A People’s Green New Deal: Obstacles and Prospects

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Abstract
Within the past years, the Green New Deal (GND) became the common language for Northern climate politics, offering a seeming exit path from Northern social and ecological crises while erasing an older Northern climate discourse tied to Southern demands for climate reparations and rights to development. This Eurocentric GND has become the environmental program for an equally Eurocentric social democratic renewal. This article situates the GND in world-systemic shifts, and Northern reactions to such shifts. It situates the GND as one of three possible Eurocentric solutions to the climate crisis: a great elite transformation from above; a left-liberal “reformist” resolution; a social democratic resolution. It then elaborates a possible “People’s Green New Deal,” a revolutionary transformation focused on state sovereignty, climate debt, auto-centered development, and agriculture. Within each proposed resolution, it traces the role of the land, agriculture, and peasants.

Keywords
Agro-ecology, agrarian question, Green New Deal, climate debt, environmentalism

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Introduction

The Green New Deal (GND) (Markey, 2019; Ocasio-Cortez, 2019) is now something like a celestial object exerting a force on discourse and politics around global climate change—inciting fear, inquiry, unease, or opportunity. In some cases, Northern scholars in platforms which sidestep the national question (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation) now try to set the agenda for the South (Cohen & Riofrancos, 2020). In others, similar mechanisms pass through multilateral and traditionally Southern institutions like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Perry, forthcoming; UNCTAD, 2019), or emerge as “pacts” from generally Northern-oriented scholars (Various, 2020) studded with buzzwords like “autonomy,” which alchemize climate debt into cheaper and agreeable debt cancellation accords and rehearse earlier fatally flawed attempts to propose North-South integration while rejecting the national question (Ahmed, 1981). And in still others, the GND is being creatively appropriated, recast, and refined to reflect Southern priorities (OSAE, 2020).

Yet much discussion of the GND lacks mooring in the political economy of the production of discourse, the environmental crisis, or shifts in capitalism. In what follows, light will be shed on why and how the GND emerged, as layers of space and time slammed together: shifts and challenges to US accumulation, the broader environmental crisis, and breakdown of capitalism as a political mode of rule in the core. The GND in its dominant anti-racist green Keynesian formulation emerges as one resolution—if not exactly a solution—to these instabilities. Three other possibilities will be discussed and the political alliances each implies. Focus will be brought to the potential elements of a People’s Green New Deal, built on foundational demands from the South/Fourth World (Manuel, 2019), which emerge from the quest for national liberation: a renewal and strengthening of state sovereignty, the unfinished conquest of economic sovereignty, and the drive for environmental sovereignty and decolonization, in the form of the 2010 demands of climate debt settlement which emerged from Cochabamba, Bolivia, the state of the art of Southern climate politics (People’s Agreement of Cochabamba, 2010).

Ecological and Political Context

The stage upon which the GND occurs has multiple political and environmental planks. First, the climate crisis and an awareness within
conservative chambers of scientific-technocratic thought that something must be done about it. The main spur has been the 2018 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which for the first time used alarming language, demanding immediate and vast change: “[r]apid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems,” and added that such “systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed, and imply deep emissions reductions in all sectors… There is no documented historic precedent for their scale” (IPCC, 2018).

The second “natural” phenomenon, although a facet of social nature under imperialist monopoly capitalism, has been environmentally uneven exchange. This is not just the well-documented phenomenon of peripheral under- and de-development through drain, primitive accumulation, and unequal exchange in the world market (Amin, 1974; Patnaik & Patnaik, 2021; Rodney, 2012). It is, furthermore, as prefigured in earlier dependency work (Ajl, 2021a), about how accumulation on a world-scale has meant grabbing peripheral use-values. Those include labor, soil fertility, forests, and the degradation of Southern capacities for social reproduction (Ossome, 2020), including the export of pollution, the enclosure of atmospheric space, and rising Southern climactic disasters (Hornborg, 2006; Roberts & Parks, 2006; Warlenius et al., 2015).

Politically, the United States has slowly and only relatively declined from its absolute political and economic predominance within the world-system. It is critical to separate such a diagnosis from discourses of the US “declining empire,” which understate the capacity of US power to de-develop Third World nation-states through asphyxiation (Ameli, 2020; Weisbrot & Sachs, 2019) and proxy war (Capasso, 2020; Higgins, 2018). The nuclear backstop and enduring dollar seigniorage (Hudson, 2003) testify to the endurance of the US imperialism and the value flows on which imperialism is based and safeguards. Rather, the rise of China and rising Chinese labor shares within bilateral US–Chinese traded goods indicate more fundamental shifts within the world-system (Kadri, 2021; Macheda & Nadalini, 2020). The United States can de-develop peripheral countries but cannot enfold them into the political architecture of value extraction. Asymmetric resistance movements in Yemen and elsewhere cannot be put down through US violence.

Second, there are rising social-democratic politics in the core, the backdrop to the GND. After the financial crisis of 2008 and Occupy Wall Street, capitalism as a mode of rule has faced serious ideological challenge. Marxism as a mode of analysis, informing a spectrum of
redistributive or anti-systemic politics, has become increasingly normalized. Furthermore, amid the crumbling of the old way of rule, an array of figures arguing for sharp internal redistributions of wealth, with serious deficits and blind spots when it comes to the national question, and usually with anti-Communist politics, have emerged across the Euro–Atlantic arena: from Britain’s Jeremy Corbyn to Greece’s SYRIZA movement to Podemos and Bernie Sanders. Ruling classes have dismantled or evaporated such challenges, pushed them into compromise, or co-opted them. Yet in each case, the challenges have left behind radicalized if disorganized downwardly mobile petty bourgeois and working-class populations in the core, constituencies for anti-systemic politics. Against this background, the GND has emerged as one option to confront these interlacing crises.

Responding to the Crises

Responses to the crisis essentially fall within four possible camps. First is a far-right response, based on green imperial integration and capitalist engorgement of remaining un-commodified arenas, above all those of peasancies, pastoralists, and forest-dwellers. Second is a left-liberal response, based on green imperial integration, some level of core redistribution, and some extension of renewable infrastructure for the South, possibly through a commodified extension of renewable energy, alongside appropriation of peripheral rural wealth. Third is a green social-democratic response, calling for deep domestic redistribution, relying on parliamentary procedures and some extra-parliamentary pressure, and a green Marshall Plan of sorts for the South—with the echoes of shoring up imperial infrastructure which that name implies. And, fourth is a radical solution, based on widespread decommodification of social reproduction, shrinking of Northern energy use, and payment of climate debt to the periphery, aiming for North-South industrial and developmental convergence with agriculture as a keystone.

The far-right proposals imagine a greened capitalism of circular economies using industrial ecology where possible to remediate or integrate waste into the productive cycle (see, e.g., Smith (2020). Ruling classes will be laagered up in the settler-states and the European core, and climate change will be controlled enough to avoid difficult-to-manage numbers of climate refugees (Spratt & Dunlop, 2018). The raw material and technologies for such “stabilization from above” would be secured through enfoldment or dispossession of peripheral direct producers and
further large-scale environmentally uneven exchange. Malthusian agendas logically are emerging as well (Shaw & Wilson, 2019).

Those sketching out such blueprints range from the Australian Breakthrough Institute to the Energy Transitions Commission to Transform to Net Zero. These proposals share several traits: one, state-corporate partnerships; two, rhetoric about corporate-state-community co-partnership; three, embrace of the “national security sector”; four, effusion about technological salvation; five, ripping open new frontiers of land-based accumulation in the South through financializing nature or turning such landscapes into carbon farms; six, the hollowing out of Third World sovereignty. Many also gesture at the Wall Street Consensus, which seeks to reorganize “development interventions around selling development finance to the market…escort[ing] capital” into bonds, remaking Third World governments as “de-risking states” by demanding that they and their treasuries take on the risks of investment, removing them from the currently more-or-less idle capital those plans mean to “crowd in” (Gabor, 2020).

Land and bio-mass-based production, in the form of the grasslands, forests, and smallholder plots currently incorporated into accumulation on a world scale as social nature and uncompensated social reproduction (Ossome, 2020), are central. Increasingly, there are calls across the Eurocentric political spectrum for Half-Earth biodiversity corrals, which rest on the apartheid concept of humanity separated from “wild nature,” a phantasm of colonial-capitalist ideologues for eons (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019; Merchant, 1990). This idea, which comes cloaked in red (Robinson, 2018) and even Northern academic production aligned to the northern imperialist agenda (Vettese, 2018), forgets human history is a history of landscape management (Denevan, 1992, 2001), and the Indigenous (Schuster et al., 2019) are some of the very best guardians of biodiversity.

This economistic agenda of neo-colonial improvement—for where are the Southern popular demands for Half-Earth?—runs cover for the capitalist right (Wilson, 2016), wherein reserving half the planet for “nature” means a fantastical afforestation, plopping trees, where they have never been before, or a reforestation, based on reductionist ecology and dreams about prelapsarian Arcadias which justified colonial agricultural settlement and incursion (Davis, 2007). Indeed, closed-canopy forests were almost certainly mythical in Western Europe, their supposed heartland, as well as the United States (Bond, 2019; Vera, 2000). Furthermore, willy-nilly tree planting is environmentally disastrous (Pearce, 2019; Schmitz, 2016) and when incorporated into carbon markets through REDD and REDD+ displaces smallholders and
sows mono-crop tree plantations (Kansanga & Luginaah, 2019; McElwee, 2009) leading to diminishing bio-diversity—“really-existing” Half-Earth (cf. Büscher et al., 2017; Kröger, 2014).

When land is not to be cordoned off for sterile tree plantations, a spectrum of core institutions advocates planting land for biofuel crops, a “clean” energy source. All such reports genuflect to potential displacement of food production and biodiversity. However, as the Energy Transitions Commission (ETC, 2020a) states, “[s]ustainable biofuels or synthetic fuels will need to scale up from today’s trivial levels to play a major role in aviation and perhaps shipping,” a clear embrace of these technologies to shift difficult-to-decarbonize sectors onto a fuel whose cost is paid on South-North gradients. Similarly, the ETC’s national manifesto for Australia states “[f]ull decarbonisation for industries such as steel, cement and chemicals require the use of electrification, hydrogen, bioenergy and carbon capture and storage” (ETC, 2020b). The EU energy transition plan proposes increases of the biofuel mix in airborne and maritime transport (European Commission, 2020). The US Senate’s Special Committee does the same, also advocating afforestation (2020). Using land for biofuel growth and planting trees while maintaining existing relations of production will worsen social and ecological outcomes, harming biodiversity, lowering water-tables, displacing smallholders, and reducing land available for smallholder crops. And even under highly optimistic projections, shifting global hydrocarbon use to biofuels would cut deeply into land and water available for agriculture.

The next option is of the liberals who propose full replacement of current energy use in core and periphery (Jacobson et al., 2015), preservation of capitalist property structures (Plan for Climate Change and Environmental Justice, 2020) the United States as a “green-tech” powerhouse, and dependency-inducing “aid” to the periphery to assist the renewables transition (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). These proposals emerge from earlier US discussions about a jobs-for-all program for the under-employed or un-employed déclassé “middle class,” and respond to the need for political containment of anti-systemic politics among largely the core petty bourgeoisie. The 2018 draft legislation situated itself as a response to “wage stagnation, deindustrialization, and antilabor policies” and the need to keep the planet below 1.5°C of warming (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019), and urged a “new national, social, industrial, and economic mobilization” updating the original pro-systemic New Deal (Ferguson, 1984) with a new corporatist, core-centered pact. The legislation did not pretend to be anti-systemic: it called for “transparent and inclusive consultation … and partnership with … businesses,” alongside allocating
“adequate capital… [to] businesses working on the Green New Deal mobilization,” partnered with “appropriate ownership stakes and returns on investment” for the public. It does gesture to “consultation, collaboration, and partnership with frontline and vulnerable communities” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). Yet such nouns are denuded of class content. Front-line and vulnerable are geographical or spatial indices of heightened threat of direct physical risks, even if they pass through the prism of power relationships. Communities themselves do not refer clearly to material divisions based on access to resources. Indeed, the appropriation and remolding of previously radical rhetoric about community was central to the post-1960s reformation of racial liberalism (Ferguson, 2013).

Internationalism and the national question did quietly enter the Markey/Ocasio-Cortez legislation on two fronts, gesturing at its scope, limits, vulnerabilities, and constituencies necessary for maneuvering on reconfigured US progressive political topography. First, the legislation called for “Promoting the international exchange of technology, expertise, products, funding, and services, with the aim of making the United States the international leader on climate action” (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019): the United States as a new green-tech powerhouse. Such a call foretells future and oncoming maneuvering amidst a new Space Race for monopoly control and leadership over green transition technology (Rifkin, 2019; The Biden Plan … Future, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2016). The second is a small openness to the indigenous question.

A third position, the most capacious and blurry, is the diffuse social-democratic tendency in the imperial core (Aronoff et al., 2019; Chomsky & Pollin, 2020; Klein, 2019). Although this position often demonizes anti-systemic anti-colonial projects like the agrarian reform in Zimbabwe (Selwyn, 2021), or the environmental record of Venezuela (Klein, 2019), ignoring its vanguard role in anti-colonial international climate politics (Frias, 2009), it is in complex alliance with indigenous formations (The Red Nation, 2021), a positioning rife with vulnerabilities for breaking in reformist and radical directions. It argues for retrofitting core countries’ infrastructure, and domestic redistribution to return to at least 1950s-era levels of inequality as a “transitional plan” to eco-socialism. It emphasizes care work, borrowing from feminist economics and Northern social reproduction theory, although like that theory, it is blind to the role of peripheral labor in social reproduction on a world scale, extending beyond care work to un-commodified production of subsistence, including using “natural” landscapes, small-scale plots, and animals to do so (Ossome & Naidu, n.d.). It ambiguously calls for grants to the
South while muting the touchstone Cochabamba Accords, and sometimes outright refuses calls for global energy-use convergence (Pollin, 2018). Techno-ecologically, this position remains in détente with calls for biofuels, afforestation, or half-Earth “conservation” strategies, reprising, in its blindness to the agrarian question, especially that of reproduction, economistic and core-centered plans for social transformation (Amin, 2019; Moyo et al., 2013). Politically, this position seeks to ride the Markey/AOC GND, expanding it through diffuse commitments to grassroots internationalism. Yet, it is silent on the national question.

A fourth, revolutionary solution, to which we now turn, advocates guaranteed well-being, far smaller core energy use, decommodified access to social needs, and tremendous grants of technology to the Third World through climate debt. A form of agro-ecological and indigenous management which intertwines with a renewed defense of sovereignty, demilitarization, and decolonization.8

A People’s Green New Deal

Because the world-system is divided materially, superficially anti-systemic movements in the core and periphery recurrently deviate into support for rallying behind the flag in the former, and in the latter “Color Revolutions” with a pro-systemic character. The reproduction of Eurocentrism in GND discussions should not be surprising, for that reason: the dominant ideology defaults to upholding the international color-class line. But it suggests the need for clarity concerning programmatic elements of a People’s GND North and South, and the complementary and distinct burdens of transformation in each.

I enter such a debate with three postulates. One: the only legitimate aim is world-scale developmental convergence on permanently sustainable ecological and relatively egalitarian social bases, alongside national-regional sovereign industrialization. Reverse-engineering that outcome means sketching political paths which lead there. Two: politics starts with location, implying distinct, converging paths. Three: agriculture and land-use management are central to the Southern and Northern transformative twenty-first-century projects (the subsequent emphasis on agriculture should not be read as rejection of sovereign and ecologically modulated industrialization).

The national question is central, with different faces in the North (Patnaik, 2015) and the South. Four elements are key. First, effective decolonization. Second, a renewed defense of sovereignty, as the political
and economic gains of decolonization are now being rolled back, especially in the Arab region (Kadri, 2016). Third, an inflection of the national question visible through the prism of climate debt, which synergistically interacts with stronger sovereignty to advocate for and receive debt settlements. Fourth, the agrarian question, enfolding land, labor, ecology, and gender, requires resolution of the national question including the active defense of peripheral gains and solidarity with those speaking in national-popular grammars (Ajl, 2021b).

The colonial question is far from over. It endures *de jure* in many settler-states. Furthermore, settler-colonialism, as the foundation for a racist system of social power, remains a potent flash point and accelerator for anti-systemic struggles. In the North American settler-states, the struggles of the Indigenous through Idle No More and at Standing Rock have catalyzed broader consciousness among non-indigenous radicals of the simmering “domestic” national question (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Estes, 2019). These struggles have a latent or explicit environmental edge, since it has been among indigenous people that rights to use-values are intertwined with rights to land and land back (Mihezuah & Hoover, 2019). Because of that, the largest arenas of biodiversity preservation are indigenous-managed. This confluence of environmental and national struggles should not imply reducing the Indigenous to any kind of prospective beneficiary of a restored antelapsarian environment. They are, in the words of indigenous scholars Andrew Curley and Majerle Lister (2020, p. 251), “modern peoples whose greatest threats are political marginalization at the hands of continued colonial processes.” Nevertheless, the scope of anti-systemic politics within this arena is potentially immense, since claims to land imply a kind of reversal of primitive accumulation.

A second national question relates to the renewed defense of state sovereignty. Nation-states are the political framework within which accumulation on a world scale can deepen or endure. Yemen, Iraq, Venezuela, or Zimbabwe are targeted with sanctions and war as nation-states, leading to national losses in productive forces. In consequence, the nation is a central political-social vehicle that carries resistance to oppression. From the 1980s to today, many of the most active struggles have deployed a national-popular idiom to unite the people for change to try to place domestic wealth at the service of their popular classes (Moyo & Yeros, 2011). It is understated that the most widely supported struggle for justice, Palestine, is that of a nation fighting for land, liberation, and return. The Zimbabwe flash-point should be obvious as the most fundamental post-Cold War material challenge to the international color line.
It is in and through the national political sphere that certain decisions must be made, alliances built, and internationalisms constructed. It matters who helms Bolivia, a national-popular, sovereign, and Indigenous-led nation-state, which was the political safehold for drafting the Cochabamba documents. A renewal of de facto and an achievement of de jure national sovereignty, the bulwark behind which peoples can consider and plan for the future, secures the institution that can advocate for, receive, and manage climate debt payments. Indeed, the international state system is the basis for calculating ecological debts in world political fora. And planning on the whole, the right to determine the contours of the future, requires sovereignty, although it cannot be reduced to it. To focus on the national question does not mean suppressing social, democratic, or “inner” environmental questions: who does get what within nations, who does make that decision, and what is the environmental texture of national production and distribution? It simply reflects the hierarchical structure of the world-system, based on a sovereignty deficit in other states. This deficit has been a feature of settler-colonialism, pacted decolonization, and neo-colonialism. It has reduced the actual material foundation upon which peoples and especially lower classes can build up their own lives (Tsui et al., 2013).

Climate debt and active respect for national sovereignty and decolonization raises the two faces, the two locations, of the national question. Third World rights to ecological debt repayment or the Fourth World rights to land implies First World political struggle to put meat on textual flesh. If Palestinians have the right to national liberation or Syrians and Yemenis the right to full exercise of state sovereignty in the international system, defense of those rights through anti-systemic struggle is part of the burden of transformation. Rights imply responsibilities, including identifying how global value relations are based on certain exclusions and primitive accumulations.

The national question’s ecological face is climate debt, requiring the restoration to radical developmental thought and practice of its state of the art as achieved in the 2010 meetings in Cochabamba. The ecological debt reflects how accumulation on a world scale, including its colonial and settler-colonial underpinnings, occurred alongside unequal access to waste sinks and the biosphere’s capacity to absorb and process all manner of waste, especially carbon dioxide. The subset of that debt related to climate refers to the seizure of global capacity to absorb greenhouse gases, with large implications for the Third World’s developmental path, preventing it from retreading the path paved in the West by cheap and easily accessible hydrocarbons: the “emissions debt.” The Cochabamba
meetings laid out a five-point program to settle climate debts. First, to return “occupied” atmospheric space and “decolonize” the atmosphere by removing and reducing emissions to try to fairly distribute atmospheric space and to account for the potentially clashing needs for “developmental space and equilibrium with Mother Earth.” Second, to honor the debts incurred by lost development opportunities related to unrepeatable cheap development paths. Third, to honor debts related to climate-induced destruction, including lifting immigration restrictions. Fourth, to honor the “adaptation debt,” the resources needed by poor countries to respond to the environmental dislocations produced by those emissions. Fifth, to refuse to wall off the climate crisis from the environmental crisis, clarifying that honoring such debts was part of the “broader ecological debt to Mother Earth” (Final Conclusions Working Group 8, 2010).

Rickard Warlenius (2012) used these positions to try to give numbers for climate debt. He found that if atmospheric space were to have been fairly allocated, the North, or the Annex I countries, would only have emitted 15% of their total emissions, c. 2008. The South, including China, would have been able to emit a bit more: 4.4%. By 2008, the North had over-emitted 746.5 GtCO₂. At a $50 per ton of CO₂, price, the historical debt value would have been $37.325 trillion. The IPCC estimates a $150–600 carbon price is needed for sub-1.5°C Celsius global warming. That price would increase the debt’s size to $111.975–447.9 trillion (IPCC, 2018, pp. 80–81). Bolivia demanded specifically “[p]rovision of financial resources by developed countries to developing countries amounting to at least 6% of the value of GNP of developed countries, for adaptation, technology transfer, capacity building and mitigation” (Submission by the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2010). In 2019, US GNP was $21.584 trillion. Six percent of that sum is $1.29 trillion. The GNP of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, approximately equivalent to Annex 1, was roughly $54 trillion. Six percent of that sum would be $3.24 trillion per year. These numbers cannot be metabolized by a system devoted to polarized accumulation, and imply a massive burden of transformation on the North to move toward developmental convergence with the South.

**Agrarian Elements of a People’s Green New Deal**

The fourth element of convergent development outcomes is a focus on and shift in Southern and Northern agrarian systems: in the South,
as the only plausible path to popular development, and in the North, as the only reasonable way to actually husband the land, eliminate the environmental crisis, produce sufficient food, and cease value extraction from the South.

National questions, anti-imperialism, and submerged but still-present Northern agrarian questions of land and labor intersect. If Third World agrarian systems oriented their production away from agro-export (Patnaik, 2015) and toward food sovereignty for their laboring classes, and the North moved away from current environmentally destructive methods of replacing labor and attention with industrial inputs and capital in agriculture, some higher percentage of core populations would be engaged in agricultural labor. This would require a large-scale agrarian reform, dismantling of the monopoly agricultural conglomerates, parity prices which reflect ecological costs, changing the relations of production to convert the sizeable rural proletariat to self-directed labor, and investments in localized processing, thereby bringing the secondary sector into the fold on planning and political levels. This would probably but not certainly require some slightly higher percentage of the US population to enter direct production, but more central is to ensure such labor is as well compensated if not more so than other forms of labor.9

In the periphery, the mostly unwalked peasant path, based on large-scale land to the tiller agrarian reforms, state support for cooperatives, due attention to historical and current “internal” oppressions related to race, gender, and ethnicity, alongside protected national agricultures and price engineering to ensure such production is as ecological as is reasonable, is the only path to Third World development.10

Such shifts in farming systems would, furthermore, produce the raw material for sovereign industrialization, preferably through regionally inter-linked markets (Ajl, 2021b; Fergany, 1987), while industry would serve the technical upgrading of agriculture, including through provision of appropriate-scale technologies.11 Such shifts would free up surplus for necessary heavy industrialization, especially for reasons of defense (Kontorovich, 2015), and renewable energy infrastructure, and the creation of national and regional transportation infrastructures. Through careful adoption of more advanced industrial suites, especially in countries that have yet to fully extend electrification, it may be possible to leapfrog over portions of the ecologically destructive industrial path walked by the North.

Second, it is increasingly clear that the unwalked peasant path, meaning worldwide land to the tiller agrarian reforms, paying attention to gender inequalities, and ideally but not necessarily through
cooperatives, is the only path to Third World development. A focus on shifting social power to smallholders and the landless is the only possible way to secure surpluses for sovereign industrialization, until such time as capital grants arrive from the North. Perhaps equally centrally, agro-ecological farming can vastly increase yields on marginal lands and in the Third World may only slightly reduce yields on prime land. In at least some cases, there have been agro-ecological transitions involving decreased labor, increased yields, and decreased inputs: the holy trinity of attention-intensive ecological farming (Rosset et al., 2011). Furthermore, agro-ecological farming and pasturing using landrace and rustic species and breeds lead to superior biodiversity outcomes. Additionally, agro-ecologically managed lands are more drought-resilient and resilient to flooding because the soil retains moisture. This will be a gift beyond value in an age of global warming-induced climatic chaos, producing rural lifeboats for oncoming floods (Altieri & Nicholls, 2017; Holt-Giménez, 2002).

Third, in a bit of historical poetic justice, peasant or small farmer agro-ecology pulls CO₂ from the atmosphere, so can attention-intensive pastoralism. The limits of these processes are not at all known, a consequence of epistemology sitting atop capitalist political economy: we know about what it is profitable to know about, rather than what a popular law of value would demand we know. The upper bounds of such absorption may be enough to bring atmospheric CO₂ levels down to early industrial levels, if emissions are stopped soon enough. It would then be somewhat ironic that it would be the small peasant class, the preserve of so-called traditional agricultural knowledge, and so often spit upon as a barely-surviving relic of the past, who holds in her hand the keys to the future of humanity.

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Notes

1. Climate debt is missing from the entire dossier.
2. One can likewise find comment from Rodney (2012) about soil exhaustion and the importation of inappropriate agricultural technology by the colonizers.
3. Southern innovations in political ecology and especially the relationship of erosion and soil loss to colonial-capitalism remain seriously underexplored through the Eurocentric process of canonical disciplinary construction; for “precursors,” see Cabral (1954), and his under-examined work on agrarian issues more broadly, and Sari (1977).
4. I follow the Yemeni government in referring to the assault on Yemen as a US attack, rather than the convention of “Saudi-led.”
5. The use of “net-zero” means that ongoing emissions will be balanced out by absorption of carbon via afforestation, reforestation, and likely bio-energy, carbon capture and storage, all premised on primitive accumulation of the Southern countryside.
6. Kevin Lin, a frequent speaker at Verso-sponsored events (e.g., MCLC Resource Center (2020) on ‘Viral Politics’), is a program officer at the NED-funded International Labor Rights Forum (2016).
7. The de-material “turn” of theory about indigenous people and settler-colonialism (Wolfe, 2016), as sharply distinct from indigenous studies or an older generation of work on settler-capitalism, and which needless to say completely ignores Zimbabwe and South Africa, has underpinned this transformation of settler solidarity with indigenous peoples into a knife more than capable of cutting into the social formations which have most supported indigenous struggles in the broadest sense, as in criticism of Bolivia under Evo Morales for essentially self-inflicting the coup d’état, in the name of solidarity with the country’s Indigenous movements; see, for example, Cavooris (2019); Dunbar-Ortiz et al., (2019).
8. One can find elements of this tendency, with internally uneven commitments to internationalism and the national question, in Adler et al. (2019), Ajl (2021c), Akuno (2017), Barca (2020), People’s Agreement of Cochabamba (2010), The Red Nation (2021) and the many writings of Keston Perry and the blog, Uneven Earth.
9. I discuss some of these issues at much greater length here (Ajl, 2019).
10. In the short-run, much like matters of defensive industrialization, there is a possibility that some measure of agricultural intensification could be necessary given short-term yield increases; but this is far from established and ought not to be the default.
11. The question of appropriate technology North and South urgently needs revisiting, see GREDET (1983) and Mahjoub (1983).
12. Some of these estimates are reviewed in Ajl (2021c, ch. 6).
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