Uneven and combined Marxism within South Africa’s urban social movements:

Trancending precarity in community, labour and environmental struggles

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'overaccumulation' and GDP stagnation: source of decline in finance-adjusted US profits

In the first series, profits are equal to the net product minus the cost of labor, and business and profit taxes. They are divided by the net worth (total assets minus debt). For the second series, real interest is subtracted from profits, i.e., interest minus a correction for the depreciation of debt resulting from inflation.

US corporate profits derived much less from manufacturing products; much greater sources of profits came from abroad; profits also came more from returns on financial assets.

Source: Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy
context: US economy as core site of overaccumulation and financialisation

when crisis sets in, 3 displacement techniques: ‘shifting’, ‘stalling’, ‘stealing’
the spatial fix, temporal fix and accumulation by dispossession

Source: John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, 2009

Financial profits as % of total profits

Source: BLS; Federal Reserve

Finance & Insurance Value Added as % of GDP

Source: BEA; 3/9/2010
limits of the ‘spatial fix’: amplified uneven development

GLOBAL CURRENT-ACCOUNT BALANCE, 1990–2008
(Per cent of GDP)

volatility and uneven development inexorably worsen
(source: Unctad 2009)
limits of ‘temporal fix’: uncontrolled financial markets

Figure 3.1. Global Over-the-Counter Derivatives Markets
(In trillions of U.S. dollars; notional amounts of contracts outstanding)

Figure 4.1. Global Liquidity
(In billions of U.S. dollars; GDP-weighted; quarterly data)

Source: IMF, Global Financial Stability Report, April 2010
stock market volatility: all markets in ‘08

... widespread, dramatic loss of paper wealth

Source: Unctad
Long waves of debt and default (by sovereign leaders)

Source: Barry Eichengreen
Key feature of imperialism: Capitalist/non-capitalist relations

Rosa Luxemburg

Accumulation of capital periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension of the market. Capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organisations, nor ... can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible.

-- Rosa Luxemburg, The Accumulation of Capital, 1913.
South Africa’s ‘moment’ of Western Marxism, 70s-80s

The struggle against apartheid became at times a focus of the hopes of the revolutionary left around the world. It represents a missed opportunity for the left not only in the more obvious sense that it did not result in a real challenge to the power of global capitalism.

It was also an opportunity to transform the historical relationship of Marxist theory and working class politics, and overcome the division which allows a dialectical Marxism to flourish in the universities and journals, while working class politics are dominated by the managerialism of Soviet Marxism or social-democracy.

• Andrew Nash, 1999
More than 50 independent left books since 2000

- H. Marais, South Africa Pushed to the Limit (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2011).
- S. Buhlungu, A Paradox of Victory (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).
- B. Maharaj, A. Desai and P. Bond (eds), Zuma’s Own Goal (Trenton, Africa World Press, 2010).
- B. Freund and H. Witt (eds), Development Dilemmas in Post-Apartheid South Africa (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).
- N. Geffen, Debunking Delusions (Johannesburg, Jacana, 2010).
- J. Saul, Revolutionary Traveller (Winnipeg, Arbeiter Ring, 2009).
- H. Britton, S. Mintjies and J. Fish, Women’s Activism in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008).
- S. Hassim, Women’s Organisations and Democracy in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006).
- J. Ossenbrugge and C. Haferburg (Eds), Ambiguous Restructurings of Post-Apartheid Cape Town (Muenster, Lit Verlag, 2003).
- D. McDonald (ed), Environmental Justice in South Africa (University of Cape Town Press, 2002).
- J. Duncan, Broadcasting and the National Question (Johannesburg, Freedom of Expression Institute, 2002).
SA’s recent marxism informed by Karl Polanyi’s ‘double movement’

The Great Transformation (1957): ‘the extension of the market organisation in respect to genuine commodities was accompanied by its restriction’ via civil society activism

Frantz Fanon

*The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie’s business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner... In its beginnings, the national bourgeoisie of the colonial country identifies itself with the decadence of the bourgeoisie of the West. We need not think that it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth.*

Frantz Fanon, ‘Pitfalls of National Consciousness’
Practical anti-capitalism: case study of successful internationalist social movement solidarity: access to Anti-RetroVirals

- 1990s – US promotes Intellectual Property above all, monopoly-patented ARVs cost $15 000/person/year
- 1997 – SA’s Medicines Act allows ‘compulsory licensing’
- 1999 – Al Gore for president, ACTUP! opposition, Seattle WTO protest and Bill Clinton surrender
- 2000 – AIDS Durban conference, Thabo Mbeki denialism
- 2001 – ‘PMA-SA v Mandela’ lawsuit w MSF & Oxfam, while TAC imports Thai, Brazilian, Indian generics
TAC’s Anti-RetroVirals campaign:

2001 – Constitutional Court supports nevirapine, major WTO TRIPS concession at Doha
2002 – critiques of Mbeki, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang
2003 – ANC compels change in state policy
2004 – generics produced in SA
2009 – nearly 800 000 public sector recipients
2010 threats – fiscal conservatism, Obama Pepfar cuts

strategic successes:

* commoning intellectual property
* decommodification
* destratification
* deglobalisation of capital
* globalisation of solidarity
Water in South African townships: world-famous struggle against commodification
South Africa’s right to water?

• ‘everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being... everyone has the right to have access to... sufficient water’


• 2003-09 lawsuit by Soweto activists and SA Coalition Against Water Privatisation against Johannesburg government (and by implication, Paris-based Suez): http://www.law.wits.ac.za/cals
two core aspects of Mazibuko v Johannesburg case

• **How much water?**
  – City of Joburg and Suez (2001): 25 litres/capita/day
  – Phiri activists, CAWP, CALS (2003): 50 l/cd
  – High Court (Tsoka in April 2008): 50 l/cd
  – Constitutional Court (Sept 2009): ‘we don’t DO policy’

• **What delivery mechanism?**
  – Joburg, Suez: pre-payment meters
  – Phiri et al: credit meters (as in white areas)
  – High Court: pre-payment meters are discriminatory
  – ConCourt: no problem with pre-payment meters
South African rights talk has so been

- individualist: private/familial instead of public/political
- consumption-oriented, without linkages to production, ecology
- framed not to resist but to legitimise neoliberalism
- prone to leave in place society’s class structure (e.g. failing to press for cross-subsidisation of water by the rich, agribusiness and other corporations)
- couched largely as technicist discourse, which alienates the mass base and society in general
- depoliticizing for mass-based organisations which become the domesticated ‘client’ (but could be instructed to halt protests during litigation in the interests of the case)
- watered down, because of Constitutional language specifying the acceptability of ‘progressive realisation’ of rights (i.e. very slow), ‘reasonable’ measures, ‘within available resources’, which are assessed and decided upon by neoliberal politicians and bureaucrats
- diverting into legal alleyways, away from a more transformative route to politics
- up for adjudication by judges, who are amongst society’s most conservative elites
lessons from Mazibuko

- Use rights narrative purely for **defensive purposes** (injunctions against disconnections), **not to change policy** (confirming Critical Legal Studies’ ‘contingency’ theory)
- Use rights narrative for **education**, ‘dignity’ and **mobilisation** (Treatment Action Campaign) but beware demobilisation potential
- For real relief: reconnection, turning meters into ‘statues’, ‘commoning’ and mutual aid, social mobilization and protest
Durban’s COP17
Conference of Polluters
28 Nov-9 Dec 2011
International Convention Centre