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GREEN CAPITALISM? POLITICS FROM THE NECROCENE TO THE ELEUTHEROCENE

Abstract: In using the idea of *Necrocene*, the age of death and extinction due to capitalist accumulation, as opposed to the *Anthropocene*, this article will discuss how green capitalism is a ramification of the business-as-usual neoliberal praxis as it does not contemplate the pressing matters caused by capitalism as it exists today which are inherently linked to inequity, exploitation, death and extinction. Furthermore, through this lens, it will generate a critique of the Green New Deal and provide speculations on the planetary future. Finally, this article ambitiously aims to illustrate how through the imaginaries of death and extinction, capitalism and green capitalism can be challenged as they prove to be deathly and inconsistent to the creation of fruitful inroads for future alternatives towards the Eleutherocene: the age of liberated Earth and Humanity.

Keywords: anthropocene, environmental humanities, Green New Deal, political ecology, political philosophy.

CAPITALISMO VERDE? POLÍTICA DO NECROCENO AO ELEUTERIOCENO

Resumo: Usando a ideia de *Necroceno*, a idade da morte e da extinção devido à acumulação capitalista, em oposição ao *Antropoceno*, discutir-se-á neste artigo como o capitalismo verde é uma ramificação da tradicional prática neoliberal, uma vez que não contempla as questões urgentes causadas pelo capitalismo atual, que estão inerentemente ligadas à desigualdade, exploração, morte e extinção. Além disso, por este prisma, gerar-se-á uma crítica ao Green New Deal e estabelecer-se-ão especulações sobre o futuro planetário. Finalmente, este artigo visa ilustrar ambiciosamente a forma como, através de imaginários de morte e extinção, o capitalismo e o capitalismo verde podem ser desafiados enquanto se comprovam mortíferos e incompatíveis à criação de avanços profícuos para futuras alternativas rumo ao Eleuterioceno: a era da Terra e da humanidade livres.

Palavras-chave: antropoceno, ciências humanas ambientais, ecologia política, filosofia política, Green New Deal.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, scientists, environmentalists, political analysts and activists have portrayed the reality of our planet as a consequence of the climate emergency we are living in. Citing a litany of crises – from the melting of ice sheets and the mass-bleaching of coral reefs to the rising sea levels and their surface temperatures, the subsequent crisis of the Climate Refugees in the Pacific Islands, and the sixth mass-extinction of species – a variety of sociopolitical movements, cultural objects, studies and research topics have come to the center of the ecological discourse. However, as Boris Frankel (2018: 48) stated, “what is striking is not just the volume of evidence warning us about the extreme dangers of climate breakdown, but just how relatively ineffective those reports have been in altering most forms of ‘business as usual’”. Vividly exemplifying the transparency of such a plight are the Planetary Boundaries proposed by the Stockholm Resilience Center in 2009, which seek to define the various broad groupings of single planetary crisis that can lead to an irreversible planetary catastrophe.¹ As they state, “transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change” (Rockström *et al.*, 2009).

In a global paradigm in which sociopolitical measures are nowhere near able to meet the goal of keeping these boundaries controlled, some economic and political spheres are opting for either a Green New Deal (GND) or Green Capitalist alternatives in order to solve the current ecological and, subsequently, cultural, political and economic crises unfolding from it. In light of this, the present article ambitiously aims to generate a critique of green capitalism as a business-as-usual perspective that is, as in all types of capitalism, extractivist, inegalitarian and deathly. This will be done by using the Necrocene nomenclature as opposed to the Anthropocene, employing it as a hermeneutical heuristic to analyze this form of capitalism from a Critical Theory and Environmental Humanities perspective. By acknowledging the deathly and extinctive nature of capitalism in all its forms, this essay will try to illuminate how thinking through the Necrocene and emphasizing death and extinction as a consequence of capitalist accumulation might be fruitful to challenge capitalism by bringing its inconsistencies and its lethal nature more convincingly to the fore. Thus, the Necrocene might show itself as a valid analytical tool in order to pave a way towards the Eleutherocene: the age of liberated Earth and Humanity.

¹ These boundaries are climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, biogeochemical nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, global freshwater use, rate of biodiversity loss and integrity, land-system change, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading. The boundaries of biosphere integrity and biochemical flows of nitrogen and phosphorous cycles have been transgressed to a critical level, and most of the others are on the verge of crossing the threshold as well.

FROM THE HOLOCENE TO THE NECROCENE

The climate stability of the geological age of the Holocene provided humanity with long-lasting resources with which it established fruitful and robust civilizations. All recorded history took place during said geological epoch. From an ontological, material and epistemological point of view, this stability was the firm ground on which humanity could construct the foundations of everything we know, from love to art, from politics to religion, and from ethics to beauty, just to name a few. Now, this epoch seems to have vanished. With the aforementioned planetary boundaries mediating the different issues at hand so humankind can grasp the magnitude of the ecological crisis, the agency of humankind itself is at stake. That is, the effects of human activities on the atmosphere have impacted nature as a whole, breaking the barrier that alienated nature from humanity in the nature/culture dialectic (McKibben, 1989). In other words, as Ursula K. Heise highlighted, “nature in the sense of a domain apart from human intention no longer exists” (2016: 8). Consequently, as Paul Crutzen postulated, “it seems appropriate to assign the term ‘Anthropocene’ to the present, [...] human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene – the warm period of the past 10-12 millennia” (Crutzen, 2002: 23). As one of the few ideas in geology that has been studied in the humanities and social sciences, the Anthropocene allows us to come to terms with vast periods of time in human history and, consequently, with the history of capitalism.

Nevertheless, the Anthropocene narrative does not underscore the fact that the planetary modifications and the radical consequences they produce are due to capitalist practices. In turn, the Anthropocene, by using *anthro* (Greek for human), blames humanity as a whole, disregarding any distinction among human beings. Whether they consider themselves pro-capitalism or not, the vast majority of causes and consequences of humankind’s modification of the Earth to unsustainable levels have been the side effects of the praxis of the one billion wealthiest inhabitants of the Earth through an extractive, mass-accumulation capitalist logic and cultural ideology (Christensen and Heise, 2018). Thus, and even though one could understand the Anthropocene as a period of modification of the Earth beginning with the first civilizations, the Anthropocene narrative does not align with the reality that the current ecocidal crisis has not been triggered by humanity as a whole but by capitalism in all its dimensions.

Amongst many different nomenclatures proposed for this uncanny epoch in the debate of the “many Anthropocenes” (Chakrabarty, 2018), Jason W. Moore (2016) defined the current age as the *Capitalocene*, an age marked not only by the geological, but also the cultural, ecological and political power of capitalist accumulation. Within this nomenclature, Moore (2016) developed his crucial idea of the Law of Cheap Nature, a dialectic in which “Nature” as a categorical frame outside “Humanity” entangles not only

non-human ecosystems but also certain members of human societies such as people of color, women and people living in semicolonial regions. In this way, Moore intertwines political economy and the ecocidal motion of the planet in a world-ecology system.

Within this debate, Justin McBrien (2016) coined this epoch with the term Necrocene, the age of death and extinction as a result of capitalist accumulation. Considering the duality Moore proposed in the Law of Cheap Nature, McBrien (*ibidem*: 116) twists the Capitalocene narrative to put death and extinction as front and center inherent traits of capitalism since in his view “capitalism leaves in its wake the disappearance of species, languages, cultures and peoples. It seeks the planned obsolescence of all life. Extinction lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation”. Namely, this alternative narrative intends to shed light upon the theoretical inconsistencies of the Anthropocene narrative as it frames global problems as problems created by humanity as a whole. As previously mentioned, the current ecological and subsequent multifocal crises that are intertwined within it have been magnified from the Industrial Revolution to the current late-neoliberal system, causing the individual death and the holistic extinction of different human and non-human ecosystems.

For McBrien (2016), a fundamental part of the Necrocene narrative is the idea of necrosis, as a process that comes after a traumatic injury which causes the destruction of the cells by their own enzymes. Capitalism is, therefore, “the reciprocal transmutation of life into death and death into capital” (*ibidem*: 117). That is, capitalism is going towards its own extinction through its own logic of reproduction of productivity. In this light, capitalism looks as though it is framed within the expansion of production and accumulation, and the effects of it on the grounds that in fact allow such reproduction. Namely, for instance, that capitalism would perish with a massive degradation of non-human ecosystems *a priori*. This is in fact what the Necrocene theory acknowledges by making it abundantly clear that the current logic of neoliberalism² no longer considers

² Neoliberalism is a capitalist political philosophy and economic theory that has as central characteristics the reduction of state intervention to regulate economy, the expansion of market mechanisms and law, privatization, the disarming of trade unions and labor organizations, a reduction of state expenditure, propulsion of endless economic growth through whatever means exist, and prioritizing private capital. Neoliberalism sees competition as a defining characteristic in human relations, and any attempts to control this competition are seen as attempts against liberty. Theorized at the beginning of the 20th century, it was brought into globalization thanks to Ronald Reagan (United States), Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom), the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Maastricht treaty at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. However, contrary to Marxism or Anarchism, neoliberalism is seldom referred to as an ideology in the public debate, neoliberalism is the dominant ideology of most of the countries in the globalized world with the slogan “there is no alternative” in which neoliberalism appears as a Darwin-like natural selection. If you do not succeed, it is not due to a systematic failure or because you simply could not inherit a fortune, but because you did not try hard enough. To put it succinctly yet in very broad strokes, capitalism is a higher category or a system, whereas neoliberalism is a *modus operandi* and philosophy within capitalism. For more information on neoliberalism and how it works in the current world, see *How Did We Get into this Mess?* (Monbiot, 2016).

such dangers in a direct way. In other words, capitalism seems to be leading itself towards its own eventual extinction, at the expense of the annihilation of everything else.

Traditional Marxism understands that capitalism is a mode of production with profit and accumulation as its unique goals and, through this perspective, the Necrocene could be proven as inconsistent as capitalism does not seek extinction as its final aim. Nonetheless, the Necrocene acknowledges this adherence to the Law of Cheap Nature as intrinsic in capitalism and the consequent extinction processes that unfold from it. It is indeed via this drive to accumulate and profit that the Law of Cheap Nature becomes possible, namely, the exploitation of nature and labor-power reframed in the world-ecology between Nature (exploited agents) and Humanity (exploiters). In other words, capitalism triggers death and extinction, but does not seek them, and as a logic able to infect everything within its reach, it has even absorbed the current ecological turmoil to a certain extent. As previously mentioned, although capitalism might be the last thing to die within capitalism due to its plasticity and ability to adapt to new challenges, it is facing its own extinction. That is, the current ecological crisis has become a central problem threatening the survival of capitalism, which is trying to reinvent itself in the direction of alternatives such as the GND.

Therefore, the Necrocene theory might help us move beyond the non-human towards the human and back. That is, it entails in its nomenclature the inequalities, inconsistencies and exploitation of non-human animals, cultures, peoples and societies. In relation to this, although developing the full narrative of the Necrocene is beyond the scope of this essay, it is pivotal to bear in mind that the very idea of the Necrocene entails within it a series of necro-realities that shape it ideologically, materially and psychologically: necropolitics, necroeconomics and necro-ontologies. Necropolitics in the Necrocene develops biopolitics through death as the right to expose people to death and death practices (Mbembe, 2003). That is, for Achille Mbembe, necropolitics is

the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations [...] the human being truly becomes a subject – that is, separated from the animal – in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death (understood as the violence of negativity).
(Mbembe, 2003: 14; italics in the original)

However, the idea of Necrocene allows us to go beyond Mbembe's assumptions. With the framing of human and non-human entities alike, the Necrocene recasts the contemporary world into Nature (exploited) and Humanity (exploiters) in the process of becoming extinction. If the Law of Cheap Nature is considered, the members of Nature,

(human and non-human), become a set of objects outside bios, lose their subjectivity and become, just like Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*³ (1995), victims of the politics of death. Central to understanding the link between Necropolitics and the Necrocene as a socio-political heuristic is Mbembe's conception of the creation of death-worlds, "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe, 2003: 40-; italics in the original). Capitalism in the Necrocene pushes entities to the status of living dead, one between the humanitarian mainstream's rejection of violence and humanity's fetish towards it.

Necroeconomics, in turn, are defined by Chaka Unzonde (2013: 328) as,

an economic system which is principally organized around the consumption of bodies as part of the process of accumulation. That is to say, necro-economics consumes specific populations that are rendered "matter" that can be used and/or disposed of. These populations, as instrumentalized "matter," can and are used in the generation of wealth, in the accumulation of capital. It follows that they are not citizens in any substantive sense. These populations' relationship to the mainstream economy cannot rest on their intrinsic value. They have none.

The Law of Cheap Nature, together with these necropolitics and necroeconomics, build up the Necrocene as a necro-ontology, "a systematic rendering of particular populations as bodies that must necessarily be killed [...] understood as a philosophical orientation that rationally organizes populations for their necessary death" (*ibidem*: 327), by considering that politics, economy, society, culture and the self are mutually constitutive of this necro-ontology under the canopy of capitalism through materialism and ideology.

This uncanny epoch is the "era of death" (Clark, 2019: 13) in multiple senses. It threatens the death of the biosphere and the humanisphere as we know them in the course of human history as a result of growth and "the forces of technological domination, in dialectical interaction with other forms of domination" (*ibidem*). In a contemporary state of affairs "marked by the globalization of markets, the privatization of the world under the aegis of neoliberalism, and the increasing imbrication of the financial markets, the postimperial military complex and electronic and digital technologies" (Mbembe, 2017: 3), and where the forms of belief "get in line with the dominating techno-Capitalist society, undergoing a

³ In this context, the *Homo Sacer* is understood as those living entities that are subjugated to the internal domination of the maximum efficiency. If said entities are not productive for capitalism, they are discarded. That is why this article argues that the Necrocene narrative has inside it the necropolitics of a society of the *living-dead*.

process of deterritorialization and deculturation that renders them apt for global consumption” (Ungureanu, 2017: 277), the Necrocene narrative might help us reframe the world-ecology at the end of nature by challenging and going beyond the nomenclature of the Anthropocene. Furthermore, it potentially brings a theoretical tool to hermeneutically analyze the contemporary world and the different tensions between capitalism and ecology, and capitalism and culture. By bringing the issues of death and extinction to the fore and identifying them as intrinsic to the logic of capitalism, the Necrocene might be a generative heuristic able to open new spaces for analysis and theoretical and material engagement. That is, this nomenclature can possibly generate new theories and narratives to appear at the surface through the acknowledgement of the infectious and extinctive nature of Capitalism, and all the inequalities that lie beyond its spectrum.

NECROCENE VS. GREEN CAPITALISM

To consider “Green Capitalism” as a solution for the current sociopolitical and ecological emergency is nothing more than a placebo to perpetuate hegemony and fix some of the ecological problems affecting the world insofar as these problems are solved by advancing the “business-as-usual” praxis. Its logic of competition, growth and accumulation, together with the unequal distribution of wealth, property and power, is leading to a commodification of basic material substances of global vital use that had never been commodified before by an economically-rich elite towards a metabolic rift.⁴ This rift, in turn, separates people from the ecosystems that support them and makes it an unsustainable alternative to face the current global ecological crisis (Scales, 2017). As Leandro Vergara-Camus (2017) noted, any socialist who wants to defend economic growth, even if it is based on renewable or green energies, “would have to explain how such overall growth will come about without more exploitation of one sort or another”. Thus, green capitalism is not a conceivable alternative as a real solution for sustainability in the current state of affairs, as it is trapped in current late-neoliberalism “statist, technocratic, patriarchal society of mass consumption” (Clark, 2019: 20), which drives societies towards selfhood and obsessive desires, accumulation, and attachments. In other words, the current system steers societies towards the necropolitics, necroeconomics and necro-ontologies of the Necrocene.

As a top-down, business-as-usual alternative, green capitalism does not address the core of the problem, which is the *Capitalist Realism* (Fisher, 2009) in which most of the humanity is submerged without visualizing any way out. Capitalism functions through a

⁴ A metabolic rift is understood in environmental Marxist theory, in very broad strokes, as a rupture in the metabolic interaction between humankind and natural ecosystems derived from the growing capitalist production.

system of production and the propagation and creation of needs. This progresses towards a culture of consumption that makes societies believe, via its necro-realities, that there is no way out and that this obsessive consumption is the only praxis possible, absorbing humankind inside such an ideology. As Jacques Rancière (2017) pointed out, capitalism has the capacity to organize a common world based on inequality and, by reproducing it in a spiral-like motion, it makes itself appear as the world in which we live, act, move and feel, and the only reality possible. Capitalism has become a material and psychological domain in which alternatives seem to be nothing more than unreal imaginaries.

Therefore, if one uses the Necrocene to hermeneutically engage with green capitalism, it appears to be just an extension of capitalism itself, meant to wash its image and portray an eco-friendly façade without rejecting its deathly and extinctive nature. In turn, it generates the necessity of consumption of such eco-materials and the generation of pseudo-ecological policies while playing by the same rules as current late-neoliberalism. Namely, green capitalism falls right in the center of the necro-realities embedded in the Necrocene narrative. It deprives of value and creates human and non-human ecosystems of *homo sacri*, those agents under the yoke of the necro-realities of the Necrocene, creating the world of the living dead: entities that are nothing more than fodder to be consumed or exploited.

Green capitalism deprives the populations subjugated to extreme neoliberal and unequal practices of their intrinsic value. It is an example of a cultural hegemony as a process of moral, intellectual, political and social domination and subordination by the dominant order, in this case capitalism. As Raymond Williams (1978) details, hegemony constructs current and lived experiences like a sense of reality and absolute since experienced reality beyond it is hardly impossible for most members of society. In addition, and even though it is not total and gives spaces to alternatives according to Williams (*ibidem*), capitalist hegemony is dynamic in the sense that it is renewed, defended and modified, and it attempts to neutralize opposition insofar as the dominant culture creates limitations to other alternatives and forms of counterculture. This is illustrative of the politics within green capitalism. Capitalism has modified and renewed itself to be plastic enough to fit within the counterculture of environmentalism, which, for its part, was challenging the hegemonical logic of capitalism itself.

That is to say, capitalism is extractivist⁵ at its core given that it also extracts from human lives, materially and psychologically speaking. Using the perspective of the

⁵ Extractivism can be defined as the “economic form of organizing natural and social resources in which sustained profitability depends on the extraction, over time, of an increasing amount of natural resources from the earth” (Diamanti, 2018: 55). As a “worldeater” (Dunlap, 2020), and due to its will to always reduce costs, extractivism is originated under capitalism and, although exogenous, it infects socialism “so long as the latter has not yet made its way through the transition period – when socialism is still a national, rather than international, political form” (Diamanti, 2018: 55).

Necrocene as a driver, this flow allows capitalism to reduce every entity, human or non-human to an instrumentalized substance subjugated to the necro-realities of the Necrocene. Extractivism is, then, unbalanced *per se*, as it creates socioeconomic inflation and inequalities that can lead to new forms of colonialism on the one hand and direct ecological problems on the other. Moreover, extractivism is an inherent trait of capitalism given that, in all its forms, capitalism desires to extract materially and psychologically. Advocates of green capitalism blindly believe that they have some sort of control over the neoliberal “business cycle” and do not consider previous failures able to foresee or prevent economic recessions, without even considering the aforementioned global inequalities and neocolonial paradigms that can rise from such practices (Frankel, 2018). This refers back to Moore’s (2016) idea of The Law of Cheap Nature, in which extractivism is a clear example of the tension between Nature and Humanity present in the Necrocene narrative. As John P. Clark (2019: 16) points out, at the center of the Necrocene epoch at the end of nature there will only remain “a sovereign lack, an imperious death drive, a destructive nothingness, surrounded by a field of objects of consumption and domination”.

We can see how advocates for green capitalism take many shapes, from utopian technological entrepreneurs to conservative managers of multinational companies. Similarly, socialist scholars such as Frankel (2018) or Erik Olin Wright (2015) have detailed in their work how difficult it is to live ‘off the grid’ and escape capitalism, noting that the only feasible solution right now is to “tame capitalism” through “public policies and socioeconomic projects of eroding capitalism through the expansion of emancipatory forms of economic activity” (Wright *apud* Frankel, 2018: 277) so as to regenerate progressive social democracy that “not only neutralizes the harms of capitalism but also facilitates initiatives to build real utopias with the potential to erode the dominance of capitalism” (*ibidem*). These ideas are pivotal for further thinking on the matters at hand, and are directly connected with the pragmatic view of the situation by degrowth political ecologists such as Giorgios Kallis *et al.* (2013), who call for a radical systemic change as a way to address sustainability via intermediate grounds, thus avoiding absolutist and fundamentalist dilemmas, cutting green capitalism commodity fetishism as a cause of the accumulation of crisis that developed from the failures of the late-Keynesian model and that have been absorbed by current late-neoliberalism (Kallis *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, to consider green capitalism as a solution rather than an alternative to be challenged from radical theory and praxis is, as Allan Stoekl (2013: 133) graphically illustrates, “the apocalypse against the apocalypse”.

Capitalism demands control over everything. If a practice does not benefit capitalism’s never-ending accumulation and control over societies, said praxis will not be

acquired by the system or, as in the case of renewable energy sources, will be accumulated by lobbies and big multinational companies so as to make such energies fit into mass-accumulation. Paraphrasing Noam Chomsky (2013), human and non-human entities cannot live in existing Capitalism – whether it be “green” or not – as it is incompatible with an equitable way of life and with any form of *real* democracy and socialism. It leads to death, inequality, extinction, exploitation and alternatives undercovered in an environmental disguise to maintain the *status quo*. Capitalism only leads to the ultimate Tragedy of Commons.

Yet, if we can scrutinize green capitalism inconsistencies from this vantage point, its inability to work might be proven through the different theoretical approaches the Necrocene entails. Then, how do we go about ontologically addressing it to develop alternative narratives and possibilities that can radically challenge it? And how can the Necrocene help us contemplate the *Eleutherocene* (Clark, 2019), the age of liberated Earth and liberated humanity? What is crucial here is to “go beyond Green”, to go beyond Nature from a multifocal lens. Let us therefore consider the implications of one of the most recognized alternatives in the current paradigm: The GND.

GREEN NEW DEAL: A SKEPTICAL APPROACH

Despite the support of some theoreticians who are extremely critical of capitalism, such as Naomi Klein (2019) or Robert Pollin (2018), the GND, even though it is much more promising than green capitalism, seems to fall into a similar category. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to fully expose what the GND entails, Ann Pettifor (2019) defines the internal logic of the GND in her book *The Case for the Green New Deal* as a

‘steady state’ economy (that is, an economy with a relatively stable, mildly fluctuating product of population and per capita consumption) that helps to maintain and repair the delicate balance of nature, and respects the laws of ecology and physics (in particular thermodynamics). An economy that delivers social justice for all classes, and ensures a livable planet for future generations. In consequence, this must be a world in which women’s rights over their own bodies are paramount – for all the obvious reasons, but also so that human fertility can be managed. A world in which labour substitutes for carbon: a decarbonised economy will be a job-rich, labour-intensive economy. In it, we will do far more walking and cycling; we will not fly; we will give up meat and grow and consume local, seasonal, slow food. We will make and repair our own garments, rather than exploiting low-paid workers in far-off places. We will use both the sun’s energy and human energy efficiently. And, to do this, we will overturn the powerful ideology that drives the

expansion of economic activity [...] to unsustainable levels, the ideology of extreme individualism and competition, and will instead celebrate the uniquely human qualities of altruism, empathy and collective action. (Pettifor, 2019: 66-67)

If that is what the GND is, it may well be complicated to go against it from a leftist, socialist and even Marxist perspective. However, and even though the GND presents itself as a very well-grounded alternative to fight back against the different crises the transgression of the Planetary Boundaries might unfold, theoreticians have reasons to be skeptical when it comes to the reality that this GND may portend. If absorbed by the financial superpowers in a very weak political environment that both depends on and is indebted to said powers, the GND can very quickly be modified in accordance with green capitalism to perpetuate 'business-as-usual'. In other words, the GND offers a well-supported theory that it might fail when approached as a praxis. As Pettifor (2019: 159) predicts, the GND will only happen if working classes fully grasp the importance that public debt and taxpaying have on the finance sector in order to leverage power "over immensely wealthy, globalized corporations and individuals". Other aspects that must be taken into account are the fact that the largest repo markets in the world, namely those in the US and Europe, are built on government debt (Pettifor, 2019). In this case, the state becomes a collateral factory for shadow banking and, in turn, this shadow banking can re-leverage a single unit of collateral several times in contrast with a "real-world" operator (*ibidem*). This has important implications. In a self-regulated, globalized financial system that is able to generate exponential unregulated credit for speculators and consumers, said credit inflates the price of existing assets while failing to promote the creation of new ones (*ibidem*). Then, this credit also serves as a tool to accelerate both extraction and consumption of the Earth's finite assets since, higher rates demand the extraction of more labor and ecosystem assets to repay debts (*ibidem*).

Furthermore, an application of a GND such as the one stated above might trigger a response by the private sectors that have the upper-hand on national governments in order to boycott this system change to keep the private power they have over nation-states by launching a large-scale exodus of assets, capital and government bonds from the country at hand. Thus, as Pettifor (2019) outlined, this outflow of capital would make the national currency fall, the central bank might raise its base rate and generate interest rates, jeopardizing the "real" economy besides unregulated markets and banks. Bearing this in mind, although courageous governments might face these financial sectors to fight the ecocidal nature of current capitalism in order to regain sovereignty over this financial upper-hand, in the current state of affairs, it seems very far-fetched, something highly unlikely to happen.

Consequently, if neither governments nor societies are able to comprehend the power they can have over financial superpowers and still fall into the capitalist realism in which the current democracies are subjugated, the efficiency of the presented GND is complicated. In addition, this GND would reflect a green capitalism in which issues would only be solved as long as their resolution would not jeopardize the ultimate interests of capitalism. Such a consideration would imply that issues of equity, solidarity and justice for all would be eliminated from the program.

If this transmutation of the GND towards green capitalism happens, we will just be left with a classic fake-progressive vs. traditionalist dynamic. A failure to define the subsequent green capitalism logic as the GND would only provide the world with a “greener” and more efficient megamachine to perpetuate the hegemony of the capitalist democracies of the global north, probably with the US or the EU at the forefront. In other words, a GND that undergoes such transformation is a GND that aims to save capitalism, not to save the planet on the grounds of equity, solidarity and justice for all as presented in theory. To provide an example, the neocolonialism and extractivism for oil may well come to an end, but it will be replaced by lithium, as we have seen with the interest the United States showed in supporting the coup in Bolivia. Therefore, as illustrated in the previous section, the Necrocene will be present as a higher category since capitalism and its deathly and extinctive logic will prevail.

The GND presents itself as the best (and probably only) hope humanity has to redefine its *modus vivendi* and direct it towards a more hopeful future. Its wide array of literature and thought make it very consistent, timely and compelling to the current crisis of the Planetary Boundaries (albeit utopian when bearing in mind the current state of affairs). The call for the GND as presented by Pettifor (2019), provides us with a ray of hope. However, theoreticians, policymakers and activists must be wary of the different problematics it entails in a world in which governments are under the sway of financial superpowers.

Thus, any ecosocialist alternative that wants to confront the current ecological crisis must acknowledge the necro-realities that come into play in the Necrocene age and the viscous nature of capitalism. In this light, critique has become more difficult than ever because what we observe after the end of formal domination is “neither a clear measure of the difference between the possible and the real, nor a straightforward reasoning why more is possible than which is the real” (Wagner, 2016: 139). Nonetheless, it is important to notice that here the “force of critique is demonstrating that the real is deficient with regard to the possible” (*ibidem*: 147). Actively engaging with whatever inconsistencies the GND might have if transmuted into a green capitalism is necessary as a collective task. However, what are the global implications of what we have mentioned so far?

Which speculative futures might appear with a failure in the application of the GND and an acceptance of a future-based capitalist ground, either green or not? Let's consider the two most likely outcomes of the current turmoil.

SPECULATIVE GLOBAL FUTURES: LEVIATHAN AND BEHEMOTH

Acknowledging everything mentioned so far, the two most likely future possibilities that can arise in the planetary paradigm are what John Wainwright and Geoff Mann (2017) established as *Climate Leviathan* and *Climate Behemoth*. Wainwright and Mann's ideas can help theoreticians, policymakers and activists to see beyond the present and envisage articulated realistic futures in the current ecological, political, social and cultural crisis. In addition, coming to terms with these two possibilities opens spaces to historically pinpoint how the Necrocene epoch works and how it needs to be challenged. Amongst these two, *Climate Leviathan* seems to be the most likely to happen as it is defined as

the dream of a planetary sovereign, [...] a regulatory authority armed with democratic legitimacy, binding technical authority on scientific issues and a panopticon-like capacity to monitor the vital granular elements of our emerging world: fresh water, carbon emissions, climate refugees and so on. (Wainwright and Mann, 2017: 30)

This Leviathan reconnects us with Stoekl's (2013) idea of the apocalypse against the apocalypse, and Clark's (2019) aforementioned speculations on the planetary futures in the Necrocene. Feeding the necro-realities that are at play in the Necrocene, this global system based on green capitalism would go beyond the nation-state territorial organization becoming the perpetuation of the hegemonic status of northern liberal democracies. Nonetheless, bearing in mind the conflictive nature that the future might entail, it is no surprise that most of the climate justice advocates that have an informed and rational perspective are being pulled towards this logic of global organization. This planetary sovereign would base itself on green capitalism insofar as said green practices have paving the way for accumulation and production as a goal. That is, a green business-as-usual praxis. The GND might also fall into this higher category of a global hegemonic order over different states. This agency would be much more present if the GND is not adopted properly in terms of praxis as it would essentially become what we have described as green capitalism. Then, this would shed light upon the plasticity of capitalism to adapt to new challenges and absorb them to its own benefit, in this case, dragging the fields of policy, conservation and ecology to its own terrain.

Nonetheless, if capitalism and the world powers fail to understand the scope and dangers of the current ecological crisis properly, the world will be put under the pressure of a Climate Behemoth. In other words, the planetary organization will become one of populist nations rejecting international agreements in an every-nation-for-itself *modus operandi* to selfishly save themselves from the impacts of climate change so as to avoid rejecting the capitalist logic (Wainwright and Mann, 2017). Therefore, the necro-realities of the Necrocene will become a very present mode of social organization, condemning the least wealthy even more than now.

As Bruno Latour (2017: 1) illustrated, since the 1980s the oligarchy and ruling social strata stopped leading and “began to shelter themselves from the world” in a contemporary age that is confined in a global system in which profit and accumulation are prioritized over everything and that political agendas do not tend to match with the logic of ecosystems. In light of this, neither the politics of a Climate Leviathan nor Climate Behemoth face the internal problem that has brought the planet to this situation. By illuminating the necro-realities that are at play in the Necrocene, even if capitalist ideology wants to make us believe that this Leviathan might be something positive for the whole planet, this ideology and praxes can be questioned and brought at the center of the debate due to its deathly nature.

That capitalism is more than an economic system is not new. It is a fixed mode of life that shapes our relationships, our own self and our practices in the material world. Yet, most of the efforts to create critiques and policies to challenge it “typically proceed without grappling fully with the entwinement of the economic with the social and cultural, much less the political, ethical, ontological, and phenomenological” (Cole and Ferrarese, 2018: 106). Today’s politics can be generalized by the inability or unwillingness to create “new ideas and modes of organization necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations. While crisis gathers force and speed, politics withers and retreats” (Williams and Srnicek, 2013). In light of this, green capitalism led by the world’s superpowers and the neoliberal agenda of the global north should not be the eventual goal but, if considered, only a tool to move beyond capitalism and in the direction of democratic economy and an egalitarian ethics for human and non-human ecosystems. As defended by most from the Paris COP21 in 2014 onwards as our best and only hope is the acceptance that the battle is already lost. A green capitalism and/or a Climate Leviathan would doom the less-wealthy to keep on generating profit for the economically-rich at the expense of having natural ecosystems on the verge of collapsing. Any shape capitalism can adopt would perpetuate the inequalities and the deathly nature that lie at heart of capitalism as it is a very adaptive system and logic.

Although neoliberalism has made it more visible, one cannot blame neoliberalism only, as the problem has always been the inegalitarian, top-down logic of capitalism.

Therefore, the thinking through the Necrocene might be helpful to challenge green capitalism, as the Necrocene narrative sheds light upon the inconsistencies of its internal condition so as to move towards a world based on the grounds of equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human beings. The Necrocene and its catastrophism might trigger responses towards a theoretical ecological justice that does not only acknowledge the green and “comforting homeostatic conception of nature” (Bryant, 2013: 292), but it also gives pivotal emphasis and attention to the issues of race, gender, discriminated minorities, and peoples disproportionately affected by the current ecological turmoil triggered by capitalist mass accumulation. In other words, by putting at stake the mainstream “green” techno-fixing of non-human ecosystems and environmental issues by approaching such problems from a non-anthropocentric perspective that acknowledges the different struggles intertwined in capitalism, the Necrocene brings to the surface the inconsistencies and deathly nature of capitalism in order to open new spaces that reject a world of multifocal death and extinction in favor of moving towards the Eleutherocene.

BEYOND THE NECROCENE: THE UNSOLVED EQUATION OF THE ELEUTHEROCENE

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, neoliberalism has shown its true colors to the world as an inconsistent, profoundly inegalitarian system. Its market and extractivist practices have led to a pandemic that is,

a hidden cost of human economic development [...] We are going into largely undisturbed places and being exposed more and more. We are creating habitats where viruses are transmitted more easily, and then we are surprised that we have new ones. (Jones *in* Vidal, 2020)

As a consequence of the result of the ruthless extraction and degradation of ecosystems, market policies and extractivism, the global COVID-19 strife, which has been considered the outbreak of mass pandemics (Vidal, 2020), is one of the most vivid examples of the necrotic nature of capitalism and, consequently, of the Necrocene epoch in which we are immersed and its necro-realities. Nevertheless, it is also fruitful to challenge capitalism (and its green versions) to its core. If we consider that capitalism can only be challenged if proven inconsistent and that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism then, through the Necrocene narrative, “we can now

revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world” (Jameson, 2003: 76).

Then, if one steps back from the brutality of the Necrocene age and analytically examines it, four reflections can be made, according to Juan Carlos Monedero (2020). The first is that the neoliberal system does not work for the masses, as most of the policies adopted are pseudo-socialist in the sense that they are powerfully shielding the core of neoliberalism where the wealthy can still be wealthy without any fear of a disruption in the system and a loss of the privileges of the control of the *Deep State*. The second is that individualism leads to disaster. In a system in which a 10% of the population owns more than a half of the wealth, only cooperation and the acknowledgement and public care of commons is a feasible way out. What leads to dysfunctional individualism is an individual’s belief that he/she is the chosen one or is immune to the neoliberal voraciousness and protected by it. The third and most compelling for this work is that limitless continuous growth and accumulation is, in fact, limited in terms of resilience. Interesting to note is how environmental conditions have improved during the pandemic due to lockdowns and partially stopping the capitalist machine. However, inequality and class struggle due to the instability of the whole system have increased. Capitalism, seen through the Necrocene lens, is a system that attacks life at its purest state as life is governed by the necro-realities. Here, one can see how green capitalism would not work in the long-run as it would play by the exact same rules as business-as-usual neoliberalism in decline. Even if it moved from neoliberalism towards a less aggressive system, it would still be profoundly unequal and, as aforementioned, probably under the planetary sovereign force of a Climate Leviathan. In his fourth observation, Monedero (*ibidem*) advocates reinventing the state towards a fully democratic people-driven system that tries to overcome the brutal control over populations through a panopticon-like social organization. Thus, the current state of affairs is leading the global population to a dialectical choice: “*socialismo o barbarie*” (Monedero, 2020).

Real Socialism and Ecosocialism might be two of the most interesting alternatives towards a more equitable and sustainable *modus vivendi*. However, these political systems cannot coexist with or within capitalism. For Álvaro García Linera (2013; italics in the original),

socialism is not a new mode of production that can live alongside capitalism [...] [but it is] a battlefield between capitalism in crisis and the tendencies, potentialities and efforts to bring production under community ownership and control. In other

words, is the historical period of struggle between the dominant established *capitalist mode of production* and another potentially *new mode of production*.

Bearing this in mind, the Necrocene might help us navigate through the logic of capitalism and radically challenge it. Green capitalism is profoundly unequal. It plays by the rules of capitalism and the inequalities that are at play under its canopy. Linera (2013) summarizes this by noting that it is naïve to believe that “extractivism, non-extractivism or industrialism are a vaccination against injustice, exploitation and inequality”. Thus, capitalism, or accumulation, industrialization and growth in any shape disguised as green alternatives, are in fact unsustainable in the long-run.

However, as Frankel (2018: 285) mentions, “without new comprehensive socio-economic and environmental state roles to redefine socio-economic activity”, the possibility of a post-growth or post-capitalist equitable society is barely existent. This is a reality also portrayed by Kallis (2018) and other degrowth advocates. This global ecological crisis is, in the view of Val Plumwood (2002), the crisis of a cultural mind that cannot acknowledge and adapt itself properly to its material “body”, the embodied and ecological support base it draws on in the long-denied counter-sphere of “nature”. Given this lack of fit, hegemonic rationality is “in conflict with ecological rationality and survival” (*ibidem*: 15). Without going into much depth as this would material for a further exploration of ideas that is beyond the scope of this article, Plumwood’s (2002) idea of Ecological Rationality might, through the acknowledgment of the Necrocene narrative, be useful to challenge capitalism within it, and work towards the Eleutherocene. This idea is based on the overcoming of neoliberalism as a self-interested, individualistic system based on formulas to satisfy as many private interests as possible, which features colonized political, social and scientific spheres without having the capacity to reflect or correct its life-threatening blindspots, creating the dichotomy and paradox between a hyper-rational system that is profoundly irrational. Ecological Rationality⁶ is defined by Plumwood (2002: 68) as,

The capacity to correct tendencies to damage or reduce life-support systems. An ecologically rational society would be sustainable to the extent that its corrective capacities enable it to make consistently good ecological decisions that maintain viable ecological relationships and coordinate them with its social organisation. [...] Ecological rationality includes that higher-order form of critical, prudential self-

⁶ One should not mistake Ecological Rationality with the Eleutherocene. The former is a philosophical perspective based on new materialism that considers ecology from a non-anthropocentric point of view. The latter, on the other hand, is the utopia after capitalism and the Necrocene: the age of liberated Earth and humanity.

critical reason which scrutinises the match or fit between an agent's choices, actions and effects and that agent's overall desires, interests and objectives as they require certain ecological conditions for their fulfilment.

Therefore, Ecological Rationality goes beyond green and challenges liberal democracy "as an interest group model produces, not as a matter of accident, radical economic inequality, often in association with ethnic, gender and other kinds of marginality and cultural subordination" (*ibidem*: 83), generating failures in ecological justice. On the contrary, Ecological Rationality suggests a turn towards a recasting of the liberal public sphere as an arena where direct democracy and opportunities to speak are equal, eliminating class as a position of silence and radical marginalization. That is, any form of post-capitalist society should have some sort of Ecological Rationality entangled into its systemic features. Consequently, and going back to the core assumption of this essay, green capitalism is not compatible with such rationality as it does not consider any foundational change in the current system that is business-as-usual, extractivist, individualistic, and voraciously accumulative.

Only in a world that manages to transcend capitalism as a mode of organization and where sovereignty is so fragmented that the political spheres cannot be framed within the nation-state sovereign exception might there be climate and world justice founded on the grounds of equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human ecosystems (Wainwright and Mann, 2017). That is why the GND is so attractive and yet so problematic when considering the current state of affairs in the political, cultural, social and ecological spheres. In spite of this, there is no ultimate answer as to how at this stage we can leave the Necrocene epoch and move towards the Eleutherocene. However, acknowledging the Necrocene narrative might help us distance ourselves from it to come closer to the Eleutherocene since by acknowledging this epoch, its necro-realities and the Law of Cheap Nature, the deathly nature and inconsistencies of capitalism are put front and center in the debate.

Green capitalism is a fallacy that is almost an oxymoron. In turn, the GND appears as a promising alternative which, as a theory, is convincing, compelling and timely. As Vergara-Camus (2017) and John Bellamy Foster (2015) have drawn attention to, societies are on the verge of a Great Transition where certain values such as consumerism, individualism, or the anthropocentric domination of nature will be replaced by the triad composed of quality of life, human solidarity and ecological sensibility. Green capitalism is unable to adapt itself to this transition in the long run as it falls within the hegemony of the Necrocene. Thus, the GND might provide humanity with a theory that that could well open new inroads leading to the attainment of systemic change. Yet, even

though ecologists and activists should have a positive attitude towards the GND, it is vital to understand that the intrinsic problems of capitalism are linked to the Necrocene which go beyond green and they will only be transgressed if the GND – or any other alternative – is proposed to put at the center of the debate a future based on equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human beings.

Therefore, what is fundamentally necessary is to overcome the Necrocene epoch via the clear and widespread acknowledgement of the Necrocene narrative so that the planet may be allowed to achieve the utopic goal of the Eleutherocene, given how capitalist logic drags dominant sectors into its own logic and necro-realities to save the dominant forces and their privileges. Although the Necrocene narrative is catastrophist in its grounds, it brings to the center of the discussion the urgent need for radical changes to advance the world towards the Eleutherocene. In other words, it advocates for a material and ontological secularization from capitalist ideology and its realism, to navigate towards a world based on the premises of equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human living beings. To achieve this, further discussion should emphasize the aim of disarticulating capitalism and articulating the responses to the question, “How do we build a democracy that democratizes all aspects of life?” (Vergara-Camus, 2017). None of us truly knows what a post-capitalist world will look like, but the impetus should lie in John Jordan’s words, “Let’s build it together” (Jordan *apud* Gibson-Graham, 2006: xix).

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