



Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism

Edited by
Aram Ziai · Praveen Jha ·
Jule Lümmen

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ISBN 978-3-031-87004-0 ISBN 978-3-031-87005-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7>

This work was supported by Universität Kassel.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was supported by the Exceed (Centres of Excellence for Exchange and Development) programme of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Ministry of Development Cooperation (BMZ).





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Introduction: Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism

Jule Lümmen and Aram Ziai

A “global partnership for sustainable development” is the 17th of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aims to strengthen the means of implementation for the other 16 goals of the Agenda 2030. A strong commitment to global partnerships between governments, the private sector, and civil society is seen as vital to achieving the SDGs (United Nations, n.d.-a; see also Cooper & French, 2018). The principle of partnership in development cooperation, however, is not new. In 2000, a ‘Global Partnership for Development’ became the final Millennium Development Goal aiming to support the achievement of the other seven goals (United Nations, n.d.-b). Partnerships between donors and borrowers were again endorsed in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid

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A. Ziai et al. (eds.), *Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7_1

Effectiveness by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2005). Here, the ownership of ‘developing countries’ over their development strategy and the alignment of donors’ policies with partners’ development strategies in the global economy were mentioned as partnership targets. SDG 17 builds on these previous commitments, emphasising the significance of collaboration in achieving global development and recognising that partnerships are vital to accomplishing sustainable development in general (Cooper & French, 2018). However, SDG 17 goes further than the previous declarations. Its 19 targets include extensive commitments to cooperation in different fields, such as development assistance, debt sustainability, investment promotion, knowledge sharing, technology transfer, capacity building, coherence regarding economic policies and international trade (Cooper & French, 2018; UN, n.d -c.).

This edited volume focuses on three specific areas of partnerships: Development cooperation, the global economy, as well as knowledge production and sharing. Despite the far-reaching commitments to create global partnerships in different areas, research still points to shortcomings and problematic aspects that have been shaped by colonialism and continue to reflect unequal power relations between the global North and South (e.g. Eriksson Baaz, 2005; Melber, 2018; Mkandawire, 2011; Ndhlovu, 2017). In the following, the state of research on partnerships in the three categories mentioned is outlined.

STATE OF RESEARCH

Within the area of development cooperation, despite the commitment to partnership endorsed throughout SDG 17, critical research has found severe deficiencies. Firstly, marginalised groups, particularly indigenous people and women, are often excluded from the development process and rarely profit from the supposed benefits (e.g. Rai, 2011; Radcliffe, 2015; Visvanathan, 2011). Critics lament that feminist perspectives have long been overlooked in mainstream development discourses or have been significantly watered down (Rai, 2011, p. 28). Although feminist voices have been increasingly recognised and considered on paper over the years, there has often been a lack of political will and resources to implement them in practice. Newer research shows that indigenous and gender-related identities are still major factors to discriminatory practices, which are still overlooked (Visvanathan, 2011, p. 4). Radcliffe

(2015), however, states that the recognition and analysis of heterogeneity is crucial, as it shapes both development thinking and its outcomes. She advocates for intersectional perspectives in development cooperation taking into account the interlocking of gender disadvantages and other layers of discrimination (Radcliffe, 2015). Secondly, mainstream development policies sometimes have detrimental side effects. Among the negative consequences scholars list the displacement of people, the destruction of livelihoods and the environment as well as the relocation of wealth in the hands of a few—all in the name of development (George & Sabelli, 1996, p. 2; Peet, 2005, p. 135; see also de Wet, 2006; Rich, 1994). Unequal power relations still make it extremely difficult for affected people to defend their rights and demand accountability for international development actors (Clark et al., 2003; Fox & Brown, 1998).

Thirdly, approaches to participation are often confined by the structures of the development system and its institutions (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Eversole, 2012; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Li, 2007; Mosse, 2005). Instead of allowing for people-driven change, people's participation is strictly limited to the structures of specific projects and programs organised and funded by development organisations and their staff (Eversole, 2012, p. 30). Critical studies warn that the word 'participation' is used as a rhetoric to hide that development agencies and practitioners continue to pursue their own agenda under the disguise of community consent (e.g. Eversole, 2012, p. 30; see also Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Perrons & Skyers, 2003). According to Eversole (2012), this once more "reflects a deeply embedded assumption, one that permeates the identities and practices of development organisations from the World Bank to small local NGOs: that development is created by formal agencies of development, flowing from us to them in the binary, depending upon the knowledge, institutions and best practice of professionals" (p. 31).

Partnerships in the global economy are necessary to ensure that poverty reduction does not remain confined to development cooperation but goes "beyond aid" (Browne, 1999). This requires policy coherence in different areas of the global economy, a principle which has already been endorsed in the 2005 Paris Declaration and is now an integral part of SDG 17 through targets 13 and 14. A coherent global governance is needed to ensure that donor states' economic interests do not accidentally or deliberately undermine measures of development policy or impair

its effects (e.g. Ashoff, 2005; Messner et al., 2005; Ziai, 2007a). Thus, while strong global partnerships for sustainable development play a vital role in different parts of the global economy, they still face challenges and have to overcome hurdles in different policy fields.

In agriculture, a field which is particularly relevant for SDGs 2, 15 and 8, partnerships play an essential role in the transformation towards organic agriculture, fair trade and the abolition of forced labour (e.g. Gold et al., 2015; Wienold, 2012). In their analysis of the potential of partnerships between buyers, NGOs, and a coffee cooperative in Nicaragua to build the supply of Fairtrade coffee, Donovan and Poole (2014) point to some of the significant problems and dilemmas that cooperatives face when creating long-term economic relationships with Fairtrade coffee purchasers and achieving goals linked to poverty reduction and the environment (p. 47). While the cooperation between buyers, NGOs and the cooperative advanced the growth of the latter and led to significant gains, producers still struggled to increase their production and fully profit from their market access (Donovan & Poole, 2014, p. 34). Overall, studies suggest that Fairtrade has the ability to improve producers' wellbeing by increasing their income and economic stability, strengthening organisational capacity, developing community-based initiatives, and establishing new trade ties between farming cooperatives and worldwide markets (Dolan, 2008, p. 307). However, in how far partnerships for ethical consumption are currently able to restructure global commodity chains in a way that shrinks hierarchies between consumers and producers remains questionable (Dolan, 2008, p. 305). Donovan and Poole (2014) hence advocate for "deeper discussions about how buyers and NGOs can more effectively contribute to building the supply of high-quality Fairtrade coffee, and the need for increased coordination and mutual learning as part of the process" (p. 34).

In the area of renewable energy, partnerships have the potential to support processes of energy transition and local adoption of energy technologies in postcolonial contexts (e.g. Barthel, 2019; Müller, 2017; Parthan et al., 2010). This field is especially significant for the achievement of SDGs 7 and 13. However, current partnerships in these areas still leave room for improvement: Barthel (2019) observes a tendency towards unequal and paternalistic partnership structures of the Global North and South in the field of decentralised and renewable energy technologies. When analysing two German-Tanzanian partnerships, she finds

that internal hierarchical power structures were maintained and dependencies on the northern partner were created or reproduced regarding technical knowledge (Barthel, 2019, p. 510).

While knowledge sharing is central to SDG 17 and mentioned in targets 6 and 16, there is a clear perception of the alleged ‘producers’ of such knowledge in the Global North and the ‘receivers’ in the Global South. Development knowledge has been and still is characterised by Eurocentrism, creating a global hierarchy and propagating a linear idea of social evolution at the top of which are European societies and settler colonies (e.g. Escobar, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Rahnama & Bawtree, 1997; Rist, 2014; Sachs, 2010). Postcolonial, decolonial and postdevelopment scholars have challenged the assumption that such ‘expert’ knowledge about social change is situated in the Global North. Instead, they advocate for alternative, local, and non-hegemonic knowledges as well as pluriversal epistemologies, mutual learning processes and participatory and decolonised pathways to knowledge production and co-construction (e.g. Apffel-Marglin & Marglin, 1990, 1996; Bendix et al., 2020; Bhambra, 2014a; Connell, 2007; Kothari et al., 2019).

Looking at research for development cooperation, Fransman et al. (2019) argue that it should go beyond translating findings into policy or practice. The research agendas and approaches should be influenced by those living and working in the Global South, academics, or NGO staff on the ground (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 21). According to the authors, these stakeholders have the necessary experience and profound knowledge of local needs and the impact of development policies (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 21 & 23). Amongst the eight principles they define for fair and equitable research, they highlight the need to redress evidence hierarchies: Oftentimes, the knowledge and experiences of Southern practitioners, academics, and communities are marginalised compared to those of actors in the Global North (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 30). They hence stress the need to overcome systems of classification of different types of knowledge (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 31). This goes hand in hand with respecting and making use of the diversity of skills and knowledge different stakeholders bring into the partnership (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 33). Based on such good practices, partnerships can offer new perspectives, skills, and knowledges and function as a space for mutual learning and deeper understanding (Fransman et al., 2019, p. 36).

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Many of the above-mentioned obstacles and factors hindering global partnerships can be explained by prevailing global power inequalities as ongoing structures originating in colonialism that structure today's global political economy. Thus, neocolonialism is a crucial concept to analyse these power inequalities.

Neocolonialism was first theorised by Kwame Nkrumah, an important figure of the African anticolonial movement who not only helped to lead Ghana into independence but later became its first president. He fully developed the concept in his book 'Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism' (1965).

In the wake of the independence of an increasing number of African countries, Nkrumah (1965) argues that colonialism is replaced by neocolonialism, which he defines as "imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage" (p. 4). The central characteristic of neocolonialism is that even though the state subject to it has gained independence and thus international sovereignty, "in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). Such control is primarily exercised through economic or financial instruments. This includes foreign control of exchange rates, monopolistic trade agreements dictating the import of products from specific countries instead of competing ones, as well as the government's dependence on financial transfers from the imperial power, and the provision of civil servants influencing state policy (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). While the former colonial powers can be the ones exercising such control, Nkrumah also points to new neocolonial actors, especially the United States of America (USA), but also international corporations and banks (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). Against this backdrop, Nkrumah advocates for a critical examination of how the political agency of African states has been undermined, and how to oppose the external influence (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 12; see also Langan, 2018, p. 23).

Nkrumah (1965) argues that in a neocolonial environment, the flow of foreign capital into "less developed" states does not result in development, but in exploitation and a growing divide between wealthy and poor nations (p. 4). Yet, for him, "[t]he struggle against neo-colonialism is not aimed at excluding the capital of the developed world from operating in less developed countries [but] at preventing the financial power of the developed countries being used in such a way as to impoverish

the less developed” (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 5). Interestingly, unlike the title of his book and in opposition to Rodney (1972, p. 16), Nkrumah did not understand capitalism, colonialism and exploitation as interlinked (see also Ziai, 2020, p. 129). He neither rejected capitalism nor attempted to establish an alternative system in Africa. Although the concept has been developed in the African context, neocolonialism also occurs in other countries (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 9).

While the core of Nkrumah’s concept of neocolonialism is the external control of the political economy of a country as a form of continuation of colonial relations, it shows parallels with several theoretical currents. Langan (2018) situates the theoretical concept of neocolonialism between African Liberation ideology and socialism on the one hand, and (Neo-)Marxism on the other. The first theoretical influence is evident in Nkrumah’s focus on Pan-Africanism and can be attributed to the significant influence of the African Liberation Movement (Langan, 2018, p. 7). One of the most prominent proponents of African socialism was Frantz Fanon (1963), who agreed with Nkrumah that erstwhile colonial powers would seek economic and political power over former colonies (Langan, 2018, p. 8). In his work on neocolonialism, Fanon expands the concept by emphasising the ideational and psychological facets caused by external influence (Langan, 2018, p. 9). Others, like Julius Nyerere and Sekou Touré echoed these ideas. The concept’s Marxist influence is already reflected in the subtitle of Nkrumah’s work, which directly refers to the work of Lenin, who declares ‘imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism’. The Neo-Marxist contours become further apparent in the overlaps of the concept and the dependency school, especially in their critique of North–South relations (Langan, 2018, p. 2). However, the concept of neocolonialism differs from dependency theory in its stronger emphasis on political agency, in contrast to the seeming economic determinism of the dependency school (Langan, 2018, p. 2). However, Nkrumah’s focus on the potentially positive features of foreign direct investment does show parallels to a more moderate approach in dependency theory as supported by Cardoso and Faletto (1979) with their concept of “dependent development” (Ziai, 2020, p. 129).

There has been rather little theoretical engagement with neocolonialism in the recent past (Langan, 2018; Ziai, 2020). While the concept is seen as outmoded by some scholars, others stress its timeliness (Langan, 2018, p. 1). Langan (2018) argues that certain aspects of Nkrumah’s

work are still as vital to analyse development interventions by both corporate actors and donors in Africa as in the 1960s and more generally contribute to a critical understanding of North–South relations (pp. 2–4).

Yet, a present-day application of neocolonialism should be aware of the theory's weaknesses and the changes apparent in the global political economy of the twenty-first century. Nkrumah's neglect of class issues within the affected societies (Ziai, 2020, p. 129f) and of ideational aspects of foreign influence (Langan, 2018, p. 2) excludes two important factors that a modern approach to neocolonialism should take into account. Moreover, theoretical elaborations need to be sensitive to changes in the actors and victims of neocolonialism that do not align with the original colonisers and victims of colonisation (Ziai, 2020, p. 137)—the cases of China and Russia being only the most prominent ones. This renders the concept vulnerable to instrumentalisation by elites of former colonies which can conveniently shift all the blame for domestic problems on imperialist states and institutions, excluding their own share of the responsibility. They rightfully question the hierarchies between states of the Global North and the Global South visible e.g. in the G7—but their (legitimate) aspiration is usually confined to attaining a larger share of the pie and does not extend to question a global economic system based on private property and individualism or a global political system based on nation states pursuing solely their own interest.

Situating the concept of neocolonialism in the theoretical landscape, we still have to discuss its relation to post- and decolonial studies, as well as to postdevelopment approaches. Postcolonial studies (see above all Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988 and Hall, 1992) have been examining the effects of colonialism in the post-colonial era, i.e. after formal independence. Coming from cultural and literary studies, they have focused on these effects in areas beyond political economy such as knowledge and popular culture (thus responding to what Langan (2018) identified as a shortcoming of the concept of neocolonialism), although some have indeed tried to link the analysis of materialist interest and the realm of ideas.

Decolonial studies have emerged mainly in the Latin American context of the group 'Modernidad/Colonialidad' and can be seen in a simplified manner as a radical variant of postcolonial studies (e.g. Mignolo, 2009; Mignolo & Escobar, 2010; Quijano, 2000). They are mostly centering the colonisation of the Americas and are connected to dependency and world systems—in (perceived) opposition to the more Anglo-Saxon

focused and literature-oriented postcolonial studies. Decolonial studies emphasises its critical, political agenda, insisting on a link to material struggles and argues that modernity cannot be conceived of without the formative experience of colonialism—also in the field of knowledge production (Bendix et al., 2020; Smith, 1999) and gender (Lugones, 2010). However, large parts of postcolonial studies would subscribe to that as well, so that a clear separation between the two schools seems difficult and an integration of perspectives from both seems a productive strategy (Bhambra, 2014b; Gutierrez Rodriguez et al. 2013).

Postdevelopment studies (above all Escobar, 2012; Rahnama & Bawtree, 1997; Sachs, 2010; for the debate see Ziai, 2007b, 2018) see the whole endeavour of ‘developing the underdeveloped countries’ as based on colonial ideas of European superiority and the geopolitical necessity to legitimise the capitalist exploitation of Africa’s, Asia’s and Latin America’s resources with a new concept after colonial racism was increasingly discredited. However, in contrast to the focus on economic growth and industrialisation in e.g. dependency theory, postdevelopment (following Illich, 1973) questions modernity more profoundly and stresses alternatives to the European models of the economy, politics and knowledge; the idea of the pluriverse (as a rejection of universal blueprints); and a new relation to nature (Kothari et al., 2019). In this, postdevelopment seems to heed Fanon’s call “comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation” (1963, p. 315).

So we can conclude that although some more recent concepts are more encompassing in their critique of colonial modernity, the strength of the concept of neocolonialism is that until today it plausibly points to colonial continuities in the global political economy after former colonies have become independent, be it in the voting rights of World Bank and IMF, in the free trade imperialism of the WTO rules and the structural adjustment programs benefitting the globally most efficient competitors on the backs of local producers, in land grabbing, biopiracy, and agricultural policy in general (Langan, 2018; Ziai, 2020). And in comparison to decoloniality (which is admittedly more en vogue today), the term neo-colonialism highlights the rupture achieved through the decades of anti-colonial struggles throughout the colonised world which is sometimes forgotten in debates about coloniality: the right of non-European peoples to rule themselves is almost universally recognised today. Although some White

supremacists still dream of it, the days of colonial rule are over thanks to these struggles. Nevertheless, we must be aware of other relations of power besides colonialism and neocolonialism that have been highlighted by feminism, postdevelopment, and intersectional critiques in general to prevent endorsing anticolonial but in other respects reactionary forces.¹

THE BOOK AHEAD

Through the lens of the above-explained concept of neocolonialism, this book takes a critical look at global partnerships. The chapters of this edited volume analyse which factors hinder global partnerships and explore how they can be established in a neocolonial environment in the fields of development cooperation, the global economy, and knowledge production—or even transform this environment. Thus, this book aims at critically assessing how global partnerships are shaped by existing asymmetrical power structures and tries to explore how more equitable global partnerships can still be possible. The chapters aim to offer pathways how to overcome these historical dynamics and create partnerships based on solidarity and mutual respect.

The contributions in this book were written by members of the Global Partnership Network (GPN), one of the Centres of Excellence for Exchange and Development funded by the German Ministry for Development Cooperation, which has been working intensively and critically on the topic of partnerships and North–South relations over the past five years. The chapters are mainly organised under four themes, three of them reflecting the previously outlined research areas of the GPN: *Partnerships and Neocolonialism in Development Cooperation*, *Partnerships and Neocolonialism in the Global Economy* and *Partnerships and Neocolonialism in Knowledge Production*. The last section of this book provides an *Outlook*.

In the next chapter, Praveen Jha and Paris Yeros explore the prospects of solidarity in the era of neocolonialism. The authors therefore provide a critical overview of efforts and strategies for building both national and transnational solidarities against imperialist domination. They argue that true solidarity requires prioritising an end to imperialist wars,

¹ A case in point would be Walter Mignolo's endorsement of the hindu-nationalist work *India, that is Bharat* (see <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/india-that-is-bharat-9789354352508/>, Nov 8, 2024).

respecting national self-determination, and enabling autonomous development. These steps are essential to reversing privatisation, protecting public goods and nature, and addressing the shared challenges of a capitalist system that values profit over people.

The contributions of the first part of this book deal with *Partnerships and Neocolonialism in Development Cooperation*. In the first chapter of this section, Aram Ziai examines the origins and colonial elements of development cooperation. A comparison of the beginnings of development cooperation with the earlier colonial discourse serves as a basis for analysing the colonial continuities and potential new perspectives of the current Sustainable Development Goals. Reflections on how to decolonise development cooperation conclude the chapter.

In the following chapter, Képler Aurélien and Marc-Arthur Fils-Aimé discuss the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) as an alternative to international development cooperation in Haiti. Against the backdrop of increased humanitarian interference since the earthquake in 2010 and an economy favouring large-scale plantations, the authors examine the prospects and challenges of the SSE, which advocates for small-scale family farming promoting social change from below.

Jule Lümmen's chapter investigates the neocolonial elements of the World Bank's involvement in the development of Guyana's oil and gas sector. After the US oil company ExxonMobil discovered immense quantities of oil and gas off the coast of Guyana, the World Bank provided the country two Technical Assistance loans of \$55 million. While the World Bank claims its mission is to support the Guyanese government in managing its petroleum sector, this chapter finds that the World Bank facilitated a neocolonial exploitation in favour of the fossil industry.

The second section on *Partnerships and Neocolonialism in the Global Economy* starts with Simone Claar's contribution on the question of energy imperialism and green colonialism. The author discusses to what extent a revised ecological New International Economic Order (NIEO²) could be an instrument to implement a global energy partnership. Claar concludes that for NIEO² to develop its full potential, a radical socioecological transformation of the economic system and the colonial dependencies of the Global South is needed.

Patrick Bond explores imperialist global partnerships in Chapter 7. He examines new forms of imperial rule in the twenty-first century and argues that the wealthiest Western economies have formed a partnership with emerging, sub-imperial economies securing the world order at the danger

of planetary destruction, as well as alliances with neoliberal elites of poor countries to the detriment of their populations. Although this current constellation of forces is certainly not free from economic and geopolitical contradictions and even attempts at international solidarity, Bond shows that the BRICS do not pose an anti-systemic challenge.

Joshua Bell and Sally Matthews examine global partnerships in Fair-trade wine production and their capacity to support decent work for South African farmworkers. The extension of Fairtrade certification to commercial producers is generally seen as a chance for the South African wine industry to overcome exploitative practices originating from colonialism and apartheid. The authors critically explore the challenges and consequences as well as possible positive outcomes for farmworkers and conclude that fair trade has yielded little significant improvement to the lives of those who work on South African wine farms.

In the final chapter of this section, Christa Wichterich scrutinises nursing through time and space through the lens of care extractivism. Her analysis shows how colonial patterns and the capitalist logic of commodification influence the international division of reproductive labour, which also becomes evident in her case study on the recruitment of nurses from Ghana and India to the Global North. She finds that Global Care Chains are characterised by an imperial mode of social reproduction, benefitting the healthcare systems in the Global North at the expense of those in the Global South.

The third book section analysing *Partnerships and neocolonialism in knowledge production* begins with a chapter by Henning Melber, who links knowledge production and North–South cooperation while emphasising the challenges and pitfalls of decolonisation. He argues that both the nature and intention of knowledge production and dissemination as well as the practices of development cooperation must first be critically examined. Melber thus advocates for new terms of knowledge production through non-hegemonic forms of partnership to create knowledge based on mutual respect and solidarity between different actors.

In Chapter 11, Maria Eriksson Baaz sheds light on the relationships between ‘contracting researchers’ in the Global North and ‘facilitating researchers’ in the Global South, which are often characterised by inequalities in working conditions, payment and recognised authorship. She discusses how and why Northern-based ‘contracting researchers’ are

unwilling and sometimes unable to recognise their complicity in maintaining such unequal knowledge production, and emphasises the need for institutional change.

The last section of this book provides an *Outlook*. In the final chapter, Devan Pillay explores democratic eco-socialist politics as counter-hegemonic alternatives to dominant paradigms. The author analyses the case of Rojava, a region in northern Syria where a women's revolution has resulted in a social context based on the principles of democracy and social ecology. Pillay stresses that such change requires the creation of meaningful partnerships based on dialogue and mutual respect.

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CHAPTER 2

Prospects of Solidarity in the Era of Neocolonialism

Praveen Jha and Paris Yeros

INTRODUCTION

The title of this chapter may appear, and rightly so, unrealistically ambitious, both in terms of potential canvass, as well as multilayered complexities, with respect to the relevant issues, that ought to be flagged. Let us submit right away that the exercise undertaken here is a modest one, and it seeks to provide an overview of the context and challenges in the post World War II (WW II) era, which, of course, have been evolving all through this period, with major elements of continuities and ruptures, as regards the frequently highlighted goals of cooperation and partnerships between the so-called ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, or the nomenclature that has acquired greater currency in the recent decades, between the ‘Global North’ (GN) and the ‘Global South’ (GS).

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There is a huge, and growing, literature engaging with the theoretical discourses, and their empirical correlates, relating to solidarities, partnerships, conflicts, contestations, irreconcilable differences, and much more, between the North and the South; it is not our intention in this article to provide even a brief overview of, and engagements with, the entire spectrum of multiples strands in this literature. Our objective here is to provide a *perspective rooted primarily in Marxian political economy*, with respect to the ever-evolving, and inextricably connected, dialectical dynamics of domination and resistance between the North and the South, during the post WW II era, with a particular focus on the economic-structural correlates.

As is well-known, soon after the WW II, with political freedom on the horizon for the remaining colonized world, most of it in Africa and Asia around that time, there was much hope that transition to political independence would also create space for substantive economic autonomy from the stranglehold of imperialist domination. Of course, amongst strands of radical political economy, there was considerable skepticism about such a prospect; influential contributions, such as Paul Baran's *Political Economy of Growth*, or several other contributions by well known scholars belonging to the so-called 'World Systems' and 'Dependency Approaches' (such as A G Frank), saw little reason for any such hope. In fact, one of the simplest and crisp formulations of the canonical skepticism in the above noted contributions was at the core of Kwame Nkrumah's (1965) formulation of 'Neocolonialism', suggesting that in spite of newly acquired political independence, there was little to cheer about the pursuit of independence in the economic policy framework, which continued to be controlled/dictated by the imperial powers. In due course, with the onset of neoliberal capitalism since the early 1970s, it was increasingly evident that the prospects of charting out relatively autonomous economic development in the newly decolonized countries, or more generally in the South, confronted very powerful obstacles and challenges.

As already noted, this chapter engages with the era of the post WW II global capitalism, with a focus on the dialectics of domination and resistance between the North and the South. The next substantive section provides a conceptual/empirical mapping of the South and the North, at the current juncture, as well as a brief historical backdrop of its evolution in the post WW II era. The third section is concerned primarily with the prospects of solidarities, as well as the underlying major challenges, which

ought to be reckoned upfront. The last section concludes the chapter with a few brief closing remarks.

MAPPING THE SOUTH AND THE NORTH

Let us begin with a word on the notion of Global South; as it happens, the term is of relatively recent origin and a political activist, Carl Oglesby, is credited with using it for the first time, in the context of the US war in Vietnam, characterizing the said war as the *apogee* in a history of Northern ‘dominance over the Global South’ (Heine, 2023). Arguably, categories such as the ‘Third World’ or ‘Periphery’, which preceded it, may be considered close analytical approximations to the idea of the GS. Without going into further details of this, and other related conceptual constructs, it may be noted that a fulsome conceptual mapping of it is not required here. Equally importantly, there is a multi-dimensional dialectical connectedness, between the North and the South, which has been a fundamental feature of the evolution of combined and uneven global capitalism, since its inception; this, necessarily, makes both the North and the South fluid in important ways. However, *a minimal but critical defining feature of the term Global South is that it has been at the receiving end of colonialism, semi-colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism, right since the advent of capitalism.* We may accordingly proceed with a workable political conception of the Global South: *it is a politico-economic project that is inspired by at least some shared fundamental concerns, and potentially powerful incentives, to co-operate with each other, to liberate itself from the hegemony of the North. Furthermore, both the North and the South should not be treated as geographical but as geopolitical constructs.* We may also note, and it hardly needs any emphasis, that neither of the two categories, North and South, is a static construct as geo-political blocs; finally, we may also note an obvious point that there is considerable socio-economic diversity, at any juncture, within both these entities.

Although these facts are well documented and widely acknowledged by historians across different intellectual/ideological traditions, it may be worth reiterating here that, almost till the end of eighteenth century, the South as a whole, with respect to basic economic indicators, including levels and incidence of industrialization, was certainly not behind the North; if anything, careful historical accounts point to the contrary. To give just one illustration; as per the meticulous and well-known contributions by Paul Bairoch (1993) and Angus Maddison (2006), China

and India accounted for between 52 to 59 percent of the total non-agricultural global output around 1750. Of course, with respect to the share in global agricultural output, the South was far ahead of the North, for obvious climatic advantages, around this date. In fact, with respect to the bounty of nature, and the overall techno-scientific and material indicators, several countries located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were clearly much better placed, as per the relevant historical records available for fourteenth to eighteenth centuries.

In this brief note, we stay away from the relevant details, but there is overwhelming historical evidence to support the argument that it is only towards the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century that the North starts moving ahead of the South, with respect to basic economic indicators, such as levels of GDP, per capita income, indices of industrialization, etc. And the surge of the North, indeed, had a lot to do with the stranglehold that the emerging colonial powers managed to achieve, primarily on account of the “comparative advantage in violence”, to use Ronald Findlay’s (1992) expression. In fact, we may recall here Marx’s well-known, and much cited, statement on the criticality of rapacious mercantilist accumulation in the genesis of capitalism:

the discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the Indians, the onset of conquest and pillage of East Indies, the turning of Africa in to a warren for the commercial hunting of the black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moment of primitive accumulation. (Marx, 1976)

Generalized loot and plunder across three continents, namely, Latin America, Asia, and Africa, provided a huge impetus to capitalist transition in Europe, and subsequently its ‘extensions’ via settler colonialism, to countries such as the USA, Australia, and New Zealand and elsewhere. The initial lead that the emerging European powers managed to achieve in a few key sectors, such as textiles, although fundamentally through unjust means (such as ban on imports from India to Britain through much of the eighteenth century), certainly facilitated their march forward in other sectors, and in critical areas to facilitate rapid capital accumulation, such as technology and finance; indeed, all these seemingly diverse processes

were connected and mutually sustaining, with subjugation of the South by the North being a powerful thread all through.

Lest we be mistaken, it is not being suggested here that the loot and plunder by the North, of the South, provides a comprehensive explanation for the surging ahead of the former over the latter; that would be inadequate and simplistic. However, we certainly subscribe to the view that the ‘squeeze of the Rest’ was a critical launching pad for the ‘West’, and in maintaining its momentum of capitalist accumulation. We are also of the view that the *nature and extent of the squeeze deformed the subjugated countries of the South structurally and created conditions of mass poverty*. Deindustrialization and de-urbanization in the three colonized continents, along with host of exploitative practices certainly contributed in major ways to structural conditions of persistent marginalization and mass poverty.

It is also very important to note here that the subjugation of the South was often rationalized, if not sanctified, by resorting to utterly retrogressive ideologies that were boosted systematically during the colonial period. The terrible scourge of racism is indeed linked inextricably with the history of colonialism. W. E. B. Dubois captures the essence of the deadly cocktail of the globally combined but uneven capitalist transformation, and its powerful racial dimension, reflected in particular in the international division of labour, in a stark manner: “That dark and vast sea of human labour in China and India, the South seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States – that great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry-shares a common destiny; *it is despised and rejected by race and colour; paid a wage below the level of decent living; driven, beaten, imprisoned and enslaved in all but name; resultant wealth is made the basis of world power and universal dominion and armed arrogance in London and Paris, Berlin and New York, Rio De Janeiro*” (Dubois, 1962, p. 15–16 [emphasis added]). It may also be noted here that along with racism, a whole range of retrogressive ideologies continue to be important in the strategic divide-and-rule arsenal of capitalist accumulation regimes across the globe at the current juncture as well, with obvious adverse implications for solidarity between the North and the South.

As already hinted, there is a huge literature on how the economic geography of the globe was reconfigured, almost inverted, dramatically, from the late eighteenth century onward, and on the reasons why the

North has continued to remain ahead of the South; we do not pursue it any further here.¹ However, it is important to emphasize that the global economy and society continue to remain extremely uneven, with respect to its division between the North and the South; in fact, several scholars tend to argue that the situation at the current juncture is worse, in many respects, compared to the middle of the twentieth century, when the process of decolonization began for a large number of countries. We will briefly return to a couple of important arguments pertaining to the relevant issues in the next section; before that, we now provide a brief general profile at the current juncture, of the North–South division, based on a recent study by the Tricontinental (2024b).

As the above mentioned study notes, of the 194 countries constituting the UN, the North consists of 49, and the South of 145 countries. To describe the North, the study uses the idea of ‘rings’ around the US and its inner core, or the closest allies; this ring consists of the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Israel and New Zealand, and the three other rings, encircle the inner core, one after the other, which are differentiated with respect to proximity to the inner-most core, based on a variety of reasons. The ring closest to the inner core consists of nine major European economic powers, enmeshed powerfully in imperialist machinations of the North; all these nine countries are NATO members, and remain generally subservient to the US hegemony. The third ring consists of nineteen countries, Japan and a set of diverse (in terms of their economic or political heft) European countries; most of these can be considered secondary powers, with little influence on the world order, in their individual capacities. Almost all of them remain loyal to the United States, on matters of military, political or economic importance. The last and the outer-most ring, consists of nineteen countries, which were earlier in the USSR-led Eastern bloc, although in a somewhat uneasy coexistence due to some important differences; after the collapse of the Socialist bloc, most of these countries have become part of the US-led Northern order.

The major thrust of the argument in the above-noted study is that *the inner core and the other rings constituting global North operate as a*

¹ For detailed discussions on these issues, readers may refer to: Baran (1957), Bagchi (1982), Blomstrom and Hettne (1984), Darity (1992), Galeano (1973), Habib (1995), Inikori (1982), Magubane (1979), Marks (2017), Marx (1976), Patnaik (1995), Patnaik and Patnaik (2021), Raychaudhuri (1985), Rodney (1972), Williams (1966), among others.

bloc, despite having some occasional differences, either between countries or groups of countries on economic or political matters. The important point is that the difference within them are of secondary nature, and they generally are willing to come together on core issues, or matters of ‘common interest’; thus, with respect to the countries in the South, there is a strong bonding within these countries grouped together as the North, on account of a host of strategic and economic issues.

On the other hand, 145 countries in the South are put into six ‘groupings’ by the above mentioned Tricontinental study; these have considerable diversity, in terms of their inner logic, orientations, interests, economic realities, political systems, governance traditions, military capacities, etc.; there are not only considerable differences between them, but occasional serious conflicts as well. Moreover, in terms of their dealings with the North, they often adopt very different positions. Thus, one may find it somewhat strange to justify these countries being put together under the label ‘South’. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, it is the experience of subjugation, during more than five hundred years of capitalism, at different junctures and different ways, which is, at least potentially, a binding thread for these diverse countries. As per the Tricontinental classification, the six groupings are: ‘Socialist Independent’, consisting of China, Vietnam, Venezuela, Laos, DPR Korea, and Cuba; ‘Strongly Sovereign Seeking’, which includes Russia, Iran, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea; ‘Current or Historic Progressive’, which consists of Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Algeria, Nepal, Bolivia, Honduras, Zimbabwe, Palestine, Namibia; ‘Heavily US Militarized’, consisting of Republic of Korea, and Philippines; ‘New Non-Aligned’, that includes India, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, Saudi Arabia; and finally, ‘Diverse Global South’, consisting of the remaining hundred and eleven countries, among which Egypt, Pakistan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Argentina, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, and Singapore happen to be the nine largest economies within this grouping.

We do not wish to engage herewith the quibbles, or even quarrels, regarding merits of the above classification. As already noted, at best, the Global South is akin to an ongoing project, in spite of its differences, including antagonistic disputes, and a host of other issues. It is certainly not a coherent political or economic project, as is the case with the North. The Tricontinental study, that we have cited here, gets into an exploration, both analytical and empirical, of several important features,

historically and at the current juncture, pertaining to these geopolitical constructs, and interested readers may dive into the relevant details. Furthermore, as the study notes, a major feature of such a construct of the global South is that *it can hardly be considered as a bloc*, which also captures its weaknesses and vulnerabilities of multiple kinds. As already noted above, the important point for us, to justify such a geo-political construct is the fact that a substantial set of working people in these countries share victimhood of Colonialism, Semi-colonialism, Imperialism, and Neo-colonialism, not only from the past, but in the present as well. Taken together, these 145 countries, which currently account for almost 86 percent of the global population and close to 60 percent of the global economic output (in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms), have shown signs of questioning the imperialist designs of the North, every once in a while, over a long period. In the next section, we engage with some of the relevant issues, focusing on the dialectics of domination and resistance during the post WW II era between the North and the South.

COMING TOGETHER OR FALLING APART?

A pithy quip from C. L. R. James, an iconic Marxist from Trinidad, ‘one does not need education or encouragement to cherish a dream of freedom’ (James, 1963, p. 18), captures an important essence of the human condition, that the regimes of domination spur processes of resistance as well. As we know very well, human history is indeed a very powerful testimony of this dialectical relationship, at numerous levels and multiple ways. With a focus on the post WW II era, this relationship between the North and the South has been contextualized in different ways, and we would like to flag here a couple of those which are quite relevant for this chapter, *and happen to be, analytically, in close proximity to our own understanding*. Samir Amin, one of the most celebrated political economists of the recent decades, who was also actively engaged with quite a few progressive movements in the South, in particular on the African Continent, divided the period from the early 1950s to the current phase into three distinct phases, in terms of some of their key constitutive features (Amin, 2019). A very brief statement of Amin’s characterization, in his own words, may be worth quoting here: “The contemporary period of the history that I experienced can be divided into three distinct periods: (1) the growth then stagnation of the Bandung era from 1955 to 1980;

(2) the restoration of the new imperialist order called ‘liberal globalization’ from 1980 to 1995; and (3) the beginning of the capitalist/imperialist system implosion in 1995 and the parallel beginning of the renewed struggles for ‘another, better world,’ particularly in the new ‘Global South’.” (Amin, 2019, p. 15).

In Amin’s opinion, the Bandung Conference of 1955 was a very powerful launching pad for the peoples and governments in the South for reconstruction of the global system, to struggle for their ‘rights’ to be recognized *at par* with the North; Amin chooses to call this phase (1955–1980) as the ‘first globalization of struggles’, building on the historic movements in the peripheries of the global capitalism for national liberation. He goes on to suggest that imperialism was put on the back foot by these determined and coordinated struggles from the South, which led to many positive achievements, in spite of serious limitations as well.

It may be interesting to note that the following short statement, from the official website of the US government, seems to have a similar appreciation of the Bandung initiative (Office of the Historian n.d.):

At the close of the Bandung Conference attendees signed a communiqué that included a range of concrete objectives... [including] the promotion of economic and cultural cooperation, protection of human rights and the principal of self-determination, call for an end to racial discrimination wherever it occurred, and a reiteration of the importance of peaceful coexistence. The leaders hoped to focus on the potential for collaboration amongst the nations of the third world, promoting efforts to reduce their reliance on Europe and North America (emphasis added). The Bandung Conference and its final resolution laid the foundation for the non-aligned movement during the Cold War... Bandung gave a voice to emerging nations and demonstrated that they could be a force in future world politics, inside or outside the Cold War framework.

As is also well known, the Bandung System was operating in a global context where both socialism and regulated capitalism (that was a contribution of, *inter alia*, the disastrous World Wars, the Great Depression, growing illegitimacy of the *Laissez-faire* orthodoxy to which the Keynesian Revolution contributed greatly, and popular demands of the national independence movements), were competing with each other for ‘spheres of influence’, which also provided a degree of autonomy to the decolonized countries. The well known Marxist political economist, Michal Kalecki, in his theory of the ‘Intermediate Regimes’ had suggested that

the newly independent countries were akin to a 'proverbial calf' which could suck on both the cows, namely, the US-led Capitalist bloc and the USSR-led Socialist bloc. Without getting into further considerations of the successes and failures, which is a hugely contested terrain, it is important to note that in quite a few countries in the South, national popular governments had considerable successes in charting out relatively autonomous economic transformation trajectories, with credible outcomes.

However, Amin suggests that imperialism, which had been forced to make adjustments in the context of the Bandung to accommodate the requirements of the peripheries, soon reconstructed itself around new forms of domination. This was primarily on account of global capitalism's transition to the phase of generalized monopoly-finance capitalism, with metropolitan powers' decisive control over frontier technologies, natural resources, global financial flows, media and communications, and weapons of mass destructions. This heralds the second period in Amin's post WW II era, with great successes for the neoliberal offensive, led by monopolistic/oligopolistic capital, headquartered in the imperialist centre or the 'Triad', consisting of the USA, Western and Central Europe, and Japan.

A major consequence of this transition was the reversal of the adjustments that the imperialist powers had to make during the Bandung era, and return to their increasing control over peripheries of the global capitalism, with domestic bourgeoisie in the South getting relegated to a 'comprador' status. Furthermore, given the humongous control that some thousand odd giant corporations succeeded in establishing over the global economic-financial system, it resulted in dramatic increases in the share of profits at the cost of wages. Moreover, as global capitalism became a capitalism of generalized monopolies, headquartered mostly in the North, but with substantial shifts in location of production to the South, the 'monopoly rent' appropriated by the capital increasingly came closer to 'imperialist rent'. In Amin's view, with the third phase since the mid-1990s, which he identified as 'the implosion of capitalist/imperialist system' due to multiple crises organically connected with neoliberalism, capitalism opened up spaces for struggles for a 'better world', and created margins to manoeuvre for 'national capitalist development', in the so-called 'emerging countries'; however, in his analysis of global capitalism, many of the adverse outcomes associated with the second phase have continued in the subsequent phase as well.

Of course, Amin in his several scholarly contributions has examined the multiple processes, issues and dimensions associated with the above noted distinct phases in great detail; for reasons of space, we stay away from any further considerations of these issues here. The important point to note is that, at a high level of generality and without getting into too many specifics, prospects of any meaningful partnership between the North and the South at the current juncture seem quite dim, given the broad drift of capitalism emerging from Amin's position, which seems valuable to us.

In the forgoing we have already provided a brief snapshot based on the recent Tricontinental (2024b) study, which seems to indicate more of a conflictual landscape between the North and the South, than anything akin to even a minimalist partnership between the two. However, as in Amin's account, this study also acknowledges a significant shift in the bases of production from the North to the South, or the so-called 'decentring' or delocalization of economic activities. It may be noted that this aspect of global capitalism, which started gaining prominence from the 1970s and has continued till date, has received considerable empirical and analytical attention in contemporary scholarship.² For reasons of space, we stay away from any in-depth treatment of this subject and relevant issues associated with it, and would like to note in passing an important and subtle difference between Amin's position and the message from the Tricontinental study: while for Amin the significant shift in the centre of gravity of global capitalist accumulation from the North to the South is not indicative of any significant expansion of the economic-structural space for the latter, the Tricontinental study seems to be more positive on this count.

As per the Tricontinental Study, important shifts in the economic-structural base of contemporary capitalism, from the North to the South, have also impacted the five critical areas highlighted by Amin: natural resources; media and finance; science and technology; global finance; and military power. In some of these domains a handful of major economies from the South have taken notable steps forward; in this respect, by all accounts, China seems to be leading the pack, and in partnership with a number of countries in the South, it is able to breach the fortress North, especially with respect to its hold over the South. The emergence and consolidation of BRICS 10 in 2023, from the initial formation of the

² Among the most recent publications on this subject, readers may refer to Jha et al. (2022) and Teipen et al. (2022).

BRIC in 2009, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, 2001), which was formed mainly on security issues but has increasingly advanced in the areas of trade, economic development etc., The Group of Friends in Defence of the UN Charter (FUNC, 2021), which was formed by 20 UN member states subjected to illegal US sanctions, and quite a few other recent initiatives rooted in the South, are being watched globally with a lot of interest, as well as with apprehension by the North.

Among the above noted cooperation initiatives within the countries of the South, BRICS has possibly attracted most attention, and a few brief words may be in order here. In the BRICS summit, held in Johannesburg, South Africa in August 2023, six new members, (out of almost 40 countries who had shown interest in joining this group), were welcomed to this fold: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; however, Argentina under the newly elected regime, led by Javier Milei, officially gave up its membership on December 29, 2023. As it happens, as per the most recent available estimates by the Tricontinental [2024a] for the year 2022), BRICS 10 accounts for 35.6 percent of the global economic output, in PPP terms, and houses 45.5 percent of the global population; in comparison, the share of the G7 countries are 30.4 percent and 10 percent, respectively. A particularly striking feature of the recent years is the growing share of the global industrial output of the BRICS countries; as per the recent estimates, the share of BRICS 10, at 44 percent is more than twice that of G7, which is 21.6 percent. The respective shares of these two formations, in 2004, were almost similar, a little more than 30 percent for each.

As per relatively optimistic accounts, the coming together of these countries as BRICS has expanded the politico-economic significance of the South in important ways, in particular strengthening their control over energy supplies and deepening their presence in the global financial as well as developmental architecture, especially for the countries of South. China's Belt and Road Initiative has been among the major programmes in this respect, along with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS bank. In passing, we may note that the AIIB currently has 103 member states, including major EU countries, such as Germany, France and Italy, which joined despite USA's request not to do so. However, it is also worth noting that the countries in the BRICS bloc happen to be 'awkward allies' in several respects; in fact, some of them are even fierce competitors, as is evident from the case of India and China since 2017. Among scholars and observers of the

BRICS, often there are serious disagreements regarding the prospects of this bloc working in a coherent manner to further the interests of the South as a whole.³ In any case, as per the assessment of the above noted study by the Tricontinental, as well as that of quite a few researchers, BRICS and several other initiatives from the South, such as SCO, FUNC, among others, appear to have taken some significant steps towards a polycentric world order. On the other hand, there is also a strong counter view that the presumed gains of the South, both within it and beyond, are overstated, and that the imperialist North is not willing to listen and accommodate the concerns of the South in any notable ways.

We would like to close this brief discussion of alternative analytical framings relating to contestation/cooperation between the North and the South by coming back to Nkrumah's conception of *Neocolonialism*, mentioned right at the outset. To put it very simply, his formulation essentially hinges on the fact that in spite of formal political independence of a country, "its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 1). As suggested by Ziai (2020), in an important and very useful commentary, a substantive engagement with Nkrumah's much celebrated book throws up critical gaps and important silences, which we do not pursue here; nonetheless, to quote Ziai: "[W]e can thus conclude that the concept of Neocolonialism has proven itself to be still a very useful term to describe the relationship between the North and the South" (Ziai, 2020, p. 137). In our analysis, we not only endorse Nkrumah's thrust on the machinations of imperialism identified by him as neo-colonial rule, but prefer to characterize the post WW II war era as consisting of two stages: '*early*' and '*late*' *neo-colonialism*.

The first of these can be, in essence, equated with a phase of 'regulated and planned economic development', when the countries of the South had relatively greater autonomy for pursuing diverse development paths under their own distinct national conditions and structural constraints, resulting in a range of different trajectories from conservative forms of modernization to radical transformations, thus with substantial differentiations both in processes and outcomes. This phase more or less comes to a close by the 1970s, as monopoly capital entered a new phase of globalization and financialization, which we label as the 'neoliberal globalization'; global monopoly capital, which had been shackled in important

³ For a flavor of these differences, although not for a detailed academic treatment, readers may look at a short article by Peter Koenig (2023).

ways during the regulated era, managed to strike back with a vengeance, to dramatically alter the rules of the game, seeking to strengthen its stranglehold over monopoly positions and rents flowing from it. Almost all countries of the South, whatever may have been their trajectories, were henceforth subjected to this renewed imperialist assault; it is this period from the 1970s to the present, that we prefer to label as ‘*late neocolonialism*’ (Yeros & Jha, 2020). This phase is one which has transformed value systems in almost every sector of the global economy, some critical features of which we will flag a little later, under the increasing control of the monopolies headquartered in the North. As is widely documented, this period has also been characterized by new rounds of aggressive primitive accumulation against working people, and against all the natural resources of the South, be it land, agriculture, water, forests, minerals, etc., with huge acceleration in the growth of labour reserves.

Very few countries, in the South, have managed to retain a substantial degree of policy autonomy and sovereignty in the late neo-colonial phase; the emergence of China, during this period, may well be considered as a major sovereign development experience, with impressive economic outcomes on several fronts. While maintaining its strategic autonomy and strengthening its planning capacity, it chose to integrate in the capitalist world economy, and has transformed itself into an industrial powerhouse, or ‘the factory of the world’.⁴ In fact, much of the material improvement that we flagged earlier, during the recent decades for the South is, directly or indirectly, connected with the Chinese experience and its manoeuvring for the larger Southern bloc. Of course there are a few other radical states in the South which have continued to resist the imperialist onslaught during the era of neoliberal globalization, such as Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, or even Zimbabwe, and have tried to preserve their struggles for ‘sovereign development’. However, large parts of the South seem to be struggling seriously in preserving the degree of autonomy witnessed during the phase of regulated capitalism, or what Amin characterized as the Bandung era.

In the following, we get into a brief discussion of a few characteristic economic-structural features of the contemporary global political

⁴ We find useful to be recall here Amin’s cryptic quip: ‘I will not say China is Socialist, I will not say China is Capitalist, it may well be characterized as trajectory, at the current juncture, of state capitalism’; (he made this observation in a conversation with us).

economy, for which we have used late neo-colonialism or neoliberal globalization interchangeably; these seem central to us for any worthwhile enquiry of the subject at hand. First of these, which has accompanied the long-drawn phase of neoliberal globalisation since the early 1970s, has been the ascendancy and dominance of ‘capital-as-finance’ as arguably the most powerful economic actor in the global economy. This is a kind of ‘Finance Capital’ which is dramatically different from the one that Hobson, Hilferding and Lenin, among others, had theorised and investigated around the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, focusing largely on Europe, that was characterised by relatively close bonding between ‘capital-in-production’ and ‘capital-as-finance’ and privileging national contexts. However, the disjunction between these two fractions of capital in the decades of neoliberal globalisation has been increasingly stark, which has received considerable attention from a wide range of scholars. It has been highlighted by several scholars that ‘capital-as-finance’ during the neoliberal globalization has increasingly been driven by quickest possible returns in the shortest possible time, as in a gambling den. In fact, in a well acclaimed book, titled ‘Casino Capitalism’ (1986) Susan Strange made a very apt remark: “something rather radical and serious has happened to the international financial system to make it so much like a gambling hall” (Strange, 1986, p. 2).

Well known Marxist political economist Paul Sweezy captured the essence of the conflict between the two kinds of capital, way back in 1994, as follows: “Traditionally financial expansion has gone hand in hand with prosperity in the real economy. Is it really possible that this is no longer true, that now in the late twentieth century the opposite is more nearly the case; in other words, that financial expansion feeds not on a healthy real economy but a stagnant one? The answer to this question, I think is yes it is possible, and it has been happening” (Sweezy, 1994, p. 6). Needless to add, there has been an unprecedented growth of financialization in the world economy, with ‘new finance’ and ‘capital-in-production’ working increasingly at cross-purposes, as documented by a large and impressive literature, in the last three decades or so, since Sweezy made this remark. To those interested in the subject, from a Marxist / Heterodox economic perspective, we may suggest a few very useful texts: Samir Amin (2013), C. P. Chandrashekhkar (2017), Foster, J. B. and McChesney, R. (2012), Gerald Epstein (2005), Jayati Ghosh (2005), Mariana Mazzucato (2018), Prabhat Patanaik (2016), and Robert Pollin (2012).

It appears that the troubling premonition of J. M. Keynes, a much celebrated economist and great well-wisher of capitalism, about untrammelled finance has come true. Almost ninety years ago, Keynes had voiced his apprehension about unregulated and footloose finance, and the ‘best brains of the Wall Street’ getting obsessed with betting and speculation; to recall his very apt warning: if “the capitalist development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done” (Keynes, 1936, p. 159). Since the 1980s, economists of various hues have engaged seriously with ever-growing power of financialization in contemporary global accumulation regime, driven by wild speculation, with a whole range of instruments at its service. Almost nothing in the real economy is untouched by it, and some estimates quantify the monetary value of speculations in the derivatives trading alone globally at the current juncture at a quadrillion (e.g. thousand trillion) US dollars, many times more than the valuation of the real economy of goods and services worldwide!

A second critical feature, already mentioned in the forgoing, that has had profound implications during the ongoing neoliberal globalisation phase for more than half-a-century, is the reconfiguration in global geography of the real economy, driven in large measure by the metropolitan capital, which has resulted in shifting of a whole range of economic activities, via the so-called off-shoring, from North to select destinations in South, often accompanied by foreign direct investments (FDI). Furthermore, even without direct investments, there has been considerable increase in incorporation of Southern producers, not only via trade in final goods and services, but with respect to components and tasks, including those at the cutting edge in terms of technology and skills.

In short, the neoliberal globalisation phase has witnessed unprecedented dilution of the traditional division of labour between the North and select destinations in the South, not only within manufacturing, but quite a few other sectors as well. Thus, by the first decade of the twenty-first century, China and India, respectively, had become the ‘factory’ and ‘office’ of the world, and few other countries had also gained, in varying degrees, from the ‘decentering’ of a host of economic activities and tasks from the North to the South. Compared to the early 1990s, most recent estimates regarding the distribution of world GDP (PPP), show close to 20 percent increase in the share of the South and corresponding decline in that of the North; we have already mentioned above the relevant figures, both for shares in global economic output and those in world industry

value added, for the year in the year 2022. It is worth emphasising right away that most of the uptick in the share of the South is on account of China, with modest increases in contributions from a small number of other countries such as Bangladesh, India, Philippines and Vietnam. In fact, there is little to show in this respect for even the largest economies in Africa and Latin America. As regards the typical model of dispersion across sectors, from the North to the South, is one where high value, non-production tasks, such as the R&D, design, branding, etc. are generally retained in the North, and the ‘low-end activities’, with respect to distribution of gains, are shifted to the South; of course, there are exceptions to this broad trend as well. In this brief note, we stay away from getting into further details regarding these important issues.

A third major characteristic worth flagging here, which again has been talked about a great deal in the recent decades, is a set of dramatic technological transformations, or in the language of classical Marxist discourses, phenomenal changes in ‘productive forces’. Taking both the Third and the Fourth Industrial Revolutions together, of the post WWII era, we have witnessed breathtaking changes, both in content and pace, in transportation and communication technologies, and fantastic leaps in structures and processes relating to these. Computation and processing of information flows, deep machine learning and big data, artificial intelligence, robotics, automation and several other critical features within the said arena are reconfiguring global capitalism in unprecedented ways, with huge economic uncertainties in the days ahead.

In sum: the above noted characteristics, aided and abated by neoliberalism, since the early 1970s, have contributed to a very significant reconfiguration of the world economic order, with accelerated deepening of ‘connectedness’, and there has been a ‘southward’ shift of at least some aspects of the economic-structural base. However, such a shift needs to be located in a more comprehensive account that includes deeper economic dynamics, with powerful imperialist dimensions at play. As productive capacities, natural resources and labour across the South get drawn in the global circuits of capital, to feed the ever-growing appetite of the North, there is also sustained and increasing flow of profits from the former to the latter. In fact, there is a large literature that has documented these phenomena in considerable details, essentially pointing to the disproportionate gains via ‘unequal exchange’, between the North and the South; some very recent studies, which engage carefully with the empirics and analytics of the relevant issues, include (Jha et al., 2022; Herr, 2024;

Hickel et al., 2024; Suwandi, 2019; Teipen et al., 2022); in essence, through multinational capital and large corporations, headquartered in the Centre, the Periphery keeps losing evermore.

It may be recalled that Baran and Sweezy had already pointed to some of the processes underlying the emerging shifts in ‘global connectedness’, during the 1960s, and several other scholars from the South, made significant contributions to the growing literature on unequal exchange around the same time, and in the subsequent decades. In short, starting almost six decades ago, when the major characteristics highlighted above were already in operation, but in their early stages, there were a host of profound contributions in Marxian political economy offering sustained and powerful investigations of the processes and mechanisms, with a focus on multinational corporations as the key actors; over the years, this literature has grown by leaps and bounds. Laws of concentration and centralisation, by the fourth quarter of the last century, had facilitated fractions of large capital in the North to become much more ambitious, and indeed capable, in strengthening its command and control of the global economic system. Transition to the overall neoliberal architecture was driven by, in very powerful ways, by these powerful behemoths.

One of the most important outcomes of neoliberalism has been huge increases in inequality, primarily through squeeze of working people and common citizens at large, subjecting them to immiseration, often of the worst kinds, particularly in the periphery, although countries in the core have also been impacted by it in significant ways. However, persistence and aggravation of deprivation of an acute order, and burgeoning of relative surplus population, have been particularly stark features in most countries in the South. Unprecedented increases in inequality in the recent years, during almost a century, have been a major hallmark of the neoliberal phase. This also explains, in large measure, that in spite of the above noted significant shifts in the structural-economic contours of the global economic order, both the South and the North are bedevilled with multiple socio-economic problems, often labelled as poly-crisis, with respect to a range of important indicators.

As we have already noted above, the contemporary global economic order has been hostage to extremely powerful monopoly-finance capital, of which the top 100 corporations in the pecking order are largely headquartered in the North, with USA as the most favoured destination. In the recent years, a substantial number of the top corporations have emerged in the areas of finance, technology and communication, and have

deepened their operations and activities, almost everywhere across the globe. In general, dominant corporations are driven by a quest of securing maximum gains in shortest possible time. As noted above, contemporary neoliberal capitalism is distinctly different in many ways compared to the Hilferding-Hobson-Lenin conception of the dominant fractions of capital during the period that their analyses focused on. One significant difference is that the tight embrace between the dominant economic powers and the nation-state of the yesteryears has become relatively weaker, at the behest of the 'New Finance' and giant multinational corporations, whose intention is to control the global economy as effectively as possible. This also requires for the powerful multinational capital from the North to have allies in the South, and it has succeeded in transforming leading fractions of capital in most countries of the South as its partner, in *subservient/comprador positions*.

In other words, a major feature of contemporary capitalism is transnational capitalist coalitions, who, in spite of their internal hierarchies, frictions, differences etc., are 'in principle' united in their advocacy of spontaneous capitalism enshrined in the so-called Washington Consensus, in order to have an easy access to all the resources and markets of the whole world. It may be premature to think of these transnational capitalist coalitions as a 'transnational class', but it is clearly the case that the vision shared by leading fractions of capitalist classes in the North and the South, e.g. adherence to neoliberal economic architecture and its imaginations through institutions like World Economic Forum, clearly demonstrate powerful bonding, even if asymmetric, between them. It is also worth emphasising that they share a strong penchant for radical offensive against working people in general; thus manufacturing legitimacy for repression of workers and a whole range of socio-political and economic movements has been a key element of the neoliberal project. Manufactured conflicts, wars, abrogation of rights and liberties, etc., in short, an entire ensemble of politico-economic and militaristic strategies, and creation of conducive social formations, to facilitate *accumulation by generalized repression*, has become yet another important hallmark of the neoliberal era, and the last half a century or so bears ample testimony to this fact.

Of course, countries and nation-states have to also factor in the needs and aspirations of a whole range of internal constituencies, but these are often given a short shrift, or, at best, a lip-service along with a few doles and handouts; manipulation of the popular classes has been a very

powerful strategy in most cases, almost across the globe. Essentially, in the neo-liberal regimes dominating most of the South even the limited range of rights and entitlements have been substituted, either *de jure* or *de facto*, by neo-patrimonial dispensations; and if required the heavy hand of the state is not too far behind. Sure enough, even countries in the North have not remained untouched by the weakening of rights in general. Almost everywhere, the nature of macroeconomic regimes have backed big capital to the hilt, often with massive tax breaks, bailouts etc. along with decimation of rights of labours in particular, and citizens at large. Even within the mainstream, neoclassical discourses, the credibility of trickle-down discourses has taken big hits, with stagnation or worsening in real earnings and living conditions of workers even in most powerful economies, such as the USA, over long periods (Herr, 2024; Ostry et al., 2016; Stiglitz, 2015, 2019). It is hardly surprising that authoritarian and neo-fascist tendencies have seen an upsurge in quite a few countries during the last three decades or so, which has a lot to do with the worsening of the overall economic fabric almost all around.

Given the snapshot of neoliberal globalisation and its outcomes briefly sketched above, it is not surprising that the prospects of solidarity between the North and the South, and even *within* either of these blocs, have tended to become increasingly difficult. This is not to say that there are no credible moments and nodes of rebellions in the current global order for a better world. In fact, on the contrary, we can identify a whole range of these, both in the South and in the North, as well as those involving both the blocs. For reasons of space, it is not possible for us to get into any reasonable conversation on the subject. However, in passing, simply to flag a couple of important instances of resistance against imperialism, we may note the recent developments in West Africa, where the union known as ‘the Alliance of Sahel States’, consisting of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, have put up a brave front against the French imperial order in the region asking the French troops to leave, and incumbent regimes are trying to reclaim important domestic resources, including by nationalization of these, such as the two gold mines in Burkina Faso, which were owned by a British company. And, of course, we must mention here the ongoing horrendous genocidal ethnic cleansing being carried out by Israel in the Gaza strip with active support from the US-led imperialism, and the valiant struggle by Palestine and its supporters to counter it.

In our understanding, for any prospect of solidarity between the South and the North, one of the most important correlates is a credible and

coherent coming together of the former. Furthermore, such a bloc must be driven by the working people and common citizens, and not the *comprador* elites, within and across countries in the South; in other words, a new Bandung movement of peasants, workers and general masses, with a strong ecological, gendered and anti-discriminatory (with respect to colour, race, caste, etc.) orientation, rooted in an anti-imperialist perspective is absolutely critical, for any significant way forward. Sure enough, economic-structural and political specificities across countries are diverse and very different; nonetheless, incessant imperialist assault has the potential to become a binding factor. Furthermore, without a serious questioning of neoliberal globalization, any progress on solidarity is highly improbable. Some very brief inputs, which are of immediate relevance, are noted in the concluding section below.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As suggested in the forgoing, for any prospect of better socio-economic outcomes, whether within the North or in the South, or between them, the stalling / reversal of neoliberal globalization must be prioritized; this, indeed, is a multi-pronged battle. With respect to the current state of affairs in the global economic system we have highlighted a number of critical features: let us recapitulate a couple of these:

- Contemporary capitalism is not only a capitalism of generalized monopoly-finance capital, but it is also tightly controlled by the Plutocrats, who have benefitted immensely, and disproportionately, from the growing concentration and centralization of capital, in its various forms. The centralization of economic power works in close tandem with political and social power, in which control over frontier technologies and institutions plays a huge role.
- Cooptation of the bourgeoisie from the South as junior, subaltern and ‘unequal’ partners in contemporary global value systems under the command of monopoly-finance capital, headquartered in the North, has shrunk considerably the autonomy for policy making in the South, whether in economic or other domains.
- Taking the above two together, contemporary global capitalism resembles a system under a powerful stranglehold of collective imperialism, led by the historical imperialist powers of the Triad (USA, EU, Japan).

- At the global level, there has been a massive expansion of relative surplus population, with its overwhelming concentration in the system's peripheries; most segments of contemporary labour reserves confront serious crisis of social reproduction, which also has significant adverse implications for working people.
- Emergence of China as a significant economic power, and a competitor of the Triad at least in some of the critical areas, with considerable presence in the countries of the South, arguably, has the potential to become an important countervailing force; however, current juncture is still an uncertain and fluid terrain, as also volatile and dangerous for humanity at large, with persistent military escalations by the North.
- Taking the world as a whole, there is no dearth of isolated rebellions and struggles; in fact, there are 'millions of mutinies'. However, these are extremely fragmented along multiple axes, and many of these get easily co-opted by those in power and get reduced to 'vehicles of micro imperialism'. It is an absolute imperative to find ways of working in close collaboration for all the progressive movements and struggles, if incessant neoliberal warfare and imperialist assaults have to be confronted with reasonable success.

We would suggest that to have worthwhile prospects of solidarity within the countries of the South or the North, as well as between them, the end of imperialist wars and sanctions and the right to national self-determination and autonomous development must be given priority. It is on the basis of this understanding that struggles for stopping and reversing privatization and commodification of nature and ecology, as well as essential goods and services, must be pursued urgently; these should be framed as 'social commons' and fundamental human rights. Calls for provisioning of affordable basic needs, such as food, decent livelihood, shelter, health, education, public transport etc., for all to guarantee the social reproduction of the masses of working people perpetually trapped in labour reserves, are also fundamental. Of course, such a vision of ecological, sociological and economic 'just transition' necessarily requires massive struggles for reclaiming natural resources and agricultural land for the reproduction of peasants in rural zones and for food sovereignty of whole nations and regions. What is more, appropriate macroeconomic regimes, locally, nationally, and globally with a strong focus on tax justice

and the establishment of financial mechanisms for autonomous development must be vigorously pursued. Humanity's common issues can be a basis for solidarity, as both the North and the South grapple with the consequences of a capitalist system that prioritizes profit over people and which still lives of the structures created by colonial rule. It is important to note that grassroots movements are vital in building transnational solidarity, in both the North and South to address issues like climate change, rights abuses, and economic justice. But it is also true that the fostering of dependence of movements through NGOsation and 'micro-imperialism' must come to an end. There is enough in the history of progressive struggles of humanity, as well as in the experiences of catastrophic outcomes of contemporary barbaric capitalism, to inspire serious visions and struggles in frameworks of solidarity, in spite of all the challenges flagged above.

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PART I

Partnerships and Neocolonialism
in Development Cooperation



Partnership Instead of Colonialism? The Origins and Colonial Elements of Development Cooperation

Aram Ziai

THE ORIGINS OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

In point four of his inaugural address of 1949, former US President Harry Truman announced the first program of development cooperation:

[...] we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.

For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people.

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A. Ziai et al. (eds.), *Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7_3

The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible.

I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development.

Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens.

We invite other countries to pool their technological resources in this undertaking. Their contributions will be warmly welcomed. This should be a cooperative enterprise in which all nations work together through the United Nations and its specialized agencies wherever practicable. It must be a worldwide effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom.

With the cooperation of business, private capital, agriculture, and labor in this country, this program can greatly increase the industrial activity in other nations and can raise substantially their standards of living.

Such new economic developments must be devised and controlled to benefit the peoples of the areas in which they are established. Guarantees to the investor must be balanced by guarantees in the interest of the people whose resources and whose labor go into these developments.

The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.

All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.

Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.

Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies – hunger, misery, and despair. (Truman, 1949)

While this new program announced in 1949 is based on viewing the global South in terms of “underdeveloped areas”, it clearly outlines the democratic relations envisioned towards the people in these areas—with the qualification that it is referring to “peace-loving” peoples, and in the context of the Cold War, this is taken to mean non-communist. Nevertheless, the new program sees itself as a partnership “based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing”. To assess how remarkable that is, we need to compare Truman’s speech to one of his predecessors. In 1901, former US President Theodore Roosevelt announced:

this nation most earnestly desires sincere and cordial friendship with others. [...] Wars with barbarous or semi-barbarous peoples come in an entirely different category, being merely a most regrettable but necessary international police duty which must be performed for the sake of mankind. (cited in Alcalde, 1987, p. 4)

The difference between the two depictions of the relations between the USA and the global South could hardly be greater. How did the “barbarous people” of the colonial era, waging war upon which is a duty for the sake of mankind, turn into poor people living in miserable conditions whose suffering has to be relieved through development cooperation—within less than half a century? How did the colonised become “the least fortunate members [...] of the human family”? Why did the USA perceive the need for a new program of North–South relations in 1949?

The answer I propose is: Because they were afraid that the double threat of socialist revolutions (like in 1917 in Russia) and anticolonial revolutions (like in 1947 in India) might lead to a situation where Africa, Asia and Latin America would be no longer available as exporters of cheap raw materials, as markets for consumer goods, and as investment opportunities. In the words of Rahnema:

development [...] was an ideology that was born and refined in the North, mainly to meet the needs of the dominant powers in search of a more ‘appropriate’ tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion. [...] [T]he ideology helped a dying and obsolete colonialism to transform itself into an aggressive - even sometimes an attractive - instrument able to recapture new ground. (Rahnema, 1997, p. 379)

This position, also articulated by other proponents of the postdevelopment school, is supported by two other important sources. The first is

the comprehensive study by Javier Gonzalo Alcalde on the emergence of the idea of Third World ‘development’ in the USA and Britain during the first half of the twentieth century (Alcalde, 1987).

Alcalde (1987) describes the complex interplay of a variety of factors only a few of which can be mentioned here: first of all, Woodrow Wilson’s fusion of commercial expansion and the carrying of liberty and justice into the world (p. 9), the surge of US investment into Latin America after WW I (p. 18), and the enormous psychological influence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 which strengthened the resolve of anticolonial movements in the South and kindled anticapitalist sentiments (p. 41). Furthermore, Alcalde (1987) emphasises the significance of the convergence of native welfare and the ‘development’ of resources between the British Colonial Development Act of 1929 (p. 30) and the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1939/40 (p. 117) and the new perception of poverty in the context of the economic crisis of the 1930s (p. 64), coupled with the recognition of the importance of economic planning (p. 71). This finally culminated into the international development program envisioned by Eugene Staley in 1939 which was to improve economic efficiency and bring “less developed” nations into the world economy in a manner which was to benefit all nations (Alcalde, 1987, p. 66). While it was deemed far from clear that there is a universal meaning of poverty during these decades and according to Alcalde the majority of people in ‘less developed’ nations were relatively indifferent towards modernization (Alcalde, 1987, p. 98ff), both of this changed with the advent of the paradigm of ‘development’.

The threat of possible cooperation with axis powers during World War II led to the first offers of financial assistance for ‘development’ (Alcalde, 1987, p. 121ff) and prosperity was seen by US elites as essential to preserve peace: “The idea of international cooperation for development of the South was thus endowed with a strong moral aim: attaining freedom from want throughout the world.” (Alcalde, 1987, p. 134) This led to the Atlantic Charter where US anti-colonial free trade interests prevailed over Britain’s desire to maintain its empire in the postwar order (Alcalde, 1987, p. 140ff) and finally to the peace and prosperity ideas articulated by Truman which saw misery at the root of the problem of communism which could thus be defeated by the abolition of poverty (Alcalde, 1987, p. 147). Thus, Alcalde argues:

The ideology of peace and prosperity was particularly addressed to the masses of workers and to less-developed nations. It was a universal and egalitarian approach proposing the same path to economic welfare for all the peoples of the world [...] [It] attempted to reconcile the development aspirations of economic nationalism in the South with an international framework of capitalist cooperation. [...] The US aimed at establishing an international order based on economic growth and democratic government of states for the purpose of securing world peace. The desire to promote economic growth rested on the assumption that the ensuing prosperity would defeat the enemies of democracy and capitalism, benefit American trade and investment, and prevent war. [...] The means envisaged by the US to bring about world prosperity were free trade and investment, international cooperation, and economic and technical assistance to impoverished and less-developed nations. (Alcalde, 1987, p. 173f)

Alcalde's detailed engagement with the historical sources points out, that in the first half of the twentieth century it was US-American and British statesmen, businessmen and intellectuals, not (as might have been expected) the countries which appeared as 'poor' in the new comparative statistics on economic output, who promoted the idea of 'development', and that the arguments by the former to justify their actions in the latter changed significantly during this period. At the end of his study, Alcalde concludes:

The first and broadest function of the idea of development was to give economic activity, particularly foreign economic activity, a positive and essential meaning for the lives of less-developed peoples. Whether it was Woodrow Wilson associating American exports with the happiness of mankind, the League Covenant and British colonialists linking development and welfare, New York financiers enticing foreign governments to contract American loans, Eugene Staley proposing a program of industrialization for the welfare of the Third World, or Sumner Welles spreading the creed of peace and prosperity, the aim was essentially the same: enhancing a mental linkage between capitalism and well-being in the South. [...] The idea of development represented a common purpose and symbolism for individual and collective economic efforts in the South involving interests and ideals of capitalist powers and less-developed nations. The economic function of the idea of development led ultimately to the identification of economic progress with overall progress. (Alcalde, 1987, p. 223f)

Yet not only Alcalde supports the postdevelopment critique. If we look closely enough, we find evidence for the hypothesis that the “bold new program” for the underdeveloped areas is at least as much about US interests as it is about helping the poor in Truman’s address itself. Truman (1949) points out: “Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas”. Why to the more prosperous areas? A handicap for the expansion of markets and a threat because it might lead to the spread of communism. Truman does not see this as hypocrisy, but as a win-win situation. He goes on to argue that through investments and transfer of technical knowledge, “this program can greatly increase the industrial activity in other nations and can raise substantially their standards of living. [...] Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.” So in this view, everyone benefits—US statesmen and investors as well as the people in ‘underdeveloped’ countries. Doing business in the South and helping the poor is no contradiction in this perspective. And this is indeed the perspective underlying development cooperation up until today. So our exploration of the origins of development cooperation yields that it emerged as a program to legitimise the capitalist world order in the global South through the promise of ‘development’ (in the sense of welfare achieved by trade, productivity and technological progress) for all against the backdrop of an increasing delegitimation of colonialism.

COLONIAL ELEMENTS OF THE CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

If we now differentiate the discourse of ‘development’ from that of colonialism, we find striking similarities as well as significant differences (Ziai, 2016, Chapter 3). The central continuity between the two discourses is the Eurocentric perspective that the ‘Self’ (the industrialised, secular, ‘developed’ society of the global North) is assumed to be superior to the ‘Other’ (the agrarian, spiritual, ‘less developed’ society of the global South). The mission to ‘civilize the uncivilized’ is seamlessly replaced by the mission to ‘develop the underdeveloped’. The convergence of interests between rich and poor countries mentioned above can also be seen as a continuity. On the other hand, one must not overlook the clear discontinuities between the old program of Roosevelt and the new program by Truman, the most important being the recognition of the ability of non-European peoples to rule over themselves. Another feature

of the discourse is that differences between global North and South are usually conceived of in terms of economic geography (“underdeveloped regions”) instead of biology (“barbarous peoples”), culture being an element that appears in both discourses.

Proponents of development cooperation usually reject the continuity thesis by pointing to the long history of the theory and practice of ‘development’ and its numerous changes (Rist, 2014). Proponents of postdevelopment, however, point out, that there surely are changes, but hardly any fundamental changes to be found in the history of development cooperation. Most can be explained by what I have called the cycle of the promise of “development” (Ziai, 2016, p. 44). The cycle starts with the Eurocentric gaze identifying non-Western societies as deficient (less or ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘developing’ in contrast to the idealized Self). This diagnosis leads to a prescription: they need economic growth and modernisation and progress. The prescription leads to a promise: then they will become ‘developed’, affluent societies like those in North America and Western Europe. However, the promise is later followed by the realization of failure: the transformation did not quite work as envisioned. Yet it is followed by a new diagnosis of a deficit and the cycle begins again.

When the Pearson report (the report of the Commission on International Development evaluating the World Bank’s development assistance, Pearson, 1969) stated that economic growth in the global South for a large part of the population had not reduced poverty and the trickle-down effect foreseen by Rostow (1960) had not materialized, the experts on ‘development’ in the World Bank and other institutions were quick to come up with new prescriptions: confessing that they had neglected social aspects and rural development, they promoted integrated rural development projects and a basic needs strategy (Jolly, 1976). A few years later, they explained the inadequate results of the new strategies by having overlooked another crucial factor: the role of women in economic development (Boserup, 1973). Inventing and implementing new schemes to include women in the productive sector also did not end poverty. Then the experts promoted participatory projects and intermediate technologies (Chambers, 1983), and then focused on the magic of the market (Lal, 1997), and then on governance and bringing the state back in (World Bank, 1992), and then on environmental protection and sustainability (WCED, 1987), and then on microcredits and entrepreneurship (CGAP, 2006), etc. Each new prescription and strategy served to maintain the

promise of ‘development’ and stabilize the existing world order, while hardly anyone (or anyone taken seriously) pointed to the elephant in the room and asked whether global capitalism based on private property and competition was in fact able to ever end poverty for all. Instead, ever new spheres of the societies defined as ‘less developed’ could become the target of interventions—in line with the general idea that the problem lay in these societies themselves but that knowledge and expertise from the ‘developed’ societies were necessary to solve them.

This expansion of spheres and the recurring new definitions of ‘development’ have led to a situation where it is not clear at all what people refer to when they use the concept. Today, it could be dams, hospitals, literacy programs, population control, protection of biodiversity, good governance, empowerment for girls, or neoliberal reforms. This is why some postdevelopment writers have referred to it as an “amoeba concept” (Esteva, 1985, p. 79, Sachs, 1992, p. 4). This allows for equivocations and misunderstandings between actors using ‘development’ with very different connotations, from investment and economic growth to defeating hunger. Despite the host of contents linked to the concept, its basic features since Truman are still shared today by most in development cooperation, and some of them can in fact be seen as colonial or neocolonial elements.

The first element can be termed Eurocentrism. It is based on the idea that (a) societies can be divided into those that are ‘developed’ and those that are ‘less developed’ (implying a universal scale and standards to measure ‘development’ and methodological nationalism in using states as units of analysis). Another underlying assumption is that (b) Europe and its settler colonies constitute the norm of ‘civilized’ or ‘developed’ societies, while others are deficient in relation to this norm—difference is perceived as backwardness. From Europe’s point of view, their present corresponds to Europe’s past and their future to its present. Ashis Nandy has described this intellectual operation as a “transformation of geocultural differences into historical stages” (Nandy, 1992, p. 146). In this line of thinking, social or economic problems of the global South can thus be explained by its backwardness (as methodological nationalism focuses on the discrete units instead of the global system) and can be solved by progressing towards the status quo of the West. It even makes sense to send experts from the global North to other countries of whose language,

history, culture and politics they have absolutely no idea—if ‘development’ is a universal process that occurs in all societies in the same manner, knowledge about this process will suffice to improve these countries.¹

This leads us to the second colonial element, and that is trusteeship. It can be described as the right to intervene in the lives of people defined as ‘less developed’ on the basis of having privileged knowledge about this universal process of ‘development’ (Cowen & Shenton, 1996; see also Li, 2007). This legitimizes interventions even against the will of the affected persons, as the trustees know better what is good for them or in their interest. While this trusteeship originally has been claimed by European colonizers, after independence it has been claimed by the governments of postcolonial states—typically on the basis of having studied in European or North American universities, the places to attain this privileged knowledge on the supposedly universal process of ‘development’.² Simultaneously, it has also been claimed (sometimes until today) by experts in development cooperation who know allegedly how to improve the lives of others without having to ask them.³ So this element is at the same time colonial and neocolonial, in the sense that it adapted to the post-independence conditions. The consequence of this element in development cooperation can be seen in development-induced displacement. Scholars estimate that between 10 and 15 mio. people each year are being displaced by projects of ‘development’—i.e. projects which are according to mainstream definitions supposedly improving their standards of living.

¹ “But life in these countries is certainly desirable, is it not?” Maybe, but it is based on colonial plunder (thus not universalizable) and a tremendously unsustainable use of resources (thus not universalizable)—while the promise always was to universalize this model.

² A closer look reveals that the trusteeship is a general feature of states claiming the legitimacy for a monopoly on the use of violence used for the pursuit of the common good (see Ziai, 2023).

³ Ferguson (1994) has lucidly pointed out, that the question “So what is to be done in order to develop this country?” is misleading in a number of senses: “There is not one question - „what is to be done“ - but hundreds: what should the mineworkers do, what should the abandoned old women do, what should the unemployed do, and so on. It seems, at the least, presumptuous to offer prescriptions here. The toiling miners and the abandoned old women know the tactics proper to their own situation far better than any expert does” (p. 281). Of course it seems presumptuous only if one denies the privileged knowledge of the trustees. In addition to overlooking this and the conflicts of interest in the society, the question assumes a benevolent and omnipotent actor implements the answer to this question (Ferguson, 1994, p. 280).

Displacement usually has the opposite effect (de Wet, 2006; Terminski, 2013; Ziai, 2019).

The third element is actually a neocolonial element, and it goes back to the origin of development cooperation as seen in the last section: the legitimization of a capitalist world order through a certain discourse and a certain practice promising better standards of living in the future—in contrast to colonial discourse which promised civilizing education and moral betterment, but not material welfare. However, we have to differentiate between two types of discourse and their corresponding practices. Type A can be described as “immanent development” (in the words of Cowen & Shenton, 1996) and its discourse has been described fairly accurately by Alcalde: it is based on the assumption that capitalist investment in the global South by private foreign actors will spur economic growth, lead to transfer of technology and ultimately to improved standards of living. This goes back to Truman and his idea that a program of ‘development’ consisting of these elements will end misery so that businesses in the North and the poor in the South can benefit equally, even without substantial financial transfers in the form of international aid.⁴ Type B, which could be called “intentional development” (Cowen & Shenton, 1996) goes beyond that and explicitly includes practices like financial transfers and interventions in the market favouring ‘less’ or ‘least developed countries’. The emergence of these practices was to a considerable extent the result of elites in the global South appropriating the discourse of ‘development’ in the arena of the United Nations to demand “special and differential treatment” in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (which they achieved) or a Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED) (which they did not achieve, but instead the World Bank created the International Development Association (IDA) giving concessional loans to poorer countries) (Ziai, 2016, Chapter 6).⁵

⁴ Note that Truman was quite hesitant on material assistance in his address.

⁵ This indicates that the discourse of ‘development’ can function as a discourse of rights for those defined as ‘less developed’, as pointed out by Cooper (1997, p. 84): “Development ideology was originally supposed to sustain empire, not facilitate the transfer of power. Yet developmentalist arguments – about labor policy as much as economic planning – were something trade union and political leaders could engage with, appropriate, and turn back. This framework allowed them to pose demands in forms that could be understood in London or Paris, that could not be dismissed as ‘primitive’. [...] Much as

While type A practice is situated in the realm of the economy which is usually perceived as non-political anyway, type B practices involve political decisions by governments. However, as Ferguson has shown, the corresponding discourse takes great care to maintain a separation of this type of ‘development’ and the field of politics. Here, ‘development’ is seen as something that benefits everyone (at least in the receiving ‘developing’ country) and thus no one can object to. Traditionally, it is seen as connected to a lack of capital, a lack of knowledge, or a lack of technology. Thus the solutions to the problem of ‘underdevelopment’ are simply technical solutions which provide capital, knowledge or technology—solutions that are seemingly unrelated to the realm of politics with its conflicts of interest between different factions and its relations of power. In a slightly simplified manner, one could argue that development cooperation thus tries to help the poor without stepping on the toes of the rich—a difficult task. Thus, Ferguson (1994, p. 256) argues that this interpretative frame of ‘development’ has the effect of depoliticizing inequality: “By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of the powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of „development” is the principal means through which the question of poverty is depoliticized in the world today.” And this frame is being reproduced by ‘development’ agencies simply because recognizing differences between elites and the poor and taking sides in favour of the latter is seen as a controversial political act and would certainly provoke distrust in the government of the country the agency seeks to intervene in (Ferguson, 1994, p. 69 & 284)—their perception of the problem is heavily influenced by the technical, non-political solutions they have at their disposal. Tania Murray Li (2007) supports and complements these findings with a comprehensive study of development projects in Indonesia, arriving at the conclusion that the discourse of development agencies is limited by the assumption that the state apparatus can be made to work in the public interest, the ignorance of experts relating to the position of power they occupy and the credo that the capitalist enterprise and the search for profit are a solution for poverty, not its cause (pp. 267 & 275). All three points

one can read the universalism of development discourse as a form of European particularism imposed abroad, it could also be read [...] as a rejection of the fundamental premises of colonial rule, a firm assertion of people of all races to participate in global politics and lay claim to a globally defined standard of living.”

contribute to the depoliticization of inequality and the legitimization of the ‘development’ apparatus and the capitalist world order.

Consequently, I would propose that the ability of both types of practices to actually improve the lives of poor people is severely curtailed as the existing capitalist and state structures are not the subject of a fundamental questioning or even any coherent and deliberate pro-poor policy.⁶ Yet there certainly are examples in development cooperation of projects which do improve the standards of living of their target group. However, in the larger context of a capitalist world order producing immense inequality and the absence of substantial measures of poverty reduction, their role seems to be more like that of a fig leaf—a symbolic type of politics designed to convey the semblance of concerted action against global inequality while leaving important parameters—such as debt service, land reform, control of the private sector or international labour migration—untouched.

These three elements (Eurocentrism, trusteeship and legitimization of a capitalist world order in which formerly colonised people are in general still disadvantaged through the promise to improve their lives and ameliorate inequality) can thus be seen as colonial or neocolonial elements persisting long after the formal end of colonialism. Now some people would argue that with the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 development cooperation has been based on a new paradigm devoid of the outdated ideas of Truman. Let us explore this thought.

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: NEW PERSPECTIVES?

According to the United Nations (UN), the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ provides “a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet”, at its heart being.

⁶ The attempt by the German minister for development cooperation during the social democratic/green coalition government 1998-2005 to establish a coherent pro-poor “global structural policy” demonstrated the limits: other ministries were adamant that the job of German politicians was to represent the economic interest of German companies, not neglect them in favour of poor people in other countries (Ziai 2007).

the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.⁷

The SDGs are the continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—described by the UN Secretary-General as “the most successful anti-poverty movement in history” (UN, 2015, p. 3)—which have been linked to the sustainability imperatives of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro 1992 and its follow-up conferences. The continued reduction of poverty and the integration of sustainability are widely perceived to be the characteristic features of the SDGs.

An investigation again has to differentiate between discourse and practice, so we will first look to what extent the SDG program differs from Truman’s from 1949. Then we will look at SDG practice in terms of poverty reduction successes, microcredits and financial inclusion as important aspects of this practice. At the end of the section, we will then conclude to what extent the colonial elements discussed in the last section are still present in the SDG agenda or not.

A closer comparison of one of the most important SDG documents, the report by the High-Level Panel on the post-2015 agenda entitled “A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development” (UN, 2014) and point 4 of the Truman address which we have quoted in the beginning, yields the following results (see also Ziai, 2016, Chapter 14): On the level of content, there are (next to some neoliberal elements) some clearly progressive elements present in the report on a global partnership that are lacking in the Truman address, such as the references to global inequality, climate change, gender-based violence and the demands for structural changes in the world economy and in consumption and production patterns of the ‘developed’ countries (UN, 2014, p. 4f). The claim that transformations have to take place in the North is certainly a break with the discursive structure of the discourse of ‘development’, but in

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Mar 4, 2024).

other respects we can see striking discursive continuities: in the diagnosis, the promise, the strategies and the credo.

Truman's (1949) diagnosis that poverty is a global problem ("More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease") is more or less repeated in 2014:

We are deeply aware of the hunger, vulnerability, and deprivation that still shape the daily lives of more than a billion people in the world today [...] the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty [...] Today, 870 million people in the world do not have enough to eat. Undernourished women give birth to underweight babies, who are less likely to live to their fifth birthday and more likely to develop chronic diseases and other limitations. (UN, 2014, pp. 4 & 40)

Also, the claim that this problem can be solved today ("For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people" [Truman, 1949]), coupled with the promise to tackle it ("we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" [Truman, 1949]) are also present in the announcement of the new global partnership:

[T]here is a chance now to do something that has never before been done – to eradicate extreme poverty, once and for all ... We have a historic opportunity to do what no other generation has ever done before: to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 and end poverty [...] We are convinced that ... the world possesses the tools and resources it needs to achieve a bold and ambitious vision. (UN, 2014, p. 4 & 47)

Regarding the strategies used to solve the problem, Truman (1949) spoke of the North's "inexhaustible" resources of "technical knowledge", which were the key to "greater production" and thus to "prosperity" and therefore "a better life". Similar invocations can be found 75 years later:

The resources, know-how and technology that are needed [to eradicate poverty] already exist, and are growing every year. [...] Developed countries [...] can encourage innovation, diffusion and transfer of technology. [...] Scientists and academics can make scientific and technological breakthroughs that will be essential to the post-2015 agenda. Every country that

has experienced sustained high growth has done so through absorbing knowledge, technology and ideas from the rest of the world [...] A profound economic transformation can end extreme poverty and promote sustainable development, improving livelihoods, by harnessing innovation, technology, and the potential of business. (UN, 2014, p. 18, 10f & 29)

The other strategy mentioned in the first program of ‘development’ was of course economic growth: “greater production” of “more food, more clothing, more materials for housing and more mechanical power”, increasing “industrial activity” and “substantially” raising standards of living. Although the tone is more cautious and qualified in the twenty-first century, the argument is similar: economic growth is needed to tackle the global problems.

The Panel calls for a quantum leap forward in economic opportunities and a profound economic transformation to end extreme poverty and improve livelihoods. There must be a commitment to rapid, equitable growth – not growth at any cost or just short-term spurts in growth, but sustained, long-term, inclusive growth that can overcome the challenges of unemployment (especially youth unemployment), resource scarcity and – perhaps the biggest challenge of all – adaptation to climate change. (UN, 2014, p. 8)

Finally, Truman’s (1949) credo that “all countries ... will greatly benefit” from the new program, because of the expansion of commerce and economic and industrial progress, is echoed in the plans for the SDGs as well: “Countries have resources, expertise or technology that, if shared, can result in mutual benefit. Working together is not just a moral obligation to help those less fortunate but is an investment in the long-term prosperity of all” (UN, 2014, p. 10).

Thus we can conclude that Escobar’s hypothesis from the mid-1990s that despite some structural changes (in our case above all regarding the necessity to transform the North in terms of sustainability) “the architecture of the discursive formation [of ‘development’] laid down in 1945–55 has remained unchanged, allowing the discourse to adapt to new conditions” (Escobar, 1995, p. 42) is surprisingly valid even 30 years later. The diagnosis that global poverty is a problem, the promise that the problem can be solved, the strategies of technological progress and economic growth and the credo of mutual benefit have remained just the same.

If we now turn to practice and examine the poverty reduction that has taken place, we first of all have to modify or even revise the claim about the successful reduction of poverty through the MDGs, the predecessors of the SDGs. Critics like Hickel (2016) have convincingly shown that the international poverty line covers only the most extreme forms of poverty in the first place and that the often-quoted successes were due to two factors: statistical manipulations of this poverty line by the World Bank (managing to turn a rise of poor people into a fall) and the economic successes of the Chinese economy which are responsible for any positive trend beyond these manipulations.

As for the current successes on the road to eliminate poverty, the UN itself is not optimistic. In the 2023 SDG progress report, the Secretary-General points out: “Progress on more than 50 percent of targets of the SDGs is weak and insufficient; on 30 percent, it has stalled or gone into reverse. These include key targets on poverty, hunger and climate” (UN, 2023, p. 2). It is noteworthy that the report does not simply blame these negative changes on the Covid-19 crisis, but also mentions debt and an undemocratic international financial architecture as factors making poorer countries unable to adopt the expansionary financial and monetary policies that helped wealthier countries to deal with the pandemic (UN, 2023, p. 2).

Yet even before the UN had to admit the failure of successful poverty reduction through the SDG process, the SDGs were implicated in a shift regarding the financial sources of aid for ‘development’. The World Bank put forward an approach entitled “Maximizing Finance for Development” (MFD) in 2018, in which it argued that the global cost of meeting the SDGs would cost an estimated 4 to 4.5 trillion US-\$ per year—and this huge amount of money could only be mobilised from the private sector. Therefore, Official Development Assistance (ODA) should be used to “unlock private sector investment”.⁸ The alternative to mobilise the money through combating illicit financial transfers, debt service, repatriation of profits and tax evasion which result in a transfer of roughly 2 trillion US-\$ per year from the poorer to the richer countries (Ellmers, 2016; Griffiths, 2014), is not seriously pursued in the SDG context. Mawdsley (2018, p. 191f) points out that the SDGs are thus implicated

⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2018/09/28/maximizing-finance-to-power-development> (Mar 5, 2024)

in a “From billions to trillions” agenda where public aid money is increasingly used in instruments like public–private–partnerships, blended finance and de-risking (designed to mitigate its risks—to the investors, that is). So the result of the neoliberal policies leading to a huge overaccumulation of private money⁹ and starved public treasuries is turned into an argument for letting the private sector take over the job of eliminating global poverty. Just like Truman back then, the World Bank still believes (or at least pretends to believe?) that investments in the poor regions of the world will both benefit the investors and defeat poverty.

A similar logic governs the promotion of microcredits and financial inclusion in the SDGs: if access to money and financial markets is at the root of the problem of poverty, it is argued in the SDG context, then loans to poor individuals will surely defeat poverty (Briant Carant, 2017, p. 18). However, systematic research has shown that despite individual success stories there was no positive effect of microcredits on poverty reduction but rather increased competition among micro-enterprises leading to job loss and a race to the bottom regarding working conditions (Bateman, 2018, pp. 140 & 142). The win–win-solutions to erase poverty that have been promoted since Truman mostly turn out to be empty promises.

Regarding the colonial and neocolonial elements identified in the last section, we can conclude the following: Eurocentrism is not seen as a problem anywhere in the SDGs, although the focus on changing the consumption and production patterns of the North is certainly an important step away from the traditional idea that the model of the ‘developed’ societies should be imitated. This of course leaves room for an ecological adaptation in the sense of a modernized, ecologically sustainable industrial capitalist society being seen as the universal goal. Regarding the question of trusteeship, a similar picture emerges: it is not problematized in the SDGs, but participation, ownership and empowerment have long (at least since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness from 2005) been important buzzwords of development cooperation which indicate at least a slight deviation from the idea of trusteeship. Again: if the buzzwords are not connected to a shift in relations of power towards the affected

⁹ Elon Musk’s wealth is estimated at 240 bio. US-\$ (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/elon-musk-net-worth-how-did-elon-musk-get-so-rich/> Mar 5, 2024), which would be enough to buy a brand new Mercedes S 580e every month of the year for his entire life—if he lives for 150.000 years.

persons, they may simply obscure and reproduce the existing hierarchies between ‘experts’ and ‘beneficiaries’.

As for the third element, the legitimation of an unequal world order, a number of points support the interpretation of the SDGs as serving just this purpose: their discursive structure (in terms of diagnosis, promise, strategies and credo) is very similar to that of the first outline of development cooperation in 1949. This includes the characteristic feature of promising a brighter future while there is little tangible success in poverty reduction and no serious attempt to reverse the massive financial transfers from the poor to the rich countries. Another similarity is the promotion of private sector investment and financial inclusion as a solution to the problem of global poverty, firmly maintaining that the objectives of making a profit and defeating poverty can be achieved simultaneously if we let the market work its magic. While the UN Secretary-General and certainly also other proponents of the SDGs apparently do not share this enthusiasm for neoliberal solutions it cannot be overlooked that the SDGs have an effect surprisingly similar to that of Truman’s point four: to legitimate a highly unequal capitalist world order.

DECOLONISING DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

So how could international cooperation look like if it was devoid of these colonial and neocolonial elements? Let us start with the element of Eurocentrism. To do away with it would require, firstly, to overcome the idea of the superiority of Western models of society based on a capitalist economy, featuring industrial production, competition, individualism, secularism, centralized states, a representative democracy and an image of nature as an object to be exploited without limits. For Gandhi (1938) to identify a good life with material wealth, with no regard for morality or spirituality, was pathetic. But also in the West there were not only hippies, but also politicians like Bobby Kennedy who remarked that measuring the quality of a society through the gross domestic product included wars, jails and advertising as positive but failed to measure things like integrity, art or joy.¹⁰ The Happy Planet Index (measuring life expectancy, happiness, inequality and the ecological footprint in a state) is just one of the alternatives put forward to promote another model of

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_F._Kennedy%27s_remarks_at_the_University_of_Kansas (Mar 5, 2024).

wealth or a “good life”. But even this would be based on a universal scale and would not leave space for other, communal definitions of what counts in life, which is why postdevelopment approaches put forward the notion of the pluriverse (Kothari et al., 2019), based on the Zapatista slogan “a world in which many worlds fit”.

Overcoming the idea of Western superiority would also mean to overcome the idea that there are problems in the ‘less developed’ countries for whose solution knowledge from ‘developed’ societies was necessary or useful—but not the other way round. And although yoga or acupuncture have found their way to the middle classes in the North, the idea that these societies can learn something from migrants from the South seems strange to most. Yet in the face of climate change and the systemic failure of industrial capitalism to preserve the planet the knowledge of indigenous people to survive in harmony with nature seems increasingly crucial and the recognition that there is more than one system of knowledge is overdue (Apffel-Marglin & Marglin, 1990, 1996).

While Eurocentrism governed the theory of ‘development’, trusteeship governed its practice. What needs to be done to protect its future victims from displacement? If we take seriously the claim that the people themselves (and not the experts of ‘development’) know best what is good for them because they know their situation and their aspirations better than anyone else (“ontological equality”, in the words of Neusiedl, 2021), some simple consequences follow: It does not make sense to send white experts (or indeed experts of any colour) into regions they are not familiar with and give them the power to decide how others should live. Instead, decentralised processes of democracy and self-organisation should be supported, indigenous rights and free prior informed consent should be respected. If there are projects of cooperation, mechanisms of accountability are imperative to reduce or eliminate the hierarchy between experts and project-affected persons. The Inspection Panel of the World Bank which emerged from the struggle against the Sardar Sarovar dam in the Narmada Valley Development Project, has been a crucial, albeit insufficient, step in the right direction (Clark et al., 2003; Schäfer, 2023).

The third element is probably the most difficult to overcome, because even a cooperation free from Eurocentrism and trusteeship could act as a fig leaf of an exploitative economic order if this order itself would not change. Therefore, its avoidance requires indeed a “global structural policy” (Ziai, 2007), a transformation of global economic structures

in favour of the weaker actors. A serious treatment of this transformation would require more space than is available here, but some keywords should be mentioned. Important elements of such a policy decolonising international economic relations would be the control of illicit financial transfers and the profits and tax evasions of multinational companies, maybe through reanimating the UN Centre for Transnational Corporations and introducing an international tax regime. In development cooperation, all support for public–private partnerships (PPPs), biopiracy, land grabbing, microcredits and financial inclusion had to be stopped. In world trade, the WTO would need to allow for protectionism, outlaw tariff escalation and abolish the TRIPs agreement, and support commodity cartels and fair trade, South-South cooperation and deglobalisation in the sense of regional and local trade networks. IMF and World Bank would have to be democratised, odious debts would have to be waived and debt service would need to be paid only if there was a trade surplus—which would also provide an incentive to invest in debtor countries. Reparations for the plunder and violence of colonialism would have to be paid. And the imperial mode of production and consumption which relies on cheap labour power and cheap raw materials in other parts of the world would have to be abandoned (Brand & Wissen, 2013).

Surely this will be seen by some as a utopian program. I would argue it is not, on the contrary: I consider it reformist in the sense that it would in theory¹¹ still be compatible with a capitalist economy. That is, with an economic system which guarantees survival only for those who are able to rent their labour power on the market for a price providing a livelihood for them and their children.¹² Between 20 and 30 thousand human beings die each single day because they are not able to buy enough food or medicine to survive (Oxfam, 2022, p. 13)—although both would be sufficiently available. To my mind, this is reason enough to think about how we can overcome this system (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Habermann, 2024).

¹¹ In practice I think that the relations of power generated by a capitalist system of production are so asymmetrical as to prevent more than superficial attempts to implement such a transformation.

¹² To be precise: Others, possessing property, do not have to work at all but live off the work of others.

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International “Development” Cooperation and Social Change from Below. Challenges to the Viability of a Social and Solidarity Economy in Haiti 2010–2020

Képler Aurélien and Marc-Arthur Fils-Aimé

INTRODUCTION

The father and son Duvalier dictatorship reinforced Haiti’s dependence and the country’s social inequalities, reinforcing the plundering of public finances and the degradation of agriculture (Péan, 2007). After the fall of the Duvalier regime, international financial institutions (IFIs) and Western states that have influence over states in the Latin American and Caribbean region, led by the United States, embarked on the design and implementation of strategic development programs to lift Haiti out of poverty. This foreign influence on the design of Haiti’s ‘development’

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programs is exercised through a close articulation between external cooperation mechanisms and the main institution responsible for planning the country's 'economic development', namely the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation, created in March 1989 (Le Moniteur, 1989, March 10). These programs were based mainly on conditional loans and grants, and involved public administration reforms, fiscal austerity policies and trade liberalization measures (Perchellet, 2010). The conditionality of "official development assistance" reflects the dependence of Haitian governments on external donors (Providence, 2022). Under these conditions, social inequalities "serve as a pretext for aligning the Haitian state with the main thrust of neoliberal policies: 'aid to finance consumption' [Our translation]" (Providence, 2022).

The corpus of reforms carried out under the influence of 'development cooperation' is generally known as 'structural adjustment'. These reforms, which were introduced shortly before the fall of the Duvalier regime, were accelerated after the political and economic watershed of 1986 (Perchellet, 2010). Following the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, there has been an increasing process of humanitarian interference, and a proliferation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Haiti, acting outside the complementarity of local actors and in the absence of state coordination (Providence, 2022). It is this context of increasing economic dependence under the influence of "international development aid" that is of particular interest to us.

In the post-Duvalier era, successive Haitian governments have adopted—often enthusiastically—so-called development programs designed under the influence of international agencies, some of which are extensions of previous programs, implemented without any real evaluation of their predecessors. These include the Strategy for Economic and Social Reconstruction adopted in August 1994, the Interim Cooperation Framework (CCI in French) designed in September 2004, the National Strategic Document for Growth and Poverty Reduction (DSNCRP in French) drawn up in November 2007, and the Strategic Development Plan for Haiti (PSDH in French) adopted in May 2012, to name but the major programs. For the purposes of this study, we are particularly interested in the PSDH, whose impact relates precisely to the period under review: after the 2010 earthquake.

Instead of contributing to economic growth and an equitable distribution of resources, these programs have reinforced Haiti's spiral of debt and dependence, have led to a reduction in public spending, and the

stripping of State (Perchellet, 2010). In the case of the PSDH, which is of particular interest to us, its implementation has led to the monopolization of peasant plots for the benefit of multinational agricultural and agro-industrial companies, or large hotel chains. In some cases, the land grabbed was abandoned following social protests.

These programs have dismantled public services. Social and popular movements, conscious of the reality that ‘international development cooperation’ programs have led to results that run counter to their own stated objectives, have turned their centuries-old experience in the social and solidarity economy (SSE)¹ to build an alternative. This alternative is intended to be a process of social change from below. More concretely, solidarity-based savings and credit associations and cooperatives, agri-food processing enterprises, seed storage and rotating profit breeding initiatives to support peasant farming, housing and catering enterprises have been created in an attempt to escape the precarious living conditions generated by neoliberal economic policies. The management of these enterprises represents a potential opportunity for small-scale experimentation with social projects based on collective ownership of the means of production and exchange, protection of biodiversity, participatory decision-making processes and food sovereignty. However, these alternative micro-experiments take place in a macro-economic environment largely shaped by the extractivist, anti-grassroots orientation of ‘international development cooperation’ programs. Extractivism is understood here in a broad sense to refer to both a mode of accumulation based primarily on “extractive activities” and “large-scale infrastructure projects” to facilitate the extraction and transportation of resources (Langlois & Magaña Canul, 2023). Extractivist accumulation refers primarily to North–South relations, but is not limited to them. The logic of extractivism brings into play global power relations and their social implications: inequality, poverty, human rights violations, labor exploitation, the imposition of economic projects by authoritarian regimes and the externalization of ecological and social costs in the countries of the South, often considered by multinationals and governments as “empty spaces” and “underdeveloped”. Such a logic runs counter to any process

¹ In this sense, Élie (2015) has listed five generations of social and solidarity economy organizations, ranging from the first work associations created in the aftermath of national independence to recent organizational models including solidarity savings and credit associations.

of social change from below that involves the participation of local populations (Dietz, 2023).

In a macro-economic context characterized by extractivist aims, dependence on external funds and the destruction of public services, what is the viability of the Social and Solidarity Economy as an alternative built from below? This is the question we set out to answer in this chapter.

To address this question, we begin by analyzing a centuries-old confrontation between two projects in Haiti's economic history. Secondly, we examine the orientation of the main economic partnerships established in the post-1986 period (with particular emphasis on the PSDH), which flowed from the position assigned to Haiti since the 1970s in a new international division of labor. Based on the exploitation of cheap Haitian labour, this division in fact emerged from the beginning of the US occupation in July 1915, when peasants were forced to sell their labour at low prices in Cuban and Dominican sugar cane fields owned by US companies. The particularity of the 1970s onwards international division of labor is that the interests of the owners of transnational capital are geared towards exploiting cheap labor through local subcontracting industries. The data analyzed in these first two parts of the study were gathered through documentary research. In the third part, we take stock of SSE in Haiti. This assessment was made possible as a result of empirical material gathered through focus groups and discussed in workshops. In the fourth and final part, we analyze the challenges posed by the negative macroeconomic environment to the SSE.

HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP IN HAITI: ONGOING AND RENEWED CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TWO PROJECTS

Immediately following Haiti's independence, the new dominant classes (large landowners and the commercial bourgeoisie) sought to impose an economic project essentially based on large-scale plantations and agricultural exports. The production of these agricultural commodities was carried out using disciplining systems reminiscent of French colonialism and slavery. In this sense, farming regulations in the wake of national independence were most severe. Regulations prohibited farmers from deserting the countryside to take refuge in the city (Dorsainvil, 1934), creating a forced attachment of farmers to the plantation. In so doing,

the dominant classes were acting against the vision of the new peasant class that had emerged from the anti-colonial struggle, which tended to prioritize food production—food sovereignty, without the name. Family-based peasant farming and mutualist initiatives in the Social and Solidarity Economy are an extension of this vision. Throughout Haiti’s history, there has been a clash between the protagonists of these two projects. Sometimes this confrontation is latent. In certain circumstances, it is open and even violent.

Successive governments have consistently taken steps in favor of the project supported by the ruling classes. This preferencing of the strategic interests of the ruling classes evolved in a way intimately linked to fluctuations on the world capitalist market. Changes in the price of coffee, cotton and other commodities on the international market had a major influence on the development in Haiti of the economic project based on large-scale plantations for the export of foodstuffs (Joachim, 1979).

Between 1850 and 1890, small-scale peasant production enjoyed a golden age without however constituting the real economic and social sector that benefited from this bloom (Hector & Casimir, 2004). Since then, despite certain periods of decline and the continual assaults of successive governments on peasant family farming, this model of farming remains dominant in Haitian agriculture and plays a major role in the national economy, both in terms of the proportion of the working population implicated and in terms of its contribution to meeting food needs (Henry et al., 2023). Grounded in this agricultural model and inspired by mutualist practices dating back more than two centuries, the working classes, particularly parcel-based peasant farmers, have developed other initiatives in the wake of post-1986 struggles: agricultural processing efforts, credit and savings initiatives and even ecotourism (ICKL et al., 2022). These initiatives are intended to avoid wasting seasonal agricultural produce, to finance peasant family farming and to compensate for the steady decline in income generated by this agricultural model. These are initiatives that their protagonists claim as part of the Social and Solidarity Economy.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURED AROUND A NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

With the start of the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915, Haiti's cheap labor and raw materials were exploited for foreign capital investment. These were mainly extractivist partnerships. Indeed, the large plantations set up by US companies enabled accumulation based on the dispossession of peasant families and the expropriation of their plots for crops destined primarily for export. A prime example is the Haitian-American Society for Agricultural Development (SHADA in French), which created a socio-economic and ecological disaster through its cryptostegia plantation program for rubber production (Gilbert, 2016). Furthermore, the exploitation of bauxite between 1956 and 1982 by a Haitian subsidiary of Reynolds Metals Company, and the exploitation of copper between 1960 and 1972 by a Haitian subsidiary of the Canadian company Consolidated Halliwell, caused significant environmental damage. In the second case cited, only 3.6% of the value of the mining flowed to the Haitian state (Global Justice Clinic and Haiti Justice Initiative, 2016).

At the end of the 1970s, the pillars of Haiti's economic growth shifted as part of a new international division of labor, with the large scale installation of subcontracting industries fueled by an abundance of cheap labor in Haiti (Caprio, 1993). At the same time, the liberalization of the Haitian market (characterized primarily by a fall in import taxes) contributed to the deconstruction of peasant agriculture. The contribution of the agricultural sector—which is dominated by peasant farming—to gross domestic product (GDP) fell from 45% in the 1970s to 26% in 2009, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR, 2009). Agriculture's contribution to GDP has risen to 20.4% in 2020, according to World Bank data (World Bank, 2022). Of course, agriculture's contribution to GDP is underestimated, since the techniques and conventions used to evaluate agricultural production tend to measure commercialised agricultural production, and omit personal consumption (Polanyi-Levitt, 1991).

The degradation of agriculture is also fuelled by migratory flows (rural exodus and emigration of rural populations to other countries) as part of a modification of the international division of labor driven by the neoliberal economic order. Christine Verschuur (2005) refers to this as a new international division of labor and care, since it implies a fragmentation of the production process for goods and services, based on discrimination

that relegates care services to women. In addition, free zone industries employ a majority of women, exploiting women’s underemployment and taking advantage of cheap labour.

Migration flows, particularly those involving rural populations, have a negative impact on the organization of households, which constitute the main labor force for peasant agriculture, which is threatened by the PSDH’s major projects.

In line with the logic of liberalization, from the early 2000s Haitian governments adopted free trade zones as a strategic pillar of Haiti’s ‘development’ (Thomas, 2014). This is a continuation of the ‘liquidationist policy’ of the Duvalier dictatorship. François Duvalier had proposed making Haiti the Taiwan of the Caribbean. For his part, Jean-Claude Duvalier described his administration as constituting an “economic revolution”, following what he considered the “political revolution” of his father, François Duvalier (Etienne, 2007, p. 286).

The priority given to free trade zones as a pillar of Haiti’s ‘development’ was demonstrated by the adoption of the law of August 2, 2002. This law guarantees 15 years’ exemption from income tax for free trade zones, as well as customs exemption on the purchase of materials and equipment. These zones reinforce the externally focused nature of the Haitian economy. Indeed, article 27 of the aforementioned law stipulates that: “Goods and services supplied from the customs territory to companies located in free trade zones are considered as exports [Our translation]” (Le Moniteur, 2002).

A new approach which further strengthened the extractivist orientation of economic partnerships was expressed through the 2012 Strategic Development Plan for Haiti (PSDH in French), drawn up under the coordination of the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation (MPCE in French), with the support of foreign experts. It should be noted that with the creation of the MPCE in 1989, the planning functions of national socio-economic organization were grouped with those of external cooperation. This choice is indicative of the ways in which national institutional conditions were favourable to the expanding influence of “international development cooperation” players in orienting Haiti’s economic planning.

The PSDH conceived an economic development model based essentially on foreign direct investment in extractivist sectors (mining, construction of agricultural and agro-industrial free zones). To implement

this plan, the government of the day launched a vast land grabbing operation of peasant land for the benefit of multinationals. Recent cases of dispossession in the North-East department provide an ongoing example of this approach (Lucien, 2018).

One of the PSDH's four major axes is legal and institutional reform to encourage foreign investment and protect foreign capital MPCE (2012). Thus, in April 2013, the government of the day—with technical support from the World Bank—set up a working group to draft a preliminary mining law. The document was made public in 2014. The aim of this reform was to replace the system of mining concessions defined in a 1976 law (*Concertation pour Haïti*, 2015) that remains in force. One of the important changes proposed in the 2014 draft law is a shortening of the process leading to mining concessions, notably by eliminating the need for ratification flowing from parliamentary power (Ibid.).

This, therefore, is the overall context in which Haitian social and grassroots movements engage in social and solidarity economy (SSE) initiatives.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY IN HAITI

As part of the 'people's university' co-organized² by the Institut culturel Karl Lévêque (ICKL), discussions have been held around the SSE for 6 years (as part of 2 three-year programs). During 2017, 2018 and 2019 editions organized around consolidating the social and solidarity economy (SSE) experiences of social and popular movements, efforts were made to establish a stock take of SSE. Those efforts led to the conclusions presented in the box below.

This data was collected during preparatory workshops for the intensive sessions of the people's university. These workshops took the form of focus groups using a flexible guide. The data collected was synthesized and discussed in workshops and plenary sessions during the intensive sessions.

² The people's university is a training and knowledge co-production space, co-organized by *Institut culturel Karl Lévêque* (ICKL), *Institut de technologie et d'animation* (ITECA), *Programme pour une alternative de justice* (PAJ), *Plateforme haïtienne de plaidoyer pour un développement alternatif* (PAPDA), *Société d'animation et de communication sociale* (SAKS) and *Solidate Fanm Ayisyèn* (SOFA).

To make it easier to identify the characteristics of the Haitian SSE in the following paragraph, we have highlighted them in *italics*.

As explained in the first section, the SSE initiatives launched by the post-1986 social and grassroots movements are an extension of the age-old struggle for family-based peasant farming. Moreover, these initiatives constitute one generation of SSE among others in Haiti’s history, as Elie (2015) argues. SSE enterprises created in the post-1986 context, on the one hand, and peasant family farming established in the early nineteenth century and consolidated over the second half of that century, on the other, respond to a common challenge despite their respective organizational particularities: the construction of an alternative to the dominant economic model. It is in this context of ongoing and renewed struggle that the experiences presented below are set.

Most initiatives that claim to be part of the Social and Solidarity Economy are *firmly rooted in the local area*, as they are recognized and acknowledged by the inhabitants of their respective communities. Sometimes, this recognition is limited to a communal section. In some cases, it extends to an entire commune. This helps build and maintain an entire network of customers. This local grounding is less evident in companies operating on a departmental or national scale.

While most of these initiatives have a strong grounding in their local area, *they remain scattered*. There is very little interaction between them. They are still far from constituting a genuine social and solidarity economy sector capable of making a significant impact on the living conditions of the working classes, or of influencing the direction of successive economic policies since 1986. Furthermore, in most cases, the decision-making bodies of the associations that took the initiative of setting up these enterprises have less and less control over them, even though the majority of enterprise staff are members of the founding associations. In some cases, the company’s operations and *revenues are divorced from the associations’ struggles*. In other words, the income generated by these companies is rarely used to support the struggles waged by social and grassroots movements.

The financial profitability of these companies remains very limited, even though most of them, especially those with strong roots in their respective communities, manage to break even. This is because they face major challenges in terms of infrastructure, access to credit and competition with capitalist enterprises benefiting from customs exemptions based on political cronyism. In addition, social enterprises that engage in production

are forced to operate on a small scale due to their low levels of investment, making their production costs very high compared with capitalist enterprises.

At the same time, the *social profitability of the enterprises* explored through the 2017–2019 People’s University program *is remarkable*. Indeed, even with their limited resources, they generally manage to create more than a dozen jobs in their respective communities (sometimes several dozen jobs), and they provide grants or subsidies to the most marginalized families. What’s more, in rare cases, such as a bakery set up in 2014 in the commune of Marigot (South-East department), the business is a mobilizing force for the members of the association that created it, and a lever for consolidating a collective dynamic within an entire network of peasant organizations.

When it comes to the organization and management of these enterprises, which claim to be part of the social/solidarity-based economy, there are *three major challenges*: (1) *ongoing staff training*, (2) *decision-making based on a collective, participatory process*, and (3) *the active involvement of women in all spheres of the enterprise*. The first challenge lies in the fact that, in general, the social and grassroots movements behind the creation of social and solidarity-based enterprises remain dependent on technical and financial “partners”. The efforts made by popular education institutions to provide training aimed at encouraging the autonomy of grassroots organizations have so far borne little fruit. As for the second challenge, it seems to stem both from the broader trend of concentrated power in collective dynamics in Haiti, and from the lack of connection between companies and the social and popular movements that are at the root of their creation. The organization of work and the management of these enterprises have not yet offered the opportunity to concretely experiment with a social project based on the collective means of production and exchange—as is anticipated in the anti-capitalist ethos of the Social and Solidarity Economy. Indeed, in most cases, the lack of connection with social and grassroots movements prevents employees from participating in the ownership of companies as members of their founding organizations. The third challenge concerns companies set up by mixed associations. In this category, women are systematically excluded from decision-making processes. In the case of companies created and controlled by women’s and feminist organizations, they participate at all levels of work organization and management, except for tasks involving

great physical effort such as handling, which these companies still tend to assign to men.

One of the main challenges facing social and solidarity enterprises is their legal status. They are obliged to use the name of individual shareholders or associates to represent collective shareholders or associates. The individual shareholders or associates sign a notarized contract to guarantee their commitments. This method is employed due to the fact that Haitian legislation does not provide for any statute adapted to the mission and needs of social enterprises. Even in the case of cooperative legislation, there is no provision for collective members.

In conclusion, it should be noted that *social and solidarity enterprises linked to savings and credit are more profitable than those linked to production.* This is because they do not face major infrastructure challenges. However, as savings accumulate, a problem arises of how to store and protect them. At this point, solidarity savings companies either resort to capitalist banking channels, as they have no channels of their own, or they quickly invest the savings in trade and/or production, and the infrastructure problem begins. All these constraints reveal *the damaging consequences of the macroeconomic environment on the development of social and solidarity enterprises* (ICKL et al., 2022).³

Some of these local initiatives are locally-grown in terms of the resources mobilized, while others have emerged through funding and projects implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the basis of so-called ‘development aid’. These are thus efforts to build an alternative to the extractivist and paternalistic orientation of development cooperation, using local resources and those mobilized through the same development cooperation.

However, as the preceding analysis reveals, development cooperation contributes to creating and reinforcing a macroeconomic framework that is lethal to Haiti’s economic and political sovereignty. In this context, any prospect of viability of SSE initiatives necessitates a profound questioning of the political conditions necessary to restructuring of the national economic context and the ‘international development cooperation’ that feeds it. These socio-economic micro-initiatives are not without their difficulties. They face major challenges, including difficult coordination. This hinders the achievement of significant impacts. The state has a

³ This long extract has been translated from French into English by ourselves.

fundamental responsibility in the coordination process, notably through political coalitions (Bardhan, 2016). But contrary to Bardhan's balancing vision, the political coalitions that help to ensure the coordination of micro-initiatives are necessarily characterized by dominance, as they are shot through with opposing visions and strategic interests.

To explore the viability of socio-economic micro-initiatives in greater depth, we compare the characteristics of the macroeconomic environment with the challenges and potential of solidarity-based economic initiatives.

A DELETERIOUS MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

One of the main features of the macro-economic environment shaped by international development partnerships in Haiti is unfair competition resulting from market liberalization and the privatization of public goods.

Because of the alignment of various Haitian governments with the dictates of international powers, notably of the United States of America, the rice industry was one of the first sectors to suffer the upheavals and misfortunes resulting from market liberalization in Haiti. This sector is a textbook case. Haiti is now the third-largest importer of U.S. rice. This cost the country more than \$200 million between June 2018 and July 2019 (Francisque, 2019), notwithstanding that the country had the capacity to be almost self-sufficient in terms of rice consumption. National production can in no way compete with that of the United States, where production is not only subsidized by the government, but also cheaper for reasons of scale and technique. As Frédéric Thomas points out: "In 1994, rice tariffs were reduced from 35 to 3%. Whereas in 1988, the ratio between local rice and "Miami" rice (American subsidized rice) was 22:1, in 2000 it was 1:2! On March 10, 2010, Bill Clinton was self-critical before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee" [Our translation] (Thomas, 2013, p. 19). Clinton formulated his self-criticism in these terms reported by Ruth Messinger: "It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake," Clinton said this month. "I had to live everyday with the consequences of the loss of capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people because of what I did; nobody else." (Messinger, 2011). But this mea-culpa has not led to a change of policy in the United States' relations with Haiti.

The same dynamic is evident when former industrialists are converted into traders, buying cement, sugar and wheat flour from abroad. After the privatization of the *Haitian American Sugar Company* (HASCO) under the military regime led by Henri Namphy in 1987, nine other public enterprises were targeted by the *law on the modernization of public enterprises*, passed by parliament in September 1996 and published on October 10 of the same year. These were the National Airport Authority (AAN in French), the National Port Authority (APN in French), the National Credit Bank (BNC in French), the Haiti Cement Factory, the Electricity of Haiti (EDH in French), the National Oilseed Company (ENAOL in French), the Flour mills of Haiti and TELECO (Pierre-Yves Crémieux & André Marcoux, 1996). The latter company, which provided telephone services, made huge profits for the Haitian state, before being sold off to a Vietnamese company. The entire privatization process was carried out without transparency (Pierre-Yves Crémieux & André Marcoux, 1996).

Liberalization has also destroyed an entire chain of what was known as “substitute industries”. This category of industry flourished, relatively speaking, until the 1980s. In addition to its economic objectives, it formed part of the U.S. ‘Alliance for Progress’ program, implemented throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to counter the expansion of the communist revolution (Plank, 1962) that had been embodied by Cuba in particular.

As the analysis in the second section above has demonstrated, another feature of the macroeconomic context is land grabbing for the benefit of multinationals. This poses a threat to peasant agriculture and the agri-food processing micro-businesses that this agricultural model enables. In addition, our assessment of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) initiatives in Haiti reveals the absence of an appropriate legal framework for this economic model.

In such a context, how can alternative, viable economic initiatives be built from the ground up? This question invites us to explore the value of access to political levers, in order to create a legal and institutional framework that would be conducive to the development of SSE initiatives—as a genuine sector capable of contributing to economic growth in Haiti and a fair distribution of wealth in the country. In turn, this raises the question of how to link the process of socio-economic transformation with the acquisition and exercise of state power. This question raises another

fundamental concern: what real room and opportunity do social movements have to participate in the process of socio-economic transformation of a community, a country or a region?

How can dominant international partnerships contribute to a viable process of socio-economic and political change, geared towards national sovereignty and equitable access to social goods and services? How can bottom-up socio-economic transformation initiatives in Southern countries be viable if the processes of capital accumulation in a set of Northern countries continue to be enabled by extractivist use of raw materials and labor in the South? How can we imagine a macroeconomic environment favorable to developing productive forces and public services in the South without restorative justice mechanisms? These are just some of the questions that an analysis of the development challenges facing Social and Solidarity Economy initiatives in Haiti leads us to ask about the process of transforming externally dependent economies in the Global South.

The macroeconomic environment we have described above is toxic to initiatives that aim to produce goods and services to first and foremost satisfy local needs. It implies an economy reduced to commercial revenue accumulated both through the export of manufactured goods produced in the free trade zones (notably the textile sector) and through the import of the majority of consumer goods. Under these conditions, the lack of financial profitability of social and solidarity-based production enterprises, and the lack of productivity of the revenue accumulated by savings and credit associations and cooperatives, can be largely explained by the macroeconomic context shaped by international agreements on trade liberalization, a budgetary austerity, and conducive to rentier capitalism, as part of the global capitalism increasingly dominated by accumulation through the control of scarce rent-generating assets rather than productive activities (Gillespie & Schindler, 2023). These partnerships are forcing Haiti into a spiral of illegitimate debt and reinforcing the country's dependence. In this context, the social and solidarity economy is not viable. In other words, international economic partnerships weigh against the building an alternative from below, if this alternative is not part of a clear agenda to redefine the framework of international economic cooperation.

So-called development programs in Haiti, such as the PSDH, aim to create a macroeconomic environment conducive to growth and poverty reduction, without regard for microeconomic experiences. As Nicolas Pons-Vignon argues with regard to certain African countries,

in the context of structural adjustment, strengthening the macroeconomic capacity of governments is often prioritized to the detriment of microeconomic policies, in order to guarantee compliance with repayment deadlines for loans contracted from international financial institutions. This vision of ‘development’ is contrary to the perspective of the ‘developmental state’, which implies, among other things, investment in sectorial microeconomic policies (Pons-Vignon, 2022). These considerations suggest that the Haitian government’s strategic development programs are a cheap import of a vision that is disconnected from the sectorial and territorial micro-initiatives put in place to bring about equitable socio-economic transformation.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the Haitian working classes, particularly those engaged in parcel-based peasant farming have developed a range of social and solidarity economy initiatives in the wake of the post-1986 struggles. These initiatives follow in the footsteps of peasant family farming and are inspired by mutualist practices dating back more than two centuries. They are part of a project for food sovereignty that has always come up against an externally focused economic model supported by the dominant classes. Preferencing this second economic model has led successive governments to engage in neoliberal integration of the Haitian economy into the global market. As a result, economic partnerships, operating within the framework of ‘international development cooperation’, have led to the degradation of peasant agriculture and other local production initiatives. This process has taken place within a framework of an international division of labour, in which cheap labour and natural resources coveted by multinationals are promoted as ‘assets’ for Haiti. Under these conditions, the viability of initiatives aimed at social change from below, notably based on the SSE model, are compromised by a deleterious macroeconomic environment.

Achieving the viability of solidarity-based economic initiatives driven by social and popular movements presupposes a redefinition of the framework for economic cooperation between Haiti and external ‘partners’. This implies the capacity for Haiti to choose partners worthy of the name. Social movements promoting the SSE model must therefore establish themselves as legitimate interlocutors capable of negotiating, on behalf of Haiti, economic integration based on the country’s sovereignty and an

equitable distribution of resources. This calls for an in-depth analysis of the changes underway in global economic relations and the characteristics of emerging blocs, in order to better explore the universe of international partners available to initiate a process of change—one based on Haiti’s economic and political sovereignty as well as on widespread access to social goods and services. This calls for a break with the neo-liberal integration of the Haitian economy into the global market, and for prospects of alternative regional integrations likely to foster a macroeconomic environment compatible with the sectoral and territorial micro-experiments carried out with a social and solidarity economy orientation.

Moreover, to establish themselves as legitimate interlocutors, SSE movements must have appropriate political levers at their disposal, and therefore must engage with the acquisition of state power. This can be envisaged through a socio-political alliance structured around the reclaiming of national sovereignty and of equitable access to social goods and services. This challenge can be met—not without difficulty, of course—if the social movements behind the SSE form a genuine sector with the appropriate organizational capacities to defend the sector’s strategic interests within the framework of a clearly defined political agenda.

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Neocolonialism Facilitated by the World Bank? A Case Study of the World Bank's Involvement in the Development of Guyana's Oil and Gas Sector

Jule Lümmen

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United States (US) oil company ExxonMobil discovered huge quantities of oil and gas off the coast of Guyana, a coastal country in the northern part of South America (ExxonMobil, n.d.-a). That same year, the Guyanese government allegedly reached out to the World Bank for assistance and advice in developing the oil fields (urgewald, 2020c, min. 14:00). Shortly after the oil discovery, the Guyanese government signed a contract with ExxonMobil and its coventurers, which granted the country only two percent of royalties and freed ExxonMobil from paying any taxes (Government of Guyana, 2016). Under these conditions, the World Bank provided two Technical Assistance loans of \$55 million to

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A. Ziai et al. (eds.), *Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7_5

Guyana between 2018 and 2019 aimed at developing new fiscal, regulatory, and legal frameworks for the oil and gas sector (World Bank, 2018, 2019b). While the World Bank claims its mission is to support the Guyanese government in managing its petroleum sector (World Bank, 2019b, p. 1), experts say the World Bank facilitated a continuation of history in favour of the fossil industry (Hintzen in urgewald, 2020c, min. 27:31): During centuries of colonialism, foreign powers extracted Guyana's resources and returned the profits to their home economies (see e.g. Reyner & Hope, 1967). Hence, whilst some praise the oil discoveries as an opportunity that will lead the country into a brighter future (see e.g. Panelli, 2019), others speak of a neocolonial environment in which profits are directed toward foreign investors (Hintzen in urgewald, 2020c, min. 27:31).

The term neocolonialism was marked by the former Ghanaian president and anticolonial activist Kwame Nkrumah. He defines neocolonialism as the last stage of imperialism, in which the economic and political system of an officially sovereign state is controlled from the outside by foreign powers (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). Drawing on Nkrumah's concept of neocolonialism, this chapter examines the World Bank's involvement in the development of Guyana's oil and gas sector to determine whether and to what extent the World Bank facilitated neocolonial structures in Guyana.

For this purpose, Nkrumah's theory and its core assumptions will first be explained. Subsequently, an introduction to the creation and structure of the World Bank will be provided, followed by a summary of its development model and most common criticism. Then, an overview of the colonial past, the economic and political situation as well as the ecosystem of Guyana will follow. Afterward, the development and implications of Guyana's oil and gas sector will be explained. Based on original documents provided by the World Bank and the Guyanese Government, secondary literature as well as NGO and media reports, the role of the World Bank will be discussed in light of the concept of neocolonialism. A summary of the findings and their implications for the evaluation of the role of the World Bank will conclude this chapter.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: NEOCOLONIALISM

The concept of neocolonialism can be ascribed to Kwame Nkrumah, a leader of the anticolonial movement and the first President of Ghana after its independence. In the following, the concept will be presented, with a particular focus on the actors, strategies, and consequences of neocolonialism. Nkrumah (1965) defines neocolonialism, which has largely replaced colonialism, as the last and most dangerous stage of imperialism (p. 4). For him, the core element of neocolonialism is that despite a state having gained independence and sovereignty in theory, “[i]n reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). While such external control can be achieved via military force, it is primarily exercised through economic and financial mechanisms. Such strategies to impose neocolonial structures include the imposition of monopolistic trade agreements and import regulations, forcing the state to procure goods from the imperial power over those from other countries (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). Moreover, the dominance of governmental politics can be exerted through financial contributions to the state’s operations, placement of civil servants in influential positions to shape policies, and financial control over foreign exchange rates facilitated by a banking system under the imperial power’s jurisdiction. While the actors of such neocolonial control can be the former colonial powers, Nkrumah also points to new imperial powers, especially the US, as well as non-state actors, including foreign financial interests and international corporations (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4).

In this regard, he specifically stresses the role of foreign governments as aid donors (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 8). Aid is not seen as an altruistic donation by foreign governments aimed at a true amelioration of people’s living standards. Rather, the author perceives it as a concealed means of ensuring compliance of specific African elites as well as facilitating corporate economic penetration that harms African populations and ultimately undermines government sovereignty (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 8; Langan, 2018, p. 5). Consequently, aid is merely a revolving credit that passes through the neocolonial state’s economy, but ultimately results in increased profits for the neocolonial master (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 8). Additionally, Nkrumah (1965) highlighted the role of foreign enterprises as neocolonial actors (p. 15). He criticised foreign corporations exploiting Africa’s vast natural resources and labour power, without

creating revenues for the local country, adequate jobs, or industrialisation (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 13ff; Langan, 2018, p. 6). Particularly, he highlighted how specific foreign corporations funded alternative political leaders if they were unable to influence the politics of those currently in power (Langan, 2018, p. 6).

Nkrumah (1965) sees the consequences of neocolonialism in the use of foreign capital to exploit the ‘less developed’ regions of the world, which results in an increasing division between rich and poor countries, instead of the development of such regions (p. 4). Interestingly, however, he emphasises that “[t]he struggle against neo-colonialism is not aimed at excluding the capital of the developed world from operating in less developed countries [but] at preventing the financial power of the developed countries being used in such a way as to impoverish the less developed” (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 5). For him, non-alignment involves cooperation with all countries regardless of their economic model, including foreign capitalist investment. The differentiating factor is that the non-aligned government must invest such money according to its own will and in the interests of its people (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 5). African elites who did not follow this paradigm but instead engaged in neocolonial relations with foreign benefactors are seen as governing on their behalf and thus betraying the economic interests of their own people (Langan, 2018, p. 4). Langan (2018) argues that Nkrumah’s analysis “clearly invoked a two-way *relationship* between the external and the internal forces at play in the perpetuation of neo-colonial systems” [emphasis in the original] (p. 6). Hence, he did not only focus on how foreign corporations and donors wield power from the top down but instead acknowledged the active and conscious involvement of specific African elites to engage with external forces to uphold favorable power dynamics (Langan, 2018, p. 6f). While Nkrumah (1965) does take into account the role of certain elites, he sidelines class issues within Africa by considering the class struggle to be exclusively global between poor and rich nations, but not within their borders (p. 10).

For Nkrumah (1965), it is clear that “[t]he less developed world will not become developed through the goodwill or generosity of the developed powers [but] can only become developed through a struggle against the external forces which have a vested interest in keeping it undeveloped” (p. 12). Neocolonialism is seen as the principal component of such forces. Nkrumah hence demands an in-depth analysis of its historic origins, the instruments that are used to undermine the ability of governance of

African states, and how it keeps states artificially poor and thus ensures its own continuation (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 12). Although his theory is based on the experience of African nations, the author stresses that neocolonialism is not exclusively concerning Africa but has been established in other parts of the world (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 9).

While some scholars regard the concept of neocolonialism as outdated within the fields of International Relations (IR) and Development Studies, others argue that its insights are still valid in various respects almost 60 years later (Langan, 2018, p. 1f; Ziai, 2020, p. 137). Despite a relative scarcity of scholarly theoretical engagement with neocolonialism (Ziai, 2020, p. 129), some work on the timeliness and relevance of the concept can be found. For Langan (2018), a modern application of neocolonialism must close analytical gaps and include an examination of ideational in addition to material aspects concerning donor and corporate power (p. 2). He specifically points to the importance of examining the ‘development’ discourse and how it is used to legitimise interventions in the internal affairs of countries by foreign actors in the name of ‘progress’ (Langan, 2018, p. 2). In his analysis of neocolonialism in today’s globalised economy, Ziai (2020) concludes that, although it still holds true for certain aspects of policymaking, the general assertion that aid is neocolonialism appears to be less credible nowadays than in the past (p. 137). He further finds a diversification of both perpetrators and victims of neocolonialism in the twenty-first century, who do not necessarily correspond to former colonisers and the colonised. Moreover, in some instances of foreign political control, stereotypes deriving from colonial rhetoric are still used to legitimise non-democratic interventions or exclusions (Ziai, 2020, p. 137).

Hence, a modern reading of Nkrumah’s theory of neocolonialism is still relevant and insightful for the analysis of (development) interventions by external elements and actors, including both donors and corporations. Yet, contemporary perspectives should also be cautious to not neglect new emerging actors and circumstances that might not align with Nkrumah’s understanding of neocolonialism (Langan, 2018, p. 4; Ziai, 2020, p. 137f).

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD BANK

Creation and Structure

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), now known as the World Bank, was founded alongside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during the Second World War in 1944 (Peet, 2005, p. 27). Led by the US and the United Kingdom (UK), 44 nations came together at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire to discuss international economic cooperation regulated by global institutions to ensure world peace and prosperity in the post-war era (Ibid, p. 27). Upon its creation, the IBRD's role was the post-war reconstruction of Europe, but soon after the initiation of the Marshall Plan, it shifted its focus to the Global South¹ (Peet, 2005, p. 111; Ziai, 2015, p. 126). In this context, it served as a demonstration of the US commitment to support 'less developed' nations in their journey towards 'development' (Ziai, 2015, p. 126). Since the 1960s, the IBRD has been joined by the International Development Agency (IDA). Together, the IBRD and IDA are referred to as the World Bank (World Bank, 2024a) and will be the primary focus of this paper. The IBRD gives out development loans and guarantees to 'creditworthy' countries at market-oriented interest rates (World Bank, 2024c). It finances investments across various sectors, offers knowledge and advisory services to governments, and provides technical support at each project stage (World Bank, 2024c). The IDA provides interest-free loans and grants to governments of the poorest countries that are not deemed 'creditworthy' on the international market (World Bank, 2024a). The World Bank Group comprises three more institutions. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) focuses exclusively on financing the private sector, and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) promotes foreign direct investments in so-called 'developing' countries. The International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) provides facilities for conciliation of investment disputes (World Bank, 2024a).

While the World Bank has 189 member countries and local offices in more than 170 countries, its headquarters are based in Washington D.C. and the president is traditionally always a US citizen (Wade, 2002, p. 217;

¹ The term Global South is employed here in a geopolitical manner, to emphasize the unequal political and economic power relations between nations. Despite its problematic aspects and weaknesses that are discussed within academic debates (see e.g. Basu 2016; Weiss 2009), it is used throughout this chapter due to a lack of alternatives.

World Bank, 2024f). The Bank is governed by the Board of Directors which consists of 25 representatives (World Bank, 2023). In this regard, it is important to emphasise that the voting rights on the board are not democratic but weighted according to the capital shares of the countries (Ziai, 2020, p. 131). Hence, not every country has one vote, but wealthy nations that pay more money have more voting rights. In the case of the IBRD, the collective voting power of the three executive directors from Germany, France, and Great Britain is more than double that of the five representatives of over 50 African states combined (World Bank, 2024b; Ziai, 2020, p. 131). However, most decisions are taken by consensus and not enforced upon a minority from the Global South (Ziai, 2020, p. 131).

Criticism of the World Bank's Development Model

The World Bank can be seen as the “most important development institution in the world” (Peet, 2005, p. 111). Its huge lending commitments, which amounted to 70.8 billion US \$ in 2023 alone (World Bank, n.d.), and its influence on the economic policies of recipient countries certainly demonstrate this (Peet, 2005, p. 111). The Bank’s intellectual leadership and its political power in defining development further underscore its powerful position (George & Sabelli, 1996, p. 4; K. Marshall, 2008, p. 72). The World Bank’s vision is “to create a world free of poverty on a livable planet” (World Bank, 2024f). Yet, for years there has been sharp criticism about the World Bank not living up to its promise, causing more harm than good (see e.g. Danaher, 1994).

From the late 80s onwards the World Bank came under increasing criticism from civil society and scholars for their structural adjustment loans (SALs), which former World Bank President Robert McNamara introduced in the wake of the second oil shock in 1980 to mitigate the debt crisis (Easterly, 2005, p. 1f; Ziai, 2020, p. 131). According to Easterly (2005), “[t]he dual rationale from the SALs from the beginning was to maintain growth and to facilitate balance of payments adjustment” (p. 2). The World Bank argued that high rates of return from investments and thus the repayment of debt were virtually impossible in a bad policy environment (Peet, 2005, p. 132). Hence, SALs provided finance over several years to specific countries in return for neoliberal economic policy reforms (Easterly, 2005, p. 2). More specifically, the conditions linked to the loans

included trade liberalisation and market opening, deregulation, privatisation, export orientation, and cuts in public spending (Ziai, 2020, p. 131; see also SAPRIN, 2002).

In the eyes of their critics, SALs led to the marginalisation of local populations, further impoverishment, and increasing inequality (e.g. SAPRIN, 2002, p. 173). Even though SALs have been replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) since 1999, which are created in cooperation with recipient countries' governments and local civil society, little seems to have changed (Ziai, 2020, p. 132). A study concludes that public participation and government ownership leave room for improvement, and that the economic framework is still imposed by the World Bank (A. Marshall et al., 2001, p. 23). According to Peet (2005), the range of conditions tied to World Bank loans expanded to encompass social sector reforms and governance as components of their poverty alleviation strategy, which facilitated a deeper intrusion in domestic policies, particularly in African nations (p. 141). As it is exercising control over a country's economy, which is the central feature of neocolonialism according to Nkrumah, some scholars argue that the World Bank's actions can be considered neocolonialist in some cases (see Ziai, 2020).

Yet, the World Bank not only exercises power through the policy conditionality of their loans but also through traditional investment and project lending in both physical and social infrastructure (Peet, 2005, p. 134). The ultimate aim to alleviate poverty is to be achieved through facilitating productivity, economic growth, and private sector development (Peet, 2005, p. 134). Especially for the financing of large infrastructure projects, such as roads, dams, and power plants, the World Bank receives massive criticism from environmental movements, NGOs, and academics arguing they result in the destruction of people's livelihood as well as the environment and foster conflict (Peet, 2005, p. 135; see also Rich, 1994). According to George and Sabelli (1996), "[World] Bank projects have been known to dislocate entire communities, displace thousands of people, destroy forests, turn grasslands to desert or concentrate land and wealth in the hands of a few rich farmers or entrepreneurs – all in the name of development" (p. 2). This criticism, albeit 30 years old, is still repeated by environmental and human rights organisations today (see e.g. urgewald, 2018, 2021). Hence, through the World Bank's "hegemony in defining development and correct policy" (George & Sabelli, 1996, p. 4), the negative consequences of projects are still "legitimized and justified

in the name of the greater good which shall come to pass at some future time” (Ibid, p. 5).

OVERVIEW OF GUYANA

Guyana is a sparsely populated coastal country in northern South America with 800,000 inhabitants and long belonged to the poorest nations on the continent (World Bank, 2024c). In the north of the country, a 459-kilometer-long coastline stretches along the Atlantic Ocean. To the west, the country borders Venezuela, to the south and south-west Brazil, and to the east, it borders Suriname (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 107). In the following, an overview of the country’s colonial history, its ongoing influence on the political economy, and the country’s ecosystem will be provided.

Colonial History

The name Guyana means “land of many waters” in the language of the Warrau, an indigenous tribe that belongs to the first inhabitants of the region alongside the Arawak and Carib peoples (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 108). For centuries, Guyana was controlled by changing foreign powers who continuously exploited its natural wealth, taking its resources and reaping the benefits for their home countries (Juhasz, 2022). While Columbus sighted the Guyanese coast in 1498 and the Spanish subsequently claimed the land as their territory a few years later, they showed little interest in the region due to its marshy coast and the apparent lack of readily available resources (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 108f). The first European settlers were the Dutch, who arrived in 1581 and soon after brought enslaved Africans who were forced to work on sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations for the Dutch market (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 109; see also Hoonhout, 2020). Until the early eighteenth century, the Dutch were challenged first by attacks from both Spanish settlers as well as indigenous people resisting the colonisation of their lands, and later also by the French and British who competed for control in the region (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 109ff). This ended in 1796 when Britain seized the Dutch colonies of Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice, which became lucrative colonies for the empire (Juhasz, 2022; Reyner & Hope,

1967, p. 109). In 1831, the territory was then consolidated and declared as the colony of British Guiana (Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 110).

Three years later, the abolition of slavery came into force (Khemraj, 2015, p. 161). In order to sustain the colonial economy, predominantly reliant on slave labour in sugar cane plantations, British landowners brought large numbers of Indian indentured servants to Guyana to work in sugar production (Bassett & Scruggs, 2013, p. 20). The migration pattern resulted in a demographic composition where approximately half of the population is of Indian descent, and slightly less than the other half is of African descent, a division that strongly influences party politics until today (Bassett & Scruggs, 2013, p. 20; Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735). During the twentieth century, US extractive companies arrived in Guyana to mine for bauxite, gold, and later also oil (Juhasz, 2022; McDonald & Üngör, 2021, p. 3).

Political Economy and Ethnic Conflicts

Guyana's colonial past continues to shape its contemporary political economy and ethnic rivalries (Khemraj, 2015, p. 151; Reynolds, 2024, p. 119f). The latter consolidated in the decade leading up to the independence, when a power struggle developed between the ethnic groups.

In 1950, the Indo-Guyanese politician Cheddi Jagan founded the People's Progressive Party (PPP), which won the first elections in 1953 (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735). The new prime minister's plan to unionise labour alarmed European plantation owners and American interests in the region. They labelled him as a dangerous communist, which led to a dismissal of the party and constitution by the British governor and the dispatching of troops a few months after the election (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735; Spinner, 2021, p. 45). The PPP split along ethnic lines, with Jagan leading the Indo-Guyanese element and James Burnham the predominantly Afro-Guyanese People's National Congress (PNC) (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735). It took four years until the constitution was restored and elections took place again in 1957, which brought the PPP back to power (Spinner, 2021, p. 67f). This changed in 1964, when the British, who wanted to see Burnham in power, changed the constitution to ensure proportional representation, which allowed the PNC to gain the majority in coalition with the small catholic party The United Force (TUF) (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735; Spinner, 2021, p. 99). In 1966, Guyana gained

independence (Calvocoressi, 2009, p. 735). When power changed hands again in 1992 and a 23-year ruling period of the PPP began, many Afro-Guyanese lost their positions in the state apparatus as well as the private sector to the Indo-Guyanese majority and felt that the hierarchical structure from the colonial era was restored (Brühwiller, 2016).

To this day, the tension and politics of division between the two largest population groups have persisted, as has the conflict between the PPP and the PNC that represent them (Brühwiller, 2016; Reynolds, 2024, p. 119f). It was only in 2015, that the multiracial opposition coalition led by the successor party of the PNC won the election and ended the PPP's hegemony (Constantine, 2017, p. 89). Shortly after the election, US oil major ExxonMobil announced the discovery of vast oil and gas resources off the coast of Guyana, which intensified political tensions even further (ExxonMobil, 2015). Three years later, in December 2018, the government led by President David Granger received a parliamentary vote of no confidence, due to accusations of mismanaging the country's oil resources by giving ExxonMobil overly beneficial contract terms (Marks, 2019). The Granger government tried to challenge the no-confidence vote but was rejected by the Caribbean Court of Justice in June 2019, which declared it as valid, leading to a call for new elections in September 2019 (Álvarez & Matera, 2020). However, despite this ruling, the government delayed the election date to March 2, 2020, causing vehement criticism from opposition leaders and members of the international community (Álvarez & Matera, 2020). Although Granger declared himself the winner of this election, evidence of irregularities led to a recount that favoured his opponent Irfaan Ali from the PPP, and subsequent court rulings and international pressure compelled the Granger administration to resign (Freedom House, 2021). In August 2020, Ali was sworn in as president (Freedom House, 2021).

Economically, Guyana has long belonged to the poorest South American countries (World Bank, 2024e). During the 1970s and 1980s, the country accumulated substantial foreign debt it was unable to service and subsequently entered the IMF's Enhanced Initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) (McDonald & Üngör, 2021, p. 2). Ever since, the country experienced rather slow economic growth, which changed significantly after the start of oil production (Ibid, p. 3). In 2022, Guyana's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 62% compared to the previous year (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024, p. 3). Even though its growth rate has now declined to 26%, it still has the second-highest GDP

growth worldwide (International Monetary Fund, 2024). While agriculture has long played a pivotal role in the Guyanese economy, oil and gas exports are now its main driver (McDonald & Üngör, 2021, p. 3; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024, p. 9f). In 2022, the volume of exported goods more than doubled and consisted mainly of mineral oil and fossil fuels, accounting for 87% of all exports (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024, p. 10). Receiving 42% of the country's exports, the US is the largest importer of Guyanese goods (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024, p. 10).

Ecosystem and the Threat of Climate Change

With a landmass of approximately 215,000 km², Guyana is small but rich in nature and biodiversity (Bassett & Scruggs, 2013, p. 2020). About 85% of the country's total area is covered by original tropical forests with one of the lowest deforestation rates globally (Bynoe et al., 2024, pp. 4 & 37). Guyana's pristine, unique ecosystem is not only home to an abundance of endemic species, but also functions as a carbon sink (Bynoe, 2024, p. 245; *urgewald*, 2020c, min. 10:12).

As a result of Guyana's geography and the large area covered by forest, almost 90% of the population resides on a small strip of land along the vulnerable coast (Bassett & Scruggs, 2013, p. 20; Bynoe et al., 2024, p. 4). The coastal plain stretches between 26 and 77 kilometres inland and is on average situated two meters below sea level (Bassett & Scruggs, 2013, p. 21f). In Guyana, sea levels are rising at a rate surpassing 10 mm annually, which is significantly higher than the global average of 2 to 4 mm per year (Velasco, 2014, p. ix). This rapid sea level rise poses a threat not only to coastal infrastructure and people in urban areas but also to agriculture, freshwater supplies, and natural ecosystems like mangroves (USAID, 2021, p. 3). According to a comparative study conducted by the World Bank on the impact of a one-meter sea level rise in Latin America and the Caribbean, Guyana would experience the greatest impact in terms of urban areas, the second-highest impact in terms of population, and the third-highest impact in terms of GDP percentage (Dasgupta et al., 2007, p. 12ff). Climate experts further predict that the entire country will increasingly experience extreme climate events such as floods and storms (Bynoe, 2024, p. 246).

THE GUYANESE OIL AND GAS SECTOR

Exploration, Development, and Production

In 2008, the US oil major ExxonMobil began its exploration campaign for oil and gas in Guyanese waters (ExxonMobil, n.d.-a). This endeavour resulted in a significant discovery of light crude oil in the so-called Stabroek Block, located 193 km off the coast of Guyana (Bynoe et al., 2024, p. 7). Since the first offshore oil find in the area, named Liza Phase 1 was announced in May 2015, there have been over 30 more discoveries (Bynoe et al., 2024, p. 7; ExxonMobil, n.d.-a). Combined, the 26,800 km² large Stabroek Block is estimated to hold over 11 billion barrels of oil, making Guyana the South American country with the third largest oil reserves. According to research done by the German environmental NGO *urgewald*, the resources in the seabed across all blocks operated by ExxonMobil even amount to 13.6 billion barrels of oil and 960 billion cubic meters of natural gas (*urgewald*, 2020b, p. 1). Even if only half of the oil and gas reserves were burned, the resulting emissions could exceed one billion tons of CO₂ (*urgewald*, 2020b, p. 1). Most of the reserves lie over 3000 meters below the seabed, in an ocean up to 2000 metres deep (ExxonMobil n.d.-a). Such ultra-deep drilling is extremely dangerous and has led to oil spills resulting in dire environmental catastrophes in the past (*urgewald*, 2020c, min 30:57).

In December 2019, the production of the first oil field in the Stabroek Block began (ExxonMobil, n.d.-b). The Stabroek Block is operated by ExxonMobil and owned by a consortium of companies, with ExxonMobil holding the biggest share of 45%, and its co-venturers Hess Guyana Exploration Limited (Hess) holding 30%, and CNOOC Petroleum Guyana Limited (CNOOC) holding 25% interest (Bynoe et al., 2024, p. 7). As of 2024, four approved offshore projects will reach production levels of 0.85 million barrels per day by 2025, namely Liza Phase 1, Liza Phase 2, Payara, and Yellowtail, while the latter two are currently under development (ExxonMobil n.d.-b). ExxonMobil has further announced that by 2027, a minimum of 6 offshore projects will be operational, potentially increasing to ten projects in the Stabroek Block (ExxonMobil n.d.-b). Hence, the production capacity is constantly rising, and the construction of more infrastructure is planned, including pipelines, Floating Production Storage and Offloading Unit (FPSO) vessels, gas processing plants, and a refinery (Bynoe et al., 2024, p. 9). However, oil prices and thus revenues have been unstable over the past years. Oil from

Guyana is trading at Brent oil prices, which have been volatile, with a high of \$126/bbl in 2012 to a low of \$9/bbl in 2020 due to the pandemic as well as an oil price war between Russia and Saudi Arabia (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 7). Even though current oil prices of \$85/bbl exceed forecasts, the number of future profits remains uncertain (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 7; Trading Economics, 2024).

Petroleum Agreement

The terms of oil production and profit sharing are set out in a Petroleum Agreement signed in 2016 by the Guyanese government with a consortium of the three oil and gas companies ExxonMobil, CNOOC, and Hess, whereby ExxonMobil holds the majority of shares and is charged with the daily operation of the oil block as its operator (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. i; Sanzillo, 2020, p. 5). The contract outlines the terms and conditions of a production-sharing arrangement, which specifies the procedures for oil extraction, cost calculation, and the distribution of profits among involved parties (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 5). The first noteworthy provision of the contract concerns the share of revenue and profit. According to the contract, Guyana receives a 2% royalty on gross revenues (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. 39). The contract further states that so-called profit oil, which can be defined as “the amount left over after the oil is extracted and sold, and recoverable contract costs have been satisfied” (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 5),² will be shared 50–50 between Guyana and the consortium (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. 26). However, Guyana is obligated to pay the recoverable costs, including all development costs of the oil fields, interest, operating and parent company expenses, as well as projected costs of future abandonment of the oil fields (Government of Guyana, 2016 p. 26; Sanzillo, 2020, p. 6). Since the development costs alone amount to \$33 billion over the first five years of the project, repaying the recoverable costs reduces the amount of cash Guyana receives and postpones its capacity to fully benefit from the anticipated annual revenue (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 6). According to a study by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), Guyana will only receive 14.5% of gross revenue until all development costs are satisfied (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 9). The second provision of interest for this

² Price of Oil x Production Volume (barrels of oil) = Gross Revenue – Recoverable Costs = Profit Oil (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 6).

analysis mandates that Guyana pays the income taxes that the consortium owes to the government (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. 38). Hence, while the consortium is freed from any tax liability it would normally owe to Guyana by law, the Guyanese government foregoes a \$1.7 billion payment from the contractor until 2027 (Sanzillo, 2022, p. 2). The last provision that will be highlighted here prohibits Guyana from amending, modifying, or renegotiating the contract without consent from the consortium (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. 68). In the event that any government action, for example an amendment of environmental laws, reduces the financial gains of the consortium, Guyana is obligated to compensate the companies (Government of Guyana, 2016, p. 68).

ANALYSIS: NEOCOLONIAL INTERVENTION BY THE WORLD BANK?

Applying Nkrumah's concept of neocolonialism, this chapter examines the World Bank's involvement in the development of Guyana's oil and gas sector to determine whether and to what extent the World Bank facilitated neocolonial structures within the country. Who profits most from the World Bank's intervention and what are the consequences for the South American nation? In the following, the context, nature, and outcomes of the World Bank's involvement will be presented and discussed in light of the theory of neocolonialism, with a particular focus on the actors, strategies, and consequences. For this purpose, relevant reports of the World Bank, the Guyanese government, secondary literature as well as NGO and media publications have been analysed.

Following the previous definition of neocolonialism, the World Bank as a major development financier who is politically and economically influenced by the US classifies as a potential neocolonial actor (see Wade, 2002). So does ExxonMobil as a large US company, which is not the focus of this analysis but nevertheless plays a central role.

For long, the World Bank has shown little interest in Guyana, providing limited public assistance of about \$70 million between 2005 and 2015 (urgewald, 2020b, p. 2; World Bank, 2024d). This changed when the US oil company ExxonMobil announced the discovery of vast oil and gas reserves off the Guyanese coast in 2015 (ExxonMobil, n.d.-a). Officially, the World Bank's involvement in Guyana's oil sector only became known in 2017, when the Guyanese government announced the World Bank's financial support for its Oil and Gas Development Program

(urgewald, 2020b, p. 2). Through this indirect financing, the World Bank is circumventing its pledge to no longer finance upstream oil and gas production from 2019 onwards amid the increasing threat posed by climate change (Elliott, 2017).

Although the World Bank has thus no direct connection to the creation of the above-mentioned Petroleum Agreement, the contract is still relevant for this analysis because it sets the basis for the oil and gas production and the allocation of profits, which shows parallels to the theory of neocolonialism. As described in the previous chapter, the contract grants the foreign oil companies substantial benefits at the expense of Guyana's profits. When the contract was finally published by the government after being withheld for months, experts and the public were shocked by the conditions (urgewald, 2020c, min. 6:40). According to media reports, even the IMF considered the terms highly favourable for ExxonMobil and thus unfair, advising the country to negotiate better terms in the future (see e.g. Buchter, 2024, p. 3; Scully, 2018). Yet, it must be acknowledged that the Guyanese government agreed to ExxonMobil's terms and ultimately signed the contract. Since the negotiations were conducted confidentially, there is limited information regarding the power (im)balance and the government's negotiating position. However, according to Anand Goolsarran, a former Auditor General of the Guyanese government, the government acted hastily and ignored the advice of experts in signing the contract, which led to a very poor and one-sided deal, possibly with the lowest royalties in the world (urgewald, 2020c, min. 07:25). Without a doubt, the terms of the contract are very advantageous to the multi-billion-dollar US corporation in comparison to Guyana. However, one must acknowledge the government's agency and should treat the accusation of an exclusively top-down imposition of conditions with caution.

Knowing how detrimental the contract conditions are for Guyana and how advantageous for the consortium led by ExxonMobil, the World Bank decided to support the expansion of the oil and gas sector with two IDA loans of \$55 million in total. Experts see the reason for the quick and extensive project support in the US government's interests in ExxonMobil's economic success. According to Hintzen (urgewald, 2020c, min. 23:35), a postcolonial sociologist researching oil extraction in Guyana, ExxonMobil has long been an economically and politically powerful institution that has a lot of influence over US policy (see also Coll, 2012). He assumes the US has used its powerful position on the Board of the World

Bank in favour of the project (urgewald, 2020c, min. 23:35). The idea of US hegemony at the World Bank is also supported by Wade (2002), who argues that the US has both substantial and procedural control over the institution. In providing financial assistance, the World Bank supported a drastic intervention in Guyana's economy with far-reaching consequences for the country.

The World Bank's official support for the development of the oil and gas sector began in June 2018, when it provided \$35 million in general budget support, followed by \$20 million in March 2019 for the Petroleum Resource Governance and Management Project (urgewald, 2020b, p. 2; World Bank, 2018, 2019b). The first IDA loan in 2018 was part of a Programmatic Development Policy Credit (PDPC) series and focused more generally on reforms in both the financial sector and fiscal management, but already included the management of the oil and gas sector (World Bank, 2018, p. 3). The second Technical Assistance loan provided by IDA in 2019 was more specific with the objective to "support the enhancement of legal and institutional frameworks and the strengthening of the capacity of key institutions to manage the oil and gas sector in Guyana" (World Bank, 2019b, p. 14). In the context of this analysis, two of the project components are of interest, the first one being the enhancement of fiscal management. Among others, this includes the support of investments in the oil and gas sector (World Bank, 2019b, p. 18).

The focus on adjusting financial policy and additional foreign investment restructures the country's economy according to the aforementioned neoliberal development model of the World Bank. According to one of the activists campaigning against the project, "the World Bank says they only advise, [...] but they don't say whether Guyana has a choice" (urgewald, 2020c, min. 09:12). Such a financial contribution along with the adjustment of the country's fiscal policy can serve as a strategy for establishing neocolonial structures (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). While Nkrumah focuses his attention on foreign countries as aid donors, parallels can be drawn to the World Bank as an institution providing development loans in this case. Although Guyana receives the money, other parties ultimately profit more from it than the country itself, as described by Nkrumah as an element of neocolonialism (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 8). Even though in this case, the profits are not directly returning to the World Bank itself, but mainly to the consortium led by Exxon-Mobil. One has to emphasise though that this would have most likely

happened in the case of financing by another institution. Yet, as previously argued, a high profit margin for ExxonMobil might be in the interest of the World Bank due to the influence of the US. However, such an equation is somewhat simplifying and portrays the World Bank and the US as homogenous actors with identical interests. The claim of such a connection therefore requires closer examination, which would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

The second and most relevant component of the loan is the improvement of legal frameworks and stakeholder engagement (World Bank, 2019b, p. 15). In its governance review of Guyana's oil and gas sector, the World Bank claimed that "the legal and regulatory frameworks in Guyana are underdeveloped and in some cases outdated" (World Bank, 2019b, p. 11). Melinda Janki, a Guyanese lawyer and activist who has been campaigning against the oil extraction since the discovery, has been actively involved in drafting Guyana's environmental guidelines (Juhasz, 2022). According to her, "the World Bank has a project to remove some of that environmental protection. They claim that this act is outdated and too complex. I think what the World Bank means is that we have set very high standards for anybody who wants to do oil production, particularly on a planet that is in a climate crisis" (urgewald, 2020c, min. 15:05). New laws and regulations that pertain to the petroleum sector are thus one of the pillars of the Technical Assistance project. In its procurement plan, the World Bank allocates \$2.2 million to hire a consultancy to draft those new laws (World Bank, 2019a, p. 1). Research by urgewald reveals that the law firm that was chosen is Hunton Andrews Kurth, which has been the go-to law firm of ExxonMobil for 40 years (urgewald, 2020a, p. 1; see also Jolly, 2020). According to the website of the Houston-based law firm, it has a "deep appreciation of the unique pressures facing clients in the oil, gas and LNG sectors" and is experienced in "transactions involving exploration, production, development and transportation" of oil and gas (Hunton Andrews Kurth, 2024).

Here, two crucial issues arise: Firstly, the World Bank contradicts its own intention to establish good governance by creating a conflict of interest that violates the basic principles of good governance (urgewald, 2020a). Secondly, and even more important considering the theory of neocolonialism, the hiring of the law firm that has worked for ExxonMobil for decades suggests that the new laws might be designed in favour of the US oil company, rather than being formulated in the best interest of Guyana. The shaping of politics for the benefit of an external actor

is another instrument of neocolonialism (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4) and represents a profound intrusion into the political economy of the country in the interest of ExxonMobil.

As of August 2023, the Petroleum Act of 1986 has been replaced by the Petroleum Activities Act as the country's main oil and gas regulation (Reynolds, 2024, p. 122; see also Ministry of Natural Resources, 2023). According to the new law, Natural Resources Minister Vickram Bharrat will oversee all oil and gas operations, including granting exploration, production, and environmental licenses, whether obtained through direct negotiations or official competitive tenders (Wilburg, 2023). The minister will also be responsible for enforcing the law and imposing fines for regulatory violations (Wilburg, 2023). While these new regulations will apply only to future projects and thus not affect existing agreements between ExxonMobil and the Guyanese government, the Petroleum Activities Act introduces new conditions that will benefit the US oil major. The act covers areas not addressed by previous legislation, such as the transportation and storage of hydrocarbons from offshore to onshore (Wilburg, 2023). Under the new law, the government can issue permits to ExxonMobil for transporting gas from the Stabroek Block via pipeline and storing it onshore, which was impossible under the old law (OilNOW, 2023).

The opposition sharply criticises the law for granting the minister extensive authority over the oil and gas sector, thereby bypassing democratic processes (Stabroek News, 2023; Wilburg, 2023). Additionally, the law fails to establish an Independent Petroleum Commission to oversee oil and gas management, a measure that opposition parties have been advocating for years (Stabroek News, 2023; Wilburg, 2023). The bill will be supplemented by several smaller laws in the coming months (Reynolds, 2024, p. 123). While the World Bank was involved in drafting earlier versions of the bill in 2018 (Reynolds, 2024, p. 123), it is undisclosed whether, and to what extent, the law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth was involved in drafting the final version of the Petroleum Activities Act or in how far it will influence future regulations.

Another factor pointing towards a neocolonial intervention by the World Bank is both the timing and political circumstances of their lending. When the World Bank approved the Technical Assistance loan in March 2019, the Guyanese government had already received a vote of no confidence as of December 2018 (Marks, 2019). While the World Bank was aware of the situation and even cancelled the planned second

tranche of the PDPC “due to the difficult political context, that resulted in the absence of a fully-functioning Government” (World Bank, 2021, p. 2), this did not stop it from proceeding with its petroleum management project. According to Janki, “the World Bank acted illegitimately, and possibly illegally, by moving ahead with a finance ministry, for which there was no official minister of finance, because of the no-confidence vote” (urgewald, 2020c, min. 09:00). Thus, although the World Bank was aware that the government had been voted out of office because it was not trusted to manage the petroleum sector in the best interest of Guyana, it still supported it with a loan. Such financial support of political elites who are aligned with foreign actors is yet another instrument for establishing neocolonial structures (see Langan, 2018, p. 6). This interference in politics by the World Bank undermines the sovereignty of the state and can thus be considered a clear indicator of a neocolonialist intervention.

Through its support to the interim government, the World Bank enabled ExxonMobil to start oil production three months earlier than planned and before a new government could be elected (urgewald, 2020b, p. 2). This was not only a record time for the development of an oil field, but also very convenient for ExxonMobil (urgewald, 2020c, min. 21:50). The oil and gas companies’ exploitation of Guyana’s resources while claiming a majority of profits for themselves represents a central element of neocolonialism (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 13ff) and seems to be a repetition of Guyana’s history. According to Hintzen, “everything in Guyana is rooted in its colonial history and its colonial history has been rooted in the extraction of its resources” (urgewald, 2020c, min. 27:04). It is not the first time that Guyana has provided one of the most requested primary goods in the world: For centuries, it was one of the major producers of sugar, bauxite, and timber. Yet, the country never benefitted from its resource wealth (urgewald 2020c, min. 27:20). During colonialism, revenues and surpluses were transferred to the colonial masters, namely the Netherlands and Great Britain (urgewald, 2020c, min. 27:30; see also Reyner & Hope, 1967, p. 109). Nowadays, Hintzen speaks of a neocolonial environment, in which profits are directed to foreign investors instead of the Guyanese people (urgewald, 2020c, min. 27:45).

The World Bank’s support of ExxonMobil seems even more plausible considering the dire financial situation of the company before the oil discovery in 2015 (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 2). Once the leader of the world economy, the oil company was expelled from the Dow Jones in 2020

after a 92-year membership due to its significant losses (Stevens, 2020). According to IEEFA, a number of the company's recent oil investment initiatives have fallen short of profit projections, while some others have simply failed (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 2). The discovery and quick development of the oil fields was thus a much-needed success for the company, which was unable to attain financial support prior to its activities in Guyana (see Hintzen in urgewald, 2020c, min. 20:45). Moreover, the oil sector in general is declining (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 11). This dynamic, in which neocolonial actors are dependent on the extraction of resources in neocolonial states to generate their wealth and use it to mitigate their domestic problems has also been described by Nkrumah, although he has been referring to states as central actors (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 6).

While at first sight, it seems that Guyana profits from the exploitation of its natural resources, a closer look reveals the detrimental consequences for the country. Due to the contract conditions and the one-sided sharing agreement, according to which Guyana currently receives 14.5% while the oil companies led by ExxonMobil receive 85.5%, the revenues from Guyana's newly discovered oil reserves will be insufficient to build sustainable wealth, support new spending, cover the country's deficits and pay for the development costs of the oil fields (Sanzillo, 2022, p. 1 & 5). Even though the country's GDP has increased by 62%, total public debt has augmented by 166.9% since the start of commercial production in 2019 until the end of 2023 and is likely to grow further over the next years (Minister of Public Works, 2020, p. 19, 2024, p. 21; Sanzillo, 2022, p. 2; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2024, p. 3). After the first year of production alone, the country had to borrow \$420 million to cover outstanding costs (Sanzillo, 2022, p. 2). Moreover, given the structure of the contract, IEEFA estimates that by 2027, Guyana will bear a hidden liability of over \$34 billion owed to the oil companies (Sanzillo, 2022, p. 2). Hence, before the nation can fully benefit from any potential long-term gains, this debt, and other legally required development expenditures, must be paid off (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 1). In the long term, the overall decline of the oil and gas sector will further make it an increasingly less reliable partner for Guyana, and future revenues will highly likely be significantly lower than promised to the Guyanese people (Sanzillo, 2020, p. 1, 2022, p. 4). According to media reports, the wealth that remains in Guyana is unequally distributed and is not reaching the poorest (Buchter, 2024, p. 3). Although some are benefitting from the economic upturn, those already suffering from poverty are economically worse off than before the

oil boom due to rising food prices and rents (Buchter, 2024, p. 3). While these reports only give a first impression of the distribution of wealth, the economic analysis by IEEFA illustrates the consequences of the oil and gas production facilitated by the World Bank. Instead of contributing to its ‘development’ as officially intended, it has resulted in the exploitation of its resources under the control of foreign powers, which is mentioned as a consequence of neocolonialism (see Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4). While the consortium led by ExxonMobil is enriching itself, Guyana is suffering the consequences, leading to an increasing global inequality pointed out by Nkrumah (1965) as a result of neocolonial investments (p. 4). Yet, even though not mentioned by Nkrumah, the gap between certain rich elites profiting from the oil and the poor within the country will likely also increase (Buchter, 2024, p. 3).

These consequences could even be exacerbated by climate change by which Guyana is already disproportionately affected. By pushing Guyana towards the expansion of oil and gas production instead of financing the renewable energy sector, the World Bank locks the country into a fossil fuel-dependent future. It transforms Guyana, whose aim has been to have 100% renewable energy by 2025, into one of the biggest CO₂ emitters globally, thereby significantly contributing to climate change and putting the country at increasing risk from rising sea levels and extreme weather events (urgewald, 2020b, p. 2). Chesney, a Guyanese academic and government consultant, summarises his criticism as follows: “I would say to the World Bank: [...] Allow Guyana to meet its aspirations not only as a democratic nation but a nation of people who desire to be free, who desire to continue to respect nature” (urgewald, 2020c, min. 44:13).

CONCLUSION

Based on Nkrumah’s theory of neocolonialism, this chapter examined the World Bank’s role in the development of Guyana’s petroleum sector to analyse whether and to what extent the World Bank facilitated neocolonial structures.

Against the backdrop of Guyana’s colonial history, in which the country was robbed of its natural resources by foreign actors, the dynamics of the oil and gas sector seem like a continuation of history. The 2016 Petroleum Agreement between the Guyanese government and the consortium of oil companies led by ExxonMobil that sets the terms of oil production and profit sharing is disproportionately one-sided and has

detrimental consequences for the country. Not only does Guyana receive meagre royalties and profits in comparison to the companies, but the oil and gas production also led to a threefold increase in its total debt and exposes the country to an ever-growing risk of climate change.

While the World Bank was not involved in negotiating the Petroleum Agreement, it decided to support the development of the oil and gas sector under the conditions mentioned above with a 55\$ million Technical Assistance loan. It enabled the oil companies to start their production significantly faster than estimated and thereby helped the US oil major out of a dire financial situation. One possible reason is Exxon-Mobil's influential position in the US and the US's significant influence over the World Bank. Although some scholars support the general idea of US hegemony within the World Bank, it cannot be conclusively proven in this case and thus remains speculative.

It can be concluded that the World Bank, through its financial contribution, has supported the development of the oil and gas sector under structures that show similarities with neocolonialism. The analysis has further shown that the World Bank has employed at least two strategies that could be classified as neocolonial.

Firstly, it commissioned the adjustment of Guyana's petroleum regulations through a law firm that worked with ExxonMobil for 40 years. This not only violates principles of good governance but more importantly suggests that the amendment might not be in the best interest of Guyana but instead more favourable for ExxonMobil. Although there is no publicly disclosed information on how far the consultancy was involved in drafting the 2023 Petroleum Activities Act, the law is accused of bypassing democratic structures by giving the petroleum minister far-reaching decision-making power over the oil and gas sector and excluding independent control by the opposition. ExxonMobil benefits from the law in that it enables the company to build a new gas pipeline and onshore storage, which was impossible under the old regulation. The amendment of a country's policies in favour of foreign actors can be defined as an instrument for establishing neocolonial structures. While the alteration of the petroleum regulations was part of the World Bank's Procurement Plan, and an influence in favour of ExxonMobil seems plausible due to the law firm chosen and the advantages that the new law offers the oil company, it could not be conclusively clarified to what extent the World Bank's consultancy influenced the new regulations.

Secondly, the World Bank moved ahead with the petroleum project in cooperation with a political party that was voted out of power because of allegations that it mismanaged Guyana's resources. The World Bank thus supported a deselected government and thereby undermined the country's democratic structures and sovereignty. However, the latter also shows that the World Bank's intervention was supported by an elite in the country. Both the interference in domestic politics and the support of specific elites can be classified as neocolonial instruments.

The theory of neocolonialism provided valuable insights into how both ExxonMobil and the World Bank influenced Guyana's political economy. It has further shed light on the colonial continuities of the exploitation of Guyana's natural wealth by foreign actors and its consequences for the country. However, the theory's limitations became evident in its inability to offer a deeper analysis of internal dynamics, power struggles, and the diverse motivations of the various actors involved: By treating countries, companies, and institutions as homogenous entities, it does not allow for an investigation of these important complexities. Additionally, the theory's relative neglect of class issues meant that the analysis of how the growing petroleum sector impacts different segments and classes of the Guyanese society remained necessarily superficial.

This chapter has provided some introductory insight into whether and to what extent the World Bank established neocolonial structures. However, the focus on a single case study does not allow for any more far-reaching or general conclusion regarding the possible neocolonial nature of its interventions. While the accusation of neocolonialism towards the World Bank is not new and has been voiced before (see e.g. Ziai, 2020), future work should examine on a larger scale if and how the World Bank facilitates neocolonialism.

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PART II

Partnerships and Neocolonialism
in the Global Economy



CHAPTER 6

Global Energy Partnerships: Green Colonialism and an Ecological New International Economic Order

Simone Claar

INTRODUCTION

“Affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” is what the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goal number 7 aims to achieve by the year 2030. The international community is still far from reaching the goal of ensuring that all people have access to energy,

This article is a translation of the German-language book contribution Claar, Simone (2023): Dem Klimawandel begegnen: Energie als Teil der sozialökologischen Transformation, in: Alex Veit und Daniel Fuchs (Hg.): Eine gerechte Weltwirtschaftsordnung? Die»New International Economic Order« und die Zukunft der Süd-Nord-Beziehungen. Transcript Verlag. Open Access, which is available under the following copyright license: CC BY-SA. The article has been slightly updated and expanded in the relation to global energy partnerships.

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A. Ziai et al. (eds.), *Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7_6

however, and the energy supply is still fraught with extreme social inequalities. Even after 2015, when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were set down, many people still have no access to energy: in Africa alone, there are over 600 million people who have no electricity (AFDB, 2022a).

The Sustainable Development Agenda is meant to enable economic development that considers the needs of the environment. This means that the SDGs address economic, ecological, and social dimensions simultaneously. Goal 7 views renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydroelectric power as effective solutions to meet global energy needs (UN, n.d.). With the increasing threats brought about by climate change, it is not only the UN that sees mobilizing funds for renewable energy as an important catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal. However, public and private financial resources and investments are not sufficient, according to an SDG progress report (IEA et al., 2022, p. 18). The multiple political, health, environmental, and economic crises of recent decades have exacerbated persistent energy shortages, particularly in the Global South.¹

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has once again changed the debate about energy supply since 2022, as Europe in particular faces a massive increase in the cost of energy as well as difficulties in accessing energy. To solve the immediate problem of finding substitutes for natural gas and oil from Russia, the European Union and its member states are looking for new suppliers of these raw materials—mostly in the Arab or African region, such as in Senegal (Rinke & Marsch, 2022). There has also been a massive increase in the export of South African coal to Europe (Banya, 2022). If fossil fuels continue to be relied upon, that is because the focus is on Europe's energy security not on the impending climate catastrophe or developing a global energy partnership.

The European strategy, which was set down in the European Green Deal in 2019 (see, for example, Claar, 2022), includes the production of what is referred to as green hydrogen. To this end, possibilities for producing hydrogen using other energy sources are being sought outside Europe, for example in Morocco. However, there are several unanswered questions when it comes to this option. First, it is unclear whether Morocco will be able to produce enough carbon-neutral energy

¹ While acknowledging the problematic nature of the term 'Global South' for its oversimplification and homogenization of diverse regions, I employ it due to the lack of alternatives (e.g. Prys-Hansen, 2023).

to generate green hydrogen. Second, there is a risk that energy poverty in Morocco itself will be exacerbated if the energy supply of the local population must be weighed against lucrative hydrocarbon exports. Third, the production of hydrogen requires drinking water—an already scarce resource in Morocco that will almost certainly become even scarcer because of global warming (Baumann, 2021). It is therefore possible that the energy transition in Europe will lead to a new period of the Global South being dependent on raw material exports although it would need a global strategy for energy access.

The inequality of distribution and undersupply of energy, the dependence on fossil fuels in general, and the dependence of the Global South on fossil fuels in particular have not fundamentally changed since the established New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s (see UN, 1974). The climate crisis is making all this worse. Alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power have become much more common in recent years, but they are far from being enough to make countries in the Global South independent of oil and gas resources and especially are not enough to provide “clean and affordable energy for all” as described in the SDG (UN, n.d.).

The Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues, chaired by the Ex-West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, dealt extensively with the problems related to global energy as part of the NIEO debates in 1977 (Brandt, 1980). The group, referred to as the Brandt Commission, determined even then that new technologies and energy sources were needed and discussed various ways to develop them. Despite the insights on this from the Commission’s report, little has changed regarding the dependence of fossil fuels by countries in the Global South since then, which points to the persistence and growth of global inequalities. At the same time, it shows the continuing economic and political dependence of the Global South on the industrialized nations, a dependence which is largely due to external factors. Energy is only one aspect in which this continued dependence of African and other countries of the Global South manifests itself.

This chapter addresses the timeliness of the NIEO and the Brandt Commission’s climate and energy proposals. To do this, I look at global political and economic changes in recent decades, predominantly in relation to African countries. I begin by pointing out gaps in the NIEO and the Brandt Report on energy and climate policy. I then postulate a perpetuation of dependency relations in the North–South relationship

and argue that these can be described as energy imperialism and green colonialism. The chapter illustrates this by looking at access to funding, including funds to combat climate change. Building on this, I discuss the extent to which a revised ecological New International Economic Order (NIEO²) could be a means of implementing a global energy partnership.

In terms of theory, this contribution is oriented on the Global Ecological Political Economy, which links theoretical approaches to dependency, imperialism, and colonialism with issues of ecology. The original dependency theory (see, among others, Frank, 1968; Amin, 1976) assumes that the underdevelopment of countries in the Global South is due to domination and exploitation by countries in the Global North. According to this theory, the Global North exploits the Global South by controlling natural resources, international trade, and technology and knowledge (Frank, 1966). Marxist theories of imperialism are closely related to this. Lenin (1917), for example, argued that imperialism leads to a concentration of capital and power in the hands of a few rich nations. These nations profit from the exploitation of raw materials and labor in underdeveloped countries. According to Lenin, imperialist states pursue the strategy of maximizing their profits by expanding into other countries, opening new markets, and gaining access to raw materials and cheap labor.

Both the dependency theory and the previously developed Marxist theories of imperialism assume that the rich countries of the Global North can exploit and oppress the poor countries of the Global South through their economic and political dominance. In the colonial era, this was done through direct control; in the postcolonial era, it is done through indirect control based on continuing economic dependencies. This shift provided the backdrop for the NIEO suggestions in 1974, which focused on naming these dependencies and inequalities. Despite the diverging interests in the Global South by fossil fuel dependent countries and non-fossil fuel dependent countries. In the meantime, global conditions, and relations between different states in the North, the South and between each other have become increasingly complex and the dichotomy that the North exploits the South does not remain so simple. Nevertheless, it remains as a symbol of exploitation, and it is used to simplify matters.

Global Ecological Political Economy (GEPE) is an expansion of International Political Economy to include the analytical categories of political ecology, that is, the aspects of energy (renewable and non-renewable), sustainability, and climate (van de Graff et al., 2016; Kuzemko et al., 2018; Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018) as well as their application to

the current potential ecological collapse. In practice, the article emphasize that ecological as analytical category must be considered, here in the political economy of energy/climate finance. The GEPE approach assumes that policy fields such as finance, trade, or production must be framed as ecological phenomena (Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018, p. 34). Representatives of this line of research illustrate how ecological aspects are interwoven with imperialism in global capitalism (Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018, p. 71). Therefore, GEPE has also been filled with analytical categories of political ecology, as their raise similar questions regarding power asymmetry or capital accumulation.

LOOKING AT THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

From 1977 to 1980, the Brandt Commission analyzed the economic and political relations between the Global South and the Global North (Wionczek, 1981). It found clear evidence of an “inequality of economic strength” (Brandt, 1980, p. 32) for all economic sectors. The “economic power,” including the “rules and regulations and [...the international economic system’s] international institutions of trade, money and finance” (Brandt, 1980, p. 32) was found to be in the hands of the northern countries. This can also be seen in the fact that “international mining companies [...] provided capital, technical knowledge and marketing facilities” (Brandt, 1980, p. 155) and thus controlled the extraction of raw materials. These power relations described by the Commission have been perpetuated in recent decades—despite the rise of emerging economies such as China.

In the UN program of action for an NIEO (UN, 1974), the issue of energy was addressed only indirectly through the question of sovereignty over natural resources. In contrast, it played a major role in the Brandt Commission’s report. The chapter on energy in the Commission’s report (Brandt, 1980, pp. 160–171) focuses especially on the need to move away from oil and on the development of alternative energy sources. Written just a short time after the oil crisis of the 1970s, the report dealt with the oil dependence of importing countries without their own oil reserves (especially developing countries). It expressed concern that there would be long-term high costs as well as insufficient scope for the development of alternative energy sources. From today’s perspective, the Commission

was ahead of its time. However, it failed to link the energy issue to sustainability, the environment, and climate impacts.

In its recommendations, the Brandt Commission aimed to secure and expand access to energy—just as SDG 7 does today. Although it was critical of the role of oil (and gas), it also assessed the raw material as difficult to avoid, since oil was not only abundant, but also had the advantage over other energy sources of being usable for many forms of energy production (Brandt, 1980, p. 166). Among other things, the Commission proposed that global oil reserves be measured so that “equitable and stable contracts” (Brandt, 1980, p. 157) could then be concluded with companies for marketing these reserves. However, such far-reaching international agreements never materialized, especially since in the meantime new explorations and the development of deeper drilling techniques continued to increase the amount of available oil. Equitable partnerships in these terms would have been a changing moment. However, recent history shows that new oil deposits are almost always exploited if states or oil companies can make a profit from them.

Even though the Brandt Commission took up the energy issue, its report lacked a link between price development, marketing, and regulation on the one hand and the exploitation of nature and the climate issue on the other. Climate and environmental policy did not play the same role at that time as they do today, although they were indirectly addressed in discussions about the NIEO. In his introduction to the report, Willy Brandt made fundamental references to these issues clear, for example by pointing to “a new awareness of the environmental and ecological dangers to our planet” (Brandt, 1980, p. 19) which are at the same time a major challenge in South-North relations (Brandt, 1980, p. 7). From my point of view, the exploitation of nature is not just a matter of awareness, but a core problem for the entire planet and needs immediately awareness.

So, from today’s perspective, both the NIEO and the Brandt Commission’s report have serious blind spots in the field of energy and climate policy. These are particularly evident in the summary of the Commission’s report, which names coal as a possible alternative energy source (Brandt, 1980, p. 279). Today we know that one fossil fuel cannot be an alternative to another. It does not make sense to speak of “clean coal” as, for example, the South African state-owned power company Eskom did until recently (Centre for Environmental Rights, 2018) or, in Germany, of natural gas as a “clean bridging technology” (LobbyControl, 2023,

p. 6)² because coal and gas—despite new technologies—are still one of the main air polluters and contribute to the global warming.

The Brandt Commission saw hydropower as another possibility for generating energy independently of oil. However, again, it did not address the environmental, social, and societal consequences of, for example, the construction of dams. After all, large hydropower plants required (and still require) resettlement and deprive people of access to water elsewhere. Today, such large-scale plants are often discussed critically due to their consequences for nature and local populations. Still, these kinds of new plants continue to be built, for example in Ghana (Hausermann, 2018) or Ethiopia (Kaledzi, 2023). Their construction cannot defy climate change, however, as the increase in droughts in recent years has shown. For example, at the Kariba Dam in Zambia in 2015/2016, hardly any electricity could be generated because the water level was too low due to drought (Claar, 2018). The problem still exists, as because Zambia obtains more than 86 percent of its energy from hydropower (Ncube, 2023), and does not have enough energy diversification. The high dependence on rain and water for energy makes Zambia's energy production highly vulnerable in times of droughts.

At the time of the Brandt Commission, solar energy was not yet sufficiently developed technologically, but even then, it had the potential to become a key alternative energy source (see Brandt, 1980, p. 167). To this end, the Commission took up an important, though often little considered, point of the original NIEO ideas: the transfer of technology from North to South (UN, 1974, p. 8). In its report, the Commission wrote:

“We believe there is a strong case, in view of the mutual interest in assured world energy supplies, for the fruits of research on solar energy in the North to be made available on specially favourable terms to the poorer countries of the South” (Brandt, 1980, p. 176).

The Commission also called for technology transfer from industrialized to developing countries beyond solar energy. This was intended to promote sustainable development and reduce environmental damage. The Commission believed this was crucial to enabling developing countries to leave polluting technologies behind and adopt cleaner and more sustainable forms of development (Brandt, 1980, p. 200).

² All quotes originally in German have been translated into English by the author.

Overall, the Brandt Commission's proposals attempted to establish a weak consensus compared to the NIEO proposals, which were highly controversial in the global community. However, even these two proposals, if implemented, would presumably have led to little fundamental structural change in the access to the global market and in particular energy for countries in the Global South. The Brandt report also lacked concrete strategies for engaging capital interests. In the context of the current climate catastrophe, their importance has become even more apparent. Capital has no interest in being restricted. Therefore, in the existing economic system, many well-intentioned proposals may have little or no effect. Fossil capital is highly interconnected around the world. Neither the power of the Global South nor that of its supporters in the Global North (such as Willy Brandt) was sufficient for fundamental, radical reforms. This problem of unequal power relations continues to be evident in energy policy and partnerships at present and limits the possibilities to develop a global energy partnership.

ENERGY IMPERIALISM AND GREEN COLONIALISM

In recent decades, however, the issues of environment and climate have certainly played a role in international politics. There have been many different initiatives in this area, including some under the auspices of the UN, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997, or the Paris Climate Agreement and SDGs of 2015. But these initiatives fall short of preventing climate catastrophe because they are not far-reaching enough. They do not prevent new forms of unilateral dependence and exploitation.

Energy and climate policy is primarily about securing access to energy sources. The export of fossil fuels has been an expression of imperialist behavior and power relations that has led to the persistence of energy poverty in states of the Global South. Industrialized nations are using their position of power in the existing world economic order to secure their own energy needs first. In the past, they relied almost exclusively on fossil fuels such as gas or coal—importing from countries that had not secured their own energy production. This pattern continues with renewables and green hydrogen. These political, economic, and military strategies of industrialized countries are also described as *energy imperialism*. In principle energy imperialism means that, industrialized countries seek to control their access to oil, gas, coal, or other energy

resources in countries with less power and has its roots in the demand of coal for industrial revolution. Ciccantell (2020) defines energy imperialism from an historical perspective that “the use of military, diplomatic, economic, and other forms of social power to take control of energy resources outside a state’s domestic boundaries, was essential to the state’s economic growth and geopolitical competitiveness” (p. 2). The consequences must be borne above all by the weakest links in the global power hierarchy, namely the local populations in the Global South, as in the example of oil production in Nigeria with its large-scale destruction of nature (Kappel, 2010).

Current climate policy runs the risk of reproducing such patterns. In 2019, the European Union (EU) adopted the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), which aims to enable sustainable and ecological conditions in the EU economic area. At the same time, it is to define core instruments for combating the climate crisis. This includes a strategy for green hydrogen (European Commission, 2019), the production of which is planned in Morocco, among other places, as mentioned above (see also Claar, 2022). However, the discussion does not focus on the energy transition in Morocco or in other potentially hydrogen-producing countries in the Global South. Instead, the core issue is the export of green hydrogen to Europe. In this context, one can therefore speak not only of energy imperialism, but moreover of *green colonialism* (Claar, 2021, 2022). Hamouchene (2023, p. 30) defines green colonialism as following:

Green colonialism, or “renewable energy colonialism” can be defined as the extension of the colonial relations of plunder and dispossession (as well as the dehumanization of the other) to the green era of renewable energies, with the accompanying displacement of socio-environmental costs onto peripheral countries and communities, prioritizing the energy needs of one region of the world over another.

In practice, the current EU strategy prioritizes energy needs and consumption in the Global North over needs in the Global South while externalizing environmental impacts to the Global South.

Access to Financing

Structural power inequalities between the Global South and the Global North are reflected in access to finances. As early as the beginning of the 1980s, the Brandt Commission noted that there was a lack of financial resources in development finance in particular, including in the energy sector (Brandt, 1980, p. 227). It called for a “massive” transfer from North to South, as well as changes in the form of development financing, such as a continuous increase in development aid to 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) or an improvement in lending practices (Brandt, 1980, pp. 241–243).

Even today, countries and companies in the Global South do not have the same access to the financial market as comparable actors in the Global North. The problem is intensifying in view of the steadily increasing importance of the financial market for other areas of society as well, which is described by the term ‘financialization.’ Referring to imperialist relations, Jeff Powell (2013, p. 144) argues in this context: “peripheral economies will experience the tendencies of financialization, but in a distinctive form which has been shaped by imperial relations in the current world market conjuncture.” The term *subordinate financialization* has since become established in academic discourse (see Bonizzi, 2013; Kvangraven et al., 2020).

African states, state-owned enterprises, and private companies in the energy sector are dependent on the global market as well as on exchange rates and foreign direct investment. They need loans for their investments, and they receive these loans in US dollars or euros. Fluctuations in exchange rates to the respective national currencies are classified as an investment risk by rating agencies such as Moody’s. As a result, international lenders demand a risk premium in the form of higher interest rates for loans (Chirikure et al., 2022; Mutize & Nkhalamba, 2021). Sustainable and socioecological transformation projects (such as for renewable energy) are also seen as a greater investment risk, as their implementation requires a lot of capital (Schwerhoff & Sy, 2017, pp. 397–398). In addition, national companies in the Global South, in particular middle- and low-income countries, are often at a competitive disadvantage: they must pay higher interest rates on loans than their competitors from the Global North. As a result, they have higher costs and do not win international tenders—for example, for renewable energy infrastructure projects. Elsner et al. (2021) describe such a case in Zambia, where the World Bank

tendered a photovoltaic project that then went to international companies from the Global North.

The increase in market-based financing perpetuates dependencies and limits African states' possibilities for acting (Banse, 2019, p. 87). This is illustrated, for example, by the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) between South Africa and various countries in the Global North, including the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. At its core are loans worth 8.5 billion US dollars for the conversion of South Africa's energy supply to renewable energies. The cooperation partners see the JETP as an innovation leading to a *just* transition to renewable energies. However, the credit model also makes South Africa dependent on lenders in new ways. The country's debt can increase abruptly due to exchange rate fluctuations. The JETP is therefore characterized by green colonialism (Global Energy Justice Workshop Collective, 2023) as the South African state pays the costs. Nevertheless, the countries of the Global North are negotiating similar cooperation models, for example with Vietnam. The new debt crisis in the Global South, which is characterized, for example, by insolvency vis-à-vis international creditors as in Zambia in 2020 or Ghana in 2022 (Banse, 2023), will probably be exacerbated by this. The term *just transition* comes from the trade union movement. It describes a phase-out of fossil fuels that creates new climate- and environmentally friendly jobs. The concept has been introduced into the international political debate on climate change mitigation (Achouche & Mokoena, 2021) and is receiving attention in many academic discourses (including in the field of energy, see Jenkins, 2019; Müller & Claar, 2021; Müller et al., 2020).

Developing countries are demanding more room for maneuver, including their right to their own development and economic growth, to be able to fight poverty and inequality. There is also a need for them to make their own decisions and set their own priorities in climate and energy policy. However, there are conflicting goals. In terms of the national economy and financing, this often means choosing between the economic development of the country on the one hand and combating climate change and designing a *just transition* on the other (interview with a civil service employee, Accra, May 23, 2022). Choosing economic development is contrasted with the need to combat the consequences of climate change (see also Neumann & Claar, 2022). The "African Economic Outlook" is published once a year and looks at the economic development of African states. In 2022 it had the focus "Supporting

Climate Resilience and a Just Energy Transition in Africa” (AFDB, 2022b), and in the debate surrounding the publication the conflict of goals is clearly evident: many countries in the Global South do not even have sufficient material resources to implement core tasks such as eradicating poverty. The demand for the same right as countries of the Global North to push forward their own development, as well as the question of why the Global South should primarily finance climate impacts, are constantly present in the global debate on climate impact mitigation.

The consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, are among the greatest challenges facing countries in the Global South. From a global perspective, the trade-off can be mitigated by implementing climate issues into the development strategies and plans of countries in the Global South. This included, for example, the promotion of investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, in renewable energies, or in environmentally friendly technologies. To this end, as the Brandt Commission already noted (Brandt, 1980, pp. 193–200), it is necessary to promote technological exchange and cooperation between the countries of the Global South and North and to expand financial support for developing and newly industrializing countries in coping with the consequences of climate change. This would also mean developing a joint global energy partnership for technology and knowledge.

In sum, energy imperialism and green colonialism are continuations of the current power relations. Overcoming the strong structural disadvantage of countries in the Global South in terms of access to finance would be one strategy to change these power relations. In practice, this means that an NIEO², for example, will have to deal more intensively with the energy-climate-environment nexus in North–South relations. In the Brandt Commission’s analysis at the time (Brandt, 1980), climate and environmental policy played only a limited role, even though this nexus had already been discussed in the debate on the NIEO.

ECOLOGICAL NIEO²–GLOBAL ENERGY PARTNERSHIP AS AN ELEMENT OF SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION?

The previous sections have made clear how strongly the climate and energy issues are interwoven with fundamental questions of economic and political structure. Ryan Katz-Rosene and Matthew Paterson (2018) also emphasize this point, and any NIEO² must address this issue. Based on the assumption that no fundamental systemic change will take place for the time being, strategies are needed on how an ecological NIEO² can level the path to a socioecological transformation and which role a global energy partnership could have. Socio-ecological transformation can be seen as a response to multiple crises (Brand & Wissen, 2017). The focus here is above all on creating climate-conscious social structures. What is meant is the vision of a sociopolitical project of fundamental change in society and the economy in which social and ecological issues are not played off against each other. Such a socioecological transformation must keep in mind issues of social justice, historical interdependencies, and power structures while also questioning neoliberal capitalism.

The task of an NIEO² would be to accompany the process of such a transformation and to set thematic priorities in climate and energy policy. In doing so, it would have to include proposals to promote sustainable development, global energy partnerships as well as to address the challenges of climate change.

Some concrete measures in this regard could follow on from the proposals made by the NIEO at the time—for example, greater technology transfer to support the implementation of low-carbon technologies that should be part of an energy partnership. According to Brand et al. (2013), a socioecological transformation requires not only technological innovation but also social innovation. This means that institutions and actors need to change social, political, and economic processes and practices. One of these practices is the funding of climate adaptation measures as well as climate change mitigation, and how energy production and consumption is distributed on the global scale. In other words, financial and capital markets should not be the only form of financing available. At the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, asked the legitimate question: “How do companies make 200 billion dollars in profits in the last three months and not expect to contribute at least 10 cents on every dollar

to a loss and damage fund?” (UN News, November 7, 2022). Mottley pointed out that corporations use nature as a free resource to maximize profits. What she suggests would be a more significant contribution by these companies to climate impact costs (see also Foster, 2000; Harris, 2013).

Changing global practices would include talking about the North–South relationship and breaking colonial continuities—such as in the form of green colonialism (Claar, 2022; Hamouchene, 2023)—and working together to create a *just* transition to a socioecological society.

Among other requirements, an ecological NIEO² would mean that the transition to a low-carbon economy would need to be shaped equitably and with an eye to social factors. Not all countries have social security systems that can absorb the fears of job loss—a lack that can be seen in the example of coal workers in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Therefore, such a transformation is always accompanied by conflicting goals such as securing jobs versus climate adaptation (Kalt, 2023). As part of a socioecological transformation within the existing global economic system, the following aspects would be part of a radical reform and, at the same time, of a transnational regulatory program, for example, within the framework of the climate and energy policy of an NIEO² including clear steps for designing a global energy partnership. This includes:

1. A comprehensive elaboration and transformation of economic and development models is required that promotes sustainable, social, climate-resilient, and low-emission development. In doing so, conditions must be placed on the principle of growth: economic growth must always consider the subsequent costs for nature and people—in the Global North and South. One possible avenue would include concepts such as post-growth or *degrowth*, around which a new scholarly field has emerged in recent years (Engler et al., 2024). These concepts criticize the focus on economic growth and seek visions for a different society that prioritizes ecological and social well-being instead of overproduction and consumption. This also means recognizing the importance of conserving resources, including during energy production. It is about an economy that focuses on human well-being, reducing inequality, and preserving the ecological foundations for life (Rahti, 2020). As GDP growth is no longer the focus, this can also have the effect of reducing growth (Hickel, 2021, p. 2). What is unique about this is that the

debate is not only an academic debate, but also a social debate that is being conducted in conjunction with social movements and political practice at major scientific *degrowth conferences* (Schmelzer & Vetter, 2019, p. 12). The theoretical debate on post-growth has so far mainly taken place in the Global North. To be more effective, it needs to engage more with postcolonial perspectives (Bendix, 2017).

2. There needs to be a change in mindset and policymaking, particularly with regard to the use of scarce resources and the implementation of measures to adapt to climate change. To this end, it must be questioned whether climate change mitigation must be profitable. At the same time, there is a need for more binding donor responsibility, such as the payment of development aid amounting to 1 percent of GDP by countries of the Global North (Franczak, 2023). Close cooperation between the government, the private sector, civil society, the population, and international organizations is essential for this. Regarding the international organizations, Ernesto Samper Pizano (2023) calls for a “solidarity-based development model” that better represents the countries of the Global South, particularly in the United Nations. In addition, the question of material reparations must be raised, as JETP makes it clear that the fight against climate change continues to drive the debt spiral. Social movements such as ‘Debt for Climate’ pursue the payment of climate debt. Climate and energy financing need to be separated from market and banking logic so that nature and the planet can be protected independently of profit targets.
3. Energy production is needed that focuses on preserving the planet. The old demand of the Brandt Commission for “[a]n orderly transition [...] from high dependence on increasingly scarce non-renewable energy sources” (Brandt, 1980, p. 171) must be implemented. This means no more energy from fossil fuels and instead more solar and wind energy based on today’s technological possibilities. Green hydrogen can also be seen as an alternative energy source if it is not exported—like fossil fuels—from developing countries whose own energy supply is not secure (Claar, 2022).
4. Energy justice must be ensured, locally and globally. Simply changing the energy mix does not guarantee that everyone will have access to affordable and sustainable energy. It is not only about low-threshold access to energy, but also about the fact that many

people feel the negative effects of fossil fuels on their livelihoods, even if they do not have access to energy (see Müller & Claar, 2021; Müller et al., 2020). Energy democracy is a pillar of energy justice. This means not only involving people in decisions about new forms of energy, but also ensuring their participation as consumers and owners (Jenkins, 2019, p. 84–85). There is also a need for further decentralization of energy generation and infrastructure. Monopoly positions of individual energy companies (including those that are state-owned) must be ended. The aim must be to feed decentrally generated energy into the electricity grids at low cost. Energy justice and Energy Democracy would be key principles for a global energy partnership, and elements how this can look like the South African Climate Justice Charter demonstrates this (COPAC/SAFSC, 2020).

Without a fundamental change to the current economic model—which is based on the idea of economic growth and the exploitation of nature and people to create financial added value for a small economic and political elite—, the changes described in the context of NIEO² reforms will not transform the existing conditions. This includes the fossil form of energy generation. What is therefore needed is a radical socioecological transformation that will question the economic system and overcome the colonial dependencies of the Global South.

CONCLUSION

Despite the Brandt Commission's forward-looking analysis of renewable energies and its support for a transformation of the global economic system, to this day two core elements for achieving the equal participation of countries of the Global South have yet to be implemented: a change of North–South relations and the assumption of responsibility for imperialism and colonialism and avoid new forms such as energy imperialism and green colonialism by countries of the Global North. This includes switching to environmentally and climate-friendly production as well as the use of energy. That can be achieved through the expansion of renewable energies, technology transfer to developing countries, and the provision of funding for climate change adaptation and decarbonization, and for developing steps for a global energy partnership.

This chapter has shown that the global and political power and inequality in North–South relations have been perpetuated since the times

of the NIEO and the Brandt Commission. This is illustrated above all by energy imperialism, green colonialism, and the impediments to the Global South's access to funding to combat climate change. There are still gaps in the areas of sustainability, environmental protection, and climate impact. Despite some forward thinking regarding the energy issue, these aspects were neglected. An NIEO² must therefore address these gaps and find strategies for socioecological transformation. The gaps could be filled by changing economic and development models, ways of thinking about development, sustainable energy production, and greater energy justice and democracy.

In the long term, solutions for the energy-climate-environment nexus must be developed that are in line with the needs and priorities of affected countries and their populations. This ensures that these solutions are effective and support the sustainability goals. Involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes can support to ensure that all relevant parties find the solutions acceptable and that these solutions can be implemented. In addition, this includes also to foster elements and rules for an energy partnership on the global level. Overall, however, the question remains open as to whether radical reforms within the framework of an NIEO² are even possible within capitalist structures or whether an alternative economic model is required in the long term to face climate and energy policy challenges.

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Transcending Imperialist/Sub-Imperialist Partnerships

Patrick Bond

INTRODUCTION

The partnership “between a rider and a horse” was the way white-supremacist Rhodesian leader (from 1933–53) Godfrey Huggins described the neo-colonial arrangements he foresaw in managing racist rule in what later became Zimbabwe (cited in Arnold, 2005 p. 383). A similar partnership exists between the wealthiest Western economies and middle (or ‘emerging’) powers, in spite of a widespread claim that ‘multipolarity’ is now in the process of replacing Washington-dominated unipolarity. The imperialist core needs partnership with the leading emerging economies, and in venues such as the G20 appears to be forging one—to the detriment of all but the elite layers of society, and at the risk of planetary destruction given how successfully the partnership has prevented the resolution of global-scale crises.

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Does the imperialist West need sub-imperial partners? The idea of imperialism was, in modern capitalist times, associated with competitive internecine battles between a few great European powers in the late nineteenth century. Their internal capitalist-crisis tendencies spurred an unprecedented geographical expansion into colonial territories. The process was facilitated by major financial markets, which in turn ran into various limits, as Rosa Luxemburg (1913) was first to explain, thus requiring empire building. There, she documented better than anyone of her era, an articulation of capitalist and non-capitalist relations emerged, to the enormous benefit of the former. In that context, colonial military power was typically deployed to conquer territory and establish formal state management and later, informal neo-colonial political-economic power relations. The policing, legal and monetary systems that capitalism required were established by the colonial regimes to subjugate peoples and to extract resources, dating to the sixteenth century in the British, French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian and Italian spheres of influence, especially when codified in the 1884–85 Berlin conference that carved up Africa.

In our current age, that imperialist formula—capitalist crisis formation in the core, its geographical displacement, facilitative financial institutions, and neo-colonial grabbing of resources and territory—remains highly relevant. The main additional element that became more vital after World War II and utterly impossible to avoid since the 1990s was the economic, socio-cultural, geopolitical and military dominance of the United States. That dominance has increasingly been exercised through Western-headquartered multilateral institutions whose operations favour the interests of the largest multinational corporations and especially financiers. The obvious policing operation for these firms has been by the Pentagon, State Department and the U.S. security establishment, especially in the form of coups against governments hostile to capital, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). More than 800 U.S. military bases abroad, and nearly \$1 trillion in annual military spending, ensure exceptional power (albeit with vulnerabilities such as were witnessed in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and the current Red Sea maritime route).

When it comes to economic processes, the main imperialist multilaterals include the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), founded in 1944, and later the World Trade Organisation (WTO, which evolved from what was originally the 1948 General Agreement on

Tariffs and Trade). The ‘Bretton Woods’ financial institutions dramatically expanded during the 1980s-90s, in the wake of commercial bank internationalisation and the 1979 ‘Volcker Shock’—the U.S. Federal Reserve’s interest rate increase imposed by Paul Volcker—that led to the Third World Debt Crisis. Another facilitative institution is the Bank for International Settlements, a Swiss-based league of central banks dominated by the U.S., UK, European and Japanese. Increasingly punitive financial regulatory systems emerged especially after the Western attack on Muslim banks following Al Qaeda’s September 2001 attack on New York and Washington, amplified by subsequent economic sanctions against Iran and Russia (the latter backfiring when calls for ‘de-dollarisation’ became more earnest). And the Financial Action Task Force (FATF, 2023) imposes grey listing and black listing of various regimes that did not cooperate with Interpol against money laundering, drug trafficking and terrorism (Gaviyau & Sibindi, 2023).

The United States had become the global capitalist hegemon after World War II, strengthening its power after the Cold War ended and, by the early 2000s, fusing its military capacity and corporate interests (often expressed through neo-liberal policies imposed by the Bretton Woods Institutions) with a pro-democracy (ostensibly liberal) rhetoric that was regularly unveiled as enormously hypocritical. But the 2007–09 global financial crisis required major revisions, especially in terms of assimilating the political leaders of G20 emerging economies, at a time re-legitimation and a financial backstop were both needed. Whereas in 2008 this was a difficult task for the neo-conservative George Bush regime, conveniently he was replaced in early 2009 by an internationalist more capable of fusing neo-conservative and neo-liberal ideology: Barack Obama (Bond, 2009; Harvey, 2010).

As a result, the 2010s witnessed new forms of imperial rule, increasingly requiring partnerships with a new set of horses that often do the hardest work, until the point in 2017 when the paleo-conservative Donald Trump replaced Obama. To illustrate with the most difficult, durable multilateral problem—ecocide—an imperial/sub-imperial partnership was initiated by Obama’s team at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 2009–16 (Bond, 2012). That body generally served the world’s main corporate fossil fuel and industrial interests by delaying imposition of greenhouse gas emissions cuts, by denying the ‘polluter pays’ liability for historic emissions (termed ‘climate debt’ or ‘reparations’), by promoting market-related strategies (e.g.,

emissions trading and offsets) and by relying upon the promise of technical advances to reduce and sequester CO₂ (innovations which in turn are typically protected behind WTO Intellectual Property regulations, as was the case with what should have been the most needed public goods of 2020–23: Covid-19 vaccines and treatments) (Papamichail, 2023).

Imperial partnership with major sub-imperial polluters has been vital to maintain this posture, against demands by poor and vulnerable countries for both emissions cuts and Loss & Damage reparations payments. The partnership process began in 2009 in earnest at the Copenhagen UNFCCC summit when Obama barged into a Bella Convention Centre meeting room to propose a deal with leaders of the Brazil-South Africa-India-China ‘BASIC’ group. In his presidential memoir, Obama (2020, p. 516) remarked of this meeting,

China, India, and South Africa appeared content to let the conference crash and burn and blame it on the Americans... Other than me, the most important player in attendance that day was the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. He’d brought a giant delegation with him, and the group of them had thus far been inflexible and imperious in meetings, refusing to agree that China should submit to any form of international review of their emissions, confident in the knowledge that through their alliance with Brazil, India, and South Africa, they had enough votes to kill any deal. Meeting one-on-one with Wen for a bilat, I pushed back, warning that even if China saw avoiding any obligation toward transparency as a short-term win, it would prove to be a long-term disaster for the planet.

After commandeering the BASIC leaders’ meeting and threatening to call them out publicly for non-cooperation, Obama (2020, p. 517) recounted how tough talk impressed one of his aides (Reggie Love):

‘I gotta say, boss, that was some real gangster shit back there.’ I did feel pretty good. On the biggest of stages, on an issue that mattered and with the clock ticking, I’d pulled a rabbit out of a hat. Granted, the press gave the interim agreement mixed reviews, but given the chaos of the conference and the obstinacy of the Chinese, I still saw it as a win... Most important, we’d succeeded in getting China and India to accept—no matter how grudgingly or tentatively—the notion that every country, and not just those in the West, had a responsibility to do its part to slow climate change.

Along with Russia, the BASIC group then took the name BRICS as a site for a loose alliance formation based upon annual conferences once South Africa was admitted in 2010, and from mid-2023 expanded when seven new countries were invited to join the network: Saudi Arabia (which ultimately refused full membership and was ‘frozen’ in late 2024 and Argentina (which also refused when a far-right regime took power in late 2023), Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Ethiopia, and then in early 2025, Indonesia. The group of ten produces less than 30% of global output but 51% of greenhouse gas emissions, and hence is not a force for ending the climate crisis. What we may describe as an imperial/sub-imperial fusion of interests is that both the West and the expanded BRICS consistently fail to commit to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to sustainable levels—or to phase out fossil fuels—and they reject a logical principle in multilateral (and national) environmental management: polluter-pays reparations. Instead, imperialist climate policy-makers prefer gimmicks like carbon markets that, in effect, privatise the air, and techno fix mythmaking, which the BRICS also firmly endorse. A large network of *status quo* NGOs and philanthrocapitalists have become vital enablers and legitimators of the West’s so-called ‘ecological-modernisation’ approach to climate policy (favouring markets and technical solutions), as is also the case in nearly every other (silo-delimited) sectoral arena of global public policy (Böhm & Sullivan, 2021; Jäger & Dziwok, 2024).

Additional informal networks of imperial power—sometimes described as a transnational capitalist class (Robinson, 2003)—can be found at the Davos-based World Economic Forum, which has taken on the mantle of a futuristic brain trust, one formerly adorning the Bilderberg Group and U.S. Council on Foreign Relations (Van der Pijl, 2012). Likewise, working to shape public consciousness, the corporate media and numerous think tanks with specialist influences are responsible for ideological and strategic aspects of imperialist regime maintenance, now located in capital cities across the world.

But states remain vital, and military, geopolitical and economic-managerial collaborations between powerful capital cities remain the crucial factor behind imperialism’s durability. Since the 1970s, the G7 bloc has often coordinated Western state power, depending upon the conjuncture. Imperialism’s main military interests are coordinated by the U.S. Pentagon-centred North Atlantic Treaty Organisation revived in recent years, along with Anglophone ‘Five Eyes’ (adding the UK, Canada,

Australia and New Zealand) security and intelligence collaboration. A Quadrilateral Security Dialogue fuses Japanese, India, Australian and U.S. forces in Asia, mainly against China's expansion (Tricontinental, 2024).

Sometimes the imperial powers use the UN Security Council for broad-based control—albeit recognising divisive contradictions associated with geopolitical and military antagonisms—and allow the UN General Assembly votes on the 'rules-based order' mainly for the sake of legitimacy. Disputes within the imperialist military networks, such as whether to support the early-2000s invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, were subdued as U.S. neo-conservative leadership consolidated through both the Bush and Obama administrations, with firm British backing (Chomsky & Prashad, 2022).

Aside from two exceptions at the UN—a 1987 ban on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and a 2002 medicines fund—as well as the coordinated 2008–11 G20 financial bailouts that mainly benefited vulnerable Western bankers, neoliberal policies have been sustained throughout. Important exceptions prove that this approach is not inevitable at the national scale, such as the Covid-19 pandemic which caused economic lockdowns in 2020–21, at which point many states engaged in mild Keynesian income redistribution and some industrial policy intervention. China remains the leading national state capable of major non-market and often anti-market interventions, such as banning cryptocurrencies, imposing tough exchange controls, tightly regulating Big Data and investing in public goods (especially environmental rehabilitation). But this occurs within context: the sustained over-accumulation of Chinese productive capital, leading to a 'going out' by many industrial firms mainly along an uneven Belt & Road Initiative, also reflecting extractivist expansion (Bond, 2021).

Most of this imperial power requires comprador elite alliances with victim-country neoliberal leaders in business and most governments. Indeed, since the world financial meltdown of the late 2000s and again during the Covid pandemic, there has been a vital new feature of imperial assimilation, especially associated with the BRICS bloc's rise to the global stage. These middle-sized economies are playing greater roles not only in the multilateral institutions, but in the G20 group—hosted in 2023 by India, 2024 by Brazil and 2025 by South Africa. The utilisation of regional middle-power allies to complement the U.S. military agenda is not new, with Brazil, Turkey and especially Israel deserving long-standing titles of 'sub-imperialist.' It was with this term that Ruy Mauro Marini

(1973) began to label Washington-Brasilia relations in the 1960s–70s, later to be broadly characterised within the category ‘semi-periphery’ by Immanuel Wallerstein’s (1974) world-systems school.

The merits of sub-imperialism to U.S. power were articulated by independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (2023), who otherwise was a strong critic of abusive military spending. But in an interview in November 2023, RFK Jr pledged that if elected in late 2024, he would “Make sure that we have the resources that are critical to us, including the oil resources that are critical to the world, that we have a strike capacity to make sure to be able to protect those. And Israel is critical, and the reason it’s critical is because it’s a bulwark for us in the Middle East. It’s almost like having an aircraft carrier in the Middle East.” That is a terribly crude, albeit honest, version of Washington’s desired sub-imperial allies. A more general reflection is in capitalism’s multilateral management, such as when economic stress rose in 2008–11 and 2020–22 and both imperial and sub-imperial regimes used the G20 and IMF to coordinate monetary expansion, bank bailouts and rapidly-lowered interest rates, creating what Michael Roberts (2021) termed a “sugar rush economy”. That was followed by the Fed’s tightening of interest rates from early 2022 and a resulting round of debt crises across the poorer countries.

But though debt became a major feature in geopolitics (with Western ideologues claiming a Chinese ‘debt trap’ for African countries) and social revolts (e.g. Kenya and Nigeria in mid-2024), the more serious reflections of partnership stresses occurred within what Marini (1973) termed the ‘antagonistic cooperation’ between imperial and sub-imperial forces. It is the partnership between rider and horse over rough political-economic terrain that is continually tested and that, at least into 2024, appears to be holding notwithstanding multiple fissures. Following a review of that terrain, a return to classical statements about imperial power allows adjustment of the ways Vladimir Lenin, Rudolf Hilferding, Rosa Luxemburg and Henryk Grossman treated the topic, so concepts such as imperialism and sub-imperialism remain relevant today.

ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTRADICTION WITHIN THE IMPERIAL/SUBIMPERIAL ARRAY OF FORCES

Major shifts in capital accumulation patterns are reflected in quite dynamic imperialist/sub-imperialist arrangements. Since the 1970s, when capitalist crisis tendencies reemerged, East Asia became an attractive investment option for firms facing lower profit rates in the West. The globalisation of trade, investment and finance accelerated, spurred by the advent of petrodollars (oil economy reserves) and Eurodollars which centralised money in core Western financial havens. Then, the U.S./British-led neoliberal financial deregulation from the early 1980s permitted an explosive growth in credit, financial product innovations and speculative capital. Soaring interest rates—imposed from Washington in 1979 to address U.S. inflation—attracted more of the West’s investable funds into the financial circuits of capital. And the European Union economy became a more coherent, less fragmented unit of capitalist power, with a single currency by the early 1990s (Bond, 2003).

Correspondingly, the multilateral institutions’ control functions in relation to debtor countries mainly served the interests of multinational corporations and banks, especially once the 1980s debt crisis transferred policy power to the World Bank and IMF. This financial component of imperialism is once again a profound problem, in the wake of many countries’ Covid-19 debt encumbrances (Hudson, 2023).

In this context, various long-standing geopolitical pressures and military tensions became more acute during the 2010s, mostly evident as full-blown wars in Ukraine and the Middle East at present, but potentially also in conflict liable to break out at any time in Central Asia, the Himalayan Mountains, the South China Sea and the Korean peninsula. These divisions can certainly escalate quickly, submerging broader mutual interests and creating a ‘camp’ mentality: the West versus a China/Russia-led so-called ‘multipolar’ alignment, which in turn profoundly affected anti-imperialist sensibilities across the world. There are increasingly fierce debates between those favouring BRICS (Fernandes, 2023) and those more skeptical of whether the bloc either represents an actual challenge to global corporate power (Bond, 2023).

The conflicts have extended to labour migration, trade and finance, as witnessed by the rise of xenophobia and rightwing critiques of ‘globalism.’ These were crystallised in rightwing-populist victories in three 2016 elections—Brexit, Trump and Duterte (Philippines)—followed by

others including Brazil, Italy, Argentina and the Netherlands, with France and Germany witnessing strong far-right upsurges in 2024, and Trump's return to power in early 2025 followed by rising far-right support in Germany and Britain. Underlying the lack of faith in liberal elite politics is not only mismanagement of what they concede is a so-called 'polycrisis' unfolding in diverse areas of multilateral responsibility, but also the decline of most globalisation ratios (especially trade/GDP) after 2008 resulting in a 'deglobalisation' or what *The Economist* (2019) terms 'slowbalisation,' or 'stall-speed' growth according to the 2023 UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) *Trade and Development Report*. That document confesses "unequal benefits from trade integration" which since 2021 have begun to generate "a new political economy of trade governance" based on "building resilient supply chains, supporting a just energy transition, delivering decent jobs, tackling corruption and corporate tax avoidance, and developing a secure digital infrastructure"—all of which deprioritise "globalisation in general, trade liberalization specifically" (UNCTAD, 2023, pp. 33–34).

In addition to these openly-admitted flaws in the system, the U.S.-China trade war starting in 2017 and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine reflect further contradictions and limits within capital's geographical expansion. The ebb and flow of 'paleo-conservative' ideology, against the neo-conservative imperial agenda, will continue to disorient imperialist managers and institutions, as was witnessed during the Trump regime (and may be again if he wins the 2024 election). But many such conflicts—born of internal capitalist contradictions—are not really inter-imperial in character, but reflect a 'rogue' character within both sub-imperialism—from which Vladimir Putin crossed the line by invading Crimea in 2014 and the rest of Ukraine in 2022—and imperialism, e.g. when the U.S. Treasury took extreme measures against Russia's global financial integration, kicking Moscow out of the main bank transaction system and seizing several hundred billion dollars of its carelessly-scattered official and oligarch assets (Bond, 2022).

It is difficult to contemplate contemporary imperialism without at least touching on all these dynamics and mentioning the institutions undergirding imperial power. Since the era of Lenin's imperialism, the system has evolved into a far more complex network responsible for managing global capital's commodification of everything under the sun, in part by displacing its crisis tendencies via more extreme uneven and combined development. In order to attack each of these processes, we need deeper

conceptual tools, especially the idea of sub-imperialism, although the term is very alienating for Third World nationalists. (The Tricontinental [2024] analysis of ‘hyper-imperialism’ even claims “Objectively, there is no such thing as sub-imperialism...”.) In the process, that would allow us to transcend a simplistic anti-imperialist rendition of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend,’ so often found in the so-called ‘campist’ logic (Robinson, 2023). After all, Vladimir Putin (2022) himself made clear on the eve of the Ukraine invasion how stifling he considered Lenin’s Bolshevik legacy of allowing ethnic nationalities decentralised power, in this mafioso-style threat: “You want decommunisation? Very well, this suits us just fine. But why stop halfway? We are ready to show what real decommunisations would mean for Ukraine.”

But in spite of that, an enemy’s-enemy-is-my-friend sentiment—backing Putin’s invasion, and claiming China is the world’s socialist vanguard (Tricontinental, 2024)—is still part of the ‘new mood,’ as Vijay Prashad (2023) terms this orientation to Global South politics. And such sentiments are regularly expressed by the leadership of the five largest centre-left forces in South Africa: the Economic Freedom Fighters, the ‘Radical Economic Transformation’ faction of the ruling African National Congress (and its 2024 manifestation as the MK Party), the Communist Party, and the two largest wings of organised labour—the Congress of SA Trade Unions and the National Union of Metalworkers of SA. Hence formulations used to address imperial/sub-imperial power are increasingly important, for example in contesting both Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the Israeli-U.S. genocidal attacks, with a consistent line of analysis.

LENIN’S WARNINGS

The anti-imperial legacy of leftwing thought and activism dates to even before Vladimir Lenin’s, 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism*. That document has strengths but also weaknesses. Lenin’s core description involves five features of an integrated world capitalist system in that particular conjuncture, which showed sufficient maturity to work in tandem: concentration of capital and production; finance capital fusing industrial, landed and mercantile capital under the domination of banks; export of capital; monopolies and cartels that operated across borders; and the division of the world among the biggest capitalist powers, which was most obvious in the Berlin ‘Scramble for Africa’ in 1884–85 and, just as he finished writing *Imperialism*, the May 1916 British-French-Russian Sykes-Picot

Agreement that carved up the Ottoman Empire. In various ways, all these tendencies are evident today.

But at least two flaws stand out. First, bear in mind the 1929 rebuttal by the first Frankfurt School economist, Henryk Grossman, to an idea of Lenin and before him, Rudolf Hilferding: the all-encompassing ‘finance capital.’ In the crucial third chapter of *Imperialism*, Lenin (1916) insisted,

“It is characteristic of capitalism in general that the ownership of capital is separated from the application of capital to production, that money capital is separated from industrial or productive capital, and that the rentier who lives entirely on income obtained from money capital, is separated from the entrepreneur and from all who are directly concerned in the management of capital. Imperialism, or the domination of finance capital, is that highest stage of capitalism in which this separation reaches vast proportions. The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy; it means that a small number of financially ‘powerful’ states stand out among all the rest.”

Much more of a social-democratic reformer than Lenin, Hilferding (1910) had advised that “taking possession of six large Berlin banks would mean taking possession of the most important spheres of large-scale industry.” The term finance capital reflected the sector’s power—of which Lenin and Hilferding provided many examples—but *not its vulnerabilities and contradictions*, as Grossman (1929) presciently argued just before the 1929–31 world financial meltdown in his book *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System: A study in Marxian crisis theory*.

Second, Lenin’s framing assumed that internecine battles between corporates—backed by states representing their interests—would define the imperialist stage of capitalism, in contrast to an earlier understanding elaborated by Rosa Luxemburg (1913). For her, due to the “ceaseless flow of capital from one branch of production to another, and finally in the periodic and cyclical swings of reproduction between overproduction and crisis... the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates.” The stress in Luxemburg’s analysis is how imperialism follows from capitalist power confronting society, nature and early states: “non-capitalist relations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly:

capital feeds on the ruins of such relations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up.”

Lenin (1913) considered such arguments to be ‘rubbish’ and he wrote off Luxemburg’s book as a ‘shocking muddle.’ But the subsequent century proved that even during a period of relatively non-competitive Western imperialism dominated by a sole military superpower, more extreme forms of ‘accumulation by dispossession’—as David Harvey (2003) has renamed such capitalist/non-capitalist thievery—are often the recourse capitalism takes when needing to temporarily displace its contradictions. Casualised labour, welfare-state austerity, privatisation and the wider reach of the extractive industries into what Marx called the ‘free gifts of nature,’ are obvious manifestations. The latter point—environmental appropriation as an accumulation-by-dispossession strategy—is ever more crucial, given the extent of capitalism’s destruction of nature not only through pollution and especially greenhouse gas emissions, but also within exploitative global value chains from which poor countries suffer uncompensated extraction of non-renewable resources (Brand & Wissen, 2018).

Samir Amin (2010) described too many accounts of imperialism that ignore depletion of non-renewable resources in a scathing manner in his *Law of Worldwide Value*: “capitalist accumulation is founded on the destruction of the bases of all wealth: human beings and their natural environment. It took a wait lasting a century and a half until our environmentalists rediscovered that reality, *now become blindingly clear*. It is true that historical Marxisms had largely passed an eraser over the analyses advanced by Marx on this subject and taken the point of view of the bourgeoisie—equated to an atemporal ‘rational’ point of view—in regard to the exploitation of natural resources.”

Two other responses to crisis, crucial ever since the first circuits of capital emerged, are what Harvey (1982) termed the ‘spatial fix,’ which is the geographical shift of capital to more profitable sites, and the ‘temporal fix,’ in which the ability to displace capital over time relies on ever more sophisticated financial systems, so as to pay later but consume now, to mop up the glutted markets. The result is a ‘new imperialism’ more dependent than ever upon shifting, stalling and stealing, in order to displace capital that over-accumulates in exposed economic spaces and sectors, rather than face full-fledged devalorisation of the 1930s Great Depression type.

That means it is vital to comprehend which reforms either proposed or underway will allow that displacement of overaccumulated capital to continue, and hence facilitate imperialism's revitalisation, and which stand in the way. In his *Strategy for Labour*, French sociologist Andre Gorz (1967) derided minor adjustments that meet broad-based imperialism's needs as 'reformist reforms,' and those that undermine the dominant political-economic logic as non-reformist reforms. That distinction requires serious anti-imperialists to transcend their current fetish with inter-state relations, in part because of the way BRICS + —even Xi Jinping's China—are *assimilated* within multilateralism.

IMPERIALIST ASSIMILATION

Enormous influence has emerged above and beyond the national state and is found within the core multilateral imperialist institutions just discussed. That is why the West has often worried about an increasingly arduous—but nonetheless vital—assimilation of emerging economies into the structures of world power. The BRICS + will be tested, issue by issue, especially in light of the way Israel's genocide has divided the bloc, into the new members which are generally faithful U.S. sub-imperial allies—Saudi Arabia (on the verge of signing the Abraham Accords before the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel), the United Arab Emirates and Egypt (the latter two had normalized relations with Tel Aviv in 2021 and 1979 respectively), plus Ethiopia (which has historic religious ties to Israel and extensive circular migration)—as against durable Washington enemy Iran. There were two critical voices against the Gaza massacres: South Africa and Brazil. Indeed by September 2024 when an International Court of Justice ruling against Israeli settler-colonialism came before the UN General Assembly, nine out of ten BRICS + governments—with the exception of Ethiopia—voted in support of Palestinian rights. But on the other hand, China and India still in mid-2024 engaged in extensive trade (China above \$20 billion annually), and have shared the privatization of Haifa port's main quays. India supplies military material used to kill Palestinians. The main supplier of coal to Israel is Russia (whose 1.3 million citizens resident in Israel are among the most anti-Palestinian), followed by South Africa. Even Brazil supplies 9% of Israel's oil and has regularly engaged in military partnerships with Tel Aviv-based Elbit Systems, and so has South Africa's main private arms firm, the Paramount Group

(Bond, 2024). Indonesia's trade with Israel also soared in recent years, undisturbed by the genocide.

Yet even with geopolitical and military turmoil affecting the West Asian, Eastern European and Southeast Asian theaters of conflict, the broader objective of any partnership and global governance agenda is assimilation of hostile forces. China is most important, and in mid-2014, Barack Obama was asked by *The Economist* (2014) about prospects:

The Economist: You see countries like China creating a BRICS bank, for instance—institutions that seem to be parallel with the system, rather—and potentially putting pressure on the system rather than adding to it and strengthening it. That is the key issue, whether China ends up inside that system or challenging it. That's the really big issue of our times, I think.

Obama: It is. And I think it's important for the United States and Europe to continue to welcome China as a full partner in these international norms. It's important for us to recognise that there are going to be times where there are tensions and conflicts. But I think those are manageable. And it's my belief that as China shifts its economy away from simply being the low-cost manufacturer of the world to wanting to move up the value chain, then suddenly issues like protecting intellectual property become more relevant to their companies, not just to US companies.

Until the early 2000s, the welcoming strategy generally paid off. On the eve of Trump's inauguration, Xi Jinping (2017) pronounced in Davos that he would gladly take the mantle from Obama: "Economic globalisation has powered global growth and facilitated movement of goods and capital, advances in science, technology and civilisation, and interactions among peoples... Whether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean that you cannot escape from. Any attempt to cut off the flow of capital, technologies, products, industries and people between economies, and channel the waters in the ocean back into isolated lakes and creeks is simply not possible."

The interpretation by Eric Toussaint (2024), based on a new exposition by Claudio Katz (2024), is that "China is now using the same economic tools that the United States used systematically—i.e. signing bilateral free-trade treaties ... it is China that favours the dogma of free trade and the mutual benefits to be derived by the various economies if they adopt this type of agreement." From Katz's (2024, p. 73) Buenos Aires view:

All the treaties promoted by China reinforce economic subordination and dependence. The Asian giant has consolidated its status as a creditor economy, taking advantage of unequal trade, capturing surpluses and appropriating revenues. China does not act as a dominating imperial power; but neither does it favour Latin America. The current agreements exacerbate primarization and the flight of surplus value. The external expansion of the new power is guided by the principles of profit maximization, not by norms of cooperation. Beijing is not a simple partner and is not part of the South.

Should the West be worried about an upsurge of anti-imperialism (much less anti-capitalism) from a China-led multipolar ideology? A former BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) vice president, Paulo Battista (2023), made the same point as Obama at the Valdai Club in Russia, in a wide-ranging autocritique of that institution and of the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) that was meant to be the BRICS alternative to the IMF: “Let me assure you that when we started out with the CRA and the NDB [in 2014], there existed considerable concern with what the BRICS were doing in this area in Washington, DC., in the IMF and in the World Bank. I can testify to that because I lived there at the time, as Executive Director for Brazil and other countries in the Board of the IMF. As time went by, however, people in Washington relaxed, sensing perhaps that we were going nowhere.”

Nowhere *different*, to be more precise. Hence in spite of talk-left critique of the West, there is a walk-right coherence with imperialism’s sustenance of corporate power within a multilateral agenda that the West and BRICS + generally support. The overall aim of imperial/sub-imperial managerialism remains the extension of the principles and practices of commodification into all aspects of human life and nature, amplified by Big Data, rising surveillance capacity, artificial intelligence and other new technologies. Even when global public goods are urgently needed, such as removing intellectual property from renewable energy and storage innovations, or in pandemic vaccine treatment and management, the WTO has proven important notwithstanding rare critiques such as India and South Africa requesting a waiver to address Covid-19—a stance they retreated from in mid-2022 when Brazil, Russia and China did not help overcome dogmatic European (especially German, British, Norwegian and Swiss) Big Pharma resistance.

The assimilation process has long corresponded with the interpenetration of capitals—and a newly-confident international capitalist class with tax-haven protection and multiple citizenships—during the period of ever-rising trade, foreign investment and cross-border financial flows, until the 2008 peak year of globalisation. A near-universally adopted ideology was vital, the neoliberal Washington Consensus, and is still associated with privatisation, deregulation, outsourcing, casualisation, market-based public policy and a myriad of public–private pilfering techniques, as austerity policies are reasserted (following the momentary 2020–22 pause when both Keynesian debt-based fiscal expansion and monetary laxity were deemed necessary to prevent another meltdown). In the case of environmental management, the ideology of ecological modernisation combines faith in technology and markets. As for social policy, attempts to reform imperialism and establish social pacts conclusively failed, aside from the 2020–21 years of Covid emergencies. And one new threat can be found in ‘financial inclusion’ strategies to leverage cash welfare grants through collateralised microfinance debt encumbrance, as innovated in an extremely predatory manner in South Africa a decade ago by the new World Bank president, Ajay Banga (Bateman et al., 2023).

Compare this ideology with that of past imperial projects, such as racist colonialism; or Bismarck’s Germany which pioneered the welfare state simultaneously with hosting the 1884–85 Scramble for Africa conference; or the way colonial and neo-colonial power fostered a labour aristocracy in the core capitalist countries (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2018); or the post-War Keynesianism and social-democratic frameworks in which U.S. and European powers projected their alternative to the Soviet and Chinese paths. Today’s imperialism is a far more vicious, extractive and effective version. Neoliberalism leads to a no-holds barred capitalism that shrinks sovereignty and entails such an all-encompassing global power structure that even BRICS countries’ firms rely upon Washington-Geneva-New York institutions to extract profits up and down the global value chain, where Shanghai-Mumbai-Johannesburg-Sao Paulo capital often does the dirty work of extraction and manufacture, rarely picking up the bulk of profits located in Research and Development (R&D), marketing and financing. The 2025 replacement of Washington’s 21st-century neoliberal/neo-conservative fusion by Donald Trump’s paleo-conservative

isolationism—and destruction of what he considers the ‘woke’ components of multilateralism (climate crisis mitigation, public health preparedness, humanitarian aid, etc.)—only makes the vicious, extractive character of contemporary imperialism that much more obvious.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM/SUB-IMPERIALIST INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

There are, however, two exceptions, amidst the UN’s overall acquiescence to corporate-neoliberal imperialism, which could be models for internationalism. Before noting these, we must recognize that other efforts, such as the 1970s-80s New International Economic Order and UN Centre on Transnational Corporations, did not prove durable. To be sure, a related UN effort—to end apartheid—did contribute to the delegitimation of pre-1994 Pretoria and assisted Western grassroots activists in boycott-divestment-sanctions campaigning, against imperialist interests. The same potential appears to be emerging against Israel, in the form of UN pressure to end genocide and settler colonialism against Palestinians, partly through the UN’s International Court of Justice as a result of South Africa’s case there in early 2024. *These* are the type of partnership potentials that could be more constructively encouraged in a post-neocolonial era.

Within the UN, substantial success can be measured on two fronts: the 1987 banning of ozone-destroying CFCs and the 2002 medicines fund which fused activist and state capacities. These addressed, at the global scale, what were and are indeed global crises. The Montreal Protocol prevented the growing hole in the ozone layer, which even the conservative Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl regimes recognised as an existential threat during the 1980s, and hence a ban was fully implemented by 1996. (The initial exemptions for hydrofluorocarbons were subsequently eliminated in a 2016 Kigali amendment). That also saved the planet from what NASA suggests would have been a potential half a degree (Celsius) of additional planetary warming by 2100. Such a ban on the main sources of CO₂ and methane, without emissions-trading loopholes, is what the UN should aim for in the UNFCCC, but appears unable to in time to prevent catastrophic climate change, due to the adverse balance of forces.

The second exception, the advent of a UN Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which was catalysed during the early 2000s by black South Africans living with the Human immunodeficiency

virus (HIV), who in their advocacy organisations were initially unable to persuade their national state leaders (especially Thabo Mbeki who was president from 1999 until his expulsion in a 2008 palace coup) to access the anti-retroviral (ARV) medicines required to improve immune systems. The Treatment Action Campaign activists found international allies—especially *Medicins sans Frontiers*, the U.S.-based AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power and Oxfam—who helped demand and win a waiver on Intellectual Property for generic ARVs within the World Trade Organisation in 2001. At the time, more than 40 million people were living with HIV. The UN Global Fund’s (2024) management, in a self-congratulatory yet justified manner, describes on its website what was “an act of extraordinary global solidarity and leadership... to fight what were then the deadliest infectious diseases confronting humanity” resulting in US\$60 billion donated by rich countries, “saving 59 million lives and reducing the combined death rate from the three diseases by more than half.”

Those are two internationalist approaches to global public goods, within and against the logic of multilateral institutions that ordinarily serve corporate power, which any critic of imperial/sub-imperial relations must consider victories. The first was, to be sure, a top-down reform within a global capitalist system in which a market externality—CFC pollution—was understood to be system-threatening and where no emissions-trading or -offset gimmicks were considered workable in the context of urgency; whereas the second was bottom-up, driven by activists who needed a reform to Big Pharma’s power and North-to-South financial resource transfers, to save millions of poor people’s lives. Other specific battles have inspiring lessons, such as South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle which stands out for at least weakening the racial power bloc of white state and capital sufficiently in the mid-1980s through both local struggle and international sanctions, that democracy was won here (even if socio-economic and environmental conditions worsened). From time to time, projects like the Zapatista autonomous municipalities of Chiapas, Mexico; Brazilian Movement of Landless Worker farm occupations; or Rojava grassroots, feminist, democratic socialists have provided prefigurative sites of liberation in particular territories (Kothari et al., 2019).

And we have seen countless other acts of anti-imperialist internationalism, such as widespread Palestine-solidarity protest against the Israeli, U.S., British, German, Dutch and French states. Globally-coordinated

climate activism sometimes shows great promise, and the best local applications—sometimes under the banner of ‘water defenders’—provide what Naomi Klein (2014) terms ‘blockadia’ activism, with many such struggles evolving from ‘climate action’ to ‘climate justice.’

However, as identity-based movements gained traction and as co-optation occurred to some degree—leaving us with the likes of an Obama or with what is termed the ‘lean-in feminism’ of the 1% (Arruzza et al., 2019)—a rightwing doppelganger mirror image has also emerged, as Klein (2023) warns. The formidable rise of a faux anti-imperialism, or more precisely anti- ‘globalism,’ around the networks Steve Bannon has built, are playing a pernicious, conspiracy-mongering role uniting proto-fascistic self-declared ‘populist’ dissidents across the world, especially what with Trump’s second term in office and the alliance he has made with ‘anarcho-capitalist’ Big Tech led by Elon Musk. On the other hand, the impressive showing of Bernie Sanders’ U.S. presidential bids in 2016 and 2020, and Jeremy Corbyn’s 2017 British leadership campaign included *both* appeals to class solidarity *and* progressive identity politics. Corbyn defanged the UK Independence Party—which had the year before driven through Brexit—as he won working-class forces back to the left using compelling socio-economic policies. But as the recent German Linke split shows, the danger of red-brown political forces making concessions to xenophobic tendencies remains acute.

As for the far-right forces’ success, even if they undermined a science-based vaccine campaign against Covid-19, rightwing populism deserves some credit for having tackled problems that the left had historically dominated, such as critiques of coercive state power, extreme surveillance, excessive medicalisation and crony corporate-state relations. The debates over hate speech and censorship exist nearly everywhere, as Big Data generates what Yanis Varoufakis (2023) terms techno-feudalism. These will be profound challenges for anti-imperialists for decades to come, thanks to the power growing in the U.S. (Seattle-Silicon Valley) and Chinese (Shenzhen-Hangzhou) corporate headquarters of the largest tech firms, in relation to the inadequate capacities of Washington-Beijing regulators.

Going back in recent history, a quarter century, to the peak global justice movement protests against multilateral institutions such as in Seattle and Washington, DC in 1999–2000, as well as against the U.S. and British militaries in 2003 as the Iraq War began, there are more sobering lessons. The World Social Forum began well in 2001 in Brazil,

but within a decade had degenerated into an ideology-free talk shop dominated by NGOs. Some strong components persisted—for example, Via Campesina, the World March of Women and Water Warriors—and both the single-issue and geographically-focused movements showed they could mobilise in coherent ways at global and local scales.

But it's obvious enough that the three primary progressive global movements of recent months and years—against Trumpism (including Musk's Tesla, X.com and SpaceX as concrete boycott symbols), for climate sanity, and in solidarity with Palestine—must win some far more profound victories in the period ahead, to avoid burnout and collapse. As forces continue to rise and fall and rise again against both imperialism *and also now sub-imperialism*, much greater attention to the failed Western partnership with BRICS + regimes—and to conflicts between and within these forces—will be vital for a coherent, internationalist, bottom-up strategy.

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Fairtrade Certification of Commercial Farms: The Case of South African Wine Farms

Joshua Bell and Sally Matthews

INTRODUCTION

A key aspect of Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is improving trade relationships in order to facilitate the favourable inclusion of developing countries in the global economy (Cruz, 2023, pp. 1,155,831–1,155,833). By linking trade with development, trade is not considered only in relation to economics, but rather seen as rooted in social, political and historical realities. It is not just any trade and any inclusion in the global economy that is sought after. Rather, in line with Goal 17, forms of trade that involve partnership and that foreground development are needed. The relevance of the Fairtrade movement, which works to promote fairer trade conditions, is clear. Indeed, according to Fairtrade International (2024a), the Fairtrade movement is uniquely positioned to bring about SDG17. This is because Fairtrade works with a

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range of different actors who partner together to promote fairer trade conditions. However, as this chapter will show, participation in Fairtrade processes is no guarantee that the fair trade conditions that are a prerequisite for the achievement of SDG17 are actually realised.

The South African wine industry is now included as a key producer of Fairtrade wine in global wine production networks (FLO-CERT, 2024). Historically, this industry has been characterised by the extreme exploitation of black and coloured¹ farmworkers through relationships of paternalism and dependency. Its inclusion in Fairtrade networks ostensibly shows that the industry has moved away from its exploitative historical practices towards practices of decent work and social transformation (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, pp. 2–6). While Fairtrade certification was originally only available for small-scale producers, since the early 2000s this certification has been made available to qualifying South African commercial wine farms (Jari et al., 2013, pp. 67–70; Moseley, 2008, p. 299–300). In the South African context, commercial wine farms have historically been white-owned and remain mostly white-owned (Keahey, 2016, pp. 411–414). The Fairtrade label's application to large-scale, commercial South African wine farms represents a departure from the long-established standard of providing certification primarily to small-scale producers (Raynolds et al., 2007, pp. 5–8). FTI (Fairtrade International) has justified this deviation from this norm as a necessary adjustment to the historical and contextual factors that shape the operation of the South African wine industry (Jari et al., 2013, p. 67). It was hoped that extending Fairtrade certification to South African wine farms would incentivise commercial farms to provide workers with better working conditions and higher wages and to allow workers to benefit from the development opportunities associated with Fairtrade (Jari et al., 2013, pp. 67–70). However, some critical commentators are concerned that the relationships between farmers and workers on Fairtrade commercial wine farms may remain similar to the paternalistic relationships that existed in South Africa during colonialism and Apartheid (Bek et al., 2007, p. 315; Keahey, 2015, pp. 443–451; Kruger & Du Toit, 2007, pp. 200–210). As a result, while the Fairtrade label has formed

¹ In the South African context, the term 'coloured' refers to a creolized cultural grouping consisting of descendants of enslaved people, Khoisan people and people of other groups (Du Toit et al., 2008, p. 7). The term is still used in official South African documentation and popular discourse, although its use is contested.

global partnerships through the inclusion of large-scale, commercial wine producers in South Africa within Fairtrade global production networks, there is a question of the impact and nature of these partnerships when viewed against the backdrop of South African socio-political history and context.

This chapter examines the implications of the FTI's decision to include large-scale, commercial South African wine producers in its certificatory standards, asking if this partnership is justifiable within the context of this industry. The chapter forms part of a broader study in which interviews were conducted with farmworkers on Fairtrade-certified farms in the Western Cape province of South Africa as well as with other stakeholders in the South African wine industry, such as farm managers and organisations which assist farmers to apply for Fairtrade certification. Research for this study has been conducted with ethical clearance from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms are used for farmworkers to protect their identities.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the broader fair trade movement and the creation of Fairtrade International (FTI). The chapter then contextualises the application of the Fairtrade certification within the South African wine industry, examining the contentious history of this industry. It is in light of this history, and the pervasive living legacy of exploitation within this industry, this chapter concludes by presenting an argument that the extension of Fairtrade's certificatory standards to large-scale, commercial South African wine producers is not justifiable as a novel global partnership and is inconsistent with the described ethos of "Fairtrade".

THE FAIR TRADE MOVEMENT

The fair trade movement arose as early as the 1950s as a grassroots alternative trade model orientated towards fairness (Jari et al., 2013, p. 66). Initially, the drivers of the fair trade movement were faith-based organisations in the Global North that aimed to import products from marginalised producers in the Global South and to introduce them to markets in the Global North, creating direct multilateral partnerships (Robbins, 2013, pp. 244–248). However, in the 1970s, the fair trade movement shifted from being orientated towards direct developmental assistance to instead focusing on restructuring trade relations to favour marginalised workers (Robbins, 2013, pp. 244–246). At the heart of this

movement is the belief that free trade is harmful both to poor workers and more generally to the Global South as trade terms are frequently set by richer nations in ways that advantage them (Sidwell, 2008, p. 6). While the free trade model assumes trade to be inherently fair and rational, advocates of fair trade acknowledge that histories of colonialism have stratified the global economy such that it facilitates the Global North's exploitation of the Global South (Murray & Reynolds, 2007, p. 6–11; Wallerstein et al., 2013, pp. 170–171). The implication of this is that any engagement in global production networks is impacted by socially embedded factors such as political, cultural and geographic power disparities. Bek et al., (2007, pp. 301–302) comment on these power disparities saying that the 'rigged rules and double standards that typify the international trade regime militate against developing nations and ensure that the hegemony of advanced industrial countries is maintained'. This has been a central concern of the fair trade movement.

Advocates of the fair trade movement highlight a need to reform the global economy through special tariffs and trade agreements aimed explicitly at applying fair trade practices for developing economies (Sidwell, 2008, p. 4). The fair trade movement proposes that instead of increasing aid, trade networks should be restructured to promote a 'high road' approach to development, prioritising the improvement of worker skills and wages (Bek et al., 2007, pp. 302–306). This approach presents a notable departure from the reasoning of the free trade model, which argues for trade relations to be left to the rationality of the economy. The fair trade movement instead argues for tightened regulation of the global economy, acknowledging the social embeddedness of global production networks in terms of historical and contemporary forms of exploitation (Keahey, 2016, pp. 413–414). While proponents of the free trade model argue in favour of less economic regulation, the fair trade movement has countered that economies are always regulated, with rich and powerful elites regulating markets where institutional regulation is absent (Fridell, 2014, p. 1182). A key argument of the fair trade movement is that, as trade inevitably involves some form of regulation, these regulations should favour the marginalised rather than the powerful (Reynolds & Wilkinson, 2007, pp. 33–34).

The fair trade movement proposes that consumers have the power to restructure international trade relations to be developmental rather than exploitative by favouring products which have been fairly traded

(Fridell, 2014, p. 1190). Where the free trade model has historically overlooked the importance of factors such as historical context, class, race and gender within trade relations, the fair trade movement aimed to centralise such socio-political factors in the structuring of production networks and in the marketing of products (Fridell, 2014, p. 1180–1181). The idea of fair trade initiated a distinct ideological shift in how trade networks should operate. With free trade, wealthy and powerful producers act as the intermediaries of developing producers' inclusion in the global economy. Whereas with fair trade, producers in the developing world can directly access the consumers of wealthy nations (Robbins, 2013, p. 244–248). By optimising consumer buying power, the fair trade movement aimed to restructure trade relations within the global economy from occurring at the expense of workers to prioritising them (Levi & Linton, 2003, pp. 407–409).

FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL

A number of organisations have arisen to drive the broader fair trade movement. The largest and most influential of these is Fairtrade International (FTI), which is also often referred to as the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO). The creation of FTI may be traced to 1988, when Solidaridad, a Dutch faith-based organisation, created a label called Max Havelaar, a name inspired by a Dutch fictional character who opposed the exploitation of coffee pickers amongst Dutch colonies (Dragusanu et al., 2014, p. 218). The creation of this label came as a result of Franz Vanderhoff, a Dutch theologian, approaching Solidaridad and requesting the creation of a label for coffee produced by the Mexican cooperative of UCIRI (Robbins, 2013, p. 246). This label remained consistent with the ethos of the fair trade movement in aiming to ensure that farmers operating under the label received fair pricing for their coffee (Robbins, 2013, p. 246). In the following decade, this label gained traction beyond the Netherlands and extended to other European nations and the United States of America and other similar labelling organisations came into being, such as TransFair and Global Exchange. In 1997, these organisations joined to form Fairtrade International (Dragusanu et al., 2014, p. 218). An important function of this organisation has been its certificatory procedures and operating standards. One of its most pivotal standards is the minimum price set to be paid to producers for their products under the label (Robbins, 2013, pp. 245–247). Consumers are

reassured that products bearing the label 'Fairtrade' have been produced and traded under fair conditions.

The Fairtrade label operates through the certification of producers and traders who sell Fairtrade products at a higher market price, with a portion of that sale price being allocated towards a Fairtrade premium intended to improve worker wages and facilities (Dragusanu et al., 2014, pp. 219–221). Importantly, Fairtrade standards seek to improve the working standards of hired labour through the assurance of secured wages, formal contracts, maternity leave, overtime rates, health and safety provisions, trade union involvement and community development through the use of the Fairtrade premium (Fairtrade Foundation, 2010, pp. 16–17). This provides a market-based solution to socio-political issues such as poverty by linking ethics-orientated consumers with producers who provide products which are certified to be fairly sourced and traded (Robbins, 2013, pp. 244–245). Consumers choose to buy Fairtrade products due to the promise that part of the product's price will go to the development and upliftment of economically marginalised groups (Cramer et al., 2014, pp. 121–123). On the other hand, producers choose to adopt the Fairtrade label (and meet the organisation's certificatory standards) to access Fairtrade buyers who are willing to pay higher prices to facilitate the creation of Fairtrade premiums (Dragusanu et al., 2014, pp. 219–221). In this way, Fairtrade purports to restructure global production networks to facilitate international development through market-based actions.

As Fairtrade applies to numerous sectors and commodities, certificatory requirements vary according to the standards applied by FTI regarding each specific industry (Keahey, 2015, pp. 441–442). However, there exist mainstays of certificatory standards that serve to retain the overarching values of the Fairtrade label when adopted by producers and traders. For traders, this entails adhering to price floors when purchasing Fairtrade commodities from producers, providing Fairtrade premiums to contribute to the social development of producers, agreeing to long-term contracts with producers, as well as assisting producers with advances and credit (Dragusanu et al., 2014, pp. 219–222). Producers, in turn, are required to adhere to safety standards that apply both to workers and the environment, to provide fair and liveable wages to all involved in production, to ensure that there is no child labour, and to provide financial transparency and public accountability (Dragusanu et al., 2014, pp. 219–222). Beyond these generalised standards, FLO-CERT aims to adapt certificatory processes specific to the contextual factors of the

respective countries in which it may apply through delegating certification to regional branches of FLO-CERT (Dragusanu et al., 2014, p. 221). For example, South African traders and producers are regulated by FLO-CERT South Africa (Kruger & Du Toit, 2007, p. 207).

Like its predecessor, the Max Havelaar label, FTI has primarily orientated its label towards small-scale producers (Barrientos et al., 2007, p. 54). However, Jari et al., (2013, p. 69) note that FTI does not typically deal directly with small-scale producers but instead requires such producers to form cooperatives. Smaller producers coordinate to produce commodities to be sold under the Fairtrade label. The benefits of selling commodities as Fairtrade, such as the price floor, accrue to all members of the cooperative equally (Dragusanu et al., 2014, pp. 219–220; Valkila, 2014, p. 477). The cooperatives are led by democratically elected cooperative members, and the social premiums are managed by a premium committee selected from cooperative members (Zackrisson & Apelberg, 2016, p. 40).

This general focus on small-scale producers makes the case of the inclusion of South African wine farms all the more noteworthy. Due to historical factors and the resultant socio-economic disparities, the South African wine industry is overwhelmingly dominated by large-scale farms (Aliber & Cousins, 2013, p. 141–142; Jari et al., 2013, p. 67). As the South African wine industry does not have a large enough body of small-scale wine producers, particularly in terms of the export market, FTI has permitted the certification of large-scale wine producers (Jari et al., 2013, p. 67–70). Given the history of the South African wine industry, which is discussed below, this decision requires careful scrutiny.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN WINE INDUSTRY

The international wine industry often characterises the South African wine sector as a ‘New World Producer’ alongside countries like Australia and Chile (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1639). While this characterisation is likely one that arose because wines from this region have only re-appeared on an international scale over the past three decades (after the ending of sanctions due to Apartheid), this miscategorises this wine industry. In fact, the production of wine is not a recent occurrence within the South African context and has, instead, occurred for close to four centuries (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1639). With the wine industry being such a longstanding sector of the South African economy, its operation is deeply entrenched

in the history of the country itself, with the result being that the current configuration of this industry may only be understood in relation to this history.

The development of a wine industry in the Cape was a crucial factor in the establishment of a South African colonial state, as the farming of grapes and the creation of wine played a decisive role in the dispossession of land beginning as early as the seventeenth century when the Dutch East India Company created a settlement in the Cape (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1639; Rasool & Witz, 1993, p. 451). The creation of wine proved such a successful endeavour that South African wine was bottled and exported with much popularity throughout Europe, constituting almost 90% of the exports from the region at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1639). The production of wine in the Cape during the colonial era involved the use of slave labour as well as other forms of unfree and exploitative labour (Bond, 2007, p. 3–4; Campbell & Guibert, 2007, p. 224; Williams, 2016, pp. 896–897). During the Apartheid era, sanctions meant that South African wine became less popular internationally, but white interests continued to be protected and labour practices continued to be exploitative and paternalistic (Ewert & Du Toit, 2005, pp. 317–318).

THE CONTEMPORARY WINE INDUSTRY

The 1990s presented a crucial point in the (re)establishment of the South African wine industry. The country underwent significant changes to the political, social and economic landscape as a result of the 1994 democratic election, ending nearly four centuries of colonial and Apartheid rule (Ewert et al., 2005, p. 8). This had a major impact on the labour market due to the creation of a minimum wage and the introduction of a more robust framework of labour rights (Ponte & Ewert, 2009, p. 1639). The most impactful change to the wine industry, however, was the end of the state-led patronage that had benefited white farmers during the colonial and Apartheid eras (Moseley, 2008, p. 296). However, such farmers were able to benefit from the opportunity to export their wine to new markets as the end of Apartheid meant that sanctions were lifted. The contemporary insertion of the South African wine industry into global production networks has proven to be a successful endeavour for local winemakers. South Africa is now the eighth largest producer of wine, with 75% of

local exports going to the countries of the European Union, generating five billion rands in export value (Ferreira & Hunter, 2017, p. 682).

FAIRTRADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 2003, the FTI extended its certificatory label to large-scale, commercial wine producers in South Africa (Moseley, 2008, p. 299). Since then, South Africa has become one of Fairtrade's most prominent African producers (Herman, 2012, p. 1124). In extending the label to the South African context, the Fairtrade labelling process has been adapted to recognise the unique historical factors that shape South Africa's contemporary political, economic and spatial dynamics (Zackrisson & Apelberg, 2016, p. 5–6). These historical factors shape South Africa's contemporary spatial dynamics with the consequence that white South Africans hold much of the nation's land resources (Keahey, 2015, p. 446–447). This spatial inequality is distinctly visible in the South African agricultural sector, consisting of a well-developed and predominantly white commercial sector and a primarily black small-scale sector orientated towards subsistence farming (Herman, 2012, p. 1123–1124). Small-scale farmers often possess only small portions of land and limited access to machinery and infrastructure (Keahey, 2016, p. 414). In contrast, the commercial farm sector historically received expansive investment by colonial and Apartheid governments and ample access to exploitable black labour through institutionalised racism (Jari et al., 2013, p. 67).

The decision to extend Fairtrade certification to commercial wine farmers was made with this context in mind. The Fairtrade Foundation (2010, p. 7) explains that most South African smallholder farmers own very small plots of farming land while also having little access to tools, machinery, water, electricity, money and education (Fairtrade Foundation, 2010, p. 7). In addition, the Fairtrade Foundation (2010, p. 4) points out that, due to South Africa's history of Apartheid, the majority of historically marginalised black people are dependent on wages rather than small-scale agricultural activities. This means that if Fairtrade certification was only offered to small-scale producers, most South African workers would be excluded from any potential benefits. It was hoped that by offering Fairtrade certification to commercial wine farms, marginalised black workers on such farms would benefit.

Furthermore, it was hoped that Fairtrade certification could also potentially help alleviate gender inequality and paternalistic practices.

Raynolds and Keahey (2008, p. 220) note that gender equity is a key facet of Fairtrade's social agenda. Following research suggesting that women involved in the production of agriculture-based Fairtrade farmed goods experience less of a benefit than men due to gender inequality, FTI established a multi-stakeholder working group in 2010 tasked with developing a gender strategy for the Fairtrade system (Smith, 2015, p. 406–407). The Fairtrade International (2024b, p. 10) introduced the Fairtrade Gender Strategy to set a clear direction for FTI's global work on gender equity and equality. The Fairtrade Gender Strategy is outlined by three goals to: significantly improve the active and equal participation of women in Fairtrade certified smallholder and hired labour organizations; empower more women and girls with opportunities to equitably access Fairtrade benefits; challenge systemic issues that impact the realization of greater gender equality in Fairtrade supply chains (Fairtrade International, 2024b, p. 12). According to Smith (2015, p. 415), available evidence suggests that Fairtrade can enhance the representation of women in trade unions, workers committees and Fairtrade Premium Committees among hired labour.

The specification of hired labour is highly important to FTI's mission towards gender equity, as women feature predominantly among hired and temporary labour in African Fairtrade productive networks, and are therefore entitled by Fairtrade standards to equivalent benefits and employment conditions as permanent workers (Raynolds & Keahey, 2008, p. 221). While such FTI standards promote gender equality, FTI rejects using its certificatory standards to impose gender equality on producers, as it is believed that to do so would be neither effective or sustainable (Smith, 2015, p. 418). Instead, FTI proposes the use of the Fairtrade premium as a direct route to meet the needs of women (Smith, 2015, p. 415). Thus, it was hoped that Fairtrade certification could also potentially contribute to gender equity on South African farms.

The decision to include commercial farms in areas such as the wine industry has not only been the result of the commercial sector predominantly holding access to markets but has also served to align the application of Fairtrade with state-led efforts to address national issues of spatial and economic inequality (Keahey, 2016, pp. 410–414). At the forefront of these national efforts has been the Black Economic Empowerment Act (BEE), which has been incorporated into FTI standards applied to South Africa (Herman, 2012, p. 1123–1124). Fairtrade certification of commercial farms further requires the formation of premium committees

wherein workers are to be included and informed as to the managerial processes of the farms on which they work (Krumbiegel et al., 2018, p. 196). This envisioned inclusion aims to facilitate national aspirations of land reform and worker empowerment (Herman, 2012, p. 1123–1124).

Fairtrade certification also held out appeal to commercial farmers. South African farmers needed to distance themselves from South Africa's history of exploitation and oppression in order to gain secure access to the international market (Moseley, 2008, pp. 292–294). By attaining Fairtrade certification, farmers could access new markets. Thus, a number of commercial farmers were keen to take up the offer of Fairtrade certification.

For the reasons sketched out above, a number of South African commercial wine farms have been given Fairtrade certification. Today, 65 out of the 115 Fairtrade wine grapes produced and traded under the Fairtrade label are from South Africa, making South Africa the most important producer of Fairtrade wine (FLO-CERT, 2024). While FTI's ambitions suggest an avenue for positive social transformation aligned with national objectives, these ambitions need to be assessed within the context of the contemporary South African wine industry.

THE DE DOORNS UPRISING AND THE BITTER GRAPES DOCUMENTARY

As discussed above, it was hoped that Fairtrade certification would play a role in improving the conditions of South African wine farm-workers. However, it is very clear that the general context in which wine is produced in South Africa remains one characterised by racialised and gendered labour exploitation. In 2013, this was highlighted by an uprising in De Doorns, a town in the Western Cape. De Doorns, within the Cape Winelands, has featured as a prominent location for the production of wine historically. Consequently, if transformation was indeed occurring, one would expect the town of De Doorns to be a site of impactful change (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, p. 15). However, between 2012 and 2013, it became apparent that such transformation was not occurring, as farm labourers began to protest for the raising of the minimum wage and against issues of labour casualisation (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, p. 15; Visser & Ferrer, 2015, p. 177). While the De Doorns uprising began with calls for higher wages, the protest shed light on the more general experience of farm labourers within the wine

industry, revealing that workers were working unjustifiably long hours while lacking access to water and toilets and adequate protection from dangers such as pesticides. Wilderman (2015, p. 9) notes that in the effort to improve product and process efficiency, 80% of the workers of De Doorns had been casualised and held little job security for employment that was already exploitative. Workers further lacked collective bargaining power as union action for casual workers is not a possibility in a work environment that already offers precarious social security (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, pp. 15–20).

Protesting workers refused to work and disrupted highways to draw attention to their plight. In February 2013, they successfully increased the minimum wage from R69 (\$3.61) to R150 (\$7.86) a day (Wilderman, 2015, pp. 7–10). While the increase in the minimum wage signalled an important victory for farmworkers, Visser and Godfrey (2017, p. 40) have pointed out that R150 (\$7.86) is still not enough for a family of four with two breadwinners to meet their basic nutritional needs. The De Doorns uprising had a wider impact through the backlash of the European market, with some European countries, such as Sweden, threatening to boycott South African wines which did not have ethical certification (Visser & Ferrer, 2015, p. 177). An important outcome of the De Doorns uprising was the increased importance of certificatory bodies as a means of assuring foreign markets that domestic wine production had taken place ethically. The uprising presented an image of a wine industry unchanged from a historical period previously characterised by international sanctions and institutionalised oppression (Visser & Ferrer, 2015, p. 177).

The South African wine industry would come under scrutiny again in 2016 with the release of the documentary *Bitter Grapes*, which featured on Danish and Swedish television and depicted harsh working and living conditions of wine farmworkers (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, p. 35–36). These conditions were deemed so dire by Swedish and Danish consumers that working conditions of South African farmworkers were described as a modern iteration of slavery (Hastings, 2019, p. 928–933). Scandinavian nations are an important export destination as South African wine is the second most popular wine of origin in Sweden, and exports to Denmark grew by 78% in the decade before the release of *Bitter Grapes* (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, p. 36). The backlash from the screening of this documentary threatened to alienate the South African wine industry from an important Northern market (Hastings, 2019, pp. 928–933). As a focal point of the documentary, Robertson Winery bore the brunt of

international discontent, with Danish supermarkets temporarily pulling Robertson Winery wines from shelves and Norwegian and Swedish importers beginning to conduct audits of South African wine farms (Visser & Godfrey, 2017, pp. 35–36). The *Bitter Grapes* documentary suggested that the conditions on many South African wine farms remain comparable to the wine farms of the early colonial slave society (Hastings, 2019, pp. 228–935). Media coverage of the De Doorns uprising and the release of the *Bitter Grapes* documentary both highlight that at least some South African wine farms remain sites of racialised exploitation and oppression. However, the focus of such coverage was not specifically on Fairtrade-certified farms. Given that a number of South African wine farms are now Fairtrade certified, it is important to ask whether the conditions on these farms are any better than the conditions exposed in the *Bitter Grapes* documentary and the media coverage of the De Doorns uprising.

INSIGHTS FROM FAIRTRADE WINE GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS

As the South African wine industry is the largest producer of Fairtrade wine, the success of the Fairtrade wine model relies on the success of the South African Fairtrade wine industry. This means that the question of the justifiability of the inclusion of large-scale, commercial wine producers in Fairtrade certification standards as a global partnership extends beyond the South African wine industry and speaks to the success of the Fairtrade wine model as a whole. If this inclusion of large-scale, mostly white, commercial wine producers promotes socio-economic development amongst historically exploited and marginalised black and coloured farmworkers, then that speaks to the success of the Fairtrade wine industry. However, if this inclusion by FTI fails to address issues of paternalism and dependency, the very mission and idea of ‘Fairtrade’ could be critically undermined. If dependency issues continue to exist even within the South African Fairtrade model, this would suggest the possibility that the Fairtrade label has been co-opted as a means for local producers to gain entry into global markets, but is not bringing about the intended benefits for workers.

As illustrated by Fig. 8.1 below, Fairtrade production networks concern numerous economic, social and political actors and structures. As a result, the apathy or advocacy of international retailers in buying South African

Fairtrade wine has an impact on the success of the Fairtrade model itself, meaning that if international retailers desire ‘fairly traded’ wine, these retailers have a role in ensuring both that South African wines are certified and that certified farms actually meet the standards supposedly guaranteed by such certification.

While Fairtrade remains a voluntary certification, the International Trade Centre (2011, pp. 22–28) has found that private certifications such as those offered by FTI are increasingly taking on a regulatory role within production networks. This means that while membership of organisations such as Fairtrade are theoretically voluntary, the standards advocated for by such bodies are increasingly becoming mandatory for accessing some markets. According to the CEO of Fairtrade wine producer Du Toitskloof, certification from the label offers an important entry point into European (and particularly Scandinavian) markets.² This is not to say

Fairtrade Wine Global Production Networks

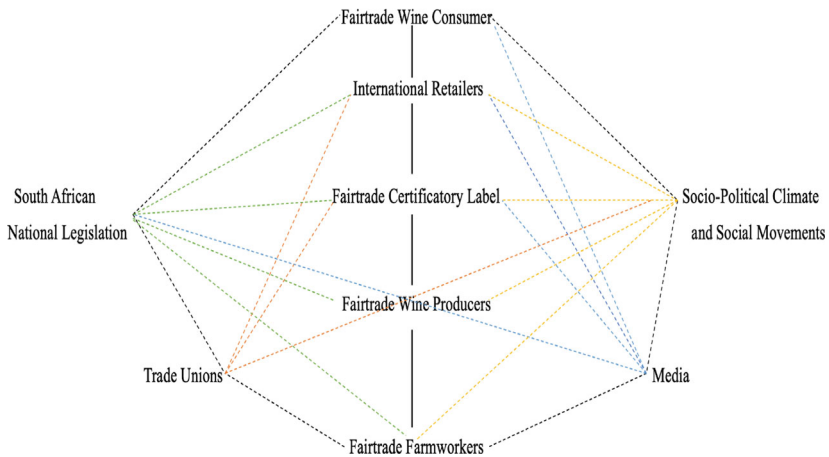


Fig. 8.1 Illustration created by the authors depicting Fairtrade wine global production networks

² Interview with Marius Louw, CEO of Du Toitskloof, Telephonic Interview, 4th May 2020.

that Fairtrade farmers join Fairtrade only to widen their market access – indeed, some of the stakeholders interviewed in this study indicate that a motivation for seeking certification was to create opportunities for workers through the use of the Fairtrade premium.³ However, as some markets increasingly expect such certification, farmers are incentivised to join Fairtrade for reasons unrelated to improving the livelihoods of workers. But joining Fairtrade can be an expensive endeavour, with one interviewee indicating that the certification cost upwards of R150 000 (more than \$8000) per annum make certification difficult.⁴ Due to these costs, a representative of the Spier wine company noted that maintaining the Fairtrade certification was so expensive that the company ultimately decided to part ways with the certification.⁵ The representative noted that while the company has continued their social and environmental developmental efforts, as previously done under the Fairtrade label, certification was found to be financially unfeasible.⁶

Alongside the significant expenses of gaining and maintaining the Fairtrade certification, through meeting auditing and certificatory requirements, local wine producers are further impacted by the undervaluing of wines among international markets, as indicated by a representative of the Wines of South Africa.⁷ She explained that within the wine industry, and particularly in the European market, there is an expectation that South African wines are ‘cheap and cheerful’.⁸ Fairtrade administrative costs increase over time, so if the wine receives a low price due to South African wine being undervalued by Fairtrade buyers, farmers may decide to reduce the salaries of farmworkers. Although the FTI sets certain

³ Interview with Wian Strydom, Origin Wine Supply Support, Telephonic Interview, 16th July 2020; Interview with Sandra Kruger and Marthane Swart, SKA Consultancy, Video Interview, 27th July 2020.

⁴ Interview with Wian Strydom, Origin Wine Supply Support, Telephonic Interview, 16th July 2020.

⁵ Email correspondence with Marina Kaiser, Global Brand Manager at Spier Wines, 29th June 2020 to 30th June 2020.

⁶ Email correspondence with Marina Kaiser, Global Brand Manager at Spier Wines, 29th June 2020 to 30th June 2020.

⁷ Email correspondence with Mayrna Calow, Communications Manager of WOSA, 14th August 2020 to 7th September 2020.

⁸ Email correspondence with Mayrna Calow, Communications Manager of WOSA, 14th August 2020 to 7th September 2020.

standards regarding wages, farmers who wish to maintain the label can find ways to reduce labour costs, provided they continue to create the impression that they are meeting Fairtrade requirements.

Jaffee (2012, p. 111) describes a 'shallow' approach by actors in the Fairtrade international market that seemingly exposes a contradiction in the Fairtrade label's effort as a developmental project, while firmly setting its roots in trade. For international markets that place financial gain at the centre of consideration, a 'shallow' approach that adopts the narrative of 'cheap and cheerful' South African wines effectively justifies the undervaluing of these wines. However, the goal of the 'shallow' approach is one rooted in a capitalist rationale of finding a producer that will supply wine at the cheapest price point, which allows for the highest mark-up for international buyers. Jaffee (2012, p. 111), who has criticised FTI for adopting a 'shallow' approach to fair trade, argues:

The most powerful actors in the fair trade system have achieved dramatic success in terms of growth, but at the cost of rendering fair trade primarily an adjunct to the conventional market, rather than posing a fundamental challenge to the terms on which it operates. For social movements whose principal tool for effecting social change is a voluntary certification, then, co-optation is most likely to occur in the arena of the effectiveness, integrity, and/or rigor of standards, and the form that co-optation takes is likely to be the dilution of the content of those standards upon which the certification rests.

Embedded in the 'shallow' approach described above, is the danger of social movements being co-opted by powerful actors that use such movements to gain market power and further their financial interests through practices that do not speak, and/or are antithetical, to the social movement itself. South African large-scale, commercial wine producers have historically featured as the subjugators of primarily black and coloured workers in a manner that emblemised the systems of racialised oppression and exploitation which characterised the colonial and Apartheid period. This is not to say, however, that there are no South African large-scale, commercial wine producers who seek to benefit farmworkers through market transactions. However, what is unclear is whether Fairtrade certification really guarantees the benefits it claims to bring for farm workers.

Through interviews with thirty farmworkers on five Fairtrade certified farms, we discovered indications that the lived experiences of Fairtrade wine farmworkers contradict the stated goals of the FTI. It may be reasonably assumed that the workers on a Fairtrade farm will be aware of the farm's certification, as the premium (the driving mechanism of Fairtrade's developmental efforts through trade) is to be independently administered by a Premium Committee consisting of farmworkers. However, only one of the thirty farmworkers interviewed was even aware of the Fairtrade certification of the farm on which they lived and worked.⁹ This issue was summarised by one farmworker who asked 'Whose Fairtrade? I don't know about the Fairtrade'.¹⁰ For some workers, there seemed to have been no discernible difference in the operation of the farm over time, which spanned across decades spent on the farm. One farmworker lamented:

I came here in 1985. My daughter was born on the farm. She's 26. There's no changes that I've seen from those early years to now, even between me and the farmer.¹¹

Others have suggested that certain issues on the farm have worsened, such as the casualisation of labour through the use of labour brokers, which plunged workers into a cycle of being dismissed from and rehired to work on the farm at the convenience of the farm's management.¹² Alongside looming fears of eviction from the respective farms, workers reported harmful exposure to flooding and wild bees (due to cross-harvesting) as factors that accompanied issues of generally unsafe and unsuitable housing.¹³ These harsh living conditions were described by one farmworker who explained:

⁹ Interview with Ms Williams (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr Nel (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 28th September 2020.

¹¹ Interview with Ms Botha (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 8th October 2020.

¹² Interview with Ms van Wyk (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 8th October 2020; Interview with Ms Pieterse (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 3, 28th September 2020; Interview with Mr Nel (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020.

¹³ Interview with Ms Smit (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020; Interview with Ms Williams (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020; Interview with Mr Cloete (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 3, 28th September 2020; Interview with Ms van Rooyen (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 3, 28th September 2020; Interview with Mr Nel (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020.

We grew up on the farm. We don't know any other farm. The conditions that we live under, especially the water, the water from the rain comes into the houses whereby our children have to walk through this water. When it comes to the farmer, nothing is being done.¹⁴

Some workers expressed the sentiment that when they contested poor living and working conditions, their complaints and pleas were not listened to by the respective farm's management.¹⁵ In speaking out against the farm on the above issues, such as to trade unions or the media, numerous workers highlighted the fear of eviction from the farm as not only relating to the loss of work but also entailing the loss of a home for their families.¹⁶

The findings of our study are supported by a study by the Women on Farms Project (WFP), where researcher Celeste Fortuin found that the conditions on Fairtrade certified farms were not consistent with Fairtrade standards (Thebus, 2023). On the 22nd March 2023, approximately 150 farmworkers, many dressed in t-shirts slogan of "UNFAIRTRADE", marched to the Labour Centre in Paarl to hand over a memorandum which called for better living conditions for people working on farms (Human, 2023). This march was accompanied by the release of the research findings from the Women on Farms Project (WFP). Key findings highlighted in this study were that 25% of surveyed farms have "poor" or "very poor" housing for workers, 31% of workers earn less than the National Minimum Wage of R25.42 (\$1.33) per hour, 54% of women surveyed are exposed to pesticides in the vineyards or at home, and 35% of women workers surveyed do not have access to toilet facilities while working in the vineyards (Human, 2023). These findings corroborate the findings of our own study. Together they suggest that the conditions on at least some Fairtrade certified wine farms are inconsistent with Fairtrade standards and instead reminiscent of the dark history of this industry.

¹⁴ Interview with Ms Williams (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 28th September 2020.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr Phillips (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 4, 8th October 2020; Interview with Mr Roberts (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 4, 8th October 2020; Interview with Ms Du Plessis (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 28th September 2020.

¹⁶ Interview with Ms van Wyk (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 2, 8th October 2020; Interview with Ms Williams (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020; Interview with Mr Nel (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 1, 28th September 2020; Interview with Ms Snyman (pseudonym), Fairtrade Farm 5, 28th September 2020.

CONCLUSION

The Fairtrade label entered the context of the South African wine industry in 2003. Twenty years later, farmworkers are contesting the conditions of Fairtrade-certified farms, highlighting issues that are inconsistent with the stated goals of the FTI. As described in the discussion of the *Bitter Grapes* documentary, the South African wine industry has very nearly faced international boycotts from global trade partners due to the exposed brutal conditions faced by farmworkers. Buyers of ethically uncertified South African wine would then have accepted the ethical risks of buying wine from the region. In the case of Fairtrade wines, however, the very purpose of the label is to assure consumers that certified wines have been produced in accordance with standards that champion fairness in the production process. While the Fairtrade label has likely produced some positive changes, the transformation of the long-standing racialised and gendered exploitation which has characterised the wine industry requires more fundamental systemic change. These changes exist as a task that is beyond the scope of a single certificatory label and, rather, require efforts to holistically transform South African spatial, social, economic and political realities in light of the country's history and context.

Following the entry of the Fairtrade label into the South African wine industry, Kruger and Hamann commented that 'surely it will be a supreme irony if white commercial farmers, who ten years ago faced sanctions, are now rewarded with Fairtrade status without having contributed to social change in South Africa' (cited in Bek et al., 2007, p. 315). In the two decades following the introduction of the Fairtrade label in the South African wine industry, this irony appears to remain true for many Fairtrade wine producers.

For FTI, a question arises as to why the label would extend its certification to the largest producers in an industry with such a pervasive history of exploitation, which is emblematic of colonialism and Apartheid (Jari et al., 2013, p. 67). FTI began and continues to place emphasis on otherwise marginalised, small-scale producers, in the effort to provide them a platform for 'fair' trade (Barrientos et al., 2007, p. 54). Why has FTI departed from those standards in the South African wine industry? An answer provided by the Fairtrade Foundation (2010, p. 4) is that due to the history of this industry, and the lack of small-scale wine producers in the industry, more can be achieved towards the goal of transforming this industry through the certification of large-scale, commercial

wine producers. In practice, this extension of the certification has seemingly been an apparent success for FTI as 56.5% of all Fairtrade wine is produced from South Africa (FLO-CERT, 2024). But if such certification has not led to profound changes on the farms concerned, then the decision to allow South African commercial wine farms to receive Fairtrade certification has not had the intended result.

For South African large-scale, commercial producers, the Fairtrade label has allowed for entry into markets that require proof that contemporary South African wine farms operate in a way that is distinct from their history of exploitation. However, we argue in this chapter that the Fairtrade label has not guaranteed the application of its standards and its benefits for Fairtrade wine farmworkers. If the certificatory label cannot guarantee these benefits, then why has FTI entered this industry at all? While the certification may offer some benefits to workers, longstanding issues of dependency and paternalism have, concerningly, been alleged to have occurred on Fairtrade certified farms. As a result, the decision to include large-scale, commercial South African wine producers in Fairtrade certificatory standards seems to be inconsistent with the concept of Fairtrade (from the fair trade movement to FTI's current standards) and unjustifiable in the South African context. Ultimately, the label may serve to disguise contemporary iterations of farm paternalism and exploitation while allowing a platform for the (re)entry of local wines into global production networks without social or economic transformation.

The example of Fairtrade and the South African wine industry illustrates the complexity of global partnerships in a post-colonial and post-Apartheid setting. Global trade partnerships through ethical trade platforms like Fairtrade International, seem to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and, in particular, to the achievement of SDG17, which focuses on partnerships for development. The Fairtrade certification of South African wine ostensibly facilitates partnerships between ethical consumers and ethical farmers (to the ultimate benefit of South African farmworkers). However, our chapter reveals some of the limitations of ethical certification. There is evidence, both from our research and that of the Women on Farms Project, that Fairtrade certification has done little to significantly improve the lives of those who work on South African wine farms.

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From Colonial Nursing to an Imperial Mode of Reproduction

Christa Wichterich

INTRODUCTION

During the SARS Covid-19 pandemic, the transnational online movement #*Decolonise Global Health* used the blatant injustice of access to vaccination to sharpen the long-standing criticism of post-coloniality in medical research, knowledge transfer and the institutions of global health. The development, supply chains and distribution of the vaccine revealed the entanglement of the post-colonial power dynamics with the commercial and patent policy on capital markets (Lawrence & Hirsch, 2020). The clinical trials of Covid-19 vaccines show how e.g. Africa is still used as raw material for Western research while the scientific achievements are not shared equally (Tilley, 2020).

People's Vaccine Alliance, supported by the International *People's Health Movement*, wants to end vaccine apartheid, protests against public funding of private sector development and production, accuses the waste of vaccines in Western countries and the tax evasion of big pharmaceutical companies. It rejects narratives which naturalise Africans blaming them

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of being generally skeptical about vaccination, and incapable of building research and production capacities. In contrast, it calls for the cancellation of patent rights, i.e. private intellectual property rights, and wants to prevent the private sector and industrial market principles from taking complete control of healthcare systems. The demand for vaccine justice is an expression of global solidarity, which views health not only as an individual and national but as a global common good, and aims to dismantle the entangled post-colonial and capitalist power structures (Büyüm et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Chaudhuri et al., 2021).

As one of the patterns of global inequalities in which the colonial power matrix is perpetuated, *#Decolonise Global Health* criticises the unequal flows of health workers between high-income and low-income countries. The number of trained medical and nursing staff migrating from the Global South to the Global North is disproportionately higher than the number of experts from wealthy countries who support the development of academic and practical health capacities in poorer countries (Kwete et al., 2022).

The following article takes up the criticism of the *#Decolonise Global Health* movement and places nursing as a neuralgic axis of health care, and nurses as central health actors at the fore of the argumentation where the imperial and racial logic of colonial power merge with the capitalist logic of commodification and profit making. The first part of this paper delves into the history of professional nursing in the colonies, recruitment of nurses for services and training in the Global South by the colonial powers and the shaping of stereotypes and stigmata ascribed to—in particular—female nurses. The second part analyses the functioning of Global Care Chains and the migration of nurses which attempt to manage the shortage of nurses in the health care systems of OECD countries—paradigmatic Germany—by importing health care professionals from the Global South. The third chapter focusses on recruitment and migration of nurses from Ghana and from India to the Global North, summarizing studies which have been done in the framework of the Global Partnership Network at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana and the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India.

COLONIALITY OF NURSING

Historically, the spreading of Western medical sciences and Western health care in the Global South was a project of imperialism within the ambivalence of conquest and subjugation on the one hand, and integration and assimilation on the other. To a large extent, this project was carried out by various Christian missions in the name of caring for the ‘natives’ and converting them (Fofana, 2021). Tropical medicine initially focused on researching infectious diseases in the tropics in order to protect representatives of the colonial powers on the ground (Neill, 2012, p.13ff). When epidemics claimed the lives of many workers in the colonies in the nineteenth century and increasingly became a threat in Europe as well, tropical medicine adopted a monocausal view of the emergence of epidemics and localised their origins in certain tropical regions, and among certain population groups. Due to this causal attribution, experiments on human bodies in the colonies were a widespread unscrupulous research method to identify the deadly microorganisms, search for transmission paths and to test drugs to cure the diseases (Bauche, 2017). The famous German Nobel prize winner Robert Koch established ‘concentration camps’ in Tanzania, Togo and Cameroon to do this kind of research and find a cure. Up to 1000 people a day were treated with an experimental drug to cure the sleeping sickness. Koch accepted the pain, agony and even death of thousands of patients who suffered from these experiments (Bonhomme, 2020).

Tropical medicine thus functioned on the one hand as a tool to construct the racialised ‘other’ in colonial regimes, and on the other hand as a means of establishing stratified and segregating health systems in the colonies. A colonial power matrix was entrenched in the provision of medical knowledge, in healthcare services and the recruitment of professional healthcare personnel for the colonial regimes, including nurses. This exacerbated power asymmetries and established a colonial and imperial continuity of tropical medicine in research, education and global health institutions for years (Bozorgmehr, 2010; Packard, 2016).

The first nurses in the colonies in the nineteenth century were nuns from catholic, protestant or anglican sisterhoods (for South Africa, see Searle, 1965). They were icons of caring, selflessness, self-sacrifice and altruism outside the family. The medical care of soldiers during the wars necessitated more targeted recruitment and, beyond lay care, the first professionalisation of nursing. The nursing personnel, their training and

placement were differentiated according to gender, class and race. The British regime recruited nurses from England to provide medical care for the colonial people on the ground and to nurse wounded soldiers, for example during the Indian uprising in 1849 or during the Anglo-Burian War in southern Africa in 1899. For the French wars in Africa, on the other hand, paramedics and exclusively male nurses and surgeons were mobilised. The Dutch colonial power recruited women from bourgeois Dutch families for today's Indonesia, who were to serve as role models in nursing training for young Indonesians from the upper classes—more male than female (Hesselink, 2015). Nurses from the *German Women's Association*, mostly from bourgeois and aristocratic classes, were sent on temporary assignments to the German colonies in Africa called 'protectorates' (Schweig, 2012, p. 9). Enthusiastic about German colonial policy, the *German National Women's Association* founded nursing stations in Zanzibar and East Africa (Schweig, 2012). The nurses were prepared for their civilising mission with rules of decency and etiquette as well as moral training (for South Africa, see Dale, 2015). In contrast, cultural norms prohibited women in the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico from working publicly as nurses outside their own families (Connerton, 2015).

Whether professional nursing was attributed to women or men for socio-cultural reasons, the European colonial powers conveyed the binary gender model of the male–female hierarchy. In all European colonial powers, nursing was fundamentally connoted with female servitude and rooted in the gender-specific division of labour (Bischoff, 1992). In England, the profession with basic training was seen from the middle of the nineteenth century as an opportunity for women from privileged classes to participate in public life through serving, charitable and religiously motivated activities (Wetterer, 2002, p. 295). These nurses from upper classes practiced a sharp distinction against women from lower class in order to upgrade the profession. One of this upper class nurses, Florence Nightingale, collected data on the nexus of hygiene, infectious diseases and death, and promoted the professionalisation of science-based nursing training in nursing schools (Pfetscher, 2021). She demanded from the states to introduce registration of trained nurses in order to acknowledge the professionalism of nursing. In addition to the hierarchy between nurses and doctors—at that time almost exclusively men—this created a stratification between nurses skilled with medical knowledge, and assistants in charge of the more physical and cleaning work (Linden,

2020). In contrast to the medical, academic job description of healing assigned to doctors, nursing is institutionally subordinated.

The colonial powers invoked the Christian mission and a universal humanitarianism of Western civilisation in their health services to the natives. Nursing care in the various colonial regimes, referred to by Sweet and Hawkins (2015) as ‘colonial caring’, posited Western biomedical knowledge and corresponding health practices, albeit with different dynamics, but nevertheless normatively as universally valid and constructed them as superior to all autochthonous systems of medical knowledge and practice. Traditional indigenous knowledge and skills were marginalised or subalternised, but continued to exist and shape local practices. The widespread Christian help and rescue syndrome constructed the colonised population as mere recipients of charity and paternalistic compassionate care (Fofana, 2021), what constantly reproduced the superiority of the white colonial power and its knowledge systems (for (Latin) America, see Quijano, 2000; for Africa, see Affun-Adegbulu & Adegbulu, 2020; Tilley, 2016). The hierarchies materialised in the introduction of a dual education and health system, actually an apartheid system in education and health.

Cultural Political Economy of Nurses

On this background the profession of nursing and midwifery were highly ambivalent in many cultures, namely as unclean work—extremely so in the Brahmanical caste system of South Asia—and at the same time as a noble altruistic activity (Wetterer, 2002). Socio-cultural attributions to nurses are effective as boundary and exclusionary mechanisms, which Sum and Jessop call “cultural political economy” (2013). The stereotype of liberal sexual morality, always linked to class, race and religion, was attached to the job due to the care of soldiers, night shifts and earlier celibacy. Male fantasies of sexual availability, female frivolity or even sex work was reinforced depending on the nurses’ distance from patriarchal control at home and even more so through migration (Nair & Healey, 2006, p. 3; Dale, 2015; Walton-Roberts, 2012). The female body and the ascribed female (im)morality were and are central factors in the discourses surrounding the status of nurses which also served as legitimisation to establish patriarchal control over nurses’ housing and residence.

Anglo-Saxon nurses had mostly travelled to the colonies to provide medical care for the white representatives of the colonial regime, soldiers,

settlers and administrative staff living there. The women from the privileged classes, known as ‘ladies’, favoured the care of white patients and did not want to work in wards for the locals. This was to be done by local nurses, who were trained by the qualified ladies in training centres at hospitals and missionary schools from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards (Quijano, 2000, p. 534).

In the course of such Eurocentric mechanisms of distinction with class-based and racialized hierarchies, the ‘ladies’ in the service of British imperialism occupied all leadership positions in the *Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service* (QAIMNS). This nursing elite discriminated e.g. against the semi-skilled Indian nurses on the Indian subcontinent with the claim of moral and professional superiority, but also against white female colleagues from lower social classes (Nair & Healey, 2006). They became a spearhead of colonial discipline and controlled access to the professionalised nursing through racialised and class-specific discrimination and selection practices. In India, christianised missionary students were mostly trained as nursing assistants in the southern state of Kerala. To this day, Keralites form the majority of nurses in India, and of Indian nurses who have migrated abroad. In South Africa, university nursing training was initially reserved for whites; it was not until 1985 that the first black nurse completed the academic training with a bachelor’s degree.

To counter stereotypes of impurity and sexual permissiveness, Christian missions ennobled nursing through concepts of discipline and care ethos, self-sacrifice and nun-like desexualisation. The symbol of this was the white uniform and bonnet of the ‘sisters’, which also aimed to establish a collective professional identity (Nair & Healey, 2006, p. 4). Male nurses were sexualized as well and constructed as gay (Harding, 2007). This shows how the political and socio-cultural economy are interacting and constructing devaluation.

With the aim of ensuring ‘dignity’, professionalism and recognition, professional (non-union) organisations of nurses were founded in the countries of the colonial powers and the colonies: 1896 the *American Nurses Association* (ANA) in the USA was the first, 1899 the *International Council of Nurses*, 1908 the *Trained Nurses Association of India* (TNAI); South Africa, where nurses from England, Australia, New Zealand and Canada met in garrison camps, was the first country to introduce the registration of nurses in 1919 (Dale, 2015). In these organisations, the interest of colonial institutions in professional nursing, and

the interest of the nursing elite in social distinction and the establishment of a respected professional identity converged. Tensions between female and male nurses remain till today, and are manifest in conflicts over leadership in associations and unions.

GLOBAL CARE CHAINS

After the phase of nurses' migration from the colonial 'mother countries' to the colonies of the nineteenth century, the international division of labour in the nursing sector along so-called global care chains represents a new phase in the transnationalisation of nursing. The following section highlights how nursing became organised across national and continental borders in the context of post-colonial global inequalities, transnational labour markets and, finally, neoliberal globalisation (Yeates, 2010). Global care chains (Hochschild, 2000; Parrenas, 2001) are the central axes of migration and of commodification of care between low-income countries and the OECD world.

Care chains are shaped by hierarchical relationships in the continuity of coloniality through the transmission of medical knowledge, training and the customised integration of migrant workers into Western health-care systems. They are informed by a patriarchal, colonial, imperial and racialized logic of service which merges with the interest of capitalist labour markets in cheap labour. Catherine Ceniza Choy has traced in a time- and space-analysis how the US colonial power built an 'empire of care' from the Philippines as part of the 'culture of US imperialism' and created 'a racialised hierarchy with the Americans at the top and the Filipinas at the bottom' (Choy, 2003, p. 5). The history of Filipino-American care chains began with the ostensibly well-intentioned, civilising 'assimilation' through nursing education with a curriculum that was and today is still profoundly americanised (Choy, 2003, p. 25). Since the 1950s, young Filipino nurses came to the USA with a temporary 'exchange visit programme' which earned them a small scholarship only. This was part of the transnational economisation of the nursing profession, for which sexist, racist and class-based discrimination is a mechanism of market integration with simultaneous devaluation, i.e. cheapening of the labour force. From the 1980s onwards, US hospitals recruited nurses from the Philippines to stay in the USA for good. However, when they were integrated into the hierarchies of the healthcare system, they were subjected

to racialisation by being often channeled into subordinate, undervalued positions.

The West German ‘guestworker’ model of migration during the time of the post-war economic miracle is another example of the interaction of a post-colonial and racial logic with requirements of the capitalist economy. Reacting to a shortage of hospital nurses, in 1963 the West German government entered a contract of ‘technical aid’ with South Korea and recruited 10.000 skilled nurses under the assumption that after some time, the shortage would be over and the guestworkers would return home. On arrival in the hospitals the Koreans were told that their diploma and certificates were not recognised, and they had to work as assistants, meaning: with little payment. The South Koreans were aware of the entangled process of commodification and devaluation. And when they were told to return home in 1977, they protested saying that they provided development aid to Germany and that they didn’t want to be traded like “a commodity” (Koreaverband et al., 2016, pp. 13 & 16).

Since the 1960s, global care chains have been a post-colonial labour regime to address the scarcity of health workers in the OECD region and ensure an “imperial mode of living”, namely social reproduction for the global middle classes (Brand & Wissen, 2021). Shortage of health care professionals is a widespread problem in most countries of the world. However, in OECD countries, recruitment of skilled health care labour from the Global South, a “spatial fix” (Harvey, 2001), has become a normal practice and appears to be an appropriate solution which drives bilateral agreements and government contracts for recruitment and placement. Global inequalities and power asymmetries are their precondition, but also in turn their result.

Mapping various needs and interests in this transnational scenario between the Global North and the Global South reveals a range of complementary interests in the migration of nurses. Since the 1970s, governments in the South became labour brokers and used the export of cheap care workers as a development strategy which earns them foreign currency through remittances, and should reduce problems of un(der)employment and poverty in their countries (Rodriguez, 2008; Yeates, 2009). Governments, municipalities and hospitals in the Global North launched recruitment programmes which aim at importing migrant health care labour as kind of neocolonial solution to their shortage of skilled labour and to manage their crisis of social reproduction with the help of a spatial fix at low costs. Furthermore, the migration processes

between sending and receiving places get increasingly facilitated by a mushrooming industry of commercial agencies in sending and receiving countries which ask for high fees. The key actor, the nurse, has a right to mobility and often a desire to migrate due to push and pull factors, and personal interests. Many decide to escape the low wages and often appalling working conditions in their home country, and get into debt due to the high fees they have to pay to training institutions and placement agencies. Their decision is informed by an economy of hope to earn more money, pay back debt, and support their family at home, get more respect as professionals and to achieve a higher standard of living. However, in this complex scenario of interests emerges a conflict of rights between the individual right to migrate and the human right to health, as the outmigration of care labour exacerbates the bottlenecks in access to healthcare in the countries of origin.

During the SARS Covid-19 pandemic, the apparent deficit of health care personnel revealed in most countries of the world a prevailing crisis of social reproduction and the systemic relevance of care work. It is bizarre that immediately after the pandemic when e.g. African countries had experienced an appalling shortage of medical and nursing personnel that patients were not admitted to hospitals and died in waiting queues, countries of the Global North intensified their efforts to recruit health care workers from the Global South, often assuming a surplus of nurses who could not find a job. While countries of origin and destination are competing with each other, the actual number of migrating nurses increased substantially, contributing to the deepening of the crisis of social reproduction in their home countries.

Migration, Development and Care Extraction

The migration of health care workers results in a new international division of social reproductive labour with asymmetrical distribution of gains and costs. The receiving country and the global middle classes can record a gain in terms of care capacities, skills and emotions which means at the same time a loss for the sending country and household, a care drain, a depletion of social capital (Isaksen et al., 2008). The care chain, which remedies a shortage in the West, creates a care drain, a brain drain, and a supply gap at the other end when labour, training and knowledge leave

countries of the Global South.¹ Even if income poverty is reduced in the households of origin, an impoverishment regarding care is created (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenberg, 2012). As public social security structures are weak, care workers have to find individual solutions to fill the care gap, by having female relatives or neighbours do extra work or by employing even cheaper, sometimes migrant labour, in Poland for example from Ukraine. Another example of the chain effect is South Africa, where nursing staff from neighbouring countries and Cuba are employed, while South African healthcare staff finds jobs in England, Saudi Arabia and other European countries. This results in a new stratification of social reproduction on a national and transnational level, and a reproduction of old inequalities under gender, class, postcolonial, and racist auspices.

Within the framework of push and pull theorems, controversial political and academic discourses developed in a range between development-optimistic and -pessimistic positions. The dynamics of remittances are a fulcrum of polit-economic discourses in global labour markets. While some economists see the reflux of funds as a development driver for the country of origin, others consider the outflow of capacities and resources as a constraint to development and a reinforcement of global inequalities (Schwenken, 2008).

Against the structuralism of migration theories that reduce its complexity mainly to push and pull factors, the concept of autonomy of migration emerged as a counter-narrative against seeing migrants as passive and as victims only, focusing more on their agency (Bojadzic & Karakayali, 2007; Mezzadra, 2011; Massey, 1994). An example for the autonomy of migrant nurses is that in India, the prime motivation to migrate changed from support and reproduction of the families at home to a higher standard of living for oneself (Wichterich, 2024).

The commodified recruitment, migration and employment of care workers can be coined “care extractivism” (Wichterich, 2019)—analogous to resource extractivism—denoting the transnational economisation, and appropriation of the resource and social common good of care in power-asymmetric markets. Through this care extractivism, resources and capacities from the Global South that were previously outside the sphere

¹ The term Global South is used with an extended meaning: firstly as a notion which depicts former colonised countries and regions of the world, additionally, low-income countries such as eastern European countries in comparison to Western European countries.

of commodification, are integrated into capitalist care markets. This process aims to manage crisis of social reproduction in high-income countries and secure an imperial mode of living of the global middle classes. The term ‘care extractivism’ aims to unpack the post-colonial rationale and power relations in global social reproduction, and the racialized stratification of the health care labour market.

In addition to the extraction of care on transnational markets, financial extraction also takes place through the privatization of training and financialisation of migration, recruitment and placement (Walton-Roberts, 2015). As countries of the Global North ask for skilled labour, the cost of training have to be born by or in the country of origin and are downloaded as fees to the individual student and her/his family. The mushrooming private training institutions and colleges, and commercial intermediaries make a profit from the competition between countries by offering destination countries such as the USA, Canada, England and New Zealand the opportunity to tailor training to their needs (for India and England, see Merz et al., 2024). Germany launched a *Global Skill Partnership* with universities from the Philippines and Mexico to offer special courses which are tailored toward specific needs of the German health system.

If migrant care takers want to leave the country of origin, they often have no option than to go into debt with private training institutions and with placement agencies. Debts indicate the integration of care work, health labour markets and institutions into financial capitalism. Indebtedness is a structural condition for the exploitation of healthcare workers and for care extraction, as it forces them to accept precarious working conditions.

These new developments in recruitment of skilled workers from the Global South exacerbates the already existing asymmetry that training, including language classes, takes place in the low-income countries of origin, usually at the expense of the trainees, while the qualification is utilised in the wealthier destination country. In this neocolonial regime, the training is governed by the needs of the wealthy destination country and not by the needs of the countries of origin and the human right to health.

Regulation by WHO and Migration Policies in Germany

In order to introduce regulations for the growing but largely unregulated transnational labour markets for nursing, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a *Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel* (WHO, 2010). In 2010, it listed 57 countries in the Global South, which were suffering from such a severe shortage of health personnel that there should be no poaching of skilled labour (Angenendt, Clemens & Merda, 2014).

A high migration rate of nurses adversely affects the nurse-patient ratio in the country of origin. The WHO-norm of three nurses per 1000 inhabitants is a key indicator for the fulfilment of the human right to health. In the underserved countries of the global South, a vicious circle is created by nurses exercising their right to migrate due to poor working conditions, meagre wages, low recognition and no career opportunities—thereby exacerbating the local nursing crisis. A brain gain, i.e. a return of health care workers to their home country with rich experience and new professional knowledge, happens in a few cases only. Most of the migrant health professionals stay in Western countries. The Gulf States often serve as a springboard from Asia or Africa to the West (Saha, Kundu & Wichterich, 2024).

Despite the growing exodus of healthcare workers, the WHO Code is not mandatory but voluntarily and often circumvented. Since 2013, the German state has entered bilateral agreements to directly recruit health care workers through the *Society for international Cooperation* (GIZ) and the *German Federal Employment Agency, Bundesagentur für Arbeit* with the help of job fairs (Güllemann, 2017). Its *Triple Win* programme in the frame of bilateral agreements normalises the transnational care extractivism organized by the state in ten countries: Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Philippines, Vietnam, Serbia, Tunisia, Mexico, Brazil, India and Colombia. Germany even recruited nurses from the Philippines during the pandemic, when there was an appalling emergency in Philippine hospitals, and President Duterte had banned outmigration for some months. Duterte took commodification to the extreme by offering to exchange labour for vaccines (Morales, 2021).

The triple-win formula assumes equal opportunities and equal gains, and sugarcoats the care extraction and the maintenance of stratified reproductive relations between North and South, West and East, rich and poor. However, the *Triple Win* programme has so far fallen short of

expectations, as only 4747 nurses have been recruited under the official agreements within ten years (Ärztezeitung, 2023).

Meanwhile, migrant health care professionals who come to Germany through informal networks are confronted for six to twelve months with bureaucratic obstacles, and have to constantly provide documents and certificates before they receive their visas and permits from the German embassy and/or the immigration authorities. Even if the health care workers have an employment contract, they face this time-consuming and energy-sapping bureaucratic power play regularly when they have to renew their residence and work permit. They are relegated to the position of a petitioner what disciplines and controls, but also humiliates them, and constructs a permanent feeling of insecurity and precarity (Wichterich, 2024).

A central precondition for integration is recognition of diploma in the German healthcare system. After arrival at the destination hospital, skilled nurses are initially employed as nursing assistants with low pay, a form of integration with simultaneous devaluation and a capitalist mechanism of cheapening labour. After six months, they have to take an ‘adaptation test’ in a specialised medical field, e.g. geriatrics. Failed exams must be repeated, and only after passing, they get employed as ‘registered’ nurses at a standard wage (Mahindrakar, 2024). In the German Bundesland Baden-Württemberg in 2023, 3000 immigrant doctors were waiting for their recognition and were not allowed to work as doctors though municipalities and clinics were desperately looking for staff. Each case is checked individually in a complicated bureaucratic assessment to determine whether the training is equivalent to German medical studies. The procedure, including technical language tests, is complex and costly (Mayr, 2023). Both procedures, for formal recognition in the hospital and by the authorities amount to a—up to two years—rite of passage for migrant professionals and lead to a racialized stratification of hospital labour. While many see this struggle for recognition and work permits in postcolonial power structures as unfair though an integral part of their status as migrant worker (see interviews in Wichterich, 2024), quite a few health care professionals left Germany after some time, discouraged by the many hindrances and racialized discrimination created systematically by German institutions (Lugert-Jones, 2022; npla, 2023).

A transnational market with mushrooming recruitment and placement agencies promises to speed up the bureaucratic recognition and the learning of German. Commercial agencies now handle 80 per cent

of the placement of nurses (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). Repeatedly, they charge skilled workers more than 10.000 euros as recruitment costs, sometimes on behalf of hospitals. Some private clinics are said to pay up to 15.000 euros per head to agencies and demand a redemption from nursing staff who leave the hospital after a short time (Correctiv, 2020). As such exploitative practices and bondages are known, the German government introduced a seal of approval for fair migration already in 2019, which stipulates that recruitment costs must not be passed on to the labour force. However, this seal is voluntary, and apparently non-reputable agencies were also able to obtain it (ZDF heute, 2021). Meanwhile, it is called a “synergistic side-by-side” of commercial and government recruitment which is deemed to be “fair and ethical” (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). Private employment agencies are still barely regulated in Germany; the ILO Convention 181 on the control of private employment agencies from 1997 has not yet been ratified.

Since the Western Balkans regulation of 2016, which allowed professionals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia to work at least temporarily in Germany, around 40.700 health professionals work in Germany, compared to the absolute number of only 108.000 professionals still working in these seven countries (dpgg, 2023). Current neoliberal austerity policies in the public sector and the shortage of skilled workers in the healthcare sector are driving the normalisation of the spatial fix and transnational care extractivism by the state (for Switzerland see Schwiter et al., 2018). German advertising campaigns and ministerial visits to countries in the Global South flank the new immigration law, which has been in force since the beginning of 2024. From a German perspective, the immigration of healthcare professionals is primarily an integration problem due to a lack of language skills, of adaptation and qualification deficits (Hill, 2024).

WEMOS, an NGO focusing on international health justice, calls the German import of healthcare professionals a scandal and recommends interventions at EU level (Güllemann, 2022). However, while from a migration rights perspective a lack of ethical standards and fairness in the poaching of nursing is condemned (Hanrieder & Janauscek, 2025), from a postcolonial perspective professionals from the Global South reject the moral charging of recruitment and stress the agency of migrant nurses (Mosuela, 2017). The *German Platform for Global Health* (dpgg) criticised the fact that Germany benefits from poor working conditions and underfunded healthcare systems in countries of the South and the East

(dpgg, 2023). According to dpgg, the import of skilled labour cannot solve structural problems in the German healthcare system resulting from the neoliberal hospital management based on the diagnosis related groups (DRG) payment, for the sake of profit making and cost saving, the root causes of work intensification and overburdening of staff. In order to counter the crisis of social reproduction, it is necessary to transform the causal profit-oriented economic structures, to make training and the health care professions more attractive, and to raise public awareness of the fact that healthcare for all and good care are a common good.

“TO STAY OR TO GO”—CASE STUDIES ON GHANA AND INDIA

The GPN research project “To Stay or to Go” explored recent dynamics of migration and recruitment of nurses from Ghana and India and policy measures addressing the prevailing challenges in health care (Global Partnership Network, 2024a; 2024b).

In both countries, the colonial matrix is deeply encribed in the health care system, education of nurses and nursing as profession (Gill, 2011; Vrooman, 2023). During the colonial era, nursing education was primarily provided and shaped by missionary institutions with a distinct female connotation (Gill, 2011). After independence, the countries made significant efforts to set up public health systems to ensure a right to health for all. Development aid and international funding organizations also played a pivotal role in shaping the health systems and nursing profession according to Western norms and standards (for India, see Walton-Roberts, 2015; Walton-Roberts et al., 2017). From the 1970s onwards, Ghana suffered like most African countries from structural adjustment programmes imposed by the *International Monetary Fund* and the *World Bank*, and a debt burden which put severe constraints on public expenses and the development of the public sector. In India, after the neoliberal turn with a privatization wave in the 1990s, the health care sector, hospitals and training colleges got to a large extent privatized. Nursing students have to pay high fees in private colleges so that they are burdened with a large debt when they migrate.

Both countries have a history of outmigration of health care workers, and face at the same time a shortage of nurses in the country. Already in the 1960s, the emigration of young Indian women and nurses began, with Kerala as the main source of outmigration. Many early migrant nurses

obtained their nursing diplomas through channels such as churches, or mission hospitals in Kerala or European countries, e.g. Germany. Most of the later migrants hold graduate or postgraduate degrees, and left the country for enhanced prospects and higher income abroad. In 2013, 640.000 Indian nurses were working abroad (Rajan & Nair, 2011). Before the pandemic in 2019, 10.200 qualified nurses left the country per year (Walton-Roberts et al., 2022); post-pandemic an estimated 36.000 or more nurses leave India each year (M. K., 2024). At the same time, the shortage of nurses is appalling, particularly in rural areas, so that India would need to add more than 4.3 million nurses by 2024 to meet the WHO norm of nurse-patient-ratio of 3:1000 (Tsujiata, 2023).

Nursing as a care profession is highly feminised, and this often restricts migration. Additionally, class, ethnicity, religious and rural–urban factors (plus caste in India) play a role in shaping the nursing profession and the candidates for outmigration (Bélanger & Silvey, 2020). From Ghana, over 8000 trained nurses had departed already in 2003; in 2023, 1200 nurses left for UK alone (Ocansey, 2024) and nowadays, around 3.000 nurses leave Ghana annually (Ghana Registered Nurses & Midwives Association, 2023). The prime destinations for nurses from both countries are the UK, USA, Canada and Australia, English-speaking countries, and the Gulf region.

In 2023, Germany signed a declaration of intent with Ghana as part of development cooperation. As a response to the shortage of skilled labour in Germany and to the planned deportation of asylum seekers from Ghana, a *Centre for Jobs, Migration and Development* in Accra should open up legal immigration opportunities for those willing to migrate after training (Dappah, 2023). Reversing the crucial concept of development cooperation, this is another neocolonial and racialised initiative to use resources and people from the Global South for purposes in the Global North while asylum seekers in Germany are not allowed to work.

In both countries, economic factors, low wages and non-decent working conditions emerged as driving forces for the patterns of nurses' outmigration which correspond with higher income and a higher standard of living in the Global North as pull factors. Nurses in India frequently face excessive workloads, long working hours, low staffing, absence of support mechanisms, insufficient funding in the healthcare system plus their debt burden what results in a high rate of burnout and discontent (Kumar, 2024). Furthermore, in Ghana, nurse migration is influenced by issues like unemployment of nurses, resource scarcity, poor infrastructure,

a shortage of supplies and equipment, demanding work settings with high patient-to-nurse ratios, and an unstable political environment. Ghanaian nurses become frustrated and disillusioned due to the pressure to provide quality care despite systemic obstacles and undecent working conditions. In the destination countries they hope for more social welfare, safety nets and better education for their children.

Confirming the simultaneous effects of pull- and push factors and the autonomy of migration, the desire for a professional career and frustration about the limited opportunities to post-graduate training, and development of their full potential in the home country motivates nurses to migrate in search to improve their qualifications and clinical experience, access cutting-edge medical technology and specialised training to get advanced degrees and international certificates (Zacharia, 2024).

Recruitment and Migration Policies

The Indian and Ghanaen governments are both ambivalent and contradictory in terms of promotion and regulation of migration. They attempt to expand nursing training to produce an excess of nurses to meet the demand of high-income countries but do not create the necessary number of jobs in the country itself. The nurses are customized through training already in the countries of origin to meet the specific needs of high-income countries rather than those of the local population in their home countries. For example, South Indian Kerala's skill development and foreign language courses for nurses adopt a proactive approach aimed at facilitating nurse outmigration.

The Indian government enacted the Emigration Act of 1983 to govern emigrations and regulate recruiting agents. The law introduced an 'emigration clearance' meaning that nurses are mandated to seek approval while the *Nurses Bureau under the Health Ministry* should oversee the hiring and deployment of nurses abroad (Zacharia, 2024). After college, nurses are obliged to practice at least two years in a hospital before the state allows them to leave the country. Applications for migration have to be channeled through four government agencies, the most important being NORKA-roots in Kerala. These policies aim at monitoring and streamlining nurse recruitment, and confining them to international contracts. However, these formal rules may push nurses toward private recruiting agencies which have become an important source of nurse hiring but frequently demand extraordinary fees (Walton-Roberts et al.,

2022). This highlights the need for a complete policy structure, as the lack of one has allowed private immigration sectors to grow.

In Ghana, bilateral agreements with destination nations or international organisations like the *International Organisation for Migration* (IOM) and the *World Health Organisation* (WHO) are frequently used to assist the recruitment of nurses. Even though the goal of these agreements is to guarantee moral hiring procedures and lessen the detrimental effects of brain drain, lack of oversight and of regulation to curb nurse emigration is still prevailing (Kwansah et al., 2012). Though it has a policy framework in place, the challenge lies in implementation and only few initiatives are actually taking place (Baah, 2024), such as the provision of allowances during nurses' training and in deprived areas (Kwansah et al., 2012). Ghana attempts to focus on long-term solutions by investing in healthcare infrastructure and increasing the capacity of nursing schools to produce more skilled professionals which can serve both, domestic needs and eventual recruitment (Jaddah, 2018; Pillinger, 2011.)

Though the governments in Ghana and India attempt to regulate and supervise migration through policies and international agreements, it is not clear how far their efforts go and what they actually achieve. Apparently, in the end, they give preference to strategies which look for remittances and reduction of the job problem in their countries over running a well-funded and well-equipped health sector which provides good health services to the entire population.

Public Debates and Policies

The discourses and recommendations around nurse outmigration exhibit notable differences between Ghana and India. In Ghana, plenty of newspaper articles are discussing the exodus of nurses in Ghana, indicating a vibrant public discourse, especially during and immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic (Boadu et al., 2024). In contrast, similar newspaper articles in India are rare, suggesting a lack of debate on the topic or a kind of censorship in the media.

In Ghana, 64 per cent of the voices presented in newspaper articles were against nurse outmigration, while 36 per cent were in favor. Interestingly, government representatives and politicians favored outmigration, what mirrors the state's interest in remittances whereas nurses, medical associations, health service representatives, and the public were opponents. There was a significant discussion on the adverse impact of

outmigration on healthcare provisioning and nursing in the domestic healthcare system (Baah, 2024). Numerous recommendations to curb the exodus were given to the government (Global Partnership Network, 2024a).

In India, 43.5 per cent of the (few) newspaper articles were in favor of outmigration, with 56.5 per cent against it. While most nurses favored nursing migration, the majority of opponents were medical doctors, hospital managers, and journalists, observing in destination countries unfavourable working conditions and racial discrimination against Indian nurses.

Concerns about the impact of migration on domestic health care services were much less prominent in India. Instead, the social justice question focusses on ‘fairness’ of recruitment, migration and integration in the destination country, mirroring less public concern about health service provisions in the country and a fewer attempts to influence the Indian state on this issue. A missing link in the public debate in both countries is in viewing the nurse migration scenario from an intersectional perspective.

Some of the migrant nurses complain about racialized discrimination, challenges and restrictions which they face abroad and prevent them from practicing at their rightful professional level. This discrimination can manifest in various ways, including limitations on the scope of their duties or being treated unfairly, ultimately impacting their labour rights, overall job satisfaction and professional career.

A significant argument in the debate about outmigration is the factor of brain gain, meaning that nurses would work overseas for some years, and then return home with experiences and knowledge which can be applied in the domestic health sector. However, neither in Ghana nor in India there is evidence of a considerable number of nurses returning home and afterwards working again in the country of origin.

In both countries references to the WHO *Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel* (2010) are made in favour of fair and ethical recruitment by countries and agencies of the Global North vis-à-vis countries of the Global South (Ameyaw et al., 2024; Mangal, 2024). However, as the code is voluntary and lacks legally binding rules, it has a very limited scope of effectively preventing the exploitation of healthcare workers. International cooperation is considered crucial to strengthen ethical recruitment practices and address issues related to migrant health personnel.

Ghana—India Comparison

Both countries, while contributing significantly to the global nursing workforce, grapple with challenges stemming from the migration of their healthcare professionals. Migration has perpetuated and deepened the shortage of skilled and experienced nurses in the Ghanaian and Indian health system, adversely affecting the quality of health service delivery in the two nations. It is a kind of vicious circle that the nurses try to escape a non-decent work and income situation in their countries of origin through migration, and at the same time reinforce this unfavourable situation by creating a deficit in skilled healthcare personnel and elevating the workload for those who remain.

The shortage of skilled healthcare personnel due to nurse outmigration has tangible repercussions on the quality of healthcare services in both countries and has been critically discussed especially in Ghana. In order to deal with its current workforce shortfall, Ghana turned even to the recruitment of nurses from other nations. For instance, during 2013, 350 Cuban medical doctors were invited by the Ghana Government to support the national health care (Jaddah, 2018). India draws workforce, in particular low paid service providers and care givers from its north eastern states.

Global Care Chains from Ghana and India manouvre between North–South-cooperation and intensification of structural global and regional inequalities, asymmetries and neocolonial structures rather than aiming at a partnership in health provisioning and implementing the universal human right to health.

CONCLUSION

This paper travelled from colonial nursing in the nineteenth century to global care chains between the Global South and the Global North, and current examples of care extractivism and its impact in Ghana and India. To fill the care gap in OECD countries and manage their crisis of social reproduction in a neocolonial way and entangled with capitalist market principles, a care drain is created in the home countries of the migrant health workers. Global Care Chains function in persisting post-colonial power asymmetries, and capitalist and financial structures of inequality between the Global North and the Global South, and reproduce them.

While migrant health care labour is indispensable for the functioning of medical care and social reproduction in the countries of the former colonial powers and the OECD world, the analysis of the migration scenario reveals paradoxes, contradictions and conflicts: Firstly the paradox of the felt crisis of social reproduction during the pandemic, and the increase of recruitment and the exodus of nurses afterwards, secondly the conflict between the individual right to migration and the universal human right to health in each country; thirdly the paradox of the skill training in the Global South and skill usage in the Global North which make for another geographical and financial gap.

Furthermore, the process of transnational care extraction reproduce post-colonial power asymmetries, a global hierarchical division of labour and a stratified reproduction between affluent and poor, between the North and South, West and East. The Global North has the means to launch recruitment campaigns to manage crisis situations in its labour market and to attract healthcare professionals from the Global South without caring about the violation of the human right to health in the Global South.

The coloniality of migration is evident in the nexus of migration and visa policies, the export and import of labour, capitalist market structures and precarious forms of employment. By using racial discrimination alongside class-based and gender-based discrimination as a means of lowering wages and stratification of the market, a pool of low-cost, transnationally available care workers is constructed in the countries of origin and destination (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018).

While health care is traded as a commodity in a global labour and migration market, and every-day as well as structural racism is still prevailing in the markets and societies of the Global North, nurses from the Global South subsidise health systems in wealthier countries and thereby contribute to drive their growth economies. From this point of view global care chains can be seen as a neocolonial axes in globalization and a structure of racial capitalism.

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PART III

Partnerships and Neocolonialism
in Knowledge Production



CHAPTER 10

Knowledge Production for “Development”—Challenges and Pitfalls of Decolonization

Henning Melber

INTRODUCTION

“Knowledge is power” remains a popular slogan in education and beyond. It aims to motivate learners to acquire knowledge and to apply it for their own gains. But while knowledge can be liberating and emancipatory, it can also be oppressive, intimidating, and domesticating. Who uses which kind of knowledge for which interests and purposes? Like development, knowledge is neither neutral nor value-free. Knowledge production (and its dissemination) cannot uncritically be taken for granted as a relevant aspect of and contribution to development without examining the nature and intention of both, the knowledge created and applied as well as the concept and meaning of development. This chapter takes previous work

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A. Ziai et al. (eds.), *Global Partnerships and Neocolonialism*,

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87005-7_10

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(Melber, 2016, 2018, 2019) further in linking knowledge production and development, with a cautious word on the pitfalls of a universalist reproduction of Eurocentric perspectives.

The pitfalls of efforts entangled in the complexity of scholarly engagement in a real world characterized by inequalities, asymmetric structures and corresponding hierarchical realities are the focus of this chapter. These are founded on the dichotomies between “North and South and the massive imbalances in access to resources that produce ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in the knowledge economy” (Standing & Taylor, 2016, p. 169). The following arguments are in support of a “renegotiation of the terms of knowledge production” (Horáková, 2016, p. 47) in the related disciplines of developmental and area studies. They advocate moving towards non-hegemonic forms of cooperation and partnership motivated by creation of knowledge based on solidarity and mutual respect between academic realms and forms of knowledge as a practical-material and intellectual task (cf. Keim et al., 2014). This is guided by the conviction that “neutral” knowledge in a value-free vacuum detached from social interests does not exist: ways of knowing and resulting bodies of knowledge are always historical and political.—So is the concept and meaning of development (Kothari & Klein, 2023).

KNOWLEDGE AND DEVELOPMENTALISM AS EUROCENTRIC CONFINEMENTS

The conditions, forms, substance, and likely impact of the knowledge produced require (self-) critical explorations. The starting point should not be the result of knowledge production, but the process of producing knowledge. Our hierarchical world is characterized by structural asymmetries as an integral part of the reproduction of societies and institutions. These are structures of power and interest, but also of contestation. Racism, class, and gender matter. Which knowledge and development do we want to be part of and what are our visions? We should always be careful and cautious when “universal knowledge” in the singular is the reference point of a “darker side of Western modernity”, rather than the “pluriversality” of knowledges (Mignolo, 2011). Defining the point of departure, Walter Mignolo (2016, p. 492) stated:

The practice of liberation and de-colonization is initiated with the recognition, in the first place, that the colonization of knowledge and being consisted of using imperial knowledge to repress colonized subjectivities and the process moves on from there to build structures of knowledge that emerge from the experience of humiliation and marginalization that have been and continue to be enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix of power.

In contrast to such an advocated project of deconstructing power relations with the aim of emancipation, ‘dataism’ has emerged as a new currency, pretending to be a revolutionary way of producing knowledge (Harari, 2016). Knowledge becomes reduced to algorithms. Such trends reinforce an oppressive, anti-humanist version of ‘modernity’. It forces us to reappraise knowledge and knowledge production as a process, which involves human interaction on the basis of respect and recognition of ‘otherness’. By standardizing life on earth as data generating object for decision-making processes, we sacrifice knowledge in other forms, influenced by empathy, social justice, and related motives—such as solidarity. If knowledge is not any longer a combination of the multiplicity of experiences but reduced to data processing, then knowledge remains part of a problem instead of searching for and contributing towards a solution.

The notion of development and by implication the nature of Development Studies has been much shaped by changing concepts and conceptualizations framing ‘development’. These paradigms can be traced in their evolution of ideologies and narratives since World War II (Jolly & Santos, 2016) and in more historical depth since the days of the ‘civilizing mission’ (Ziai, 2016). With the Millennium Development Goals as a significant marker and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the latest reference point on which much of Development Studies funding depends, the discourse and its focus has entered a new stage which directly affects the role and scope of the discipline. Not only does it shift the premises from a North–South perspective towards one viewing global challenges as a necessary and long overdue adjustment. While the SDG-triggered agenda opens new windows of opportunity, it also closes others, by reducing the notion of development and its goals to a checklist. But Development Studies should not be defined or instrumentalized by policy makers and practitioners who engage in ‘development’ (Melber, 2017).

Juan Telleria takes this essentialist approach to global issues to task. He unmasks the underlying narrow understanding of transformation of human societies and of economic, political, and social issues. As he points out, *Agenda 2030*.

explains the present in terms of the lack of ability to create the right context for the realization of the human essence. In this sense, the 17 goals and 169 targets would be the means for the transformation of human societies in a way that they enable the full realization of the human potential.

Overall, the essentialist perspective avoids an open debate about global issues. (Telleria, 2024, p. 29). Aram Ziai warns to be too quickly convinced of having the answers to the problems. As he concludes:

claiming to know better what is good for the people than they themselves would merely lead to assuming the role of the trustees again and reproduce the hierarchies of development discourse. The task ahead is to disentangle the idea of a good society from the model of the industrialized affluent societies. [...] people not everywhere want to live like those in the affluent industrial capitalist regions—and thus challenge the paradigm of ‘development’. Alternatives to colonial global capitalism exist. (Ziai, 2024, p. 51)

By pointing to the relevance of hierarchical structures and power, “the academic profession must rid itself once and for all of the notion that knowledge is invariably ‘positive’, that every question has one correct answer (the truth), and that this is to be obtained through one correct method” (Halvorsen, 2016, p. 303). This demands a critical self-reflection and honest assessment of our understanding of and role in research and the forms of interaction with social realities and scholars in and from the so-called global South. True decolonization should have a critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices. We should always interrogate our own internalized value systems, which we often tend to understand and apply unchallenged as the dominant (if not only) norm.

Global asymmetric relations have many faces. They are not only manifested in unequal terms of trade, a dominance of the world market by industrialized countries and their economies, worldwide growing inequalities and the continued control over and exploitation of natural resources in so-called less developed countries mainly serving the interest of various

external agencies (largely in the private corporate sector) and local elites. Structural dependencies and their effects on current societies are visible in production and ownership of knowledge too, like many other forms of open or hidden dominance of the past still existing in the present.

The slogan that “knowledge is power” is visibly reproduced in the landscape in which we navigate as scholars and practitioners. While this dictum is not new, it has a more pronounced meaning nowadays through new information technologies and media reinforcing comparative advantages among those who apply knowledge as power. But there is a flip side to this widely accepted truism. As Broadbent (2017, unpaginated) alerts us, academics “are much happier asserting that knowledge is power than they are conceding that power is knowledge”. But if we are serious about partnership and emancipation, we must scrutinize not only how knowledge is power, but also how power is effective in terms of knowledge—not least also in the definitions and framings applied. Knowledge in its current dominant forms includes epistemic violence.

Empirical data illustrate the unequal North–South divide. Mucha and Wegener (2023) present a telling story when analyzing the composition of participants in the last pre-Covid Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) held in Toronto in 2019: 90% (5,108) of those in attendance were from OECD countries, 6% (359) from the so-called BRICS member states, and a mere 4% (197) from other countries. 63 participants were from the Sub-Saharan African region, of which more than half (34) were from South Africa. A total of 169 panels on the Global South were held, in which 80% of scholars were based in OECD countries, 12% in BRICS states and 8% elsewhere. A misrepresentation was also observed with Northern based scholars looking at Africa and Southern scholars working on the continent, which suggests that the divide is reproduced in the physical location of scholars: only one tenth of paper presenters in Global South panels had obtained their academic degrees in universities outside of OECD countries. As they conclude: “the analysis reveals a highly selected perspective on IR knowledge that is being (re-)produced by scholars who are based at universities in the Global North. The voices of non-OECD-based academics in the field remain largely unheard.” (Mucha & Wegener, 2023, p. 100).

The nature and conceptual understanding such development promoted reinforced a paradigm and equation created during the times when the Enlightenment in central Europe paved the way for an expansion into the rest of the world under the flag of early global domination. It equated

colonialism with a civilising mission and progress. The price was paid not only by those forced under foreign rule and subject to exploitation in most other parts of the world. Such notion of development had the local population in the colonizing countries in a process of domestication during early industrial capitalism as collateral damage too. Colonisation as “Development” was enforced both at home and abroad. It is a reminder that we deal with Development in the long shadow of several centuries of a Eurocentric fabric, which managed to obtain a global sphere of influence pretending to be a universal framework taken for granted. Its success lies in the acceptance and internalisation by people at the receiving end, and the creation of local elites benefiting from practices guided by such model. To that extent, governance these new regimes execute, often reproduce the hegemonic notion of ‘development’ and continue to benefit from asymmetric power structures. Such transition without fundamental transformation has transcended to some extent the North–South divide into one of a global system. Such universality is one based on class interests. As observed by Arturo Escobar (1997, p. 501):

Since its inception, ‘development’ has been considered to exist in reality, ‘out there’, solid and material. Development has been taken to be a true descriptor of reality, a neutral language that can be utilized harmlessly and put to different ends according to the political and epistemological orientation of those waging it. Whether in political science or sociology, economics or political economy, development has been debated without questioning its ontological status. From modernization theory to dependency or world systems; from ‘market-friendly development’ to self-directed, sustainable, or eco-development the qualifiers of the term have multiplied without the term itself having been rendered radically problematic.

Challenging such development dogma means to question the normative legitimacy of a point of departure taken for far too long as granted: If European or Western or Northern or any other type of framework claiming to be a compass for global normative values as a form of internationalism exercises a power of definition over others and imposes its values, norms, mindsets, and views as a (in this case Eurocentric) project on the rest of the world, then this international dimension of European frameworks is of dubious value—everywhere.

KNOWLEDGE PARTNERSHIP BEYOND WESTERN HEGEMONY

Scientific dependence in Africa, dubbed by Paulin Hountondji (1990) as “extraversion”, refers to the fact that African scholarly production is oriented towards an overseas public. It corresponds with and is an integral part of the structurally anchored socio-economic imbalances: “Unfortunate, but undeniable, the Academy is the North” (Kamal, 2020, p. 73). The vested interests and networks rooted in a Northern hemisphere ensure that citation gaps result in further marginalization and gate-keeping. International bibliometric databases document the bias (Keim, 2008).

Given such Northern hegemony, the meaning of relevance must be interrogated. Adebayo Olukoshi, then regional director for Africa and West Asia at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, questioned at the Times Higher Education Africa Universities Summit in 2016 the notion of “world class” as seemingly global currency. As reported (Bothwel, 2016), he argued:

The mistake which we made over time has been to assume there is a defined standard of excellence, by which we must measure ourselves. Excellence itself is a changing concept and today’s universities in Africa must speak to the goals of transformation. We have an opportunity to establish a much more nuanced and considered definition of ambition that speaks to our context.

By engaging with both northern and southern development discourses, Ndhlovu (2017, p. 91) suggests that “perhaps the answer might as well lie in a judicious and innovative combination of previous and emerging theoretical traditions from both the Global North and the Global South”. This, however, although it seems to be common sense, should not lose sight of who acts in which capacity in the process of seeking new ground and drawing the demarcations.

Current collaboration between policy makers, development agencies, and funding institutions in the spheres of research, including the involvement and role of scholars, offers differing results and conclusions. The tricky part—often not explicitly reflected upon—is the (self-)critical exploration, to which extent European or Western frameworks are considered universal and/or taken simply for granted as being hegemonic when it comes not only to applied science but also to best practices. At times such kind of ‘invisible hand’ shapes despite the declared other intentions the

frame of an interaction guided by mindsets not (yet) emancipated from or even aware of the paternalistic and patronizing undercurrents of what is considered our world of knowledge. This also includes the continued abuse of local researchers in insecure zones. Dubbed as ‘fixers’, they facilitate knowledge production through their field research, often under high personal risks, without any adequate acknowledgment (cf. Dunia et al., 2023).

This is a reminder that international cooperation—even with the best of intentions—is far from being per se good. Well-meaning engagement does not protect from flaws, setbacks, and failures in terms of asymmetric forms of cooperation. Power structures influence research-practice-collaboration (Bender, 2022; Dannecker, 2022). ‘North–South partnership’ (seldom called South–North partnership) in the true sense of the word requires careful and critical self-reflections especially (though not exclusively) by those from the North entering the minefield but trying to avoid the pitfalls of paternalism or racism (and, for that matter, gendered discrimination). Carbonnier and Kontinen (2014, 2015) pointed at the structural constraints, which often lead to an instrumentalization of southern partners, tasked to become mere implementers of a northern agenda.

Being international in nature, outlook and practice does not mean being automatically safe from or immune to bias. Something international in nature and organization does not guarantee being all-inclusive, nor does it—kind of automatically—secure adequate representation. All too often inter-nationalism in its basic characteristics and regarding its main beneficiaries is confined to countries and people inside the circle of power—in contrast to those remaining at the margins or outside and on the receiving end. Critical Western scholarship is by no means on safe ground, while anchoring its arguments mainly within the confinements of Western theories and discourses. Doing so, we are trapped in perspectives, which risk to reproduce at least in parts Eurocentrism (Baaz & Parashar, 2021; Kothari & Klein, 2023). So-called progressive political-philosophical ideologies and perspectives rooted in Western trajectories are by no means secure scaffolding.

INTROSPECTION FOR EMANCIPATION

This does not prevent challenges also from within the belly of the beast, as already articulated by representatives of the ‘Radical Enlightenment’ (cf. Israel, 2001, 2006, 2011). The Enlightenment always had the ambiguity to establish on the one hand a rationality, which promoted a pseudo-scientific belief in mono-causal, linear progress and development as all-embracing concept to explain and master the world, while at the same time providing the tools and instruments for emancipation based on questioning this claim. On balance, however, the era of Enlightenment to a large extent established a smokescreen to cover Eurocentric dominance through claims of universality. The legitimizing humbug of such claims has been questioned not only by those raised at the receiving end of such an introvert, self-centered mindset, but also by some who were socialized within the system and supposed to be an integral part of its reproduction. Emancipation from hegemony, power and subjugation is a collective effort, which crosses boundaries and is internationalism in practice.

Being European or Northern or of any other descent therefore does mold but not pre-determine worldview and convictions, even though cultural and religious factors, gender and skin colour (and the privileges accompanying the social positioning of many scholars in the Northern hemisphere) should not be dismissed lightly in forming identities and mindsets. But primary experiences and socialization do not exclude or deny processes of learning, changing, adapting, and re-positioning. A continued supremacy of ‘Northern’ social sciences does not offer scholars any excuses to abstain from joining counter-hegemonic strategies also from within the dominant spheres of influence and knowledge production. True partnership in research and knowledge production should in principle be able to overcome boundaries. This requires efforts creating an enabling environment for more equal partnerships, guided by the need to deconstruct an agenda claiming to be global, but in fact still being largely driven by actors in the North. All too often, such efforts remain confronted with the dilemma, that even with the best intentions, these are still based on and dependent upon Northern funding and scholars. They might try to overcome structural constraints but remain confined to operations rooted and embedded within a Northern setting. These undertakings often have hardly any direct Southern participation—neither in terms of funding nor through individual and institutional representation.

Southern partners—individuals as well as institutions—remain at the receiving end as implementing agencies, often added on after decisions are taken without adequate consultation during the process. At best, they are invited to indicate their willingness to enter such forms of cooperation in funding applications, in which they had no say during the drafting process, to create the impression that this is about true partnership. This brings back the issue of “scientific power”. Declared awareness of the asymmetrical North–South relations does not eliminate the risk that these are perpetuated even within the settings of those claiming to be aware, as long as historically rooted animosities and structural legacies as well as internalized value systems and behavioral patterns prevail. This is far more than a cognitive challenge: “an alternative epistemology cannot solve the structural symbolic violence displayed among worldviews and forms of knowledge by itself; therefore, any dialectical hermeneutic needs to be combined with a critical theory of society and power” (Lagos, 2015, unpaginated).

SHARED DECOLONISATION

Scholars from the global South, aware of and sensitized by the history of marginalization and dehumanization inherent to our dominant worldviews also penetrating academic discourses and paradigms, might have more to offer than many scholars from other parts of the world. Interaction by listening and learning might help us to become more aware in creating a social contract also in academia, which pursues the ultimate justification of scholarly engagement: to find ways and means to generate and apply knowledge contributing to social justice and general well-being. As the introduction to a Bulletin of the Institute for Development Studies suggested:

Development needs to be reframed from narrowly tackling poverty and vulnerability, to navigating complex challenges in ways that reduce inequalities and build more sustainable, inclusive and secure futures for people and societies.

We need a universal framing of development that recognises these challenges as matters for everyone, everywhere, from London to Lagos, from South England to the sub-Saharan, and Brighton as well as Beijing. (Aghajanian & Allouche, 2016, p. 6)

But the currently popular currency of development as decolonisation needs to be handled with care. “Rethinking thinking” to bring about a pedagogy on unlearning “as part of epistemological decolonisation which results in the removal of that colonial/Eurocentric hard disc of coloniality together with its software” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 42) is easier said than done. More often than we realise, our own affirmative involvement is determined by the mere position we occupy and the role we execute, whether we like it or not. Therefore, it is necessary to throw a spanner in the current spinning wheel of popular demands for decolonisation.—Not to obstruct them, but to point at the pitfalls and traps.

As scholars and educators, we are part of formal socialisation processes in a given society. This bears the risk of being instrumental in a process of domestication. Coloniality is a project transcending but not eradicating Western universal rule. As Mignolo (2017) declared in an interview, it “requires actors and institutions, and actors and institutions conserve, expand, change the structure of knowledge but within the same matrix: the colonial matrix of power”. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021, unpaginated) also maintains: “The reality is that colonialism was never an event. It has always been a power structure with far-reaching consequences”. Taking decoloniality serious, therefore “requires a fundamental shift away from the language, knowledge, and aims of non-Indigenous or Western researchers” (Kothari & Klein, 2023, p. 57).

The all too uncritical affirmation of what is subsumed under the label postcolonial theory (which should actually be in the plural) is a trap. As Wahbie Long (2018, p. 21) observes: “decolonisation seals us within a colonial imaginary in which the binaries of coloniser and colonised, white and black become impossible to displace”. For him, “decolonisation activists, by and large, do not seem to take issue with the instrumentalization of their education. [...] Instead of a materialist reading of the asymmetries of academic life, they support a decolonisation agenda that centres on the notion of epistemic violence” (Long, 2018, p. 23). The focus on epistemic violence risks to reduce—if not ignore—the underlying dimensions of material facts and realities. By denying appreciation of the mind of others, postcolonial theory alone “cannot provide the moral vision we need now more than ever” and “forms the ideological superstructure of an identity project” (Long, 2018, p. 25). Long refuses reconciling “to a theory whose practices would rehumanise some by dehumanising others”, a process in which “identity becomes the basis

for political mobilisation as the possibility of universal comradeship disintegrates” (Long, 2018, p. 22). Concerns of that kind offer a useful sensitisation—namely that the awareness of the asymmetric North–South (or any other given) power relations does not eliminate the risk of perpetuating these, even within the settings of groups who claim to oppose them.

These cautionary reflections resonate with Frantz Fanon’s (1967, p. 232) emphatic conclusion in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I want the world to recognise, with me, the open door of every consciousness”. A search for a truly emancipatory interaction therefore requires a paradigm shift towards the plurality of experiences, practices, knowledges, and theories. This requires transcending not only geographical borders but also the plurality of other confines we have internalised, while paying respect and giving recognition to diversity in efforts seeking and establishing common ground. Unfortunately, this leads to another challenge: how do we recognise otherness without othering?

CONCLUSION: SOLIDARITY MATTERS

Taking decolonisation seriously, one must start with and within oneself. Socialised in unequal societies based on hierarchies, one has internalised fundamentals which contribute to the reproduction of these societies. This does not mean one is predetermined. There are choices. Scholars are supposed to analyse and reflect. Knowledge is indeed power—and it matters which knowledge is used for what power. This requires self-critical explorations and reflections and a change in perceptions and subsequent approaches to what we do and how we do it. We need to interrogate the knowledge we acquire and apply and question if knowledge is indeed wisdom. We need to change attitudes and behaviour and need to learn,

that there are alternative accounts which explain their social positions in terms of class, race, and gender. Those accounts may provide students with more powerful epistemic tools which not only help them understand the production of their own histories, but also enable them to conceive of new and different ways of doing things. Rather than proposing a theory which gives no power to the people, or one which concedes some power to some people, my proposal is that power is the property of all people. (Lakowski, 1984, p. 161)

The impact of the era of Enlightenment and the violent expansion of central Europe to the rest of the world is not past. It exists in the present. Executed with brute force and immense human costs culminating in genocidal forms of elimination on the side of those forced under a regime of so-called development having its roots in the European (un)civilising mission. These were barbaric acts for the benefit of the perpetrators, with lasting consequences of destruction of indigenous forms of social reproduction. They left not only scars and festering wounds, but also a legacy we must face as a challenge for global emancipatory transformation on the way to decoloniality and justice (Melber et al., 2023). For Gurminder Bhambra such task must be an obligation to explore what “Development” should be about. As she diagnoses, shared histories are rarely presented as such. Scholars fail to adequately counteract the inadequate and inaccurate omissions and silences: “This requires us – and here the us is social scientists in particular – to be more alert to questions of history and historiography and both to the political economy and demographic diversity of who gets to produce knowledge of our past and the ways in which it shapes the possibilities of the present.” (Bhambra, 2022, p. 236)

“Whiteness” as much as white supremacy, for that matter, has a factual side anchoring and protecting privileges. But primary experiences and socialization do not exclude or deny processes of learning, changing, adapting, and re-positioning. True partnership in alliances should in principle be able to overcome boundaries and pursue shared values. This would contribute to eroding orthodoxy and fundamentalisms in their diverse forms of articulation, impacting social and political realities in all parts of our world.

Development as decolonization in a very fundamental and personal way is after decades of ignored warnings, a matter of survival. As pointed out by Su-ming Khoo (2023, p. 8), this requires.

policies and practices that exemplify the human-environmental solidarity principle of common but differentiated responsibilities... The fundamental objective of solidaristic humane security merits deep consideration, in the face of post-human predicaments and the conative poverty of Anthropocene crisis discourse. (Khoo, 2023, p. 8)

This brings back the notion of solidarity, in the era of neoliberal dominance in most parts of the world a forgotten but essential ingredient to survival strategies. Empathy and solidarity, not only with other human

beings but with all life, must be a guiding principle for what is called Development Studies. The slogan that “an injury to one is an injury to all” needs to be the moral and ethical compass if Development serves the goal to be of benefit for all. By implication Development Studies should not serve as an apology for maintaining the status quo as untenable, unsustainable trajectory, serving as “an apology for the status quo, for exploitation, for the reproduction of inequality within and between nations, and for the destruction of the conditions of life on Earth” (Saad-Filho, 2023). Questioning “the problematic foundations of development”, Kothari and Klein (2023, p. 113) conclude: “It is imperative to get beyond the singular, unilinear framings of development. Questions remain about what solidarity, decoloniality and pluriversality mean for the field of development, which has long tried to sidestep its history.” Facing and acknowledging this history and its lasting impact, also means to challenge the notion of established knowledge and how it is brought about and disseminated. Emancipation, knowledge and (de)coloniality should go hand in hand.

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Recognizing Complicity and our Unwillingness (and Inability) to do so

Maria Eriksson Baaz

INTRODUCTION

In this talk I will reflect upon inequalities in North–South knowledge production, building on findings and experiences from a recently completed research project. The project was conducted together with my colleagues Oscar Abedi Dunia, based in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, Anju Oseema Maria Toppo, based in Jharkhand, India, James B Vincent, based in Sierra Leone and Mats Utas and Swati Parashar, both based in Sweden.

The “our” in the title refers not to the whole research team, but to the privileged Northern-based researchers, including myself. I will highlight how “we,” hence including so called “critical” scholars, in various

This chapter is based on a keynote held at the Global Partnership Conference 2022.

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ways continue to be complicit in enacting and reproducing the power inequalities we criticize.

The aim of the research project was to shed light on and give voice to facilitating researchers in insecure settings in the global South, a group which most often are referred to as “local research assistants” or “fixers”. I will soon explain the background and rationale behind the concept. While facilitating researchers play a crucial role in most research contexts, they tend to be particularly important in conflict and other insecure areas. They are the ones who have networks that provide safe research access to different actors. They also have the necessary knowledge to properly interact with different actors and know what questions to ask without putting people at risk. These are also the people who take upon them the responsibility of ensuring that all parties are safe. In fact, they often describe their experience with foreign, more privileged researchers in terms similar to a parental role: you guide, teach them what is dangerous, how to treat others and you sometimes have to spend a lot of time reassuring and comforting them.

Facilitating researchers have also come to conduct an increasing amount of data collection. Over the past 10 years, we have seen a marked increase in interest in security at universities in Europe and the United States. The main focus has been on Northern-based researcher safety, linked to the fact that research is conducted in highly uncertain and changing environments, sometimes in or near armed conflict. Different safety procedures have been created, outlining how risks should be assessed and navigated. In some countries, many areas are no longer accessible to European and US-based researchers, due to insecurity and insurance considerations. This, in turn, has led to research being outsourced to facilitating researchers who live and work locally, who are then charged with collecting data in areas deemed too dangerous for foreign researchers. Yet, while the inequalities and exploitation exposed in the research project tend to be more rampant in research in insecure settings, they are certainly not unique to them.

The research project clearly revealed the continuance of inequalities in North–South knowledge production, highlighted since long back by numerous scholars and critics. It also clearly revealed that critical scholars are no exception, but also enact and reproduce colonial and classed power relations which we set out to criticize. The research project itself, which at the onset may give the appearance of a decolonial endeavour, is, as I will show, no exception. The very fact that it was me, and not Oscar, Anju or

James, who was invited to hold this talk is of course itself also a testimony to that.

In this talk I will first give a brief overview of the project, illuminating also how it reflected the inequalities that we set out to interrogate and criticize. After that, I will provide a brief overview of the findings of the project, which have been described in detail in the book “Facilitating researchers in insecure zones. Towards a more equitable knowledge production” edited by Abedi Dunia, Toppo and Vincent (2023). I will end with some reflections on our unwillingness to recognize complicity and break the longstanding patterns of silencing and exploitation.

METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTS IN A FLAWED, DECOLONIAL PROJECT

As mentioned before, the project aimed at shedding light on, and give voice to, facilitating researchers in conflict settings in the global South, a group which most often are referred to as “local research assistants” or even “fixers”. Methodologically, it was set up as a participatory project in which Oscar Abedi Dunia and James Vincent set up workshops with facilitating researchers in the DR Congo and Sierra Leone. The workshops had an open format in which the participants freely spoke about their working conditions and shared experiences of working with Northern-based researchers. In Jharkhand, India, the workshop format had to be abandoned and replaced with interviews due to the Covid pandemic, which were conducted by Anju Toppo.

The project also included both interviews, but mainly informal discussions with Northern-based researchers, often in relation to various workshops and conferences where the unfolding project and our recommendations were presented.

The concept of facilitating researchers emerged during the workshops as the commonplace concepts used were all deemed as flawed. The term “local assistant researchers” was discarded as it reduces the tasks performed to merely assistance. The term “contracted researchers” was also discussed, but dispensed with since very few enjoy the benefits of security and rights of working under clear written contracts. The term “facilitating researcher” was instead chosen, defined as “a key agent, based in the research setting, who performs research but who also regulates the access and flow of knowledge between ‘contracting researchers’ and the researched.” (Abedi Dunia et al., 2023, p. 2).

It should be emphasized that facilitating researchers constitute a highly heterogeneous group when it comes to a range of factors, such as educational background as well as present and past employment and occupations. While some are affiliated to universities as students on various levels or as lecturers, many are not. Many do not have a regular employer but instead have more temporary working opportunities, often through engagements in NGOs. In that sense, the research project engaged with a wider group than those usually included in debates on inequalities in North–South knowledge production, which tend to focus more on established scholars in the global South with a PhD degree or more.

As alluded to initially, despite the seemingly participatory, decolonial set-up of the project it in many ways reflected the inequalities that we sought to highlight. The project itself was designed by me, Mats Utas, and Swati Parashar, all Sweden based researchers. Furthermore, it was funded by a funding research agency where project leaders have to be based at a Swedish university. While the roles of Oscar, James and Anju were stipulated in the project, they were neither named, nor consulted prior to submitting the application. They were asked if they wanted to participate only after the project was granted funding. Hence, they never got to see or give input into the set-up of the project, including the budget, prior to funding. Moreover, while we (the Swedish-based researchers), had 20 percent funding for three years, they were contracted for a shorter period of a year each. Hence, the project was in this way reflecting the unequal set-up of the research”collaborations” analysed. Most facilitating researchers conveyed similar experiences in the workshops: that they are asked to participate in projects where the aim and scope of the research—including budgets—have been set up by others. They are rarely asked for inputs to, or even properly informed of, the aim and set-ups of projects and budgets lines.

EXPLOITATION AND SILENCING

In this talk I will simply provide an overview of the findings of the project. I urge everyone to read the book edited by Abedi Dunia, Toppo and Vincent mentioned initially, which outlines the experiences of facilitating researchers in more detail, containing chapters written by facilitating researchers in the three countries.

Let me first say something about the tasks performed. Because of the often-used term”research assistant”, it is often assumed that facilitating

researchers mainly contribute to the data collection. However, facilitating researchers' duties and responsibilities go far beyond this, something which is very rarely recognized in contracts—in the rare cases there are any. They are the ones preparing research access and the “field visits” of foreign researchers i.e., arranging meetings with different stakeholders, often state authorities, and acquiring formal permissions. These can be very time-consuming and testing tasks.

Moreover, they are often tasked with identifying informants and arranging for the logistics of interviews/data-collection. Hence, the often quite arduous task of explaining research projects to research subjects and managing their expectations also falls upon them. As most foreign researchers do not speak local languages, they also perform the crucial task of translation and adjusting research tools to the context at hand. In addition to participating in the data collection itself—either by collecting it themselves in cases the foreign researcher remains in their home countries or in a safer area or facilitating by acting as translators for foreign researchers—facilitating researchers perform a crucial role in translation and preliminary interpretation of the collected data. In insecure settings a lot of efforts are, as mentioned initially, poured into ensuring safety in terms of scheduling secure times and settings and planning safe itineraries to travel, often under tight schedules.

Not the least, facilitating researchers are the ones who remain in the aftermath of data collection. They are thus the ones who are left to handle expectations among research participants/subjects. They are the ones who are receiving the difficult questions about how the research is progressing, and when and how the research may reap benefits for research subjects. As it is common that facilitating researchers themselves get no information about how the research is progressing or when and how it is published, such questions are clearly particularly difficult to answer. In addition, facilitating researchers are also the ones who have to live through the risks and insecurities in the aftermath of data-collection. As demonstrated in the book, many have the experience of being subjected to threats, physical violence and arrests.

Much of this essential work which facilitating researchers do goes completely unrecognized and is often rendered invisible. Often the only recognition is a brief and unspecified, thank you in the acknowledgment section. Only very few of the facilitating researchers attending the workshops had the experience of being offered the opportunity to appear as

co-authors. As mentioned before, often they are not even informed about when the results are published.

In addition to being unrecognized, facilitating researchers are also grossly under-remunerated. In most cases, the payments are poor, not open for negotiations, and are not regulated in contracts. There are several practices of paying facilitating researchers: some pay per day or for the time the facilitating researcher spent in the field, most pay parts in advance and the remaining part after data-collection. In general, the tasks which appear as valid for remuneration are connected to data-collection itself, thus rendering many tasks performed unpaid. The most common answer we got when asking foreign researchers about the levels and practices of payment the answer was: “Well, I just offered what I was advised by researchers before me who had more experience.”

It is further crucial to mention that everyone worked without any insurance, even in very insecure settings. They also have limited provisions for a range of expenses. Many underscored that transport, for example, is underfunded, which forces them to cover parts of these costs themselves. Many also mentioned the common mundane expenses in the field necessary to get access to certain stakeholders. That is also something that facilitating researchers often pay out of their own pockets. They expressed that they do not dare to tell their foreign researcher because they might think that they are tricking them, or think they are bad negotiators.

Moreover, cases of injury or sickness during fieldwork are also often not paid for by the overall project’s budget. We encountered plenty of examples of facilitating researchers who had to pay medical bills connected to injuries inflicted during data collection themselves. Many also relayed how they have had to pay from their own pockets to dispose of threats occurring during fieldwork.

CLEARLY NOTHING NEW...YET WHY?

I have here only briefly summarized the findings of the project, as they emerged in the workshops. The state of the art is in one way hardly surprising. While the working conditions of facilitating researchers in insecure zones are most probably particularly poor and the inequalities more visible, given that facilitating researchers are particularly indispensable in such settings, the silencing and exploitation are neither new nor unique to

insecure settings. Inequalities and exploitation are embedded in North–South research relations more generally and have been highlighted and criticized for a long time.

Yet, despite decades of calls to decolonise North–South research relations, little seems to have happened. Moreover, the silencing and exploitation are not restricted to certain kinds of mainstream scholars, oblivious of, or unconcerned with power inequalities and labour rights. The research project clearly revealed that also scholars who name themselves critical (post/de-colonial, feminist or otherwise) are enacting the very same practices. As I noted above this project was no exception. While it had a participatory set up and while Oscar, James and Anju were co-writers and the editors of the subsequent book, some basic features of North–South research collaboration remained. It was never truly collaborative as Oscar, James and Anju were not involved in the outlining stage where the set-up was decided upon and the budget lines allocated. Moreover, the funding was enabled through a funding institution which, without the involvement of a Swedish project leader would be out of reach for them.

On a higher level of abstraction, the continuity of the exploitation and silencing of facilitating researchers in the Global South must of course be understood as a reflection of the power inequalities in the global economy of knowledge production and the continued dominance of academic institutions, funders and publishers in the Global North, firmly rooted in colonial history.

Yet, I would here like to focus more on the question: why does it seem to be so difficult to break with these patterns even when we, as privileged critical Northern-based scholars, are (officially) so opposed to them? As I mentioned earlier the project also involved some interviews and more informal discussions with Northern-based researchers, often in relation to various workshops and conferences where the unfolding project and our recommendations were presented. These conversations provided many hints on why it is so difficult to break the patterns and also to recognize our complicity.

One aspect is self-interest and the ways in which critical scholars are situated inside—and not outside—a marketized academia in which success is measured in visibility and productivity. While self-interest seldom was brought up in discussions, the increased pressures to publish and be visible were often looming in the background. Really acknowledging the crucial role of facilitating researchers in research clearly reduces the spotlight on

the foreign researcher. The same undoubtedly goes for involving them as co-authors, especially in the social sciences, where sole authorship and a limited number of authors hold a higher merit value. During the project, we came across a number of publications in which facilitating researchers had conducted most, sometimes even all, data collection. Yet, this was not acknowledged in the publications.

Moreover, the conversations also revealed the ways in which critical scholars are situated inside the workings of common racist stereotypes. Recurrent arguments that authorship requires being part of all phases of research: participating in the conception and design of a project; participating in data collection, participating in the analysis, and contributing to writing were voiced. When questioning this by arguing that it is difficult to contribute to aspects of research (conception and writing) if you are not invited to participate, it was sometimes countered by arguments that facilitating researchers often lack enough knowledge of theory and academic debates, as well as academic writing skills. Another argument brought forward was a concern about the safety of facilitating researchers, that they are put in danger if they appear as authors. Thus, here the foreign researchers conveyed a belief that they have the capability and responsibility to judge if facilitating researchers, who know the context best, are in danger if they appear as co-authors. Yet all the participants in the workshops in all three countries underscored that they were fully capable of assessing these risks themselves.

Moreover, the research results highlighting the very insecure living conditions of most of the facilitating researchers who participated in the project were sometimes countered. Some conveyed a need to underscore that not all are poor, that some actually have a very good economic situation, in fact earning more and having better houses or cars than foreign researchers.

One of the recommendations of the project is that we should move towards less physical presence of foreign researchers in data collection at "field sites" both in order to mitigate climate change but also to provide locally based researchers with more influence, something which was also concluded in the project as a lesson learned from the Covid pandemic. This recommendation was sometimes met with commonplace arguments for the need to be present yourself since facilitating researchers lack the appropriate methodological competence. Concerns were also raised here about the risk of facilitating researchers simply inventing data.

In several ways the discussions reminded me of my PhD project from 2005 where I conducted interviews with progressive, leftist development workers in Tanzania. Similar descriptions of development partners as lacking adequate competence and as somewhat unreliable were voiced also there. In that context, it justified the development worker taking the lead and function as a controller, despite the calls for equal partnerships and for development workers merely acting as advisors. Such representations featured together with sentiments that economic inequalities were somehow a bit justified as “they prioritize other things in life” or reminders that “not everyone is poor in Tanzania”.

In addition to reflecting on how we are all situated inside the colonial library, that racist stereotypes are not simply the problem of “others”, I read such images in relation to the development workers’ political orientation and the shame and guilt of being visibly so privileged in the Tanzanian context—sentiments which were also clearly expressed. One way of trying to release ourselves from such feelings of shame and guilt is to locate the blame outside ourselves and legitimate the state of the art in various ways. A similar ambivalence between, on the one hand, a stark critique of the state of the art, and, at the same time, justifications for it, was reflected in conversations with Northern-based scholars, “critical” scholars included.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In the edited book mentioned in this talk, a range of recommendations on how to move forward towards more equitable knowledge production is provided. I will not echo those here but prefer to refer you to the book itself. The recommendations include an identification of what needs to change, as well as the institutions that need to take the lead such as university representatives, research funders, research ethics boards and publishers.

One of the main lessons learned from the project is that change clearly requires much more than appealing to the willingness or consciousness of individual researchers. More structural, institutional changes are undoubtedly needed.

In an ongoing subsequent research project we are now, with the same constellation of researchers, looking into the institutional practices and obstacles involved. In this new project we tried to correct some of the faults in the previous one, by engaging everyone from the beginning and

giving everyone equal time. Yet, that does not mean that it is an equal, decolonial project. The inequalities remain. How to make this new project more equal and fairer is a source of continuous discussions, requiring constant critical self-reflection, recognizing also my own complicity and my failures.

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PART IV

Outlook



In Search of a Democratic Eco-Socialist Politics

Devan Pillay

INTRODUCTION

As the science of climate change becomes irrefutable, alongside the increased recognition of a range of other environmental threats, the discourse around a ‘just transition’ to a post-carbon future has increased in intensity. The dominant discourse, however, has taken the form of a green capitalism that says little about the social dimensions of ‘fossil’ capitalism, including rising inequality (both between and within countries) and a deep appreciation of patriarchy. Thinking and practice around eco-socialism and feminism has come from groups outside the dominant paradigms. They draw on growing struggles and bodies of thought throughout the world, that grapple with the ravages of ‘fossil’ capitalism, colonial dispossession and patriarchy.

The failures of twentieth century working class and national liberation struggles to build viable, democratic alternatives to capitalism has resulted in a retreat from a revolutionary politics that focusses on the

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armed capture of state power. The twenty-first century left, in its various guises, has either pursued a path of ‘social-democratic’ electoral politics, or have engaged in transformative struggles outside the state, in the belief that Another World Is Possible. New thinking has emerged around happiness, well-being, degrowth, a Green New Deal and ecosocialism, and how to pursue a counter-hegemonic politics within the context of the established nation-state. In recent years, a bold rupture with capitalist-patriarchy has occurred in northern Syria, where the Kurdish people of Rojava (alongside a diverse range of ethnic and religious groups) are leading a women’s revolution founded on the principles of social ecology and a new democratic civilisation.

Invoking the ‘necessity of Utopian thinking’ urged by the South African humanist Marxist Rick Turner (1980), this chapter looks at the various social-ecological alternatives that have emerged in the twenty-first century, in different parts of the world. As such the chapter seeks to go beyond the limited (and hegemonic) thinking that permeates the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but fails to address the fundamental issues facing the people and the planet. Instead, this chapter considers the possibilities of partnerships, or social alliances between subaltern groups, that contain more transformative, counter-hegemonic possibilities.

THE NECESSITY OF UTOPIAN THINKING

The thinking and practice of Rick Turner was an inspiration for a new generation of South African trade unionists and activists in the 1970s (Keniston, 2010). He promoted “workers’ control” (Turner, 1980) of both unions and industry, as a stepping stone towards maximum participatory democracy in society as a whole—a *society-focussed* socialist vision. This was in contrast to the authoritarian-statist versions of socialism promoted by the Soviet-aligned South African Communist Party (SACP) (as well as Maoist and Trotskyist variants) which had strong resonance throughout the anti-colonial world in general. His brand of democratic-humanist Marxism was infused with a belief in universal love and the unity between inner (introspective) and outer (structural) transformations. In

some ways, this resonated with the concept of ‘revolutionary love’ articulated by the Cuban-Argentinian revolutionary Che Guevara (Guevara, 1965).¹

The feminist movement (echoing amongst others Mahatma Gandhi) warned that activists must *be* the change they want to see, if true radical transformation is to be achieved. This was in response to the failures of socialist and national liberation struggles, where revolutionary leaders, once in power, behaved as oppressively as those they replaced—what might be called the *Animal Farm* effect. Drawing on the thinking of the ancients (Armstrong, 2006), activists were called upon to focus on both *personal transformation* and continuous introspection, as well as a *deep participatory politics*, where leaders are always held accountable to their organisations, members and communities.

A humanist socialist ‘love’ means rising above ourselves as individuals, and embracing the whole of humanity, and as such is no different to the ‘spiritual’ essence conveyed by ancient secular and religious philosophers (Armstrong, 2006). While some of them imagined an external personal god or gods as the embodiment of the totality of love, others, like the ancient Samkhya school in India and the Buddha (see Chattopadhyaya, 1964, 1970), found that capacity *within* all of us. Turner easily made connections between his humanist Marxism and the ‘spiritual’ (without embracing a theism or belief in a personal god). Indeed, his thinking resonates with that of the Tibetan Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama, who on more than one occasion declared “I am a Marxist” (Smithers, 2012).

Like the Buddha, Turner extended this humanism to the realm of non-human nature (i.e. the ‘environment’). He understood the limits to growth argument, arguing that capitalism is ‘intrinsically growth-oriented’, but there are “limits to the resources of our planet” as well as “limits to our ability to dispose of our own rubbish” (Turner, 1980, p. 98). Unless this obsession with growth ended, and resources re-allocated to vital material needs (food, shelter and health), Turner argued, “we can only look forward to a future of famine, growing inequality, social conflict, and universal hate and fear in the struggle for survival” (1980, p. 97).

¹ An important point of difference, of course, is the use of revolutionary violence to achieve political ends. Turner leaned more to the Gandhian focus on non-violent but militant resistance.

Turner argued for the ‘necessity of utopian thinking’ (1980, p. 1–6) which resonates with the ‘real utopias’ of Marxist thinkers such as Erik Olin-Wright (2010) and that of the Latin American Marxist Atilio Boron (2012). Unlike a utopian politics that under-estimates power relations, a pragmatic utopian politics recognises the politics of ‘non-reformist reforms’ (Gorz, 1967), that seeks short term tactical victories embedded in longer term strategic visions. However, these can only be guaranteed by a fundamentally democratic project, where power truly resides with the people. This was, indeed, the *modus operandi* of the independent South African trade union movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Friedman, 1987), as well as the social movements that emerged in the 1980s, many of which fell under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (Marais, 2011). Turner’s ‘ecosocialist’ prescience was, unfortunately, not taken up by his trade union colleagues at the time, and environmental awareness generally had a minimal presence in the UDF and other anti-apartheid formations. Environmental groups, however, did emerge to struggle against a range of environmental issues, and on occasion did forge alliances with trade unions around particular issues in the decades that followed (Cock, 2007).

In recent years, as climate science becomes irrefutable, labour and other social movements around the world are beginning to take the just transition towards a post-carbon future more seriously. However, after becoming incorporated into official processes at international and national levels, there is a danger that the concept is being emptied of its radical content, to accord with a green capitalist ‘ecological modernisation’ framing of issues. This, however, is being vigorously contested by labour and other social movements around the world, in both a defensive and a transformative manner (see Rätzel et al., 2021; Sikwebu & Aroun, 2024). Combined with the rise of a range of other social struggles against neoliberal capitalism and patriarchy, these struggles have re-ignited the utopian imagination of ‘another world’, where human flourishing for all is indeed still possible.

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

The World Social Forum (WSF), which emerged in 2003 as an alternative to the World Economic Forum, popularised the slogan Another World Is Possible (see Sen et al., 2004). This captured the hopes and dreams of oppressed and exploited people around the world, suffering under

the ravages of globalised neoliberal capitalism. British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who with the USA's Ronald Reagan ushered in the era of neoliberalism in the 1980s, boldly asserted *There Is No Alternative* (TINA). This was a response to the capitalist crisis of the 1970s, when the state-led Keynesian boom ran aground in developed countries, along with other statist experiments in the Soviet bloc and the post-colony around the world. This, in many eyes, de-legitimised socialism as a viable alternative to capitalism. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 put a final seal on East European totalitarian state-socialism, thus paving the way for the rise of private corporate power, and with it exponentially increasing social inequality throughout the world.

As neoliberalism continued to wreak havoc on peoples' lives and the natural environment around the world, movements that became part of the WSF came up with the counter-slogan to TINA, namely THEMBA (There Must Be Alternatives), meaning 'hope' in the South African dialect isiXhosa. The first wave of resistance came with the Zapatistas in Mexico, with their dramatic statement in 1994 against the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), followed by rise of the 'pink tide' in Latin America, led by Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, and the election of socialists in Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay. Chavez promoted a new 'twenty-first century socialism', which some termed 'utopia reborn' (see Barrett et al., 2008). Bolivia and Ecuador gave the environment constitutional rights, which significantly boosted the hopes of a serious tilt toward an ecosocialist pathway. Along with the increased promise of 'solidarity economy' alternatives, this gave further confidence to social-ecological movements around the world. The slogan THETHA (There Are Thousands of Alternatives)—'speak' in isiXhosa—emerged, particularly within the South, and animated eco-feminist, anti-racist and indigenous movements grounded in communitarian solidarity, as well as "peasant, trade union and degrowth movements" (Löwy, 2018, p. 11).

However, the imploding of what some have called 'petrosocialism' in Venezuela, due in part to the decline in the oil price, US sanctions, internal bureaucratic blundering and corruption, did much to taint the idea of 'twenty-first century socialism' (inasmuch as the Stalinist regimes tainted the idea of twentieth century 'actually existing socialism'). Environmental and indigenous groups became disillusioned with Bolivia's return to extractivist economic development, and Ecuador abandoned all pretense of having an ecological sensibility. The pressures of development-as-usual, in order to meet immediate social needs, became irresistible.

When Bolivia's Evo Morales changed the constitution to seek a third term as president, his support was significantly reduced, which opened the way for a US-sponsored coup in 2018. However, a year later Luis Arce of Morales's party the Movement for Socialism won the presidential election in a landslide victory. Indeed, in recent years, after the setbacks against the 'pink tide', the Latin American left have built up a groundswell of support, and have won significant electoral victories in Mexico, Honduras, Chile, Colombia and Brazil (Daphne, 2022).

While the social-ecological sensibilities of some of these regimes remain opaque, the 'well-organised, deep rooted, community and worker-based organisation' (Daphne, 2022, p. 4) in many of these countries have strong feminist, indigenous and environmental components. This is captured by Colombia's new president Gustavo Petro and his running mate Francia Márquez (a black woman), who promised:

to mobilise Colombian society as a caring society that recognises and rewards women's care work; to establish a new relationship between society and nature that prioritises the defence of life over economic interests, promoting energy transition and democratizing environmental knowledge; to move from an extractivist economy to a productive economy that reduces inequality in land ownership and use through agrarian reform, including access to and use of water (Petro, Francia and Hope, 21-06-2022, Alice News as quoted in Daphne, 2022, p. 3)

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVES

The feminist, social-ecological emphasis being witnessed in Latin America has emerged out of years of struggle and thinking around alternatives to the GDP growth paradigm.² The social solidaristic ethos of traditional beliefs, such as the Native American *buen vivir* (Acosta & Abarca, 2018) and the African *ubuntu* (Terreblanche, 2018), as well as Eastern philosophical thought, inform much of the social-ecological perspectives that converge around the degrowth movement in Europe, and considerations of happiness, well-being and localised Buddhist economics (Pillay, 2020). While ecological Marxism (see Foster, 2009; Saito, 2017) has some differences with these perspectives, there are major points of convergence.

² See Fioramonti (2013) for a comprehensive critique of GDP growth, and Coyle (2014) for a critical defence.

Marx's theory of alienation had a strong 'spiritual' meaning (Fromm, 1961), and his arguments for social equality and human flourishing, and the restoration of the metabolic rift between humans and non-human nature, connected strongly with the yearnings of ancient philosophers seeking the end of human (and often animal) suffering (see Armstrong, 2006; Sardesai, 1982; Chattopadhyaya, 1970; Bensaada n.d.; Duchrow & Hinkelammert, 2012).

'Ecosocialism' emerged out of the debates of the 1980s between the Marxist Left (red) and the ecological Left (green) perspectives and is thus often depicted as a red-green synthesis (Pepper, 1993). Michael Löwy, along with Joel Kovel, was the first to craft an *Ecosocialist Manifesto* in 2001. More recently, Löwy (2018, p. 1) argued that ecosocialism stands against both reformist market ecology and the productivist socialism that dominated the Marxist Left during the past century. Instead, he argues for a new model of "robustly democratic planning", such that society "takes control of the means of production and its own destiny" (p.1). In other words, in contrast to neoliberal market dominance on the one hand and bureaucratic state dominance on the other, ecosocialism advocates the subordination of both state and market to society (i.e., the people). However, to achieve this longer-term goal, Löwy is aware of the need to fight for "concrete and urgent reforms in the near term", without succumbing to the illusions of a "clean capitalism" (2018, p. 10).

All of this can fit into the logic of transformative reforms (or non-reformist reforms), whereby partial victories combat both environmental degradation and social immiseration, and despair about the future. However, they must fit into a longer-term strategy of raising consciousness around eco-socialist possibilities, through activism from below, as part of a myriad number and variety of movements that can merge into an 'overarching systemic global movement' (Löwy, 2018, p. 10). In Latin America, as discussed, these mobilisations have borne fruit in the form of new leftist governments that have broken with the sterility of twentieth century productivist and patriarchal statism. However, it remains a challenge to put their ideas into practice, in partnership (and dialectical tension) with the movements from below that brought them to power.

If the ecosocialism Löwy (2018 and 2019) emphasises is explicitly anti-capitalist, the Economics of Happiness³ and wellbeing perspectives

³ The documentary *Economics of Happiness* (2011) produced by Local Futures can be found on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2kHUKbPogQ>.

blame neoliberal ‘globalization’, not capitalism per se, for the damage to the earth and people (Fioramonti, 2017). Unlike Löwy’s emphasis on democratic planning (at the national or indeed global) level, happiness and wellbeing perspectives place more emphasis on the *localization* of production and exchange, through small business development (including cooperatives). These, however, are not hard-and-fast positions, and the distinction between being ‘anti-capitalist’ or merely anti ‘neoliberal’ capitalism is often fudged (see Olin-Wright, 2019). The ‘movements-in-movements’, in the absence of clear-cut ideological reference points (e.g. the statist socialism of the twentieth century) are still feeling around for viable alternatives to the failures of both the market and the state. As such there is a degree of fluidity of positions, and an opportunity to break down turf walls and enter into effective dialogue (Pillay, 2020).

Another perspective that aims to address the social-ecological crisis, the Green New Deal (GND), has also emerged in recent years, and takes on different forms. It is a green version of the New Deal adopted by US president Roosevelt in the 1930s, which involved massive state intervention to address unemployment and increase social welfare. A ‘green capitalist’ version of the GND has been promoted in the EU, and is criticised for having very limited, corporate-friendly ambitions that do not go to the root of the social-ecological problem (Seoane, 2022).

A more radical ‘ecosocialist’ GND subsequently emerged in the USA, through the deliberations of the Democratic Socialists and given prominence by congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (Battistoni and Cohen 2019, Riofrancos, 2022). The GND also inspired movements and parties in other parts of the world (including in the United Kingdom, where the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn committed itself to a Green Industrial Revolution that explicitly linked climate justice issues with social justice and class struggle). After the Labour Party lost the 2019 general elections, Corbyn resigned as party leader, and the new moderate leadership shifted towards more lukewarm green capitalist policies. Similarly, in the USA, the election of Joe Biden as US president in 2021 saw a shift towards more moderate green economy policies (now undermined by US president Donald Trump, who calls climate science a ‘hoax’). Nonetheless, despite the odds, the seeds have been sown for continued mobilisations, as the social-ecological crisis deepens (see Pettifor, 2019; Fernandes, 2022).

Meanwhile, in Europe and Japan, there has been a flourishing of scholarship around Degrowth over the past decade. According to Demaria

and Letouche (2019, p. 149) the term ‘degrowth’, after first making its appearance in the 1970s, was launched in 2001 as a provocation to ‘repoliticise’ the environmental movement in France. It initially argued that all economic growth needs to end, given the limited carrying capacity of the earth, and the rapid advance of climate change that threatens the very existence of life on earth. However, in response to criticism that stopping all economic growth locks in the wealth of the North, and consigns the global South to perpetual poverty, the degrowth perspective has refined its position. It recognises that the countries of the global North are in fact *over*-developed, while those of the South are *under*-developed and therefore need to grow certain sectors of the economy to meet the needs of human development, in harmony with the natural environment (see D’Alisa et al. 2015).

Löwy (2019) initially criticised the degrowth perspective for arguing against any growth, or even negative growth, in countries of the North. From an ecosocialist perspective, he emphasised ‘qualitative transformation’ of both production and consumption:

This means putting an end to the monstrous waste of resources by capitalism, based on large-scale production of useless and/or harmful products such as the armaments industry. Many of the ‘goods’ produced by capitalism have inbuilt obsolescence; they are designed wastefully for rapid replacement to generate profit. From an ecosocialist perspective, the issue is not so much one of ‘excessive consumption’ therefore, but the ‘type’ of consumption. (Löwy, 2019, p. 174)

In the recently published *The Future Is Degrowth: A Guide to a World beyond Capitalism*, Schmelzer et al (2022) seek to absorb all the currents of social-ecological thought under the umbrella of ‘degrowth’, by acknowledging the criticisms, and clarifying that the degrowth perspective is not arguing for degrowth in all sectors of the economy—but for *aggregate* degrowth, both at the national and global level. They concede that ‘good’ sectors of the economy, such as care work, need to grow, while destructive sectors need to degrow. They are agnostic about whether the term ‘degrowth’ is used, or the alternative terms popular in European green circles, the ‘Green New Deal’ or ‘post-growth’. For them, the *content* of their proposals, which is explicitly anti-capitalist, decolonial and eco-feminist, is important.

Barlow et al.'s *Degrowth and Strategy: How to Bring About Socio-Ecological Transformation* (2022) takes the argument further, by considering the various ways degrowth struggles could be advanced within the state, outside the state and against the state (see also Helliker & Van der Walt, 2020). While all these bodies of work acknowledge that the term 'degrowth' has *no resonance* in the global South (in fact, it invites intense negative reaction), they nonetheless are forging ahead with the 'degrowth' label. It seemed that, unlike in the USA, where 'democratic socialism' has been promoted by politicians such as Bernie Sanders, the European ecological left has been reluctant to use the term 'socialist', given its negative connotations associated with eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

However, there has now been a convergence of thinking between degrowth proponents, and ecosocialists, giving rise to the 'ecosocialist degrowth' perspective. Prominent ecosocialists such as Michael Lowy and John Bellamy Foster have all recently incorporated 'degrowth' into an ecosocialist framing (Lowy, 2023 and Foster & Speth, 2024)—with Kohei Saito going a step further by arguing that Marx, towards the end of his life, had embraced 'degrowth communism' (Saito, 2023).⁴ Chen (2023), from a socialist perspective, reluctantly accepts the socialist degrowth argument, but like Foster and Speth (2024) links it to "planned deaccumulation", whereby planning need not imply the top-down, statist planning of the twentieth century.

Isikara and Narin (2023) question the "revolutionary vision" of the degrowth perspective, as it is "ambiguous as to the questions of organization, the use of force, and the revolutionary rupture" in that it "shies away from confronting the need to ground and complement local, autonomous instances with larger-scale ones". This critique could be extended to the other perspectives discussed above.

THE ROJAVA RUPTURE

The relative caution of these social-ecological approaches is challenged by the more far-reaching social ecology practice of Rojava in northern Syria, where the revolutionary Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), through its various proxies, has taken power through armed struggle (not for

⁴ See Foster and Speth (2024) for a critique.

‘state power’ as such, but for a decentralised autonomy). The common fight against the medieval and misogynistic Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) has resulted in the limited (and temporary) military support of the big powers the USA and Russia,⁵ and Rojava autonomy was tolerated by a fragile Assad-led Syrian regime recovering from a brutal civil war (and subsequently overthrown in December 2024, leading to a fragile standoff between the new regime and Rojava). While it could be argued that theirs is a special case of a liberated zone arising out of the fight against ISIS insurgents, it nonetheless shows how a political rupture opens up enormous space for social experimentation.

The imprisoned leader of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan, inspired by Murray Bookchin’s social ecology and anarchist perspectives (Bookchin, 1986 and 1987), and the Marxist-Feminist Sylvia Federici (2004), led a significant shift away from orthodox Marxist-Leninism in the 1990s. The revolution in Rojava, where women play a critical role in building a decentralized democratic alternative (Internationalist Commune of Rojava, 2018) is a culmination of years of struggle of the women’s movement in Kurdistan (Dirik, 2022). While the Rojava experience is quite recent (it was liberated in 2012), and faces fierce military opposition from Turkey, amongst other threats, it is an inspiring example of an attempt to immediately implement a radical social ecology, anti-capitalist and feminist

⁵ At a public meeting organized in Johannesburg by the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG) with 3 Kurdish activists on 27 July 2024 (they preferred anonymity), the author asked for their response to criticism by sections of the “anti-imperialist” left about the limited US military air support in their fight against ISIS (during the Trump administration this support was withdrawn, exposing the region to greater danger, but resumed under Biden. After the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, and the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president in January 2025, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about future security arrangements in Rojava). This is a reason why some leftists, particularly in the USA, do not seem to support the Rojava revolution. The Kurdish activists’ response was that they have no alliance with the USA (who oppose their autonomy), and indeed they have also been assisted by Russia who, unlike the USA and Turkey (their NATO ally and the Kurds’ main foe) previously supported their inclusion in any peace talks on Syria. Both the USA and Russia have a common enemy in ISIS, while there is suspicion that Turkish intelligence has links to the fundamentalist group. It was pointed out that Turkey, in collaboration with NATO, illegally abducted Ocalan from Nairobi while en route to South Africa in 1999. It is apparent that this is a highly complex geopolitical scenario, with shifting tactical alliances, and it is simplistic to adopt a one-dimensional “anti-imperialist” stance. The clearly anti-capitalist politics of Rojava is diametrically opposed to long-term US imperialist interests, and once ISIS is removed from the equation, the limited US support will cease.

alternative to capitalist modernity. It explicitly rejects the traditional statist socialism that privileged oppressive hierarchies, in favour of decentralized emancipation that embeds participatory democracy and gender equality at all levels of the liberated zone. Dilar Dirik (2022, p. 148–149), an activist-scholar from Rojava, captures the social ecology and ecofeminist approach of Rojava:

Marxist-feminists and eco-feminists have long pointed out that the colonization and commodification of nature goes hand in hand with the colonization and commodification of women. Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg’s work on imperialism, many linked the parasitic nature of capitalism to the exploitation of women, nature, and colonies as free commodities to generate surplus and accumulate profit.

Knapp et al.’s *Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women’s Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan* (2016) record the wide-ranging transformations that have been implemented in that region. These include setting up a system of democratic confederalism, giving women equal representation at all levels; implementing a new justice system with peace committees that empower women and arbitrate family disputes (including the challenges of combatting patriarchal domination); democratising education; setting up health care assemblies; building a social economy through cooperatives; and dealing with ecological challenges such as the destruction of biodiversity, the water crisis, waste disposal, air pollution and petroleum production.

There is, however, still a long way to go to achieve all its objectives. The Rojava economy, for example, is still dependent on oil revenues, and while cooperatives have expanded significantly, they still only represent a small proportion of total economic activity (Hatahet, 2019). Nonetheless Aslan (2023), in a major study, argues that cooperatives are the social economy’s organizational foundation, as long as they adhere to the cardinal principles of self-management and collective work within the context of social-ecological needs, not profit. Specific mechanisms have been put in place to ensure a “communitarian-democratic, ecological and women’s liberation” ethos (Aslan, 2023, p. 128), such that decisions are not only made by the workers in the cooperative, but also the larger community. Cooperatives must develop “independently of market conditions” (p. 130) in order to develop autonomous power. This principle also extends to other areas, such as education and health.

While there is much concern to prevent existing structures from becoming state-like, and to actively prevent bureaucratisation (Dirik, 2022), there is nonetheless an independent observation that interventions from the autonomous administration central commissions and offices can lead and bypass local structures, and create a feeling of detachment amongst citizens (Hatahet, 2019). According to Hatahet (2019, p. 5) this is justified as being necessary to “protect the nascent democracy in the region” as a form of “dual bottom-up and top-down transitioning”.

A crucial point that Knapp et al. (2016) are at pains to make is that this revolution is not just that of the Kurds but involves all the different ethnic and religious groups that reside there, on an equal basis—unprecedented in the recent history of the middle east, where the secular pan-Arab nationalism or Islamic chauvinism smothered and marginalised non-Arab and non-Muslim groups.

Women’s militias formed a critical part of the fight against ISIS, and after defeating them, they now play a central role in the defence of Rojava against continued threats (both from ISIS remnants and the Turkish state). They also play a policing role within the various cities and towns of Rojava. The late David Graeber, in his foreword to Knapp et al., (2016, p. xvii), quotes a member of the militia summing up their approach: “Well, we’re anti-capitalist. One thing we think the twentieth century has shown us is that you can’t get rid of capitalism without getting rid of the state. And you can’t get rid of the state without eliminating patriarchy”.

As inspirational as the Rojava revolution is, it can be legitimately asked whether its unique experience—arising out of a civil war and the fight against ISIS—can be easily replicated elsewhere. Rojava, and indeed the Zapatista revolution in Chiapas, Mexico, represent utopian visions made flesh, but on a relatively small scale.

The state of Kerala in India can be held up as a different pathway, using existing democratic institutions, to achieve far-reaching socio-economic transformation on a relatively larger scale—but with less immediate ambition (social and ecological) than what pertains in Rojava.⁶ The state of

⁶ Indeed, Ashish Kotari, in a talk at Wits University on 2 October 2024, is more lukewarm about Kerala’s environmental record and the ability of states to make substantive social-ecological advances (in contrast to the many struggles outside the state, such as that of Rojava and the Zapatistas – all of which need to be “OUTscaled” through horizontal networks, not upscaled, he argued). Former Kerala Finance Minister Thomas Isaac (2022) acknowledges the difficulties, despite enormous social achievements, but presents a more

Kerala, India, which has been ruled intermittently by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) since the late 1950s, is also a case of a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party undergoing substantive transformation, through its embrace of participatory-democratic development. Its combination of top-down and bottom-up decision-making processes is therefore similar to that of Rojava. The key difference is that it has pursued a non-violent electoral pathway combined with mass mobilisation (Isaac, 2022; Williams, 2008). Both are sub-national cases, with Kerala operating within the constraints of the national state of India, while Rojava has declared self-government outside the purview of the state of Syria. While Kerala has a population size similar to South Africa (around 40 million), the Rojava region has an estimated population of approx. 6 million.⁷

It all boils down to the balance of forces within any given context.

CONCLUSION

Kohei Saito, in the hugely popular⁸ Japanese version of his book *Slow Down: A Degrowth Manifesto* (2024, p. 12), provocatively described the SDGs as the “opiate of the masses”. He argued that “many governments and major industries have conformed to various aspects of these SDGs, yet these actions have proven unable to stop climate change. SDGs mainly function as an alibi, most effective at allowing us to avert our eyes from the danger right in front of us” (p. 12). By contrast Thomas Isaac (2022), in a recent assessment of the achievements of Kerala, uses the SDGs as a benchmark to measure the achievements of this sub-national state.

Whether the UN’s SDGs and the ‘partnerships’ they call for are impotent distractions (Saito) or useful targets to mobilise around (Isaac), it is apparent that radical social-ecological struggles are necessary to confront the crisis of fossil capitalism facing humanity. The democratic-humanist alternative has taken on many different forms, the most recent being a

optimistic picture about future prospects, especially if the Left bloc is given a third term to fulfill its transformative agenda.

⁷ There is some uncertainty about the population size in Rojava, due to the influx of refugees during the civil war. The Kurdish activists (see note v) use the figure of approx. 6 million, pending a census which is yet to be done in the region. The website www.rapidtransition.org/st uses the figure of 4.6 million.

⁸ The book, which argues for degrowth communism, was first published in 2020, and sold 500,000 copies in Japan.

resurgence of social-ecological struggles in different parts of the world, with a strong feminist component. The pragmatic-idealist or ‘real utopian’ framing of Olin-Wright’s (2010) places short to medium term tactical goals within the context of a longer-term idealist vision (what Antonio Gramsci (1982) called a ‘war of position’). Indeed, the failures of twentieth century revolutionary movements that focused on Gramsci’s ‘war of maneuver’—namely a full-frontal attack against the capitalist or colonial state—have made leftwing movements much more cautious about pursuing the violent overthrow of the state, and the repression of opposition that often follow. Nevertheless, while the achievements of Latin American countries, and the sub-national state of Kerala, India, point to possibilities within the context of multi-party democracies, the revolutionary ruptures in Rojava, northern Syria and Chiapas, Mexico keep alive possibilities of deeply democratic alternatives outside the state.

The search for democratic ecosocialist politics, as counter-hegemonic alternatives to the dominant paradigms, continues in many spaces throughout the world. Only meaningful dialogue based on mutual respect amongst social movements and engaged intellectuals can build on the gains that have already been made. The aim must be to forge ever-larger alliances—meaningful partnerships—that can shift the balance of forces against the hegemonic powers, in both incremental and dramatic ways.

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