

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Reproducing socio-ecological life from below: Towards a planetary political economy of the global majority

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## Abstract

Confronting the coming five decades from our present conjuncture demands – to paraphrase Antonio Gramsci's famous mantra – both critical pessimism and a wilful politics of hope. In this article, we engage with the politics of climate breakdown and the responses to wider socio-ecological crises with a necessary critical pessimism. Specifically, we confront the capture of green transition imperatives by finance capital, as well as the troubling orientation of transition towards building new structures of accumulation around the vision of an electrified consumer society. We also see the coming decades being marked by the ever-increasing wealth of global asset-owning classes – who, by definition, enclose the atmospheric commons faster than any other community. Against this dystopian picture of increasingly concentrated wealth, corporate excess, and terrestrial crisis, we focus on the stubborn reproduction of socio-ecological life through various grounded projects across the world. We engage with communities who work against structural constraints to reproduce life from below through urban commoning, food sovereignty, Indigenous organising, and caretaking economies – all of which are scaling out their visions through alternative internationals. All of these projects, we argue, present a planetary and multiscalar political economy in practice, which connects grounded experience with resistance to the dynamics of capitalism at the state, corporate, and transnational levels. With lessons from these communities in mind, we call for a 'planetary political economy of the global majority', which prioritises the reproduction of socio-ecological life according to the visions of grounded anti-systemic projects.

**Keywords:** climate change; energy transition; food sovereignty; global majority; International Political Economy; social movements

## Introduction

Conjunctural analysis – the attempt to unpack how the 'condensation of [social] forces' and 'contradictions' interact with moments of crises in generative and contingent ways – has always been grounded in a methodology of political hope.<sup>1</sup> Seen through the lens of a conjunctural mode of thinking, the present global moment of intersecting socio-economic, ecological, and political crises emerges as one which is shaped by the structures of power formed through history. Yet the future is not yet written indelibly into those heavy stones of the present. A contingent potential for distinct trajectories, therefore, opens up the terrain of possibility and of political struggle to confront socio-economic, ecological, and political crises.<sup>2</sup> We have to admit, however, that at the time of writing this piece, planetary geophysical conditions are closing down potential futures, while the

<sup>1</sup>Stuart Hall, 'The neo-liberal revolution', *Cultural Studies*, 25:6 (2011), pp. 705–28 (p. 705).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey, 'Interpreting the crisis', *Soundings*, 44 (2010), pp. 57–71.

enduring structures of power bestowed by colonialism, racial capitalism, and neoliberalism continue to further constrict our horizons. In this article, we look ahead to the coming five decades and – without abandoning our consciousness of the anterior conditions of the future – we suggest avenues of political hope in projects committed to the reproduction of socio-ecological life, against all odds.<sup>3</sup>

Looking ahead 50 years into the future of global politics inevitably means confronting climate projections and facing the reality that 1.5°C of *long-term* global warming above pre-industrial temperatures – the level at which many vulnerabilised societies still have the chance of a future – will likely be passed within years, rather than decades. As this reality dawns, even many one-time denialists have become vocal climate action champions, with the decarbonisation narrative extending across the corporate and policy spheres. As the writer Zadie Smith suggested in a speech on London's Tufton Street in 2023, another kind of denialism – perhaps a more pernicious one – has emerged in this moment among wealthy proponents of green capitalism.<sup>4</sup> We believe that this current will to action is also structured by those historically endowed conditions we have not yet managed to resolve – from racialised systems of organisation and the patriarchal division of labour, to extractive relations between the Global North and South, and the global class system.<sup>5</sup> The energy transition towards decarbonisation looms large over our present conjuncture, but its capture by those with financial power is already steering the transition towards building new structures of accumulation around the vision of an electrified consumer society, if only for the most historically privileged.<sup>6</sup> The socio-economic and political inequalities that surround the question of energy transition (or 'sustainable development' more broadly) also compel us to interrogate our own position and approach to knowledge production: how should International Studies scholars, and particularly those who are invested in the questions of political economy, attempt to conceptualise, analyse, and – perhaps more importantly – learn from the actually existing politics of climate breakdown?

In this article, we cautiously survey the coming decades from the precipice of both actual and potential extinctions, and in the face of the reconfiguring force of a major energy transition. We do so conscious that, despite contemporary narratives of emergency, we need to remain alive to the need for critique of the errant directions and the excesses of power. We also write while remaining acutely conscious of the alternative socio-ecological realities which are built daily by communities with the audacity to commit to something better and who do not allow themselves the luxury of resignation to despair.

While (International) Political Economy and cognate critical spheres of knowledge have provided vital analyses of the relationship between capital accumulation and climate breakdown, our purpose here is to urge for more attention to alternative ways of organising and relating to economy

<sup>3</sup>We do not seek to replace anthropocentrism with a crude ecocentrism here. We use the term socio-ecology to recognise human life and activity as within, rather than separable from, nature. The movements we engage with in this article vary greatly in terms of their understandings of socio-ecological relations, including Indigenous collectives who do not recognise a nature-culture divide at all. However, collectives with diverse ontologies and strategies can be, and often are, closely aligned in struggles for planetary futures on the ground, as the analysis here shows.

<sup>4</sup>Zadie Smith, 'More evil than climate denial', *YouTube* (21 April 2023), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9wWZ0GlumU&t=23s>. We will investigate these new forms of denialism further in our discussion.

<sup>5</sup>While we recognise, including in this analysis, that extractive relations are evident both within the Global North and within the Global South, it remains empirically notable that drains of wealth still flow from the Global South into centres of power in the North. Relations of aid, debt, and trade, along with value differentials, ensure that extractive flows remain overwhelmingly in the South to North direction. See, for example, Jason Hickel, Dylan Sullivan, and Huzaifa Zoomkawala, 'Plunder in the post-colonial era: Quantifying drain from the Global South through unequal exchange, 1960–2018', *New Political Economy*, 26:6 (2021), pp. 1030–47.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Baines and Sandy Brian Hager, 'From passive owners to planet savers? Asset managers, carbon majors and the limits of sustainable finance', *Competition & Change*, 27:3/4 (2023), pp. 449–71; Thea Riofrancos, Alissa Kendall, Kristi K. Dayemo et al., 'Achieving zero emissions with more mobility and less mining', *Climate and Community Project* (January 2023), available at: <http://www.climateandcommunity.org/more-mobility-less-mining>.

and ecology. Guided by the recognition that the established parameters of ‘growth’ and ‘development’ are unfit to produce tangible and timely answers to the unfolding climate breakdown,<sup>7</sup> we tentatively outline a *planetary political economy* as an alternative framework to prioritise the politics of the global majority and its material, ecological conditions of reproduction. Anchoring our intervention at a ‘planetary’ level allows us to recognise that the operation of the global economy is always bound up with earth systems combined with social systems. A planetary frame also allows us to more extensively trace the impacts of collective action on all levels, from the atmosphere to the hydrosphere. By complementing existing attempts to interrogate what Rafi Youatt has called ‘the planetary moment’, such a relational focus on the socio-ecological dynamics that produce the global economy presents opportunities to overcome the entrenched anthropocentrism of the International Studies literature.<sup>8</sup>

We categorise subaltern social forces, particularly in the Global South, as key constituent communities of the ‘global majority’, referring broadly to peoples and communities that lack sustained access to or ownership of the *capitalist* means of production. Notwithstanding this, many of the communities we engage are expanding their control of collective, peasant, and Indigenous modes of production.<sup>9</sup> The point here is not to abandon a critical focus on the state and financial actors, but to work towards a more *relational* and *multiscalar* political economy, which draws connections between various socio-spatial configurations and begins from the analyses of grounded anti-systemic movements themselves. This partly reproduces political ecology’s well-established central concern with relations between scales,<sup>10</sup> but without importing the familiar elisions of that discipline around race and the Global South.<sup>11</sup>

The following discussion, therefore, confronts the decades to come in terms of climate projections, as well as in terms of the energy transition accumulation project, which is currently being constructed by powerful financial and political actors. After this, we survey various grounded projects which, against and in spite of structural constraints, reproduce the conditions of socio-ecological life on the ground – from urban commoning and grassroots environmentalism to food sovereignty and agroecology movements, which scale out viable socio-ecologies from below. We then centre Indigenous organising against hydrocarbon extraction and infrastructure, which has kept deadly carbon ‘in the ground’ for many decades. This takes us to a final section on the caretaking economy, which draws on Marxist feminist, degrowth, and Indigenous organising to build societies that value caretaking (broadly defined) and challenge existing conditions of exploitation in care work. Overall, we provide illustrative vignettes from critical socio-spatial spheres of

<sup>7</sup>Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, ‘Is green growth possible?’, *New Political Economy*, 25:4 (2020), pp. 469–86.

<sup>8</sup>Rafi Youatt, ‘Interspecies politics and the global rat: Ecology, extermination, experiment’, *Review of International Studies*, 49:2 (2023), pp. 241–57 (p. 245).

<sup>9</sup>We do want to emphasise that this conceptualisation is not a geographically or historically determinist one. On the contrary, we echo Anne Garland Mahler’s insistence on recognising ‘Souths in the geographic North’, which are conditioned by ‘an extensive spread of unwaged forms of remunerative work, including those mediated by sophisticated technologies as in the case of platform economies, together with accelerated processes of informalization and casualization of wage labour’. Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 6; Surbhi Kesar, Snehashish Bhattacharya, and Lopamudra Banerjee, ‘Contradictions and crisis in the world of work: Informality, precarity and the pandemic’, *Development and Change*, 53:6 (2022), pp. 1254–82 (p. 1269). For similar deployments of the term ‘global majority’, see Ariel Salleh, ‘Climate, water, and livelihood skills: A post-development reading of the SDGs’, *Globalizations*, 13:6 (2016), pp. 952–59; and Farhana Sultana, ‘Decolonizing development education and the pursuit of social justice’, *Human Geography*, 12:3 (2019), pp. 31–46. See also Charles Shafaieh, ‘Shahidul Alam on the majority world’, *Harvard Design Magazine* (2022), available at: {<http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/articles/shahidul-alam-on-the-majority-world/>}, for a discussion of how the term has been popularised in the public realm by Bangladeshi photographer and activist Shahidul Alam.

<sup>10</sup>For variations on political ecology as a discipline, see Farhana Sultana, ‘Political ecology 1: From margins to center’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 45:1 (2021), pp. 156–65; Max Ajl, ‘Theories of political ecology: Monopoly capital against people and the planet’, *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy*, 12:1 (2023), pp. 12–50.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Sharlene Mollett and Caroline Faria, ‘Messing with gender in feminist political ecology’, *Geoforum*, 45 (2013), pp. 116–25.

mobilisation that document how the global majority is *already* producing knowledge and action on climate breakdown.

### Towards a planetary political economy of the global majority

Over the past two decades, climate breakdown, as well as the existing and emerging crises linked to its various socio-ecological and political ramifications, have become increasingly mainstream fields of inquiry in social scientific research. From urban geography to migration and border studies, critical development research to political ecology and agrarian studies, scholarly attempts to understand and explain the social world have become progressively shaped by a recognition of our collective ecological impact and its limits. Even in International Relations (IR) – a discipline that has long remained ‘wedded to Holocene thinking, defined most acutely as the separation of humans from the world’<sup>12</sup> – ecological inflection points are increasingly integrated into analyses of power politics. ‘Global climate change’ is now ranked as the number one ‘foreign policy issue’ for IR scholars in the United States, while key IR textbooks are continually revised and expanded to feature substantive discussions of the environment and climate change.<sup>13</sup>

Within this wider web of social scientific research, International Political Economy (IPE), in theory, is well positioned to analyse how global economic activity itself – i.e. the systems and practices with which we organise ourselves and reproduce the world – acts as an engine of climate breakdown and biodiversity and habitat destruction. Yet IPE finds itself in a contradictory position to evaluate the distinctly ‘international’ and ‘economic’ dimensions of the unfolding climate emergency, particularly with reference to the impact of climate breakdown on the global majority. Notwithstanding numerous important contributions on climate change governance, the relationship between neoliberal restructurings and environmental regulation, and the politics of climate change mitigation at national and international levels, important critiques continue to demonstrate that climate breakdown remains as a ‘blind spot’ for the discipline.<sup>14</sup> Not only are ecological crises relegated to the margins in the design of general approaches to analysing the global economy, political economists – unlike their counterparts in, for example, political ecology or agrarian studies – also remain preoccupied with a ‘narrow focus on treaties, institutions and regimes’ in their engagement with the environment.<sup>15</sup>

We suggest that the increasingly popular ‘blind spot’<sup>16</sup> framing of IPE’s disciplinary shortcomings prioritises an additive, not a remedial, approach to tackling the plethora of issues identified as ‘gaps’ in the IPE literature.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the purported recognition of IPE’s constrained engagement with the politics of climate breakdown – among other key vectors of political economy, such as gender, race, ‘the North–South divide’ – is accompanied by efforts to integrate those parameters into IPE’s existing theoretical, ontological, and disciplinary frameworks. In contrast, we argue

<sup>12</sup>Cameron Harrington, ‘The ends of the world: International Relations and the Anthropocene’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:3 (2016), pp. 478–98 (p. 480).

<sup>13</sup>Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J. Tierney, ‘TRIP 2022 faculty survey’, Teaching, Research, and International Policy Project (March 2023), available at: <https://trip.wm.edu>.

<sup>14</sup>Matthew Paterson, ‘Climate change and International Political Economy: Between collapse and transformation’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 28:2 (2021), pp. 394–405; Jacob A. Hasselbalch, Matthias Kranke, and Ekaterina Chertkovskaya, ‘Organizing for transformation: Post-growth in International Political Economy’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 30:5 (2023), pp. 1621–38.

<sup>15</sup>Jennifer Clapp and Eric Helleiner, ‘International Political Economy and the environment: Back to the basics?’, *International Affairs*, 88:3 (2012), pp. 485–501 (p. 485).

<sup>16</sup>Jacqueline Best, Colin Hay, Genevieve LeBaron, and Daniel Mügge, ‘Seeing and not-seeing like a political economist: The historicity of contemporary political economy and its blind spots’, *New Political Economy*, 26:2 (2021), pp. 217–28; Genevieve LeBaron, Daniel Mügge, Jacqueline Best, and Colin Hay, ‘Blind spots in IPE: Marginalized perspectives and neglected trends in contemporary capitalism’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 28:2 (2021), pp. 283–94.

<sup>17</sup>For a similar assessment, see Felipe Antunes de Oliveira and Ingrid H. Kvangraven, ‘Back to Dakar: Decolonizing International Political Economy through dependency theory’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 30:5 (2023), pp. 1676–700.

that the ‘gaps’ or the silences in the literature cannot be rectified in a piecemeal manner. A fundamental cause of IPE’s inability to reckon with the ‘North–South divide’, climate breakdown, and its impact on the global majority is the centrality of European capitalist development as a foundational organising principle that continues to define how IPE scholars interpret the questions of economic development, conflict, and cooperation across the world. Much like its disciplinary relative Development Studies,<sup>18</sup> IPE has long attempted to explain processes of ‘development’ and ‘underdevelopment’ from the prism of a distinctly European–North American trajectory of capitalist accumulation. The centrality of the Global North’s particular experience with capitalist development has circumscribed IPE’s ability to engage with and learn from concrete struggles waged in the Global South around socio-ecological, economic, and political justice. Even in critical IPE scholarship, where research is often shaped by clear normative principles around emancipatory politics, the question of ‘agency’ has tended to prioritise the perspectives and experiences of particular subject groups and communities in line with established historical and theoretical accounts of ‘development’. The corollary of this orientation has been to sideline the perspectives and struggles of those who are placed in contexts that remain outside the discipline’s privileged core epistemic geography.<sup>19</sup>

We therefore propose a significant reconsideration of the ways in which IPE scholarship approaches its substantive object of study – the global economy – by prioritising the often-marginalised social/ecological forces that (re)produce the material conditions of existence. Our argument is purposefully blunt: if we are serious about addressing how the next 50 years of global politics will secure the existence or extinction of many communities and ways of life around the world, our scholarship must be driven by concepts and forms of knowledge-making that prioritise the experiences, perspectives, and struggles of the global majority. This paper, accordingly, aims to provoke IPE and International Studies scholars more broadly to adopt a sense of urgency and responsibility in mobilising their scholarship to address the compounding socio-ecological, economic, and political challenges facing the global majority.<sup>20</sup>

In order to build this tentative, forward-looking framework of inquiry, we first highlight a need to re-embrace the foundational principles of political economy as a field concerned with what Friedrich Engels astutely called ‘the production and reproduction of *actual life*’.<sup>21</sup> This might appear paradoxical given the centrality of ‘production’ as an organising category in IPE research, as well as the widening deployment of ‘reproduction’ as an *equally* fundamental concept with which to analyse the global economy by a long line of feminist and materialist scholars.<sup>22</sup> What we are specifically

<sup>18</sup>Christy Thornton, ‘Developmentalism as internationalism: Toward a global historical sociology of the origins of the development project’, *Sociology of Development*, 9:1 (2023), pp. 33–55.

<sup>19</sup>It is rather telling that in a recent literature survey focusing on critical IPE’s potential to correct ‘the underappreciation of climate change within IPE’, the global majority is either absent as an agential force or discussed largely as an externality of climate breakdown. See Milan Babic and Sarah E. Sharma, ‘Mobilising critical International Political Economy for the age of climate breakdown’, *New Political Economy*, 28:5 (2023), pp. 758–79. For an important exploration of ‘the erasure of Indigenous peoples from the academic imagination of IR’, see Chris Hesketh, ‘Indigenous resistance at the frontiers of accumulation: Challenging the coloniality of space in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies* (2023), pp. 1–20, DOI: 10.1017/S0260210523000268.

<sup>20</sup>We are not the first to make a plea of this kind. Stefanie Fishel and her colleagues, for example, provoked IR scholars to focus on ‘Planet Politics’ – a re-envisioning of international politics that aims ‘to nurture worlds for all humans and species co-living in the biosphere’. While we are sympathetic to their critique and certain aspects of the alternative vision they set out, our own approach is defined, unequivocally, by the global majority and the material struggles waged by its constituent communities to address climate breakdown beyond established institutional political and economic structures. See Anthony Burke, Stefanie Fishel, Audra Mitchell, Simon Dalby, and Daniel J. Levine, ‘Planet Politics: A manifesto from the end of IR’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:3 (2016), pp. 499–523 (p. 500). On institutional attempts to overcome anthropocentric approaches to international politics, see also Costas M. Constantinou and Eleni Christodoulou, ‘On making peace with nature: Towards a diplomacy for the future’, *Review of International Studies*, 50 (2024), pp. 579–99.

<sup>21</sup>Friedrich Engels, ‘Letter to Bloch’, in *Collected Works*, vol. 49 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2001), p. 34, emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup>See, *inter alia*, Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Isabella Bakker, ‘Social reproduction and the constitution of a gendered political economy’, *New Political Economy*, 12:4 (2007), pp. 541–56.

calling for here is incorporating a subaltern scholarship of ‘the international’ – one that foregrounds its analytical and theoretical advances in the politics of how the global majority produce, reproduce, contest, and negotiate their own material conditions of existence. Refocusing our efforts to understand the intersecting crises of the current conjuncture through (re)productive social relations and struggles that govern the lives of the global majority charts a road map for us to overcome state-centric and Eurocentric conceptions of ‘the international’. This strategy explicitly forces us to theorise ‘the international’ from the material and political positions of ‘subjects’<sup>23</sup> beyond states, international organisations, or market forces/processes – privileged focal lenses with which we tend to explain how the global economy ‘works’.

We frame the toiling masses that comprise the global majority not as passive recipients of socio-ecological and economic knowledge produced exclusively by ‘experts’, but as active knowledge producers who develop their own analytical and political repertoires.<sup>24</sup> A focus on grassroots collectives and strategies not only allows us to gain a more productive understanding of the ways in which different communities confront climate breakdown but also facilitates an appreciation of the distinctly planetary political economy of expropriation and dispossession that these movements struggle against. Yet it is important to resist the temptation to fetishise local knowledge or inflate the political power and agency of grassroots movements. We seek to avoid these pitfalls by recognising that movements and communities are also constrained by the political–economic structures and modes of governance they encounter and respond to at multiple levels, e.g. local, national, regional, and global.

This recognition leads us to define the appropriate horizon of theorising at the planetary level. Not only do existing circuits of accumulation rely on a planetary constellation of ever-sprawling and deepening mechanisms of extraction, production, and circulation, but so do the toiling masses, whose conditions of social reproduction are intimately tied to the processes that cannot be constrained to specific localities, territories, or habitats.<sup>25</sup> As we will explore further, the movements and communities that actively confront our climate-precarious world *already* perceive their ‘local’ or ‘national’ challenges as global ones. They mobilise, practically and ideologically, on the basis of explicitly transnational frames of action and conjoin ‘livelihood, social, economic, and environmental issues with emphasis on issues of extraction and pollution’.<sup>26</sup> A *planetary* approach to political economy thus takes seriously the global majority’s own repertoires of mobilisation and understanding of their material struggles, while also remaining attentive to the ways in which the historically privileged subjects of political economy interact with those who envision alternative practices of socio-ecological reproduction.

By advancing this strategic reorientation, we do not intend to downplay existing, significant contributions to the materialist/ecological understandings of political economy in the literature.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup>See Meera Sabaratnam, ‘IR in dialogue ... but can we change the subjects? A typology of decolonising strategies for the study of world politics’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 781–803.

<sup>24</sup>Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, ‘Movement-relevant theory: Rethinking social movement scholarship and activism’, *Social Movement Studies*, 4:3 (2005), pp. 185–208.

<sup>25</sup>Alessandra Mezzadri, ‘Social reproduction and pandemic neoliberalism: Planetary crises and the reorganisation of life, work and death’, *Organization*, 29:3 (2023), pp. 379–400.

<sup>26</sup>Joan Martinez-Alier, ‘Social metabolism, ecological distribution conflicts, and languages of valuation’, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 20:1 (2009), pp. 58–87 (p. 59).

<sup>27</sup>It would be remiss not to highlight key IPE contributions that grapple with many of the political and intellectual issues we discuss throughout this article. We particularly would like to draw attention to works that prioritise social forces and the variegated politics of their social reproduction. See, for example, Juanita Elias and Shirin M. Rai, ‘Feminist everyday political economy: Space, time, and violence’, *Review of International Studies*, 45:2 (2019), pp. 201–20; Spike V. Peterson, ‘Informalization, inequalities and global insecurities’, *International Studies Review*, 12:2 (2010), pp. 244–70; Benjamin Selwyn, ‘Twenty-first-century International Political Economy: A class-relational perspective’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 21:3 (2015), pp. 513–37; Peter Newell and Dustin Mulvaney, ‘The political economy of the “just transition”’, *The Geographical Journal*, 179:2 (2013), pp. 132–40; Matt Davies, ‘Everyday life as critique: Revisiting the everyday in IPE with Henri Lefebvre and postcolonialism’, *International Political Sociology*, 10:1 (2016), pp. 22–38; Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Nor do we wish to promote a new set of disciplinary hierarchies by relegating research questions and topics that do not directly address our challenge to the margins of the discipline. The scale of the crises that confront us – both politically and intellectually – clearly necessitates the deployment of a wide range of sources and tools. However, we emphatically argue that the future scholarly work, particularly within the confines of International Studies, must be driven by a clear commitment to addressing the needs and demands of the global majority. In the next section, we outline the severity of the socio-ecological challenges confronting the existing *modus operandi* of the global economy and begin sketching out the ways in which the global majority is *already* responding to a disintegrating planetary system of material reproduction by developing its own alternatives.

### Confronting the coming decades

Global temperatures are rising and carbon budgets are still being rapidly depleted, so with every new round of reports on the entwined emergencies in the world system, these crises appear to be increasingly intractable. With respect to climate breakdown, by 2020 global surface temperatures had already risen to 1.1°C above those at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>28</sup> In the terms of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the total carbon budget refers to the maximum cumulative carbon emissions above pre-industrial levels that must not be exceeded if we are to limit warming to a particular temperature. A limit of 1.5°C has, thanks to Caribbean leadership in particular, become accepted in international climate policy circles as an existential limit for many communities made most climate-vulnerable by historical and contemporary imperialism.<sup>29</sup> However, as things stand, if carbon emissions continue at the same average rate as 2019 levels, by 2030 we would have burned through most of what remains of the carbon budget calculated to keep temperatures below 1.5°C. The same trajectory would also mean exhausting around one-third of the remaining carbon budget linked to 2°C of warming by 2030.<sup>30</sup> At the time of writing, the El Niño event of 2023–4 has generated enough additional warming to push temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for a full calendar year for the first time.<sup>31</sup> This does not mean we have exceeded the 1.5°C limit on a permanent basis, breaking the Paris agreement, but such temporary breaches are likely to become more frequent in the near future. Regardless of the finer points of temporary and permanent breaches, exceeding the 1.5°C critical point on a long-term basis is increasingly an inevitability.

Conditions at 1.1°C of warming are already unbearable for many in the most vulnerablised areas, which are also overwhelmingly populated by the racialised poor. Pakistan's climate-related floods and landslides in 2022 – caused by rainfall exceeding the 30-year average by five times – affected at least 33 million people and killed over 1,700, with damages estimated at US\$15 billion.<sup>32</sup> At the time of writing in April 2023, an extreme heat wave across continental Asia is taking temperatures to record breaking highs – 45°C in Myanmar and 44.5°C in India – resulting in 13 heat-related deaths

<sup>28</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)*, p. 6 (2023), available at: [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_LongerReport.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_LongerReport.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Leon Sealey-Huggins, ‘1.5°C to stay alive’: Climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean’, *Third World Quarterly*, 38:11 (2017), pp. 2444–63.

<sup>30</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> ‘The global mean temperature for the past 12 months (February 2023–January 2024) is the highest on record, at 0.64°C above the 1991–2020 average and 1.52°C above the 1850–1900 pre-industrial average.’ Copernicus Climate Change Service, ‘Copernicus: In 2024, the world experienced the warmest January on record’ (2024), available at: <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2024-world-experienced-warmest-january-record>. See also World Meteorological Organization, ‘Global temperatures set to reach new records in next five years’, *World Meteorological Organization* (17 May 2023), available at: <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/global-temperatures-set-reach-new-records-next-five-years>.

<sup>32</sup> Sharmila Devi, ‘Pakistan floods: Impact on food security and health systems’, *Lancet*, 400:10355 (2022), pp. 799–800; United Nations, ‘UN continues to support Pakistan flood response’ (7 March 2023), available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134302>.

in Mumbai alone.<sup>33</sup> Such extreme heat events have already driven extensive species loss and mass mortality incidents, both in the ocean and on land.<sup>34</sup> Extreme weather patterns, including increasingly intense tropical cyclones, already afflict Caribbean communities in particular. As sea levels rise, Caribbean and Pacific islands are also already experiencing the loss of coastal ecosystems, the salinisation of ground water and agricultural soils, and the cascading effects of these problems on food and water access.

As global warming increases, these effects will become even more intense, extreme, and widespread over the coming years. If, as most projections suggest, the world hits 1.5°C of permanent warming within the coming years, heavy rain and intense floods will become more common and more devastating, especially in Africa and Asia.<sup>35</sup> At 2°C of warming, floods and droughts will become even more commonplace, as will extreme weather events, such as tropical cyclones.<sup>36</sup> In the unbearable scenario that warming continues to 4°C, water scarcity is likely to afflict 4 billion people, climate-related fires would be around 30 per cent more frequent than in the present, and mass loss of life and species extinction would characterise global conditions of existence.<sup>37</sup>

At the same time as the planet burns and the global majority struggles with multiple, protracted crises, those crises are no less than opportunities for accumulation for corporations and the richest individuals. The global Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2019/20 and led to widespread lockdowns, as well as suspensions of much social and economic activity, in fact presented a chance for the wealthiest to enrich themselves on rising asset prices driven up by injections of public money intended as an economic safety net. In this context, the world's billionaires have added trillions of dollars to their wealth since 2020, with US\$1.7 million going to each billionaire for every dollar of wealth added by individuals in the global majority (90 per cent of the world's population).<sup>38</sup>

Further, as rising food and energy costs since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine have brought renewed hardship to most of the world's communities, resulting price rises serve to engorge corporate profits and deliver record dividends to wealthy shareholders. Petrochemical companies, for example, reported record, or near-record, profits in the first quarter of 2023, with Shell reporting US\$9.6 billion and BP reporting US\$5 billion in quarterly gains. Further, contrary to the notion that accumulation, registered as economic growth, is necessarily linked to 'green' investment, both Shell and BP have been exposed for investing far more of those profits into hydrocarbons and paying more to shareholders than they invest in renewables. Shell invested six times as much in fossil fuel expansion as it did in renewable energy at the start of 2023, while BP channelled 10 times as much to shareholders as it invested in 'low carbon' projects.<sup>39</sup>

This continuing transfer of extracted value from working people, in all their diversity, to an increasingly engorged asset-owning class<sup>40</sup> is corrosive to all aspects of socio-ecological life, not

<sup>33</sup> Camilla Hodgson, 'Asia's prolonged April heatwave concerns scientists', *Financial Times* (22 April 2023), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/b1b07514-f1c0-4f1b-88ce-974379ce4d64>.

<sup>34</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Oxfam, 'Survival of the richest: How we must tax the super-rich now to fight inequality' (2023), p. 8, available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/survival-of-the-richest-how-we-must-tax-the-super-rich-now-to-fight-inequality-621477/>.

<sup>39</sup> Common Wealth, 'Q1 results: For every £1 Shell invested in "renewables and energy solutions", they invested £6 in fossil fuels' (5 May 2023), available at: <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/publications/q1-results-shell-spent-14-times-as-much-on-shareholder-payouts-as-on-renewables-and-energy-solutions/>; Common Wealth, 'Q1 Results: BP hands ten times as much to shareholders as they spend on "low carbon" investment' (2 May 2023), available at: <https://www.common-wealth.co.uk/publications/q1-results-bp-ten-times-shareholders-low-carbon-investment/>.

<sup>40</sup> While 'asset ownership' can be defined by different socio-economic relationships and degrees of economic power, our usage here targets the wealthiest individuals (i.e. those who belong in the top 1 percent of wealth distribution), as well as large asset owners and managers. See Jodi Melamed, 'Racial capitalism', *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 76–85. On asset managers, see Benjamin Braun, 'Asset manager capitalism as a corporate governance regime', in Jacob S. Hacker, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Paul Pierson, and Kathleen Thelen (eds), *The American Political Economy: Politics, Markets, and Power*

least because the super-rich are responsible for disproportionately high greenhouse gas emissions per capita.<sup>41</sup> By 2050, millionaires (in 2020 US\$ terms) are expected to grow from 0.7% to 3.3% of the global population, and this wealthy asset-owning class alone is projected to spend 72% of the remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C within 30 years.<sup>42</sup> In short, current conditions of resilient wealth accumulation, which only intensify in times of ‘crisis’, are enabling an increasingly bloated super-rich class to rapidly enclose our global atmospheric commons, thereby driving us towards extinction at an alarming rate. The persistence of ecologically disastrous accumulation strategies should thus compel us to pay closer attention to the specific policy responses and policy imaginaries that ostensibly address climate breakdown, yet often end up fencing off the conditions of such accumulation from popular contestation and systemic change.

### On the precipice of energy transition as accumulation project

We are currently in a confounding phase of the climate crisis in which climate change denialism, in its more rigid and ‘literal’ form, appears to have receded as a meaningful political force in the Global North, making way for an appearance of consensus around a broad, but varied, green growth project which has adherents across the political spectrum.<sup>43</sup> Those profitable petrochemical corporations mentioned earlier place front and centre their decarbonisation missions in greenwashing PR strategies and yet, as we have seen, continue to invest in hydrocarbon development and pump value towards shareholder accumulation. Powerful corporations, investment and asset managers, right-wing political parties, and conservative pundits and academics increasingly appear to endorse green political discourse in some form.<sup>44</sup> We find ourselves surrounded, therefore, by corporate, political, and intellectual actors who prefix their visions with eco- and green- yet reproduce the conditions which continue to drive us towards socio-ecological breakdown.

As the public groundswell has gradually built up around the need for climate action, corporate and financial actors have appeared to realise that decarbonisation will, with or without them, involve a substantial reorganisation of social and economic relations, which will inevitably redetermine distributions of value and accumulation. Left to environmental campaigners, the transition to a post-carbon society might mean, for example, the taxing of domestic flights until they are prohibitively expensive, coupled with the expansion of low-cost public transport for all. Alternatively, with the capture and steering of corporate and financial actors, the vision for transition might look more like the expansion of flights marketed as ‘low-carbon’ and ‘net-zero’, while the mass electrification of the vehicle market would steer publics further towards private car ownership and away from public transportation.<sup>45</sup>

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021), pp. 270–94. On varying classifications of asset ownership, see Lisa Adkins, Melinda Cooper, and Martijn Konings, ‘Class in the 21st century: Asset inflation and the new logic of inequality’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 53:3 (2021), pp. 548–72.

<sup>41</sup>Oxfam, *Climate Equality: A Planet for the 99%* (November 2023), available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/climate-equality-a-planet-for-the-99-621551/>.

<sup>42</sup>Stefan Gössling and Andreas Humpe, ‘Millionaire spending incompatible with 1.5°C ambitions’, *Cleaner Production Letters*, 4 (2023), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>This is not to dismiss the significant reach and relevance of ‘ideological denialism’, the offshoots of which we unpack further in the article, and which ‘involve relying on solutions to climate change that focus on individual, technological, or market approaches and fail to address the root drivers increasing emissions’. See Brian Petersen, Diana Stuart, and Ryan Gunderson, ‘Reconceptualizing climate change denial: Ideological denialism misdiagnoses climate change and limits effective action’, *Human Ecology Review*, 25:2 (2019), pp. 117–42 (p. 121). See also Adrienne Buller, *The Value of a Whale: On the Illusions of Green Capitalism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

<sup>44</sup>See Baines and Hager, ‘From passive owners to planet savers?’; Ander Audikana and Vincent Kaufmann, ‘Towards green populism? Right-wing populism and metropolization in Switzerland’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 46:1 (2022), pp. 136–56.

<sup>45</sup>See Caroline Brogan, ‘World’s first net zero transatlantic flight to fly from London in 2023’, Imperial College London (16 December 2022), available at: <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/242294/worlds-first-zero-transatlantic-flight-from/>.

With corporate and financial pressure and encouragement, Green New Deal proposals, which once had some radical elements, have become oriented in practice towards creating investment and accumulation opportunities for private investors.<sup>46</sup> Translated into policy in the form of the European Green Deal and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in the United States, green deal visions have become focused on turning critical mineral extraction, battery storage expansion, and other energy transition components into profitable ventures for private capital. Key to this process is the ‘de-risking’<sup>47</sup> of transition technologies through state-backed securing of investment, a process which will effectively ensure that private capital profits from transition while public accounts are burdened with all of the risk.<sup>48</sup>

Although green deal-inspired programmes mark a shift from an era when climate action was restricted almost entirely to market-based mechanisms – tweaks which largely shift carbon emissions from one balance sheet to another – the surge to action remains structured by the same colonial and capitalist power relations which led us down the path of climate breakdown in the first place. The race to make Europe ‘the first climate-neutral continent’ by means of the European Green Deal<sup>49</sup> hinges on making (or re-making) colonial territories into sacrifice zones for the extraction of transition minerals. This intensely affects resource frontiers in the Global South but also impacts colonial frontiers in the North. Embracing the perspective shift towards the global majority that we prioritise in this intervention allows us to critically reframe such large-scale transition projects and their concrete impact on the conditions of existence for many marginalised and vulnerabilised communities.

Sámi peoples of Northern Europe, for example, have been fighting against European colonialism in many forms for centuries across the area known as Sápmi, which is claimed variously by Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Russia. Today, the proposed expansion of critical minerals extraction extends the expropriation and socio-ecological harm, which has long been enacted through Scandinavian colonialism, state formation, and capitalism. The rare earth metals and phosphorus on Sámi lands have the potential to meet a substantial portion of the requirements to drive forward the European Green Deal.<sup>50</sup> Conscious of this, the Swedish state-owned company Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB), encouraged by the European Commission and the Swedish government, plans to open a new iron ore mine on Sámi territory, which will be key to Europe’s green transition. The mine itself, aside from further impacting the delicate and important Arctic ecology, will divide the Sámi people’s reindeer-herding lands into two separate areas and effectively end the practice of herding in its present form.<sup>51</sup> It is already the case that forestry and hydropower projects have diminished Sámi grazing areas, to the point where Sámi territories on the Swedish side of the border have been reduced by a reported 71 per cent in the past six decades.<sup>52</sup> The plight of Sámi communities on Europe’s transition frontiers may be less well documented than lithium frontiers across

<sup>46</sup> Max Ajl, *A People’s Green New Deal* (London: Pluto, 2021).

<sup>47</sup> See Daniela Gabor, ‘The Wall Street consensus’, *Development and Change*, 52:3 (2021), pp. 429–59.

<sup>48</sup> See Kate Aronoff, ‘The IRA is an invitation to organizers’, *Dissent*, 70:2 (2023), pp. 26–9.

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, ‘A European Green Deal: Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent’, available at: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en).

<sup>50</sup> LKAB, ‘Europe’s largest deposit of rare earth metals is located in the Kiruna area’ (12 January 2013), available at: <https://lkab.com/en/press/europes-largest-deposit-of-rare-earth-metals-is-located-in-the-kiruna-area/>; Rosie Frost, ‘Mining Europe’s biggest rare earth deposit could make life “impossible” for Sámi communities’, *Euronews* (11 February 2013), available at: <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/02/11/mining-europes-biggest-rare-earth-deposit-could-make-life-impossible-for-sami-communities>.

<sup>51</sup> Min Odda Giron, ‘Sweden’s shameless pursuit of “green minerals” generate a conflict with the Sami people’ (13 January 2023), available at: <https://www.minoddagiron.se/press-information-swedens-shameless-pursuit-of-green-minerals-generate-a-conflict-with-the-sami-people/>.

<sup>52</sup> Karen McVeigh and Klaus Thymann, “We borrow our lands from our children”: Sami say they are paying for Sweden going green’, *The Guardian* (10 August 2022), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/aug/10/indigenous-sami-reindeer-herders-sweden-green-transition>.

South America and cobalt frontiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,<sup>53</sup> but this case is vital for understanding the actually existing politics of green transition in Europe.

Overall, contemporary shifts towards decarbonisation action harness de-risked private capital for ambitious transition projects – a picture which will no doubt characterise the political economy landscape over the coming decades. Without disturbing commitments to economic growth that drive national politics, these are projects intended to maintain the status quo of high consumption and private luxury for the wealthier classes. Electrifying the private vehicle market and ‘greening’ aviation, among other green deal policies, renew the intensive drive for land and resources on colonial frontiers. In short, mainstream environmentalism has been turned firmly towards accumulation projects, which intensify colonial and racial modes of expropriation in particular.<sup>54</sup> The current direction of travel can be starkly contrasted to alternative visions of organising socio-ecological life that we focus on for the remainder of this article. These include Indigenous, urban, and rural organising to protect and expand commons, as well as degrowth visions for reorganising Global North societies around social justice, and feminist visions for centring and valuing care work as social and ecological priorities. We pick up this thread in the following section with an engagement with food sovereignty as an alternative ‘international’.

### Building up and scaling out food sovereignty from below

Many of the processes we expect to intensify over the coming 50 years – including climate change impacts *and* the scramble for land and resources for energy transitions and carbon offsetting – will most drastically affect agrarian communities and ecologies. Rural socio-ecologies, especially those of the Global South, have long been afflicted by the sedimented agrarian crises imposed by colonialism, racial capitalism, and neoliberalism, which have brought displacement, contamination, violence, and the enclosures of everything from land and seeds to genetic codes and all forms of biotic life.<sup>55</sup> In the present, corporations, asset management firms, philanthrop capitalists, and donor organisations, as well as states and private investors, continue to increase their pursuit of rural lands and resources for the sake of profit and for the sake of short-term resolutions for the many contradictions of contemporary capitalism.<sup>56</sup>

As we covered above, political economy scholarship (including critical work within IPE) often has an orientation towards macro-level dynamics, a focus on policy and governance at the level of states and corporations, and a concern with the innovations of contemporary finance. Notwithstanding the importance of analysing these powerful operations, this often comes at the expense of understanding the impact of these where they ‘land’ with communities ‘on the ground’. The result of this is academic work that throws its weight behind programmes – such as green transition and carbon-offsetting initiatives – without an equal concern for the effects of these on rural peoples and ecologies located on resource and climate frontiers. In contrast, scholars working within Indigenous studies, critical agrarian studies, political ecology, and related areas, along with Indigenous and peasant movements themselves, tend to begin instead by analysing and exposing

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, Maria Daniela Sanchez-Lopez, ‘From a white desert to the largest world deposit of lithium: Symbolic meanings and materialities of the Uyuni Salt Flat in Bolivia’, *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 51:4 (2019), pp. 1318–39; Ben Radley, ‘Green imperialism, sovereignty, and the quest for national development in the Congo’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 50 (2023), pp. 322–39.

<sup>54</sup>Lisa Tilley, Anupama M. Ranawana, Andrew Baldwin, and Tyler M. Tully, ‘Race and climate change: Towards anti-racist ecologies’, *Politics*, 43:2 (2023), pp. 141–282.

<sup>55</sup>Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014 [1993]).

<sup>56</sup>See, for example, Amanda Shaw and Kalpana Wilson, ‘The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the necro-populationism of “climate-smart” agriculture’, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 27:3 (2020), pp. 370–93; Diana Aguiar, Yasmin Ahmed, Duygu Avci et al., ‘Transforming critical agrarian studies: Solidarity, scholar-activism and emancipatory agendas in and from the Global South’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50:2 (2023), pp. 758–86.

those ‘on the ground’ dynamics first and foremost. Engaging with Indigenous and peasant community experiences in this way allows for analyses which connect the local scale with the national and the global and which see the real impact of financial flows and governance shifts ahead of time.

For many decades now, food sovereignty movements have been warning that the coming years of intensifying climate and world food systems crises would be used by corporate actors to expand their control of agriculture and further enclose ‘the ecological commons.’<sup>57</sup> Such voices have continuously sounded alarms while much mainstream scholarship has continued investing in detrimental solutions, which ultimately compound socio-ecological problems. With this context in mind, there are three particular contributions of food sovereignty and related movements that we want to highlight here: first, and as mentioned, these movements have provided prescient analyses of climate and food crises provoked by shifts in state, corporate, and financial operations ahead of time. Second, food sovereignty movements not only resist mainstream neoliberal agendas, they have also set limits to the excesses of those agendas through dialectical processes of resistance. Third, food sovereignty movements actively create alternative ways of organising socio-ecologies from the ground up and are steadily scaling out those alternative ways of being to incorporate and empower more communities and territories globally.

Many hundreds of diverse rural movements across the world – from the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN) in Indonesia to the Landless Workers Movement (MST) of Brazil – have long worked collectively in the interests of their members living at the sharp end of global capitalist expansion. Emerging from the Abya Yala (Latin America) context, La Via Campesina (LVC) has become the largest global movement, with 200 million members worldwide.<sup>58</sup> Disturbing scholarly categories, which often imagine struggles as separate from one another, LVC draws from peasant, feminist, Indigenous, and labour organising currents. It combines overlapping struggles within a broad-based movement while actively forming transnational alliances.

Francisca ‘Pancha’ Rodríguez co-founded both LVC and the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo, CLOC), which fed into the development of the food sovereignty concept. In the 50th anniversary edition of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Pancha shares insights from ANAMURI (the National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women or Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas) – her local LVC–CLOC-affiliated organisation. Established in 1998, ANAMURI was originally a product of peasant, working-class, and labour organising, and later Indigenous and Afro-descendent women took a central place in the movement. In Pancha’s words, ANAMURI became ‘an organisation of peasant women and indigenous women, and women of African descent.’<sup>59</sup> The composition of ANAMURI illuminates how the rural movements that feed into LVC draw from a fusion of labour, feminist, peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendent organising in defiance of both state habits of division and academic habits of categorisation. These projects of liberation join in broad-based coalitions and, in Pancha’s words, ‘act under the same banner of food sovereignty.’<sup>60</sup>

Since the 1990s, LVC has galvanised this broad-based support for food sovereignty, defined among other principles as:

the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food

<sup>57</sup>Terra Preta, ‘Civil society declaration of the Terra Preta Forum’ (5 June 2008), available at: {<https://viacampesina.org/en/civil-society-declaration-of-the-terra-pret-a-forum/>}.

<sup>58</sup>La Via Campesina, ‘La Via Campesina political declaration: 30 years of collective struggle, hope and solidarity’ (2022), available at: {<https://viacampesina.org/en/la-via-campesina-political-declaration-30-years-of-collective-struggle-hope-and-solidarity/>}.

<sup>59</sup>Francisca ‘Pancha’ Rodríguez quoted in Francisca Rodríguez and Andrea P. Sosa Varrotti, ‘Thirty years of sowing hope to globalise the struggle: Women and youth of La Via Campesina in the construction of food sovereignty. A conversation’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 50:2 (2023), pp. 559–77 (p. 565).

<sup>60</sup>Rodríguez and Varrotti, ‘Thirty years of sowing hope to globalise the struggle’, p. 566.

and agriculture systems. ... It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations.<sup>61</sup>

Organising around food sovereignty, therefore, works towards a wholesale rejection of the speculative, corporate, and financial control of land, seeds, crops, and other vital components in the reproduction of socio-ecological life. Importantly, agroecology has always been integral to food sovereignty, as captured in the mantra that 'agroecology without food sovereignty is a mere technicism. And food sovereignty without agroecology is hollow discourse.'<sup>62</sup> And, while difficult to define in a concise way, agroecology itself is based on 'ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales.'<sup>63</sup> Rather than simply a set of techniques, however, agroecology incorporates collective rights to land and ecological commons, as well as equal and just social relations.

Considering the sheer power of agribusiness, the increasing commodification of agriculture, financial expansion of speculation on food futures, and the intensifying interest of the state in rural lands and resources, the question of pushing back and scaling out is always central to food sovereignty and agroecology strategies. Again, because food sovereignty movements have been so broad, with manifold organising bases, they are able to scale 'up and out' using a variety of methods across a '*diálogo de saberes*', or dialogue between different ways of knowing.<sup>64</sup> Scaling out in a context of *diálogo de saberes* takes many possible forms. Simplified examples include farmer-to-farmer knowledge-sharing methods in the case of peasant producers; Indigenous farmers' reliance on community assemblies to share knowledge and practice; and organised agro-proletariat farmers using classroom settings to build collective knowledge of agroecology.<sup>65</sup> While the weight of structures and the innovations of neoliberal finance appear all powerful, food sovereignty movements still manage to build their power through such forms of sideways organising across coalitions of the marginalised. In this way a better world is steadily built from below, against the odds.

### Mobilising multiscale resistance to expropriation and dispossession

As our discussion has highlighted so far, confronting a climate-precarious world requires a distinctly multiscale approach to global politics. We continue our discussion by further unpacking the transnational frontiers of extraction, expropriation, and dispossession, and by examining how grassroots movements harness explicitly multiscale conceptions of political economy to address socio-ecological and political crises. Here, we specifically focus on grassroots mobilisations in urban and urbanised contexts, and on movements that challenge megaprojects, infrastructures, and extractive industries.

Cities represent a key socio-economic space in the reproduction of capitalism. They act both as a facilitator of accumulation – by generating new areas of surplus extraction, primarily through the built environment – and as incubators of movements that challenge capital's ever-increasing encroachment into spheres of social organisation and reproduction. Cities – and wider processes of urbanisation – are also integral to the ongoing entrenchment of the planetary ecological crises, as their dependence on vast energy resources and commodities fuels 'an extraordinary expansion of

<sup>61</sup>Nyeléni, *Declaration of Nyéléni* (27 February 2007), available at: {<https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>}.

<sup>62</sup>Unnamed South Korean LVC delegate cited in Peter M. Rosset and María Elena Martínez-Torres, 'Food sovereignty and agroecology in the convergence of rural social movements', *Alternative Agrifood Movements: Patterns of Convergence and Divergence*, 21 (2014), pp. 137–57 (p. 146).

<sup>63</sup>Nyeléni, 'Agroecology as resistance and transformation: Food sovereignty and Mother Earth' (December 2016), available at: {[https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/12/2016-12-14-Nyeleni\\_Newsletter\\_Num\\_28\\_EN.pdf](https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/12/2016-12-14-Nyeleni_Newsletter_Num_28_EN.pdf)}.

<sup>64</sup>María Elena Martínez-Torres and Peter M. Rosset, '*Diálogo de saberes* in La Vía Campesina: Food sovereignty and agroecology', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41:6 (2014), pp. 979–97 (p. 979).

<sup>65</sup>Martínez-Torres and Rosset, '*Diálogo de saberes*', p. 988.

the resource extraction frontier, particularly in the Global South.<sup>66</sup> Yet cities – and urbanised spaces more generally – are largely absent from popular conceptualisations of ‘the international’, as they tend to be understood as bounded localities with limited agency in global politics or highlighted as ‘actors’ in select cases where the discussion focuses on the outsized influence of major metropolitan centres, or ‘global cities’.<sup>67</sup>

We argue that attempts to envision and produce alternative forms of socio-ecological life must ultimately reckon with the urban, and its deep connection to the ways in which planetary political economic processes are organised. This recognition of the transnational reach of urban politics *already* acts as an anchoring principle of many grassroots movements that challenge the privatisation and expropriation of urban commons. For example, movements organised around the principle of ‘urban commoning’ regularly coordinate campaigns to address ecological and socio-economic threats to their immediate locality by relating those challenges to the wider processes and actors in the global economy.<sup>68</sup> Those who attempt to reappropriate and secure access to key resources, such as water and energy, not only confront local/national state apparatuses but also navigate complex, often transnational, ownership and investment relations that commodify the conditions of reproduction for their communities.<sup>69</sup>

Urban movements further generate spaces of collective action to shelter communities from national and international crises. In Greece, alternative grassroots collectives such as *drasis* provide important spaces for residents and communities to organise against the appropriation of public commons and design ‘new socio-spatial relationships’ beyond individualised and commercialised subjectivities ingrained in neoliberalism.<sup>70</sup> In Turkey, urban neighbourhood forums similarly act as prefigurative spaces to translate local issues into concrete political action. Often spurred into action to contest urban regeneration and transformation projects, forums bring together residents and professional associations to challenge state-led and corporate attempts to reshape the socio-ecological fabric of their communities. While their success as demand-making civil society groups vary, they formulate an emphatically collective form of belonging shaped by a commitment to social, economic, and environmental justice. As participants in Ankara declared in their manifesto, activities prioritised by the forum are rooted in a demand to achieve ‘[diverse], clean and functional ... urban commons that are open to all, accessible by all, safe for all’.<sup>71</sup>

Grassroots movements’ multiscalar conception of the threats they confront is also visible in bottom-up challenges to state-led or externally induced climate ‘mitigation’ and ‘adaptation’ initiatives as well as to the established narratives of ‘development’. In the Middle East – ‘the most unequal region in the world’ in terms of income disparities<sup>72</sup> – climate breakdown is an increasingly visible and inescapable facet of daily life for millions of people, whose encounters with the crisis are defined by extreme temperature increases, droughts, resource shortages, and the prospect

<sup>66</sup>Martín Arboleda, ‘In the nature of the non-city: Expanded infrastructural networks and the political ecology of planetary urbanisation’, *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 48:2 (2016), pp. 233–51 (p. 234).

<sup>67</sup>See, for a corresponding critique, Anni Kangas, ‘Global cities, International Relations and the fabrication of the world’, *Global Society*, 31:4 (2017), pp. 531–50.

<sup>68</sup>Sören Becker, James Angel, and Matthias Naumann, ‘Energy democracy as the right to the city: Urban energy struggles in Berlin and London’, *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 52:6 (2020), pp. 1093–111.

<sup>69</sup>Farhana Sultana, ‘Embodied intersectionalities of urban citizenship: Water, infrastructure, and gender in the Global South’, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 110:5 (2020), pp. 1407–24; Andreas Bieler and Madelaine Moore, ‘Water grabbing, capitalist accumulation and resistance: Conceptualising the multiple dimensions of class struggle’, *Global Labour Journal*, 14:1 (2023), pp. 2–20.

<sup>70</sup>Maria Daskalaki, ‘Alternative organizing in times of crisis: Resistance assemblages and socio-spatial solidarity’, *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 25:2 (2018), pp. 155–70 (p. 1660).

<sup>71</sup>Quoted in Ceren Ergenç and Özlem Çelik, ‘Urban neighbourhood forums in Ankara as a commoning practice’, *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 53:4 (2021), pp. 1038–61 (p. 1056).

<sup>72</sup>Facundo Alvarado, Lydia Assouad, and Thomas Piketty, ‘Measuring inequality in the Middle East, 1990–2016: The world’s most unequal region?’, *Review of Income and Wealth*, 65:4 (2019), pp. 685–711.

of displacement from coastal regions.<sup>73</sup> Yet climate mitigation policies have remained a ‘low priority’ for many governments across the region.<sup>74</sup> Uneven governmental efforts to combat climate breakdown have often prioritised adaptation at the expense of mitigation.<sup>75</sup> While many countries in the region are members of the international climate regime – as parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement – their adherence to carbon-intensive economic development models continues to hinder their attempts to meet meaningful mitigation targets. This picture is further complicated by the fact that governments in many countries have largely deregulated environmental protections, are committed to hydropower and coal-based energy production, and continue to promote public and private ‘megaprojects’ that pose significant environmental harm.<sup>76</sup>

Simultaneously, official mitigation strategies – or lack thereof – are challenged by social movements. Often at great personal risk, grassroots movements mobilise constituent power to campaign against deforestation, privatisation of public land, mining operations, and constructions on environmental protection sites. We highlight that resistance to state-/corporate-led forms of dispossession and expropriation cannot merely be understood as local struggles. They also cannot be easily integrated into the existing Global Value Chain analyses favoured by IPE scholars (i.e. as issues that affect *individual* nodes of an otherwise well-functioning production regime).<sup>77</sup> Rather, we insist that grassroots movements confront *localised* manifestations of the ‘global infrastructure turn,’<sup>78</sup> by contesting both megaprojects themselves *and* the actors and processes that bring them to their particular communities. Environmental movements and collectives in the region wage popular campaigns against deforestation, air and soil pollution, commodification of key resources, and controversial public and private infrastructure projects by developing an explicitly transnational framework of critique that attacks (transnational) corporate ownership of public utilities, and wider extractivist accumulation and ‘development’ strategies promoted by official actors.<sup>79</sup> As noted by detailed ethnographic accounts, grassroots environmentalisms in the Middle East – particularly the movements that confront mining and energy infrastructure projects – radically undermine growth-based developmentalism commonly adopted by states, NGOs, and international organisations.<sup>80</sup> They place lived ecological priorities at the heart of their struggles and promote strategies and ideas around ‘democratic, place-based, and collective ownership’ of common resources that

<sup>73</sup>Jeremy S. Pal and Elfatih A. B. Eltahir, ‘Future temperature in southwest Asia projected to exceed a threshold for human adaptability’, *Nature Climate Change*, 6:2 (2016), pp. 197–200; Edoardo Bucchignani, Paola Mercogliano, Hans-Jürgen Panitz, and Myriam Montesarchio, ‘Climate change projections for the Middle East–North Africa domain with COSMO-CLM at different spatial resolutions’, *Advances in Climate Change Research*, 9:1 (2018), pp. 66–80.

<sup>74</sup>Jeannie Sowers, Avner Vengosh, and Erika Weintal, ‘Climate change, water resources, and the politics of adaptation in the Middle East and North Africa’, *Climatic Change*, 104:3/4 (2011), pp. 599–627.

<sup>75</sup>Rana El Hajj, ‘How serious are Arab countries about climate change? A new era of climate change policy’, *Perspectives: Political Analyses and Commentary*, 9 (2016), pp. 2–5.

<sup>76</sup>Ethemcan Turhan, Semra Cerit Mazlum, Ümit Şahin, Alevgül H. Şorman, and A. Cem Gündoğan, ‘Beyond special circumstances: Climate change policy in Turkey 1992–2015’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 7:3 (2016), pp. 448–60; David Sims, *Egypt’s Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015); Sinan Erensü, ‘Powering neoliberalization: Energy and politics in the making of a new Turkey’, *Energy Research & Social Science*, 41 (2018), pp. 148–57.

<sup>77</sup>See, for a similar critique, Benjamin Selwyn, ‘Global value chains and human development: A class-relational framework’, *Third World Quarterly*, 37:10 (2016), pp. 1768–86.

<sup>78</sup>Jago Dodson, ‘The global infrastructure turn and urban practice’, *Urban Policy and Research*, 35:1 (2017), pp. 87–92.

<sup>79</sup>Dina Zayed and Jeannie Sowers, ‘The campaign against coal in Egypt’, *Middle East Report*, 271 (2014), pp. 29–35; Sinem Kavak, ‘Cross-class alliances and urban middle classes with peasant characteristics: A historical-spatial approach to agency in territory-based rural mobilisations in Turkey’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (2023), pp. 1–22, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2023.2259809.

<sup>80</sup>Fikret Adaman, Murat Arsel, and Bengi Akbulut, ‘Neoliberal developmentalism in Turkey: Continuity, rupture, consolidation’, in Fikret Adaman, Bengi Akbulut, and Murat Arsel (eds), *Neoliberal Turkey and Its Discontents: Economic Policy and the Environment* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 1–17.

address concrete threats to their means of socio-ecological reproduction.<sup>81</sup> Put bluntly, grassroots urban and rural movements in these contexts advance a conception of ‘development’ and climate mitigation that is far more transnational and comprehensive in its understanding of the scale of ecological crises than many of our existing political economy accounts.

### Decades of keeping it in the ground: Indigenous organising against hydrocarbon extraction

Centres of power in the Global North are sluggishly catching up to the existential need to decarbonise, with the IPCC making clear that 80 per cent of remaining global coal reserves and 30 to 50 per cent of oil and gas reserves must remain in the ground if warming is to be limited to even 2°C, and ‘significantly more’ hydrocarbon reserves should be left untouched to limit warming to 1.5°C.<sup>82</sup> Despite this stark truth, governments are still granting licences for new coal, oil, and gas extraction, including the United Kingdom’s planned Whitehaven coal mine in Cumbria and the huge Willow Oil project in Alaska – approved by so-called ‘climate president’ Joe Biden – which will potentially extract 600 million barrels of oil a day for the next 30 years.<sup>83</sup> Such projects reveal the dissonance between climate rhetoric and policy reality, with hydrocarbon-fuelled economic growth remaining a priority above decarbonisation. In stark contrast to the reckless actions of policymakers and corporations, many Indigenous communities living on resource frontiers have been fighting against the extraction and transport of hydrocarbons from and across their lands for many decades.

On Turtle Island, across the area known as North America, multiple struggles continue between oil and gas giants on one side, backed by the weight of settler colonial states, and Indigenous communities defending their own sovereignty and unceded lands on the other. The Unist’ot’en camp, for example, is located on unceded Wet’suwet’en territory and stands firm against multiple hydrocarbon infrastructure projects. Access to Unist’ot’en territory is sought by TransCanada for the Coastal GasLink project, by Chevron for the Pacific Trails Pipeline, and by Enbridge for the Northern Trails Pipeline. Protecting and preserving Unist’ot’en land, waters, and more-than-human relations has involved building a camp in the location sought for access by the hydrocarbon giants, and building a resistance community that repeatedly turns away corporate contractors.<sup>84</sup> In 2019, the camp was invaded by Canadian armed forces, and 14 Indigenous land protectors were arrested.<sup>85</sup> In this case, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) worked in the interests of hydrocarbon expansion, and specifically in the interests of TransCanada Corporation, which sought to expand its Coastal GasLink pipeline through unceded Indigenous lands.<sup>86</sup>

Hydrocarbon extraction has always followed relational dynamics and geopolitical changes in the world system. When Margaret Thatcher closed down the coal mines and accelerated the deindustrialisation of the United Kingdom in the 1980s, for example, the coal-extraction frontier was

<sup>81</sup> Alevgül Şorman and Ethemcan Turhan, ‘The limits of authoritarian energy governance: Energy, democracy and public contestation in Turkey’, in Majia Nadesan, Martin Pasqualetti, and Jennifer Keahey (eds), *Energy Democracies for Sustainable Futures* (London: Elsevier, 2022), pp. 233–42 (p. 238).

<sup>82</sup> IPCC, *Synthesis Report*, p. 24.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Whitehaven coal mine legal challenge rejected’, *BBC* (12 April 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cumbria-65253462>; Oliver Milman, ‘Biden’s approval of Willow project shows inconsistency of US’s first “climate president”’, *The Guardian* (14 March 2023), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/14/biden-president-approved-alaska-willow-project>}.  
<sup>84</sup> Unist’ot’en, ‘No pipelines’ (n.d.), available at: <https://unistoten.camp/no-pipelines/background-of-the-campaign/>.

<sup>85</sup> ‘First Nations pipeline protest: 14 land protectors arrested as Canadian police raid Indigenous camp’, *DemocracyNow!* (8 January 2019), available at: [https://www.democracynow.org/2019/1/8/protesters\\_resist\\_as\\_police\\_raid\\_protected](https://www.democracynow.org/2019/1/8/protesters_resist_as_police_raid_protected)}.  
<sup>86</sup> For historical roots of the state’s protection of settler colonial accumulation, see Sabrina Axster, Ida Danewid, Asher Goldstein, et al., ‘Colonial lives of the carceral archipelago: Rethinking the neoliberal security state’, *International Political Sociology*, 15:3 (2021), pp. 415–39.

displaced to other parts of the world, including to Colombia.<sup>87</sup> Since the 1990s, the Colombian department of La Guajira, the country's northernmost peninsula, has been a key site of expanding and socio-ecologically devastating carbon extraction. Since 2006, the Wayuú Women's Force (Fuerza de Mujeres Wayuú) has made up one organised front of the Indigenous resistance to coal mining in La Guajira.<sup>88</sup> Coal mining in the area is run by the company Cerrejón, which in turn is owned by Glencore. Extractive operations have brought displacement, dispossession, and the damming of multiple bodies of water, restricting water access for remaining communities. The expansion of the coal-mining industry has also coincided with a steep rise in child mortality, which suggests deep connections between reproductive and environmental injustice in the area. Indigenous organising has led to interventions from the Colombian Constitutional Court and the United Nations, but the Wayuú Women's Force is committed to fighting Cerrejón until the company leaves their lands and the coal mines are closed for good.

Countless other Indigenous struggles against hydrocarbon extraction and infrastructure have held back at least some coal, oil, and gas burning over the years, often at the cost of the lives of Indigenous land defenders themselves. For example, Eduardo Mendúa, the Indigenous leader of CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nations of Ecuador), was murdered by hitmen on 26 February 2023. The killing of Mendúa came just after CONAIE resolved to redouble their efforts to resist oil extraction on their lands. In a familiar story, Petroecuador EP, a state-owned oil company, imposed the expansion of oil drilling on Indigenous territory, with the backing of force by the state armed forces.<sup>89</sup> Mendúa's killing adds to hundreds more annual murders of Indigenous land defenders whose lives are taken in the struggle against the expansion of extractive industries globally.<sup>90</sup>

Policymakers and corporate actors continue to equivocate on decarbonisation and walk an impossible tightrope of net zero discourse across an ever-deeper canyon of continued carbon-fuelled economic growth. At the same time, the Indigenous movements and leaders profiled in this section continue to pay with their lives for attempting to take the only course of action which will preserve planetary socio-ecological life: that is, to keep hydrocarbons locked away in the sub-soil. As the next section elaborates, these vital and prescient Indigenous struggles also connect with and expand the horizons of feminist movements centred on alternative economies of care.

### Caretaking economies against the growth fetish

As the Red Nation collective suggests, the kinds of actions detailed in the previous section to protect Indigenous socio-ecologies from the expansion of resource extraction can be understood as vital elements within a broader 'caretaking economy', which works against the ravages of growth-focused capitalism.<sup>91</sup> Contrary to the colonial conservation imaginary, which imagines 'wilderness' without people,<sup>92</sup> Indigenous peoples act as caretakers for around 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity and at least one quarter of the world's land.<sup>93</sup> However, Indigenous forms of

<sup>87</sup> See Isobel Tarr, 'Fighting Colombia's largest coal mine', *The Ecologist* (18 December 2018), available at: <https://theecologist.org/2018/dec/18/struggle-against-colombias-largest-coal-mine>.

<sup>88</sup> Carol Sánchez, 'In Colombia, threatened women of the Wayuú community continue to fight rampant mining', *Mongabay* (13 December 2021), available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/12/in-colombia-threatened-women-of-the-wayuu-community-continue-to-fight-rampant-mining/>.

<sup>89</sup> See Ana Cristina Alvarado, 'Indigenous leader assassinated amid conflict over oil that divided community', *Mongabay* (17 April 2023), available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2023/04/the-indigenous-leader-assassinated-amid-an-ugly-oil-conflict-and-a-divided-community/>.

<sup>90</sup> Global Witness, 'Decade of defiance' (2022), available at: <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/environmental-activists/decade-defiance/>.

<sup>91</sup> The Red Nation, *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save our Earth* (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2021).

<sup>92</sup> See Malcolm Ferdinand, 'Behind the colonial silence of wilderness: "In Marronage Lies the Search of a World"', *Environmental Humanities*, 14:1 (2022), pp. 182–201.

<sup>93</sup> The Red Nation, *The Red Deal*, p. 24. These percentages are also contested and depend on how expansive the working definition of 'Indigenous' is.

‘caretaking’ – for example in the blocking of pipelines, as in the #NoDAPL actions at Standing Rock in 2016 – have been countered by the state through harsh ‘critical infrastructure’ laws designed to protect petrochemical companies over people and ecology.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, care in the form of solidarity towards migrants navigating the deadly borders of the capitalist core is also increasingly met with a punitive state response.<sup>95</sup> Not only do we find, then, that care is undervalued (or not valued at all) under capitalism, as Marxist feminists have long argued, it is also increasingly criminalised and punished in our contemporary political economic context.

Almost four decades ago, Maria Mies asked ‘what would a society be like in which women, nature and colonies were not exploited in the name of ever more wealth and money?’<sup>96</sup> And yet today, despite decades of feminist, ecologist, and other radical critiques, we still measure national well-being in terms of growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which refers to the total value of all the goods and services produced within a given economy. In a GDP growth-oriented system, the imperative is always for us to produce more goods and services each year than we did in the previous one, in defiance of the finite nature of material resources and the neocolonial extraction this growth implies. As feminists have long pointed out, the essential non-commodified services upon which the reproduction of life depends are not included – and therefore not valued at all – within national accounting systems.<sup>97</sup> Alternative projects imagined – and often actually enacted at the community level – by feminist, Indigenous, ecologist (most recently degrowth), and queer organisers and scholars provide clear blueprints for a life without growth in which care is abundant.<sup>98</sup>

Our central concern in this article is for the stubborn reproduction of socio-ecological life, often in the wastelands left behind by colonialism, militarism, racial capitalism, and neoliberalism – this is quite literally planetary ‘care work’ realised in practice in myriad ways. Caretaking means nurturing ecology and human life at all scales – often recognised as an explicitly feminist practice. For example, the Alliance of Women in Agroecology (AMA-AWA), a collective of agroecologists and feminists from across Abya Yala and Europe, have contributed to a feminist approach to land protection and food sovereignty which expands and preserves the commons. One of the fundamentals of such a *feminist* food sovereignty ethos is the ‘acknowledgement that care work, which involves the affective, psychic, relational and physical work needed for life, is indispensable in creating the conditions for agroecology and food sovereignty to proliferate’. They stress that food sovereignty rests upon a feminist ethics of care and a recognition that ‘we are beings who reproduce life, therefore, we need and can give care.’<sup>99</sup>

In the Global North, ecofeminist, Marxist, and feminist degrowth organisers are increasingly working towards expanding care-centred economies which challenge established structures and rebuild commons outside of the market. As Amaia Pérez Orozco (translated by Liz Mason-Deese) explains, the task is to broaden our understanding of the capital–labour relation, not only to include unpaid care and other forms of non-waged labour, but also to include broader relations of planetary

<sup>94</sup>See Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London: Verso, 2019).

<sup>95</sup>Deanna Dadusc and Pierpaolo Mudu, ‘Care without control: The humanitarian industrial complex and the criminalisation of solidarity’, *Geopolitics*, 27:4 (2022), pp. 1205–30.

<sup>96</sup>Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014 [1986]), p. 205.

<sup>97</sup>See, for example, Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*; Shirin M. Rai, Benjamin D. Brown, and Kanchana N. Ruwanpura, ‘SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth. A gendered analysis’, *World Development*, 113 (2019), pp. 368–80.

<sup>98</sup>Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Verónica Gago, *Feminist International: How to Change Everything* (London: Verso, 2020); Sara Stevano, Alessandra Mezzadri, Lorena Lombardozi, and Hannah Bargawi, ‘Hidden abodes in plain sight: The social reproduction of households and labor in the COVID-19 pandemic’, *Feminist Economics*, 27:1/2 (2021), pp. 271–87; The Red Nation, *The Red Deal*.

<sup>99</sup>Diana Lilia Trevilla Espinal and Ivett Peña Azcona, ‘Care ethics in agrology research: Practices from southern Mexico’, *Cultivate!* (15 June 2021), available at: {<https://www.cultivatecollective.org/in-practice/care-ethics-in-agroecology-research-practices-from-southern-mexico/>}.

life beyond labour. The objective is also to dissociate ‘the task of sustaining life from femininity’ in part through creating economies based on expansive collective relations. Orozco urges us to shift the responsibility for reproducing the conditions of life from the private, domestic realm into the realm of common responsibility. Such a feminist ethics works towards the end of both the racial and sexual divisions of labour and turns the invisible practices of care into visible and public endeavours. Overall, a range of materialist feminist projects teach us to value the reproduction of life, not simply for the sake of reproducing value through the labourer as capitalism broadly intends, but for the sake of reproducing life itself in all of its beautiful and decommodified forms.<sup>100</sup>

As these varied projects show, the alternative basis for organising the reproduction of socio-ecological life is precisely the caretaking work which nourishes human and other forms of biotic life, and which protects water, soil, land, and air as conditions of existence. Reorganising the economy around the essential functions of care – whether that work is in the form of social care, healthcare, education, child and elder care, or care for land, food cultivation, and ecology – would mean a reversal of current priorities in which such vital work is increasingly carried out under conditions of racial and gendered exploitation. One starting point for such a shift towards a caretaking economy in the Global North is to articulate the labour struggles of care workers with climate organising, and to centre such struggles within green visions for organising social life. Beyond this, degrowthers’ varied visions for drastically reducing material and energy throughput focus precisely on creating the conditions of collective abundance through managed redistribution to ensure a transition towards such a caretaking economy.<sup>101</sup> These are the projects and visions which will rebuild expansive forms of collective socio-ecological life out of the ruins of capitalism.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to think in terms of future horizons five decades ahead when climate projections tell us that important ecological limits will be breached within single-figure years, and while climate-related disasters and species extinctions are already conditions of our times. However, if the movements we engage with here refuse to concede to despair and commit instead to working through practices of reproducing the conditions of life, then we all surely have a responsibility to do the same. We approached our analysis of the coming decades here through a conjunctural method, which squarely confronts the historical debts and legacies shaping the future, but without conceding political hope and struggle to the demobilising force of historical determinism. We recognise, though, that geophysical conditions inherited from colonial, racial capitalist, and neoliberal projects continue to conspire against both the future and the present for many in the global majority.

Our reading of the contemporary conjuncture recognises that the political force of climate denialism, in its familiar form at least, is giving way to an energy transition accumulation project, backed by major state and corporate power in articulation with finance capital. Although, as with any historical energy transformation,<sup>102</sup> the current transition will provoke a reconfiguration of social relations, it is also clear that scrambles for land and critical minerals are renewing the sacrificial status of those communities and ecologies subordinated on familiar race, class, caste, and colonial hierarchies. Yet it is those same communities on resource and climate frontiers who refuse sacrificial status by reproducing the conditions of socio-ecological life – they are firmly among the revolutionary subjects of history for a time of overlapping planetary crises.

Food sovereignty movements such as ANAMURI, for example, fuse peasant, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, feminist, and labour organising against state, colonial, and corporate expropriation

<sup>100</sup> Amaia Pérez Orozco and Liz Mason-Deese, ‘Ecofeminist degrowth for sustaining *buen convivir*’, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 37:2 (2022), pp. 223–40.

<sup>101</sup> See Jason Hickel, ‘Degrowth: A theory of radical abundance’, *Real-World Economics Review*, 87:19, pp. 54–68; Corinna Dengler and Miriam Lang, ‘Commoning care: Feminist degrowth visions for a socio-ecological transformation’, *Feminist Economics*, 28: 1 (2022), pp. 1–28.

<sup>102</sup> See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).

of their lands. They show that producing food ‘in place’ according to agroecological principles works against the climate impacts, social exploitation, and ecological exhaustion of agro-industrial production. Similarly, movements reclaiming the commons in urban settings subvert processes of privatisation and commodification which further individualise social relations in the city. Elsewhere, Indigenous land and water protectors – from the Wayuú Women’s Force of La Guajira to the Unist’ot’en camp on Turtle Island – have worked for many years to keep hydrocarbons in the ground, facing down state military forces and corporate power in the process. Such work against hydrocarbon extraction also forms part of a broader conception of a ‘caretaking economy’ in which care of all human and more-than-human life is properly valued. This stands powerfully against the dominance of a growth-focused capitalism that devalues and exploits care work in all forms.

By centring these protective, commoning, and caretaking collectives, this article also aimed to provoke wider questions about the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that underpin our disciplinary knowledge production. We are provoked to ask, which conceptions and political configurations of ‘the international’ are valorised by International Studies (and particularly political economy) scholars? And why is mainstream scholarship often silent on the politics of socio-ecological reproduction for the global majority? What can we learn from *alternative internationals* – transnational movements and politics that do not customarily find a place in the conceptual grammar and empirical archives of our disciplines? All of the movements we engage with here produce multiscalar analyses by necessity – largely because exertions of power at the global, state, and corporate scales are ‘felt’ most acutely at the scale of the community. A *relational planetary political economy* is, therefore, something experienced in real time, as much as something studied. Food sovereignty, Indigenous, urban commoning, and other movements also form powerful and expanding internationals which scale ‘up and out’ through effective sideways organising.

The coming 50 years will undoubtedly continue to see the dramatic reconfiguration of planetary geophysical and socio-ecological conditions. Remaining alive to existing structures and operations of power – constructed through colonial and racial capitalist histories – and the ability of these to turn any crisis and transition into an accumulation project will be vital for all scholars who are committed to a viable future. All critical conjunctures demand both uncompromising analysis and wilful political vision. As shown in the analysis above, this critical vision and commitment to reproducing life is already being scaled out from below across multiple global majority communities through anti-systemic projects. The challenge for our disciplines will be one of resisting old power formations in green clothing and meaningfully supporting global majority visions for the reproduction of socio-ecological life.

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