

“What does citizenship mean?” the bishop asks. “Does it mean—well, you must be proud that you have an identity document? But that’s more helpful to the police, to locate where you are!” Instead, “let citizenship not start with the official documents, but start with the *sharing of the resources*. . . . Citizenship should mean that I partake in the wealth of the country!”

Here it is possible to observe a kind of convergence, in which the muscular assertions of ownership that we see in Julius Malema-style resource nationalism are being harnessed to concrete and universalistic distributive claims, claims that are made both plausible and practical by the new cash transfer apparatuses that deliver existing forms of social assistance. And while I have tried to illustrate this sort of reasoning by dwelling on one especially clear case (the recent Namibian BIG campaign), I emphasize that the idea that universalistic cash payments might be reconceptualized as a kind of share of a collectively owned mineral wealth is not unique to Namibia. Indeed, a recently launched region-wide campaign argues for a basic income grant scheme that would be funded by levies on mineral extraction, covering the entire Southern African Development Community. The campaign’s argument begins by noting the regional fact of “poverty alongside mineral wealth” together with “evidence from countries such as India and Brazil” showing the effectiveness of cash transfers in fighting poverty and then seeks to mobilize support for universal basic income precisely under the banner of the rightful share. (The slogan emblazoned on the campaign’s logo reads as follows: “Our Right—Our Wealth—Our Share.”)³⁴

Conclusion: Toward a Politics of the Rightful Share

In all this, it may be possible to detect an emergent politics. Such a politics is based on a kind of claim-making that involves neither a compensation for work nor an appeal for “help” but rather a sense of rightful entitlement to an income that is tied neither to labor nor to any sort of disability or incapacity. Like the claims to land discussed earlier, such claims are rooted less in legal rights, narrowly understood, than in a powerful encompassing sense of righteousness—a conception that, as noted in chapter 1, relies less on the liberal idea of rights “held” by individuals than on the principle (more moral than legal) that material distributions

must answer to some idea of the proper, of the just, of the “rightful.” At the most fundamental level, such distributive claims do not take the form of exchanges at all (neither market nor gift) but instead something more like demand sharing—a righteous claim for a due and proper share grounded in nothing more than membership (in a national collectivity) or even simply presence (cf. Widlok 2012; I return to the theme of “presence” in the book’s conclusion). It is this (emergent, only partially realized) politics that I term the politics of the rightful share, and my claim is that, in a range of societies (especially where wage labor has lost the political and economic centrality it once had), it may be becoming a much more prominent and important form of political aspiration.

How are we to assess the potential of such a politics of the rightful share? Let us begin by considering where (and why) claims to rightful shares are politically potent and do manage to gain some traction. As noted in chapter 1, it seems to be the case that share-reasoning is most readily accepted when it comes to mineral wealth.³⁵ Why is this? If a small farmer works hard to grow a modest agricultural crop on some little patch of land, we readily accept the idea that the goods so produced belong to him or her, and not to us all collectively. But if the same farmer finds oil on that piece of land, installs a few cheap pumps, and starts earning billions, we easily conclude that at least some share of the wealth is or ought to be common. Why? Because, I think, the value is so out of proportion to the effort; in some sense, we recognize that the value was “already there”—stumbled upon, not created, by the farmer.³⁶ Immense value, that is, here emerges not from labor, but fabulously, almost magically, as if from nowhere.³⁷

But mineral extraction is not the only place where the proportionality of wealth to effort we see in the case of the small farmer is absent; indeed, a disconnection of accumulation from such things as work, effort, and duration has been noted to be a distinguishing feature of the current era of “casino capitalism” (Strange 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). In fact, the morality of the unearned oil bonanza is not easily distinguished from similar “gushers” that nowadays spray torrents of money out of hedge funds, currency speculation, and executive compensation agreements. But, as pointed out in chapter 1, the same is true, in a different way, even of such pillars of the “real economy” as manufacturing, at least at the most up-to-date and capital-intensive end of things. In fact, a high-

tech factory is today not so different from an oil rig—a huge piece of capital investment that, once in place, pumps out unimaginable amounts of valuable stuff with only small amounts of supervisory labor. The distributive claims that are plausible for mineral wealth thus become increasingly plausible for other forms of wealth as well—for they, too, now seem to appear fabulously, magically, as if from nowhere.

Distributive claims of this kind (i.e., grounded in membership rather than labor or misfortune) are, I have suggested, increasingly evident in certain new domains of social policy, both in southern Africa and internationally (the shifting international scene is briefly discussed in the book's conclusion). The legitimacy of such claims is a key theme, too, in much contemporary radical social thought, especially in a recent revitalization of thinking about what is an old topic for socialism: "the commons." David Harvey, of course, has in recent years revisited Marx's old discussion of "primitive accumulation," reminding us that the accumulation of capital via the appropriation of property formerly held in common is not an "original sin" that occurs at the birth of capitalism but a continuous process that carries through to the present as commonly held resources continue to be subject to private appropriation, especially in the latest, "neoliberal" round of capitalist restructuring (Harvey 2005). But more interesting for my purposes here are lines of thought that lie outside of the well-rehearsed verities of Harvey's traditional (and production-centered) Marxism and derive instead from alternative formulations of socialism that give a greater place to distribution—formulations to which it may be time to return. As discussed in chapter 1, for instance, the anarcho-communist Peter Kropotkin founded his critique of capitalism not on arguments about labor and production but on a fundamentally distributive claim—the claim that society's wealth properly belongs to all. Every member of modern industrial society, he noted, benefits from "an immense capital accumulated by those who have gone before him" ([1892] 1995, 11). And among those wealth-creating predecessors, he paid special attention to poor and working people and their sufferings: "Whole generations, that lived and died in misery, oppressed and ill-treated by their masters, and worn out by toil, have handed on this immense inheritance" ([1892] 1995, 14). Yet the descendants of those who paid this terrible price, instead of being treated as the inheritors of a vast richness, are denied any property rights at all. For all the vast wealth produced by

modern railways, for instance, “if the children of those who perished by the thousands while excavating the railway cuttings and tunnels were to assemble one day, crowding in their rags and hunger, to demand bread from the shareholders, they would be met with bayonets and grapeshot” ([1892] 1995, 17).³⁸

Importantly, Kropotkin does not say that such a person deserves a share of wealth because he or she works a certain amount. On the contrary, the entire production apparatus must be treated as a single, common inheritance. I therefore deserve a share of production not because I labor but because I own (via inheritance) a share of the entire production apparatus. Kropotkin appeals to labor, to be sure, but not just the labor of the present. Instead, it is past labor that is most fundamentally the source of the productive apparatus that we all inherit, so the heritage of labor is as important as its current condition. What is more, he grounds the right to a common inheritance not just in a long, shared history of work but equally in other historical accumulations such as inventions as well as forms of suffering, deprivation, and bloodshed (cf. Moore 2005). In this broad panorama, which encompasses the whole history of all of mankind, there can be no accounting of who produced how much or whose suffering was greater; the only practical as well as ethical conclusion is, as he famously put it, “All belongs to all” ([1892] 1995, 19).

More recently, autonomists have revitalized this old tradition of theorizing about “the common.” Thus Michael Hardt (building on Virno 2004) has argued that value is really produced not by labor in the narrow sense but by society as a whole (2000). For instance, when an advertising campaign makes money using a hip-hop-themed jingle, where does the value originate? Not, he suggests, in the labor of the individual advertising employee, who is just repackaging creative musical ideas heard at a club the previous night—but not either in the individual performance of the hip-hop artist at the club (who has likewise borrowed and sampled from the prior creativity of others). It is society as a whole that produces such value, and society as a whole thus has a claim to appropriate the fruits of such production (2000, 27). (Indeed, Antonio Negri has recently suggested that, given the centrality of such social creativity in generating value today, the metropolis might properly take the place that the factory held for Marx as a principal site of struggle [Negri 2008, 211–30].) The key claim here belongs not to the wage laborers but to the members of