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RESURGENCE

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Third World
RESURGENCE

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From climate change to soaring food and energy costs, the world is wracked by multiple, far-reaching crises, prompting questions about the deeper systemic roots of these problems. **10**

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‘The axe always falls on the most vulnerable’

Pakistan demands debt cancellation and climate justice

More than 1,700 people have been killed in floods that continue to submerge parts of Pakistan. Amid this crisis, activists are demanding debt cancellation and climate reparations.

EVEN as the floodwaters have receded, the people of Pakistan are still trying to grapple with the

death and devastation the floods have left in their wake. The floods that swept across the country between June and September have killed more than 1,700 people, injured more than 12,800, and displaced millions as of 18 November.

The scale of the destruction in Pakistan was still making itself apparent as the world headed to the United Nations climate conference COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November. Pakistan was one of two countries invited to co-chair the summit. It also served as chair of the Group of 77 (G77) and China for 2022, playing a critical role in ensuring that the establishment of a loss-and-damage fund was finally on the summit’s agenda, after decades of resistance by the Global North.

‘The dystopia has already come to our doorstep,’ Pakistan’s Minister for Climate Change Sherry Rehman told Reuters.

By the first week of September, pleas for help were giving way to protests as survivors, living under open skies and on the sides of

Tanupriya Singh

where communities have been calling for help since July, waited months for assistance.



An aerial view of flooding in Pakistan’s Sindh province in September.

‘Initially the floods hit Lasbela, closer to Karachi [in Sindh], so people were able to provide help, but as the flooding spread to other parts of Balochistan the situation became dire,’ Khurram Ali, general secretary of the Awami Workers Party (AWP), told Peoples Dispatch. ‘The infrastructure of Balochistan has been neglected, the roads are damaged, and dams and bridges have not been repaired.’

The floods precipitated a massive infrastructural collapse that continues to impede rescue and relief efforts – more than 13,000 kilometres of roads and 439 bridges have been destroyed, according to an 18 November report by Pakistan’s National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Speaking to Peoples Dispatch in September, Taimur Rahman, secretary-general of the Mazdoor Kissan Party (PMKP), said that the government had been ‘unable to effectively provide aid on any large scale, or to ensure that it reached where it was supposed to go’. This has also led to the emergence of

highways, were dying of hunger, illness and lack of shelter.

Parts of Sindh province, which was hit the hardest, including the districts of Dadu and Khairpur, remained inundated until the middle of November. Meanwhile, certain areas of impoverished and predominantly rural Balochistan,

profiteering, as gangs seize aid from trucks and sell it, Rahman added.

In these circumstances, left and progressive organisations such as the AWP and PMKP have attempted to fill the gaps by trying to provide people with basic amenities to survive the aftermath of this disaster.

Cascading crises

On 17 September, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned of a ‘second disaster’ in Pakistan – ‘a wave of disease and death following this catastrophe, linked to climate change’.

WHO has estimated that ‘more than 2,000 health facilities have been fully or partially damaged’ or destroyed across the country, at a time when diseases such as COVID-19, malaria, dengue, cholera, dysentery and respiratory illnesses are affecting a growing share of the population. More than 130,000 pregnant women are in need of urgent healthcare services in Pakistan, which already had a high maternal mortality rate even prior to the floods.

Damage to the agricultural sector, with 4.4 million acres of crops having been destroyed, has stoked fears of impending mass hunger. In a July report by the World Food Programme, 5.9 million people in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces were already estimated to be in the ‘crisis’ and ‘emergency’ phases of food insecurity between July and November 2022.

At present, an estimated 14.6 million people will be in need of emergency food assistance from December 2022 to March 2023, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Malnutrition has already exceeded emergency threshold levels in some districts, especially in Sindh and Balochistan.

Not only was the summer harvest destroyed but the *rabi* or winter crops like wheat are also at



Flood survivors lining up to receive aid.

risk, as standing water might take months to recede in some areas, like Sindh. Approximately 1.1 million livestock have perished so far due to the floods.

This loss of life and livelihood has taken place against the backdrop of an economic crisis, characterised by a current account deficit and dwindling foreign exchange reserves.

Then came the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

As part of its attempt to resume a stalled \$6 billion bailout programme with the Fund, Pakistan’s government imposed a hike in fuel prices and a rollback on subsidies in mid-June.

‘The conditions that the IMF placed on us exacerbated the inflation and cost-of-living crisis,’ explained Rahman. ‘They imposed on Pakistan tax policies that would try to balance the government’s budget on the one hand, but on the other really undermine the welfare of the people and cause such a catastrophic rise in the cost of living that it would condemn millions of people to poverty and starvation.’

By the end of August, the IMF had approved a bailout of more than \$1.1 billion. By then, Pakistan’s consumer price index had soared to 27.3%, the highest in

nearly 50 years, and food inflation increased to 29.5% year-on-year. By September, prices of vegetables were up by 500%.

‘We went to the IMF for \$1.1 billion, meanwhile, the damage to Pakistan’s economy is at least \$11 billion,’ said Rahman. The figure for the damages caused due to the floods now stands at \$40 billion, according to the World Bank. ‘The IMF keeps telling us to lower tariff barriers, to take away subsidies, to liberalise trade, make the state bank autonomous, to deregulate private capital and banking, and to balance the budget,’ he added.

‘The axe always falls on the most vulnerable,’ Rahman said. ‘Over half of the budget, which in itself is a small portion of the GDP, goes towards debt repayment, another quarter goes to the military and then there’s nothing left. The government is basically bankrupt.’ ‘The advice of the IMF is always the same – take the state out, let the private market do what it does. Well, look at what it has done: it has destroyed Pakistan’s economy. ... Imposing austerity at a time when Pakistan is coping with such massive floods and the economy is in freefall is the equivalent of what the British colonial state did during the Bengal famine – it took food

away.'

Pakistan will be forced to borrow more money to pay back its mounting debt, all while IMF conditions hinder any meaningful recovery for the poor and marginalised. The Fund has now imposed even tougher conditions on Pakistan to free up \$3.5 billion in response to the floods, not nearly large enough to address \$30 billion worth of economic damage. The conditions include a hike in gas and electricity prices as well as cuts in development spending.

It is in this context that activists are demanding a total cancellation of debt, and climate reparations for Pakistan.

The Global North must pay

Between 2010 and 2019, 15.5 million Pakistanis were displaced by natural disasters. Pakistan has contributed less than 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions, but remains at the forefront of the climate crisis.

Delivering the G77 and China's opening statement at COP27, Pakistan's Ambassador Munir Akram emphasised, 'We are living in an era where many developing countries are already witnessing unprecedented devastating impacts of climate change, though they have contributed very little to it...

'Enhanced solidarity and cooperation to address loss and damage is not charity – it is climate justice.'

In its February report, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change acknowledged that 'historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism' have exacerbated vulnerability to climate change. Yet, even as the Global South faces an existential threat, the Global North actively impedes efforts towards redressal.

'Reparations are about taking back [what] is owed to you,' environmental lawyer Ahmad Rafay Alam told Peoples Dispatch. 'As the climate crisis grows ... this



Farmers seeking to salvage their crops from a flooded field. Damage to Pakistan's agricultural sector, with 4.4 million acres of crops having been destroyed, has stoked fears of impending mass hunger.

discourse [of reparations] is going to get stronger. It's not just going to come from Pakistan, we will hear it from places like Afghanistan where people don't have the infrastructure and are freezing in the winter ... We'll hear it as the Maldives and the Seychelles start sinking.'

While this struggle plays out globally, there is also justifiable anger within Pakistan over the government's failure to prepare for the crisis, especially in the aftermath of the deadly floods of 2010.

'Everyone anticipated that this monsoon would be disastrous, and the National Disaster Management Authority had enough time to prepare,' Ali said. 'However, there is nothing you can find that [shows what] the NDMA did to prepare for these monsoons. In fact, they do not even have a division to take precautionary measures.'

Holding the government accountable for its lack of preparedness, which might have contained the damage, is crucial, Alam said. However, given the sheer scale of the impact of the climate crisis on the Global South, talking about adaptation has its limitations. As Alam stressed, 'There is just no way you can adapt to a 100-kilometre lake that forms

in the middle of a province.'

Activists are drawing attention to infrastructure projects the state is pursuing, and how they put the environment and communities at risk. 'As reconstruction takes place, it is important not to repeat the mistakes of the past,' Alam said.

'The projects that are affecting riverbeds and other sensitive areas are the development projects themselves,' Ali said. He pointed out that development often takes place on agricultural or ecologically sensitive land such as forests, adding to the severity of future crises.

'It is a very dangerous situation now because imperialist profit-making is devastating the climate, affecting regions that are already maldeveloped. We are living under semi-feudal, semi-colonial conditions in Pakistan, with a strong nexus between the imperialist powers and the capitalists, all making money off our misery,' Ali stressed.

'We have no other option but to fight these forces; there is no other option but a people's revolution.' – *Globetrotter* ◆

This article was produced in partnership by Peoples Dispatch (peoplesdispatch.org) and Globetrotter (globetrotter.media). Tanupriya Singh is a writer at Peoples Dispatch and is based in Delhi.

Myanmar's forest guardians face disempowerment

The state of conflict prevailing in Myanmar since the military takeover is harming the country's indigenous communities – and the lands and forests they protect.

Carolyn Cowan

MYANMAR harbours some of the most extensive tracts of old-growth forest in mainland Southeast Asia. These forested landscapes represent many of the region's last refuges of rare and threatened species, including tigers, leopards and gibbons. And besides their importance for biodiversity, they also absorb vast amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Strides have been made in forest protection over the past decade, but violent conflict, shrinking civic space and 'rampant' natural resource extraction in the wake of the February 2021 military coup have severely hampered community-level efforts to safeguard the country's ecosystems from development, according to representatives of Myanmar's Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) participating in a recent online discussion.

'Environmental defenders have been targeted by [the military-led State Administration Council] and aligned forces for resisting expanding mining, land confiscations and logging in their territories,' said Saw Alex, a representative of the All Burma Indigenous Peoples Alliance (ABIPA), a nationwide network of civil society and community organisations that hosted the 4 November online event. Saw Alex was speaking at the event under a pseudonym for security reasons.

With the event held during the lead-up to the COP27 climate summit in Egypt, speakers also



Myanmar's indigenous peoples and local communities have been involved in protecting the customary lands and forests under their stewardship for generations.

addressed the key role that IPLCs, who account for roughly 40% of Myanmar's population, can play in mitigating climate change through the protection of customary lands and forests under their stewardship for generations.

However, Rosa, a legal expert at ABIPA and also speaking under a pseudonym, said that with the rapid closing of civic space in the country, many groups that were making progress over the past decade were forced to abandon their activities.

Participants questioned how the world can address the enormous challenge of climate change when environmental defenders in countries such as Myanmar are prevented from taking action. 'The rights of Indigenous peoples in Myanmar are not only a human rights issue, but an environmental issue of global magnitude,' Rosa said.

Tom Andrews, the United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said that although IPLCs have been making progress to 'protect their lands and forests and save fragile ecosystems' over the past decade, that came to an abrupt halt with the coup.

The military regime and its associates are 'forcibly evicting people from their homes to make way for mining developments', Andrews said. 'Those who speak up are threatened, arrested or murdered. Conflict is further displacing these groups as they seek shelter in the forests, unable to protect the land they depend on for water, food and medicine.'

Myanmar's military regime has been widely criticised for relying on natural resources, such as mining, logging and oil and gas reserves, to generate foreign revenues to fuel its

activities. Its forces have arrested more than 16,000 people and overseen the killing of more than 2,400 since the coup, according to AAPPB, a group that has closely tracked casualties and arrests during this time.

Speaking at the event, F Abreu, a representative of ABIPA speaking under a pseudonym, said that breakdown in the rule of law since the coup is leading to uncontrollable environmental destruction. ‘The extractive companies and [other] actors no longer pay any attention to rules, regulations and laws,’ he said.

In 2022, ABIPA carried out interviews and focus group discussions with 233 IPLC members from 22 villages and seven townships in the states of Kachin, Shan and Karen, and the region of Tanintharyi, to find out how escalating levels of resource extraction are affecting them. What they found was a vicious cycle.

Under pressure of environmental destruction, violent conflict and insecurity, many interviewees had abandoned their farms and villages, ABIPA reports. Left without access to a livelihood, some have had no choice but to work at mining sites that are stripping mountainsides and riverbanks of trees and polluting watercourses that provide the sole source of drinking water for many displaced communities. Furthermore, at least half of the more than 1 million people internally displaced by the conflict have sought refuge in Myanmar’s forested landscapes, creating new pressures on already heavily impacted ecosystems.

According to the ABIPA research, gold mining has rapidly expanded north of the city of Myitsone along the confluence of the Mali Kha and N’Mai Kha rivers in Kachin state, an area widely recognised as the beginning of the Irrawaddy River. ‘The confluence is a landmark area for not just the Kachin people, but also the entire country,’ Rosa said. ‘The large-



A jade mine in Hpakant, Myanmar. The military regime has been widely criticised for relying on natural resources, such as mining, to generate foreign revenues to fuel its activities.

scale mining in the Myitsone area is concerning and could potentially restart the Myitsone dam construction project which has been opposed [throughout] the country.’

Rosa added that local communities are left baffled and discouraged by the stark contrast between their present situation and that of just over a decade ago, when, under a civilian government, they were able to raise objections to plans to build the large-scale hydropower dam. Public activism at that time prevented the project from progressing, but now they’re unable to stop clandestine mining along the same stretch of river out of fear of reprisals for their activism.

Further south, gold mining has also proliferated along watercourses in the Tanintharyi region. Residents reported to ABIPA that one of the Tanintharyi River’s main tributaries, Balaw Creek, was destroyed over a six-month period due to unchecked mining activity since the coup. Fish populations have disappeared, the river has been polluted, and water flow has been blocked by mining waste, according to the ABIPA research.

Given that the latest assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel

on Climate Change held that conflict-ridden countries are the least equipped to deal with the consequences of climate change, preservation of Myanmar’s intact forest landscapes is all the more pertinent, speakers at the online event said.

Andrews said that with security risks and travel restrictions blocking a comprehensive assessment of the full extent of environmental degradation following the military takeover, it’s hard to imagine the full extent of the destruction that is actually happening.

‘If the world is serious about tackling climate change, then the world needs to pay attention to Myanmar, from where 90% of the world’s jade flows, from where rare earths power smartphones, from where teak lines luxury ships,’ he said. ‘What is needed now is action, action that the people and the precious and fragile natural environment of Myanmar need and deserve ... the stakes could not be higher.’ ◆

Carolyn Cowan is a staff writer for Mongabay, where this article was originally published (<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/11/myanmar-communities-decry-disempowerment-as-forest-guardians-since-2021-coup/>).

An open letter to Bill Gates

In this letter, over 50 non-governmental groups involved in agriculture and food security work challenge the views voiced by the prominent philanthropist and co-founder of the Gates Foundation on what is needed to fight global hunger.

Dear Bill Gates:

You were recently featured commenting on the global state of agriculture and food insecurity, in a recent *New York Times* op-ed¹ by David Wallace-Wells and also in an Associated Press article.²

In both articles, you make a number of claims that are inaccurate and need to be challenged. Both pieces admit that the world currently produces enough food to adequately feed all the earth's inhabitants, yet you continue to fundamentally misdiagnose the problem as relating to low productivity; we do not need to increase production as much as to assure more equitable access to food. In addition, there are four specific distortions in these pieces which should be addressed, namely: 1) the supposed need for 'credit for fertilizer, cheap fertilizer' to ensure agricultural productivity, 2) the idea that the Green Revolution of the mid-20th century needs to be replicated now to address hunger, 3) the idea that 'better' seeds, often produced by large corporations, are required to cope with climate change, and 4) your suggestion that if people have solutions that 'aren't singing Kumbaya', you'll put money behind them.

First, synthetic fertilisers contribute 2% of overall greenhouse gas emissions and are the primary source of nitrous oxide emissions.³ Producing nitrogen fertilisers requires 3-5% of the world's fossil gas.⁴ They also make farmers and importing nations dependent on volatile prices on international markets, and are a major cause of rising food prices globally. Yet you claim that even more fertiliser is needed to increase agricultural productivity and address hunger.



Nitrogen fertiliser being applied at a corn field in the US. Producing nitrogen fertilisers requires 3-5% of the world's fossil gas.

Toxic and damaging synthetic fertilisers are not a feasible way forward. Already, companies, organisations, and farmers in Africa and elsewhere have been developing biofertilisers made from compost, manure, and ash, and biopesticides made from botanical compounds, such as neem tree oil or garlic. These products can be manufactured locally (thereby avoiding dependency and price volatility), and can be increasingly scaled up and commercialised.

Second, the Green Revolution was far from a resounding success. While it did play some role in increasing the yields of cereal crops in Mexico, India, and elsewhere from the 1940s to the 1960s, it did very little to reduce the number of hungry people in the world or to ensure equitable and sufficient access to food. It also came with a host of other problems, from ecological issues like long-term soil degradation to socio-economic ones like increased inequality and indebtedness (which has been a major contributor to the epidemic of farmer suicides in India). Your unquestioning support for a 'new' Green Revolution demonstrates wilful ignorance about history

and about the root causes of hunger (which are by and large about political and economic arrangements, and what the economist Amartya Sen famously referred to as entitlements,⁵ not about a global lack of food).

Third, climate-resilient seeds are already in existence and being developed by farmers and traded through informal seed markets. Sorghum, which you tout in your interview as a so-called 'orphan crop', is among these already established climate-adapted crops. You note that most investments have been in maize and rice, rather than in locally-adapted and nutritious cereals like sorghum. Yet AGRA (the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa), which your foundation (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) created and financed, has been among those institutions that have disproportionately focused on maize and rice. In other words, you are part of creating the very problem you name. The AGRA initiative, which your foundation continues to fund, has also pushed restrictive seed legislation that limits and restricts crop innovation to well-resourced labs and

companies. These initiatives don't increase widespread innovation, but rather contribute to the privatisation and consolidation of corporate monopolies over seed development and seed markets.

Finally, your assertion that critics of your approach are simply 'singing Kumbaya',⁶ rather than developing meaningful (and fundable) solutions, is extremely disrespectful and dismissive. There are already many tangible, ongoing proposals and projects that work to boost productivity and food security – from biofertiliser and biopesticide manufacturing facilities, to agroecological farmer training programmes, to experimentation with new water and soil management techniques,⁷ low-input farming systems,⁸ and pest-detering plant species.⁹ What you are doing here is gaslighting – presenting practical, ongoing, farmer-led solutions as somehow fanciful or ridiculous, while presenting your own preferred approaches as pragmatic. Yet it is your preferred high-tech solutions, including genetic engineering, new breeding technologies, and now digital agriculture, that have in fact consistently failed to reduce hunger or increase food access as promised. And in some cases, the 'solutions' you expound as fixes for climate change actually contribute to the biophysical processes driving the problem (e.g. more fossil-fuel based fertilisers, and more fossil-fuel dependent infrastructure to transport them) or exacerbate the political conditions that lead to inequality in food access (e.g. policies and seed breeding initiatives that benefit large corporations and labs, rather than farmers themselves).

In both articles, you radically simplify complex issues in ways that justify your own approach and interventions. You note in the *New York Times* op-ed that Africa, with the lowest costs of labour and land, should be a net exporter of agricultural products. You explain that the reason it is not is because

'their productivity is much lower than in rich countries and you just don't have the infrastructure'. However, costs of land and labour, as well as infrastructures, are socially and politically produced. Africa is in fact highly productive – it's just that the profits are realised elsewhere. Through colonisation, neoliberalism, debt traps, and other forms of legalised pillaging, African lives, environments, and bodies have been devalued and made into commodities for the benefit and profit of others. Infrastructures have been designed to channel these commodities outside of the continent itself. Africa is not self-sufficient in cereals because its agricultural, mining, and other resource-intensive sectors have been structured in ways that are

geared toward serving colonial and then international markets, rather than African peoples themselves. Although you are certainly not responsible for all of this, you and your foundation are exacerbating some of these problems through a very privatised, profit-based, and corporate approach to agriculture.

There is no shortage of practical solutions and innovations by African farmers and organisations. We invite you to step back and learn from those on the ground.¹⁰ At the same time, we invite high profile news outlets to be more cautious about lending credibility to one wealthy white man's flawed assumptions, hubris, and ignorance, at the expense of people and communities who are living and adapting to these realities as we speak. ♦

From:

Community Alliance for Global Justice/
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Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI)
GRAIN
African Centre for Biodiversity
Kenya Food Rights Alliance
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Notes

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Battles in the WTO Negotiations and Outcomes of the WTO Ministerial Conferences

by Martin Khor



ISBN: 978-967-0747-40-8 376 pp

The World Trade Organisation has been an extremely controversial and divided organisation ever since its establishment in 1995. The big battles are most evident at its highest governing body, the Ministerial Conference, where the Trade Ministers of member states convene to chart the WTO's course.

This book is a compilation of contemporaneous reports and analyses of what unfolded at each Ministerial, as well as a few "mini-Ministerials", that took place from the WTO's inception up to 2017. As these articles reveal, the Ministerials have been the stage on which battles over the future direction

of the WTO are most prominently played out. These clashes have mainly pitted developed member states pushing to expand the WTO's ambit into new subject areas, against many developing countries which call instead for redressing imbalances in the existing set of WTO rules.

This book also shines a light on the murky decision-making methods often employed during Ministerials, where agreements are sought to be hammered

out by a select few delegations behind closed doors before being foisted on the rest of the membership. Such exclusionary processes, coupled with the crucial substantive issues at stake, have led to dramatic outcomes in many a Ministerial.

The ringside accounts of Ministerial battles collected here offer important insights into the contested dynamics of the WTO and the multilateral trading system in general.

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Confronted by crises

The world is faced with a confluence of crises – geopolitical, economic and ecological – that threatens the very future of peoples, nations and even humanity itself. At the root of this existential danger, contend *Lim Mah-Hui* and *Michael Heng Siam-Heng* in the following excerpt from their new book, lies a society in which market forces run rampant. How we respond to this troubling conjuncture may well determine the course, and fate, of human civilisation.

THE COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare some of the fundamental flaws and fractures in our globalised society. These range from environmental degradation and climate crisis and broken healthcare systems to increasing political polarisation, and historic levels of economic and social inequality. In addition, we can see a highly concentrated economy that enriches big corporations to the disadvantage of smaller businesses. This discourages innovation and bolsters a financial system dissociated from the real economy, one that values the extractive over the productive, with all the attendant ecological degradation that implies. In short, we are faced with multiple crises, the cumulative effect of which is that human existence, and the civilisations it depends on, are under threat.

These crises present an opportunity for public debate, with a reassessment of the role of the market and a re-examination of how the economy became a market economy and how society became a market society. We need to question the personal, social and environmental consequences that are intrinsic in a market economy and a market society, and, while we're at it, reformulate the goals of what they ideally should achieve.

Concepts of the market, the market economy and the market society

The concept of the market has different meanings to different people, partly because the term

is employed loosely and contains several nuanced definitions. For our purposes, the market can be best understood on three distinct levels:

- 1 – the market as an economic tool
- 2 – the market as a social institution
- 3 – the market economy, which leads to a market society.

The market as an economic tool

The economic historian Karl Polanyi argued that markets, as economic tools and social institutions, have existed for thousands of years. Markets are mechanisms for organising production, exchange and distribution. Societies have had different ways of accomplishing these goals. Prior to the birth of industrial capitalism in 18th-19th century Europe, the major forms of markets were reciprocal, redistributive, barter and exchange.

The market as a social institution

While economists view the market primarily as an economic tool for facilitating exchange, sociologists embrace a wider conception of the market. Social institutions play a role in the maintenance of social order, with culturally constructed values, norms and rules that govern behaviour. The market as a social institution evolved as a system where individuals came together for the common purpose of exchanging goods and services. Two other examples of social institutions are families, where children are raised and family members provide mutual support to each other, and religious

organisations, where members share spiritual practices and goals, as well as social ties.

Social institutions are not ahistorical and universally uniform constructs. They are historically grounded and culturally shaped. They are organised or controlled by particular groups or classes and connected with other institutions, including legal and ideological entities, that they interact with, in either supportive or conflictual ways.

Markets as social institutions have become woven into the broader social structure and embedded in society. Polanyi wrote, '...never before our time were markets more than accessories of economic life. As a rule, the economic system was absorbed in the social system' (Polanyi, 1957:68). To truly understand markets, we cannot look at them in isolation, but see them rather as elements or components of a larger social context.

The market economy, leading to a market society

Polanyi was interested in exploring how markets, as historically specific economic tools and social institutions, embedded in and subordinate to the higher values and priorities of society, were overturned to create a market economy that dominates society, rather than playing the initial role of serving society and the wellbeing of the people who make up that society. 'Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system,' he wrote in his

book *The Great Transformation* (ibid.:57). 'A market economy is an economic system controlled, regulated and directed by markets alone' (ibid.:68).

Markets within the economy took over the economy to become a market economy. A market economy is one where production and exchange is based on the process of competition between individual agents motivated by the single aim of achieving maximum profit. It implies all production is for sale on the market, and all goods and services exchanged have a price determined purely by supply and demand. Additionally, the transformed economy becomes an entity separate from the political sphere. Any attempts by governments to regulate the economy are perceived as interference.

A market economy cannot function unless society is subordinate to its requirements. Not only are produced goods and essential services exchanged and traded, but natural elements of life, like human beings and land, are also turned into commodities and traded. Man becomes labour, land becomes real estate, each with its own market price. This transformation of land, labour and money (an essential element in trade and industry) creates what Polanyi calls fictitious commodities. Left to its own logic and devices, the unregulated or self-regulating market must inevitably wreak havoc on people, nature and economy.

In modern-day society, the commodification or marketisation process has reached extremes. Market values penetrate all spheres of life, transforming society into a market society (Sandel, 2013). These values seep into personal relations, communal life, law, education, health, culture, politics, prison systems and the environment. Sandel highlights, as examples, the purchasing of Ivy League eggs and sperm, paying

to jump queues, paying for prison cell upgrades, buying pollution permits through carbon trading, monetary rewards for reading and good grades, money exchanged for immigration status, etc. As he says, 'the logic of buying and selling no longer applies to material goods alone, but increasingly governs the whole of life.' Education becomes a tool to train people to be cogs in the wheels of business and industry, and much less about forming well-rounded citizens capable of critical thought. People are reduced to digits in the market, rather than citizens who function with democratic responsibilities. Sandel laments the cultural, social and moral costs of marketisation. He points out that marketisation sharpens the sting of inequality, as more and more people are increasingly shut out from accessing basic needs and public goods.

Furthermore, marketisation corrupts the fundamental values of life. Putting a price on everything corrupts good social practices and transforms the nature of the goods transacted. Market values crowd out non-market values, as in the traffic of human organs, whether legal or otherwise, or the purchase and sale of blood and plasma 'donations', which crowd out the altruistic values of compassion and sharing, while encouraging the unethical behaviour of selling infected blood, or even the sale of organs from 'donors' whose organs are harvested without their consent (Titmuss, 1970; McLean and Poulton, 1986).

Under a self-regulating market, everything in life is reduced to and measured in terms of price. Price is equated with value. A thing that has no price has no value. By extension, housework and the vital task of raising children, mostly done by women, is unpaid and thus deemed to have no intrinsic value in the view of the market. The gender imbalance in the market economy is deeply embedded in social customs and norms.

Re-embedding the market into society

As discussed above, markets as an economic tool and social institution play an essential function in societies. In a modern economy, the market's price mechanism aids in deciding what to produce or exchange. The market is an efficient tool for discovering price and allocating resources. Price signals to producers and traders what and how much is demanded, and, based on that information, how much to supply. This is particularly true for consumer goods and services.

In microeconomics, the lower the price of a good or service, the greater the demand, and higher the supply, until an equilibrium is reached. However, there are some types of consumer goods where price does not follow this 'law' of supply and demand. One example is luxury goods. Subject to socially driven conspicuous consumption, a higher price signifies exclusivity and bestows prestige on consumers who bask in the glow of jealousy and admiration of those who cannot afford these goods. This type of compensatory materialism is rooted in deep-seated psychological insecurities that the market is only too happy to exploit and exaggerate. Buy this product because you're worth it, goes the unspoken message; if you don't buy this product, you are worthless. Again, the consumer's worth and value as a human being can be cleanly measured in monetary terms. But this preying on affluent consumers is just a means to an end. The market cannot resist an economic sector where a higher price produces a greater demand, with a subsequent higher profit margin.

Another example where the normal 'rules' of supply and demand don't always apply is in the financial markets with products such as stocks and bonds. Here a rising price often spurs demand, driven by greed and expectations of an even higher price or greater

returns. This in turn sends the price higher yet, and the cycle continues until a bubble forms, which inevitably bursts with a corrective and often catastrophic pop, as in the historic subprime mortgage crisis of the first decade of the 21st century. Such behaviours are driven more by speculation and future expectations, than by the rational satisfaction of essential human needs. In sum, financial speculation and crashes are inevitable in an unfettered market and it can be argued that if the market is to be truly free then these market failures are unavoidable.

Leaving aside these exceptions, even as a pricing and allocative mechanism, the limitations of the market should be recognised. There can be failures in planning, but not too infrequently the failures of the market are even larger and more consequential. Markets fail for a number of reasons. Unregulated markets generate what are known as externalities. Externalities are costs generated by private parties that are passed on to the public. They are not priced into the overheads, because businesses do not pay for them. For example, Amazon doesn't pay for the upkeep of roads, the public pays for roads through taxation. Yet these roads are essential for the shipping and delivery of the products the company sells. It could be argued that a business indirectly finances these things by paying taxes as well, but that argument quickly collapses when a business is allowed to function without being obliged to contribute much or even anything in taxes.

Externalities impose huge costs on society and the environment, as in the case of industries failing to curb pollution in the course of production. Externalities are one of the most significant factors in accounting for pollution and climate change. Banking is another sector that generates enormous externalities. This will be further discussed below.

Another failure of unregulated markets stems from informational and power asymmetry. Often market participants do not meet on equal footing, with one party possessing

more information and hence more power. This asymmetry encourages morally hazardous behaviour, adverse selections of outcomes, and generates excess benefit or rent to the party with more power. In short, markets should either be stringently regulated or not be permitted to operate in industries with high external and social costs, such as in finance, and industries that have an adverse impact on the environment.

Another area where the market should not operate as the organising principle is in the realm of public goods and services that should be made freely available to all members of society on the basis of human rights, rather than on the ability to pay. Examples of these goods and services range from the mundane, like street lighting and public roads, to the more fundamental, like safety, basic shelter, clean air, health, education and national security. A decent society guarantees not only freedom of thought, speech and association; it should include freedom from hunger, from ignorance and from unwanted exposure to bad weather, as well as bolstering values of equality and fraternity. These are fundamental values in a fair society.

Human society cannot simply be run on the principle of efficiency. Market mechanisms as an economic tool should not dictate the values or goals of a society. A society whose success is measured in market terms alone would be a fascist society. Those who are not deemed productive or not aligned with the impulses of a market-driven society are discarded, imprisoned or even culled.

The foundational values of human society – dignity, integrity, kindness, liberty, social justice, equality and compassion – all serve towards the goal of human development to the fullest. That these values are clearly an anathema to the market society should be reason enough to question the logic of such a society. The market and the principle of efficiency should only ever be means to serve the ultimate good in society. What is good for society clearly cannot

and should not be determined by or in a market. These are things that can only be established in non-economic spheres and should be subject to public debate, reason and empathetic thought. When means, such as efficiency, come into conflict with ends, the former should make concessions to the latter. Markets and efficiency cannot determine or dictate the fundamental values of society.

Re-embedding finance into the economy and society

Finance plays a vital role in the real economy, and should serve its needs. However, finance has become an oversized sector in and of itself, more engaged in extracting value from rather than creating value in the economy.

Here we argue that for finance to serve society and the real economy, large conventional banks and financial institutions should be downsized. Additionally, their disproportionate influence should be trimmed back and better regulated, with the state promoting and providing more support to alternative banking and financial institutions that can better serve the needs of the economy and society in general.

Not all banks are predatory and disembedded from the real economy and society. Community banks, savings banks, social banks, cooperative banks and state-owned public banks all serve the real economy while embracing the broader objectives of society. The share ownership structure and the mission of these banks are different from those of profit-oriented private banks. While maintaining financial viability, they are also committed to fulfilling social objectives. We will examine these different types of banks in turn.

Community banks

Far from the competitive capitalism envisaged by classical economists and touted by neoliberals, we live in an age of monopoly capitalism, where large corporations control the economy.

Even mainstream economists lament this excessive concentration of power and capital. The financial sector is highly concentrated. The US has a dualist banking structure. Of the 5,000 banks in the US banking industry, just 3%, or 148 large banks – defined as those with assets of over \$10 billion – account for 85% of total assets. The remaining 97% of banks are smaller community banks and control just \$3.2 trillion, or 15% of total assets, in the US banking system. Typically, the individual assets of these community banks are between \$100 million and \$500 million, with only a few with assets over \$1 billion. In 2020, the US had 4,918 community banks, down from about 7,000 in 2003 (Bankingstrategist.com; Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, 2003).

Unlike conventional large banks, whose activities are widespread, community banks are more focused on their local neighbourhoods, where their depositors live and work. They play a vital role in supporting small businesses in rural communities, and help keep local communities vibrant and growing. Community bankers are typically deeply involved in local community affairs.

A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas revealed that community banks in the US held up much better during the 2008 global financial crisis compared with the big banks (DallasFed, 2012). They were more customer-focused and better supported their communities during the crisis. They were an oasis of stability, despite the challenges they face to maintain a market share and the disadvantages they face in shouldering the burden of regulations meant to police big banks.

The Dallas study concluded: 'For a prosperous future, the nation must find lasting financial stability ... but where? Not in the big financial institutions at the center of the recent crisis ... America's numerous community banks demonstrated stability during the crisis and its aftermath. Imparting their virtues to the financial system

as a whole *will require the end of financial institutions that are too big to fail*' (ibid., italics added).

Social banks

While community banks are still profit-oriented, social banks are less so. Social banks are a subset of social enterprise concerned with making positive social and environmental impacts through lending and investments. The idea of social banking was pioneered by Rudolf Steiner and Silvia Gesell, who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They also promoted alternative ideas of associative and free economies.

How do social banks work? What makes them distinct? Unlike normal commercial banks glued to a single bottom line of maximising profit and shareholders' value, social banks are guided by a triple bottom line philosophy of serving people, planet and profit. In other words, their mission encompasses social, environmental and financial objectives. Investment decisions are guided by three criteria:

- 1 – Providing finance to those who need, rather than those who have
- 2 – Funding projects that must have positive social, economic and environmental value
- 3 – Financial viability.

Money and monetary profit are not ends, but rather the means to achieve the other two objectives. A study by Weber (2013) of 25 social banks in six continents found that, despite embracing non-pecuniary objectives, social banks were able to follow their mission of social finance and the prioritisation of social impacts over financial returns, without neglecting financial sustainability.

Presently, the number and size of social banks globally are minuscule compared with conventional banks. There is no comprehensive data on social banks. The closest is a list of members of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV). As of September 2020, it has 63 financial institutions and 16 strategic partners

operating in countries across all six continents. Collectively they serve more than 70 million customers, supported by more than 77,000 co-workers, and hold over \$210 billion of combined assets under management.

Triodos, one of the largest social banks, has \$18 billion in total assets and funds under its management. Its commitment to objectives other than profit making is reflected in its lending and financial statistics. The bank is financially sustainable, with an average annual net income of \$45 million, and an average return on equity (ROE) of 4% over five years from 2014 to 2018. In contrast, JP Morgan had \$2.6 trillion in assets, \$32 billion in net income, and an ROE of 13% (JP Morgan, 2018).

A case can be made that banks serving the real economy and society should behave like public utilities, with stable, financially sustainable and socially acceptable rates of return. The constant over-reach for high rates of return for shareholders pushes banks to engage in activities that are speculative and risky, leading to crises with high costs to society.

Social banks are focused on investing in and serving the community, supporting ethical and environmentally friendly projects. Triodos, a Dutch social bank, has 715,000 customers supported by 1,427 co-workers. Triodos's loans fund projects in education, organic agriculture, recycling, renewable energy, health food stores, affordable housing and poverty alleviation.

Social banks are concerned not only with their external impact, but also with the internal structure of their organisation. There are two basic ownership structures – a cooperative structure where the bank is collectively owned by members, and a more traditional share ownership structure. Interest rates on loans in social banks are typically lower than those charged by normal private banks. Dividends paid to shareholders

are also lower than those expected in normal private banks. Social banks limit the salary differential between senior management and ordinary staff to reasonable levels. In Triodos, the ratio of highest to median salary is 5.5 times (Triodos Bank, 2018). By comparison, the ratio of CEO to average employee pay for S&P 500 companies today is 278 times. If counting the number of working days in a year, that equates with a CEO earning more than the equivalent of an average employee's annual salary in a single day.

The philosophy of social banking is based on an anthropomorphic concept of money and capital, meaning that the value of money is not intrinsic but socially constructed. Money is not a material thing but a social relationship of mutual trust and cooperation between people. Paper or digital money is exchanged for real goods and services based on trust. Money is not to be accumulated but to be circulated, to be used productively, to be shared (loaned or donated). Like blood, money is healthiest when it circulates. Social banks eschew speculation in favour of financing the real economy.

Public banks

Another category of banks that are clear candidates for serving society's interests is public banks or state-owned banks. Public banks operate at national, regional and international levels. Examples of national public banks include the Brazilian Development Bank and the Korean Development Bank. Regional public banks include the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the African Development Bank. On an international level, the World Bank is a public bank. National public banks are owned by the government of that country, whereas regional and international public banks are owned by member-state countries. Some national development banks, like the Brazilian Development Bank,

are bigger in size than regional banks like the ADB. Historically, state-owned development banks played a vital role in the economic development of countries like Japan, Germany and South Korea, providing long-term financing for projects and industries that were critical for economic development. According to a World Bank report, public banks account for a quarter of global banking assets in 2012, rising to 30% in the European Union, and even higher in some developing countries.

Public banks, being state-owned, have a clear mandate to support national development plans and international sustainable development goals, to prioritise the public good over private profit, to hold long-term perspectives, and to deliver the type of patient capital needed for massive structural and infrastructural transformation required to transition to a greener and more balanced economy. Public banks also have reliable and sufficient financial resources from governments. They can work closely with central banks, supported by capital account management, trade, industrial, environmental and income policies of governments.

Central banks should reclaim the role they played during the period between the 1930s and the 1970s, which included not only safeguarding financial and price stability, but also promoting development objectives, such as full employment, credit guidance and government debt management. Central banks were important agents of national development. More recently, the Prime Minister of New Zealand asked its central bank to broaden its functions to include introducing monetary policies that address the housing crisis and a potential housing bubble in the country.

Since the late 1970s, with the growing influence of the free market and monetarism, the role of central banks has narrowed to maintaining price stability and targeting inflation.

Central banks can reclaim some of their historical role as agents of development. One area in dire need is creating and directing capital in favour of projects with high impacts on reducing or slowing the rate of climate change.

A more recent public financial institution is the phenomenon of the sovereign wealth fund (SWF). Most SWFs were set up by countries that enjoyed windfall revenue from natural resources like oil and gas. Examples include Norway's SWF, those of most Middle East countries, and the SWFs of Malaysia and Singapore (though Singapore is exceptional in that its wealth is not derived from natural resources). SWFs are publicly owned assets that could play the kind of patient capital role envisaged for catalytic state investment. They have considerable firepower, with assets estimated at \$8 trillion, of which \$7 trillion is owned by funds of developing countries. However, most of these funds see their role as being one of maximising returns, rather than boosting national development. For the most part, they do not play any kind of transformational role, of the kind needed to redirect the economy to a more sustainable pattern of production, consumption and trade. Some notable exceptions are the Norwegian SWF, which has blacklisted at least five companies engaged in coal mining. Another is the New Zealand Superannuation Fund, which has long been following green investment principles. In Turkey, the SWF used its sizeable public assets to help recapitalise national development banks. More SWFs should walk this road rather than the path of maximising returns.

There are two major obstacles, mainly political in nature, to putting the financial genie back into the bottle. Both result from state capture by big corporations and wealthy elites. The first is the influence and power of financial lobbies over politicians, particularly in the US where it is sometimes euphemistically referred to as

‘pay to play’. Removing corporate infiltration requires huge domestic reforms that can only succeed if there are stronger political and civil society movements. The second influence comes from global regulatory coordination and governance. Finance has become so internationalised, and capital so footloose, that any regulation and change undertaken by or in one country can easily be subverted by corporations moving the same financial activities to other countries. This regulatory arbitrage is the biggest challenge facing countries attempting to close down illegal financial activities or plug tax loopholes.

Defanging the market in politics

Western neoliberals equate capitalism with democracy. In essence, however, capitalism and democracy are incompatible. They operate along different principles. Capitalism is market-economy-driven and controlled by private owners for profit. Democracy is a political system where citizens are supposed to have equal rights in making policies and laws. There are two levels of democracy – participatory democracy and representative democracy. Capitalism fails them both.

The essence of democracy is to have people make public decisions that affect their lives, empowering citizens as agents of history. This is the objective of democracy. It is best practised at the local level, where communities can gather to deliberate and decide on local issues. Even at a national level, citizens enjoy equal rights to decide on important national issues through referendums.

Because modern society is large and complex, the idea of electoral or representative democracy emerged. Citizens choose representatives to sit in legislatures to make political decisions on their behalf. The principle of equality – one person,

one vote – works when selecting representatives. But it fails miserably where laws and policies are made. At this level, where real power resides, the principle of ‘one dollar, one vote’ operates. Money politics is particularly blatant in the US, where corporations spend an annual average of \$3 billion to fund political campaigns so that politicians make decisions in their interests. These financially influenced decisions range from lax financial and environmental regulations and restrictive intellectual property rights, to the reduction of corporate and capital gains tax, etc. In the words of lobbyist Lauren Maddox, ‘the policy process is an extension of the market battlefield’ (cited in Reich, 2007:146).

Another method of state capture is through the practice of revolving doors, where leaders in the corporate sector become cabinet members, and high-ranking government officials move into the corporate sector whose interests they have served upon leaving office. State capture by corporate interests is more pronounced in the US and in the UK compared with European countries.

Democracy fails when social protection is unmet and the state is captured by the corporate sector. The marketisation of politics, and the economic polarisation of society, leave ordinary citizens feeling excluded, alienated and angry. They respond in one of two ways. The first is a movement towards populist politics that can easily cascade into fascism. The second path is where citizens seek to articulate their interests through the civil and public sphere.

In the 21st century, instead of a clear counter-movement for social protection against marketisation that Polanyi painted for the 20th century, there is a vast array of social struggles that are not necessarily class-based or focused. These movements range from anti-racism, feminism, gender liberation

and climate movements to anti-war, anti-globalisation, etc. Fraser (2013) terms these projects as the triple movement, which seeks redress beyond social protection from marketisation, to include emancipation from domination. Examples are Occupy Wall Street, Extinction Rebellion, feminist and Black Lives Matter movements.

Civil society is a sphere that is neither economic nor political. The concept of civil society grew out of what Habermas (1989) termed the ‘bourgeois public sphere’, where marginal groups in mid-19th-century European society gathered, outside of the influence of market and state and church relations, to engage in critical debate on issues of public concern and common interest. The public sphere is an arena for discursive relations, not market relations – a theatre for deliberation, not for buying and selling. One of the main functions of the public sphere was to subject the state to critical scrutiny and the forces of public opinion.

Today, civil society is much more diverse and broader than the original public sphere. The European Union defines civil society as ‘all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to, nor managed by, the State’. The African Development Bank regards civil society as the ‘voluntary expression of the interests and aspirations of citizens organised and united by common interests, goals, values or traditions and mobilised into collective action’.

Civil societies play critical roles in society, offering avenues for ordinary citizens, shut out from state and market, to organise and articulate their interests, and in the process empower communities. They encourage citizen engagement and promote participatory democracy; they give voice to the marginalised; they provide platforms for alternative policies and visions to establishment ideas; they act as watchdogs, monitoring state actions

and promoting accountability and good governance.

The need for global governance

There has never been a greater need for stronger global governance, yet centrifugal forces are formidable.

For years there have been voices arguing for the need for governments all over the world to establish a new set of *modus operandi* to deal with global problems. COVID-19 is the most recent problem of this nature. Other examples are pollution, organised crime, climate change, money laundering, tax havens and terrorism. As the world becomes more integrated through economy and technologies, these problems have a deeper and wider global reach. Global problems require global solutions. They cannot be dealt with by a single country, or even by a group of cooperating countries. Global solutions in turn require global solidarity and cooperation, which requires a kind of global governance where all countries cooperate. The refusal of a few rogue countries to comply can ruin the entire project, as can be seen in the persistence of tax havens that facilitate tax evasion.

Theoretically, sovereignty allows a country to carry out policies with negative spillover effects on other countries. Yet such spillover is common in global problems. If we are serious about tackling global problems, it makes sense to rethink the concept of sovereignty. Ceding some degree of sovereignty to appropriate international bodies with the authority and responsibility to pull together collective financial, technological, logistic and human resources to solve the problem assigned to them is necessary. It is easy for parochial nationalists to criticise these bodies as remote and elitist. Instead of echoing such views, it is more constructive to monitor their performance, to demand that they produce results,

and to ensure that their members or delegates are not paid excessive salaries.

One concrete experience of downsized global governance is the European Union. The EU is supposed to represent the most advanced form of ‘miniature global governance’. It was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for its contributions to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights. Yet in the same year, it did a disappointing job in helping Greece during the eurozone crisis. Since then, it has lost much of the admiration the world had for it as a body capable of effectively solving collective problems. The progress, failures and difficulties experienced by the EU in its endeavours to manage shared problems offer useful insights for global governance. Given that there is a gap between the EU as a regional body and the world as a whole, its problems and solutions need not be the same. But there are certainly some useful lessons, for example, on how to manage the degree of sovereignty that needs to be ceded in the interests of tackling shared problems. Brexit hinges on the perception that EU member states are asked to surrender too much sovereignty. But leaving the EU seems likely to be less beneficial to the United Kingdom and its citizens than remaining within the EU.

Other examples of forms of global governance or oversight are the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, and international agencies that regulate air traffic, marine traffic and even sports.

The worsening of global problems shows that there is a mismatch between the damage humans can cause and the capability of global governance. It is easy to blame governments. It is fair to some extent, and it is more valid in autocratic and authoritarian states, where citizens have little or no influence on their

governments. But in the case of actual functioning democracies, the responsibility is diffused. Citizens in democracies can exert decisive influence on the behaviour of their leaders, most vividly demonstrated in Scandinavian countries. In the case of global governance, voters must acquire an international consciousness, so that they can reject the parochial nationalist agendas of their governments. They can and should pressure their governments to sign on to global projects to protect the environment, to slow down and then reverse global warming, to combat epidemics and pandemics, among other global problems. Straddling between government and citizenry are non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious organisations, mass media and businesses, which at the atomic level essentially consist of ordinary citizens. These organisations act as conduits to influence state policies on a continuing basis, while voters mainly exercise decisive influence during elections.

Prospects for change

We are experiencing the most severe health and economic crisis since the Spanish flu of 1918 and the Great Depression of 1929. But every crisis offers opportunities for change.

Referring to the 2008 global financial crisis, Rahm Emanuel, former Mayor of Chicago and one-time chief of staff to Barack Obama, is often quoted as saying, ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste.’ But will the COVID-19 crisis elicit radical changes, and if so, in which direction? On this there is less agreement, not only from people with different political leanings, but even from people with similar political views. Yanis Varoufakis, economist and former Finance Minister of Greece, said, ‘We are sitting on a saddle point, prepared to tip in either direction. It is utterly indeterminate which of the two

directions we travel' (McWilliams, 2020).

Rutger Bregman, a Dutch historian and commentator, thinks the time is ripe for a move away from the neoliberal ideology that has dominated the world for the last four decades. But a move away to what? That depends on the ideas that are lying around. He cites the example of the US economist Milton Friedman and fellow members of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS), who laid the intellectual groundwork of the free market. When the economic crisis of the 1970s erupted, they pounced on the opportunity to replace Keynesian ideas and policies with neoliberal ideas. Their ideas, once marginal and seen as radical, were put into practice by politicians like Thatcher and Reagan and became mainstream. The influence of the doctrines of the MPS was so pervasive that these ideas were later adopted by their political opponents like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. Neoliberalism became the zeitgeist of an era that has endured for four decades.

Bregman (2020) thinks a similar opportunity may be present in today's crisis, where ideas that once seemed radical and on the fringe can become mainstream. He refers to an editorial in the *Financial Times*, known for its staunch conservatism, that advocated for the need for radical reforms that would reverse the policy directions of the last four decades. These reforms include accepting that governments play a more active role in the economy, seeing public services as investments rather than liabilities, making labour markets less insecure, and redistributing wealth and income through a wealth tax and basic income. Bergman goes on to point out that the ideas of non-mainstream economists like Milanovic, Piketty, Mazzucato and Kelton have gained more prominence.

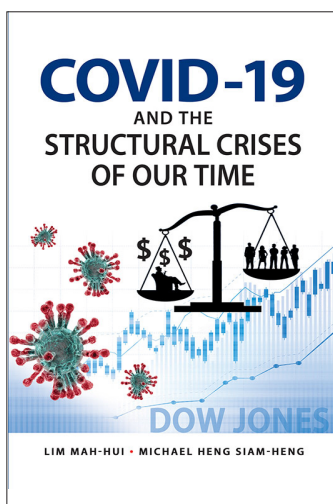
Inequality, long ignored by mainstream economists as a side issue unworthy of study or, even worse, labelled by Robert Lucas, a

Nobel Prize recipient, as poisonous to sound economics, has now taken centre stage. Not only economists but policymakers like US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva, Li Ka-shing, once the richest man in Asia, and world elites at the World Economic Forum are now forced to pay attention to this problem.

Contrary to political scientist Francis Fukuyama's hubristic and premature claim of the 'end of history' 30 years ago with the apparent dominance of Western liberal democracy and the market economy, the contest for leadership and for hegemony between different structures of political and economic organisation is very much alive. What political and economic regime will the world choose? Will it be one capable of addressing the cumulative global existential threats we face, whether as individuals, nations or even as a species? These are the defining questions of our time. ♦

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Isn't it time to challenge the growth paradigm?

The multiple crises besetting people and planet demand rethinking of an economic system in thrall to the goal of perpetual growth.

AT the end of July, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned of a 'gloomy outlook' for the world economy. It was doing so not because of a spike in poverty, a widening of inequality or a surge in carbon emissions. Quite the contrary: the IMF was making its pessimistic assessment because it was revising down its forecast for global gross domestic product (GDP) growth for 2022 from 3.6% to 3.2%. In other words, the global economy was growing, *but not enough*, and that for the IMF was cause for concern.

At the same time that the IMF was making its announcement, the US government was trying to dispel concerns that a second successive quarter of economic contraction – a decline of 0.9% that followed a 1.6% decrease in the first quarter of 2022 – meant that the country was on the verge of a recession. The US economy was not growing, and that for the government was cause for even greater concern.

Economic expansion remains the yardstick of success at the global and national levels. Robust growth garners positive headlines; anaemic growth and contraction generate anxious forecasts. This remains the case despite the widely acknowledged link between economic growth and the climate crisis, a connection reinforced during the COVID pandemic when carbon emissions dropped considerably as a result of the economic shutdowns in many countries.

'The goal of almost all economists and politicians is continued economic growth,'

John Feffer

explains Josh Farley, a professor in Community Development & Applied Economics and Public Administration at the University of Vermont, in a Zoom seminar in July sponsored by the Global Just Transition project. 'For anyone who knows anything about complex systems, exponential growth is always ephemeral. It cannot be sustained in any finite system. Exponential growth must always collapse.'

One way of postponing collapse, and to combine growth and environmental protection, has been 'sustainable development'. But as Ashish Kothari, the co-founder of Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group in India, points out, 'even sustainable development is a very superficial way of trying to deal with the multiple crises that we are in. It doesn't address the structural roots of the crises, which can be found in much older systems of racism and patriarchy or new systems of capitalism and nation-state domination.'

More recently, the 'Green New Deal' has been an effort to combine decarbonisation with an economic shift to clean energy that nevertheless promises a growth in jobs and benefits to disadvantaged communities. 'The Green New Deal faces opposition and also resistance from movements and governments in the Global South because it is seen as a Northern approach,' says Dorothy Guerrero, the head of policy and advocacy at Global Justice Now in the United Kingdom.

'It is indeed a big task for Green New Deal politics to counter that view that it's a Northern alternative and break down the prevailing neoliberal politics that pits workers and jobs against environment.'

More radical attempts have been made to identify economic models that are not predicated on exponential growth. Some of these are national-level models of a 'steady-state' economy. Others focus on local alternatives that stress more democratic politics and a more integrated approach to nature. But as Katharine Nora Farrell, an associate professor in the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Universidad del Rosario in Bogota, notes, the challenge is not just theoretical or even practical, but moral as well.

'We need to take responsibility in social and economic contexts for our role in stipulating how systems function,' she notes. 'The failure to face up to this is part of the problem. It's embarrassing to say that "I have these good things because you are being exploited." It's hard to be moral toward someone when you discover that you have your heel on their neck.'

Unsustainable economic growth relies on just such a heel: on the necks of workers, marginalised communities and nature itself. But that growth is now coming under enhanced scrutiny and greater criticism, from within the status quo and from those who have suffered the most from its effects.

The problem with growth

For 3,000 years, until 1750, economic growth per person

averaged about 0.01% per year. After 1750 and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, however, that rate went up to 1.5%. To express this radical change a different way, the global economy took 6,000 years to double before 1750. Afterward, the economy doubled every 50 years.

‘When the World Bank says that there’s 3.2% economic growth, that doubles the size of the global economy every 24 years,’ Josh Farley notes. ‘In the past 100 years, we’ve quadrupled the human population and increased the per capita consumption nine-fold for a 36-fold increase in the size of the economy. That can’t be sustained.’

One popular image of economic growth is a rising tide that lifts all boats. But in reality, economic growth lifts yachts much higher than dinghies. ‘All forms of monetary wealth grow much faster than the economy as a whole,’ Farley continues. ‘Not only is this unsustainable, we’re systematically transferring our resources to the owners of capital.’ Similarly, the growth in interest-bearing debt ‘shifts resources from debtors to creditors, the people that the government gave the right to create money out of thin air’.

Farley uses two comparisons to drive home the unsustainability of growth. ‘If your lilies are doubling in a pond every few days so that in 30 days it’s full, when is the pond half-full? In 29 days. So, if we use up half our oil, it’s all used up after one more doubling period,’ he says. ‘I was growing exponentially until I reached 18 and then I stopped growing. We’ve all reached maturity and we need to stop growing.’

Economic growth is also unsustainable because it requires enormous inputs of resources, and those resources are limited. The climate crisis is one indication of many that economic growth has outstripped the resource capacities of the planet. ‘The Biden administration’s plan calls for a shift to electric cars,’ Ashish Kothari points out. ‘That sounds

good but where will all the mining take place to get all the materials for those cars? Again, this is based on the inequality between North and South, including patterns of consumption.’

Yet, as Dorothy Guerrero adds, a consensus is emerging that humanity has to reduce its reliance on these resources. ‘The idea of leaving fossil fuels in the ground has gained legitimacy as the most viable response to climate change,’ she explains. ‘The political consensus among climate activists and scientists is that renewable energy must now be fast-tracked and developed where it is not developed.’

‘We need to develop an economy whose main goal is not growth but secure sufficiency for all,’ concludes Josh Farley. ‘Our planet is too small to achieve much more than sufficiency. More and more consumption can no longer be our goal. We should instead be focusing on systems in which production is fun. Collaborating with others to meet our basic needs should be our reward.’

The role of markets

Economic growth is at the heart of capitalism, and markets have played a central role in generating growth.

‘Capitalism is defined by private property rights, individual choice, competition and pursuit of individual profit,’ Josh Farley points out. ‘But for the social dilemmas that we’re facing – global climate change, loss of biodiversity, loss of the ozone layer – private property rights are not worth talking about, and individual choice is impossible. I cannot choose how stable a climate I want. We are faced with situations in which the physical characteristics of the resources are no longer compatible with a capitalist system. This isn’t to say that we necessarily eliminate capitalism altogether, but we can’t rely on it to solve certain problems.’

The capitalist system encompasses much of the world, North and South. But markets, despite the ideology of a disinterested ‘invisible hand’, favour certain parts of the world over others.

‘In addressing the current climate emergency, who will reap the benefits and who will pay for the costs of the adjustment?’ asks Dorothy Guerrero. ‘There has been an unequal ecological exchange between core countries and countries on the periphery. We need to address the issue of monopoly capitalism where, in the case of vaccines, corporations have introduced life-saving vaccines for their own profit. The transition to clean energy – whether it’s orderly or destructive, peaceful or violent, market-led or regulated – will be determined by the conflicts between North and South, between core and periphery as well as the balance of forces within societies.’

Like it or not, globalised capitalism is the system ‘we are dealing with today’, Katharine Nora Farrell points out. ‘Unregulated markets can and do generate enormous damage, human and environmental. But it’s a poor musician that blames their instrument. Markets are created by human societies, relying on norms and customs established by humans. Sometimes those norms are consolidated into law, sometimes not. Rather than say that markets are all bad or all good, we have to determine when and how and under what conditions markets work or do not work.’

The market economy is not the only game in town. ‘I ask my students, “What type of economy has most affected your life”, and they say, “Oh, we’re a market economy”,’ says Josh Farley. ‘And I reply, “Oh, really? Your parents charge you for room and board?” Your main experience is the core economy, the economy of reciprocity and gifting and providing for your close kin and

community, which is totally outside the market.’

The market with its emphasis on self-interest, he continues, is not well-suited to the social dilemmas that humans currently face. ‘If I catch all the fish, I get all the benefits even if I wipe out the population and future generations suffer,’ he continues. ‘If I spew carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, I get the benefit while others suffer. Instead of the invisible hand that Smith talked about, social dilemmas create an invisible foot that kicks the common good to pieces.’

Moving towards transformation

Many of the proposed solutions to the climate crisis are market-driven, such as carbon trading systems. Some are even predicated on growth strategies.

‘We are confronting so-called solutions that are coming to us from the systems that created the problems in the first place,’ explains Ashish Kothari. ‘These are mostly Band-Aids, such as techno-engineering solutions or the “net zero” that most countries have said that they will achieve in terms of carbon emissions by 2050 or 2060 or 2070. These so-called solutions tend to sustain these structures and even greenwash them.’

The origin of many transformative solutions, on the other hand, comes from resistance on the ground to mining, large-scale hydroelectric plants and similar efforts to generate the electricity and inputs to sustain economic growth at unsustainable levels. Kothari recalls the movement in central India 30 years ago against two large hydroelectric projects. ‘We didn’t want these projects not just because they would displace our villages and destroy our livelihoods, but because the river on which these dams are built is our mother and we won’t let our mother be shackled by your dreams of progress,’ he says. ‘You can see in this resistance movement

alternative ways of being, acting, dreaming, and relating to each other and to nature.’

This alternative way of relating to nature challenges the anthropocentrism that lies at the heart of unsustainable economic growth. ‘In Western modernity, there is a divide between humans and nature,’ he continues. ‘You can see it even in the way we speak. We don’t say “humans and the rest of nature”. At school we learned about a pyramid in which humans are on top. Actually, there is a circle of life in which all species have equality.’ This different approach to nature, he continues, can be found ‘in the solidarity economy, in movements for food and energy sovereignty, and among those fighting for self-determination like the Zapatistas who say that we will be the ones who will govern our communities in ways that are more equitable and just’.

The challenge is to inject this kind of thinking into the efforts to address global challenges.

‘What we lack – and what ecological economics is trying to promote – are economic institutions that preserve, enhance and restore the biotic community of which humans are a part,’ Josh Farley adds. ‘Over the last 50 years, we have been through a neoliberal revolution that has taken everything from the care economy and the public sector economy and put it all into the market. We’re now trying to put the natural resource base into the market. This is the wrong approach because of the physical characteristics of the resources. We need to flip the dialogue around and start taking things out of the market economy and put them into other sectors of the economy.’

Mechanisms of change

The current economic system is ill-suited to handle challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss. Worse, it is directly responsible for these problems in the first place.

Alternatives exist, but are they replicable and scalable?

‘While we have amazing examples of alternatives around the world, we need to create scale to challenge the mega-problems,’ Ashish Kothari explains. ‘We need much greater horizontal networking among these amazing initiatives. It’s not about upscaling but outscaling across horizontal networks of solidarity, then creating the critical mass to affect those larger problems.’

Alternatives like the Zapatista struggle, he adds, ‘are not replicable. You can’t copy them in India and make them successful. But we can learn and exchange these values and ethics and principles and create horizontal solidarity networks around the world. We can become more resilient based on the understanding that there is a pluriverse of politics, ideologies, ecologies and economies, all of which are important and worth respecting in so far as they do not undermine other ecologies, ideologies and so on. These are expressed in different languages as *swaraj*, *ubuntu*, *buen vivir* and so on.’

The role of cooperation – as opposed to the competition fostered by markets – will prove critical in any response to the climate crisis. ‘Mainstream economists argue that humans are inherently selfish, that we always act in our own self-interest and can’t cooperate, which is absolutely absurd,’ Josh Farley argues. ‘Humans are the most cooperative species ever to evolve. Think about what you had for breakfast. How many people were involved in getting the food to your plate, between truckers and farmers and producers of fertilisers and farm machinery. Think about how many people were involved in developing the knowledge necessary to do that – agronomy, metallurgy, geology. The knowledge required to meet your basic needs every day was generated by billions of people over thousands of years. Humans cannot

live apart from society any better than a cell can live apart from an individual body.’

Farley sees culture as the medium through which cooperative ideas and approaches can evolve at a rapid pace. ‘Within a society, the most selfish individuals outcompete other individuals,’ he notes. ‘But the most cooperative and altruistic group outcompetes other groups. So, we have dual forces selecting for self-interested and cooperative behaviour. We need to evolve to cooperate at larger and larger scales, at the scale of problems like climate change.’

Humans pass on their genes to successive generations. Bacteria, on the other hand, ‘swap genetic information called plasmids horizontally’, he continues. ‘At times of stress and difficulty, they do so more quickly. For humans it’s culture where we swap ideas horizontally. We’re at a time of crisis. We need to grab ideas from other cultures. That’s this pluriverse idea. There is not one idea; different cultures and ecosystems need different solutions. A socially just, sustainable transition is the goal, and we need to test all our policies against that goal. If the policies work toward that goal, we accept them; if not, we reject them.’

Species evolution takes multiple generations. ‘Cultural evolution can be astonishingly fast,’ Farley adds. ‘Look at World War II. The United States went from being a capitalist economy to a form of state capitalism very quickly. How many cars did we produce in Detroit in World War II for the public? Zero. The government just took over the industry. We suddenly rationed everything – food, gasoline – and people accepted it. We faced a serious challenge, we stopped focusing on individual needs and started focusing on collective needs, and we did this very fast.’

Ashish Kothari agrees. ‘There are elements in the Green New Deal or some of the other programmes around the world that we can

encourage,’ he says. ‘Which of these transitions will lead to systemic transformations and which ones will entrench the current system? A shift from fossil fuel to electric cars only entrenches the system of inequality between North and South. But if we’re talking about a transition from private cars to public transportation, that would lead toward a more transformative system. A transition also has to move toward radical forms of democracy or self-determination (*swaraj* or *ubuntu*). It has to move toward economic democracy, worker control, cooperatives, and a social economy that does not use GDP as yardstick of progress.’

Kothari points to a number of examples of local initiatives that move in this direction, including forms of agriculture that don’t require much in the way of external energy inputs. ‘There are 5,000 Dalit women farmers in south India who are growing not just enough for their families but also enough to participate in the local market and provide food relief to others during COVID,’ he relates. ‘They’re doing this with dryland farming, completely rain-fed, with their own seeds and no external inputs. They’re relying entirely on their own knowledge and labour.’

Another example comes from the Ladakh region of India. ‘We have two models there,’ he continues. ‘One is mega solar built by corporations, and the other is decentralised passive and active solar. Ladakh has over 300 days of sunlight in a year. By constructing buildings with a blend of traditional and new technology, you can trap the sunlight during the day and it warms you without artificial heating even when it’s minus 20 degrees at night.’

Farley similarly identifies the commons as a key element of any socially just transition. That includes a ‘green knowledge commons’, which shares knowledge transnationally, as well as a social media commons where

the algorithms encourage people to focus on ecological limits and social justice rather than on buying more stuff and the polarising images and language that facilitate that commerce. And it would include an atmospheric commons that asserts that no one owns the atmosphere.

Dorothy Guerrero puts ownership at the top of the list of factors to consider. ‘Any conversation that doesn’t put nationalisation on the table would mean leaving the terms of transition to fossil fuel executives,’ she notes. ‘Acknowledging that we can’t do this transition overnight, we have to discuss what we do with existing fossil fuel. First, we take control of it. If states don’t own these resources, they can’t control them or design a programme of transition involving them. I don’t disregard totally the small, the independent, because they have roles to play. But when you talk about transition, it has to be at a certain scale, at a national level, and there should be national ownership. Yes, small is beautiful but big is beautiful too because that is how we control geopolitics.’

Nationalisation implies a focus on the national or state level. ‘I often say that one weakness of the left is that we’re so good at being in opposition, but it is so difficult when it comes to us governing,’ notes Guerrero. ‘There are many discussions in Latin America now with Colombia, Bolivia, Chile and hopefully Brazil: will it be the pink tide again and will there be more red in the pink? What were the economic problems that weren’t addressed before? Politically it was a success. But even the radical governments didn’t make very radical changes in the economic realm, because they were also scared of being crushed – and they would be crushed by the United States not wanting them to succeed.’

National control applies equally to renewable energy. ‘We have to ask what this energy is for,’ she says. ‘We need to clarify who will build it up, where and

for what purpose. There is also a threat that fossil fuel companies are portraying themselves as key players in renewable energy buildup but they are not actually investing in the development of renewable energy.' Meanwhile, the countries that are already investing in the infrastructure of renewable energy will control this technology through patent protections. 'This debate will determine which countries will dominate and which countries will be excluded,' she continues. 'The United States, China and Germany are competing to see who will dominate the renewable energy sector. But Haiti and Bangladesh won't be players.'

For climate justice movements and those pushing against fossil fuels, 'we need to increase solidarity with mineral-producing countries', she continues. 'OPEC is an important example that we need to look at. At the same time, we have to avoid weakening the labour movements in those countries. We need solidarity in both political and economic terms. During a transition, someone will pay, and it's usually those without voice or bargaining power.'

Implementing change at a local, national and global level will not be easy. For one, powerful forces benefit from the current status quo. 'It's not enough to wish and work for alternatives but to be aware that the stronger the alternatives, the greater the forces against them,' Dorothy Guerrero warns.

Another challenge is the time frame. Serious decarbonisation should have started decades ago. 'If scientists tell us that we have only 10 years left to reverse the climate crisis, we can't transform the situation in 10 years,' says Kothari. 'We're talking about a multigenerational transformation. We're dealing with structural forces that have been around in some cases for thousands of years like patriarchy or hundreds of years like capitalism. To say that we need to do this in a single generation is unrealistic.'

Truth and reconciliation

When Pope Francis visited the Nunavut region of Canada in July, he apologised to the indigenous community for the role played by the Catholic Church in Europe's colonisation of the country and the forced assimilation of native peoples. Some responded that that apology has not been matched by action. But in Manitoba, the Pope received a very visible token of appreciation: a headdress that he wore during the event.

'This stunning image of Pope Francis wearing an indigenous headdress placed on his head by the representatives of a consortium of indigenous chiefs of Canada was a ritualistic act and very symbolic,' says Katharine Nora Farrell. 'We have to deal with reconciliation and peace and apology, as well as embarrassment and shame for all the horrible things that have been done.'

'It's not just about the Pope but about these incredible indigenous leaders,' she continues. 'They're saying, "You came here in good faith to apologise and we're not going to rub your face in it. Instead, we're going to say you're just like us and we're going to do this in the most majestic and symbolic way by giving you this headdress. You can't wear this headdress unless you have earned it." By placing it on his head, they said that he had earned their respect.'

The crimes of colonialism and forced assimilation also have had an ecological dimension since the land of indigenous peoples was often stolen for precisely the kind of polluting industry responsible for the huge uptick in carbon emissions during the Industrial Revolution. Indeed, the Global North bears the lion's share of the responsibility for all the carbon emissions currently in the atmosphere.

'Climate reparations are at the centre of the climate justice struggle,' Dorothy Guerrero says. 'We need to highlight the need to create historically informed approaches that confront

colonialism and imperialism and the climate crisis simultaneously. That's gaining traction in the UK among young people who see the role of the UK in extracting resources from countries and impoverishing those countries by doing so.'

Such reparations can be understood as not only an apology for past actions but also a concrete effort to repair the harm done. What the Pope attempted in Canada is taking a different form in Colombia where Gustavo Petro and Francia Marquez recently took over as leaders. 'Marquez, the vice president, is [a] winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize,' Farrell says, referring to a picture of Marquez. 'She's angry in this photo and she's right to be angry. And the people of the Choco region, with a large Afro-Colombian population, are also right to be angry. It's a mega-biodiverse region with a lot of violence inhabited mostly by poor people. Marquez appealed to these voters in the last days of the election and many people think that's what swung the election. She said, "if you're a nobody, vote for me, because I'm a nobody. This will be a government of the nobodies." She and Petro have put together an incredible coalition of individuals in the new government with plans to introduce agricultural tax reform and manage the resource economy.'

'We need to recognise that economic processes are anthropogenic,' Farrell continues. 'We have to link ecological economics to moral theories connected to questions of responsibility. These issues motivate activists to get involved. Look at the indignation in Greta Thunberg's arguments. Someone has to answer for what has happened. Only then can we get involved in fixing it. The damage done has been brutal. Until we as a global community comprehend this great tragedy, I don't think we'll be able to pick up and move beyond this.' ♦

John Feffer is the director of Foreign Policy In Focus (FPF), from whose website (fpf.org) this article is reproduced. The article is part of FPF's Global Just Transition project (fpf.org/global-just-transition).

Getting out of the food-energy-climate crisis

High food prices. Soaring energy costs. Runaway climate change. One common element linking these adverse phenomena: corporate power.

GRAIN

'Memo to the media: Please don't say inflation is at a 40-year high without also mentioning that corporate profits are at a 70-year high. Give the people the full picture.'

— Robert Reich, former US Secretary of Labour¹

ON 11 October 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s head of research, Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, warned that today's high energy prices were not going away any time soon. The 'energy crisis', he cautioned, 'is not a transitory shock'. The same could be said for what he called the 'food crisis'. As Gourinchas noted, today's high prices for energy and food are intimately linked.² But they are also intensely connected to how corporations exercise control over consumers, decision-makers and workers, and the ensuing destabilisation of our climate. Finding a way out of this 'polycrisis' requires a deep transformation in how energy and food are produced and distributed, with actions that challenge corporate control head on.

A fossil fuels diet

The food system accounts for around a third of the world's total energy demand.³ So any upswing in energy prices has an impact on food prices, even though it can take some time for that impact to occur. This is especially true of fossil fuels. The industrial food system is more



The East African oil pipeline being built by French energy giant Total in Uganda and Tanzania is mainly to serve Europe.

addicted to fossil fuels as an energy source than other sectors, with little involvement of renewable sources.⁴ Much of this dependency is due to the massive amounts of natural gas needed to produce nitrogen fertilisers. Fossil fuels are also used widely in crop cultivation and food processing, packing, transport and retailing.

But the food and energy picture varies greatly around the world. The large-scale, mechanised farms that dominate Europe, North America and parts of Latin America use vastly more energy than small farms in the Global South. Farms in the Global North use roughly 2.5 times the amount of energy to produce a tonne of cereals than farms in the Global South, and more than three times the energy per hectare. The disparity is even larger when looked at in terms of farmers. On a per-worker basis, a farm in the Global North uses 33 times the energy of a farm in the Global South.⁵

There is also variation when it

comes to farming systems. Studies show that organic farming is more energy-efficient than industrial farming. One recent comparison of organic versus conventional rice farming by colleagues in the Philippines found organic farming to be 63% more energy-efficient, while producing equal yields.⁶

These differences help to explain why the heavily industrialised US food system consumes as much energy as India's total energy budget or the entire energy budget of all African nations combined.⁷

Hungry for energy

Europe's food system is equally reliant on fossil fuels as that of the US. Over a quarter of all the energy consumed in Europe goes into the cultivation, processing, packing and retailing of food.⁸ Without cheap, abundant access to fossil fuels, Europe's food system would be in serious trouble.

This is why the war in Ukraine is such a disaster for Europe's industrial food system. Without cheap natural gas, European food companies cannot run their processing plants, nitrogen fertiliser factories have to shut down, and greenhouses cannot keep the lights on. This winter many European households will have to choose between heating or eating, as prices for both are rising too high and real wage growth is not keeping up. Experts predict the situation will only worsen next year.

This should be a moment for European powers and citizens to rethink their outsized energy consumption and reliance on a model of food production that is overly dependent on fossil fuels. Instead, the continent's corporations and governments have their eyes on an overseas energy grab – with scant consideration for the people living in those countries or our climate. There's a boom in energy projects that involve drilling, building ports, signing purchase agreements and making other investments across Africa and Asia, for example. The European Union has committed €50 billion to fossil fuels since the war broke out earlier this year, most of it to be able to import new, non-Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) from countries like the US, Qatar, Senegal, Algeria, Egypt, Congo, Mozambique and Tanzania.⁹ The East African oil pipeline being built by French energy giant Total in Uganda and Tanzania is mainly to serve Europe. The EU is even deploying massive funds to beef up security services in Mozambique to protect its gas interests there.¹⁰ These are not one-off blips that will stop when the war in Ukraine comes to an end. There are 20 new long-term LNG terminals being planned in Europe right now.¹¹

Europe is taking energy supplies from countries in Asia as well. It is buying up Indonesia's coal and Malaysia's LNG resources, driving up energy prices for local communities there. Similarly,

communities in Pakistan and Bangladesh have been suffering blackouts due to gas supplies being diverted to Europe.

All of this spells disaster for a world already heading for a 2.5°C increase in temperatures by 2100. More fossil fuel production will deepen the climate crisis, which will put further stress on global food production. Already, the increase in global temperatures is wreaking havoc on food production through droughts, floods and storms and scorching temperatures that make it unbearable for farmworkers to work in open fields. We cannot solve the energy crisis or the food crisis with measures that worsen the climate crisis; all three crises are deeply connected and overlapping.

Paths out of the polycrisis

There have been open protests against fuel and food prices in over 90 countries this year.¹² Huge mobilisations, sometimes aimed at the highest seats of power, have filled the streets in major cities of Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Ecuador and, most recently, Ghana. In many countries, the costs of medicine, housing and other necessities are being equally painfully felt.

People are now talking about 'polycrisis' to describe the growing anxiety, dishevelment and destruction that this is leading to. And while it is triggering many new forms of social activism, it is also making clear that drastic structural change is needed.

For one, people are realising that corporate power is playing a big role in the surge in prices of daily necessities. It is widely recognised today that companies are taking advantage of the general inflationary time we are in to increase their margins and raise prices above and beyond what's needed to cover their own costs.¹³ In the US, experts say that while corporate profits accounted for 11% of price increases there in the 40-year period spanning 1979-2019, today they

account for a massive 53.9%.¹⁴ This is playing out quite notably in the food sector, including supermarket chains and restaurants. In Canada, the government is launching an official investigation into this, while in Europe and Australia business leaders themselves and media are reporting unjustified price hikes.¹⁵

Countries are increasingly talking about moving to tax windfall profits or super profits, and actually implementing measures on this. This is being targeted not just at energy companies, who are making a killing off the supply restrictions created by the war in Ukraine, but at banks, agribusiness conglomerates and food retail chains themselves. The ongoing announcements of exorbitant profit figures coming from these corporations – including food and agriculture giants like Nestlé, ADM or Mosaic – make new taxation strategies more than justified. Another approach being talked about to curb inflation and better distribute resources is a one-off wealth tax.¹⁶

Price caps, for both energy and food, are another measure being taken as a short-term move to protect the majority of people who can't foot the bills. Longer term, people are actively talking about wresting much more public control over these two sectors, such as through municipalisation or new forms of cooperatives.

Many of the most interesting actions being discussed and implemented today are about shifting social control of energy and food production and distribution to more collective ownership or governance. In some countries, for instance, groups are talking about extending social security systems – which provide public healthcare and retirement pensions – to food.¹⁷ The idea is that salaried workers would see monthly contributions deducted from their wages while all citizens would receive an equal amount of money to spend regularly on food. (Which foods are eligible, and therefore what kind of farmers

are supported, would be determined through local decision-making.)

Another key issue that people are acting on now is making energy conservation a top priority – and *not* creating conditions for more cheap consumption or the status quo. Retrofitting housing is a top social demand in many countries, to make homes energy-efficient against heat and/or cold. This is widely seen as an effective approach that would uplift people's living conditions and create a lot of local jobs. Similarly, in the food sector, people are focusing on significant cuts in food waste, which is not only energy-intensive to produce but currently causes 8% of global climate emissions.¹⁸ People are also recognising that we have to scale back consumption where this makes sense (meat, dairy, ultra-processed foods and excess) while investing more in decentralised community-led food models (where producers, vendors and consumers cooperate).

These are all very promising changes that we can fight for together. We clearly need to shut down the fossil fuel industry and win public support for more collective and localised food systems. This means supporting small-scale producers and local markets while dismantling the power and profits of the corporate food chain. ♦

GRAIN is a small international non-profit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. This article is reproduced from its website grain.org.

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Armed conflict and climate change: How these two threats play out

Not only is climate change a potential driver of conflict, but violent conflict also worsens vulnerability to the impacts of climate shifts, in what could produce a vicious circle of destruction.

Halvard Buhaug

THE world is falling miserably short of reducing carbon emissions in line with the Paris Agreement, a 2015 treaty to keep global warming well below 2°C.

The results of this failure are a greater increase in the prevalence and severity of extreme weather events, more rapid sea-level rises and an elevated risk of triggering irreversible climate tipping points, like the collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheet or the loss of the Amazon rainforest.

The speed and magnitude of these changes have immediate consequences for ecosystem health and biodiversity. Further, sustained climate change threatens fundamental dimensions of human well-being.

There are also frequent claims about looming ‘climate wars’. These depict a chaotic world with unsustainable mass migrations, devastating weather-related disasters and violent clashes for survival in an era of rapidly diminishing resources.

However, the link between climate change and conflict is weak when compared with the main drivers of conflict, notably poverty, inequality and weak governance.

Instead, violent conflict in the context of a warming planet plays another and far more prominent role: it’s a critical driver of vulnerability, which makes adverse impacts from weather extremes more likely and more severe. In other words, violent conflict weakens communities and



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The consequence of the war in Ukraine on the food crisis in developing countries is evidence that armed conflict can affect social vulnerability and human security at a global scale.

countries so that they are not in a position to adapt to the changing world around them.

Although it may be possible to maintain peace without successful climate adaptation, successful climate adaptation is impossible in the absence of peace.

How climate change affects conflict

Climate change is commonly framed as a risk multiplier that worsens conditions known to increase conflict risk, such as poverty and inequality.

Research shows that adverse climate conditions may lead to more support for violence. These conditions can also contribute to escalating or prolonging conflict. This is particularly the case in

places marked by climate-sensitive economic activities, political marginalisation and a history of violence.

Typical hotspots of such dynamics are found in the Sahel and rural East Africa. However, the true role of climate change in causing conflict in these settings remains disputed. How climate shapes peace and security depends on how societies respond to climate change.

In a recent journal article, my colleague and I outline several potential ways climate policy can be linked to drivers of conflict. These could, for example, be by way of addressing energy insecurity, financial vulnerabilities from altered tourism patterns or loss of oil revenues, and land-use competition related to environmental conservation projects.

These links have attracted little systematic study to date and remain a key priority for future research.

How conflict affects climate risk

The link from climate to conflict seems to be modest. But the reverse – from conflict to climate vulnerability – is very strong.

Armed conflict ruins economic activity and livelihoods. It threatens food security, obstructs markets and public goods provision, damages critical infrastructure and triggers forced displacement. All of these erode local capacity to cope and adapt to environmental hazards.

Put simply, armed conflict is development in reverse. The consequence of the war in Ukraine on the food crisis in developing countries today is evidence that armed conflict can affect social vulnerability and human security at a global scale.

Given the devastating effect of conflict on coping capacity, it's extremely worrying that violent conflict is on the rise in Africa. The continent is already judged to be the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Conflict, alongside the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, has also been identified as a major cause of recent reversals

in sustainable development. The most severe humanitarian crises today are all found in countries suffering from major conflicts and wars.

A vicious circle

Each of the processes outlined above challenges sustainable development:

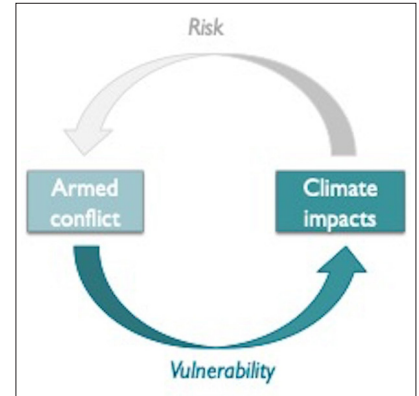
- violent conflict deters long-term growth and ruins local capacity to manage climate-driven risks
- climate impacts threaten human security in vulnerable societies, thereby increasing conflict risk.

Together, they may result in a vicious circle of destructive effects (see illustration).

The solution is peace

The ways in which climate change and extreme weather events challenge peace and security are widely acknowledged and increasingly well understood. This is why the likes of the UN's Climate Security Mechanism exist. The UN Development Programme also plans to 'climate-proof' peacekeeping and stability in regions that have experienced conflict.

Climate security has additionally been the subject of nine



Halvard Buhaug

open debates at the UN Security Council since 2007, seven of which have been held in the past four years.

Successful climate adaptation allows for sustainable development and has important benefits for peace. However, it should not replace traditional conflict resolution and peacebuilding programmes. And it is important to be aware of the dark sides of environmental peacebuilding.

Less attention has been paid to 'conflict-proofing' climate adaptation programming. Instead, adaptation plans often assume peaceful settings and fail to consider political contexts that may underpin local conflicts and be a major source of vulnerability.

Yet, without peace on the ground, actions to address climate risks will be restrained, ineffective and possibly counterproductive.

From this follows a key insight: in violent contexts, peacebuilding should be seen as the first and most crucial step towards addressing complex climate risks.

Resolving conflict is no replacement for effective climate adaptation. But climate action without a safe environment with functioning governance structures is unlikely to solve structural sources of vulnerability. As has been said elsewhere: no peace, no sustainable development. ♦

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Climate impacts threaten human security in vulnerable societies, thereby increasing conflict risk.

How to survive us

Yesterday, today and tomorrow on a broiling planet

Amid a looming nuclear threat and potential climate catastrophe, an American peace activist ponders what it might take to make it through this crisis-ridden age.

Frida Berrigan

WHEN I was growing up, there was a parody of an old-fashioned public announcement tacked to the wall of our kitchen that I vividly remember. It had step-by-step instructions for what to do 'in case of a nuclear bomb attack'. Step 6 was 'bend over and place your head firmly between your legs'; step 7, 'kiss your ass goodbye'.

That shouldn't be surprising, since my parents, Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAlister, once-upon-a-time priest and nun, were well-known antinuclear activists. I was too young to be a part of the 'duck-and-cover generation' who, at school, practised hiding from a nuclear attack beneath their desks or heading for local bomb shelters in the basements of churches and town halls.

Born in 1974, I think of myself as a member of *The Day After* generation, who were instructed to watch that remarkably popular made-for-TV movie in 1983 and report on our observations and feelings. Dramatising the life of people in a small town in Kansas after a full-scale nuclear war between the Soviet Union and the United States, it made a strong (if perhaps unintentional) case that dying in the initial blast would have been better than surviving and facing the nuclear winter and over-armed chaos that followed.

In this Ukraine War era, maybe we could label today's kids as the Generation Fed Up With Grown Ups (Gen Fed Up). The members of Gen Z are 'digital natives', born with smartphones in their hands and instantly able to spot all the messy seams in, and agendas behind, poorly produced, uninformative



Kelly Michals (CC BY-NC 2.0)

Nuclear missiles on display at the National Museum of the US Air Force. '... 77 years of nuclear brinkmanship and impending doom has taken its global toll ...'

Public Service Announcements like the New York City Emergency Management department's much-pilloried recent PSA about what to do in case of – yep, you guessed it! – a nuclear attack: get inside, stay inside and stay tuned. (Sounds pretty close to the poster on my wall growing up, doesn't it?)

Young people need real information and analysis, survival skills and resources. Generation Z and the younger Generation Alpha (I have some of both in my family) are growing up in a world torn apart by the selfishness and short-sightedness of earlier generations, including the impact of the never-ending production and 'modernisation' of nuclear weapons, not to speak of the climate upheaval gripping this planet and all the horrors that go with it, including sea level rise, megadrought, flooding, mass migration, starvation, and on and on and on...

Jornado Del Muerto

The nuclear age began during World War II with the 16 July 1945 test of a six-kilogramme plutonium

weapon codenamed Trinity in the Jornada Del Muerto Valley in New Mexico. No one bothered to tell the estimated 38,000 people who lived within 60 miles of that atomic test that it was about to take place or that there might be dangerous nuclear fallout following the blast. No one was evacuated. The area, whose Spanish name in translation means, appropriately enough, Journey of Death, was rich in indigenous culture and life, home to 19 American Indian pueblos, two Apache tribes and some chapters of the Navajo Nation. Though hardly remembered today, they were the first nuclear casualties of our age.

That initial test was quickly evaluated as successful and, less than a month later, American war planners considered themselves ready for the ultimate 'tests' – the atomic bombing of two Japanese cities, Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki three days later. The initial blasts from those back-to-back bombs killed hundreds of thousands of people on the spot and immediately thereafter, and countless more from radiation

sickness and cancer.

Fat Man and Little Boy, as those bombs were bizarrely codenamed, should have signalled the end of nuclear war, even of all war. The incineration of so many civilians and the levelling of two major cities should have been motivation enough to put the cork in the deadly power of the atom and consign nuclear weapons to some museum of horrors alongside the guillotine, the rack and other past devices of obscene torture.

But it would prove to be just the beginning of an arms race and a cheapening of life that goes on to this day. After all, the United States continues to ‘modernise’ its nuclear arsenal to the tune of trillions of dollars, while Vladimir Putin has threatened to use one or more of his vast store of ‘tactical’ nukes, and the Chinese are rushing to catch up. I keep thinking about how 77 years of nuclear brinkmanship and impending doom has taken its global toll, even while making life more precarious and helping render this beautiful and complex planet a garbage can for forever radioactive waste. (Okay, okay, hyperbole alert... it’s not forever, just literally a million years.)

Some among the duck-and-cover generation feared that they wouldn’t live to see adulthood, that there would be no tomorrow. Not surprisingly, too many of them, when they grew up, came to treat the planet as if there indeed were no tomorrow. And you can see evidence of just that attitude any time you consider the ‘prosperity’ of the second industrial revolution with its toxic sludge of fossil fuels, PCBs, asbestos, lead in paint and gas, and so many plastics. This polluting of our ground, water and air was all, I suspect, spurred on by a nihilistic nuclearism.

It seems impossible to work so hard to shift from burning carbon to capturing solar or wind power if there’s a chance that it could all go up in a mushroom cloud tomorrow. But there have been some notable

efforts from which to draw hope and inspiration as we keep living out those very tomorrows. As environmentalist and futurist Bill McKibben writes in his memoir *The Flag, the Cross and the Station Wagon: A Graying American Looks Back on His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What the Hell Happened*, President Jimmy Carter tried to guide this country to a less carbon-dependent future – and it cost him the presidency. The Carter White House sought to mitigate the damage of the 1979 oil crisis with significant investments in solar power and other green technologies and cutting-edge conservation. Had such policies been allowed to take hold, as McKibben points out, ‘climate changes would have turned from an existential crisis to a manageable problem on a list of other problems’.

Can you imagine? We love Carter now for his folksy accessibility, moral stamina and promotion of affordable housing through Habitat for Humanity, but as we doom-scroll the latest news about present and future climate catastrophes, we have to reach back through time to even imagine a healthier tomorrow. Sadly enough, with Carter, we might have been near a turning point, we might have had a chance... and then actor (and huckster) Ronald Reagan rode his 10-gallon cowboy hat into the White House, removed the rooftop solar panels the Carters had installed, instituted tax cuts for the very wealthy, and loosened regulations on every type of polluter. President Reagan did that in 1986, only a year or so after the last month of our era that the planet was cooler than average.

Tomorrow

1986 seems like just yesterday! Now what? How about tomorrow?

After all, here we are in 2022 about to hit eight billion strong on this planet of ours. And there is, of course, a tomorrow. Hotter and drier

but dawning all the same. Wetter and windier but coming anyway.

I have three kids, ages 8, 10 and 15, and they anchor me in a troubling and strange, if still ultimately beautiful, reality. This world, however finite with its increasingly overwhelming problems, is still precious to me and worth a good fight. I can’t turn away from tomorrow. It’s not an abstraction. The headlines now seem to endlessly scream: we are at a potential tipping point in terms of the climate. Did I say *a* potential tipping point? I meant to make that plural. In fact, an article in the 8 September issue of *The Guardian* lists 16 of them in all. Sixteen! Imagine that!

Three of the biggest ones that climate scientists agree we’re close to tipping over are:

1. The collapse of Greenland’s ice cap, which will produce a huge rise in global sea levels.

2. The collapse of a key current in the north Atlantic Ocean, which will further disrupt rainfall and weather patterns throughout the world, severely curtailing global food production.

3. The melting of the Arctic’s carbon-rich permafrost, releasing staggering amounts of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere and so further broiling this planet. (Will it freeze again if we do the right thing? Not likely, as it seems as if that tipping point has already tipped.)

In the face of all of this, in the age of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Elon Musk and the rest of the crew, how do you change political or corporate behaviour to slow, if not reverse, global warming? More than three-quarters of a century of uncertain tomorrows has made the human race – particularly, of course, those in the developed/industrialised world – awful stewards of the future.

‘So when we need collective action at the global level, probably more than ever since the second world war, to keep the planet stable,

we have an all-time low in terms of our ability to collectively act together. Time is really running out very, very fast.’ So said Johan Rockström, a scientist with the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany. As he added tellingly, speaking of the global warming ceiling set at the Paris climate accords in 2015 (and already considered out of date in the latest devastating United Nations report), ‘I must say, in my professional life as a climate scientist, this is a low point. The window for 1.5C is shutting as I speak, so it’s really tough.’

Dire predictions, reams of science, sober calls to act from climatologists and activists, not to speak of island and coastal communities already being displaced by a fast-warming world. Only recently, two young people from the climate movement Last Generation threw mashed potatoes at the glass covering a classic Claude Monet painting in a museum near Berlin in a bid to get attention, while activists from Just Stop Oil used tomato soup on the glass of Vincent Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* in London in October. In neither case were the paintings themselves harmed; in both cases, they have my attention, for what that’s worth.

For striking numbers of climate refugees globally, the point has already tipped and, given their situations, they might like to have some tomato soup and mashed potatoes – to eat rather than to be flung as protest props. In the longer term, for their children and grandchildren, they need masses of people in the biggest greenhouse gas polluters – China and the United States top the list – to radically alter their lifestyles to help protect what’s left of this distinctly finite planet of ours.

Yesterday

Thomas Berrigan, my grandfather, was born in 1879. My grandmother Frida was born

in 1886. While they missed the pre-industrial era by more than 100 years, their early lives in the United States were almost carbon-free. They hauled water, chopped wood, and largely ate from a meagre garden. As poor people, their carbon footprint remained remarkably small, even as the pace and pollution of life in the United States and the industrialised West picked up.

My father, Philip Berrigan, born in 1923, was the youngest of six brothers. There could have been two more generations of Berrigans between his birth and mine in 1974, but there weren’t. I could have been a grandmother when I gave birth to my last child in 2014, but I wasn’t. So, in our own way, whether we meant to or not, we slowed down the march of generations and I’m grateful for the long perspective that gives me.

In her later years, my grandmother marvelled at the ways in which a car could bring her back and forth to the city ‘all in one day’. More recently, her great-grandchildren have found that they could still go to school (after a fashion) thanks to computers during the Covid pandemic, communicating in real time with teachers and classmates scattered elsewhere in our world.

It’s not likely that I’ll live until 2079, my grandfather’s 200th birthday, but his great-granddaughter, my daughter Madeline, will just be turning 65 then. If she has my mother’s longevity, she’ll be 86 when we hit the year 2100. That is the grim milestone (tombstone?) when climate scientists expect that we could reach a disastrous global average temperature of 2.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Unless. Unless something is done, many somethings are done, to reverse greenhouse gas emissions. Otherwise, that spells disaster beyond measure for my children’s children.

When I look at old photos, I see my own face in my mother’s hollowed-out, age-spotted cheeks.

And when I look at my daughter’s still chubby cheeks and the way her eyebrows arch, I see my own younger face (and that of my mother, too).

As far as I’m concerned, the year 2100 is my future, even though I won’t be here to struggle through it with my children and their children. In the meantime, we keep putting one foot in front of the other (walking is better for the environment anyway) and struggling somehow to deal with this beautiful, broken world of ours. One generation cedes to the next, doing its best to impart wisdom and offer lessons without really knowing what tools those who follow us will need to carve a better tomorrow out of a worsening today.

To go back to the beginning, while such a thing is still possible, if nuclear weapons, the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, fossil fuels and apocalyptic fear helped get us to this breaking point, we need something truly different now. We need not war, but peace; not new nukes, but next-generation-level diplomacy; not fossil fuels, but the greenest of powers imaginable. We need a world that Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Elon Musk and their ilk can’t even imagine, a world where their kind of power is neither needed nor celebrated.

We need gratitude, humility, and awe at the deep web of interconnection that undergirds the whole of nature. We need curiosity, joy in discovery, and celebration. And our kids (that Gen Fed Up) can help us access those powers, because they’re inherent in all children. So, no more ducking and covering, no more *Day After*, no more staying inside. Let us learn from Generation Z and Generation Alpha and change – and maybe survive. ♦

Frida Berrigan is the author of It Runs in the Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood. She is a regular contributor to TomDispatch (tomdispatch.com), where this article first appeared. She also writes the ‘Little Insurrections’ column for WagingNonviolence.org. She has three children and lives in New London, Connecticut, USA, where she is a gardener and community organiser.

Agent Orange in Vietnam: Lingering pain and injustice

Over 60 years on, the devastating legacy of Agent Orange in Vietnam persists.

Phan Xuan Dung

MOST Vietnamese have put the Vietnam War behind them. But leaving the past behind does not mean forgetting it. As Madam Ton Nu Thi Ninh, a veteran Vietnamese diplomat actively engaged in US-Vietnam reconciliation, once said, 'On post-war matters, pain and justice must never be forgotten.' What Madam Ninh specifically alluded to was the consequences of Agent Orange, the most visible and obstinate legacy of the war between Vietnam and the United States.

In 1961, as part of the Vietnam War, the US launched a 10-year aerial campaign called Operation Ranch Hand that aimed to strategically deny North Vietnamese forces vegetation and forest cover. By the time the operation ended in 1971, approximately 75 million litres of herbicides had been sprayed over nearly 15% of Vietnam's territory. A total of six defoliants were deployed, and four of them – Agent Orange, Pink, Green and Purple – contained dioxin – the most toxic substance known to humanity. Since Agent Orange was the most extensively sprayed herbicide (45.6 million litres), it has become associated with the legacy of US herbicidal warfare in Vietnam.

Decades after the spraying stopped, Agent Orange continues to inflict pain on presumably millions of people. Those directly exposed to dioxin might contract chronic ailments such as cancer and diabetes, while their descendants have a high chance of suffering from severe disabilities. Vietnam claims 4.8 million victims, 3 million of whom are debilitated by the health effects



Professor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Phuong at Tu Du Obstetrics and Gynaecology Hospital in Ho Chi Minh City with a group of disabled children, most of them victims of Agent Orange.

of Agent Orange. There are now up to four generations of victims in Vietnam, and for all we know, the inter-generational transmission of effects will continue. Hundreds of thousands of American, South Korean, Australian and New Zealand veterans and their children also experience health conditions linked to dioxin exposure.

For many years after the war ended, Agent Orange was a source of contention in US-Vietnam relations, even after the two former enemies normalised their ties in 1995. Deadlocks and disagreements persisted well into the early 2000s. Washington denied causality between dioxin and birth defects and refused to take responsibility, while Hanoi insisted on the largest number of victims possible.

Breakthroughs finally occurred around 2006-07, following activism and initiatives by state and non-state actors. In 2007, the US Congress approved the first annual funding for dioxin remediation in Vietnam.

Separate funds for health and disability programmes were first appropriated in 2011, starting at \$3 million but increasing over time. Since then, the United States has provided around \$139 million to address the health effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam.

The State Department tasked the US Agency for International Development (USAID) with administering the earmarked funds. In 2019, USAID and Vietnam's Ministry of Defence signed a five-year memorandum that commits \$65 million to assist people with disabilities in eight priority provinces. In July this year, the US Senate Appropriations Committee released its appropriations bill for fiscal year 2023, which provides \$30 million 'to assist persons with severe physical mobility, cognitive, or developmental disabilities' that 'may be related to the use of Agent Orange and exposure to dioxin, or are the result of unexploded ordnance accidents'.

The US has accepted



A US Air Force plane spraying Agent Orange onto forests in Vietnam, circa 1969.

Jediozzi (CC BY-SA 4.0)

responsibility in practice, but there has not been any formal acknowledgment of wrongdoing. To be sure, there is now a growing acceptance in Washington that Americans have a 'moral obligation' to help Vietnamese Agent Orange victims. At the same time, the official position remains that herbicides deployed in the Vietnam War did not constitute chemical weapons, legally defined as any toxic chemical intended to inflict death or harm.

But many have long viewed the use of Agent Orange as illegal chemical warfare. In March 2022, the Facebook page of the US Embassy in Hanoi insinuated that, unlike Russia, the US has never deployed chemical weapons. Vietnamese netizens quickly rebuked this claim as hypocrisy. In fact, the toxicity of Agent Orange is taken for granted in Vietnam. The universal term used to refer to the herbicide is *chat doc da cam* (orange-coloured poison), not the direct translation, *chat da cam* (Agent Orange). Terms like 'toxic chemicals' or 'toxic chemical consequences' are commonly used in Vietnam's official discourse on the issue.

Vietnamese are not alone in suggesting that the impact of Agent Orange is akin to chemical weapons. In 1967, around 5,000 American scientists signed a petition to protest what they called the US use of 'chemical and biological weapons' in Vietnam. A few years later, Professor Arthur Galston of Yale University promoted the term 'ecocide' to highlight the US' wilful act of destroying Vietnamese ecosystems, which would eventually

engender human suffering. The term has since been used by activists and victims' supporters to hold the US accountable for Agent Orange use in Vietnam. Most notably, in May 2009, the International People's Tribunal of Conscience in Support of Vietnamese Victims of Agent Orange found that the US was guilty of ecocide and, therefore, must compensate Vietnamese victims.

For Vietnamese-French Tran To Nga, Agent Orange producers are the true perpetrators. She was exposed to dioxin while working as a war correspondent in 1966 and later suffered from its harmful health effects. In 1968, she lost her first daughter to a dioxin-related disease, a tragic event for which she blamed herself for decades.

Nga's pain set her on the path of advocacy for other Vietnamese Agent Orange victims. She was a witness at the 2009 international people's tribunal. In 2014, at the age of 72, Nga filed a lawsuit in France against Agent Orange producers for causing her plight and that of millions of other Vietnamese. Her lawyers alleged that these companies knew about the dangers of their product but kept quiet about it to generate more profit.

Even though the court rejected Nga's claim in May 2021, she remains resolute in the 'last battle of her life' and has appealed the ruling. Nga believes that it is her duty to stand up for the victims; otherwise, the Agent Orange tragedy will remain on the backburner. Moreover, she hopes her trial will create a precedent and promote international recognition of ecocide. Her activism has garnered

a wave of transnational solidarity, especially in Europe, where there is a growing movement to make ecocide the fifth international crime. Despite its ties with the US, the Vietnamese government has also pledged to support Nga and other Agent Orange victims in the quest for justice.

Nga's supporters have mentioned the US' differential treatment of American and Vietnamese victims. Prior to Nga's legal actions, the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange launched a class-action lawsuit in a US court in 2004, but their claim was also dismissed. As such, Agent Orange producers have been able to deny responsibility for the dioxin-related environmental and health effects in Vietnam. Yet, in 1984, they paid \$180 million in settlement to American veterans and families who claimed that Agent Orange harmed them. Critics are also frustrated that the US government dispenses billions of dollars annually to compensate dioxin-affected American veterans but is not doing nearly enough for Vietnamese victims.

Central to Nga's movement are the calls for acknowledgment and restoration of the victims' dignity. It is not hatred that motivates Vietnamese victims like Nga to raise their voices. It is personal and collective grievances, as well as the perception of unfair treatment. Therefore, in the absence of legal justice, future reconciliation on this issue will need to focus on reparative justice – measures which seek to 'secure victims' sense of dignity and moral worth in ways that are compatible with social justice and equality'. This requires greater direct assistance and symbolic gestures by the US government and chemical companies to ease lingering pain and injustice. ♦

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Plurilateral negotiations, WTO reform and other initiatives: Further marginalising the developing countries at the WTO

Countries of the Global South are already in a disadvantaged position in the multilateral regime governing international trade. New proposals being pushed by the developed countries at the World Trade Organisation could further tilt the odds against them.

Abhijit Das

1. Introduction

FOR the past 75 years, the multilateral trading system, as embodied initially in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and subsequently the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has provided the overarching framework of rules for the conduct of international trade among its members. The agreements at the GATT/WTO have substantially curtailed the flexibility available to developing countries to pursue development-oriented policies in many areas including agriculture and manufacturing. At a time when the world is grappling with multiple crises – food, energy and climate change, to name a few – fresh attempts are being made at the WTO that could compel the developing countries to become further subservient to the developed countries. As these initiatives could significantly erode the economic prospects of developing countries, it is relevant to comprehend what is afoot at the WTO.

As a threshold issue, this article examines how the rules of the multilateral trading system have progressively shrunk the policy space for developing countries. In



In the manufacturing sector, GATT/WTO international trade rules have prevented countries from implementing policies to give a fillip to domestic producers.

section 3, the article discusses how the developed countries failed to deliver on the development promise contained in the Doha Work Programme of the WTO (popularly referred to as the Doha Round). After the failure of the developed countries under the Doha Round to achieve their objective of prising open the markets in developing countries, attempts are being made to curtail the special and differential treatment provisions at the WTO. This aspect is discussed in section 4. Sections 5 and 6 examine two contemporary issues – digital economy and trade-environment linkage – to highlight attempts at

negotiating rules for preserving the first-mover advantage of corporate entities in the developed countries and preventing developing countries from implementing catch-up policies in these two sunrise sectors of considerable economic promise. Section 7 examines issues related to WTO reform and discusses how the outcomes of this process could modify the institutional architecture of this organisation and further tilt it against the developing countries. Section 8 provides some broad conclusions and makes a few suggestions for developing countries.

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2. How GATT/WTO rules have shrunk the policy space for developing countries

If we take a bird's-eye view of the evolution of the multilateral trading system, two important points cannot be missed. First, the developed countries have repeatedly sought to expand the rules of the GATT/WTO to promote the commercial interests of their entities, particularly in new and emerging areas of economic activity. This is reflected in the inclusion of rules on services and intellectual property rights (IPRs) under the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations held during 1986-94, which resulted in the creation of the WTO. These were areas of economic activity of growing salience mainly to the developed countries. In line with this historical trend, in more recent times, the developed countries are seeking to negotiate rules at the WTO on two sectors of huge economic potential for the future – the digital economy and climate-friendly products. These negotiations remain to be concluded.

Second, the GATT/WTO rules have prevented most developing countries from implementing policies to catch up with the developed countries. Consequently, much of the economic gains from the new and emerging sectors have accrued to the developed countries, with the developing countries getting a minuscule share of the pie.¹ Further, even in traditional sectors, such as manufacturing, GATT/WTO rules have prevented countries from implementing policies, including mandating purchase of domestically produced inputs, to give a fillip to domestic producers. In addition, the requirement not to impose customs duties above the negotiated ceilings (technically called 'bound rates') has constrained developing countries in protecting their producers from import competition. In some cases, this has had a devastating impact on the local

economy.² In the pharmaceutical sector, the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights prohibit countries from reverse-engineering medical products, thereby raising the cost of healthcare in developing countries but protecting the windfall profits of business entities manufacturing patented products. In respect of agriculture, it is widely recognised that the Agreement on Agriculture is riddled with many asymmetries and imbalances,³ which have hurt the farmers in many developing countries. While the rules of this agreement allow considerable leeway to the developed countries to provide subsidies targeted to specific agricultural products, most developing countries cannot provide product-specific subsidies beyond 10% of the value of production of the concerned product. WTO rules also come in the way of developing countries seeking to effectively ensure food security for their poor and hungry.

Given the context mentioned above, it is not surprising that within five years of the establishment of the WTO, many developing countries started voicing strong concerns on many WTO rules. How were the concerns of developing countries addressed? The next section addresses this question.

3. Failure of the developed countries to deliver on the 'development promise' under the Doha Round

At the Doha Ministerial Conference of the WTO, held in November 2001, the developed countries pushed strongly for launching a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. However, this was strongly opposed by a large number of developing countries. Eventually, the latter group softened their resistance and agreed to the Doha Work Programme after the developed countries emphasised that that was meant

for development. To illustrate, in his plenary statement at the Doha Ministerial Conference, Pascal Lamy, the European Union (EU) Trade Commissioner, explicitly mentioned that development belongs 'right at the heart of the multilateral trading system'. Referring to the likely contribution of the Doha Round, Robert Zoellick, the US Trade Representative, stated that it would be 'the starting point for greater development, growth, opportunity, and openness throughout the world'. In fact, in the Doha Ministerial Declaration the development promise was specifically articulated in many paragraphs, including the following: 'The majority of WTO Members are developing countries. We seek to place their needs and interests at the heart of the Work Programme adopted in this Declaration.'⁴

As the negotiations under the Doha Work Programme evolved, the determination of the developed countries to address development issues, articulated so explicitly and firmly in the Doha Ministerial Declaration, considerably weakened. They thwarted proposals that were aimed at redressing some of the past imbalances in the WTO agreements and seeking development through trade. Within a few years into the Doha negotiations, the developed world did not shy away from saying that WTO negotiations are about trade and not about development. At the same time, the developed countries did not hesitate in promoting their export prospects by seeking to pry open the markets in developing countries. However, a large number of developing countries created effective coalitions, particularly in agriculture, and thwarted the moves of the developed countries.⁵

Unable to have their way at the negotiating table, the developed countries eventually abandoned the Doha Work Programme at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference held in 2015, but blamed the developing countries for the logjam

in the negotiations. After having failed to deliver on the development promise, the developed countries have started creating pathways for reordering the global trading system to achieve their mercantilist objectives. What are some of these initiatives and what could be their likely consequences for the developing countries? We address four specific initiatives in the subsequent sections.

4. Attempts at curtailing special and differential treatment in the WTO

An important element of the GATT/WTO rulebook is the following: ‘The developed contracting parties do not expect reciprocity for commitments made by them in trade negotiations to reduce or remove tariffs and other barriers to the trade of less-developed contracting parties.’⁶ Over nearly six decades, this has formed a basis for special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions and less than full reciprocity under the GATT/WTO. This has been reflected in different ways, including the following: some of the WTO obligations are less onerous for developing countries; developing countries get a longer transition period for implementing their obligations; and the possibility of developing countries receiving technical assistance for implementing their obligations. It should be noted that at the WTO the member countries have the flexibility to self-select themselves as a developing country, and benefit from S&DT provisions.

Over the past three years, the US and a few other developed countries have sought to dilute and undermine S&DT. In this context, the following assertion by the US appears particularly relevant: ‘All the rules apply to a few (the developed countries), and just some of the rules apply to most, the self-declared developing countries. The perpetuation of this construct has



New rules proposed by the developed countries could prevent developing countries from building a vibrant domestic digital economy.

severely damaged the negotiating arm of the WTO by making every negotiation a negotiation about setting high standards for a few, and allowing vast flexibilities or exemptions for the many.⁷ Thus, the objective of the developed countries is that developed and developing countries must comply with the same rules. Such a regime, based on reciprocity, will mainly benefit those who are better endowed with capital and technology. Those countries which face constraints on these two crucial elements will not be able to fully benefit from the reciprocal regime. By undermining a fundamental underpinning of the multilateral trading system – S&DT provisions – the developed countries seek to impose further constraints on the ability of developing countries to pursue development-oriented policies.

Why do the developed countries want to deprive developing countries of S&DT provisions in future negotiations, and instead make them adhere to a common framework of rules? Hard-nosed commercial interests lie at the core of the answer to this question. This is explored in the following two sections, which focus on two areas of considerable economic significance for the future.

5. Using the trade-environment linkage to promote mercantilist objectives

The climate change crisis is compelling countries to transition to a low-carbon economy. This is likely to result in a surge in demand for products required for producing renewable energy, as well as products that consume less energy. Thus, climate-friendly products (also referred to as ‘green products’) provide huge commercial prospects now, and more so in a few years. In its transition to a low-carbon economy, a country can either depend almost entirely on imported green products/technologies, or it could seek to meet at least a part of its demand from domestic sources.

The developed countries are seeking to use negotiations at the WTO to negotiate rules that would prevent developing countries from nurturing domestic production of climate-friendly products. This is sought to be achieved through multiple initiatives, including the attempt to get countries to agree to eliminate tariffs on environmental goods. As climate-friendly products are most likely to emerge in developed countries, other countries would need to use various policy instruments, including tariffs, for catching up. The attempt at the

WTO is to shut this option.

Further, in an initiative titled Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD), some WTO members have launched 'dedicated discussions on how climate-related trade measures and policies can best contribute to climate and environmental goals consistent with WTO rules and principles'.⁸ These discussions are proceeding without any mandate from the entire WTO membership, and are commonly referred to as a plurilateral initiative. If we take a cue from provisions in some of the recent free trade agreements of the developed countries, it is likely that the outcomes of the TESSD would be twofold:

(i) obligations related to liberalising trade in environmental goods and services, harmonisation of standards at stringent levels and commitment to accord non-discriminatory treatment to domestic and foreign suppliers of products relevant for renewable energy in government procurement, would curtail the ability of developing countries to create a vibrant domestic sector producing climate-friendly products; and

(ii) provide legal justification to the developed countries for erecting non-tariff barriers to exports of other countries, ostensibly for protecting the environment.

The overall impact of the likely outcomes of the various environment-related initiatives among some WTO members is clear – developing countries would become overwhelmingly dependent on imports from the developed countries of climate-friendly products and technologies. Further, the rules would facilitate the exports of the developed countries, while providing a justification to these countries for blocking imports from developing countries, which might not be able to comply with stringent environment-related conditionalities. Thus, the trade-climate linkage is sought to be

used by the developed countries to pursue mercantilist objectives.

However, the developed countries face an important hurdle in securing their mercantilist objectives. Most of the new rules being contemplated by them can be included in the WTO rulebook only after *all* WTO members agree. Those countries that have chosen to stay out of these plurilateral discussions/negotiations are unlikely to agree to the new rules. How the developed countries seek to overcome this hurdle is discussed in section 7. But before proceeding to that section, it is also relevant to discuss developments at the WTO in another sunrise sector – the digital economy.

6. Seeking to lock out developing countries from economic benefits from the digital economy

The digital sector is set to be one of the main drivers of economic growth in the future. Given the ecosystem required for creating new digital products, it is a reality that most of these will emerge in developed countries. It is also true that behind every successful digital product lies access to a huge trove of digital data. This can be an area of comparative advantage for developing countries, who are some of the largest sources of data. By using suitable policy initiatives, they can leverage their data advantage to create jobs and generate incomes from the digital economy.

However, the developed countries are seeking to thwart this by negotiating rules that would mandate almost unrestricted cross-border data flows and prohibit localisation of servers. Further, if government data is shared with domestic entities, then the commitments might require the developing country to share it with other countries on a non-discriminatory basis. These obligations will prevent developing countries from leveraging their huge data advantage to create a vibrant

domestic digital economy and nurture domestic digital start-ups, thereby locking them out of making any significant economic gains. Overall, it is apprehended that the provisions on the digital economy would make developing countries overwhelmingly dependent on imported digital products, even if the products are based on their data at the back-end.

The negotiations on rules related to the digital economy are being undertaken by some WTO members without the consent of the entire WTO membership. As with the discussions/negotiations on issues related to trade and environment, the outcome of the plurilateral negotiations on digital issues needs the endorsement of the entire WTO membership. As this is unlikely to be forthcoming, the developed countries are seeking to make fundamental changes to the WTO institutional architecture to push the ambitious agenda of their commercial entities and achieve their economic objectives. What are the developed countries seeking to achieve through WTO reform? We discuss this question in the next section.

7. What is sought to be attempted through WTO reform

Despite enjoying huge economic and political clout at the negotiating table, the developed countries have been constrained by some of the WTO rules from securing their negotiating objectives. In order to circumvent this problem, an attempt is sought to be made to modify some of the fundamental rules of the WTO through an initiative called WTO reform. The 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO, held in June this year, has provided a mandate for launching an ambitious work plan for reforming the WTO. The contours of WTO reform remain to be decided. However, we can get an inkling of the thinking of the developed countries on this

issue from two documents of the EU which are available in the public domain.⁹

The EU has identified the WTO's tradition of decision-making by consensus as an impediment to concluding negotiations among 164 members. It is pushing for amending the WTO rules so that agreements reached among a limited number of WTO members – technically called plurilateral agreements – can be integrated into the rulebook even without the endorsement of the entire membership. This would facilitate agreements on the digital economy and environment-related issues getting integrated into the WTO. The EU's vision would also change the member-driven character of the WTO by expanding the role of the WTO secretariat in different aspects and making it a more active player, including in negotiations. Further, it seeks to provide a formal role for businesses and the private sector in WTO processes, through a consultative or advisory committee.

If the EU's vision of WTO reform prevails, the developed countries would acquire almost unfettered rights to decide the issues on which to initiate negotiations and conclude final deals, thereby further marginalising the voice and role of developing countries. In the absence of decision-making by consensus, developing countries would find it almost impossible to pursue issues of their interest in the negotiations. Developing countries already confront formidable odds and power asymmetry at the WTO. Active involvement of business interests of the developed countries in WTO processes and expanding the role of the WTO secretariat would further deepen the power asymmetry between the developed and developing countries.

8. Conclusions and way forward

Overall, the vision of the developed countries in respect of WTO reform would make the WTO an instrument for unabashedly

promoting their commercial interests, particularly in sunrise sectors such as the digital economy and climate-friendly products, without any meaningful concern for the interests of the developing countries, who constitute the large majority of its membership. Compelling most developing countries to adhere to the same set of rules as those required to be followed by the developed countries would further stunt their prospects of economic growth. Most developing countries will likely be staring at a balance-of-payments and foreign exchange crisis if they become overwhelmingly dependent on imports of products in the emerging and buoyant sectors. Reordering of the global trading system through reform of the WTO would destroy the basic principles of equity and differentiation of development levels.

How should the developing countries respond to the scenario unfolding at the WTO? First, they need to join the dots and look at the big picture emerging from various developments at the WTO. Second, they must carefully reflect on how their prospects of economic development and growth would be adversely impacted by the various initiatives led by the developed countries. They must not be misled by the narrative sought to be created by the developed countries and their cheerleaders in the academic world regarding the plurilateral initiatives as well as WTO reform. Developing countries need to undertake detailed technical studies to comprehend the impact of these initiatives. Third, they must join hands and form coalitions with like-minded developing countries to resist the designs of the developed countries to further tilt the multilateral trading system against their interests. Failure to follow these suggestions could result in the reordered multilateral trading system spelling considerable disaster for many developing countries. ♦

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Notes

1. This general point is forcefully reflected in the receipts for the use of intellectual property by other countries. In 1995, the year when the WTO was established, the European Union, Japan, Switzerland and the United States collectively accounted for 83% of the global cross-border receipts, which increased to 85% in 2015. On the other hand, the combined share of Argentina, Brazil, India and Indonesia remained less than 0.5% during this 20-year period, when the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights has been under implementation. These figures are based on the World Bank's World Development Indicators database.
2. An important example to note is the significant loss in share of domestic producers in India after it removed tariffs on IT hardware. For a detailed analysis, see Das, Abhijit, Kallummal, M, and Banerjee, S. 2020. 'Performance of Computer, Electronics and Optical products in post-ITA phase: Some insights from OECD TiVA database'. Centre for WTO Studies, Policy Brief no. 3.
3. See, for example, Das, Bhagirath L. 1998. *The WTO Agreements: Deficiencies, Imbalances and Required Changes*. Zed Books (London) and Third World Network (Penang).
4. WTO document WT/MIN(01)/DEC/1 dated 20 November 2001.
5. Two coalitions in the agriculture negotiations are worth mentioning. The G20, a coalition led by Brazil and India, targeted the farm subsidies of the developed countries and sought equitable agriculture reform through the negotiations. The G33, a coalition led by Indonesia, India and the Philippines, sought to protect food security and farm livelihoods in developing countries.
6. Article XXXVI:8 of GATT 1994.
7. Submission by the US titled 'An undifferentiated WTO: Self-declared development status risks institutional irrelevance'. WTO document WT/GC/W/757 dated 16 January 2019.
8. WTO document WT/MIN(21)/6/Rev.2 dated 14 December 2021.
9. The EU's concept paper on 'WTO Modernisation' dated 18 September 2018; and the EU's 'Trade Policy Review – An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy' dated 18 February 2021.

Africa does not want to be a breeding ground for the new Cold War

Western attempts to subordinate Africa to their geopolitical agenda threaten unity and sovereignty on the continent.

Vijay Prashad

ON 17 October, the head of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), US Marine Corps General Michael Langley, visited Morocco. Langley met with senior Moroccan military leaders, including Inspector General of the Moroccan Armed Forces Belkhir El Farouk. Since 2004, AFRICOM has held its 'largest and premier annual exercise', African Lion, partly on Moroccan soil. This past June, 10 countries participated in African Lion 2022, with observers from Israel (for the first time) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Langley's visit is part of a broader US push onto the African continent, which we at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research documented in 'Defending Our Sovereignty: US Military Bases in Africa and the Future of African Unity',¹ a joint publication with The Socialist Movement of Ghana's Research Group. In that text, we wrote that the two important principles of Pan-Africanism are political unity and territorial sovereignty, and argued that '[t]he enduring presence of foreign military bases not only symbolises the lack of unity and sovereignty; it also equally enforces the fragmentation and subordination of the continent's peoples and governments'.

In August, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield travelled to Ghana, Uganda and Cape Verde. 'We're not asking Africans to make any choices between the United States and



US Army (CC BY 2.0)

US, Moroccan and British soldiers in field training during the African Lion 2019 military exercise in Morocco.

Russia,' she said ahead of her visit, *but*, she added, 'for me, that choice would be simple'. That choice is nonetheless being impelled by the US Congress as it deliberates the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, a bill that would sanction African states if they do business with Russia (and could possibly extend to China in the future).

To understand this unfolding situation, a briefing prepared by the No Cold War movement, 'NATO Claims Africa as Its "Southern Neighbourhood"', looks at how NATO has begun to develop a proprietary view of Africa and how the US government considers Africa to be a frontline in its Global Monroe Doctrine.

In August 2022, the United States published a new foreign policy strategy aimed at Africa. The 17-page document featured 10 mentions of China and Russia

combined, including a pledge to 'counter harmful activities by the [People's Republic of China], Russia, and other foreign actors' on the continent, but did not once mention the term 'sovereignty'. Although US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has stated that Washington 'will not dictate Africa's choices', African governments have reported facing 'patronising bullying' from NATO member states to take their side in the war in Ukraine. As global tensions rise, the US and its allies have signalled that they view the continent as a battleground to wage their New Cold War against China and Russia.

At its annual summit in June, NATO named Africa along with the Middle East 'NATO's southern neighbourhood'. On top of this, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ominously referred to 'Russia and China's increasing

influence in our southern neighbourhood' as a 'challenge'. The following month, the outgoing commander of AFRICOM, General Stephen J Townsend, referred to Africa as 'NATO's southern flank'. These comments are disturbingly reminiscent of the neocolonial attitude espoused by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in which the US claimed Latin America as its 'backyard'.

This paternalistic view of Africa appears to be widely held in Washington. In April, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act by a vote of 415-9. The bill, which aims to punish African governments for not aligning with US foreign policy on Russia, has been widely condemned across the continent for disrespecting the sovereignty of African nations, with South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor calling it 'absolutely disgraceful'.

The efforts by the US and Western countries to draw Africa into their geopolitical conflicts raise serious concerns: namely, will the US and NATO weaponise their vast military presence on the continent to achieve their aims?

AFRICOM: Protecting the US and NATO's hegemony

In 2007, the United States established AFRICOM 'in response to our expanding partnerships and interests in Africa'. In just 15 years, AFRICOM has established at least 29 military bases on the continent as part of an extensive network which includes more than 60 outposts and access points in at least 34 countries – over 60% of the nations on the continent.

Despite Washington's rhetoric of promoting democracy and human rights in Africa, in reality, AFRICOM aims to secure US hegemony over the continent. AFRICOM's stated objectives include 'protecting US interests' and 'maintaining superiority over

competitors' in Africa. In fact, the creation of AFRICOM was motivated by the concerns of 'those alarmed by China's expanding presence and influence in the region'.

From the outset, NATO was involved in the endeavour, with the original proposal put forward by then Supreme Allied Commander of NATO James L Jones, Jr. On an annual basis, AFRICOM conducts training exercises focused on enhancing the 'interoperability' between African militaries and 'US and NATO special operations forces'.

The destructive nature of the US and NATO's military presence in Africa was exemplified in 2011 when – ignoring the African Union's opposition – the US and NATO launched their catastrophic military intervention in Libya to remove the government of Muammar Gaddafi. This regime change war destroyed the country, which had previously scored the highest among African nations on the UN Human Development Index. Over a decade later, the principal achievements of the intervention in Libya have been the return of slave markets to the country, the entry of thousands of foreign fighters, and unending violence.

In the future, will the US and NATO invoke the 'malign influence' of China and Russia as a justification for military interventions and regime change in Africa?

Africa rejects a new Cold War

At this year's UN General Assembly, the African Union firmly rejected the coercive efforts of the US and Western countries to use the continent as a pawn in their geopolitical agenda. 'Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history,' stated Chairman of the African Union and President of Senegal Macky Sall; 'it does not want to be the breeding ground of

a new Cold War, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis.' Indeed, the drive for war offers nothing to the peoples of Africa in their pursuit of peace, climate change adaptation and development.

At the inauguration of the European Diplomatic Academy on 13 October, the European Union's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, said, 'Europe is a garden ... The rest of the world ... is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden.' As if the metaphor were not clear enough, he added, 'Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us.' Borrell's racist comments were pilloried on social media and eviscerated in the European Parliament by Marc Botenga of the Belgian Workers' Party, and a petition by the Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25) calling for Borrell's resignation has received over 10,000 signatures.

Borrell's lack of historical knowledge is significant: it is Europe and North America that continue to invade the African continent, and it is those military and economic invasions that cause African people to migrate. As President Sall said, Africa does not want to be a 'breeding ground of a new Cold War', but a sovereign place of dignity. ♦

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The above article was originally written for the newsletter of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research (thetricontinental.org/newsletterissue/africa-new-cold-war/).

Notes

1. <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-42-militarisation-africa/>

Haiti's political collapse

With violence erupting on the streets, government institutions failing and citizens desperately seeking to flee its shores, Haiti is a country in turmoil.

Jeff Abbott

HAITI is undergoing one of its most severe, prolonged crises – one that has left vast swathes of the capital Port-au-Prince in the hands of gangs, left journalists and protesters dead, and shut down social services and the distribution of gasoline. In October, the country's prime minister – who is also its de facto president – called for the deployment of foreign militaries to combat the unrest.

The unrest and political crisis comes in the aftermath of the July 2021 assassination of the country's president, Jovenel Moïse. Following the murder, Prime Minister Ariel Henry took power, further limiting Haiti's democratic process by continually pushing back elections at all levels of government. Investigations into the assassination of Moïse have stalled.

'Prime Minister Henry has not been doing anything,' Rosy Auguste Ducena, a human rights defender with the Port-au-Prince-based human rights organisation Réseau National de Défense des Droits de l'homme, told *The Progressive*. 'This is the reason why the population is asking for him to step down.'

She added, 'The government is using the gangs to maintain power.'

The assassination occurred as the country had already seen its democratic institutions begin to fail. Since 2020, the country's parliament has remained inoperable, local governments have had their terms end without new elections, and the country's supreme court has lacked a quorum. Corruption has grown and gangs have increasingly gained more power and influence throughout the country.

In September 2022, protests erupted across Haiti after Henry announced that fuel subsidies

would end. But the unrest was driven more by popular anger over the lack of democratic elections and functioning social services pushed by a US-backed de facto leader. Protesters demanded that Henry resign, a guarantee of safer streets, and a decrease in the cost of goods. The situation grew worse when gangs allied with various politicians and began to expand their influence through violence.

At least eight journalists have been killed by police during the unrest.

Haitian police have responded by repressing the protests with tear gas and live ammunition. Despite this, the protests have continued. According to the United Nations' International Organization for Migration, more than 96,000 Haitians have been forced to flee their homes because of the violence.

'This is what we are living with today,' Auguste Ducena said. 'The government is not doing anything to make sure they are able to survive or that they will be able to go back to their homes. It is a very bad situation.'

Foreign forces

Faced with the growing unrest, the de facto government of Haiti has requested that the international community send military forces to the country to assist in controlling the crisis. The United States and Canadian governments have continued to seek support from the United Nations to deploy soldiers to the Caribbean country, but some UN members have condemned efforts to escalate the situation.

International organisations, too, have denounced the efforts to deploy soldiers. The Haitian lawyers group Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, or BAI, issued a letter to the intergovernmental organisation Caribbean Community, or CARICOM, calling on the region to reject the militarisation of the crisis.

'Any support for the intervention by [CARICOM] would violate CARICOM's democratic principles, betray Haitians' centuries-long struggle for democracy and sovereignty, and implicate CARICOM in attacks against civilians exercising their basic human rights,' Mario Joseph, the director of BAI, wrote in the letter. 'We do not want our CARICOM sisters and brothers to come with guns to help powerful countries impose a repressive regime on us. We want our sisters and brothers to come in solidarity, with respect and democratic principles.'

There is a long history of the use of foreign military interventions in Haiti to maintain the influence of the United States and other international powers. US troops first occupied the island nation in 1915. These interventions have had the effect of rolling back democratic institutions.

'The only explanation for the policy of powerful countries like the US, Canada and France over that time period is a persistent fear of popular democracy breaking out in Haiti,' Brian Concannon, a lawyer and executive director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, told *The Progressive*.

In 1804, Haiti became the first former slave colony to rise up in revolution against an unjust colonial power. That

year, revolutionary former slaves declared their independence from France, liberating themselves but also denying France's claim to the spoils of one of the richest colonies in the New World.

But since the 1804 independence from France, foreign powers have long sought to invade or extort Haiti. These invasions culminated in 1915, when US Marines invaded the country and carried out a brutal occupation after National City Bank, now Citigroup, expressed fears of the country defaulting on its loan payments. The Marines would not be forced out by popular protest until 1932, after years of occupation.

'[Marines] shot and killed all the Haitians that were resisting the US occupation,' Concannon said. 'The US did not install or do anything to advance Haitian democracy and in fact, deeply corrupted Haitian democracy, because they overthrew presidents and members of parliament who didn't do the United States' bidding.'

The occupation had a long-lasting effect on Haitian democracy, and ushered in a string of dictators like François Duvalier, commonly known as Papa Doc. While Haiti would briefly have hope of democracy in the 1990s, the coup d'état in 2004 against democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who previously had been the country's first democratically elected president in 1991, further eroded the country's fragile democracy.

The United Nations peacekeeping mission, led by Brazil following the 2004 coup, also undermined Haitian democracy. The mission, known as MINUSTAH, was marked by numerous human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, the rape of children, and further destabilised the country's democratic institutions.

UN troops were also responsible for the introduction of cholera in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, when a Nepalese unit dumped raw

sewage into a river in the highlands. Amidst the current unrest, cholera has once again emerged, leaving at least 136 people dead.

Exodus

As the country continues to face political crisis and violence, the number of people fleeing the island and seeking to migrate to the United States has steadily increased. While 2021 saw a sharp increase of Haitian migrants arriving to the southern border of the United States with Mexico, now many have once again sought to reach the United States via boats.

'If the situation does not improve, then people will always try to flee the country,' Auguste Ducena said. 'These victims will not want to stay here.'

The return of people seeking to flee on boats reflects what occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s during the unrest following the overthrow of Papa Doc's son Jean-Claude Duvalier, known as Baby Doc. Nearly 40,000 Haitians took to the seas to Florida to flee the violence as the country transitioned to democracy.

The United States had been deporting Haitian migrants back to Haiti amid the unrest, but according to the US-based migrant watchdog group Witness At The Border, the US did not carry out a single deportation flight to Haiti in September of 2022. The United Nations issued a statement on 3 November calling on countries to not remove or deport Haitians back to Haiti during the current crisis.

The blockade of fuel distribution by gangs associated with the Henry regime briefly limited the ability of people to escape the island, but now that that blockade has been lifted there is a renewed fear of an exodus of refugees from the country. According to NBC News, the Biden administration is considering policy that would lead to Haitian migrants who arrive to the United States

being sent to a 'safe third country' or to the Migrant Operation Center at the military installation at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a horrific plan that echoes the US response to Haitian migrants in the 1990s.

The use of the facility echoes the United States' pattern of racist discrimination towards Haitians. Prior to becoming a prison for alleged terrorists, the US military installation at Guantanamo Bay was used as a prison for Haitian refugees who were fleeing the violence in the early 1990s following the first coup d'état against President Aristide, which unleashed a wave of violence against Aristide's supporters and pro-democracy activists. The facility was also used to imprison Haitians who tested positive for HIV.

These echoes of past US human rights violations against Haitians led nearly 280 migrant and human rights groups and faith-based organisations to issue a letter in early November condemning the possibility of sending Haitian migrants to Guantanamo.

'Your administration should not add yet another chapter to the shameful US history of mistreatment and racism toward Haitian people seeking protection, including those forced to take to the seas,' they wrote in a letter.

The increase of people seeking to flee the island via boat is reflective of changes in immigration policies across the hemisphere, pushed by the United States, that have left Haitians with few other options.

'People could physically leave for a destination, but now that's all been made impossible,' Nicole Phillips, the legal director of the Haitian Bridge alliance, told *The Progressive*. 'It is like [the United States] is setting fire to the house and then locking the door of the house so no one leaves.' ♦

Jeff Abbott is an independent journalist currently based out of Guatemala. This article originally appeared in The Progressive at <https://progressive.org/latest/the-other-americans-haiti-political-collapse-abbott-111122/>.

Israel's relentless war against the children of Palestine

Thousands of Palestinian children have fallen victim to Israeli security forces, yet this mass killing is little addressed in international human rights discourse.

Ilan Pappé

'Mankind owes to the child the best it has to give.' – Preamble, UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959)

MORE than half of the population living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are below 18; in fact, one can confidently say that half of the people of the occupied West Bank and besieged Gaza Strip are children. Anyone who wages a war against these two territories, through house demolition, arrests without trial, shoot-to-kill policy and humiliation, is waging war against children.

At times, whole military brigades of the Israeli army, accompanied by elite units, border police and police, chase a boy and, in most cases, kill him or at best arrest him.

If there is anything that changed in the last few years in what finally the United Nations was willing to call the colonisation of Palestine, it is the intensification of the Israeli shoot-to-kill policy. And although so many of us understand that the new Israeli government will not change the policies the previous governments pursued, one can expect further brutalisation in the war against the children of Palestine.

As I write this, the news has reached us of the murder by Israeli soldiers of Fulla Rasmi Abd al-Aziz al-Musalamah. She was on her way to celebrating her 16th birthday. She was with others in a car near Beitunia, when the soldiers, without



Relatives mourn at the funeral for 16-year-old Mohammed Abdullah Hamid, who died as a result of Israeli fire, in the West Bank in June 2022.

any reason, opened fire on the car and killed her. Needless to say, the Israeli newspaper reporting the 'incident' blamed the driver and did not even bother to mention her name.

The killing of children is not a new aspect of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians. By April 1948, the military leadership of the Zionist forces began to strategise more clearly its policy towards any population that would be left in the villages they occupied during the 1948 ethnic cleansing. One of its clear guidelines was to either kill or send to a prison camp, at the discretion of the commander on the spot, 'men at a fighting age'. The command clearly defined what was meant by men: anyone above the age of 10.

Very much like any destructive Israeli policy since the massive expulsion and killings of 1948,

a new method of incremental piecemeal action and policy became the norm. It is a very deceptive policy as whomever you want to alert is faced with a killing of one or two persons every now and then, and the dots are not easily connected to produce a damning indictment. This was true in the early 1950s, but of course, since then, the numbers are massive and this incremental killing is far more visible.

In November 1950, the Israeli army shot dead three children, ages 8, 10 and 12, from the village of Yalo, while in 1952, the Israeli commando murdered four children, ranging from ages 6 to 14, in Beit Jalla. A year later, among the five shepherds the Israelis killed in February 1953, one was a 13-year-old boy from al-Burg.

The incremental infanticide at times is replaced by a more intensive killing of children. During

Anadolu Agency

the First Intifada, according to the association of Israeli and Palestinian physicians for human rights, every two weeks, a child under six was shot in the head by the Israeli army.

During the Second Intifada, 600 Palestinian children were killed. Among them were the 12-year-old Muhammad al-Dura, the 14-year-old Fairs Odeh and the 11-year-old Khalil al-Mughrabi. Five thousand children were wounded. In 2007, the Israeli air force killed eight children of the Shehadeh family in Gaza.

In the first wave of attacks on Gaza in 2008, more than 300 children died, and another 30 in 2012. And the highest death toll was recorded in 2014, at more than 550 children. Put differently, since 2000, 2,250 Palestinian children have been killed by the Israeli army and security forces. This is equivalent to the killing of nearly 45,000 children in Britain by a military or police force in that period.

Why is it so important to record these grim and horrifying figures and define clearly their legal and moral significance? For a few reasons. First, the fact that only here, in an alternative media outlet, will you be aware of these atrocities, is an indication of the hypocrisy of the Western media and political elite when it comes to Palestine, compared with the compassion shown towards children in Ukraine or Iran.

Secondly, these figures highlight the existential threat Zionism and Israel still pose to the Palestinian people and their future. It is not only land that Israel covets; it is intent on continuing the destruction of the people themselves.

But most important of all is the infuriating exemption of Palestine from the international discussion of mass killing in general and that of children in particular. Take for example the international definition of mass killing: 'The deliberate actions of armed groups, including



Palestinian schoolgirls being stopped at an Israeli military checkpoint in Tel Rumeida in the West Bank.

but not limited to state security forces ... that result in the death of at least 1,000 non-combatant civilians targeted as part of a specific group over a period of one year or less.'

In the First and Second Intifada, in 2009 and in 2014, the number of Palestinians killed by Israel exceeded 1,000 by far. Nowhere in the UN or another human rights organisation recording mass killings worldwide, do the Palestinians appear as a case study.

The issue is not one of numbers of course, but much more about the ideology that facilitates such mass killing; a kind of inhumanity only possible if the humans you target are dehumanised. An ideology that leads in many cases to genocidal policies. The definition of genocide according to Article II of the UN Genocide Convention includes mass killing, bodily and mental harm, and physical desertion as indicators of such policies.

The report of the special representative of the UN Secretary-General in October 2009, updated in November 2013, lists six grave violations of international human rights law regarding children's rights in armed conflict. There is no armed conflict in Palestine and yet, three of these grave violations occur daily in the colonised West Bank and occasionally, in massive numbers, in the besieged Gaza Strip. Killing and maiming of children, attacks against schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. Some of the Israeli policies enacted

during the siege on Gaza, in terms of denial of food, energy and, above all, medical help, create a criterion by itself that should have been added to this document.

In August this year, UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet expressed alarm at the high number of Palestinians, including children, killed and injured in the occupied Palestinian territory since the beginning of 2022. She was referring to the killing of 37 children from the beginning of the year until August and was particularly horrified by the killing of 19 children in one week. She stated: 'Inflicting hurt on any child during the course of conflict is deeply disturbing, and the killing and maiming of so many children this year is unconscionable.'

As a father myself, I would have used a stronger word than 'unconscionable'. But I will be content with it if the Israeli mass killing of Palestinian children is no longer denied or marginalised and appears as an urgent topic in the venues where the international community discusses the gravest violations of human rights in our time, and acts upon it. ♦

Ilan Pappé is a professor at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. He was formerly a senior lecturer in political science at the University of Haifa in Israel. He is the author of The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, The Modern Middle East, A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples and Ten Myths about Israel. Pappé is described as one of Israel's 'New Historians' who, since the release of pertinent British and Israeli government documents in the early 1980s, have been rewriting the history of Israel's creation in 1948. The above article is reproduced from The Palestine Chronicle (www.palestinechronicle.com).

The forgotten victims of the Cuban missile crisis pact

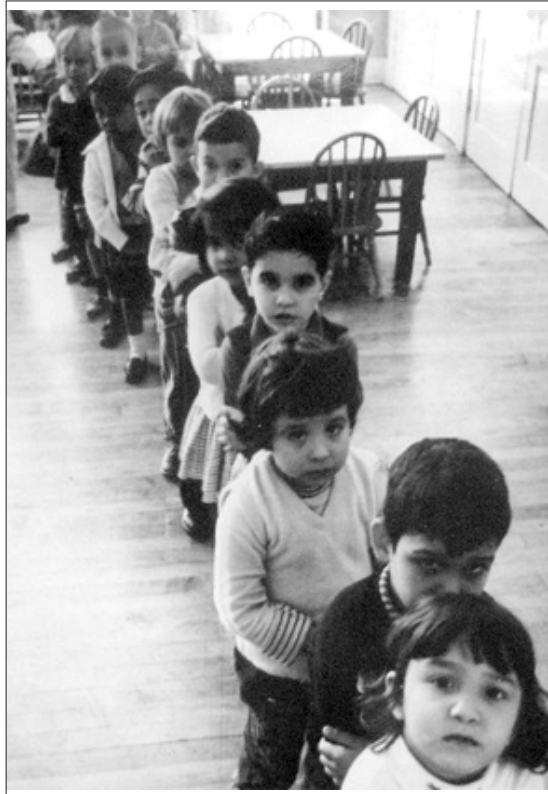
Between 1960 and 1962, some 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children were evacuated to the United States in an airlift dubbed Operation Pedro Pan. Some of them were never reunited with their families.

SIXTY years ago, when Moscow and Washington reached an accord that resolved the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, the world breathed more easily. But for 4,100 of the 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children who had arrived in Miami over the previous 22 months, and who were still scattered all over the United States, the future looked bleak. The prospect of reuniting with their families was more uncertain than ever.

Quaintly dubbed Operation Pedro (or Peter) Pan, the evacuation scheme for Cuban children had been initiated in the lead-up to the fateful April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Washington had hoped that by offering sanctuary for the offspring of anti-Castro activists, more Cubans would remain on the island and participate in what was expected to be the successful ouster of Fidel Castro and halt the rapidly accelerating revolutionary process.

What was behind this unprecedented mass exodus of Cuban children is still highly contested. In Cuba, even though no one was ever arrested or charged for having organised the evacuation scheme, the story is often recounted as one of a mass kidnapping of the nation's smallest citizens. On the other hand, the story of Operation Pedro Pan has helped bolster Washington's belligerent policy

Deborah Shnookal



Cuban children waiting in line to emigrate to the United States.

towards revolutionary Cuba for well over half a century.

The hoax of *patria potestad*

When US President Donald Trump announced in June 2017 that he was 'cancelling' his predecessor Barack Obama's Cuba policy, he made special mention of the exodus as evidence of what he stressed was the 'brutal nature of the Castro regime'. In doing so, he was simply

reiterating what has become the orthodox view in the United States: that the operation was an urgent,

humanitarian mission to save Cuban children from 'communist indoctrination'.

The airlift was spurred by a widespread rumour that the government was about to promulgate a new law that would eliminate parental authority, or *patria potestad*. This hoax undoubtedly tapped fears, prejudices and insecurities among largely white and more privileged Cubans in a highly volatile political climate. The introduction of daycare to encourage women to participate in the workforce and the revolutionary process, along with the desegregation, nationalisation and secularisation of a previously highly discriminatory and corrupt education system, also alarmed more conservative sectors of Cuban society.

US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) psychological warfare operatives in Cuba went so far as to print and circulate a fake government 'decree' outlining government plans to assume custody over its youngest citizens. Only decades later would some former agents such as Antonio Veciana express sincere regret for their part in perpetrating this fraud.

In the Cold War atmosphere, publicity about the plight of the little Cuban exiles fed US propaganda against the revolution

at home and abroad. A heart-wrenching documentary featuring a sad and lonely little boy was made and circulated by the US Information Agency, and appeals for foster families published in US newspapers stated bluntly: 'We can think of few better ways to "fight communism" than to care for the children who flee from it.'

The Pedro Pans were paraded as junior anti-communist celebrities at American Legion and Catholic Church functions to recount their horror stories of Castro's Cuba, and their 'rescuers' were hailed as heroes.

From 'rescue' to isolation

The airlift was facilitated by an extraordinary, politically motivated and unprecedented immigration policy. During the Trump years, the children of Central American and other migrant families were brutally torn from their parents' arms in the name of a 'zero-tolerance' policy towards undocumented entrants. In contrast, after the Cuban Revolution, Father (later Monsignor) Bryan Walsh, a young priest who ran a small staff at the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, received the imprimatur of the US State Department to sign visa waivers for as many Cuban children as their parents wanted to dispatch.

A federally funded foster-care programme (the Cuban Children's Program) was established, and within a few years it had become a major part of the federal government's refugee budget. Far from being overcome by panic about the supposed threat to children's minds and parental rights, some Cuban families saw this as an opportunity for a much-coveted *beca* (or scholarship) for their offspring to study and learn English in the North, a factor that is frequently overlooked in accounts of the operation.

By October 1962, the child evacuation scheme had largely served its purpose in Washington's

covert and propaganda wars against the Cuban Revolution. The anti-Castro networks in Cuba on which the operation had relied were significantly weakened. More importantly, however, the airlift was no longer viable after the cancellation of direct flights between the United States and Cuba.

At this point, US policy towards Cuba became isolationist, making emigration from the island more difficult and costly as Cubans had to travel through third countries. This significantly hindered the possibility of reuniting stranded children with their families. Furthermore, the number of children requiring placements was overwhelming foster-care agencies in Florida and elsewhere, and young Cubans arriving in Miami during 1962 were often more likely to find themselves sent to orphanages and other inappropriate placements if they could not be claimed by family or friends.

These policy changes highlighted the flawed justifications for the programme: Were the minds of children remaining in Cuba no longer in peril? Why stop the evacuation effort, even if it was more difficult at this time?

As former US diplomat in Havana Wayne Smith acknowledged, 'We now know, the rumours [about the *patria potestad* law] were false. The children [who stayed in Cuba] were not separated from their families, and so the painful experience was not really necessary.'

The Pedro Pan generation grows up

What happened to those thousands of young Cubans who found themselves stranded by the momentous events of October 1962? Most, but not all, were reunited with their families when the so-called Freedom Flights from Cuba to the United States began in December 1965. However, several

months later between 5-10% of the Pedro Pans had still not reunited with at least one parent. About 3% never reconnected with their families, and only a handful of them ever returned to live in Cuba.

When families did eventually reunite, in cities and towns across the country where the children had been sent, many found it impossible to take up where they had left off, especially those who had been separated for years. Thus, although the Pedro Pans were indeed 'children who could fly like Peter Pan' in JM Barrie's original children's 'fairy play', the metaphor for the exodus proved tragically ironic. Unlike the storybook character who never grew up, many of the young Cubans soon found themselves alone in a foreign land and forced to grow up all too quickly.

Over the years, the story of the desperate flight of the Cuban children became key to the ideological foundation of the Cuban exile community. It continues to justify the political power and special privileges Cuban immigrants still expect and enjoy as 'political' and not 'economic' refugees. In fact, some Cuban Americans were recently enraged when Miami's Archbishop Thomas Wenski dared to compare the unaccompanied children from Central America attempting to cross the border today with the flight of the Pedro Pans from 'communist Cuba'.

One tragic ending is the paradoxical tale of Carlos Muñiz, who was assassinated at the age of 26 by the very same anti-Castro exiles who had supposedly rescued him as a Pedro Pan. Along with his mother and sister, Carlos settled in Puerto Rico, where he was influenced by the island's independence movement. As a student, he joined a group of young Cuban Americans who sought a dialogue and reconciliation with the land of his birth. These young émigrés' visits back to Cuba, however, provoked a violent reaction from the exile community. Although the

exile terrorist organisation Omega 7 claimed responsibility for the crime, no one was ever charged for Carlos's cold-blooded murder.

'My mother took the decision to send me [out of the country],' commented Silvia Wilhelm, a former Pedro Pan, 'but the decision to return was mine.' She felt a need to return 'in order to close the circle and to make peace with ourselves, our history and our country'. For many parents, however, such return visits challenged not only their painful decision to send their children out of the country alone but their very identity as an exile community.

One former Pedro Pan reflected in anger: 'I began to feel part of a great hoax of an enormous manipulative machine ... What had happened is that the Americans were using the Cubans: [T]he departure of the children had been a propaganda tool. And what came out of the [Miami children's] camps was a wounded generation.'

Many Cuban families remain split today – politically and geographically. Sixty years later, recalling the tragic tale of Operation Pedro Pan sheds light on how effectively natural family sentiments were manipulated by Cold War propaganda and how Cuban children became caught up in an international political power play. While little known among the wider population in the United States, the episode remains a touchstone in US-Cuba relations and is still recalled with great bitterness on both sides of the Florida Straits. ♦

Deborah Shnookal is a historian and editor who has written and researched on Cuban history for 30 years. She is currently a research fellow at the Institute of Latin American Studies, La Trobe University (Australia). She is the author of Operation Pedro Pan and the Exodus of Cuba's Children (University Press of Florida, 2020). The above article is reproduced from the website of the North American Congress on Latin America (nacla.org/pedro-pan-children-forgotten-victims-1962-cuban-missile-crisis-pact).

The Malaysian Economy: Structures and Dependence

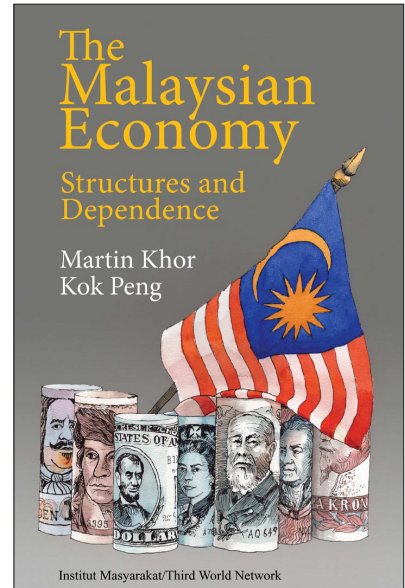
by Martin Khor

THIS book provides an analysis of the structures of the Malayan and the Malaysian economies using the perspective of dependence.

It analyses the structures of dependence in colonial Malaya established by the British during the colonial era, in foreign ownership of key sectors, in trade, finance, the public sector and technology. Estimates are provided on the amounts of surpluses transferred out of colonised Malaya under British rule.

The book then examines the post-colonial situation, as continuity as well as changes took place after Independence. It provides details on and changes in ownership and control of the Malaysian economy, and in trade, finance and technology-related issues. Methods by which economic surpluses have been transferred out of the economy and the large amounts are meticulously described.

The framework used in this book distinguishes it from other works on the performance and transformation of the Malaysian economy. The present economy has many elements of the



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structures and dynamics described. This book is thus essential reading for those interested in knowing how the Malaysian economy was shaped in the colonial and post-colonial periods, and many of the features that characterise the present economy.

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Agroecological women farmers boost food security in Peruvian highlands

Sustainable farming practices are yielding a harvest of productivity and empowerment for women in rural Peru.

Mariela Jara

LOURDES Barreto, 47, says that as an agroecological small farmer, she has improved her life and that of Mother Earth.

‘I love myself as I love Mother Earth and I have learnt to value both of us,’ she says in her field outside the village of Huasao, in the highlands of the southern Peruvian department of Cuzco.

Barreto’s story highlights the difficulties that rural women face on a daily basis, and their ability to struggle to overcome them.

‘I was orphaned when I was six years old and I was adopted by people who did not raise me as part of the family, they did not educate me and they only used me to take their cow out to graze,’ she said during a visit by Inter Press Service (IPS) to her village.

‘At the age of 18, I became a mother and I had a bad life with my husband, he beat me, he was very jealous. He said that only he could work and he did not give me money for the household,’ she said, standing in her greenhouse outside of Huasao, a village of some 200 families.

Barreto said that beginning to be trained in agroecological farming techniques four years ago, at the insistence of her sister, who gave her a piece of land, was a turning point that led to substantial changes in her life.

Of the nearly 700,000 women farmers in Peru, according to the last National Agricultural Census, from 2012, less than 6% have had



Maria Antonieta Tito at her vegetable garden in the village of Secsencalla.

Mariela Jara/IPS

access to training and technical assistance.

‘I have learnt to value and love myself as a person, to organise my family so I don’t have such a heavy workload. And another thing has been when I started to grow crops on the land, it gave me enough to eat from the farm to the pot, as they say, and to have some money of my own,’ said the mother of three children aged 27, 21 and 19.

Something she values highly is having achieved ‘agroecological awareness’, as she describes her conviction that agricultural production must eradicate the use of chemical inputs because ‘the Pacha Mama, Mother Earth, is tired of us killing her microorganisms’.

‘I prepare my *bocashi* [natural fertiliser] myself using manure from my cattle. And I also fumigate without chemicals,’ she says proudly.

‘I make a mixture with ash, *rocoto* chili peppers, five heads of garlic and five onions, plus a bit of laundry soap. I used to grind it with

the *batan* [a pre-Inca grinding stone] but now I put it all in the blender to save time, I fill the backpack with two litres and I go out to spray my crops naturally,’ she says.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 prompted many rural municipal governments to organise food markets, which became an opportunity for Barreto and other women farmers to sell their agroecological products.

‘I sold green beans, zucchini, three kinds of lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, Chinese onions, coriander and parsley,’ she says, pausing to take a breath and look around in case she forgot any of the vegetables she sells in the city of Cuzco, an hour and a half away from her village, and in Oropesa, the municipal seat.

Another, less tangible benefit of her agroecological activity was the improvement in her relationship with her husband, she says, because she gained financial security with the sale of her crops, in which her children have supported her. Now

her husband also helps her in the garden and the atmosphere in the home has improved.

Spreading agroecology

Barreto, along with 40 other women farmers from six municipalities, is part of the Provincial Association of Ecological Producers of Quispicanchi, known by its acronym APPEQ, a productive and advocacy organisation formed in 2012.

The six participating municipalities are Andahuaylillas, Cusipata, Huaró, Oropesa, Quiquijana and Urcos, all located in the Andes highlands in the department of Cuzco, between 3,100 and 3,500 metres above sea level, with a Quechua indigenous population that depends on family farming for a living.

The president of APPEQ, Maribel Palomino, 41, is a farmer who lives in the village of Munapata, part of Urcos, where she farms land given to her by her father.

The mother of a nine-year-old son, Jared, her goal is for the organisation and its products, which the rural women sell under the collective brand name Pacharuru (fruits of the earth, in Quechua), to be known throughout Cuzco.

'I recognise and am grateful for the training we received from the Flora Tristan institution to follow our own path as agroecological women farmers, which is very different from the one followed by our mothers and grandmothers,' she tells IPS during a training workshop given by the association she presides over in the city of Cuzco.

The Flora Tristan Peruvian Women's Centre disseminates ecological practices in agricultural production in combination with the empowerment of women in rural communities in remote and neglected areas of this South American country of 33 million people, where 18% of the population is rural according to the 2017 national census.

Now, Palomino adds, 'we are part of a generation that is leading changes that are not only

for the betterment of our children and families, but of ourselves as individuals and as women farmers'.

She is referring to the inequalities that even today, in the 21st century, limit the development of women in the Peruvian countryside.

'Without education, becoming mothers in their adolescence, without land in their own name but in their husband's, without the opportunity to go out to learn and get training, it is very difficult to become a citizen with rights,' she says.

According to the National Agricultural Census, eight out of 10 women farmers work farms of less than three hectares and six out of 10 do not receive any income for their productive work.

In addition, their total workload is greater than men's, and they are under-represented in decision-making spaces. Further, women in rural areas experience the highest levels of gender-based violence between the ages of 33 and 59, according to the National Observatory of Violence against Women.

In this context of inequality and discrimination, Palomino represents a new kind of rural female leadership.

'I am a single mother, my son is nine years old and through my work I give him education, healthy food, a home with affection and care. And he sees in me a woman who is a fighter, proud to work in the fields, who defends her rights and those of her colleagues in APPEQ,' she says.

Palomino says it is crucial to contribute to 'change the chip' of the elderly and of many young people who, if they could look out a window of opportunity, could improve their lives and their environment.

'With APPEQ we work to share what we learn, so that more women can look with joy to the future,' she said.

This is the case with Maria Antonieta Tito, 32, from the municipality of Andahuaylillas, who for the first time in her life as a farmer is engaged in agroecological

practices and whom IPS visited in her vegetable garden in the village of Secsencalla, as part of a tour of several communities with peasant women who belong to the association.

'I am a student of the APPEQ leaders who teach us how to work the soil correctly, to till it up to forty centimetres so that it is soft, without stones or roots. They also teach us how to sow and plant our seeds,' she says proudly.

Pointing to her seedbeds, she adds: 'Look, here I have lettuce, purple cabbage and celery, it still needs to sprout, it starts out small like this.'

Tito describes herself as a 'new student' of agroecology. She started learning in March of this year but has made fast progress. Not only has she managed to harvest and eat her own vegetables, but every Wednesday she goes to the local market to sell her surplus.

'We have eaten lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, and chard; everyone at my house likes the vegetables, I have prepared them in salads and in fritters, with eggs. I am helping to improve the nutrition of my family and also of the people who buy from me,' she says happily.

Every Tuesday evening she picks vegetables, carefully washes them, and at six o'clock the next morning she is at a stall in the open-air market in Andahuaylillas, the municipal capital, assisted by her teenage son.

'The customers are getting to know us, they say that the taste of my vegetables is different from the ones they buy at the other stalls. I have been selling for three months and they have already placed orders,' she adds.

But the road to the full exercise of rural women's rights is very steep.

As Palomino, the president of APPEQ, says, 'We have made important achievements, but there is still a long way to go before we can say that we are citizens with equal rights, and the main responsibility for this lies with the governments that have not yet made us a priority.'

— IPS

KwaZulu-Natal Gothic

The crime drama *Reyka* delivers a dark, often disturbing, interrogation of violence in South Africa's troubled KwaZulu-Natal province.

Christopher McMichael

FROM the air, the sugarcane fields of KwaZulu-Natal look like peaceful seas of verdant green. But inside is a festering nightmare of carnage, as young women looking for work in factories are lured to their death by a serial killer. These grisly crimes are uncovered by police profiler Reyka Gama (Kim Engelbrecht), haunted by her own abduction as a child by a predatory sugarcane farmer, trapped in a claustrophobic farmhouse.

Reyka – nominated for both Best Actress (Engelbrecht) and Best Drama series at the 2022 International Emmys – explicitly draws inspiration from real-life crimes. The murders reference Thozamile Taki, who killed 13 young women before he was apprehended. Reyka's kidnapping in early 1990s Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal's second city, echoes the abduction of Fiona Harvey by the apartheid-era serial killer Gert van Rooyen. The contemporary reality of organised crime and assassinations conducted by Izinkabi – hitmen who work for criminal syndicates within the taxi industry – is used as narrative backdrop. A key location is clearly modelled on Glebelands, a hostel in Umlazi (a township in Durban) with its notorious reputation as a haven for gunmen.

The show is a successful, often disturbing, exercise in applying the tropes of neo-noir to the South African context. The themes of troubled anti-hero protagonists and murders that reveal wider societal injustices and secrets have become part of international narratives. *Reyka*'s quietly sinister fields, ominously shrouded in mist, parallel *Memories of Murder* (2003), a film by *Parasite* director Bong Joon-Ho about the hunt for a serial killer

in rural South Korea. *Narcos: Mexico* – the final season of which is competing in the Best Drama category of the Emmys – includes a plot about the ongoing femicides in Ciudad Juarez, where hundreds of women, often working as migrant labour in border factories, have been killed in the last decades.

Portrayals of violence

The KwaZulu-Natal depicted in the series is full of lawless, scuzzy taverns and taxi ranks where armed hoodlums lurk against an ominous soundtrack of gqom – a percussive dance music originated by bedroom producers in the townships of Durban. These tropes are widely circulated in mass media, where KwaZulu-Natal is depicted as a national crime capital and the 'wild west'. Depictions go back to at least the 1980s, when the province was in a state of virtual civil war, as tensions between the African National Congress and the Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) were deliberately manipulated by the apartheid state. The 'third force' counter-insurgency strategy fuelled intercommunal violence, state-supported massacres and the rise of warlords and 'no-go' areas. This violence was rooted in the specific politics of the day, but continued even after the 1994 elections in spirals of reprisals and vengeance.

But rather than locating it as a problem with definable contemporary origins, media portrayals choose the more dramatic conclusion that the province

was condemned to an intractable violence, rooted in undying enmity from a social hierarchy where whites, descended from British and Irish settlers, dominated both Africans and Indians. This perspective was seen in the reportage of Rian Malan, a white South African author who built an international reputation off his best-selling book, *My Traitor's Heart*. Malan's reporting included extensive focus on KwaZulu-Natal. In a story about the trial of Simon Mpungose, known as the 'Hammerman' for a series of killings where he broke into the homes of white victims, Malan reports the actions of one psychopath as conveying the truth about the province as a whole. In highly racialised language, Malan claims that the courtroom gave an illusion of civilised order. Instead, the 'real KwaZulu-Natal is outside. You can hear it through the open window – a clamouring throng of several hundred Zulus held at bay by cops with dogs.' This depiction of the police is especially ironic, as the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) revealed that apartheid-era police and the KwaZulu 'homeland' forces were instrumental in facilitating and participating in political killings.

But elements of this Kurtzian discourse of horror have persisted in contemporary reporting. Organised violence in KwaZulu-Natal today is rooted in a political economy based around patronage and kleptocracy, where construction mafias and 'business forums' use force to control local markets. Criminal violence is closely linked to power struggles within the provincial ANC, currently dominated by a self-described 'Taliban' faction. In the aftermath of the July 2021 unrest,

in which supporters of Jacob Zuma orchestrated looting and sabotage of public infrastructure as a reprisal for the former president receiving a jail sentence for contempt of court, the image of KwaZulu-Natal as an armed backwater which threatens the stability of the rest of the country was again in circulation. In this latest version, South Africa has a 'KZN problem'.

Reyka however complicates these narratives. For one, its heightened depiction of plantations and farms as quasi-gothic spaces of domination and pain shows how the poor and women are at the mercy of a wildly unequal political economy which reproduces violence on a daily level. Rather than viewing this as an immutable fact of history, it depicts how these structures intersect with new struggles over control and resources. From power brokers using private security as armed militias to religious pastors abusing the trust of their followers, the series paints contemporary South Africa as a society where the ruthless pursuit of money leads to human life becoming the cheapest commodity of all.

Violence in KwaZulu-Natal is not merely localised, but also linked to wider national and global circuits of crime. Izinkabi are regularly outsourced to commit murder for hire in other parts of the country. And though Jacob Zuma presents himself as a Zulu traditionalist – tradition being a shorthand for whatever benefits him at any particular moment – his presidency was based on transnational exploitation, with Asian business people and American corporations colluding to plunder public finances.

Rather than being an outlier, KwaZulu-Natal is at the forefront of the most destructive politics and social forces of the 21st century. ♦

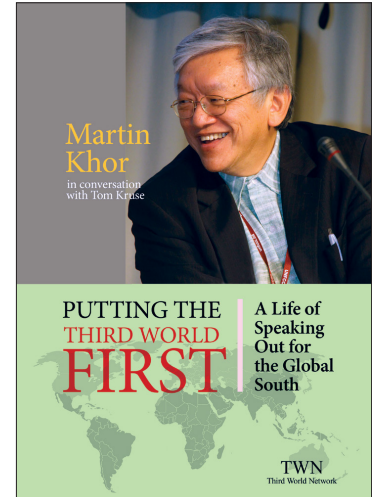
Christopher McMichael is a cultural critic and political commentator. He has a PhD in political science from Rhodes University and writes on power, crime and culture. This article is reproduced from Africa Is a Country (africasacountry.com).

Putting the Third World First A Life of Speaking Out for the Global South

*Martin Khor in conversation with
Tom Kruse*

Martin Khor was one of the foremost advocates of a more equitable international order, ardently championing the cause of the developing world through activism and analysis. In this expansive, wide-ranging conversation with Tom Kruse – his final interview before his passing in 2020 – he looks back on a lifetime of commitment to advancing the interests of the world's poorer nations and peoples.

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