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ROSA LUXEMBURG, IMPERIALISM AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ANIL SHAH

**Luxemburg Meets Schumpeter:
Understanding Contemporary Socio-Ecological Conflicts
as Processes of Destructive Creation**

ABSTRACT This paper develops a theoretical framework to understand contemporary socio-ecological conflicts in the context of capitalist development. Drawing on almost 2,400 cases mapped in the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA), it outlines major characteristics of these struggles. It is suggested that these struggles are best understood as class struggles of a distinct form. While traditional class struggles focus on the capital-labour relation situated in the visible zone of commodity production, socio-ecological conflicts are analysed through a reinterpretation of Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism as value struggles between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of (re)production. The implications for capitalist development are highlighted by introducing the inversion of Joseph Schumpeter's famous Creative Destruction, thus Destructive Creation. As frontier-making processes, these conflicts are conceptualised as dynamic limits to capital and therefore are an important terrain for socio-ecological transformation.

KEYWORDS creative destruction, primitive accumulation, socio-ecological conflicts, environmental justice

“Accumulation is more than an internal relationship between the branches of capitalist economy; it is primarily a relationship between capital and a non-capitalist environment [...]” (Luxemburg 2003: 398).

I. Introduction: At the frontier of anti-imperialism

The 17th of March 2017 will remain a memorable day for the small farmers, forest dwellers and fisherfolk in the Jagatsinghpur district in the eastern Indian state of Odisha. After close to 12 years of firm resistance, the South Korean Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) announced its decision to withdraw from their plans to build an integrated steel plant. The POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti (PPSS, The People’s Movement Against POSCO) had mobilised against the plans since their inception in order to protect people’s livelihoods, as well as the environment. The area is characterised by a vibrant local economy, including the cultivation of betel leaf and cashew nuts, fish farming, use of forest products, and so on. According to the corporate’s plans, more than 20,000 people from eight villages in Dinkia, Nuagaon and Gadkujang would have been displaced from the steel plant and port area alone, and about 50,000 people were going to be affected through environmental destruction, loss of livelihoods or otherwise. Iron ore for the steel production was going to be mined from the Khandadhar mountain area in the northern district of Sundergarh, roughly 400 kilometres north of the envisaged port. The mining activities would have largely occurred in an area predominantly inhabited by tribal communities, who depend on the forest and water bodies for a living.

The large-scale project was celebrated by politicians and business as India’s largest foreign direct investment (FDI) to date, comprising a total investment of 12 billion USD. Accordingly, the state government tried its utmost to live up to its commitment in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which it had signed with POSCO India back in April 2005. In the agreement, the state government pledged itself to identify, acquire and transfer a suitable tract of land, within a reasonable time frame, amounting to 50 square kilometres for the integrated steel plant alone, excluding plans for a captive port, water supply systems, new roads and an integrated township. When the MoU took effect in 2005, the state government did not

own a single acre of the fertile coastal area, which was mostly inhabited and cultivated by small farmers, forest dwellers and fisher people. Neither were local communities interested in selling their land. As the struggle intensified, street protests, sit-ins, public campaigns, lawsuits, official complaint letters and petitions by the People's Movement (including youngsters) were increasingly met with violent repression, criminalisation of protest, arbitrary arrests, demolition of houses and land, as well as fabricated criminal charges (ESCR-Net/IHRC 2013). At the same time, environmental clearance was bogged down in legal processes for years, national and international attention from media and civil society increased pressure on the company, and a novel amendment of the Mine and Minerals Development and Regulation Act in 2015 required POSCO to participate in an auction process in order to get its captive iron ore mine. Eventually, the Korean steel giant, one of the world's largest steel producers, decided to surrender the allotted land back to the state government in March 2017.

It is by no means an exaggeration to call this struggle anti-imperial. At least not, if we follow Rosa Luxemburg's suggestion that we understand imperialism as "the political expression of the process of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle over the unspoiled remainder of the non-capitalist world environment" (Luxemburg 2003: 426). Within three decades, POSCO's large-scale mining, steel plant and port project would have extracted 600 million tons of iron ore and 70 billion litres of fresh-water per year, irretrievably altering both local ecosystems and existing modes of living and production. Whereas local communities would have to bear the brunt of this socially and environmentally destructive model of development, POSCO's annual profit was estimated at 1.5 billion USD annually for the next 30 years. The struggle over POSCO's plans in Odisha is a distinct but certainly not an isolated case. It is, however, exemplary for a vast number of socio-ecological conflicts throughout the world, mainly fought between private corporations backed by state power and adversely affected communities. Although each case has its own political, historical and cultural context, this paper argues that we need to understand the common ground of these struggles to make sense of their systemic relevance for global development.

Following Luxemburg's notion of imperialism, this article intends to outline a theoretical framework to understand contemporary socio-

ecological conflicts. The second section will briefly define these conflicts and summarise key insights from nearly 2,400 cases registered in the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA). Based on this outline, section three introduces a re-reading of Marx's theory of primitive accumulation and Luxemburg's theory of imperialism to make sense of these conflicts. Subsequently, this re-reading is contextualised within broader trends of capitalist development. Schumpeter's famous notion of *Creative Destruction* will be complemented by introducing the concept of *Destructive Creation*. Finally, the article will discuss the implications of this conceptualisation, suggesting that socio-ecological struggles be perceived as both analytical and political entry points for debates on socio-ecological transformation.

2. Socio-ecological conflicts as global phenomena

Social conflicts with an inherently environmental dimension have increasingly captured the public in the form of notions of “blood diamonds”, “climate wars” or the mismanagement of natural resources by third-world elites (Collier 2011; Le Billon 2012; Welzer 2012). Although intimately linked to these conflicts, the analytical focus of this paper is somewhat different. Whereas competition between nation-states is crucial to these approaches, the way socio-ecological struggles are defined here refers to conflicts between economic actors (either private or state-owned companies) and local communities. What lies at the heart of these conflicts is a struggle over economic activities that fundamentally change the social access to, use of, and control over, land, water bodies, forests and other natural resources. Despite occasional attention for individual cases, these struggles have rarely received academic or public notice as a *distinct type of struggle* that requires a common theoretical understanding.

In attempting to promote both attention for and research interest in these conflicts, academics and activists have developed the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA). In April 2018, this global database listed 2,397 socio-ecological conflicts worldwide. It represents the largest open source data base on these conflicts to date. Besides attempting to make these struggles visible, the founders of the EJA sought to stimulate “deeper evidence-based enquiry into the politics, power relations and socio-metabolic processes

surrounding environmental justice struggles” (Temper et al. 2015: 257), beyond individual cases. As such, it builds fertile ground for the present attempt to develop a theoretical framework to understand the common nature of these conflicts.

Registered cases have to fulfil three criteria; first, these conflicts are socio-ecological because they revolve around economic activity or legislation with actual or potential negative environmental and social outcomes. These include consequences for livelihood opportunities, socio-cultural traditions and forms of knowledge, impacts on health, and environmental impacts such as loss of biodiversity or desertification. Second, a claim by a social group has to be advanced to the effect that such harm occurred or is likely to occur as a result of the disputed activity, and this social group has to be involved in mobilising against this. Third, one or more media stories reporting on this issue have to exist in order to provide witness to the above mentioned claims (Temper et al. 2015). The way conflicts are understood in this paper thus always incorporates both corporate claims on natural resources and resistance movements. The notion of conflict highlights the potentially violent dimension of the incompatibility of interests and related claims. This is all the more justified, when we realise that the vast majority of these conflicts (71 per cent) are characterised by street protests and visible mobilising or widespread mass mobilisation, including violence and arrests (see also Navas et al. 2018). Simultaneously referring to these conflicts as struggles emphasises the social class dimension. Several scholars have suggested that these “dispossession struggles” be understood as a distinct form of class struggle (Andreucci et al. 2017; Guha/Martinez-Alier 1997; Levien 2013), a notion which will be discussed later in the article.

The uneven geography of contemporary socio-ecological conflicts becomes visible at first sight. Three quarters of these struggles occur in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Considering the size and population of these continents, this may come as no surprise. However, the extraction of biomass and raw materials has rapidly increased with economic growth since the second half of the twentieth century (Krausmann et al. 2009). While consumption largely occurs in Europe and North America, production has shifted towards the South and East, increasing extractivist pressures and the potential for conflict in these regions (Schaffartzik et al. 2016). Although numerous socio-ecological conflicts occur throughout

Europe and in the United States, the hubs for these struggles are mainly found in Latin America (e.g. Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Mexico) as well in South and South East Asia (India, Philippines, Indonesia). In the ranking according to the number of incidences the top 15 countries comprise more than half (54 per cent) of all mapped conflicts, and they are also mainly former European colonies.

More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of these conflicts are fought over land acquisition, water use, control over raw materials (including fossil fuels) as well as large-scale infrastructure and related waste. Grievances almost invariably include issues of displacement and land dispossession, loss of livelihood opportunities, biodiversity and traditional knowledge and practices (see also Özkaynak et al. 2015). Moreover, violations of human rights, food crop damage, and ground water depletion or pollution occur in most cases. It is the communities that suffer from adverse environmental, health and socio-economic consequences of the disputed economic activities that are at the forefront of mobilisation. Almost invariably, farmers and fisher people, indigenous groups, traditional communities or racially discriminated groups are at the heart of social movements against corporate claims, while in many cases women's groups play a pivotal role. Mobilising groups frequently receive support from local and international civil society, including non-governmental organisations, local political parties, academics and trade unions. The actors behind the disputed economic activities are mostly transnational corporations (TNCs) which dominate their respective sectors. Mining, being one of the most contested sectors, is a case in point. The top five largest mining companies, namely Glencore Xtrata, BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto, Vale SA, and Anglo American, are involved in at least 111 contemporary struggles over land acquisition, air pollution or toxic waste throughout the globe. A similar picture emerges when looking at other sectors, such as energy, agriculture and food production (Shah 2016). Although this involvement might seem limited to industrial production, investigative reports suggest that contemporary financial institutions such as banks and insurance companies are increasingly involved in realising these "dirty profits" (FacingFinance 2018). Although these findings do allow for a general understanding of relevant actors, matters, and interests, the question remains open as to what role these struggles play in the context of capitalist development.

3. Capital and the battle of annihilation

In recent years, contributions from ecological economics and political ecology have significantly contributed to understanding the complex nature of these “ecological distribution conflicts” (Temper et al. 2018). Important aspects of these studies include aspirations and strategies of mobilising groups, as well as different languages of valuation and analysis of alternative society-nature relations (Martinez-Alier 2002; Martinez-Alier et al. 2010; Singh 2015; Swyngedouw 2015). More often than not the conflicting line in these struggles is not between ecology and economy or conservation and utilisation, but between “*different forms* of human utilisation of nature” (Brand et al. 2008, own emphasis). Several analyses show that local communities involved in mobilising value their land, forests, and water sources for reasons other than the purely economic, perhaps because they consider nature to be sacred and uncommodifiable (Escobar 2006; Gerber et al. 2009; Urkidi 2010). Put simply, “[s]ome values such as human life, health, nature, love, honor, justice, or human rights, are seen as absolute and inviolable and thus trading them off with other values (e.g. money) is considered taboo” (Temper/Martinez-Alier 2013: 85). In other words, these conflicts are not fought in economic terms, despite economic activity being at the centre of the dispute. Moreover, although these struggles mostly revolve around economic activities, a conceptual understanding of their systemic economic and extra-economic dynamics remains vague. In what follows, I will argue that these conflicts can be interpreted as value struggles that are essentially about different society-nature relations that clash due to capital’s violent expansion into “the unspoiled remainder of the non-capitalist world environment” (Luxemburg 2003: 426). These value struggles are conceptualised from the perspective of capital’s imperialist drive to expand, since it is corporate claims on people’s living environments that trigger conflicts in the first place.

Before further exploring capital’s imperial character, it is important to understand capital as a distinct *social form*. It is a relation that structures the (re)production of society while simultaneously mediating society’s relation to non-human natures. As such it is a historically specific mode of production. Moreover, it is a peculiar form of commodity production and exchange, one that abstracts from a commodity’s use value, and instead

privileges its exchange value. In other words, capitalist relations imply that land, forests or water bodies are not primarily used for the production of specific use values but for the accumulation of value in the form of money. As such capital is value-in-motion. Hence, Marx describes capital as a social relation in which money is perpetually sent in search for more money, a “restless never-ending process of profit-making” (Marx 1887: 127).

Its inherently social character becomes most obvious when looking at the explicit presuppositions of the capitalist mode of production, namely a class division between capital and labour that requires the latter to sell their *labour power* in the absence of control over sufficient *means of production*, in order to produce commodities. From this perspective we can also understand why capital can only fully be understood as a social relation, or, more specifically, as a class relation. Frequently, the capitalist mode of production and capitalism are simply equated and used interchangeably. This conflation is problematic both analytically and politically. In her famous treatise *The Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg consistently emphasises that “we cannot gain a true picture of it by assuming the exclusive and absolute domination of the capitalist mode of production” (Luxemburg 2003: 345). In other words, capital accumulation implies a “metabolism” between the capitalist economy and other modes of (re) production (Luxemburg 2003: 397). From this perspective, the capitalist mode of production is predominant but not exclusive in global capitalism, just like the class relation is a constitutive power relation of capital, but certainly not the only one. Ultimately, these multiplicities coalesce into a complex hegemonic order that evolves dynamically over time and in specific locations (Alnasser 2004; Buckel 2015; Sanyal 2007). While accumulation proper via commodity production remains vital, Luxemburg innovated Marxian thinking by highlighting the dual character of capital accumulation. The latter includes the persistent need for cheap elements of constant capital, such as raw materials or fertile soil, in order to increase productivity, as well as the existence of non-capitalist outlets to realise the surplus value (Luxemburg 2003: 323ff.).

Complementary to accumulation proper, the expansion of the capitalist mode of production depends on what Marx referred to as so-called primitive accumulation, a process which creates the “fundamental conditions for capitalist production” (Marx 1887: 507). However, contrary to

Marx's conceptualisation of primitive accumulation as limited to a historical period that led to the rise of global capitalism, extra-economic moments remain key to sustained capitalist expansion, from the perspective of Rosa Luxemburg. These moments most importantly include (state) force, rule of law, and compulsion through economic laws (Luxemburg 2003: 351; Marx 1887: 526ff.). The pivotal importance of land acquisition and control over other natural resources in contemporary socio-ecological struggles reflects the mixture of these three moments very well. A recent meta-study of 95 socio-ecological conflicts in Central America has highlighted the multidimensional forms of violence which only become visible due to movements of resistance and opposing claims by mobilising groups (Navas et al. 2018).

However, these processes go beyond what Marx and Luxemburg described in their works. Ultimately, they are about the re-structuring of how societies and their relation to the environment are constituted and reproduced through and beyond the economic sphere. After all, socio-ecological struggles not only consist of claims like "the land is ours", but also often involve more fundamental questions regarding society-nature relations, such as "what are the trees for?" (Martinez-Alier 2003). In recent years, several feminist and ecological re-readings of Marx's so-called primitive accumulation have shown that this process also includes the gendered division of labour sustaining social reproduction (LeBaron 2010), the control over women's reproductive capacities (Federici 2004), processes such as "housewifization and colonization" (Mies 1986), and the appropriation of non-human natures (Görg 2004; Moore 2015), both historically and in the present period. In other words, capital's imperial expansion and appropriation of non-capitalist environments creates conditions for further capital accumulation beyond the explicit presuppositions of labour power and means of production. Most importantly, these implicit presuppositions include the mostly unpaid and invisible work in the sphere of social reproduction (Elson 1998; Federici 2012; Katz 2001; Mies 1986), and the appropriation of natural resources and use of ecosystem services as "nature's free gifts" (Guha/Martinez-Alier 1997) that sustain capital accumulation (Foster et al. 2011; Shiva 1993). Without these implicit presuppositions, capital cannot reproduce successfully. Ultimately, these presuppositions increase labour productivity because they are not (fully) valued, although necessary for accumulation. As feminist and environmentalist

studies have shown, invisible work and non-human natures influence the systematic determination of socially necessary labour-time, and thus labour productivity and the creation of surplus value in commodity production (Burkett 1996; Elson 2015). Nevertheless, in the process of capital's imperialist expansion they are made invisible at the level of valuation and are thus subsequently referred to as *invisible presuppositions*.¹

While these enclosures clearly revolve around the re-structuring of people's material livelihoods, they also always comprise the altering of the immaterial sphere, including knowledge systems, cultural practices, and lived normalities (von Werlhof 2000). However, neither the material nor the immaterial sphere are 'given' per se. A consequent re-reading of the dual character of capital accumulation has to move from a substance-based view towards a relation-based perspective, in order to avoid the deterministic impetus embodied in Luxemburg's writings. In other words, spaces that are commodified and invisible presuppositions that are appropriated are not simply given substances. Rather, they are produced through social relations, most importantly (scientific and public) discourse, which constantly shifts the lines between the "colonised and colonisable" (De Angelis 2006). Since most of the disputed projects are labelled as "development projects", it is primarily the development discourses that produce such suitable terrains (Nixon 2011; Sanyal 2007). It is neither a coincidence that the above mentioned case of POSCO India was hailed as a major development project, attracting more foreign direct investment than any other project before, nor that the influence of public discourse through visible mobilisation, litigation, national and international attention, and solidarity has significantly contributed to halting the company's ambitions.

For Luxemburg, the essence of imperialism under capitalist relations is fundamentally different from other historical forms of empire: "All conquerors pursued the aim of dominating and exploiting the country, but none was interested in robbing the people of their productive forces and in destroying their social organisation" (Luxemburg 2003: 352). The specificity of capitalist imperialism thus lies in its ability to re-structure social and society-nature relations according to its own needs. Yet this process is neither a functional necessity, nor is it always successful. It is an ambition by certain social groups and related class interests which is always also opposed by other social forces which actively (re)produce an

outside to capital (De Angelis 2006; Nixon 2001; Sanyal 2007). In other words, socio-ecological conflicts are expressions of hegemonic struggles between different existing social and society-nature relations (Raza 2003: 163). Although radically different in their use of symbols and language or ways of mobilising, these conflicts challenge the appropriation of their living environment through the process of capitalist valorisation (*Inwertsetzung*). In this context, the notion of struggle is crucial. After all, the re-structuring of social and society-nature relations that lies at the heart of imperialism is a “battle of annihilation” (Luxemburg 2003: 349). When looking at the increasing number of environmental activists that are being killed in contemporary socio-ecological struggles, the image of “battle” becomes more than just a metaphor: last year, almost 200 environmentalists were murdered, four times more than those recorded in 2002 (Watts 2018).²

4. Destructive creation

Understanding Luxemburg’s “battle of annihilation” from an ecofeminist perspective requires us to shift our attention from the mere focus on the horizontal struggle between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production to include the corresponding vertical appropriation of unpaid labour as well as that of free energy (see Figure 1). After all, the horizontal de-integration of other modes of production (e.g. subsistence economy) is directly linked to the re-structuring of conditions for the vertical appropriation of capital’s *invisible presuppositions*. While economic exploitation in commodity production is based on the formal exchange of equivalents, unpaid work and non-human natures are appropriated by extra-economic means without exchange for equivalents. Only from the perspective of capital’s *invisible presuppositions* can we fully understand its contradictory reproduction through expansion. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, these struggles “extend over values as well as over material conditions for constant capital, variable capital and surplus value alike. [...]” (Luxemburg 2003: 345). Although surplus value arises out of the capital-labour relation, it is not exclusively determined by it. Recent studies on the history of capitalist development have emphasised that labour productivity has always

been co-determined by the appropriation of de-valued work and “cheap natures” which are often formally outside the zone of commodity production (Beckert 2015; Malm 2016; Moore 2015). Socio-ecological struggles are thus not only struggles over the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens (Temper et al. 2018), but always also struggles over economic value appropriation and distribution that “unfold in relation to the capital–labor axis, but occur outside of the relation of [commodity] production” (Andreucci et al. 2017: 39). Put differently, socio-ecological struggles are a distinct type of class struggle that co-produce the trajectory of capitalist development. In order to highlight this point, I would like to build on Schumpeter’s famous notion of Creative Destruction.

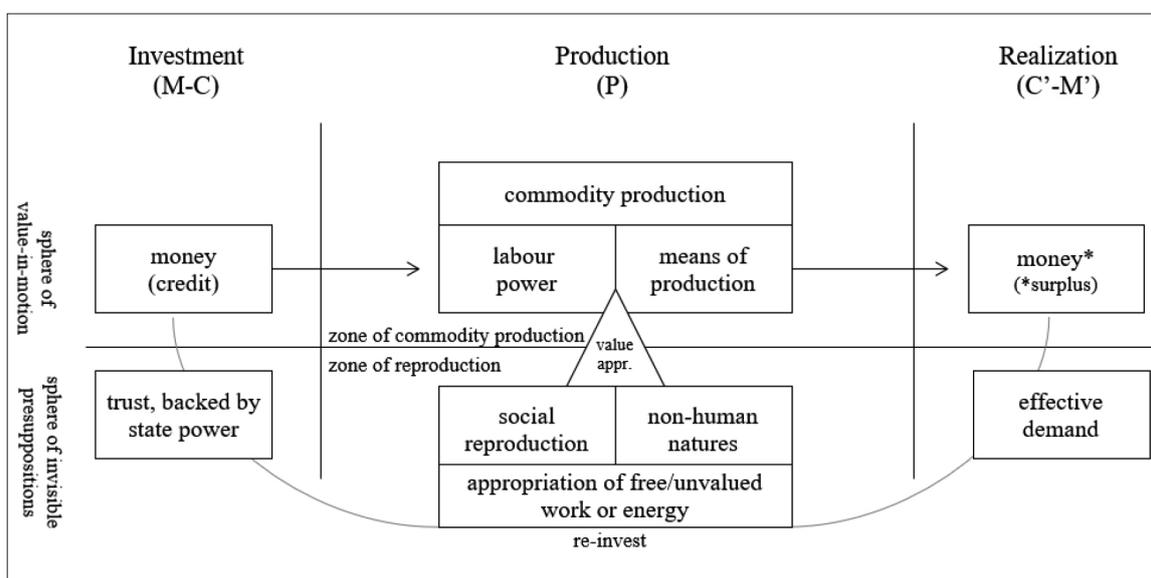


Figure 1: Abstract Capitalist Circuit and Invisible Presuppositions

Source: own illustration; inspiration from Marx (1887); Mies (1986); Moore (2015)

Contrary to many economists in the early 20th Century, Schumpeter argued that capitalism’s fundamental dynamic is evolutionary and thus cannot be captured in an automatic increase of population or money. Instead, it arises from new objects of consumption, new markets, and new forms of industrial organisation created by capitalist corporations (Schumpeter 1950: 137). It is these innovative processes that “inces-

santly revolutionize[s] the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism” (Schumpeter 1950: 137f.). Although certainly not a Marxian scholar, Schumpeter essentially elaborates on what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels describe as the bourgeoisie’s drive to “constantly revolutionise the instruments of production” (Marx/Engels 1969: 16) in a famous passage of the *Communist Manifesto*, or what Rosa Luxemburg labelled as “incessant revolutions in the methods of production” in *The Accumulation of Capital* (Luxemburg 2003: 324). What makes the notion of Creative Destruction so appealing for critical scholars is that it places emphasis on the relational dynamics of economic activities and not on their properties. Accordingly, capitalism does not simply work within a given social structure, but rather creates and destroys its own environment at the same time (Schumpeter 1950: 139). As was emphasised before, capital is a relation and we can only understand it as a process in-the-making. Moreover, it is not merely an economic process, but a social relation that structures social and society-nature relations. The incessant revolutionising of the capitalist mode of production is thus also linked to a constant change in the structuring of society-nature relations.

What becomes obvious is that such a notion of capitalist development exclusively privileges the visible sphere of value-in-motion. This is not to deny innovations in terms of technology or organisation as the most successful instances of value generation. The ongoing digitalisation of the global economy is an impressive example of the destruction of old business models and sectors, and the rise of others, including the fundamental re-structuring of labour (Huws 2014). However, the question is whether these “incessant revolutions” in the zone of commodity production are the only answer to the secret of capitalist development. Of the hundreds of millions of computers, smartphones and cars that are produced and consumed every year, none could exist without a constant influx of raw materials. The creation of cheap raw materials through the destruction of people’s livelihood opportunities is part of more efficient commodity production on a global scale. What appears as destruction to the affected communities is profitable investment for capitalist corporations, and cheap deals for the global consumer class. This nexus is what Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen have referred to as the *imperial mode of living* (Brand/Wissen 2013).

From this perspective the difference between economic revolutions in commodity production, i.e. through innovative technologies and organisation, and extra-economic dimensions related to the commodification of non-capitalist spheres and the appropriation of free or de-valued work and non-human natures, becomes clear. In addition to the industrial revolutions characterising new phases of capitalist development, there is a distinct set of destructive and creative processes related to the sphere of *invisible presuppositions*. In adopting the concept of Creative Destruction, I suggest conceptualising this family of processes as a form of ‘Destructive Creation’. Contrary to the disintegration of old business models and consumption patterns, destruction here is not synonymous with elimination. Rather, destruction describes the articulation between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of (re)production, where the latter are fundamentally altered and subsumed under the hegemony of the former (Alnasseri 2004: 86). What is destroyed are other modes of living and (re)producing communities which are not primarily based on profitable commodity production in the market, or, as Michael Perelmann put it, “the destruction of their way of life” (Perelman 2007: 49). This not only includes forms of material dispossession or displacement, most visible in the thousands of socio-ecological conflicts, but also the fragmentation of communities and the destruction of local knowledge systems (De Angelis 2006; Shiva 1993; von Werlhof 2000). Put more poetically, it is the “annihilation of those who have a different imagination” (Roy 2010). Moreover, creation refers to new opportunities for capital to reproduce itself by appropriating unpaid work and energy. As discussed earlier, appropriation strategies do not simply refer to something existing out there, but rather involve complex processes of meaning-making, or the discursive production of suitable outlets for profitable investment and appropriation. Logically, such discursive production has to be materially realized in order to be subsumed under the global circulation of capital.

The notion of Destructive Creation helps to demonstrate the transformative and conflictual nature of development projects at the level of *social forms* that organise the reproduction of communities. In doing so, it grasps the global and simultaneously local character of these conflicts. Complementary to the (mostly economically) innovative process of Creative Destruction that places emphasis on the ingenuity of new entrepre-

neurs, the notion of Destructive Creation highlights the mostly violent and coercive dimensions of the (largely extra-economic) global re-structuring of social and society-nature relations that creates the necessary conditions for successful capital accumulation on an expanded scale. As Rosa Luxemburg emphasised, “[o]nly the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible” (Luxemburg 2003: 397). Capitalist development is therefore best understood as the “audacious mixture of productivity and plunder” (Moore 2010c: 46), or as the unified process of Creative Destruction and Destructive Creation. While some strategies of expanded reproduction aim at deepening existing exploitative relations (creative destruction/accumulation proper), others aim at appropriating and restructuring new spaces and thus new social and society-nature relations in order to subordinate them to the circulation of capital (destructive creation/primitive accumulation).

5. Socio-ecological conflicts and dynamic limits to capital

Understanding the restructuring of social and society-nature relations as Destructive Creation gives us a more accurate idea of how capitalist development advances. The global economy is thus not only made up of global value chains in the sphere of value-in-motion. In a similar fashion, it is constituted of commodity frontiers (e.g. for raw materials or cultivable land) which trace back capitalist expansion and simultaneously show the often violent nature and unevenness of this process (Moore 2000: 411). Such capitalist development, as outlined above, is premised on both the commodification of uncommodified spaces and on the appropriation of services that keep commodity production profitable (Moore 2015: 63). For the “restless never-ending process of profit-making” (Marx 1887: 127), these frontiers create windfall profits, both visible and invisible. As such, socio-ecological struggles are also frontier-making movements. On the one hand, the notion of the frontier represents a spatial boundary between two distinct spheres, namely capitalist and non-capitalist relations of (re) production. On the other hand, it also signifies a certain (though dynamic) limit to the expansive drive of capital.

In writing *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg was motivated in to analyse a question neither Marx nor his followers had systematically touched upon - the future economic limits of capital. Building on Marx's mathematical reproduction schemes from *Capital Volume II*, Luxemburg was particularly struck by the question of who realised the permanently increasing surplus value, if neither capitalists nor the working class were able to do so. Today, most historical materialist scholars agree that there are numerous analytical flaws in Luxemburg's underconsumption theory, while some of her basic intentions remain pertinent to this day (for an overview see Albo 2016). Following the notion of Destructive Creation, the question of limits to capital can be thought differently. Instead of focussing on the realisation of surplus value in the visible sphere of value-in-motion, our attention shifts towards capital's challenge of constantly assembling sufficient *invisible presuppositions* to safeguard the expanded reproduction of capital. Accordingly, destruction and creation are part of a dialectic movement that occurs both in the visible zone of commodity production and at the border of the zone of reproduction. As such, destruction and creation characterise the evolution of a socio-ecological relation of (re)production (not merely a substance). Raw materials, fertile soil or other natural resources may get partly depleted by excessive global consumption and the drive for further economic growth, and as such may create geographically specific limits to further appropriation. However, the present climate crisis shows that depletion of resources is also a vast opportunity for Creative Destruction, e.g. new markets, new investment streams, and new business models, such as carbon markets (Lohmann 2012). Limits to capital are thus not definite and external but spatio-temporarily specific³, so that limits at one point in history may not be perceived as limits at another. In other words, the valorisation process characterises the immanent limits of the capitalist mode of production while simultaneously being the source of its creative and destructive force vis-à-vis human beings and nature (Brand/Wissen 2013: 692; Parenti 2015: 833). The outlined theoretical framework allows us to see socio-ecological struggles as crucial struggles in the process of valorisation, albeit different from labour struggles in the zone of commodity production. From the perspective of Destructive Creation, socio-ecological conflicts are thus disruptive forces against capital's imperialist quest to valorise ever more

territories. By contesting capital's violent expansion, these struggles politicise development projects and make the frontiers of imperialism visible in specific locations.

Even more importantly, they may create limits to capital. About one in six of the more than 2,000 cases in the EJA has been successful in halting the progress of socially and environmentally destructive projects (Scheidel et al. 2017). Consequently, mobilising groups also disrupt geographically specific ambitions of valorisation for a certain time. Given the size and scope of many of these investments, often including the building of large-scale infrastructure, such barriers may influence capital accumulation on a broader scale. Yet these limits are always only temporary and never without sacrifices, as the opening example of POSCO in India shows. The firm resistance of local communities and their regional and international support networks managed to stall India's largest FDI by one of the world's largest steel producers, halting their attempts to valorise their living environment. The "battle of annihilation" was won after almost 12 years of resistance but the victory was pyrrhic, as several observers commented. It left the communities with over 2,000 warrants for arrest, 400 police cases, lives lost, livelihoods disrupted, communities fractured, and the constant memory of violence and repression (Padhi/Patana 2017). Furthermore, understanding capitalist development as a process that is always in motion implies another dynamic, namely that any such attempt is likely to occur again, either in the same area or elsewhere. Shortly after POSCO's withdrawal from its investment in Jagatsinghpur district, the Indian conglomerate JSW Group requested more than 18 square kilometres of the project land granted to POSCO from the state government of Odisha in June 2017. The company is currently involved in at least four other socio-ecological conflicts in India. How these ambitions materialise and what form local resistance will take remains to be seen. What can be concluded, however, is that limits to capital, actively produced by contemporary socio-ecological struggles, can only ever be temporary limits. In this sense, these conflicts can be understood as dynamic limits to capital.

Theorising contemporary socio-ecological struggles in the context of capitalist development is not only a theoretical exercise. In the context of progressing climate change, a more nuanced understanding of and broader

attention to these struggles are pertinent for emerging debates on global transitions towards sustainable forms of (re)production (Brand et al. 2013; Haberl et al. 2011; Scheidel et al. 2017). This is neither to idealise these conflicts nor to ignore their differences and potentially conflictual interests. Rather, it is to argue that once we acknowledge these conflicts as a specific type of (class) struggle inherently linked to contemporary capitalist development, these conflicts become entry points for repelling exclusive, exploitative and divisive social and society-nature relations, and for creating, strengthening and protecting alternative modes of (re)production. Clearly, such an analysis cannot arbitrarily re-define these highly defensive struggles as offensive ones. However, it may trigger debate on new alliances and novel forms of solidarity, if contemporary socio-ecological conflicts are envisaged as part of a transnational challenge to global capitalism.

- 1 In order to highlight the strategic dimension of capital's value regime, Jason Moore has referred to work, food, energy, and raw materials as "cheap natures" (Moore 2015). Recently, Patel/Moore (2017) have added money, care and lives to the list. For the purpose of this article, however, the notion of cheap natures blurs the line between capitalist and non-capitalist spheres too much. Since this distinction is crucial to make capital's expansion visible while at the same time highlighting capital's dependence on these dimensions, the concept of *invisible presuppositions* is used.
- 2 The crucial role of multiple forms of violence in these struggles is also emphasised by scholars from the field of ecological economics (Navas et al. 2018). For a more specific analysis, one has to include the terrain on which these struggles are fought, that is the 'integral state'. Due to limited space, this point cannot be elaborated further here. For a more detailed description, see (Shah 2016: 51ff.).
- 3 This is not to say that theoretically there are no definite ecological limits to human production. Instead, it highlights the fact that, historically, the perceived limits and strategies to circumvent them through geographic shifts of various commodity frontiers have been far more flexible than commonly suggested (Moore 2010b; Moore 2010a).

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ABSTRACT Dieser Artikel entwirft einen theoretischen Rahmen, um gegenwärtige sozial-ökologische Konflikte im Kontext kapitalistischer Entwicklung zu verstehen. Durch die Zusammenfassung von knapp 2.400 Fällen aus dem Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA) werden zentrale Charakteristika dieser Kämpfe vorgestellt. Es wird vorgeschlagen, diese als Klassenkämpfe einer anderen Form zu begreifen. Während traditionelle Klassenkämpfe auf das Verhältnis von Kapital und Arbeit in der sichtbaren Zone der Warenproduktion fokussieren, werden sozialökologische Konflikte durch eine Reinterpretation von Rosa Luxemburgs Imperialismustheorie als Kämpfe um Inwertsetzung (value struggles) zwischen kapitalistischen und nichtkapitalistischen (Re-)Produktionsweisen analysiert. Die Konsequenzen für kapitalistische Entwicklung werden durch die Umkehrung von Joseph Schumpeters bekanntem Konzept der kreativen Zerstörung in eines der zerstörerischen Schaffung betont. Als grenzziehende Entwicklungen werden diese Konflikte als dynamische Grenze des Kapitals konzeptionalisiert und bilden somit ein wichtiges Terrain für sozialökologische Transformation.

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