



EDITORIAL

In a continent that is already reeling from the impact of a global pandemic and climate crisis, the question of how Africa can overcome its location in the periphery of the global economy and assert its control over its resources may appear to be misguided. The continued need for the use of natural resources in process of a just transition, as South Africa's energy transition highlights, and due to an immense infrastructure deficit on the continent asserts the continued importance of grappling with this challenge. Due to a combination of green extractivism and the unmet developmental priorities from within economies and societies in Africa, we need to also grapple with how to center Africa's priorities, and what to do with our land and natural resources. This is also part of what makes us fully human to prevail over neocolonial conditions that we live within and redefine our relationship with nature on our terms. Nonetheless, one of the perennial obstacles of development in Africa is the fact that the conditions within which our diverse economies operate are dominated by by external interests.

The question of how to strengthen the productive capacity of Africa's economies in these conditions has been a persistent one. How can we advance the right to develop and exercise sovereignty over resources in Africa and not rely on a strategy of offering cheap wage labour and our minerals to foreign investors? This strategy also risks increasing environmental degradation in the context of the current climate crisis. This question has taken on greater urgency in an era in which the concept of 'green mining' or 'green extractivism'- that refers to intensive resource extraction viewed as compatible and necessary for mitigating the impact of climate change¹- has taken off, fuelling an expansion of mining operations on the continent and across the globe.

This Special Issue of *New Agenda* takes on these vexing questions and more. In the first section of the edition, *Early Post-independence Lessons for Natural Resource Sovereignty*, we undertake an exercise of Sankofa by reflecting on the past and learning lessons from the present. Although our attention in this issue has been on mineral resources, we take a more comprehensive view by including water, land, labour and food. Sovereignty here means asserting control over African social and economic relations and also our relations with nature in a manner that centres the class interests of workers and peasants, especially women. This section features pieces from *Post-Colonialisms Today*, a research and advocacy project recovering insights from the immediate post-independence period in Africa, and mobilizing them through a feminist lens to address contemporary challenges. It is a collective undertaking directed by a working group and advisory group of African activist-intellectuals, with *Regions Refocus* serving as Secretariat.

This section features *The Limits of Resource Nationalism in the Post-Colonialisms Today*, and *A History of Resource Plunder* by Tetteh Hormeku and Camden Goetz. Yao Graham in *Reflections on the Fragmented Terrain of Mineral Governance in Africa* focuses on more contemporary challenges of regulating the minerals sector in Africa in the era of neoliberal globalisation. In *The African Mining Vision: Prospects and Challenges*, Treasure Mphanga draws on her direct experience of the adoption of the African Mining Vision (AMV), the minerals development strategy of the African Union that seeks to strategically focus on building economic and social linkages to benefit the continent. These articles bring into sharp focus the need for grappling with possibilities and limitations arising out of the past and more contemporary policymaking processes, frameworks





and institutions. This lays out a new pathway to think through what African Resource Sovereignty can mean today.

The section concludes with an article titled the Political Economy of Extractivism and Land Rights, written by Hibist Kassa who draws attention to how the extractivist orientation of economies in Africa as exporters of raw materials on the basis of cheap wage labour has been imposed and entrenched through the process of colonialism and apartheid (in the Southern African context). The article argues that to reverse these relations requires reorienting productive capacities. As part of this effort, Kassa calls for an expanded understanding of the economy which includes smallholder producers, gendered labour relations and social reproduction. This breaks from a focus on the public sector and industrial working class which does not enable analysis of the diversified nature of our economies.

The second section of this edition deals with *Social, Economic and Environmental Justice* by drawing on an analysis the extractivist nature of our economies. The next contribution by Hibist Kassa and Rachael Nyirongo draws into focus the question of corporate accountability for human rights and environmental violations. The ongoing negotiations for a Global Binding Treaty has opened the possibility for directly taking punitive action against corporations for violations committed in countries where they operate. However, even as civil society organisations across the world have mobilised to ensure this is implemented robustly it has also come up against attempts to dilute this process. This sets the context of an IFAA research project on documenting AngloGold Ashanti's human rights and environmental record in South Africa (North-West and Gauteng), Ghana (Obuasi) and Tanzania (Geita).

In the article titled *Women and Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM)* Hibist Kassa draws on analysis of Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Africa. This highlights some key issues captured in a forthcoming report to be published by WoMin African Alliance. Here, Kassa traces how the rise of large-scale mining has had a disruptive effect on ASM while simultaneously cheapening and displacing women's labour by marginalising the interests and needs of smallholder producers. A proposal is made to rethink an approach to structural industrial transformation that does not rely on the privatisation of natural resources. Instead, Kassa insists that we can build on the commons, in a manner that ensures artisanal miners and smallholder farmers can be integrated into downstream linkages. Other articles focus on Tanzania's mineral tax reforms and gaps in environmental regulation and provide crucial insights into a case that has been controversial and raised crucial debates on resource nationalism in Africa. Rachael Nyirongo writing about mining tax reforms in Tanzania provides a sobering analysis on the positive dimensions of tax reforms that have been introduced more recently to support ASM, while Esther Somi highlights glaring gaps and slippages in the regulatory capacity of the state to hold itself to account for graft and corporates to account for environmental damages.

This issue also has incorporated perspectives of researchers and activists who work in communities affected by mining to analyse the impact of these operations from the vantage point of those experiencing it. In the *Return of AngloGold Ashanti: Will Obuasi Rise Again?*, Richard Elimah, writing from Ghana, takes readers to a mining town in the middle belt of Ghana with over a century history of mining. The recent closure of the Obuasi operations had a dramatic impact on the mining communities, creating a state of despair. As AngloGold Ashanti resumed operations, a semblance of hope returned. Yet Elimah also presents a sobering analysis of what can be done to prevent





Obuasi becoming a ghost town once more when the gold reserves become unprofitable to mine. Similarly, Papiki Shawn Lethoko, shared with *New Agenda*, his reflections on the history of Margaret Village, a historically black village, built by mining corporations for its black mine workers, and which has become desolate after mining operations ceased. The struggle of Margaret Village and its neighbouring Khuma township to hold AngloGold Ashanti to account provides an inspiring example of what can be achieved once communities affected by mining are armed with information and legal support, but it also highlights the limitations. The vacuum left by the state due to its weakened regulatory capacity and bias towards extractive industries needs to also be addressed.

The third section on the *Agrarian Mining Nexus and Energy Sovereignty*, also comprises articles that examine other dimensions of natural resources. Steven Mberi, Freedom Mzawi and Walter Chambati in *Exploring linkages between Extractives, Agriculture and Land in Zimbabwe* maintain that although mining has had a disruptive impact, it can still play a more positive role through building linkages between agriculture, mining and manufacturing. The next piece titled **Grass-roots Women and Energy Sovereignty**, grapples conceptually with the concept of energy sovereignty as an alternative to corporate controlled energy systems. Melania Chiponda draws on insights from her PhD dissertation on electrification in Zimbabwe. Chiponda elaborates on the concept of energy sovereignty from below, as an alternative to corporate driven alternatives and draws attention to the importance of socially owned and renewable energy systems.

This section concludes with two informative pieces that elaborate on the historical context of the Blue Nile/Abay river conflict. Mekdelawit Messay Deribe in *The 1959 Agreement "For the Full Utilization of The Nile Waters": The Crux of The Problem In The Nile Basin Water Use Dilemma* draws attention to the historical roots of the Nile water conflict. She concludes that numerical sharing is not the approach to resolving the crisis, but instead a regional strategy for resource sharing is needed. The section concludes with Stephen Max Donkor in *Reclaiming the Shared Vision of The Nile Basin Starting with The Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)*. He breaks down contemporary conflict resolution processes and also makes the case for a regional water sharing strategy. This draws attention to an important continental challenge of the competing interests rooted in colonial 'divide and rule' strategies that undermine regional strategies to develop our resources for own social and economic progress.

New Agenda features two interviews in the Section on *Resource Sovereignty: Beautiful Contested Vision(s)* in Issue 83. First is an interview with Nonhle Mbuthuma Spokesperson of the Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) in Xolobeni in the Eastern Cape. Nonhle explains how the ACC has been struggling against the coercive imposition of extractive projects on their ancestral lands. She explains the history of Pondoland revolt, the violence of dispossession and its link with gender-based violence and importance of Free Prior and Informed Consent. Mbuthuma also discusses the continued assassination of activists after the formal end of apartheid as well as the challenges facing the left and trade unions in South Africa. Finally, she assesses alternatives such as food and energy sovereignty and the industrial commons.

Our second interview is with Bruce Baigrie, formerly part of the IFAA research team, on his work on energy. Bruce shares his thinking on energy sovereignty from the viewpoint of the state in the South African context. He discusses the place of nuclear energy in the energy mix of South Africa, the threat posed by privatisation and the opportunities to reform ESKOM and advance renewable





energy in the country. He concludes with his thoughts on green industrialisation and offers a critique of the calls for 'degrowth' in the Global North and South.

The final section of this issue pulls together a review of books on *Extractive Industry Law in Africa and the People's Green New Deal*. Brian Kamanzi's review of the People's Green New Deal charts the more complex terrain that the left from a Global South perspective has to take in countering Green alternatives rooted in corporate dominated and 'for profit' solutions. Grappling with the specificities of what faces settler colonies like South Africa is also considered. Rachael Nyirongo's review of Extractives Industries Law in Africa enables reflection on the legal, fiscal and institutional frameworks on a continental level. Although New Agenda acknowledges the bias of governments towards corporate interests, the review enables us to also recognise shifts to integrate human rights concerns.

Reviews of albums of radical artists, such as the award winning 'Dialectic Soul' reviewed by Phethani Madzivhandila and 'AlterNatives: reviewed by David Coplan both evoke decolonial practice and thought and offer reflections across generations on the work of radical cultural workers on the Cape Town/South Africa music scene. Each of these differently positioned mediums alongside the cover art by Khubu Zulu, offer reflections into varied viewpoints conditions of exploitation and oppression facing Africans and especially with the existential threat posed by Climate catastrophe from a Global South perspective. Altogether, these provide us with wide-ranging reflections on what has been five centuries of trauma, struggle and continued attempts to re-think, redefine and reimagine and prevail over interests that attempt to undermine self-reliance and autonomy of Africa.

This Special Issue concludes with prose poetry by Quondiswa James. In *Land and Landless*, we are guided to view the planet as it hurls through space and to the everyday blood and sweat of the exploited who generate the wealth from which they are excluded, alongside swathes of surplus labour, amongst whom women continue to hold communities together in the everyday struggle for survival. The greed of the profit driven system out of which corporate giants have captured the State and dominated society is brought into full view. Understanding the logic of extractivism in the African region, and ultimately building strategic linkages between its malcontents is what this Special issue ultimately seeks to articulate.

It is New Agenda's view that the commons and our relationship to nature is one that cannot be reduced to cold analysis of capital and profits. We dare to prevail with the aim of advancing interests that centre the needs and priorities of smallholders and workers, whilst also grappling with the inevitable problems that will arise in any step towards structural change. Being grounded in a process that respects and practices Free Prior and Informed Consent is crucial. However, building consensus around any change that will transform a way of life is trying to say the least. Nonetheless, in the conditions of corporate led neoliberal globalisation, it is absolutely necessary to ensure that wide-ranging and diverse interests of communities affected by mining, including the Right to say No, are respected. What remains to be addressed in prevailing discourses is what we are saying Yes to?

The first on the agenda has to be finding a balance between structural ecological and economic transformation that centres workers and smallholder interests. What the articles in this Special Issue draw our attention to are the many challenges that arise in this process. While it is import-





ant to hold corporates accountable especially where there is a prevailing practice of voluntary commitments, there is also a need to have processes that guide how Africans can utilise our own natural resources to develop in ways that do not repeat the combined violence of unequal exchange, exploitation and environmental degradation. This is not an easy direction to take but it is a necessary challenge.

Other matters of concern include interventions to address illicit and licit financial flows can complement this process, especially in the context of climate crisis. There is also an urgent need to recenter indigenous knowledge systems as part of a process of understanding our diverse economies and breaking away from extractivism. Additionally, there is a need to develop regional resource sharing development strategies, as highlighted by Mekdelawit Messay Deribe and Stephen Donkor in the case of the GERD to orient towards building the productive capacity of economies in Africa, while also retaining a balance with environmental and human rights protection. This Special Issue offers some responses to these matters. For example a regional accountability mechanism that not only engages with existing frameworks like the AMV but also goes beyond their remit by actually focusing on strengthening the capacity of the state to effectively regulate the sector and provide extension services to smallholder producers is a promising avenue to explore. This has to be complimented with integrating more explicitly regional natural resource development strategies for more holistic and beneficial projects that focus on environmentally sustainable practices that centre smallholder producers and protect workers rights, whilst also investing significantly in social infrastructure and systems that retain value on the continent under the principles of equity and sharing. These are the kind of interventions will take us closer to asserting our self-reliance and autonomy through African Resource Sovereignty.

REFERENCES

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