

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2511>



South Africa

Uneven and combined Marxism' within South Africa's urban social movements

- Features -

Publication date: Friday 2 March 2012

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The political dynamics of contemporary South Africa are rife with contradiction. On one hand, it is among the most consistently contentious places on earth, with insurgent communities capable of mounting disruptive protest on a nearly constant basis, rooted in the poor areas of the half-dozen major cities as well as neglected and multiply-oppressed black residential areas of declining towns. On the other hand, even the best-known contemporary South African social movements, for all their sound, lack a certain measure of fury.

I. Introduction

In the face of the government's embrace of neoliberal social policies since shortly after the fall of Apartheid, what are often called "service delivery protests" occurring many thousands of times a year according to police statistics,[Mottiar and Bond 2011, Duncan and Vally 2008.] are at once the site of poor people's demands for greater responsiveness to human needs in general, but are also intensely localized and self-limited in their politics. The upsurge of protest since the late 1990s invariably invokes images of the anti-Apartheid struggle and thus focuses analysis on continuities and breaks between the old anti-Apartheid mass action and the new mass action in post-apartheid society.[For a sample of the debates on the independent left see Alexander 2010, Ballard et al, 2006, Bond 2006, Desai 2002, Duncan and Vally 2008, Maharaj, Desai and Bond 2011, Runciman 2011, Sinwell 2011, Williams 2006.] And yet, the majority of community protesters operate in close interconnection with parts of the Tripartite Alliance, composed of the African National Congress (ANC), the trade union movement represented by the Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), and so the line between insurgencies and governing organizations is not always clear. Yet their geographic and political isolation from each other have contributed to their having little leverage over the Alliance, which notwithstanding some resistance by unions and communists, embraced neoliberal policies in the transition from anti-apartheid resistance to class-apartheid government in 1994.

But beyond the community protests, in many respects, the problems that have faced more traditional radical social movements in South Africa are familiar to students of social movements elsewhere: of moving from movement to governing; of cooptation and shifting roles vis-à-vis the state; of the limits of localism; and of the joining of community- and workplace-based organizing to forge a strong working-class politics. These are all the subject of considerable scholarship, both within and outside of the Marxist tradition, and within and outside of South Africa.[e.g., DeFilippis, Fisher and Schragge 2010, Piven and Cloward 1979; Katznelson 1981.] We argue here, however, that in the South African context, these can be more clearly seen as symptomatic questions of a larger problematic, what we term, following Trotsky, the problem of "uneven and combined Marxism.'

For Trotsky, "uneven and combined development" was a fundamentally dialectical framework through which he sought first to theorize the relations among Russia's nascent industrial base (and hence, too, Russia's urban proletariat), and its backward, semi-feudal rural relations, and second, following this, the revolutionary potentials for Russia at the time of the Revolution. For Trotsky, this implied understanding the relationship among forms of capital both within Russia and across borders. Uneven development means that extremely different relations of production coexist within and across territory, while combined development suggests not that the "less developed" are archaic and simply bound, at some point to "catch up" with the more advanced, perhaps going through the same "stages" of development. (The South African modernization narrative since the early 2000s, shared by former president Thabo Mbeki and current president Jacob Zuma, is that the "two economies" are "structurally disconnected".)[Bond and Desai 2006, Maharaj, Desai and Bond 2011.]

Instead, it means that in order to understand the revolutionary possibilities of a given moment, it is important to understand how more and less advanced relations of production are related, how they often reinforce each other, and how their contradictions may lead to revolutionary advances in developmentally 'less-advanced' contexts. 'Uneven and combined Marxism' implies a way of considering the difficulties of constructing independent left politics in the conjuncture of a long-term capitalist stagnation in a 21st century South Africa in which some sectors of the economy – construction, finance and commerce – have been booming while many other former labour-intensive sectors of manufacturing were deindustrialised (or shifted from general production for a local mass market to niche production for a global upper-class market, such as luxury autos and garments), and in which large sections of society are still peripheral – aside from serving as a reserve army of unneeded surplus labour = to the interests of capital, domestic and global.

The unevenness is also geographical, with small areas of South Africa operating within a circuit of luxury consumption and new technologies, but others such as ex-Bantustan rural areas continuing their decline. The unevenness of sector and space is no surprise, of course, since capital has always flowed to sites of higher profitability not to establish equilibrating trends, but on the contrary to exacerbate differentials and enhance inequalities. The word 'combined' is important in South Africa because of the ways capital interacts with the non-capitalist sectors and spaces, including women's reproductive sites and mutual aid systems, spaces of community commons, state services, and nature.

Unevenness is obvious across the cities and townships (and towns and dorpiess or villages) where battles rage, among the sectors of capital, and across scales of struggle. The 'combined' part of anti-capitalism is an area we are yet to see fully invoked (in the spirit of, for example the Latin American mobilizations which foreground indigenous movements' struggles), because of the complexities of organizing the unorganized – especially women – in shack settlements and rural areas where the act of daily survival in the interstices of capitalist/non-capitalist articulations generates far more collisions of political self-interest than standard Marxist urban theory so far elucidates.

To speak of uneven and combined Marxism, therefore, is to invoke a political project on the South African left that cannot but begin with the contradictory totality of the country's social relations, both internal and external, at multiple geographic scales and at vastly different levels of development. And yet, the beginning cannot also be the end; the challenge for South African left politics is to create a hegemonic formation from this unevenness that is capable of moving toward fulfilling the global left's hopes in the anti-Apartheid struggle, which was, at the same time, in many respects, an anti-capitalist struggle as well. But to articulate a left politics on this uneven ground is also to enrich the typically imported Marxist analysis, in the sense that the South African experience heightens and encapsulates several otherwise familiar tensions – urban/rural; worker/poor; local/national/global; society/nature; gender; etc. – and can therefore show, perhaps more clearly than can other contexts, the essential relations among them.

In what follows, we begin by describing the contemporary contours of protest in South Africa, and then return to the problem of the hegemony of the Tripartite Alliance and its embrace of neoliberal policies, even if this has itself been somewhat uneven and the source of some tension among Alliance members. We then discuss the development of a strategic impasse among South African social movements, and present and critique several theoretically informed alternative routes out of or around the apparent cul-de-sac. We conclude by rearticulating more precisely the stakes in proposing an uneven and combined Marxism; and rather than proposing solutions, we draw upon it to pose the strategic questions for an agency-centred South African left more sharply.

II. Contemporary South African protest

Writing five years after the end of Apartheid, Andrew Nash observed:

"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." [Nash 1999, p. 79.]

This sense of a lost opportunity persists in South African politics today. It is found in the widespread discontent in townships and shack-dweller communities on the urban periphery over the rising cost of living and of previously state-provided services such as water and electricity; it is found in the militant protests among the poor for redistricting so that poor areas and rich areas are not administratively separated, thereby hampering the poor's ability to gain access to resources and public services (as in the towns of Khutsong and Balfour); it is seen in the divisions within the ANC, SACP and COSATU; and it is seen in the Treatment Action Campaign's successful and well-known battle against Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism and against Big Pharma's price-gouging of antiretroviral medicines. And yet, in many of the successful instances of protest – e.g., the reconnection of water and electricity, [Bond, 2011.] the rolling-back of privatization schemes, [Bond 2006.] and the reduction in the price of antiretrovirals from \$15,000 per person to zero [Geffen 2010.] – revolutionary Marxists played important leadership roles, suggesting, perhaps, that Nash bends the stick a bit too far.

Nevertheless, the question of how far to bend the stick remains. There is no question that anti-racial Apartheid also had within it the seeds of anti-class Apartheid. This can be seen in the Treatment Action Campaign's successful attack, not just on price-gouging by Big Pharma, but also on intellectual property rights, which were curtailed by the 2001 Doha exemption for medical emergencies. It can be seen in the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee's work since 2000 not only to fight against the electricity company's privatization, rate changes, and electricity cut-offs, but also to teach people how to illegally reconnect themselves to the grid. These are only part of what Peter Alexander calls a "rebellion of the poor".

In the wake of the introduction of the "Growth, Employment and Redistribution" strategy or "GEAR" that marked the Alliance's definitive turn toward neoliberal macroeconomic policy, the most militant communities that took to the streets in protest and which formed the new urban social movements were relatively privileged. They already had houses, but were now fighting a defensive battle just to stay on in the urban ghettos. Those who clung on to spaces in the city in shacks appeared to be more patient. The Alliance's promises to the poor included gaining access to the formal ghetto, while at the same time, its municipal officials were evicting others for non-payment as employment became increasingly precarious and unemployment increased to more than forty percent of the workforce. For a while, the enormous legitimacy of the ANC explained this patience.

But from the late 1990s, ongoing waves of protests broke across the country's formal townships and shack settlements and the "new urban social movements" formed in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town from 1999. Though the first waves ebbed after a national protest at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, more surges were noticed from mid-2004 in Zevenfontein north of Johannesburg and in Harrismith in the Free State (where repression was marked by shooting and death), and in Durban's Kennedy Road beginning in early 2005, shack-dweller protest coalesced into the Abahlali baseMjondolo (shack-dweller's movement).

Yet, in many cases what started out as insurgencies outside the control of the Alliance were siphoned off into calls for participation, legal challenges, and "voice". Furthermore, one of the striking elements of South African protest is its failure to "scale up," or join together either geographically or politically. With some few exceptions, the recent upsurge of service-delivery protests have taken the form of "popcorn protests", that is, movements that fly high, move according to where the wind blows – even in xenophobic directions at times – and then fall to rest quite quickly. [Petras and Morley 1990, p.53.] There have been several attempts at coordination in the mid-2000s: Johannesburg's Anti-Privatization Forum brought together service-delivery protest groups, students, left political

activists (including, at first, some in the municipal workers' union and the SACP), and independent-left trade unions; the Social Movements Indaba which from 2002-08 combined community struggles; and since 2011, the Democratic Left Front has taken a similar initiative. Despite these efforts, and in part because of continual splintering of independent left forces and a failure to make common cause with the left of the labour movement, there have developed no common programmes and no bridging organizational strategies that can challenge neoliberalism on a national level. Three elements of this failure – reflecting the uneven and combined nature of anti-capitalism in South Africa today – are worth noting here: the importance of access, localism, and leadership.

Access

Social movements often organize around sets of demands on the state that are, at least in principle, winnable. Service-delivery protests targeting the privatization of water supply or high charges for water use by the local water authority, the regressive kilowatt-per-hour charge on electricity, or the eviction of shack-dwellers from squatted land all imply the possibility of success. In Durban's rebellious Chatsworth community,[Desai 2002.] for example, in order to achieve de facto recognition and therefore the delivery of services that would keep the movement constituency close to its leadership, movement activists increasingly joined with the city council in various committees to administer and monitor the movement's success. A decade after the initial 1999 uprising, political work mainly involved technical issues and oversight over upgrading, liaison with welfare departments and a range of other interventions which pressed less for radical policy change but focused instead on merely getting existing policy implemented.[Hinely 2009.] This also inevitably brought the movement into close working relationships with ANC local councilors and limited the autonomy of the movement, and ultimately led to enormous disappointments in Chatsworth when official promises were broken and municipal contractors engaged in fraud.

Likewise, in Durban's shack-lands, in order to get recognition from the local council, shack-dweller activists had to ensure that no more shacks were built. Activists had to also ward off competitors. This was especially so if an organization defined its role as ensuring delivery. It was paradoxical but increasingly common that movements took political positions sharply critical of neoliberal policies on the one hand, while negotiating for better delivery within those policy frameworks on the other.

Of course, this is a common feature of social movements, and of poor people's movements beyond the South African context. There is a recurring question of how to consolidate a movement's 'victories' without demobilizing it, and how to move beyond the initial 'winnable' demands to more radical ones that cannot be so easily administered. In the South African context, however, this problem is deepened by the sheer weight and presence of the ANC. Though there is a significant variety of political positions taken by local ANC branches and officials, larger matters of policy and financing are settled at the centre, while implementation – and enforcement – depend greatly on the local level. Reaching the centre, therefore, is fundamentally difficult given the fact that the service-delivery protests tend to limit their demands to locally constituted authorities, with the possible exception of Eskom, the utility providing ninety-five percent of South Africa's electricity (Eskom sells energy both to municipalities as well as to four million individual households – mainly in black townships and rural areas – who were retail customers dating to the apartheid era). Access problems therefore imply a need for protesters to 'jump scale' from local to national, and sometimes also to global, for the World Bank has been known to give 'instrumental' advice on matters such as water pricing.[Bond 2000, 2002.]

Localism and the geographic scales of protest organization

Marxist urban theorists, following the geographer Henri Lefebvre, speak of social relations unfolding on multiple geographic scales. Scales combine aspects of people's own construction of the extent of their social relations, and boundaries of the arenas in which they exist. They thus, depend, too on historically accreted understandings of the spatial limitations exerted on these relations, and on the physical properties that may inscribe them. As Marston writes, they "are the outcome of, both everyday life and macro-level social structures." [Marston 2000, p.221.] Finally, the framings of scale – framings that can have both rhetorical and material consequences – are often contradictory and contested and are not necessarily enduring. To say, therefore, that contemporary South African protest – with several exceptions such as the Treatment Action Campaign and for a time, the Jubilee SA network, as well as some of the more innovative community groups in the major cities – is characteristically local in orientation is to make an observation about the scale of the protests.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the localist orientation of protest. To the extent that participants stop evictions that affect them; to the extent that they force local authorities to increase the free allowance of electricity and water and lower fees for anything above the survival allowance; to the extent that a "residue" of protest emerges as some local institutional safeguards against further abuse; to this extent, they are better off for having protested. From a Marxist perspective, however, limiting protest to the local scale both narrows the immediate transformative potential of social movements and in the longer term, disadvantages both the movements and the people who compose them. The same can be said about sectoral-narrowness, in which the "water sector", economic reform advocacy, gender, energy justice, climate activism, access to education, healthcare advocacy, and myriad more specific struggles fail to connect the dots between each other, both in South Africa and across the world (notwithstanding a World Social Forum movement meant – but apparently unable – to solve this problem). [Bond 2005.]

What does going beyond localism mean? To ask the question begs, first of all, a more precise definition of what constitutes the "local" in the present case. Here, we propose that "local" in South African protest denotes a focus on administrative and jurisdictional boundaries on one hand, and on the site of social reproduction, on the other. The extremely vigorous protest movements in the country focus most of their attention on the failings of local councils and governments which are themselves both the local enforcers of ANC policies formulated on the national scale – often influenced by the demands of global brokers of capital (the SA Treasury places great stock in its international credit ratings) – and often, political machines in which allegiance to the ANC line at the time is paramount for gaining access to decision-making processes. They are also focused on the circumstances of life in communities in which many people share abysmal living conditions.

As people active in these struggles, we can confirm that these were not originally meant to be narrow and localized. We initially shared the hope that struggles at the community level – at what provisionally could be called the point of reproduction – would have a quality and depth to them that would enable radical social antagonisms to flourish in ways that were unthinkable in the world of regular wage-work, at the "point of production". As an idea, it makes sense. People live in communities 24 hours a day. With a huge mass of unemployed people stuck in these ghettos, many with experience in previous struggles, including that against Apartheid, it would be easy for demands made from these sites to be backed up with the force of mass organizations. All that was needed was a focus on bread-and-butter township or shack issues and then an ideological extrapolation to broader political questions. Or so our thinking went, along with that of various segments of the independent – non-ANC, non-SACP – left.

Focusing on the site of reproduction made sense in another way. In fact, the townships, shack-dweller communities, flat-dweller communities, and dorpiess of South Africa contain a vast amount of economic activity, and the unemployed are as often as not also the marginally employed, the unofficially employed, and the precariously employed, which means, as well, that they play no role in the preeminent labour organization in the country, COSATU, which has its base in the country's heavy and extractive industries and public sector. Only the narrowest view of the working class would ignore this group.

And yet, the local community as a site of post-Apartheid resistance to neoliberalism has been much more difficult to sustain. Partly it is because of an assumption, seldom made by those actually living in townships, that there exists

substantial ground for unity flowing from merely living under the same conditions. One version of this assumption, as articulated in Latin American cities by James Petras and Morris Morley, is that:

“The power of these new social movements comes from the fact that they draw on the vast heterogeneous labour force that populates the main thoroughfares and the alleyways; the marketplaces and street corners; the interstices of the economy and the nerve centres of production; the exchange and finance centres; the university plazas, railway stations and the wharves – all are brought together in complex localized structures which feed into tumultuous homogenizing national movements.”[Petras and Morley 1990, p.53.]

But in the South African context, while localism produced militancy, it did not necessarily produce solidarity with any regularity. Indeed, shack-dwellers often face the ire of those with a tighter, but still tenuous, hold on stable tenure in the townships. Township residents can be mobilized for violence against shack-dwellers and immigrants as much as they can be mobilized for solidarity.

Another source of optimism for the fusing of proletarian and precariat identities is alluded to by John Saul, recalling arguments made nearly four decades ago:

“In a capitalism in crisis the ‘classic strengths of the urban working class’ could become ‘more evident,’ with the ‘the upper stratum of the workers [then] most likely to identify downward [to become] a leading force within a revolutionary alliance of exploited elements in the society.’”

In the South African context, therefore, the mobilization of communities could, in theory, join up with the existing organization of workers through COSATU, provided the latter could peel itself away from allegiance to the ANC and the Alliance's embrace of neoliberalism, especially in the light of clearly deteriorating conditions.

But beyond the disappointments generated by a COSATU much changed by its entry into the Alliance and the decline of the shop-steward leadership that had provided much of its strength during the anti-Apartheid struggle, local communities were themselves difficult to coalesce around consistent analyses of the problems that led to their oppression, and abstraction from the local to multiple scales proved difficult once the problem of evictions, electricity, sewerage, and potable water were addressed.

Finally, it must be said that from a strategic point of view, there is some value in being able to organize at a scale commensurate with that of one's adversary's organization. The ANC is organized at the national level and it staffs its organization by positioning cadre in local areas. This means that it centralizes power and is able to exert significant – though far from total – control over local cadre. Thus, although some local councilors, for example, are more ‘trigger happy’ when it comes to repressing service-delivery and shack-dweller protests (and there have been more than a dozen deaths of protesters at the hands of police and non-official enforcers), the ANC's centralized organization, which is extremely averse to criticism, has set a policy of repression while also trying to channel protest into the least threatening, least direct forms, such as marches, as opposed to land occupations. The ANC's factional violence against its own cadres is notorious, such as in Durban where in mid-2011 the party's leader was assassinated. But by December 2011 the ANC city manager and political elites were sufficiently united to unleash thugs on Democratic Left Front activists who staged a march of more than 5000 against the United Nations climate summit and who put up signs a few days later in City Hall during a visit by Zuma.

Leadership

Another set of problems that arises from contemporary South African protest is also familiar to students of social movements and revolutionary politics, namely, the problem of leadership, and particularly, the role of intellectuals in the movement. Antonio Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals is apposite here. Gramsci argues, in essence, that intellectuals are those who give shape, through mental labour, to specific sets and sites of social relations. Those he calls 'traditional' intellectuals are those whose roles as intellectuals were formed in earlier periods, and thus appear as separate from, and above, contemporary class relations and antagonisms, such as clergy and the professional scholars and teachers. 'Organic' intellectuals, by contrast, are those whose intellectual labours shape the projects of entire groups of people, such as industrialists and union militants. Traditional intellectuals can, by virtue of their social position, make claims about universals, whereas organic intellectuals allegedly articulate particularities. But as Gramsci makes clear, traditional intellectuals are just as moored to class as are organic ones, and that in fact newly dominant groups work not only through their own organic intellectuals, such as managers and consultants, but also through traditional intellectuals.[See Gramsci 1971, pp. 4-23.]

In South Africa, many organic intellectuals arose out of the anti-Apartheid struggle. Many were linked to the trade union movement, others to the ANC, still others to the SACP, and others to the Trotskyist and other independent left wing formations. Even since the Apartheid period, the boundary between organizations of traditional intellectuals – e.g., the universities and NGOs – and the organizations that produced and were produced by organic intellectuals in and of social movements has been porous. Student militants were enormously important to the anti-Apartheid struggle, and post-Apartheid South African universities have been home to some academics who have aligned themselves closely with, and worked within, the social movements. The question this has raised within social movements, however, is that of vanguardism.

In some social movement efforts, significant participation by university-based and foundation-funded scholar-activists and NGOs seemed to other participants to reproduce inequalities. Accusations of 'ventriloquism' and 'substitutionism' by academics within movements have been traded.[See, e.g., debates initiated by Bohmke 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b and reactions in PoliticsWeb and Pambazuka.] Some university-based intellectuals have argued that since 'the poor are the embodiment of the truth', that the role of traditional intellectuals is to reflect their positions to the world and simply act in concert with the poor.[See critical discussion initiated by Walsh 2008.] This kind of analysis sometimes results in the romanticization of urban social movements, and also denies the complex articulations of movements and the education of their leaders. There is no doubt about the dangers of vanguardism. The question is whether a populism that homogenizes 'the poor' is capable of building the necessary coalitions to bring protest up to a regularly coordinated non-local scale.

The question of leadership has led, as well, to the involution of protest, especially divisions within social movements and their networks including the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, Western Cape Anti-Evictions Campaign, Landless People's Movement, Jubilee South Africa and Social Movements Indaba. These divisions are, however, more a symptom than a cause of the strategic impasse faced by South African urban movements today. Scholars of movements have noted that internal tensions often come to the fore when there is no clear way forward for externally oriented action.[See Polletta 2005.]

Together, the contradictory tendencies of access, localism, and leadership have produced a movement sector that is at once extraordinarily militant in its actions and profoundly moderate in its politics. The increasing turn away from electoral politics in poor areas in favor of protest politics signals a strong disenchantment with the apparatus of representative government and with the actual governance of the (mostly) ANC officers. On the other hand, in spite of this disenchantment, South African movements are nowhere close to articulating alternatives, and doing so would require movement leaders to engage in the sustained dialogue necessary to abstract from local concerns to national, and even international ones. The potential is there: the Treatment Action Campaign's successful demand for decommodified and locally-made (generic) AIDS medicines, and the Campaign against Water Privatization's fight against Johannesburg Water's management outsourcing to Suez, took activism in these sectors out of tired social policy or NGO-delivery debates, and set them at the cutting edge of the world's anti-neoliberal backlash.

III. Tripartite Alliance hegemony

Another inescapable feature of South Africa's contemporary politics is the continued – though increasingly fragile – hegemony of the ANC. The ANC enjoys an enormous amount of legitimacy and ongoing prestige, in spite of the fact that nearly twenty years of ANC rule has resulted in deepening poverty and inequality, and in spite of the visible divisions within the ANC, as for example, in the clashes between President Jacob Zuma and his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, and between Zuma and the ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema. The ANC was the main organization of the international anti-Apartheid struggle, and even though it was banned within South Africa from 1963 to 1990, quickly reasserted itself as the largest, best-organized group capable of taking the reins of power during the early 1990s transition. In establishing its hegemony at the local level, it supplanted already-existing organizations with its own (e.g., women's organizations, youth groups), and has dominated electoral politics since the first post-Apartheid elections in 1994.

The Tripartite Alliance is dominated by the ANC, which, under Mandela, began to separate the ideological strands that had undergirded the most militant elements of the anti-Apartheid movement, both in South Africa and abroad. Capital flight increased after the democratic elections of 1994, and in reaction, in early 1995 the ANC government relaxed exchange controls to prove its new loyalty to the Washington Consensus. By the mid-1990s, indeed, ANC leaders had distanced the party from the interventionist currents in the movement. In his first interview after winning the presidency in 1994, Mandela stated: "In our economic policies...there is not a single reference to nationalization, and this is not accidental. There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist ideology." Although he inexplicably missed the nationalization mandate he was given in the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (page 80), Mandela's specific reference to Marxist ideology in many senses reflects the strong strand of anti-capitalist thinking that linked into resurgent struggles against Apartheid from the early 1970s. Through its policy and slogan of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), moreover, the ANC deracialised capitalism – albeit for a very few billionaires – and separated the profitability dynamic of South African capitalism from racial domination. The latter has remained strong, of course, but more notable is the rise of class apartheid techniques.[Bond 2005.]

Mandela's avowed anti-Marxism did not, however, so alienate the SACP and COSATU that they abandoned the coalition. To the contrary, the initial redistributive promises in the ANC platform – eclipsed by GEAR in 1996 as well as by numerous White Papers starting in mid-1994 – gave the SACP and COSATU power in administering what might, in other circumstances, have been the development of a managerialist, social-democratic welfare state. The SACP chairman, after all, was Joe Slovo (prior to his death in early 1995), and his 1994 U-turn towards a fully neoliberal housing policy[Bond 2000, Republic of South Africa 1994.], as the World Bank explicitly recommended, was the main signal that the Reconstruction and Development Programme was finished before it had even begun. Slovo reversed nearly every major mandate he was provided.

Though centralized, corporatist bargaining was not part even of the initial coalition deal, COSATU had a prominent place at the table to represent the concerns of the organized working class. It did so with enough friction with the ANC that it could boast of putting up a fight, even while lauding the not-really-corporatist arrangements of the Alliance as corporatist, suggesting that it in fact had codetermination powers (in sites like the National Economic Development and Labour Council), and that the working class was more institutionally powerful than it patently was. After all, in the post-apartheid era the share of profits to wages shifted to the favour of capital by nine percentage points.

The SACP gained some power over the state's redistributionist functions, with the Mandela era witnessing central committee members in positions that included the ministers or deputy ministers of trade and industry, public works, housing, transport, public services and even defense. At once, this meant that the SACP had something to lose from challenging the ANC within the coalition too strongly, and it was consistent with the party's longstanding line that racial democracy had to precede the larger economic project of socialism. It also meant that the party would be at the front lines of managing a rapidly changing urban landscape as the lifting of residency laws under Apartheid resulted

in the vast growth of shack communities both on the urban periphery and in already urbanized township areas. That the party endorsed GEAR and the neoliberal Africa strategy (the New Partnership for Africa's Development) and supported a platform that put private investment at the center of its housing strategy – in a period characterized by capital flight – suggests that it was a comfortable member of the publicly anti-Marxist ANC-led Coalition, and that its constant support for the Coalition's neoliberal macroeconomic initiatives at multiple scales in 1996, 2001 and 2010 should not surprise.[Bond 2000.]

Nevertheless, the Alliance's cohesion and hegemony has not been rock-solid. There have, from the start, been tensions both between COSATU and the ANC and within COSATU about the ANC and the union federation's role in the Alliance and what it gets out of it. These tensions extend backwards in time to before COSATU's founding in 1985 and speak both to the shop-floor militancy of 1970s unionism in South Africa and to the tensions around the integration of the union movement into the nationalist project. But these tensions were raised with GEAR's introduction by the ruling party's neoliberal bloc, and ultimately resulted in COSATU's support for Jacob Zuma's successful bid for ANC leadership against Thabo Mbeki in the 2007 ANC National Conference, and Mbeki's humiliating firing by the ANC as president in September 2008.

And yet Zuma's government has done little better than Mbeki's, and has not changed the country's neoliberal macroeconomic course.[Maharaj, Desai and Bond 2011.] A three-week strike of public-sector workers in 2010, most of whom were members of COSATU, and which both imposed real hardship and threatened to spread to other sectors of the economy signaled the ripening of the contradictions of COSATU's continued alliance with the ANC. COSATU's membership has become older and more skilled as neoliberalism has resulted in segmented labour markets and the proliferation of informal work, and a growing proportion of its members are employees of the state. For this – and for the access to a different lifestyle for leaders who move into government positions – COSATU depends on the ANC-dominated state. On the other hand, continued austerity and attempts to squeeze public workers – visible from Johannesburg to Wisconsin, from Durban to Athens – in the face of already desperately inadequate services and a massive and visible gap between rich and poor (even among Africans), has led at least one COSATU leader to criticize Zuma's government as becoming a 'predator state.' [Vavi 2011.]

The fraying hegemony of the ANC with respect to its Alliance partners, and the simple refusal of many township and shack-dweller communities to engage any more in the formal political process, signify South Africa's deep crisis. Nevertheless, the protests raise the questions of whether dissent is solely about the delivery of services, or whether it signifies a bigger dissatisfaction with the social order as such? Do protesters see continuity between the anti-Apartheid struggle and the struggle today? Even in extreme cases of struggle (such as the disputes over district boundaries in Khutsong), the lead activists retained connections to the Alliance that through its legitimacy from the anti-Apartheid struggle and its patronage networks, were more durable than the centrifugal pressure to disconnect. And if a crisis consists in the fact that 'the old is dying, but the new cannot yet be born' [Gramsci 1971, p. 276.], it begs the question of what 'the new' is and what its birthing process could look like.

IV. Theorizing the strategic impasse

The question of how to move out of the crisis to a renewed revolutionary politics that separates the nationalist project from the politics of neoliberal development has garnered several answers. Each is partial, and each, as we will argue, is inadequate to the task. In this section of the chapter, we will examine three that have particular currency: the expansion of rights through litigation; the claim for 'the right to the city', which is distinct from juridical rights-talk; and the creation of spaces for 'participation'. In the following section, we will revisit the question of the impasse with reference to a reformulated Marxist account of uneven and combined development.

Rights

Community-based social movements have repeatedly gone to court to enforce their rights. And actual 'victory' in court is beyond our quibbling, and indeed some offensive victories (nevirapine to halt HIV transmission during birth) and defensive successes (halting evictions) are occasionally recorded. Nevertheless, we consider insidious the constitutionalist discourse that envelops individual cases in an overall strategy: the idea that 'the turn to law' is a good or beneficial thing to do with the energies, affinities, possibilities and power of a movement.

The 'turn to law' discourse bears the unmistakable scent of reform without a strategic sense of how to make more fundamental demands that bring into question barriers as large as property relations. The result is the kind of 'reformist-reform' (as Gorz put it)[Gorz 1967.] that entrenches the status quo. (In contrast, nonreformist reforms work against the internal logic of the dominant system, and strengthen rather than coopt the counterhegemonic challengers.) In this sense, the illegal occupation of land is far more powerful than a court's ultimate granting of tenure to the occupiers. The turn to constitutionalism also has consequences for movement leadership; it is based on the conception that a certain professional legal caste among us can secure in the constitutional court meaningful precedents (and consequent compliance by the executive) that advance the struggle of the poor in a fundamental way.

To be clear, we are not opposed to going to court. This may be useful from time to time. But as a strategy – rather than as a tactic – it is limited, and unable to compensate for weaknesses in protest organization and militancy. For example, the Treatment Action Campaign's victory against Mbeki in late 2003 was spurred, to some extent, by a mid-2001 Constitutional ruling that compelled his government to provide nevirapine to HIV+ pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission. In general, it is fair to say that the rights narrative was important to reducing stigmatization and providing 'dignity' to those claiming their health rights. Also successful in the Constitutional Court was Durban's Abahlali baseMjondolo shack-dwellers movement, which in 2009 won a major victory against a provincial housing ordinance justifying forced removals. Such removals continue unhindered, unfortunately, and at nearly the same moment that Abahlali baseMjondolo won the court victory they were violently uprooted from their base in Kennedy Road.

Thus, as Rosenberg indicates, writing in the critical legal studies tradition, rights depend on their enforcement, and courts cannot compel this.[Rosenberg 1993.] Further, court judgments can be reversed: a crucial rights narrative test came in the struggle to expand water provision to low-income Sowetans. A victory had been claimed by the Anti-Privatisation Forum in 2006 because after community struggles, water in Johannesburg is now produced and distributed by public agencies (the multinational firm with Soweto's water contract Suez was sent back to Paris after its controversial 2001-06 protest-ridden management of municipal water). In April 2008, a major constitutional lawsuit in the High Court resulted in a doubling of free water to 50 litres per person per day and the prohibition of pre-payment water meters.[Bond and Dugard 2008.] But the Constitutional Court reversed this decision in October 2009 on grounds that judges should not make such detailed policy, and that the prevailing amounts of water and the self-disconnection delivery system were perfectly reasonable within the ambit of the South African Bill of Rights. Once again, this meant that activists were thrown back to understanding the limits of constitutionalism: they recommitted to illegal reconnections if required.[Bond 2011a.]

We therefore object simply to the subordination of a political discourse to a legal discourse – even if superficially an empowering one, in terms of 'rights' narratives – and therefore to the subordination of a radical discourse to a liberal one. As Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham argue, discourse 'structures the possibility of what gets included and excluded and what gets done and what remains undone. Discourses authorize some to speak, some views to be taken seriously, while others are marginalized, derided, excluded and even prohibited.'[Hunt and Wickam 1994, pp.8-9.] By flirting with legalism and the rights discourse, movements have seen their demands watered down into court pleadings. Heartfelt pleas are offered but for the observance of the purely procedural: consult us before you evict us. Demands for housing that could be generalized and spread, become demands for 'in situ upgrading' and

â€‘reasonable government action' and hence feed the politics of local solutions to the exclusion of demands that can be â€‘scaled up'.

Right to the city

An alternative formulation of â€‘rights' is given by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey's â€‘right to the city' argument. Harvey is clear that the â€‘right to the city' is a collective right, rather than a liberal-individualist one, and is based on the idea that â€‘the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is...the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.' Because Harvey links urbanization, and therefore, the way of life of an increasing majority of humanity, to the absorption of capitalist surplus, the â€‘right to the city' implies empowering the mass of people to take the power from capitalists to produce their way of life and learn to wield it themselves. The current crisis of global capital has led to some of the uneven developments to which we have already referred in South Africa. The explosive price of real estate (nearly 400 percent from 1997 through to a 2007 peak) was facilitated by not only local overaccumulation but by the inflows of surplus global capital, thus contributing to the boom-bust dynamic in the construction trades even as the rest of the economy stagnates or worse. â€‘The results,' Harvey writes, â€‘are indelibly etched on the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly consist of fortified fragments, gated communities, and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance.' He continues, quoting Marcello Balbo:

“[The city] is splitting into different separated parts, with the apparent formation of many â€‘microstates'. Wealthy neighbourhoods provided with all kinds of services, such as exclusive schools, golf courses, tennis courts and private police patrolling the area around the clock intertwine with illegal settlements where water is available only at public fountains, no sanitation system exists, electricity is pirated by a privileged few, the roads become mud streams whenever it rains, and where house-sharing is the norm...

Harvey sees the â€‘right to the city' as a â€‘both a working slogan and political ideal' to democratize the â€‘necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use.'”[Harvey 2008.]

However, in the South African context, the slogan has been taken up both by proponents of legalistic means of struggle and by the more autonomist-oriented shack-dweller campaigns, and so the â€‘right to the city' can be seen as a kind of ambiguous hinge that joins quite different political orientations. For example, Marie Huchzermeyer argues that the South African Constitution mandates â€‘an equal right to the city,” and that this requires movements to pursue marginal gains through the courts: â€‘Urban Reform in this sense is a pragmatic commitment to gradual but radical change towards grassroots autonomy as a basis for equal rights.' After all, she argues, â€‘three components of the right to the city – equal participation in decision-making, equal access to and use of the city and equal access to basic services – have all been brought before the Constitutional Court through a coalition between grassroots social movements and a sympathetic middle class network'. Nevertheless, she also argues that human-rights â€‘language is fast being usurped by the mainstream within the UN, UN-Habitat, NGOs, think tanks, consultants etc., in something of an empty buzz word, where the concept of grassroots autonomy and meaningful convergence is completely forgotten'.[Huchzermeyer 2009, pp.3-4.]

Unfortunately, given the power imbalances, Huchzermeyer and others who make the â€‘right to the city' claim run the risk of merely extending a slogan, rather than a strategic vision, to the question of the current impasse in South African social movements. The danger here is particularly felt in the ways in which â€‘the city' can be taken to mean â€‘particular cities' (which, on one level, they must) and therefore to privilege local politics and local solutions, without a larger-scale analysis that could provide a kind of standard by which locally generated choices and strategies could be subjected to criticism. One result is that like groups often accept each other's political stances while discounting the possibilities of coalition across types of community: hence, for example, â€‘Abahlalim' – â€‘shack-dwellerism' – arises as a kind of autonomistic-populist practice in which the deep suspicion of non-shack-dwellers, even if sometimes merited, finds its mirror image in the idea that political ideas are invalidated or

validated simply by virtue of their issuing from 'the poor.' [Desai, 2006.]

'Participation'

A clause in the Constitution as well as various laws compel municipalities to involve residents in 'community participation' processes to enable people to directly influence decisions that affect them. John Williams, reporting on research in the Western Cape finds that 'Most community participation exercises in post-Apartheid South Africa are largely spectator politics, where ordinary people have mostly become endorsees of pre-designed planning programmes, [and] are often the objects of administrative manipulation.' As a result, formal municipal governance processes are 'a limited form of democracy [that] give[s] rise to an administered society rather than a democratic society' since there is no real debate of policy or of social programmes by the working class electorate and government officials. [Williams, 2006.] In Durban, a study of community participation in local economic development processes by Richard Ballard and his colleagues reveals that such processes allow ordinary people 'to demand accountability' from 'elected representatives and sometimes quite senior officials.' However, they are 'consultative rather than participatory' and 'invariably become conspicuous for the issues they leave out, and for the voices they did not hear.' [Ballard et al, 2006, p4.]

This was particularly apparent in the way that the Durban 'Citizen's Voice' process was handled by the city and the main water NGO (Mvula Trust), invoking participation by what might be termed 'civilised society' as a way of encouraging poor communities to consume less water just after the municipal prices had doubled in real terms over a period of six years. [Bond 2011b.]

In a different vein, David Hemson concludes that 'community participation in South Africa is informed by the memory of community struggle – a radical form of participation – against the racist Apartheid State' and that this must be harnessed. 'It is precisely this repertoire of radical strategies that can and should be revisited and adapted, to advance the interests of the materially marginalized communities at the local level.' [Hemson 2004.] Luke Sinwell applies a theoretical approach first developed in the South African context by Faranak Miraftab, [Sinwell 2009, p.31.] based on a distinction between 'invited' versus 'invented' spaces of popular participation. The ward committees, imbizos (government-initiated public forums) and integrated development plans of invited participation contrast with invented spaces through 'self-activity' such as community self-organization, direct action and other non-official mechanisms of exerting pressure. Based on extensive research conducted in Alexandra, one of the country's oldest and poorest black working class townships, he concludes that progressive change is more likely to emanate from the use of invented rather than invited spaces. However, Sinwell laments that community activism in the invented spaces also fails to question power relations and social structures in a fundamental way. Community organisations tend to work within budgetary constraints set by the state and as a result community groups end up competing among themselves for limited resources rather than questioning the neoliberal framework and its ideological underpinnings. [Miraftab 2004.]

V. Combined and uneven development, combined and uneven Marxism

The importance of Marxist criticism is to uncover, in particular situations, what is 'systematic' and what is 'conjunctural', as Gramsci put it. [Gramsci 1971, p. 177.] This, in turn, helps to distinguish – and therefore, to both facilitate and structure discussion about – short- and longer-term demands. The 'pure militancy' of an immediate politics of the poor does not do this easily. It is rather through dialogue, not just among 'the poor' but among the several sectors of society caught at various points in the contradictions of neoliberalism that a larger political formation capable of a sustained revolt against capital, and the creation of a new order, can be built.

Here, Trotsky's understanding of 'combined and uneven development' is useful. Though it can be read somewhat more broadly, most interpretations of Trotsky understand him to have meant 'combined' development to refer to the relations among different levels of development within a given nation.[Barker 2006, Trotsky 1962.] In South Africa, the logical corollary is to 'articulations of modes of production,' a concept promoted by Harold Wolpe to explain race-class politics linking sites of surplus value extraction to bantustans (where impoverished women provided cheap-labour's reproduction at a vast distance), but which is even more relevant in post-apartheid South Africa given enhanced migrancy, xenophobia and adverse gender power relations.[Wolpe 1980.] Geographers such as David Harvey and Neil Smith have emphasized that even within nations, the combined unevenness of development is given spatial expression. Apartheid was, in its nature, both a racial order and a spatial one, and it enforced uneven and combined development in almost caricatured forms. The systematic separation of racial groups, the profound underdevelopment of black areas, and the racial segmentation of labour markets suggested to many on the left (including us), as we noted earlier, that the fight against Apartheid was coterminous with the fight against capitalism. Though we were correct that capitalism and racism were mutually reinforcing during the 20th century, the conventional mistake by radicals was in thinking that the defeat of one durable but ultimately conjunctural manifestation of racism, Apartheid, would bring the capitalist system to its knees.

Accordingly, we found that Apartheid was conjunctural, but uneven and combined development is systematic.[Maharaj, Desai and Bond 2011, Bond 2005.] The particular spatial manifestations of uneven and combined development are also conjunctural, though, again, they can be extremely durable. Hence, fights against eviction or for clean and affordable water, even while encountering the severe power of state coercion, and sometimes taking years to resolve, do little to change the systematic dynamics of uneven and combined development that are deepened in new ways in neoliberal South Africa.

Trotsky also marshaled the theory of uneven and combined development to argue against 'stageism' or the idea that revolutionary politics depended on a given country's going through the specific, drawn-out processes of capitalist development found in other countries. What this meant, however, was that coalitions among workers across space and across situations in the process of capital accumulation (e.g., industrial workers, peasants) were central to revolutionary potentials, but that these potentials were realizable, even if with difficulty. The contemporary conjuncture in South Africa, beset by entrenched neoliberalism imposed by a weakening-but-still-present ruling Alliance dominated by the ANC, has seen the accumulation of protests by township residents over services, shack-dwellers over evictions and services, and the relatively 'privileged' public-sector workers over pay and the quality of services they provide. Though the public workers' strike was suspended without winning the union's key demands, it came close to bringing out private-sector workers – all in the formal sector – as well.

The question for an 'uneven, combined Marxism' is how to take advantage of the unevenness and particular conjunctural combinations of social relations in South Africa and beyond. The present period in South Africa exemplifies the dynamics of uneven and combined development and its spatial and social consequences. Within South Africa, it is important to think about how, for example, shack-dwellers' struggles and public workers' struggles could be linked up, even as the latter's relative privilege and operation in the formal labour market may make them wary of such an alliance, and as the former's distrust of cooptation creates an equal hesitancy. The Durban climate summit –the Conference of the Parties 17 – illustrated how very difficult it is to conjoin labour, community and environmental considerations, especially in the context of a set-piece 'Global Day of Action' march (3 December 2012) when distances between constituencies, political traditions and issue areas remain debilitating.[Bond 2011c.]

How could a joined-up movement respond to the conjunctural pressures upon it, such as the apparent advantages to the unemployed of labour-market flexibilization schemes or to the quality of life of township residents of evicting shack-dweller settlements? What kind of ways can – or should – Marxists talk about taking on the systemic problems of uneven and combined development with people who are located in different, and even sometimes opposed, areas of this combination? What organizational forms might be applied to start this conversation and yet keep it focused on the systematic elements of the present? How do we move beyond the concern for access, the localism, the

constitutionalism, and the anti-political populism of contemporary protest – even as these sometimes yield concrete results – while also moving beyond the ambiguity of a simple slogan? To us, the protests represent a profound critique of neoliberalism by working class communities. But are protesters aware of the greater significance of their protests? And to what extent do protesters' demands require solutions that challenge neoliberal policy and even entail a challenge to the capitalist mode of production? Or is it the case that the overarching neoliberal economic framework constrains the realization of not only the people's aspirations, but their ability to think beyond capitalism?

We agree with Andrew Nash that the answers to these questions will not come through the elaboration of a new, 'proper' Marxist line by mainly university-based, white intellectuals, and that the great task of a renewal of South African Marxism will depend on the elaboration of a new stratum of organic intellectuals from the movements (though not necessarily bypassing the universities) who can, perhaps, move among them in ways that enable them to abstract from the local without abandoning the reality of it. Being able to do this partly depends on the ability of South African movements to look beyond themselves, to a world increasingly resistant to neoliberalism and to contribute to, and take from, a growing global movement. The successes of the Treatment Action Campaign were one such contribution, although this movement also teaches the dangers of self-liquidation into state-conjoined service-delivery and narrow sectoral politics as well as a seeming over-reliance on foreign funding.

In encountering similar-but-different movements and contexts, movement intellectuals gain new perspectives on the possibilities of coalitions and on the similar-but-different permutations of combined and uneven development elsewhere; these can enhance their capacity to reinterpret local conditions by denaturalizing existing political categories and divisions. Indeed, in calling for a 'combined and uneven Marxism', we intend to suggest that the way forward cannot lie in the search for the pure revolutionary subject, whether the worker, the township 'poors', the shack-dweller, the organic feminist, the red-green social environmentalist, or anyone else; and it cannot lie in the search for the perfect location, whether the household, community, farm, benefits office, oil refinery or factory. Combined and uneven development makes clear that if the Marxist view that people are a 'nexus of social relations' holds, a combined and uneven Marxism must draw on the interdependence of locations in these relations in order to reinforce our interdependence rather than accept the capitalist combination of unevenness and mutual social antagonisms among those from whom capital is extracted. Of course this is to state a problem rather than to proclaim a new strategy. However, consistent with the argument above that it is the development of organic intellectuals from within the movements, and their discussions and alliances with one another as well as with 'traditional' Marxist intellectuals, it is only here that a way forward will be found.

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