

Agrarian South Network Research Bulletin

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EDITORIAL***“The local wages of global capital”***

This issue of the Bulletin takes a close look at the political questions which ongoing processes of accumulation raise for the affected majority in the national context. Neocolonialists – ‘perpetrators of national destruction’, as Muratt rightfully terms the local bourgeoisie that in Brazil are currently engaged in the ongoing privatization of key national resources, and in ensuring the maintenance of colonial dominance under the guise of external aid and adherence to economic plans from the West. This latest round, the privatization of Brazil’s major electricity producer Eletrobrás, is rightly being met with circumspection regarding the potential of even a left-leaning government to reverse the tide without a clear rejection of the neoliberal logic that has bedeviled even past progressive governments. The ongoing fight, a class struggle as Muratt makes clear, has to be total given the extent of interference across life spheres of the people, and can no longer be partial.

A constant theme in our discussions has been the exploitation of workers that is the primary means for the realization of surplus value, and the global value chains that make this possible are well known in the literature. Karatepe turns our attention to a less explored passage in the global agricultural value chains – what is sometimes termed the *instream* of the global AVC – and provides a peek into this process through an enquiry indirectly framed by questions regarding how it is that agricultural produce

is shipped from the Global South to the North; what the working conditions on the ships are; and whether opportunities exist to reduce the decent work deficit along this maritime chain. Highlighted is the lack of regulations political will in this sector, which intensifies the resort to cheap labour mainly from the global south, especially Asian countries with surplus labour, and importantly, the financial and regulatory maneuvering that continues to fix the bottom line against maritime workers.

Lastly, in an highly insightful and wide ranging interview with Alejandro Pedregal, Max Ajl elaborates a vision for ecological justice in which national liberation for the periphery is central, a demand which frames his recent book titled *A People’s Green New Deal*. The interview takes us through some of the major critiques which the book puts forward, including propositions for alternative policies to tackle the current climate emergency and ecological unequal exchange. The reflections carried here are a must read for all who seek alternatives to the Eurocentric green models that are dominant, and who give serious consideration to anti-imperialist pathways and anticolonial internationalism that are also central to Ajl’s method.

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The privatisation of Eletrobrás and the Brazilian neocolonial misery

Bernardo S. Muratt¹

The sale of the largest energy company in Latin America is the latest episode that denotes the neocolonial situation in Brazil. I will not seek to cling to the absurd aspects in relation to the immense damage of this privatisation whether in national sovereignty, in the implementation of public policies, in economic development, in nuclear security or even in its illegality. These aspects do not matter to the perpetrators of national destruction. Let's first understand the current context.

Kwane Nkrumah - Ghanaian political leader and one of the main exponents for an independent Africa - already made it clear, as early as the 1960s, that neocolonialism was the regime of domination that was built over colonialism. The difference lays in the method of domination after the former colonies obtained their formal independence. Revenues from structural economic adjustments from Washington, IMF loans – all an integral part of an invisible government under the auspices of Wall Street – became the rule in this, then, new model. That is, it is the maintenance of colonial logic under the

guise of external aid and adherence to economic plans from the West.

We can see in the main Brazilian media outlets, that the privatisation of Eletrobrás is treated as positive, better for the accounts, better for the markets, consequently better for the country and for society. Under the strand of a supposed improvement we are destroying our own autonomy. The truth is that everything goes in order to fulfil an imported market logic that serves the interests of the most powerful countries in the globe and also our bourgeoisie.

The main national monopolies have been internationalising and financializing themselves since the 1970s and 1980s. Foreign capital's economic affirmation in Brazil was in fact established in the 1950s through the Juscelino Kubitschek government and finally cemented its political power in the 1964 coup and the military regime. We have to consider these facts in order to understand the deafening silence of most Brazilian social classes. Realise that there is no bourgeoisie that values an idea of autonomous development and national

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sovereignty is the first step. What to say about our resistance tactics?

The CNE's (National Electrical Industry Workers Collective) calendar of struggles, in order to stop privatisation, contained four *tuitaços*ⁱ and online plenary sessions that did not have any objective effect, since it is enough to wait until June 13th for the auction to be finalised. The main progressive forces present - CNE, CUT (Brazil's largest union federation) and PT (Worker's Party) - seem to believe in a kind of noble bourgeoisie with good principles aligned with sovereignty and national development. A certain ideal bourgeois archetype that never existed in Brazil except in those moments that it was pulled by the state - as in the Vargas Era - in contexts in which the strength of foreign capital was small or limited. As in 1964, it wasn't long before the supposed national bourgeoisie launched its attacks against the country and the working class.

It seems that the concern of most of the progressive field is to lead a moral dispute and embarrassment of the bourgeois and conservative sectors with the expectation that such embarrassment would halt their actions and motivations. This is actually a liberal view of politics that ignores the material factors and the bourgeoisie's real gains in each of its actions of destruction in the little that remains of Brazilian national

assets. In the midst of this, we see that the main actions of the organised progressive sectors are concentrated in national institutions - Federal Court of Justice, National Audit Office the same responsible for the 2016 coup -, and on social networks.

About social networks themselves, they are part of the problem. Samir Amin skillfully characterised five monopolies of domination that guarantee the political and economic dominance of the Capitalist Centre (United States, Europe and Japan) over other nations of the globe, they are: the technological monopoly; world control of financial markets; monopolistic access to land resources; control of the media and communication; and the control over weapons of mass destruction. We can safely say that social networks are part of today's media and communications monopolies, either for their immense market value or for the commodification of their users' engagement.

What do we come across? The fact that the national progressive camp makes the main tool of struggle, in the face of a serious political dispute, an international private monopoly of communication to dissuade the action of other national and international monopolistic sectors - the same twitter that censored profiles of the Iranian and Venezuelan government. Would it be productive to use a tool of imperialism,

commanded by international bourgeois sectors, in order to politically combat our own bourgeoisie aligned with the same international sectors?

Here comes another question: would an eventual electoral victory for Lula be able to reverse this situation? Lula manifested through twitter regretting the privatisation of the state-owned company and cited the Luz Para Todos program, and also regretted the increase in the cost of energy from privatisation through a scenario of increased hunger in the country. He also said that, in case of victory, he would return sovereignty to the Brazilian people (which is not the same as declaring the reversal of privatisation). On the other hand, the candidate for vice presidency, Geraldo Alckmin, remained silent about the subject.

If we remember, we will see that, even when it had the political majority at the National Congress, PT did not reverse the privatisations that occurred in the 1990s. Now, in a much more adverse political scenario with a vice presidential candidate who has always been neoliberal, it is possible to infer that a possible reversal is even more remote. The judicial sector, in 2016, has already given its message endorsing the coup and criminalising a series of public policies made by the PT government. The criminalisation of BNDES disbursements and even the criminalisations of measures to

combat hunger with the FAO's support are examples of this.

As the right wing progresses and neoliberalism takes over, the political horizon becomes meagre and the objectives increasingly poor. That's why a neoliberal vice is acceptable, so is a left without a program and without a clear strategy - which focusses only on Lula's political skill - and that accommodates the hopes of the most radical to the most conciliatory. I want to make it clear; it still seems to us that Lula is the only electoral alternative against Bolsonaro. But we must not forget that the room for manoeuvre of an elected government is very small, especially without popular mobilisation and with adherence to neoliberal logic.

The picture requires more than a mere change of attitude, it is necessary to cut the material and historical links with the states of the Capitalist Centre that the country has since its formation. We don't need isolation, but emancipation. It is not enough to have a self-centred economy, but to change the country's position on the international scene according to its own demands. However, these measures are unlikely to happen in such an electoral victory as mentioned before.

Therefore, Brazil's scenario and prospects are darker than they seem.

Reversing, or even curbing, the processes of privatisation and loss of our limited sovereignty that has been occurring since the 1990s consists in facing a logic of historical domination of stupendous material force that transcends borders and even ideologies.

Let's acknowledge our real enemies, the fight is not partial, it is total. Our enemy is attacking us with all its instruments, it does

not value the truth to do so. Embarrassment will not demote it from its goals and actions. It is not just a clash of interests; it is a struggle. It is a class struggle. The bourgeoisie is well aware of this, the left sometimes seems to believe that everyone can meet up and reach a common ground. There is no common ground in a clash between exploiters and exploited, you either win or lose. Who's winning?

ⁱ A "wave of tweets", a form of political manifestation made through Twitter.

Regulations and working conditions in the maritime industryⁱ

Ismail Karatepe¹

The working conditions in the upstream of the agricultural value chain (AVC) is appalling, especially in the rural areas of the Global South. The scholarship of global AVC also underlines the role of buyers in the downstream, including retailers, who ostensibly squeeze out the profits of the producers, which further deteriorate the working conditions and eventually increase decent work deficits. Very little attention is paid to what we call, half-jokingly, the *instream* of the global AVC. We raise three fundamental questions: how is agricultural produce shipped from the Global South to the North? What are the working conditions on the ships? Moreover, what are the opportunities to reduce the decent work deficit?

International trade has been reliant on maritime transportation since its inception. This is true also for the period when city-states emerged around the Mediterranean Sea, and when the empires ruled the world. Laws and regulations were drafted in order to secure the trade lines (generally for luxury goods) and increase the state revenues levied on maritime transport. Yet, the massive production of final and intermediate goods for the international

market can be regarded as an important characteristic of capitalism (Wallerstein, 1976). So too is the rapid development of seaborne trade.

Currently, 90 percent of the traded products in the world is carried by ships. Being the backbone of world trade, the volume of global seaborne trade has increased, just as the trade of goods has increased. Digitalization and new developments in shipping technologies (such as mega containerships) are important factors in contributing to rampant international trade and geographically dispersed business operations.

Working in the sea is still one of the most dangerous occupations (Walters and Bailey, 2013). Tough working conditions, and the concomitant decent work deficits, are generally regarded as disposition of the work, as if deficit were an inevitable aspect. Yet historically, the sea is generally associated with mystery and danger. It is full of sea monsters, such as Scylla and Charybdis, who are ready to ambush and pose an inescapable hazard to the seafarers. However, humankind has never been obedient to the sea, regardless of the adverse conditions as (quite

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melodramatically) depicted by Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*. Many think that hard work, struggle, and distress are important features embedded in the sea. However, we will argue that the tough working conditions on the sea are not the result of the sea itself, but more the result of the structure of the sector. So the working conditions can be straightforwardly improved thanks to the financial capacities of the companies, along with technological advancement.

Market structure and maritime transport

We can identify three types of maritime transport, namely container vessels, bulk carriers, and specialized cargo carriers. Container vessels carry intermodal truck-size containers, which can be transported by trucks as well as trains, along with ships. Most of the agricultural produce is carried out this way, with grain being the most notable exception. Grain, along with coal, cement, steel, crude oil, etc., is carried by bulk carriers, which are specialized in non-packaged goods. Specialized cargo carriers are solely designed for certain products such as cars or bananas.

The structure of the maritime transport market resembles the general division of labor in the world. East Asian countries are the main *builders* of the world merchandise fleet. The ships are generally *owned* by Chinese and European companies. Yet, they are mostly *registered* in countries

such as Panama, Liberia, or the Marshall Islands, i.e. countries which have relatively lax regulations. Once a ship is registered in one of these countries, it should fly its flag (civil ensign) and is subject to its laws, which are indeed much less strict than those of their counterparts. The attempt to evade regulations and to hide the ownership is a very common business practice, which is known as flags of convenience. Most of the vessels are *operated* and owned by shipping firms that are mostly based in Europe and China. The sector poses a very oligopolistic structure. The 20 largest carriers organized 90% of container capacity in 2022 (Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2020). These companies have also built alliances in order to enjoy more economies of scale (and thus more profit) thanks to lower unit costs. The Global South is the big labor pool for these firms. Most notably, the Philippines, China, and Indonesia host large numbers of seafarers for the global maritime industry. Russia and Ukraine follow them. Ships are generally *scrapped* in South Asia, namely in Bangladesh, China, India, and Pakistan. As the operations of the shipping company are costly, risky, and very central to value chain processes, finance and insurance has become central to the maritime industry. The service for credit flows, along with insurance activities to mitigate risks, is generally carried out by British and Scandinavian firms.

As a truly global sector, the number of firms that have emerged as middlemen or brokers has grown drastically as the global VC has become more and more deep-seated. Logistic firms, charterers, and crew recruiting agencies establish a large network, which eventually relies on hundreds of business contracts backed by credit flows and covered by insurance companies. Especially when it comes to container shipping, the number of actors has increased, as they carry a number of goods from various companies.

Flags of convenience have become dominant business practices, as it offers several advantages to the companies. Registration of the ship is quite simple and, even online in some countries. The registration fee is much lower than in other countries. It provides several tax advantages to shipping companies, as the countries in question are also regarded as tax havens, with their lower tax rates and lax financial regulations. These countries do not have very strict labor standards for ships as other traditional maritime countries (such as France and England) have, and either cannot or simply do not strictly inspect vessels in order to ensure that the standards they set are being maintained. They avoid this step not only because of their financial and institutional incapacity to inspect ships and subsequently enforce labor regulation, but because doing so enables them to market obligatory registration to the shipping firms

and operators. This business practice also allows firms to exploit cheap labor from the Global South, notably from the Asian countries with surplus labor.

The power of shipping companies vis-à-vis other actors, as well as the business practices aiming to evade regulations, led us to look more closely at the working conditions in the maritime industry. There is no great imagination needed to claim that a decent work deficit can be reduced with the help of regulations, political will, and financial resources, despite the uneven character of the sector. Therefore, how the working conditions are regulated, and who enforces the regulations, become fundamental questions.

Regulation of labor conditions in the maritime transport industry

It is no big surprise that the urge to regulate working conditions in the maritime industry emerged alongside nation states and their desire for regulation. The Merchant Shipping Act of 1850 in England was generally cited as the first attempt to regulate working conditions at sea, and to record seafarers so as to track who works on ships. Walters and Bailey (2013) explained the reason for early attempts to regulate the conditions on the ships with the extraordinary economic loss of investors.

The second half of the 19th century can perhaps best be understood as a time of increasing international trade activities due to several developments. *Inter alia*, the discovery of gold in California and Australia, and the expansion of French and British economic activities in the periphery and semi-periphery (including Egypt, India, and the remnants of the Ottoman Empire) can be listed as examples (Kindleberger 1961). This has brought about bilateral agreements in the maritime industry, most notably between France and England.

An international agreement came only after the tragic sinking of the Titanic, which is still considered the biggest peacetime disaster in maritime history. The disaster created a shock wave, because the huge loss of life might have been easily prevented by basic life-saving appliances and arrangements. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) was initially signed in 1914. Yet, its amended version entered into force only in the interwar period.

Being one of the most important pillars of maritime law, the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC) was concluded in 2006 as an International Labor Organization Convention. The convention can be read as an attempt to regulate the labor conditions on ships on a global scale. The convention has been ratified by most of the conventional

shipping countries, which represents 90 percent of the shipping industry. The convention covers not only conditions of the working hour, but also rest time, considering different needs of seafarers.ⁱⁱ

MLC's innovative aspect is its control mechanisms, which can be read as a response to the weakness of the flag state control. The weakness of land-based approaches to achieving compliance increases the importance of port state control, which allows port states to inspect foreign flag ships for compliance. MLC's 'no more favorable treatment' clause for vessels of non-ratifying states means that ships registered in non-ratifying countries should comply with labor standards at the port of a ratifying state. Port state inspectors can thus board any ship entering port, regardless of the judicial coverage of the MLC. This means that a ship with a non-ratified state flag, e.g. a Colombian flag, can be inspected in a German harbor.

The effectiveness of port state control (PSC) is inconclusive in the relevant literature. Grbić et al. (2015) state that control at the port was becoming powerful in detecting the lack of compliance onboard. Yet, Bateman (2012) discusses the contrary in the case of the Indian Ocean region. The author notes that "PSC works effectively in the developed world but much less so in the developing world, including in and around

the north-western Indian Ocean” (199). Conflicting results concerning the effectiveness of the PSC is also documented by Walters and Bailey (2013). The authors highlight that the demand for PSC has been increased, but the supply, i.e. the capacity to inspect, has not increased. Pointing out limited resources, they highlight the lack of capacity to deal with whole maritime transport. Moreover, they argue that the capacity varies significantly among different countries, which leads to the continuation of substandard shipping in certain regions of the globe.

What should be added to the regulatory landscape depicted is the non-state actors. Trade unions, classification societies, and protection and indemnity clubs can be listed, among others. The International Transport Federation (ITF) is noteworthy against the backdrop of the MLC. Yet the same capacity problem applies here as well, as it also has inspectors, but only 150, so it can at best give a picture of a group of single ships, not the whole industry hosting more than 1.5 million seafarers.

The lack of capacity can be ascribed with the absence of the will. The case of oil tankers appears to be an exception, since the will in question is institutionally established:

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oil majors push for occupational safety measures for the ships that they charter. One can of course argue that this is more to protect their products, which are very fragile against any misconduct, rather than the labor-friendly attitude of oil majors.

As a conclusion: The need for a detailed analysis

The global character of the maritime industry, together with nation-state-driven regulations and enforcement, appear to create flags of convenience. In other words, the space and scale of operation and the actual regulation/enforcement do not match, and this in turn creates loopholes in the regulatory framework, widening the decent work deficit in the process. Private actors' involvement in enforcement, notably the ITF's push for more decent conditions along with the PSC, can be seen as a response. Yet, the literature points to very contradictory results of their effectiveness. How is agricultural produce shipped from the Global South to the North? And under which conditions? We cannot answer this question from our desks. Each line and type of product requires a very careful analysis, along with well-elaborated data. Perhaps it is a task that can be successfully undertaken.

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ⁱ This text is a part of a #DecentShipping project, carried out by International Center of Development and Decent Work (ICDD) and led by Christoph Scherrer (University of Kassel). Special thanks to my colleague Florian Dörr, who substantially contributed to this project.

ⁱⁱ The regulation involves: i.) recruitment and placement, ii.) wages, iii.) food and catering, iv.) hours of work and rest, v.) entitlement to leave, vi.) repatriation, vii.) access to shore-based welfare facilities, viii.) crew accommodation and recreational facilities, ix.) minimum age for the work, x.) career and skill development; opportunities for seafarers' employment xi.) medical certificates, xii.) shipowners' liability, xiii.) medical care aboard ship and ashore, xiv.) health and safety protection and accident prevention, xv.) manning levels, xvi.) seafarer compensation for the ship's loss or foundering, and xvi.) social security.

“Neither liberal nor social democratic policies have a structured approach to understanding imperialism, including its ecological history”

Alejandro Pedregal¹ - in conversation with Max Ajl

Max Ajl does not bite his tongue, neither when he writes nor when he speaks. This rural sociologist based in Tunisia, a researcher associated with the Tunisian Observatory for Food Sovereignty and the Environment and with the Rural Sociology Group at Wageningen University, has written possibly the fiercest critique of the dominant models of the Green New Deal (GND), both social democratic and liberal. With a language as scathing as it is rigorous, his *A People's Green New Deal*, published by Pluto Press, is an urgent book that, in addition to speaking out against the Eurocentrism of Western green policies, devotes half of its pages to elaborating alternative proposals. Its method draws from the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist internationalism of the rich radical thought of the Global South—from the Marxist theory of dependency of Ruy Mauro Marino or Vania Bambirra, to the Thirdworldist world-systems analysis of Samir Amin or the decolonialism of Enrique Dussel—, in order to address head-on, without any subterfuge, the current climate emergency and the ecologically unequal exchange between core and periphery, and to

imagine an ecosocialist future hand in hand with a socially just degrowth. Economic anthropologist Jason Hickel has called Ajl's work "the best book yet on the GND"; historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, a "lucid and profound" text with "an actual political program of survival and renewal," where "nearly every sentence is urgent and quotable"; indigenous activist Nick Estes has called it a "critical work" so that, in the face of the climate emergency, the North understands the persistence of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism in the South; and evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace has invited anyone who "really wants to learn what'll be necessary for our species to survive climate apocalypse" to read it. We spoke with Ajl about his critiques of hegemonic GNDs and the alternatives to them, as well as his position on other pressing debates within environmentalist thought and the challenges facing the Global South in light of the global geopolitical reconfiguration brought about by the war in Ukraine.

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Your book intervenes in the GND debate by disputing the dominant approaches by liberal and social-democrat views, hegemonic within certain sectors of the Western left. What are the features and limitations of these two, especially in regard to the development of social-democracy and its connection to the history of the socialist bloc?

Liberal and social democratic policies converge and diverge. Both envision a place for capitalism in the short-to-medium term; neither have a structured approach to understanding imperialism, including the ecological history of imperialism. Neither support national liberation for the periphery. Both in general neglect agriculture, especially smallholder agriculture and pastoralism in the periphery. And both are warm (if not very warm) to capitalist-developed technological solutions. They lack a clear sense of the social subjects who will carry forward ecological transformation on a world scale. And they practice an essentially opportunist and frequently chauvinist politics, trying to lull and allure liberal anti-racist progressives, rejecting building a common front with radical forces in the South, and rejecting anti-imperialism as a political practice (this is alleged to be “campism,” a northern smear dredged up from

Trotskyite pro-NATO Cold War scribbles, and essentially now used primarily to tar anti-imperialists in order to harry them into silence or embarrassment).

Each of these GND approaches forgets that northern post-war industrial Fordism/social democracy emerged against the threat of foreign communist powers setting the world developmental agenda on a systemic level, combined with the domestic popularity of extremely radical redistributive policies, not to say widespread explicitly communist sympathies and organizing. That is, even on their own terms – which I reject – they are unachievable, which may be why they are increasingly receiving financial support from the Rockefeller Foundationⁱⁱ for their policy papers. The ruling class seems to understand that it has a clear interest in channeling unease with the social-ecological crisis into dead-end reformist technocracy. These proposals also forget that the post-war welfare states were based on a history of colonial looting and ongoing neo-colonial value transfer. It is not a surprise, then, that many proposals for a northern social-democratic or socialist GND malign the radical attempts at social transformation in Venezuela or Zimbabwe, or erase the role of the US in the anti-MAS coup d’etat in Bolivia, or are willing to surrender on the Palestinian struggle. That is, they ignore or

deride the national question and more-or-less converge by effect on continued neo-colonial domination of the South alongside ecological civilization or ecological market socialism for the North.

How does your approach differ from these positions?

In fact, I think my book would be a little different if I had written it now. Having spent more time with literature from the 1970s and metabolized better the essence of thinking around national liberation, I more and more think that in line with the classical Leninist hypotheses (which are now castigated as “Third Worldism”) revolution, including ecological revolution, can only begin in the weak links of the world-system where primitive accumulation is permanent, social reproduction and under-reproduction of the ecology converge, and the victims of neo-colonialism encounter simultaneous national, social, and ecological contradictions. This does not mean there is no place for northern struggle for eco-socialism, but it means that we have to raise consciousness around things like anti-imperialism, national sovereignty, the climate debt, etcetera, at every step of transforming northern capitalism into a northern eco-socialism founded on

permanently sustainable management of the ecology and rational collective management of the human interaction with non-human nature.

If we put agriculture, sustainable/appropriate technology, including architecture, the national question, climate debt, and world developmental convergence through directly taking on the northern “style of development” based on capitalist-induced over-consumption and over-production of commodities, at the center of these debates, we end up with a political strategy. And this would be based on popular organizing to enhance the quality of the use-values available to the northern working classes, turn them into social rights, and build a principled anti-imperialist front with southern national-popular forces.

Can you tell us about how your approach engages, methodologically and analytically, with unequal exchange and dependency theories, as these contributions are so closely linked to radical authors from the Global South? How is this related to the demands of national liberation movements and the anti-imperialist radical tradition, for instance? And how are those related to the ecological emergency we live in?

National liberation puts the politics of sovereignty and essentially auto-centered development, or more likely regional collective self-reliance, at the center of ecological planning. It reminds us that the dusk of formal colonization was often the dawn of neo-colonialism, precisely meaning continued value drain from South to North. Dependency theories, which many northern academicsⁱⁱⁱ have put great effort into discrediting, is at its core a theory of the drain of surplus value^{iv} and of the peripheral social structures which allow for the outflow of value. To stop that outflow of value you need to reconfigure domestic social structures, re-orient them towards introverted and auto-centered development, putting the productive forces and the play of the productive forces under domestic popular and proletarian control. This is the line of thought we can trace from Amilcar Cabral to Ismail-Sabri Abdalla, and which reached its peak in practice with the Chinese revolution. Unequal exchange, of course, is one mechanism for the outflow of value (there are many others, including illegitimate debt repayments, intellectual property monopolies, dollar seigniorage, etcetera). Now, my approach draws on the new theories of ecologically unequal exchange, which in fact group together a diverse family of empirical findings essentially showing that alongside increased northern appropriation of the

products of global hectarage and mineral resources, there is also an uneven exposure to global pollution. In fact, this is a form of super-exploitation based on the under-reproduction of non-human nature which leads to damage to human life and its reduction below its potential historically-given level. This tells us, again, that the southern proletariat, semi-proletariat, slum-dwellers, peasants, pastoralists, forest dwellers, face the ecological crisis as a crisis of day-to-day well-being and so need to be central to a liberatory vision.

In your book, you discuss the importance of ecological debt and reparation for a genuine people's GND, which would take seriously the environmental damage caused by the North to the South. What does this demand imply? What are the historical reclamations in this regard and what's the importance of the Cochabamba Agreement for this matter?

Ecological debt has been raised at least since the early 1990s (perhaps, and likely, earlier). It is akin to a broader discourse of reparations coming from a wide variety of actors who have been “the underside” of imperialism and colonial-capitalist accumulation, be it from the slave trade, colonial drain, or more recently the neo-

colonial enclosure of the atmosphere and appropriation of the biosphere's capacity to absorb and metabolize CO₂ emissions. Because the South cannot emit the same amount of per capita emissions without crashing the biosphere, and because the South cannot walk the same cheap energy paths, and because the South is already suffering from damages from global warming, the North accordingly owes it a debt. Building on earlier demands, the Cochabamba's People's Agreement stated that the OECD countries should do fiscal transfers of 6 percent of their gross national product (GNP), or around \$1.2 trillion from the US alone, for an indeterminate period, as reparations. So we know what it means numerically. The question is, what does it mean politically? I do not have a clear answer to that. At the very least it clarifies that the responsibility for the ecological crisis is essentially northern. But concretely speaking, it would require a widespread insurrectionary atmosphere in the North to actually commit to fiscal transfers to the South, since they would go alongside a controlled reduction of the ecological "heaviness" of northern production and consumption. That "reduction," which is basically what degrowth refers to, would mean a constant lightening of the ecological impact of northern production – which cannot merely be reduced to de-commodification – and in turn, would flow from a heightened

consciousness that northern "ways of life" have to change to create a planet in which many are able to live well. We are, obviously, very far from that situation on any level.

You have also exposed how reasonable environmental concerns and terminology (the debate around the notion of extractivism comes to mind, for instance) can be instrumentalised by the imperial cores for their own interests of global dominance. This has been the case, for instance, with certain segments of the environmental left in regard to Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, etc. What are the limitations and dangers of these views?

I find it helpful to take a sociology of knowledge approach to this question. First, though, to be clear, when people encounter ecological degradation that damages their ability to live decent lives, it is natural that they name and resist that degradation. We should have all the sympathy in the world for people living in such conditions. But such sympathy is not a political map, and naming is not innocent or random. It is not clear to me that extractivism, as circulated in the works of scholars like Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas, or Maristella Svampa, provide any such political map. Take Svampa, who has

been particularly embraced by the regime-change left. She writes, “Contemporary neo-extractivism refers to a way of appropriating nature and a development model based on the over-exploitation of natural goods, largely nonrenewable, characterized by its large scale and its orientation toward export, as well as by the vertiginous expansion of the borders of exploitation to new territories.” Is this in any way an improvement over previous widespread core-periphery analysis or dependency analysis, based on extraversion, disarticulated accumulation, and unequal exchange in world trade? It is basically analytical chaos, what Marx called a chaotic concept. It cannot tell us how to balance the social needs of those segments of peripheral population who unfortunately need capital from commodity exports in order to secure their social needs (and would need to process some of those commodities under any conceivable industrialization pattern as part of a socialist transition). On the analytical level, as Alvaro Garcia Linera has written, “Just as the extractivism of our societies is an integral part of the networks of the international division of labour, the industrial processing of raw materials or the knowledge economy are part of the same world capitalist division of labour. Neither extractivism nor non-extractivism is a solution to this worldwide domination.”

We need to discuss how to move to ecologically modulated industrialization, including for reasons of national self-defense, as part of national liberation and in a situation of neo-colonial dependency. Those are the issues. The extractivist discourse, part-and-parcel of a shift on the Left away from serious comprehension of macro-economic planning, the need for industrialization, and the need to re-think industrialization, has simply not proven to be a basis for thinking through these issues in a way that can give us a guiding rope that allows us to navigate theoretically and practically contradictions which emerge between communities directly harmed by resource extraction, and those in the periphery which need resources from that extraction for day-to-day survival. Although I am a committed agro-ecologist, a pure focus on ecologically embedded agricultural production cannot and will not by itself solve developmental problems of the 21st century.

As you have noted, it's been largely discussed that the environmental damage led by the Global North economies is mostly suffered by the peoples in the Global South. What sort of social reorganization could be taken to stop this?

Northern economies need to be restructured, first, on non-capitalist lines, to produce not for the accumulation of surplus value, but oriented around the permanently ecologically sustainable production of things people need for day-to-day survival and a decent life, including homes, cultures, appropriate levels of industrialization, decent food, medical care, and transport systems. We know that this can be done with far lower levels of ecological impact, whether this be preventative healthcare, agro-ecology, sustainable/vernacular building materials and designs, collective mass transit and re-planned cities. Life will certainly have to change in the North in substantial ways, as the other option is to off-load the costs of “social democratic” green industrialization onto the South, which would be a disaster from any perspective.

As a rural sociologist, you dedicate quite a big part of your argument to the agricultural question, in relation to land and soil. Why is this so relevant and yet so often undervalued by mainstream environmentalism in the Global North? What are the major issues to take into consideration in this regard for thinking of a people’s GND?

There is a deep anti-peasant prejudice in western thought, including western Marxism (anti-peasant more than anti-nature, since western thought often fetishizes a certain construction of nature). People naturally do not think about where they get their food, because they basically think machines get their food for them. In fact, substantial amounts of global labor regimes are engineered to support imperialism and global accumulation overall and cheap tropical foodstuff for northern workers, as part of the northern corporatist pact. Now: it is only natural that those regimes would be made invisible, because they would imply different theoretical and therefore political mandates for northern environmentalism. In particular it would mean putting national liberation and the agrarian question, North and South, at the center of socialist planning, thought, and practice. Agriculture is also a keystone sector for at least getting to genuine 0 CO2 emissions, and for that matter for certainly attention-intensive and perhaps, perhaps not labor-intensive CO2 drawdown. This drawdown is a matter of survival for southern states to ride out this century. Thus we need to place agriculture front-and-center for land use planning including moving to national-level planning of agro-ecological production. Agrarian questions are just critical also to dry up labor reservoirs, increase rural consumption

and free up a surplus for sovereign industrialization, as well as to secure necessary domestic inputs for, again, an ecologically attentive form of Third World (and First World!) industrialization, moving to sustainable and renewable inputs where possible. This means placing agriculture in conversation with global planning the world over.

There are tendencies within certain trends of environmentalism, even within the left, to think almost exclusively on solutions from a technological perspective to address the ecological emergency. How does this techno-fetishism and techno-optimism neglect North-South relationships? What would be the role of technology in a people's GND?

The whole techno-fetishism is first of all a brain-exploding device which is anti-thought, and which prevents us from adopting a principled Marxist position on technology. Absolutely no one is against technology as such, not just because everyone wants some technology in their lives, but furthermore because there really are not technologies “as such.” There are concrete technologies, which depend on particular configurations of market prices and access to

pollution sites and labor inputs in order to be feasible or un-feasible, and at least at an initial point, reflect the class interests of those in a position to determine the trajectory of technological development. This means not merely levels of pollution but “solutions” to global warming like geo-engineering or bio-fuels which will far more sharply impact the South versus the North – for example through allowing global warming to continue through burning fossil fuels in the hope of a future technological salvation which will come too late for Bangladesh or the Caribbean; or which preserves the northern monopoly-capitalist created “way of life” while suppressing peripheral food consumption, as in the case of biofuels.

A socialist or people's GND would be heavily reliant on technology but would use the precautionary principle when implementing technological change, would ensure that the intellectual property would be in the public domain or in the hands of radical states, would try to develop technology in partnership with the poorer people who would need it, and would be mindful of the ecological impacts of industrial versus non-industrial technologies (which reminds us that the extractivism discussion touches on real concerns even if in an unproductive way).

The war in Ukraine seems to have displaced the environmental debate from the central focus of the public debate. The urgency of implementing certain environmental policies seems to be postponed as a consequence. At the same time, this seems to reshape the geopolitics of energy globally, while there emerges the possibility of a more marked division between North and South, affecting prospects of trade and the reorganization of the finance sector. What kind of scenarios could open for the environmental struggles in this context? What role could the Global South play for that matter?

It seems to me that the US removal of sanctions on Venezuela is a major opening for a renewal of socialist construction in Latin America, after the imperial-imposed Thermidor which has been ongoing for the

past years. Amidst the new rising surge of the Left within the electoral sphere, a reflection of unceasing popular mobilization and the complete discrediting of neoliberalism if not capitalism as modes of political rule, we need to forge a new political-ecological and eco-socialist discourse which takes seriously the concerns raised by the “extractivist” discussion, but in a way that allows for moving forward towards eco-socialist horizons. In particular, the new political space and slightly reduced atmosphere of imperial predation should be an opportunity to again insist that socialism is on the agenda and that the forms of accommodation to monopoly capital, which have gained strength over the last decade, need to be actively resisted. Finally, of course, leftist forces the world over need to assess the opportunities and limits of a new multi-polarity in terms of opening up developmental space closed off by the anti-developmental agenda of US-EU monopoly capital.

ⁱ <https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745341750/a-peoples-green-new-deal/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/1-billion-for-a-green-and-equitable-recovery/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27933674>

^{iv} <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=dussel+dependency>

