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Capitalism as colonialism as capitalism (and the alternatives)

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It is a well-established position that the European colonial project has played a central role in bringing about the current dominant sociocultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical realities and imaginaries—from the way we see and interpret ourselves and the world around us, to the global sociopolitical and socioeconomic institutions (Amin, 2010; Escobar, 2018; Fanon, 1952). The problem is that the majority of the Minority world (i.e., the majority of racially or otherwise privileged people living in the affluent European and settler colonial states) treat the European colonial project as a thing of the past, a historic fact that does not matter now and that nothing can be done about it. This is problematic because, first, colonialism is also the current state of affairs—as we are painfully reminded by the ongoing (plausible) genocide of Palestinians and confiscation of their land by Israel, but fully backed by the former colonial and settler colonial states. Second, because treating colonialism as something that is no longer present and just a part of European “dark history” is a major inhibitor for socioecological justice, transformations, and liberation.

Colonialism produced logics and structures including norms and praxis that are harmful to the web of life, the rest of the living world, land, water, planet itself, and eventually to all humans, as an intrinsic part of the whole. That we are part of and one with ‘the rest of life’ is something that some of us, faced with the horrendous global socioecological destruction and health crises, are starting to relearn, while others have never forgotten it (for example, see Kimmerer & Artelle [2024]; Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) & Narvaez, [2022]). Colonialism has altered our psyche, the ways we

think, and the ways we know and understand the world, the ways we see ourselves and our positions in the world and the ways we understand our roles and responsibilities in the web of life.

Capitalism as colonialism as capitalism

Colonialism permeates every aspect of our living, both in the Minority world, or the so-called Global North as well as in Majority world, or the so-called Global South, albeit in starkly different ways, as I will explore in this chapter. My contributions to the debate on capitalism is two-fold. First, I explore the shared temporal and historic coevolutionary pathways of colonialism and capitalism, arguing that the two are inseparable and that one does not exist in isolation of the other (hence, ‘capitalism as colonialism as capitalism’). Second, I dwell on the critiques of this colonialism-capitalism nexus, not merely to highlight its socioecological violence and destruction, but also to explore the various strategies to tackle this nexus, exploring their divergences and possibilities for convergence, which I argue is necessary for devising collective responses and shared pathways towards post- and anti- colonialist-capitalist futures. Finally, I emphasise that in this chapter, I focus predominantly on the linkages between capitalism and colonialism to illuminate the colonial roots of capitalism as we know it today. This, however, does not mean that colonialism can only be understood through and/or reduced to capitalism and capitalist violence and exploitation (Tharappel, 2023).

What do you mean when you say capitalism?

The comeback of capitalism in academic and political debates is to its own detriment, as noted by Nancy Fraser (2022) in her book *Cannibal Capitalism*. In the last couple of decades, the term is increasingly discussed in the ‘belly of the beast’, i.e., the core economies of the European and settler colonial states, including the United States of America (USA), and the United Kingdom (UK). This discursive comeback is associated with the growing concerns about the alarming state of ecosystems, such as the loss of life (‘biological diversity’), and the climate change associated risks that are increasingly felt also in the ‘core’, all of which have been linked to capitalism as the root cause (Fraser, 2022; Harvey, 2014; Hickel & Sullivan, 2023; Moore, 2015). Thus, capitalism has become the mutual target of various movements for justice, be it social, racial, ecological, or climate justice. It unified movements tackling issues beyond the narrowly defined economy, which is quite right considering that rather than being an economic system, capitalism is a (global) social system, where *social* is defined quite broadly, to include race, wealth, ecology, gender, care work, etc.

Fraser (2022) explains this by highlighting the non-economic ‘background conditions’ on which the economic ‘foreground features’ of capitalism depend, and without which the economy and profit accumulation are impossible. Those background conditions include: 1. Social reproduction and care work; 2. Earth ecology; 3. Political power; and 4. Racial expropriation. Hence rather than an economic

system, capitalism is better framed as a social system, where ‘social’ also includes the ecological, political, and ideological. It is also central to keep in mind that, due to its shared origin and proximity with European colonial project (see next section), capitalism discriminates when choosing its prey. It bites especially hard the people of specific race, class, gender, religion, historic background, and political affiliation, and the territories where they reside (Danewid, 2023).

Scholars distinguish between several historically specific forms of capitalism, including merchandised, liberal colonial, state managed, and globalising neoliberal, as the latest version (e.g. Fraser, 2022). Others differentiate between markets and trade vis-à-vis capitalism, convincingly arguing that markets and trade have existed for thousands of years before capitalism (i.e. before 15th century) and that:

What makes capitalism different from most other economic systems in history is that it is organised around the imperative of constant expansion, or ‘growth’: ever-increasing levels of industrial extraction, production and consumption, which we measure as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Hickel, 2020).

This growth-oriented critique of capitalism is most common in degrowth literature (e.g. Schmeltzer et al., 2022) and is commonly positioned in relation to socioecological crises, including the accelerated dying of species, climate change, and associated global inequalities. Kate Raworth (2017), another well-known proponent of postgrowth economics similarly argues that while capitalism is based on private property and markets, private property and markets existed well before the rise of capitalism, and therefore capitalism is more than that.

One feature of capitalism on which scholars commonly agree is capital and/or profit accumulation. Importantly, such accumulation cannot occur in an egalitarian and democratic system where means of production are co-owned, profit equally distributed, and the questions on the use of productive capacities of a society democratically decided upon (Hickel & Sullivan, 2023). These can therefore be considered as antidotes of capitalism, and thus central features for any postcapitalist future scenario. Since its origins in the 15th and 16th centuries, capital accumulation has required access to cheap, confiscated and/or forced labour, raw materials, minerals, and land for agricultural and other ‘commodities’. We cannot begin to understand capitalism without going back to the European colonial project, the expansion, exploitation, expropriation, and dehumanisation of the ‘other’ and the forced imposition on the rest of the world, which led to severe ongoing consequences and violence, as opposed to the more common economic progress and industrialisation in the ‘core economies’ (Hickel, 2017).

The process that started with mechanisation and externalisation of nature defined in Cartesian way, followed by commodification and appropriation, as well as devaluation and cheapening of nature, land, labour (Patel & Moore, 2017), care work (through the processes of exploitation and/or expropriation (Fraser, 2022)), and finally

the dehumanisation required to justify the unjustifiable (Danewid, 2023; Luxemburg, 2015; Rodney, 2018), with the aim of profit accumulation and domination, is what I understand by capitalism as manifested today. The process that destroyed common ownership (Harvey, 2014; Patel & Moore, 2017), the existing ways of doing the economy otherwise (Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), as well as other ways of social organising, some of which were egalitarian well before the ‘invention’ of agriculture (Graeber & Wengrow, 2021).

Capital accumulation relies on two interconnected processes: 1. Exploitation, i.e. transfer of value through contractual labour for wages, which workers use to cover their costs of living, while surplus labour time and productivity is captured by capital; and 2. Expropriation, i.e. brutal and forced caesura of time, labour, confiscation of land and resources of the subjugated and/or marginalised people, who gain little or nothing in return, as in the cases of slavery and modern slavery (Fraser, 2022; ILO, 2022; Luxemburg, 2015). Expropriation of the subjugated and marginalised make exploitation of ‘free’ wage workers profitable, and it makes lavish profit for the capitalist elite. The expropriated subjects are often black, indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC), or otherwise marginalised rural or urban communities in the periphery. Both exploitation and expropriation are necessary, structural, constitutive, and institutionalised elements of the capital, rather than errors or undesired effects. Oppression, violence, marginalisation, appropriation, confiscation, corporate landgrabs, labour-grabs, and structural debt are necessary conditions for capitalism. Capitalism is violent, socioecologically destructive, and racist not by error but by design, which links it with the current socioecological crises, green and (neo) colonialism, imperialism, and racial oppression (Danewid, 2023; Du Bois, 2010; Fraser, 2022; Hickel et al., 2021).

On colonial origins of capitalism, and how it reproduced the polarised racist world we live (in) and manifest today

As capitalism emerged and evolved alongside the European colonial project, justification for the violence, enslavement, and commodification of black and brown bodies, was mediated through false narratives of the supremacy of the white race, leading to racial domination, dehumanisation, and genocides, which became second nature to capitalism (Danewid, 2023; Du Bois, 2010; Wilson, 1996). The rise of early capitalist enterprises, for example, the nutmeg spice trade, is heart wrenchingly described in Amitav Ghosh’s (2021) *Nutmeg’s Curse*. Placing economic benefit and profit above human life during colonialism marks the start of capitalism, and is the corner stone for continued oppression, which is the first condition of many wherein colonialism serves capitalism (see the next subsection). While the forms, ownership and to an extent even the colour line of capitalism is evolving and changing the aims and logics remain unchanged. This can be clearly seen with the more recent rise of emerging economies in BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) (Wilson, 1996).

As white, educated men and women, with legal residence in Finland, and relatively secured and relatively well-paid jobs in the formal economy, we enjoy access to

amenities and public services, from education, to healthcare, to paid parental and sick leaves. This stands in contrast to those who for various reasons, including their origin, class, race, citizenship, have no access to such amenities in Finland. This also stands in even starker contrast to the billions of women and men in the global peripheries who are structurally disadvantaged and whose labour is either exploited for meagre wages, or fully expropriated, for the benefits of capitalist elite, but also for the benefit of those of us in the Minority world, including myself. At any given time, I can afford food, clothes, and electronic gadgets, which are grown, extracted, and produced in and by exploited 'others', land, and resources from around the world. Thus, in capitalist society we are structurally conditioned to exploit others, complicit in the existing polarisation and violence against racialised and gendered black and brown bodies.

This polarisation and 'global peripheralisation'—while mostly taken for granted—is constructed over the last 500 years. The polarisation and peripheralisation is directly linked with the internal colonisation and/or marginalisation throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, as well as in the settler colonial states, including in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. The violence is specifically targeting black, and/or native and indigenous populations, some of whom are currently being cleansed in masses, under the full sponsorship of the capitalist-colonial allies, USA, UK, Canada, and most of the European Union (EU) member states.

While historically rooted, the exploitation and expropriation of land, resources, and labour continues to the present day (Hickel et al., 2021), in the form of modern slavery, for example in cocoa production (in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana), textile manufacturing (China, India, Bangladesh), and the mining industry across Sub Saharan Africa and South America. The colonial-capitalist process has captured not only the traditional sectors and discourses, but also those of environmental protection (for example, carbon trading, fence nature protection), all of which are organised around nature commodification and profit accumulation (Fletcher, 2023). As Jason Hickel (2017) shows in his book "The Divide", the great divide is fuelled by structural adjustments of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), preventing the countries in the Majority worlds from accessing fair tariffs and providing subsidies to Western economies, while keeping wages low. Low wages and extreme poverty benefit the Empire because they allow for slave workers in various value chains, from agriculture to mineral extraction for electronic devices, electric vehicles, and batteries for solar energies (Almeida et al., 2023).

Economic growth as the latest cloth of the emperor, and the role of the state

Contemporary capitalism manifests and works through economic growth. To show this manifestation of capitalism, I will draw from degrowth literature, even if with few exceptions (e.g., Hickel, 2021a, Schmelzer et al., 2022), the 'mainstream' degrowth literature hardly engages in deeper analysis of colonial-capitalist nexus. This contrasts with the decolonial and postcolonial (Escobar, 2015), and to some extent, the feminist perspectives on degrowth (Dengler & Lang, 2021; Hanaček et al., 2020; Singh, 2019),

where the relations between colonialism, capitalism, and economic growth (EG) are central.

Generally, degrowth literature points out that, while capitalism is as old as colonialism, EG is comparatively a recent phenomenon, originating only in the mid-20th century (Schmeltzer et al., 2022). As Schmeltzer et al., (2021) point out, EG was adopted as a political and economic goal only after the introduction of the GDP in the 1930s, and became relevant after the Second World War, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. What distinguishes EG from other earlier forms of capitalism is the freedom of markets (Fraser, 2022). In this context, as well as historically, EG is equated with what Nancy Fraser (2022) refers as the last form of capitalism—globalising neoliberal capitalism.

Free or autonomous markets implies that market signals and monetary flow are used as indicators for deciding on key issues regulating our lives, including how, how much, for whom, by whom the socioecological and productive, as well the biophysical or material capacities are used, produced, and distributed in a society. This, however, does not mean that the state is an innocent observer in this (neo)liberal globalising capitalism. On the contrary, capital has always depended on the state and vice versa (Danewid, 2023; Rodney, 2018). The increased use of state violence against land-, forest-, and environment- defenders, as well as against climate justice movements and movements for liberation, including the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS), but also pro-Palestinian protests in the EU countries, are only some of the latest examples where the state protects financial and racial capitalism against its citizens.

This includes state-backed violence against pro-Palestinian protests, which has made it plainly obvious that Western states are ready to defend the colonial-capitalist nexus, regardless of their ally Israel mass murdering black and brown bodies. However, as the black Marxist literature reminds us, the state has always been racial state (Danewid, 2023; Du Bois, 2010). Protected by state-sponsored violence and augmented by consumerist ideology and lifestyle, the logic of neoliberal economy quickly led not only to eroding of earth's bearing capacities, but also to disproportionate impacts on racialised, gendered, and marginalised others, leading to unrepresented and ever-growing inequalities.

Framing EG as the latest manifestation of capitalism shows the adaptiveness of capitalism, but more importantly how the logics, norms, values, and myths are the hardest to die, especially when militarised and protected by the global hegemonic capitalist-colonialist-statist power. When and if the struggle for global hegemony were historically questioned, for instance during the Cold War, EG was the main political tool of the (Western) states. Embracing EG as their 'new religion' and imposing it onto the rest of the world, just as they did with their old religion through missionaries during colonialism, the latest 'gift' of the West to the rest of the world became the primacy of EG. This 'gifting' process that started in 1960s is similarly violent, even if somewhat more covert.

Narratives of democracy have been important to justify invasion of countries that reject the West's imposition and conditions of free/cheap access to resources

and labour, including some—not all—Middle East countries. In cases of democratic states across Africa and South America, democratically elected leaders who mobilised the population towards economic liberation were assassinated and/or removed by military coups, covered up by the narratives of democracy, development, economic growth, and structural adjustment programmes (Hickel, 2017; Hickel & Sullivan, 2021). Effectively the Western states installed a neoliberal state-backed globalising economy, while clashing and smashing any movements for liberation from the hegemony of the West, under the guise of economic progress, democracy, and in some cases the narrative of fighting terrorism. In case of the most recent, and currently ongoing oppression no attempt is made to cover the intention, by this I mean the Israelian plausible genocide in Gaza that killed close to 30.000 people (as of March, 2023). The violence is streamed around the clock globally for nearly half a year at the time of writing, ignoring international rule of law and institutions, such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. This sends a message to anyone, but especially the emerging economies, such as BRICs and others, that the imperial capitalist order and global dominance of the West (the USA, UK, the EU, and its allies) is not to be questioned.

Coloniality/ism & decoloniality/ism: Problematising the divide between material/structure & immaterial/symbolic

In decolonial schools of thought, the distinction between *colonisation* and *decolonisation*, vis-à-vis and *coloniality* and *decoloniality* is quite central. *Colonisation*, or *colonialism* commonly refer to the historical point in time when the Western colonising powers (Spanish, Portuguese, British, French, Belgian, Dutch, German, Danish, among others) seized and occupied half of the planet. Decolonisation in turn refers to the political independence of former colonies and the withdrawal of the occupying European colonising powers. *Coloniality* on the other hand refers to indirect and to a degree hidden means and forms of oppression and domination, including symbolic, cognitive, epistemic, ideational, and discursive. However, all of these are essential for enabling and maintaining the very material, or structural violence of historic colonial powers over politically liberated colonies. *Decoloniality* by extension then refers to the multifaceted process and set of strategies that aim to deconstruct, unlearn, and abolish the harmful narratives that enable coloniality and colonialism.

The common argument when elaborating *Coloniality* and *decoloniality* is that while European colonisation project has mostly—even if not fully—ended approximately 70 years ago, the domination of previous colonial and settler colonial states over the postcolonial ones remained, which is due to the ongoing process of coloniality. Examples of coloniality include universalised hierarchies such as (i) social hierarchies (race, gender, ethnicity), (ii) epistemic hierarchies (different knowledge systems), (iii)

institutional and power hierarchies and domination (global institutions regulating finance, trade, economy, such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank).

Brenny Mendoza (2015, p. 15) defines coloniality as:

Long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism that redefine culture, labour, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer. Surviving long after colonialism has been overthrown, coloniality permeates consciousness and social relations in contemporary life

Thus, while coloniality is a result of historic and ongoing colonialism, it is not the same as colonialism. Coloniality is also defined as modernity. Building on Anibal Quijano's (2000) *coloniality of power*, various decolonial thinkers, including Walter Dignolo, Arturo Escobar, María Lugones, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and others, have further illuminated this link between Eurocentric modernity and coloniality. Eurocentric modernity, meaning an ontology that proposes the universality of a singular, one-world world—a world where there is no space for different interpretations, a world based on rationality, individualism, separation, hierarchy, domination, and capitalist accumulation. Quijano's work linking the material (political, economic, existential) with the symbolic (the meaning, the mind, the epistemic) (see also, Fúnez-Flores, 2023) is central for my purpose and argument that the two are co-constructive and inseparable.

Ontology as used here is understood as worlding, so in that sense it is very material and political (de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018). This implies that the current crises of modernity (socioecological crises and injustices), are a direct result of the symbolic and cognitive bias. Modernity as coloniality imposes one dominant view of seeing the world. It is a singular lens to reality, which robs others to live outside of this projected singular reality. It erases plural views and forms of living, being and knowing, and substitutes them by universal, Eurocentric ways (Amin, 2010; Icaza & Vázquez, 2016).

Decoloniality as a scholarly debate has mostly focused on the so-called symbolic or ideational (decoloniality of mind and knowledge), compared to the material and structural, including the struggles for land and life (Tuck & Yang, 2012), even if such debates are often in direct relation to and support of such struggles. However, more often than not, the two strands of literature stand in opposition to one another, forming one of the *major tensions* in decoloniality debate, which is the decoloniality as modernity *vis-à-vis* decoloniality of land, structures of oppression.

Decoloniality of mind/knowledge and the focus on Eurocentric modernity or ontology has been critiqued as co-optation of anti-colonial movements of liberation and indigenous land repatriation (Smith & Lester, 2023; Tuck & Yang, 2012). To my mind the tension is artificial at best and unhelpful at worst, because as I discussed above, the patterns of exploitation, domination, and even massacres and genocides require the narrative, the logic, mind/set, and worldviews to legitimise such acts. To

be clear, I am not arguing that experiencing, for example, racism verbally vis-à-vis as a violent act of beating by police are equally harmful, but rather that they are part of the one and the same system of oppression—two sides of the same coin, two branches of the same tree. Thus, both should be tackled, not necessarily at the same time or with the same urgency, but both require attention, as they are mutually co-constructive and part of the same struggle for liberation and freedom.

Just as we have established above that because ‘capitalism is colonialism is capitalism’, the end of it can only come from anti-capitalist-colonialist movements and initiatives, so I argue that because colonialism requires mindsets, logics, philosophies, and knowledges (provisionally referred as ‘symbolic’), as well as structure of violence (provisionally referred as ‘material’); thus, the anti-colonial and decolonial efforts must work towards the decoloniality of mind/knowledge, and of structure/institutions. Decoloniality can and should include a wide range of strategies that seek to either unlearn or eliminate the various forms of oppressions and dominations—either at an ideational level (mind, language, constructs, categories, and interpretation of reality), or at the level of actual resistance, uprising and movements for liberation. To approach decoloniality in this way is to enable connection and platform for joint action against the same enemy, rather than delegitimising others’ efforts, which has mostly been the case until now (Smith & Lester, 2023). In this sense the calls for decoloniality of knowledge, education, academia, science, and curricula—as acts of epistemic disobedience and struggles for epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021)—stand as extremely relevant, as do the calls for civil disobedience and insurgency for fighting ecological and climate catastrophe and injustices (Dunlap & Tornel, 2023; Sovacool & Dunlap, 2022).

Alternatives and transformative movements and agendas: teasing out the divergence to call for unity and convergence

Alongside decoloniality (See previous section), there is an array of initiatives that recognise the colonial and/or capitalist roots of our socioecological crises, even if not necessarily as two sides of the same coin and/or even if they tend to (over)emphasise one over the other. These initiatives are based on and embedded in one or more of the following traditions and schools of thought: (i) Pluriverse; (ii) Degrowth; and (iii) Marxist approaches. In addition, (iv) Anarchist, and (iv) Feminist approaches contribute immensely to the fight against the ills associated to the colonial-capitalist nexus.

Anarchist approaches frame the state as a colonial construct and violent structure that needs to be challenged and eventually abolished for the freedom and liberation of human and other-than-human populations. It emphasises the importance of self-organisation and autonomous movements for self-sufficiency, liberation, and organisation of social life beyond state (Gelderloos 2022). When compared to degrowth, decoloniality, and pluriverse there are some parallels in aims, but also differences in

means (Dunlap, 2022). Specifically, anarchist perspectives challenge the idea that degrowth or any other response to socioecological crises require state-level policy interventions, favouring instead ‘bottom up’ movement and struggles for liberation.

Feminist approaches highlight the intersectionality between layers of oppression and domination and hegemonies across the board, from human-nature relations to accumulation through various forms of domination (Arruzza et al., 2019; Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015); emphasising care as labour, affect, and politics (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Vaittinen & Confortini, 2019). Feminism critiques the lack of acknowledgement and devaluation of reproductive care work, especially but not only by the deemed dispensable ‘others’ (women, BIPOC, and lower classes) for economic outputs (Fraser, 2022). Linking Marxist and feminist perspectives have illuminated the relations between the multi-layered violence (gender, race, etc.) and the colonial-capitalist regime, highlighting the role patriarchy, racism, and heterosexuality, among others (hooks, 2004). Anarchist and feminist approaches shape others by emphasising their blind spots, and the narrow and shallow scope(s). I refer to some of those critiques in relation to the three transformative blocs covered in the subsequent sections.

Pluriverse as anti-capitalist and anti-colonial response

Pluriverse may refer to multiple ways of thinking, being, knowing, acting, dreaming, existing, living, and dying. It rejects the ‘One-world world’ meaning the universality of ways and norms of living, relating, knowing, teaching, doing economics, and so on, which have been promoted as universal, modern, or Eurocentric (Amin, 2010). It acknowledges and encourages a world that includes many worlds, as the famous definition of pluriverse goes—“a world where many worlds fit”—initially defined by the Zapatista movement (Escobar, 2018; Mignolo, 2011). As Escobar (2008) explains, pluriverse is different from pluralism, since pluralism is not concerned with how different worlds come into being, and/or come to dominate others, and is therefore apolitical, ignoring the histories and struggles, global and local power relations, worldviews, and praxis. In addition, unlike pluralism, which does not go into the topic of colonia-capitalist violence and oppression, pluriverse is specifically anti-colonial and anti-capitalist, acknowledging, claiming, and owning its normative nature and radical values and principles.

As specifically anti-capitalist, pluriverse puts forth an argument that to liberate from the oppressive and destructive neoliberal, financialising, globalising, capitalist, (neo)colonial system described above, changes are needed at an ontological and practical level. Theoretically, the pluriverse is outlined by decolonial scholars, including Arturo Escobar and Walter Mignolo, while the practical examples of existing initiatives worlding ‘a world where many worlds fit’ are documented by Kothari et al. (2019).

Pluriverse and decoloniality (of mind, of power, and of land) have many common aspects. Both question the universality of the dominant Eurocentric ontology and the associated development models, critiquing the logics of human-nature duality, (neo) extractivism, consumerism, and those associated with it. Additionally, both focus on

the grassroots and community level and are quite closely linked to the postdevelopment school of thought (Escobar, 2015; Garcia-Arias & Schöneberg, 2021). Some scholars have argued that pluriverse, like decoloniality, tends to overemphasise the discursive and/or the so-called ‘cultural’, compared to the structural, which combined with its emphasis on scattered, local, and place-based responses casts doubt on pluriverse as a viable response to the colonial-capitalist nexus (Garcia-Arias & Schöneberg, 2021; Gills & Hosseini, 2022). Others have questioned it by bringing forth a theory of a ‘rich universality’, which links universality and solidarity (Heron, 2019).

While in my view the strength of pluriverse is precisely its embeddedness in the local and the grassroots issues and responses, the above critiques point to the important challenge of organising and connecting to build global networks of resistance, which can confront the global capitalist-colonial structures, including gendered and racialised labour expropriation and exploitation, appropriation and accumulation in the global value chains, and the ownership of means of production, which suggests the need for complementarity with other responses and strategies.

Degrowth: Planetary limits and beyond

Unlike decoloniality and pluriverse, until recently degrowth has been a school of thought by and for the ‘Global North’, i.e. the Minority world. This remains the case in the mainstream literature, despite the emerging scholarship that links postdevelopment, pluriverse, decoloniality, and degrowth (Escobar, 2015; Hanaček et al., 2020; Kothari et al., 2014; Singh, 2019; Trophe, 2024). This later literature highlights the synergies between degrowth and Eastern and Southern philosophies. Pluriverse and decolonial thinking suggest that degrowth is but only one in the pluriverse of alternatives (Kothari et al. 2019), and that it needs convergence with other movements (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019) if it is to avoid the tyranny of domination and universalism.

This definition by Jason Hickel (2021b) offers a fair outline of the key qualities of the concept,

democratically planned reduction of energy and resource throughput designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world, in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being for all, globally.

Degrowth calls for reimagining the meaning of “good life” and for collectively and democratically defined societal boundaries. Further, Hickel and Sullivan (2023) argue that degrowth can be understood as an anti-colonial demand that calls for an end to the colonial appropriation that underpins the capital accumulation in the North at the cost of the South. The implications for the South include, ending structural adjustment programs, cancelling external debt, transferring necessary technologies, and enabling governments to use industrial and fiscal policy for economic sovereignty (Hickel, 2021a). For the time being, framing degrowth as anti-colonial project is unique to a smaller group of scholars, and thus the question of degrowth’s super-powers to tackle the colonial-capitalist nexus are worth revisiting. Despite degrowth popularity

and undeniable potentials, anarchist, feminist, decolonial/postdevelopment, and Marxists offer various critiques:

- (I) anarchist critique: state-based and ‘non-reformist reforms’ as solutions, as well as insufficient engagement with indigenous resistance and autonomous movements (AKC Collective, 2023; Dunlap, 2022) and co-optation (Spash, 2021),
- (II) feminist critique: lack of engagement with social reproduction, expropriation of (care)work (Dengler & Lang, 2021),
- (III) postdevelopment and decolonial critique: objectification of rural and/or racialised women and lack of engagement with other intersectional layers of domination (Garcia-Arias & Schöneberg, 2021; Mehta and Harcourt, 2021; Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019),
- (IV) Marxist critiques are many, including degrowth’s demand for limiting production, including socialist, centralised and state regulated, its preference for local and/or small-scale operations (Huber 2022a, 2022b); and its engagement with growth, that is seen as obscuring the complexities of power relations, ownership, capital accumulation behind it (Heron, 2022a).

However, far from all Marxists dismiss the idea of degrowth as utopian and/or naive. On the contrary, an eco-socialist and communist version of degrowth is emerging (next sub-section; see also, Saito, 2023). In any case, the so-called ‘mainstream’ degrowth (with an emphasis on the biophysical limits, socioecological ‘metabolism’, and the state policy response) has attracted various more and less friendly critiques, including the arguments that it is reformist (AKC Collective, 2023; Garcia-Arias & Schöneberg, 2021) and universalist (Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019). In their commentary of the “The Case for Degrowth” (Kallis et al., 2020), Garcia-Arias & Schöneberg (2021, p. 4) note: “(the book) proposes a collection of measures within capitalism, to make it greener, progressive, (...) better—seemingly more sustainable—while continuing operating under the capitalist episteme”.

Such critiques are instrumental for expanding and diversifying the degrowth movement, resulting in different varieties of degrowth. In the spirit of building synergies, and recognising the significant divergences within degrowth movement, for the purpose of this chapter, I join with Eastwood and Heron (2024) to emphasise degrowth as one of the key responses to socioecological crises and capitalist destruction of life, and that the different views on degrowth are unified by the rejection of growth paradigm, and the imperative of growth at all costs (Schmelzer et al., 2022). Finally, degrowth has won popularity across very different societal groups, from activists to researchers to policy makers, and it might well be that the perceived weakness

(the simplification of complex processes behind economic growth, and openness to different ways of affecting change—from grassroot initiatives to social movements to policy), are its strengths when it comes to momentum building. Co-optation in policy circles however remain a challenge ahead (Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2023).

(Eco-)Marxist approaches, their tensions, and synergies

It goes without saying that a text about capitalist-colonialist nexus, polycrises, and alternatives cannot be complete without a section on (Eco-)Marxist views and contributions (Danewid, 2023; Moore, 2015). The core concepts in Marxist tradition, including primitive accumulation, class struggles, modes of production, value creation and exchange, ownership of means of production, and to a various degree integrated issues of race, gender, social reproduction, imperialism, dependency, under-development (depending on the specific variant of Marxism) are central for and in anti-colonial and anti-capitalist alternatives, responses, and struggles.

Significant tensions exist between distinct positions within this bloc. To illustrate this, I will consider the tensions between the (i) *eco-socialist* (Heron, 2022a, b) and (ii) *eco-modernist* position (Huber, 2022a). The former emphasises the importance of national self-determination and sovereignty, the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle, and the importance of agrarian question and land reforms (Ajl, 2022b; Heron & Heffron, 2022). The latter emphasises centralised production and control over production relations, as well as green technologies and industry powered by ‘renewable’ energy. In addition, the (iii) *(Eco)Feminist* (Arruzza et al., 2019) view emphasises care labour and ethics, unpaid care work, mistreatment and exploitation of the least privileged women and men, which applying the Marxist teaching advances an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, eco-socialist, and anti-racist feminism. Such is at the margins, however, as is shown by the silence of the mainstream white feminism, in the case of Israeli’s attack on Gaza, including murder of women and children. Finally, (iv) *Anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and black-Marxism* (Amin, 1990; Danewid, 2023; Du Bois, 2010; Rodney, 2018,) provide invaluable contribution by positioning race in the context of value creation and capitalism, as I touch on in the next section of this chapter. They are central in the debate on colonial-capitalist entanglements and the associated anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperial responses that deserve an undivided attention in a separate piece of analysis.

Beyond internal disagreements, some of the points that delineate (eco-)Marxist tradition from others examined here include, the centrality of class struggle (i.e., workers vis-à-vis bourgeois class), core and periphery, and value generation and exchange. Such concepts link socioecological crises with labour and trade unions, and position the production, consumption, and inequalities within the global colonial and neocolonial relations and contexts. It is precisely here where synergies are made between the (eco-)Marxist and degrowth as eco-socialist and anti-colonial project. The extent to which labour and trade unions can tackle socioecological issues and inequalities is a different question, especially globally and in the global peripheries. This question calls attention to the tension between job creation and economic growth,

which remain key concerns for labour and trade unions, vis-à-vis the socioecological destruction and exploitation in the periphery. Sadly, the green transition stands as the latest example where ‘green jobs’ prevail at the cost of neocolonial and imperialist capture (Ajl, 2022a). This has resulted in calls for international solidarity with the exploited workers in the periphery, in the eco-socialist varieties of Marxism. Similar solidarity with the periphery is called for in relation to the agrarian question and land reform in the core, which requires attention to agrarian struggles in the periphery (Ajl, 2022b; Heron & Heffron, 2022).

Eco-socialist vs. eco-modernist Marxist positions as an example of internal tensions

As noted above, while there are commonalities between the different Marxist traditions, the differences between the eco-modernist and the eco-socialist positions are quite significant¹. First, while the proponents of the eco-socialist Marxist strand, who question the unbound production and consumption, and therefore not only the ‘who and how’, but also the ‘how much’ of production, and therefore the associated question of (over)consumption, including the overconsumption of the working class in the core economies. The proponents of the eco-modernist strand are less worried about these issues, assuming that growth would automatically be sustainable under socialist economy and modes of production.

This concerns the second point of divergence between the two, which is the eco-modernist over-reliance on green technologies vis-à-vis the eco-socialist reservation in terms of ‘technology fixes’. This is quite central, as the eco-modernist view leads to harmful optimism and false solutions, where half-truths are presented as solutions to socioecological crises and inequalities, perpetuating rather than resolving them (Fletcher, 2023). It also risks the continuity of neocolonial and neo-extractivist imperial relations between the core and periphery in the light of ‘green transition’ (Almeida et al., 2023; Ramcilovic-Suominen et al., 2022).

The third set of divergences concern the ‘core and periphery’ debate mentioned above. On the one hand, it is the difference in attention given to the core-periphery debate, with the eco-modernist Marxist position brushing over the debate and focusing mostly on the core economies (Huber, 2022b), vis-à-vis the eco-socialist Marxist position debating the existing predatory and imperial relations of the core over periphery (Heron, 2022a). On the other hand, it is the similarities between the eco-socialist Marxist and degrowth as anti-colonial project (Hickel, 2021a) versus the eco-modernist Marxist views. The former two positions invariably place the debate in the context of ‘imperial mode of living’ in the core economies on the cost of the periphery (Brand & Wissen, 2021)².

¹ Kai Heron’s response (2022a) to Matt Huber’s (2022a) ‘Mish-Mash Ecologism’ offers a good summary of tensions between the eco-modernist vis-à-vis eco-socialist Marxist perspectives.

² This is far from an exhaustive debate on synergies and differences between 1. degrowth as anti-colonial project and 2. eco-socialist Marxist position, vis-à-vis 3. eco-modernist Marxist position. I invite readers to check out the newly published DeGruyter Handbook on Degrowth (Eastwood and Heron 2024), with interesting and more detailed discussions on disagreements and bridges between Degrowth and Marxism, (e.g. Hornborg 2024; Jackson 2024), as well as Kohei Saito’s “Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the idea of Degrowth

The differences as a strength rather than a weakness, and how to nurture political solidarity

My call for convergence of different strategies and responses does not imply that I consider the means less relevant than the aims (see Hamilton & Ramcilovic-Suominen, 2023). It simply means that diverse ways and approaches are applicable in different situations towards the same goal of post-capitalist-colonial futures. One universal way that works in all contexts across the Globe is not possible, and while all presented positions recognise this, they rarely inhabit or manifest this understanding in their recommendations and engagements with one another. In my view, the tendency to seek superiority over other ways, traditions, and approaches is a significant part of what hold us back collectively, and the first thing we must unlearn for collective transformations to post-colonialism-capitalism. After all, if your house was attacked, you do not start arguing about the shape, size, and colours of arrows to use, rather you would use all of them to defend it.

Having said that, the existing rifts between various responses and strategies are not insignificant, and while they may appear to be (only) about the ways they perceive or define problems and possible solutions, these perceptions are based on distinct value systems, and ideologies and therefore they are hard to bridge or compromise. Perhaps one of the rifts that is hardest to bridge is the view on the role of the state. If a tradition or a set of responses consider state as the problem (part and manifestation of colonial-capitalist establishment), it is indeed hard to see how it can join forces with those working through state, and/or aim to better or reform the state, largely within the capitalist boundaries (see previous subsection). Similarly, the tension between (de)coloniality of mind and knowledge versus structures and land, and the tendency to downplay the former by the proponents of the later approach (see previous section) is significant. However, just as there are many ways in which colonial-capitalist system affects different societal groups, there are many ways to respond and fight it. The ways to fight may also depend on personalities. For example, resistance can be manifested in different ways: as silent resistance and refusal (e.g., refusal to consume imported products, or industrially grown meat) or vocal and active resistance (e.g. protests and barricades). Both approaches can be radical and anti-colonial and can lead to elimination of violent practices and regimes, even if not in the same way or at the same speed. Yet, both are fighting the same ill and both can lead to peaceful and liberated future because decolonised minds never seek to colonise, dominate, or oppress others.

Finding common ground and motives between these vastly different ideas is possible as it is necessary if we are to build collective, and democratic responses to the capital-colonial present. Hence, rather than working towards developing new

Communism" (Saito 2023), for discussions on, inter alia: (i) production vs. production *and* consumption; (ii) local and people-driven actions and responses, vs. national/centralised initiatives, (iii) localised and commonly owned supply vs. large-scale, globalised supply chains, (iv) solidarity internationalism vs. an approach to green transition that is likely to lead to (neo)colonial seizure of land, labor and resources from the periphery.

‘best solution(s)’, we need to shift gears towards building political solidarity between the existing solutions and consequently develop joint collective anti-capitalist imaginaries and structures. All efforts are needed, as long as they work to unsettle, challenge, and eventually abolish the hegemonic colonial-capitalist system that leads to socioecological destruction of human and other-than-human life.

Building solidarity between different and opposing movements and approaches could include: (i) defining joint principles, for example principles of radical democracy, conviviality, and non-duality between human and the rest of nature; (ii) building safe spaces and platforms for engagement where different strategies and praxis can be planned in support of shared anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-capitalist efforts; and (iii) strategising of responses in relation to scale and context. For instance, in some cases small-scale and local responses might be needed (community gardens, local energy supplies, and other cooperatives), while in others, large-scale corporate and international responses and regulations are better suited (policies and laws to keep corporate actors in check in terms of profit accumulation and/or introducing limits on their material and energy use). To conclude, the solutions are already here, and not only some but all are needed.

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