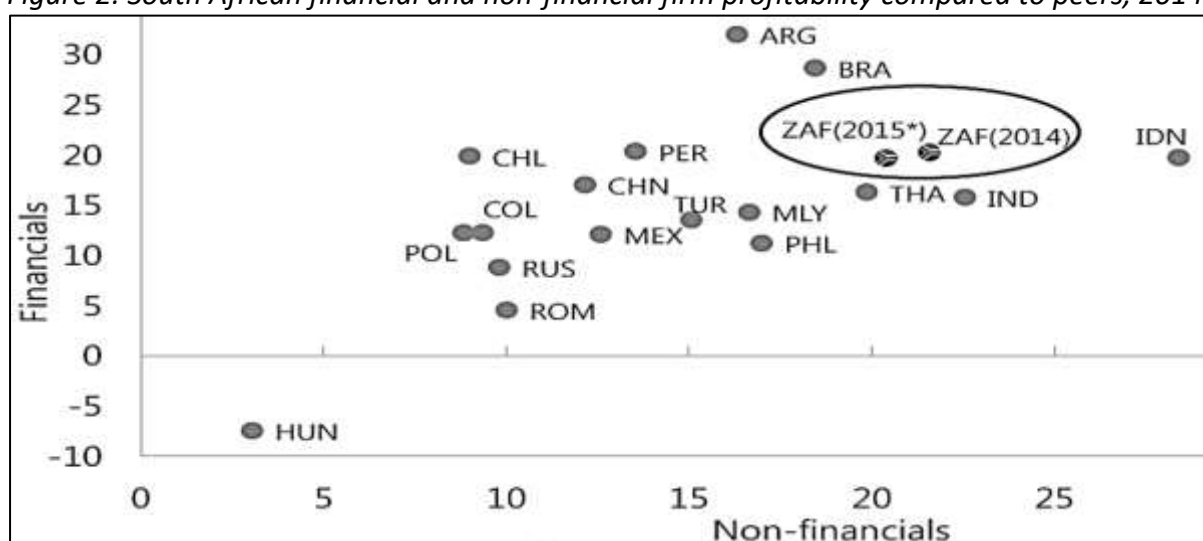
However, the problem with these rough indicators of super-exploitation is not only that they are slightly unreliable and excessively positivist in nature, but that they abstract from the deeper socio-political relations that Luxemburg understood so well through her reading of secondary material about South Africa. As a result, they fail to incorporate temporal dynamics of profiteering as well as the social resistance that arises periodically as a result. In the 1980s, such resistance amplified pre-existing capitalist-crisis tendencies to the point that apartheid had to be jettisoned by big business. But even more extreme internal contradictions are intrinsic to super-exploitative systems.

Figure 1: Public social spending as a percent of GDP—2007, peak level after 2007, and 2016



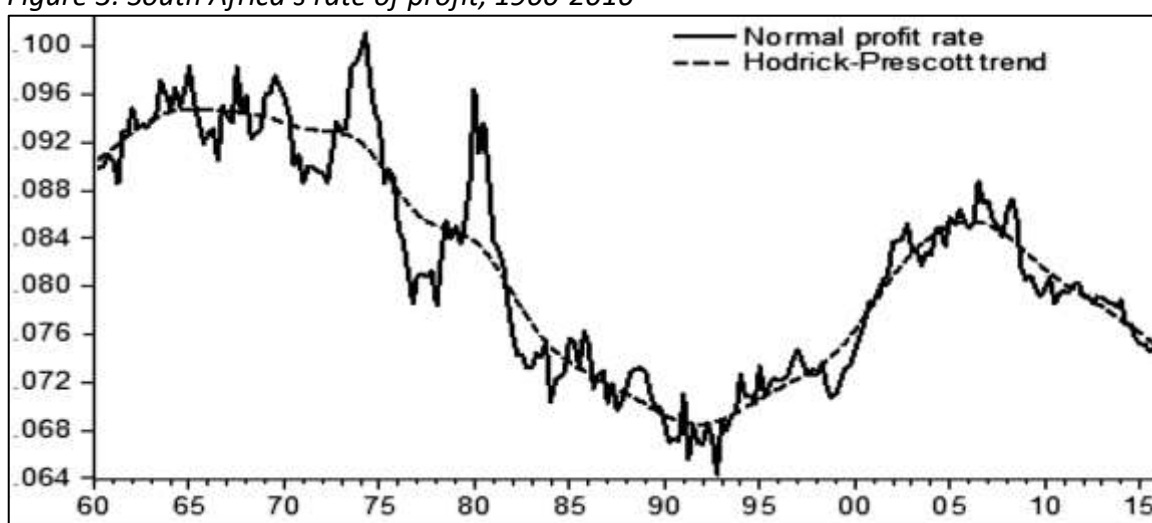
Source: OECD (2017)

Figure 2: South African financial and non-financial firm profitability compared to peers, 2014



Source: International Monetary Fund (2016)

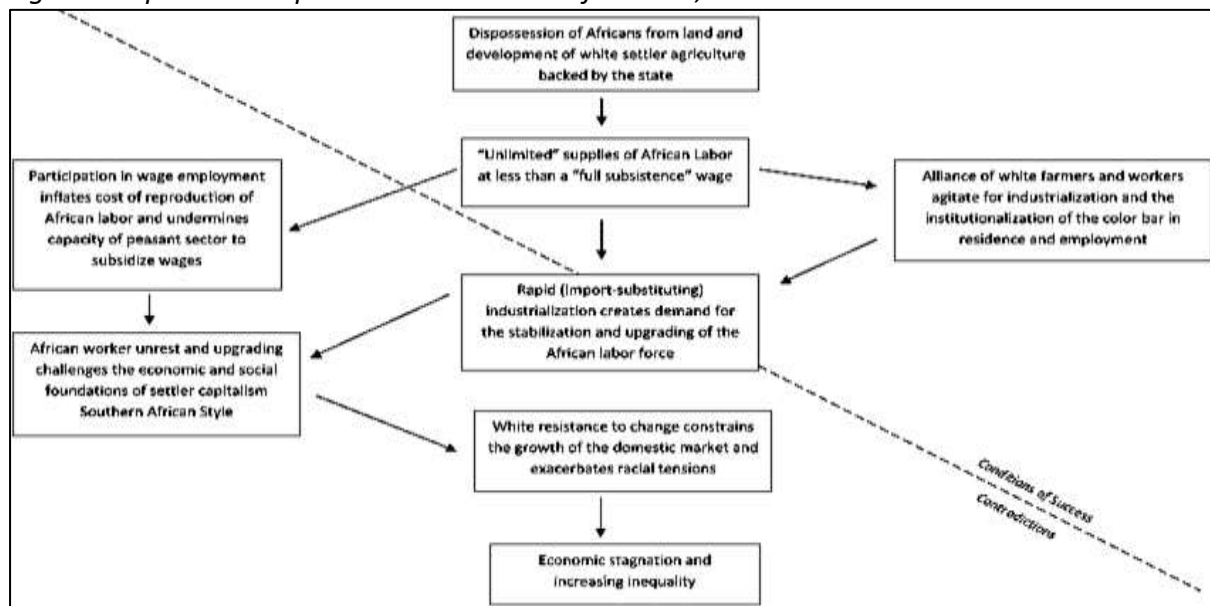
Figure 3: South Africa's rate of profit, 1960-2016



Source: Malikane (2017)

Looking at super-exploitation historically, as did Luxemburg, the character of these contradictions became obvious in South Africa especially once their limits within over-accumulation were reached. As elaborated by Giovanni Arrighi, Nicole Marie Aschoff, and Ben Scully, this was “a paradigmatic outlier case of accumulation by dispossession—that is, as one of its extreme instances capable of highlighting in almost ideo-typical fashion its nature and limits” (2010: 410). Figure 4 summarizes their assessment of the dialectic between conditions of successful super-exploitation and crucial contradictions that emerged from within those successes.

*Figure 4: Apartheid-capitalism's conditions of success, and contradictions*



Source: Giovanni Arrighi, Nicole Marie Aschoff and Ben Scully (2010)

The limits and contradictions were witnessed in regular overaccumulation crises of capital. During apartheid's terminal period, the mid-1980s, the crisis was most associated with luxury-oriented import-substitution industrialization, due to limits to the size of the market, the extremely high level of class antagonism, and the bursting of the financial bubble in mid-1985. That was the catalytic event for white capital to shift political support from Pretoria Afrikaners to the exiled African National Congress (Field, 2009; Bond, 2014). But the crisis was displaced—not resolved—during the subsequent era of non-racial, constitutional democracy.

Although devalorization of capital exposed to various labor-intensive manufacturing sectors (clothing, textiles, footwear, appliances, electronics, etc.) occurred during the 1990s, and although the rate of profit was at least temporarily restored (Malikane, 2017), the unpatriotic character of formerly (white) “national capital” was ultimately the greatest contradiction. It was revealed in 1999-2001 when most major firms decamped their primary stock market listings from Johannesburg, and moved abroad. Even Afrikaner firms did so in the late 2010s, including Naspers (the country's largest company and owner of 30 percent of China's giant tech firm Tencent, which was moved to Amsterdam) and the catastrophic Steinhoff empire (listed in Frankfurt, which did not prevent the firm's widespread international fraud). So South Africa never achieved the promised virtuous cycle of reintegration into the world economy as a “new NIC,” an aspiring follow-on to the successful integrations of East Asian Newly Industrialized Countries.

In the past decade, a renewed overaccumulation of capital—and ongoing “capital strike”—can be traced to the overproduction of raw materials for the world market, most of the “super-cycle” prices of which peaked in 2011, plateaued, and then crashed after 2015, along with the limits of financialized consumption which in 2008 were witnessed in the National Credit Regulator’s finding that half the country’s twenty million formal sector borrowers had such weakened repayment capacity that they were in “impaired credit” status: they were at least three months behind on servicing their debts (Bond, 2015).

As a result, ever more extreme versions of accumulation by dispossession accompanied neoliberal public policy in South Africa, and much worse uneven development of the economy was experienced, including in the geographies of new residential and business enclaves. There, “gated community” and “edge city” strategies of re-segregation became obvious. One re-integrative strategy, inner-city gentrification, repeatedly reached its limits in Johannesburg and Durban due mainly to the limited center-city markets (and effective demand) for office space, residential housing and artisanal consumption goods (Bond, 2000; Bond and Browder, 2019). The result is a spatially-segregated outcome, far beyond the bounds of explanation via a capitalist logic expressed in neoclassical economics (the dogma that takes market transactions as the outcome of implicitly equal relations between atomistic buyers and sellers and of benefit to all).

The most sustained African attacks on the neoliberal standpoint were grounded in an account of the shifting role of racial domination, as expressed by Ben Magubane (2001) in his periodization of South African racism’s *functionality* to super-exploitative capitalist circuits during various epochs:

In 1776, Smith described two events that he said were the greatest and most important in the history of mankind: “the discovery of America, and the passage to the east Indies by way of the Cape of Good Hope.” Asking, “What benefits, or what misfortune to mankind may hereafter result from these great events,” he lamented that “no human wisdom can foresee.” But it was possible even in 1776 for Smith to foresee that “the savage injustice of Europeans” towards those who were in the process of being colonized would “render an event, which ought to have been beneficial to all, ruinous and destructive to several of those unfortunate countries.” (Magubane, 2001: 1)

Magubane recounts how during the 1800s—a period also replete with overproduction crises (Bond, 2003)—“The expanding frontier of ‘settler capitalism’ saw the recrudescence of the worst form of racism. The old social relations of usurious and commercial capitalism, with its conquistadors and slaves, were replaced by the dominion of industrial capital, with its plantation and wage slaves” (2001, 6). That expanding frontier reflected, first, a “spatial fix” (Harvey, 1982); the geographical displacement of what, even in nineteenth-century South African capitalism, was a series of periodic overaccumulation crises (Bond, 2003). We can term this approach “shifting.” But there were also bouts of “financialization,” when rising credit achieved at least a momentary displacement of overaccumulation, because the credit system mopped up current consumption at the cost of a later more expensive repayment (Bond 2003). We can call this “temporal fix” (Harvey, 1982) “stalling.” Third, as Luxemburg (2003) stressed in *Accumulation*, capital regularly enhanced its profitability through new means of what is now widely considered to be “accumulation by dispossession,” or “stealing.”

The shifting, stealing, and stalling of overaccumulated capital in South Africa meant renewed state-capital-society-labor-nature arrangements that were institutionalized so as to super-exploit the indigenous people, women and nature. These may have seemed, as Harvey recounted, similar to Marx's idea of primitive accumulation, namely "conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; ... colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources)... and ultimately the credit system as radical means of primitive accumulation" (2003, 145). South African capital hardwired these structural systems of oppression into the body politic so deeply, that, in the post-apartheid era, super-exploitative labor relations are not only maintained, attacks on the environment are also undertaken with renewed vigor.

### **Capitalist versus Non-Capitalist Relations in Structural *Environmental-Economic* Terms**

Thus far, we have touched on the super-exploitative characteristics of labor power that have allowed economic creolization to proceed in the manner Luxemburg suggested it would, in settler-colonial societies like South Africa where natural economies continue to be disrupted. More generally, though, the wreckage is not just of the pre-capitalist societies—or for that matter, the decommodified state services, matriarchal care relations and mutual aid systems that societies created in response—but also is evident in the (removable) ecological assets of the dominated country. Capital's creolization when invading the spaces of nature deserves much more attention, because at least in the 2015-19 period in Southern Africa, the boomerang of eco-destruction from fossil fuel abuse became evident with several debilitating droughts, cyclones and floods attributed to greenhouse gas emissions, i.e., anthropomorphic causes (Fitchett, 2019).

Luxemburg was profoundly concerned about the environment: "land, game in primeval forests, minerals, precious stones and ores, products of exotic flora such as rubber, etc." (2003: 349). Indeed, for "the communist peasant community no less than the feudal corvee farm," she argued, "the most important of these productive forces is of course the land, its hidden mineral treasure, and its meadows, woods and water, and further the flocks of the primitive shepherd tribes" (Luxemburg 2003, 350). Drucilla Cornell explains: "Apart from the profits earned on capital reinvested in the new territories, great capital gains are made simply through the conquest and possession of the land and all natural resources" (2012: 196).

As another instance of Luxemburgist environmental-economic thinking (an epistemological creolization of intellectual resistance), consider the way Samir Amin likewise analyzed the ecological implications of super-exploitation. For Amin, they emerged both from differential rates of surplus value extraction, for which his 1971 *Accumulation on a World Scale* was the most famous expression, and also from capitalism's abusive contact with non-capitalist relations. This was a vital component of Amin's overarching theory of unequal exchange:

Luxemburg is right: capitalism expanded by destroying pre-capitalist modes of production both within the societies of the dominant centers and the dominated peripheries. Handicrafts are replaced by manufacturing industries, small shops by supermarkets etc. This process of accumulation by

dispossession still goes on with the current privatization of former public services (Amin 2016).

Without diminishing his critique of destructive articulations of modes of production and hence of *social* relations, Amin gradually—and then more decisively at the end of his life—brought unequal *ecological* exchange into his value-transfer schema:

Capitalist accumulation is founded on the destruction of the bases of all wealth: human beings and their natural environment... historical Marxisms had largely passed an eraser over the analyses advanced by Marx on this subject and taken the point of view of the bourgeoisie—equated to an atemporal ‘rational’ point of view—in regard to the exploitation of natural resources (Amin, 2018: 159, 86).

In my own review of Luxemburg’s lasting significance to African political economists, the extent to which resource depletion—i.e., the diminution of natural wealth through insufficiently-compensated extraction—impoverishes the continent became abundantly evident (Bond, 2019). This net resource loss is also (controversially) termed the depletion of “natural capital,” for in Africa it occurs without foreign or local corporations making compensating reinvestments, or paying adequate taxes and royalties (unlike, say, in the case of resource-rich Norway, Canada or Australia). Africa’s net resource losses have amounted to roughly \$150 billion per annum over the past two decades (Bond, 2018). Notwithstanding this enormous magnitude, Africa’s depleted natural resource base is the victim of erasers wielded by nearly all bourgeois economists and progressive political economists alike, including those based at international and local NGOs which purport to advocate that corporations “publish what you pay” and “stop the bleeding.”

One crucial exception, albeit so evidently suffused with policy schizophrenia that it is often unreliable (Bond, 2018), is the World Bank. There, thanks to environmental economists Herman Daly (1996) and Robert Goodland, various reports have been released over the past quarter century addressing what is termed *The Changing Wealth of Nations*. In these, a notional shift in a country’s wealth is calculated over time: “Adjusted Net Savings” (ANS). The ANS incorporates four factors that allow the reform of the variable Gross National Income (GNI) in order to approximate “genuine savings”: physical capital’s depreciation, damage caused by pollution and depleted natural resources (all three of which are considered debits from GNI), and educational expenditure (“human capital” investment, considered to be an extra credit to GNI). To establish the magnitude of *uncompensated* exploitation of natural resources can at least be attempted with these data.

Leaving aside the depreciation of physical capital and the appreciation of human capital, the environmental calculations are profound. South Africa’s CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are 9.0 tons per person, eleventh highest in the world among countries of over ten million people, and third highest behind Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic if measured per unit of economic output. In addition to damage from CO<sub>2</sub>, which the Bank estimates at 4.6 percent of GNI (Table 2), the main negative features of the environmental accounts are Luxemburg’s “hidden mineral treasure”: unlike the land (meadows), forests (woods), water, and livestock that she also mourned, these are non-renewable. Once gone, they are lost forever.

If GNI captures the national (domestically-produced) output of goods and services in a given year, then to sell such “goods”—for instance, South Africa’s four leading mineral



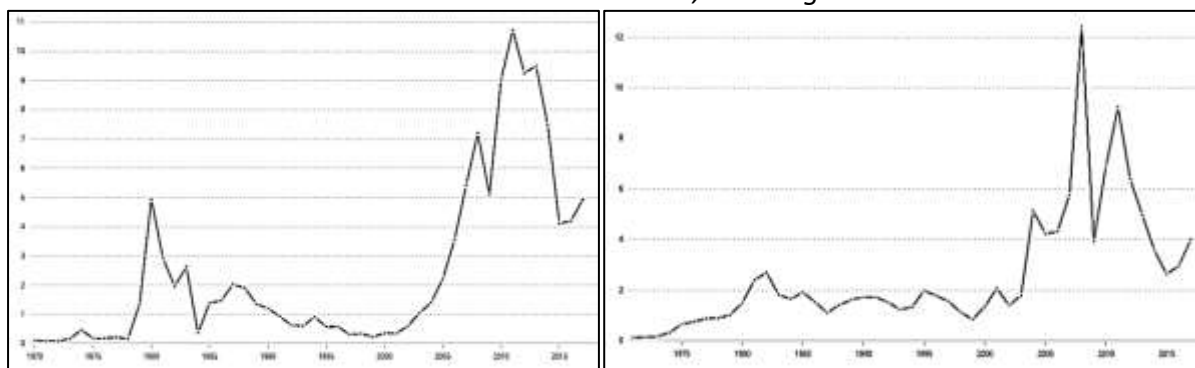
exports, which are coal (25 percent in 2017), platinum group metals (21 percent), gold (15 percent) and iron ore (11 percent)—requires extraction, smelting, refining and shipment of non-renewable minerals (ores) and metals, as well as disposal of waste residue. To be sure, all these activities produce value within the commodity form, and with it, capital extracts surplus value from labor at the point of production. But in addition, the extraction of what Marx termed “free gifts of nature”—e.g. South Africa’s non-renewable minerals taken from the ground each year—can be usefully integrated into the critique of capital’s super-exploitation of natural economy.

Cyclical dynamics are evident in the World Bank’s (2019) calculation of mineral and fossil-fuel wealth loss in South Africa (Figure 5). The dollar-denominated depletion of these minerals worsened in 1980, due to the very high gold price resulting from U.S. stagflation, which was soon dramatically reversed in 1981 due to much higher U.S. interest rates, known as the “Volcker Shock.” The next burst of depletion was in 2010-13, as the commodity super-cycle peaked. In 2011, (non-coal) minerals depleted by \$11.7 billion, up from a previous high of \$7.2 billion in 2008. That year, coal depletion was measured at \$12.3 billion, and in 2011 it was \$9.2 billion. So in 2008, these combined resource outflows were \$19.5 billion and in 2011, \$20.9 billion (World Bank, 2019). As a share of GNI this was far less than other African economies with a skew to primary production (Mauritania, Togo, DRC, and Zambia) and especially those with oil sectors (Angola, the Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea) (Bond and Basu, 2020).

*Figure 5: South Africa’s mineral and fossil-fuel depletion, 1970-2017 (US\$ billion)<sup>3</sup>*

*5a. Non-coal minerals*

*5b. Coal, oil and gas*



Source: World Bank (2019)

Luxemburg (and, more recently, Amin) would not be surprised at the temporally-dynamic unequal ecological exchange and environmental destruction represented in these World Bank bean-counting exercises. But there are important debates to be joined about whether the provisional natural-capital accounting is not excessively generous to those corporations doing the extraction. For example, South Africa’s subsoil assets are valued by the Bank at just \$400 billion, far less than the International Monetary Fund’s (2018) \$800 billion estimate, as well as far less than the \$2.5 trillion regularly cited as a result of a CitiGroup guess (Bloomberg, 2010), albeit a figure that is now ridiculed as far too optimistic given that the bulk is in platinum group metals that are currently impossible to extract (Seccombe, 2019).

Even if the Bank’s studies of South African wealth and depletion processes are severely flawed (for example, platinum and diamonds are not included), the Bank nevertheless provides a starting point for a discussion of natural resource exploitation. The

population of South Africa in 2014 was 54.1 million. Dividing the different types of wealth in the country by each resident allows an estimate of \$77,348 in per capita wealth. Of that, 17.8 percent consists of the country's natural capital, of which just more than half (9.2 percent) is accounted for in "subsoil assets," which include the subcategories minerals and "energy" (coal and a small amount of gas). The other combination of nature's wealth—pastureland, cropland, forests and protected areas—amounted, in 2014, to 8.5 percent of total wealth. By far the greatest amount of South Africa's wealth that year—58.1 percent—was allegedly in human capital, while 24.9 percent was in the produced capital stock (Table 1).<sup>4</sup>

*Table 1: South Africa's per capita wealth, 2014 (in US\$)*

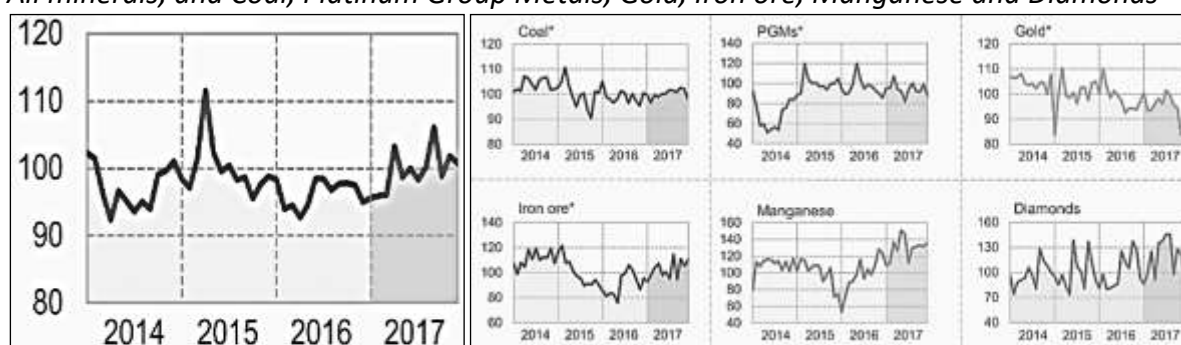
Total wealth	Produced capital	Natural capital	Forest		Protected areas	Cropland	Pastureland	Subsoil assets	Human capital	Net foreign assets
			Timber	Nontimber						
77,348	19,263	13,743	898	320	370	2,115	2,892	7,149	44,921	-579

Source: World Bank (2017)

What do we learn from perusing these accounts, in which GNI is adjusted to incorporate natural capital and human capital? The five major categories in which annual output should be adjusted downwards are: 1) consumption of fixed capital in the form of wear-and-tear depreciation (14.3 percent of South Africa's GNI), 2) CO<sub>2</sub> damage (4.6 percent), 3) mineral depletion (1.1 percent), 4) energy depletion (0.7 percent), and 5) air pollution (0.4 percent). The (controversial) upward adjustment of education spending is 6 percent of GNI, leaving a total ANS of 1.5 percent. In absolute terms, the ANS for an average South African attributable to depleted mineral wealth (including coal) was thus \$129 in 2014 (but again, recall that platinum and diamonds are not included).<sup>5</sup> The snapshot capital accounts provided by the World Bank (2017) in its *Little Green Databook* also allows further contemplation of the destruction of South Africa's natural economy (Table 2).<sup>6</sup>

Again, the crucial limitation of a snapshot is that it does not capture the extreme dynamism associated with minerals demand and supply. A 2014-17 dynamic graph of the volumes of South African minerals sold reveals not only that the 2015 crash was led by coal, iron ore, and manganese; also of critical importance in this period was the impact of the five-month platinum mineworker strike in 2014 (Figure 6). And it is to non-capitalist and anti-capitalist resistance, that we turn in the next section.

Figure 6: South Africa's mineral depletion, 2014-17 (volume index, 2015=100)  
All minerals, and Coal, Platinum Group Metals, Gold, Iron ore, Manganese and Diamonds



Source: StatsSA (2019)

Table 2: Breakdown of South Africa's per capita wealth, 2014 (in US\$)

Population (millions)	55.0	Land area (1,000 sq. km)	1,213	GDP (\$ billions)	314.6		
South Africa							
	Country data	Sub-Saharan Africa group	Upper middle-income group	Country data	Sub-Saharan Africa group	Upper middle-income group	
GNI per capita, World Bank Atlas method (\$)	6,080	1,631	8,263	827	3,986	8,261	
Adjusted net national income per capita (\$)	4,671	1,239	6,302	34.6	3.2	6.3	
Urban population (% of total)	66.8	37.7	64.1	Agriculture (% of total freshwater withdrawal)	63	81	68
Agriculture				Access to improved water source (% of total population)	93	68	95
Agricultural land (% land area)	80	42	35	Rural (% of rural population)	81	56	91
Agricultural irrigated land (% of total agricultural land)	1.7	-	-	Urban (% of urban population)	100	87	97
Agricultural productivity, value added per worker (2010 \$)	9,451	1,219	2,208	Access to improved sanitation (% of total population)	66	30	80
Cereal yield (kg per hectare)	4,894	1,452	4,104	Rural (% of rural population)	61	23	67
Forests and biodiversity				Urban (% of urban population)	70	40	87
Forest area (% land area)	7.8	25.7	34.9	Environment and health			
Deforestation (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	0.0	0.5	0.0	PM <sub>2.5</sub> pollution, mean annual exposure (µg/cu. m)	30	36	42
Terrestrial protected areas (% of total land area)	8.9	15.3	15.2	PM <sub>2.5</sub> exposure (% pop. exceeding WHO guideline level)	100	99	95
Threatened species, mammals	26	918	1,056	Acute resp. infection prevalence (% of children under five)	-	5	-
Threatened species, birds	46	876	1,511	Diarhea prevalence (% of children under five)	-	14	-
Threatened species, fish	107	2,023	2,315	Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	41	83	19
Threatened species, higher plants	116	3,740	6,808	National accounting aggregates—savings, depletion and degradation			
Oceans				Gross savings (% of GNI)	16.8	14.4	36.6
Total fisheries production (thousand metric tons)	578	7,416	103,240	Consumption of fixed capital (% of GNI)	14.3	13.8	18.0
Capture fisheries growth (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	-1.0	1.8	-0.5	Education expenditure (% of GNI)	6.0	3.3	3.0
Aquaculture growth (avg. annual %, 2000-15)	5.6	17.0	5.3	Energy depletion (% of GNI)	0.7	1.7	1.1
Marine protected areas (% of territorial waters)	13.4	6.1	9.9	Mineral depletion (% of GNI)	1.1	0.9	0.4
Coral reef area (sq. km)	-	17,980	48,880	Net forest depletion (% of GNI)	0.0	2.3	0.0
Mangroves area (sq. km)	30.5	28,061	50,774	CO <sub>2</sub> damage (% of GNI)	4.6	1.6	2.6
Energy and emissions				Air pollution damage (% of GNI)	0.4	1.2	0.3
Energy use per capita (kg oil equivalent)	2,715	701	2,192	Adjusted net savings (% of GNI)	1.5	-3.9	17.2
Energy from biomass products and waste (% of total)	10.5	57.4	7.3				
Electric power consumption per capita (kWh)	4,229	497	3,495				
Electricity generated using fossil fuel (% of total)	93.1	64.3	71.1				
Electricity generated by hydropower (% of total)	0.4	21.2	21.0				
CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per capita (metric tons)	8.8	0.8	6.6				

Source: World Bank 2017

## Non/Anti-Capitalist versus Capitalist Relations

Luxemburg was assassinated in 1919, during her period of most active revolutionary organizing, at the peak moment of Berlin's new communist movement. At a very different moment in the world left's fortunes, a century later in Johannesburg, the Democratic Marxism (2019) seminar series at the University of the Witwatersrand convened to contemplate the meaning of her contributions, particularly as they inform popular protest. This, one speaker concluded (Kaaf, 2019), should not be limited to formulaic political-party communism, but much more creative, connected revolutionary activity within social movements, on a variety of topical problems faced by poor and working people, as well as women and youth, and with a strong anti-capitalist ideology.

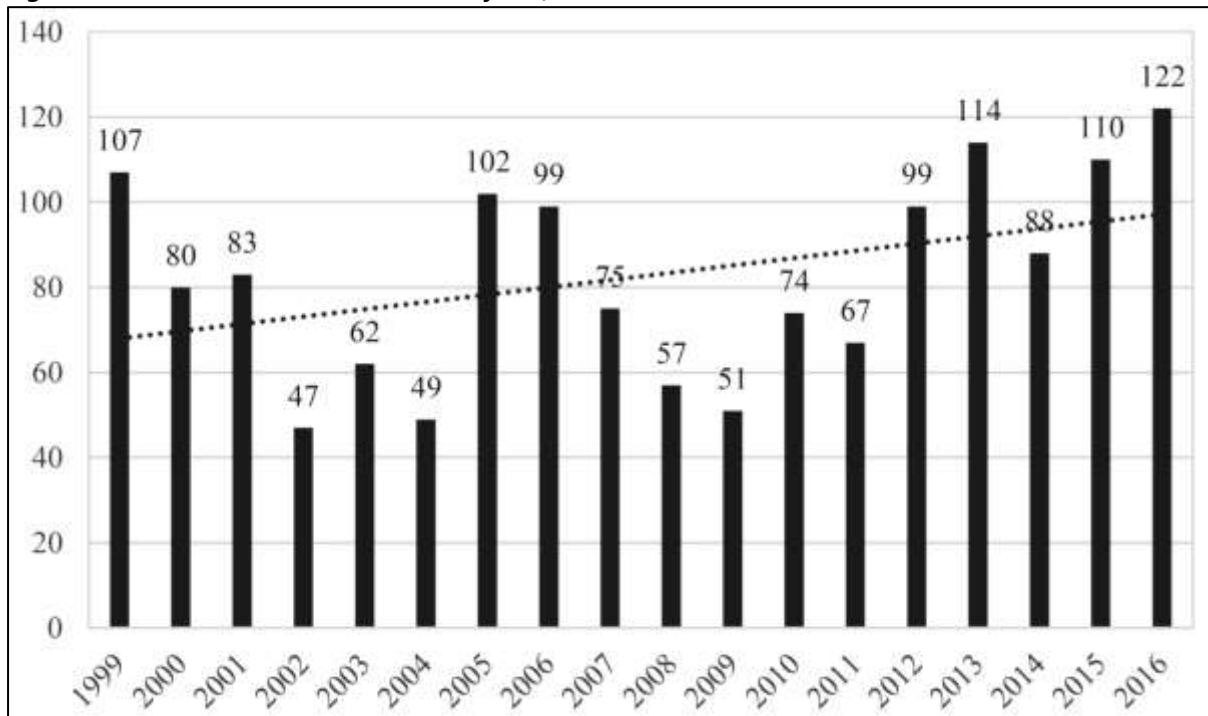
This, too, was the South African "people's commons" challenge identified by Cornell (2012), against what Luxemburg assessed as the three core strategies capital deployed against natural economies:

1) to achieve the liberation of so-called labor power, which actually means the capacity to coerce it into services, as in the persistence of unfree black labor in South Africa during the entire period of colonization; 2) to gain control over all natural resources; and 3) to introduce a commodity economy, and to separate trade and agriculture (Cornell, 2012: 193).

First, in South Africa the persistence of unfree black labor lasted until the early 1990s, when formal racial apartheid was ended. This entailed cessation of the Pass Laws and Group Areas Act which had regulated transit and residential aspects of migrant labor. In coming years, other racist legislation and the lack of democratic voting were remedied—e.g., in 1994 when the first democratic national elections were held, and in 2000 when municipal elections dropped the most obvious residual privileges enjoyed by white residents (Bond, 2000: 2014). But simultaneously, the official unemployment rate soared from 16 to 29 percent in the ten years after democracy was won, and up to 40 percent if we include those who live in faraway (ex-Bantustan) areas and had given up looking for (non-existent) work. South African capitalism therefore retained a reliance upon both undercompensated migrant workers and a vast reserve army of labor, which together keep wages lower than they would otherwise be.

One form of resistance is trade union organizing, and it is no accident that in this context, the World Economic Forum (2017) rated South Africa's working class as the most confrontational on earth from 2012-17 among 140 countries surveyed. There are increasing numbers of "work stoppages," but one indication of the power of labor is that with few exceptions (public sector workers in 2010 and mineworkers in 2014 and 2019), these now take fewer days to resolve, with a trend line of days affected by strikes down from seven million in 2006 to four million in 2017.

*Figure 7: Industrial actions in South Africa, 1999-2016*



Source: Runciman (2019)

Labor resistance that is oriented to demanding higher wages (the subject of most strikes) tends to be assimilationist, not socialist. The standard trade union political strategy is “corporatist,” demanding a seat at the table for big labor, alongside big business and big government, often resulting in gains for organized workers at the expense of the unorganized proletariat. South Africa’s unions often deployed this power aggressively, through regular inputs by the major labor federations into social policy and broader socio-political organizing. One result was the main federation’s contribution to forcing the governments of Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008) and Jacob Zuma (2009-18) to leave office nine and fifteen months early, respectively.

There are, too, a variety of ongoing labor struggles against “unfree” labor through demands that transcend higher wages and more amenable political leadership. South African working-class battles continue against the commodification of life. One strategy is constructing a commons of state services via a more expansive social welfare policy, such as a long-delayed National Health Insurance plan (likely to be introduced in 2020). Unfortunately, aside from the state’s extension of its somewhat tokenistic, \$90/month old-age grant to African workers (Bond 2014), very little progress in social policy could be claimed by organized labor during the post-apartheid era, compared to the kinds of perks won in prior years *within the category of company benefits to workers*. However, such benefits are not properly “decommodified,” as argued by Esping-Andersen (1990), because if a worker loses employment with a company, then the healthcare, pension and housing benefits also fall away. In such analysis of social policy, workers are still economically coerced to commodify their labor power (Barchiesi 2011).

As for Luxemburg’s critique of capital’s “control over all natural resources,” a new commons philosophy emerged among both conservationists—who in South Africa tend to be white and of greater wealth (and often guilty of promoting the advocating dispossession of communities in the vicinity of game reserves)—and advocates of “environmental justice.” The latter most famously oppose the class and racial character of pollution, starting in the U.S. South during the 1980s (Bullard, 2000). But in two ways, a new resource-commoning philosophy is emerging from a fusion of the better tendencies of planetary stewardship—e.g. the eco-feminist version of *Ubuntu* as explored by Christelle Terreblanche (2018)—and climate consciousness. The former is finding increasing expression in campaigns waged by a network, Mining Affected Communities United in Action, and its various allies (e.g. the feminists of Johannesburg support-NGOs, Womin and ActionAid). Their “right to say No!” to mineral resource extraction has generated flashpoints and success stories in several sites (Bond, 2018). Likewise, a climate justice philosophy and practice emerged across the world, including South Africa, to tackle the degeneration of *all natural resources* due to climate change. Unfortunately, the challenge to capital’s externalization of costs associated with greenhouse gas emissions proceeds at a pace that is so far inadequate to halt the potentially catastrophic damage (Bond, 2012; Satgar. 2018).

Finally, there are commoning struggles against a “commodity economy” that not only separates “trade and agriculture”—i.e., during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century’s “rise and fall of the South African peasantry,” as Colin Bundy (1979) put it—but that also distorts all other socio-economic and environmental relations. Here, there are more encouraging signs of resistance. Cornell’s first cut is revealing but incomplete:

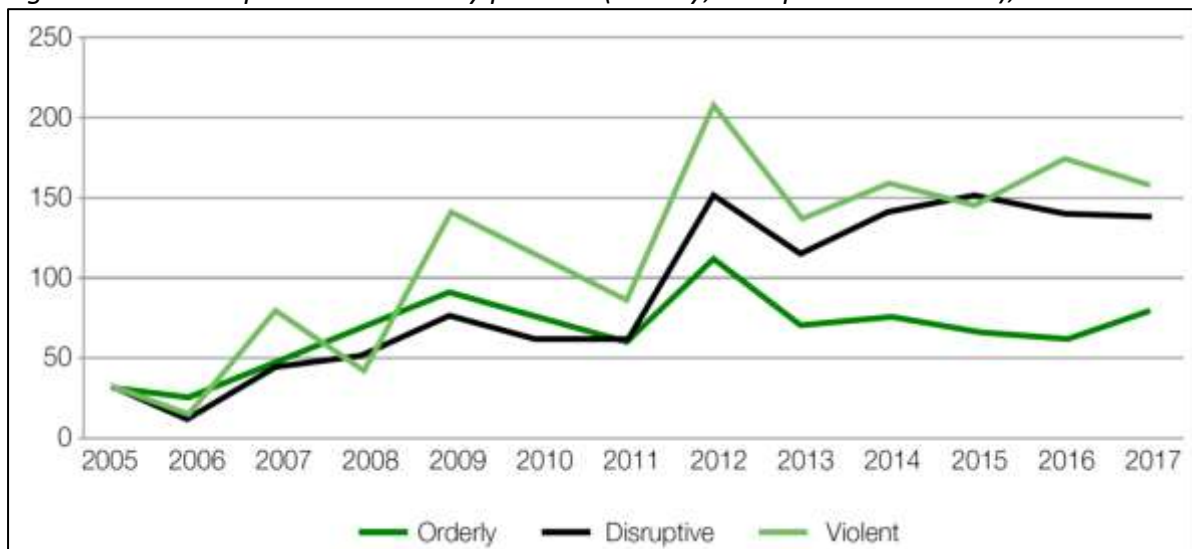
The anti-hegemonic struggles against the ANC and their attempts to turn all the means of life into capital, from water to education, may stimulate people’s

struggles to create a commons that is outside capitalist relations... It is through direct participatory mechanisms that crucial decisions about resources are to be made (2012: 193-97).

This was a prescient statement about one campaign that is still waged against water commodification, and about another that was underway and reached peak strength in 2015-17, against costly tertiary education and the outsourcing of (super-exploited) university service workers. However, both involved *not* ideal-type “direct participatory mechanisms” allowing community and student “voice” within a consultative policy decision-making process (one that legitimizes the rulers and their rules), but rather the opposite.<sup>7</sup> Victories have been won through sustained protest against decision-makers, through the increasingly militant *delegitimization* of state elites, who are typically labelled “neoliberals” hostile to the interests of the black working-class majority (Bond 2014).

In the first case Cornell cites, it was the 1998-2000 emergence of hundreds of “service delivery protests” (Bond, 2000) and the accident of a Communist water minister (Ronnie Kasrils) who initiated a modicum of “Free Basic Services”: 25 kiloliters of water per person per day (two toilet flushes worth) and a household monthly electricity supply of 50 kiloWatt hours (which, typically for the working class, amounts to a week’s worth of supply) (Bond, 2002). Considered insufficient (even “tokenistic”), those free services have not deterred service delivery protests, which continue rising (since accurate measures began around 2005, drawing on police data). Using the criteria of “disruption or injury to persons or property,” University of Johannesburg scholars identify the category of “orderly” protests as neither, while “disruptive” protests include tactics such as road blocking but no injuries, and “violent” protests entail both. Taken together, the annual rate of major protests has risen inexorably from 60 to 360 from 2006-17 (with a 2012 peak of 470 protests) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Media-reported community protests (orderly, disruptive and violent), 2005-17



Source: Alexander et al (2018, 38)

In working-class townships and shack settlements, activists intensified their disruptive capacity, the more that the neoliberal squeezing of municipal budgets—and repeated bankruptcies by local governments and massive deficits within the electricity parastatal Eskom—led to water and power cut-offs (Ngwane *et al.* 2017).<sup>8</sup> In 2019, the monthly rate of

major protests against local government according to the most conservative researchers, in the consultancy Municipal IQ, had risen to 28/month by mid-year. This was a dramatic increase from earlier levels: 20/month in 2018, 14/month in 2017 and 11/month in 2016, and far more than the average of 2/month from 2004-08 (Gous 2019).

Reforms of the state to improve the supply of affordable basic services included not only municipal planning, environmental impact assessments, and similar “invited spaces” meant to assimilate opposition. The most feted direct-participatory mechanism was the formal justice system, via the 1996 Constitution’s oft-celebrated socio-economic rights clauses (Republic of South Africa, 1996). But in the cases of healthcare access (*Soobramoney v Minister of Health* in 1997), housing (*Grootboom v Oostenberg Municipality* in 2000), and water (*Mazibuko v Johannesburg Water* in 2009), the Constitutional Court failed the plaintiffs (Bond, 2014).<sup>9</sup> Activists then resorted to extra-legal means of supplying, for example, AIDS medicines via illicit importation of generic drugs from India and Thailand during the early-2000s activism of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC); or what are termed “land invasions” to establish “shack settlements” in better-located areas,<sup>10</sup> or informal reconnections of water and electricity. The latter strategy is most advanced in Soweto, where Eskom estimates 86 percent of connections are illegal (le Cordeur, 2016).

The most successful and internationally relevant of these decommodification struggles was TAC’s campaign to get access to drugs that strengthened the immune system of those who were HIV-positive, known as Anti-RetroViral (ARV) medicines. In branded form, made by corporations in Europe and the U.S., an annual course of ARVs cost \$10,000 in the late 1990s, limiting access to a few thousand (mainly white, male) South Africans. As Mandisa Mbali (2013) showed, TAC and its international allies (especially *Medicins sans Frontiers* and in the U.S., AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, ACT-UP!) worked effectively against Big Pharma, the U.S. and South African governments, the World Trade Organization’s (WTO’s) Trade Related Intellectual Property System, and purveyors of Intellectual Property (IP) ideology, especially the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Their two most potent weapons were rising social anger at Big Pharma’s ultra-profitsteering commodification of life and ridicule of Mbeki’s AIDS denialism. As the death toll rose into the hundreds of thousands, he was increasingly called a genocidaire and made unwelcome in local and international venues. Hundreds of TAC activists committed civil disobedience and were arrested to dramatize the urgent need for policy change. It was this pressure both inside and outside the ruling party that led to a reversal in policy in 2004. Similar pressure had been applied against U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick in 2001 at the Doha WTO summit, making possible widespread diffusion of generic ARVs that cost only \$100/year to produce. The quite miraculous result was that, after forcing Pretoria’s policy shift, the ARV roll-out through public clinics reached more than five million patients within a decade, in turn raising national life expectancy from 52 to 64, with similar results across Africa and the world (Bond, 2014).

### **Commoning Luxemburg, Beyond the Contradictions**

To conclude, there are both tendencies towards and away from the radical creolization of anti-capitalist politics Luxemburg would have endorsed that are evident in the discussion above, and the latter need further exploration before closing. For example, Jane Gordon shares this warning, which reminds us of South Africa’s liberal advocates of reformist strategies for social change:

Those who benefit from partial arrangements masked as benefitting all are more likely to oppose the appearance of more legitimate alternatives that clearly reveal previous claims to generality or representativeness as phony. As such, they are more likely to reject further creolizing products as illicit, impure, or otherwise undesirable, opting instead for already existing and sedimented instantiations of mixture. (2014: 74)

In contrast, the framing put forward so spectacularly by TAC is of access to a genuine socio-economic commons of *life*, extending far beyond liberal 'rights talk' (Bond, 2014). TAC's people's commons entailed the decommodified, destratified commoning of medicines, in contrast to those whose interest in preserving private IP rights was the previous norm, particularly the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Bond, 2016).

However, a tragic dialectic is also at work in South Africa, in which a creolization process unfolds in the opposite way Luxemburg would have desired, due to a mortifying contradiction: the bleeding-over of anger from labor's super-exploitation into xenophobic sentiments, and also of community service delivery protests into periodic pogroms against immigrant suppliers of retail services ("spaza shops").

First, not all labor's broader social instincts are progressive, for there is a propensity among poor and working-class people not only to fight *against* capitalism, but sometimes to return to the more barbaric identity politics of pre-capitalism, namely artificial ethnic distinctions. These divisions were amplified by colonial-era and apartheid-era economic managers, with resulting conflagrations in South Africa between competing fractions of the working class dating to the early twentieth century, a reality Luxemburg did not have the tools (in the secondary literature she read) to observe.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, during the dying days of apartheid (1980-94), all manner of old divisions between ethnicities were amplified (and some new ones created) by Pretoria's security apparatus, often through its patronage power over "tribal" Bantustans. Tens of thousands of deaths resulted from what was incorrectly termed "black-on-black violence," particularly involving the "Zulu nation" and its leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi's reassertion of ethnic power against the liberal, modernizing, detribalized Nelson Mandela.

Because so many ties to traditional homes were retained by male migrant workers, the apartheid-era melting pot of the mine, factory or commercial farm, or even temporary residence in a cosmopolitan township like Soweto, could not tear asunder ethnic identity. Instead, South Africa's economic creolization accentuated migrant labor's pre-existing cultures. And the persistence of migrancy was also the source of identity crisis after 1994, mainly when declining employment prospects for South African workers generated a surge of working-class xenophobia (Amisi *et al*, 2011). There is a certain obvious logic in this disarticulation of modes of struggle, insofar as neoliberal, globalized capitalism introduced much less expensive labor power to South Africa from even more faraway, desperate sites than during apartheid. Mass immigration—much of it illegal via porous borders, or based on bribing the Department of Home Affairs for residence papers—today stretches further into the Southern African region (especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo), and further still to Nigeria, to the Horn of Africa and to South Asia.

Aside from the xenophobic *decommoning* of labor power, communities have grievances that also lend themselves to reject immigrants. The township xenophobes' main complaint is that immigrant purchasing networks have achieved economies of scale through their commoning of bulk buying power, hence undercutting locally-owned shops, whose



owners then regularly take revenge through looting (or worse), often in the midst of social protests. In addition to intra-micro-capitalist competition as a material basis of conflict, the official 2016 state commission investigating Durban's violent xenophobic outbreaks the prior year identified non-material explanations, also reflecting an uncomfortable creolization of the commons:

Many South Africans operating in the tuck shop and spaza sector made allegations that businesses owned by foreign nationals thrive due to unfair advantages, and that these improprieties directly undermine the viability of locally-owned businesses. Such businesses are not registered and do not pay taxes; foreign nationals sell products at prices below those that local business owners conclude are feasible and are therefore receiving illegal support; foreign nationals receive unfair privileges from wholesale companies due to shared religious beliefs; foreign nationals intentionally open spaza shops within close proximity to locally-owned businesses, thereby capturing some of the locals' markets; foreign-owned businesses sell fake goods or non-South African products; foreign businesses owners operate their shops for nearly 24 hours every day and even have workers sleeping there (Madlala, 2016).

There is certainly scope, at least conceptually, for a resolution of this contradiction, in the form of regional proletarian solidarity (Bond, Ruiters and Miller, 2001). Historically, that would mean not only rejecting the inherited borders of the 1884-85 Berlin colonial conference known as the "Scramble for Africa" and identifying how the regional workforce was forged within the migrant labor system, but then ensuring South Africa provides reparations for the sub-imperialist damage done to neighboring lands since at least 1910, the date the country came into being.

However, the regional powerhouse has not yet constructed a contemporary, post-1994 solidarity politics. During the neoliberal era, especially since at least 2008 when xenophobic attacks in working-class communities became ubiquitous, South Africa's left-wing leadership has failed to generate a grassroots and shopfloor "commoning" of the regional proletariat. Thousands of leaders and activists with anti-xenophobic principles do operate within contemporary socio-political movements, in townships (e.g. Johannesburg's United Front), trade unions (e.g. the SA Federation of Trade Unions), and political parties (e.g. the Economic Freedom Fighters). But they continue to lose the battle for society's hearts and minds, as witnessed by major upsurges of xenophobic attacks in 2008, 2010, 2015, 2017 and 2019.

Aside from the contradictions of commoning associated with divergent identity and socio-spatial relations, as are so evident in South Africa, the traditional dilemma of "jumping scale" must be addressed. After Elinor Ostrom's (1990) concession that communities of 15,000 are the largest effort at commoning she could identify, Harvey insisted on higher scales of ambition: "the whole nature of the common-property problem and the prospects of finding a solution change dramatically. What looks like a good way to resolve problems at one scale does not hold at another scale" (2011: 102).

It is there that Luxemburg (1916) would join in a final argument, not content with the politics of people's commons, but instead, warning so clearly (ahead of her time by two decades and then, again, by a century), "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism."

## Post-script (June 2020)

The Covid-19 crisis that began shortly after this chapter was drafted amplified most of the extreme processes of super-exploitation. On March 1, 2020, Patient Zero and eight of his friends – wealthy Durban residents – brought the virus to South Africa following a skiing vacation in Northern Italy. In spite of a severe lockdown, within three months nearly 30,000 were infected (as judged by tests which were scarce and not entirely accurate), leaving at least 600 dead, with contagion rapidly gathering speed. The victims were increasingly from the lower classes, subject to the health-apartheid system in which private medical aids support the healthcare financing needs of 14 percent of South Africans with half the expenditure, leaving public hospitals unable to cope with testing, and even masks.

At the time of writing, there was insufficient class-race-gender analysis available of the virus' spread, but in late May, the geographic 'Covid-19 hot spot' sites that were identified in Cape Town made crystal clear that it was moving fastest through the slums. This was easy to predict, given the lack of social-distancing capacity in such dense quarters, and the much more vulnerable immune systems of residents who were already living with HIV and TB. Beyond such geographical nuance, there were few who would remark on the characteristics of Covid-19's victims. The best known in local politics was the leader of the left-opposition Economic Freedom Fighters, Julius Malema, who – as the lockdown's relaxation was announced on May 28 – remarked on how healthcare apartheid had persisted over the prior nine weeks because of lack of state inaction:

Government has not renovated any hospital or given any significant improvements. Admittedly, even the misguided 'events-based temporary' quarantine centres will not meet the demand that is coming. However, people in black communities who could have lived another 10 years, will die. Not because they have bad immune systems, but because they did not get healthcare. The white community and some insignificant minority black elites will rely on private healthcare – which is fully functional, fully resourced and ready to give them a fighting chance. (Tshabalala 2020)

Malema had, in late March, called on President Cyril Ramaphosa to follow Spain's lead and nationalise healthcare resources, which led Ramaphosa to laugh at him outright during a press conference (Bhengu 2020). Malema's former spokesperson Mbuyiseni Ndlozi tweeted an implicit race-class analysis:

Dr Zweli Mkhize [SA Minister of Health] should start releasing the racial breakdown of Covid-19 data. I personally don't think the white community can lose 165 of their own in 1 week over a pandemic without noise. The only lives that don't matter, that are dispensable & voiceless, are black lives. I think the SA Covid-19 lockdown was for the white community. It has finally flattened the curve in their white spaces & put all systems in place to function amidst Covid-19: private schools in particular. Now they want their cheap & easily disposable black workers back to work! (Ndlozi 2020)

Although in South Africa's atomized society, there was no such thing as a 'white community' as a coherent unit of analysis, there was nevertheless truth to the capital-labor angle within this allegation (Mvumu 2020), as exemplified in the mining industry. Operations began

prematurely, without the full Covid-19 testing called for by the trade unions. Within days the world's deepest mine (at 2.5 miles), AngloGold Ashanti's Mponeng gold mine, had to be closed down. After a Covid-19 outbreak on May 24, 650 workers were tested, and 164 tested positive (York 2020). The pressure on South Africa's working class to return to 'easily disposable' status grew intense, as other super-exploitative processes within the economy were amplified, especially in the credit system (Bond forthcoming). There was virtually no fiscal relief for ordinary South Africans in the first nine weeks, and then only a small temporary rise in the child support grant and an emergency grant (both less than \$20/month on average).

The contradictions were rising, and beyond emergency relief advocacy, the main question for those opposed to capitalism was whether 'the economy' would be given license to recommence its abusive relationship with the working class, women and the environment. The alternative would be the expansion of the social and environmental justice agenda, which initially took three forms: first, NGOs and the mainstream labour movement doing mainly a combination of emergency relief services and (mild-mannered) advocacy, asking for more welfare funding and less restrictive survival conditions; second, the nationally-coordinated activist groups – such as the centre-left C19 People's Coalition and the leftist 'Cry of the Xcluded' network – which combine more radical labour and social movements with a structural critique and 'non-reformist reform' advocacy (and to some extent, too, local commoning through mutual aid not simply charity); and third, the community-based struggles which included food riots and land invasions as well as wildcat labour strikers. The first were partially assimilated, integrated into the very limited state-capital 'social contract'; the second were generally ignored; and the third were actively repressed by a state not in the least hesitant to deploy 77,000 army troops (in addition to the regular police and private security forces) to brutally repress local protests.

Within the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis, the contradictions were severe, yet the inability to discover the basis for a united front was often psychologically debilitating. Luxemburg would have nodded sympathetically but urged the South African working class and its allies to redouble efforts, to reverse the slide into barbarism.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Disputes continue not only as to whether an income measure of poverty is appropriate, but also as to whether StatsSA is engaged in systemic under-counting of both essential expenses (including the food basket) and the share of the population living below the line. Normally, I prefer to use higher round-number estimates—the local-currency value of R50/day, or in mid-2019 dollar terms, \$100/month—because researchers at the University of Cape Town SA Labour Development Research Unit (Budlender et al 2015) and an anti-poverty NGO (Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity 2019) have identified serious methodological flaws at StatsSA. The latter suggests that a *household* budget of \$498 is appropriate, which is \$129/month/person for one of average size, i.e., 3.86 members. Budlender et al estimated that, in contrast to StatsSA’s calculation that 53 percent of South Africans survive with income under \$2.78/day, the actual figure was probably 10 percent higher in 2015; by 2019 poverty had worsened by a few more percent. An enormous “reserve army of labor” exists in South Africa, one able to survive only through access to a family member’s monthly state grant. (The main one is a \$27.45/month Child Support Grant that goes to 12 million primary caregivers, but it is means-tested for families whose head earns less than \$3500/year, or \$7000 if there are two heads of household.)

<sup>2</sup> The official South African unemployment rate is nearly 40 percent (counting “discouraged work seekers” who have given up looking), even though “work” is defined as merely one “yes” answer to any of these three questions: “In the last week, (a) Did you work for a wage, salary, commission or any payment in any kind (including paid domestic work), even if it was for only one hour? (b) Did you run or do any kind of business, big or small, for yourself or with one or more partners, even if it was for only one hour? (c) Did you help without being paid in any kind of business run by your household, even if it was for only one hour?” Until 2008, the StatsSA (2007, 3) definition was even more generous, with “employed” including these categories of activity, even if it was for just one hour over the week prior to the Labor Force Survey:

- Run or do any kind of business, big or small, for himself/herself
- Do any work for a wage, salary, commission or any payment in kind
- Do any work as a domestic worker for a wage, salary or any payment in kind
- Help unpaid in a family business of any kind
- Do any work in his/her own or family’s plot, farm, food garden, cattle post or kraal or help in growing farm produce or in looking after animals for the household
- Do any construction or repair work on his/her own home, plot, cattle post or business or those of the family
- Catch any fish, prawns, shells, wild animals or other food for sale or household food?

<sup>3</sup> The Bank’s (2019) definition of mineral depletion is “the ratio of the value of the stock of mineral resources to the remaining reserve lifetime. It covers tin, gold, lead, zinc, iron, copper, nickel, silver, bauxite, and phosphate”—neglecting diamonds and platinum group metals (also, palladium, rhodium, iridium, osmium, and ruthenium).

<sup>4</sup> The human capital investment is dubious because most South African public schools produce an education that *sets learners back*. In 2015, the World Economic Forum (2015) rated South African science and mathematics education as the worst of 140 countries, and 138<sup>th</sup> in overall quality. If education spending is meant to be a proxy for human capital investment (in terms of Bank logic), in many cases the result is better considered *disinvestment*. Nicholas Spaull (2013) notes that “with the exception of a wealthy minority, most South African pupils cannot read, write and compute at grade-appropriate levels, with large proportions being functionally illiterate and innumerate.” The main Treasury official responsible for funding these schools, Andrew Donaldson (2014) admitted that educational system “entrenches inequality between rich and poor.”

<sup>5</sup> Crucially, as noted above, this figure fluctuates wildly as a result of swings in commodity prices. In 1980-81, gold exceeded \$800/ounce before soon plummeting to \$250/ounce, and from 2002-11, the upswing of the commodity super-cycle raised the rate of depletion dramatically, from 0.2 to 2.5 percent of GNI, before the 2015 crash reduced the depletion rate to 1.5 percent of GNI. It is worth remarking that while energy production is 93 percent reliant upon coal, which is by far the main cause of the CO2 damage accounted for, the ‘benefit’ from extraction of coal is far less, and in any case mainly accrues to multinational corporations like Anglo Coal, BHP Billiton and Glencore (although these firms are increasingly selling their coal mines to local black entrepreneurs given that carbon-divestment pressures are rising in their headquarter cities such as London, Melbourne and even Baar, Switzerland).

<sup>6</sup> These accounts are not yet sufficiently strong in data consistency to compare across time periods, so as to assess the depletion *process*. But they do allow more breakdown of what is pre-existing “nature” (albeit after several centuries of settler-colonial interventions) and what society must make special efforts to preserve.

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There are, for instance, nearly 300 “threatened species,” including 116 higher plants, 107 fish, 46 birds and 26 mammals.

The natural economy of the human lung is also threatened, with 100 percent of the population having PM2.5 particle exposure higher than World Health Organization guideline levels. The family’s natural economy is disrupted by under-5 mortality rates that are more than twice as high as the average peer (upper middle-income) country. South Africa’s freshwater hydrological natural economy suffers massive withdrawal, ten times as much as do other African economies and more than five times the rate of upper middle-income peer economies. And in every category of energy aside from hydropower, South African capitalism uses far more than do other African and upper middle-income economies. The most destruction is in CO2 emissions, which are eleven times higher for an average South African (that mythical construct), than the 0.8 tons per average Sub-Saharan African.

<sup>7</sup> The liberal formulation emphasizing voice and participation also repeatedly surfaces on the radical left; see Mottiar and Bond (2012).

<sup>8</sup> In the latter case, this is not merely a local result of neoliberalism, for national-scale electricity supply disruptions (“load-shedding”) began in earnest in 2008, reaching peak levels in March 2019. That month, rising Mozambique Channel water temperatures—a feature of worsening climate change—caused the unprecedented intensity of Cyclone Idai, whose winds were sufficiently powerful to wreck pylons carrying a 1000 MegaWatt power supply to Eskom from a Mozambican hydropower facility. Coal-fired generators supply more than 90 percent of South Africa’s electricity, yet Eskom has been extremely slow to consider much implement decarbonization.

<sup>9</sup> To be sure, there were Constitutional Court cases that improved rather than foiled socio-economic rights, but they were mainly defensive, in telling the state *not* to adopt certain policies or practices. The only pro-active decision of consequence to improve health rights was the 2002 decision to compel the state to make nevirapine available so as to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission (*Department of Health v TAC*).

<sup>10</sup> As Ivan Turok (2018) remarks, “A recent surge in urban land occupations and invasions suggests that people’s tolerance of apartheid’s cruel geography is diminishing.”

<sup>11</sup> Even Mahatma Gandhi found it logical to endorse the alliance of Indian workers with their British colonial masters during the 1906 Bambatha Rebellion of the indigenous Zulu people against further land dispossession (Desai and Vahed 2015).