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Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

Beyond the green new deal? Dependency, racial capitalism and struggles for a radical ecological transition in Argentina and Latin America

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Dependency
Racial capitalism
Environment
GND
Crisis
Developmentalism

ABSTRACT

In recent years, discussions on the need for a transition to stop climate change have multiplied. In the global North, several alternatives have appeared, ranging from green capitalism proposals to several versions of Green New Deals. In Latin America, particularly in Argentina, several initiatives are being posed by governments, academics and social movements. In this article, we concentrate on critically discussing the main alternatives: the Green Developmentalist initiative of the Argentine government and the Social, Ecological, Economic and Intercultural Pact fostered by several academics and social movements across the region. We present our analytical framework, providing a succinct discussion on marxian dependency and racial capitalism as key elements of our analysis. Then we engage in a critical dissection of the green developmentalist initiatives to tackle climate change from Argentina. Afterwards, we discuss the strengths and limitations of the Pact, and later on we present some of the main ideas being stressed by radical eco-social collectives and organizations in Argentina. We finish our work with some brief reflections.

1. Introduction

“In this confluence of social and ecological crises, we can no longer afford to be unimaginative; we can no longer afford to do without utopian thinking. These crises are too serious and the possibilities too sweeping to be resolved by customary modes of thought — the very sensibilities that produced these crises in the first place”

(Bookchin, 1982, pp. 40–41).

We are witnessing an unprecedented global environmental and climate crisis, which is not alien to the political agendas of governments, organisations, NGOs and social movements. The impending catastrophe of the global environmental crisis has forced the dominant sectors on a global scale to think of alternatives. The responses and proposals put forward in the global North tend to underestimate the impact of the core countries' capitalist development strategies on the South. At the same time, and in spite of the urgencies and pressures implied by the strangulation produced by the foreign debt, alternatives to the climate crisis are also being thought out and put into practice in the dependent countries across the global South.

At the present time, transnational corporations and the most conservative political coalitions push for solutions to recreate conditions for capitalist accumulation in a way that allows them to profit from the

ecological wave. With the global crisis of 2008, the idea that something radical had to be done to confront climate change was branded a new name. The Green New Deal (GND) became a buzzword in the United States and Europe as it appeared an appealing proposal to restart the economy in crisis, albeit with a greenish tint.

This advance of green capitalism in the central countries has as its counterpart the proliferation, in the dependent countries, of extractivist projects that will provide the material means for the proposed transformation in the global North. The neoliberal globalisation in the 1980 s and 1990 s has established new rules for international trade and free flow of investment capital and required countries to integrate into the global economy through structural adjustment in their policies (e.g., liberalisation and deregulation). In Latin America, this program was fully implemented with the forceful support of international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (Veltmeyer, 2016) and the Inter-American Development Bank, through the pressure generated by external debt obligations. This situation created the necessary conditions for the advance of extractive initiatives in these territories, which have multiplied in the last twenty years.

In this way, in recent decades, we have observed the transition in Latin America from the Washington Consensus, focused on financial valorisation, to the Commodity Consensus, based on the export of

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2022.10.010>

Received 25 November 2021; Received in revised form 18 October 2022; Accepted 25 October 2022

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primary goods on a large scale (Svampa and Viale, 2014). This new stage implied the deepening of the dynamics of dispossession (Harvey, 2004), whose main characteristic is the dispossession and concentration of land, resources and territories by large transnational capital. In this framework, Latin America confirms itself as an “adaptive economy” in relation to the different nuclei of accumulation (Nochteff, 1995), which tends towards the acceptance of the place that this region occupies in the international division of labour, changing the role of the State from producer and regulator (Svampa and Viale, 2014) to a guardian of the reproduction of capital. Thus, multiple forms of extractivism have been promoted, ranging from mega-mining projects in the Andes for the extraction of critical minerals to produce more energy-efficient electronic devices, to extractivist ventures at the meeting point between Bolivia, Chile and Argentina to extract lithium from brines to aid in the production of new batteries. As a counterpart, extractive projects have destroyed local communities by polluting agro-ecosystems, making people sick and fracturing community ties.

In Latin America we can find different approaches to the need to topple climate change. On the one hand, building on previous articulations and experiences, several social and academic organisations proposed in 2020 the need to set up a Social, Ecological, Economic and Intercultural Pact for Latin America (henceforth, the Pact). With some resemblance to the Green New Deal proposals of the global North, it outlined some ideas to try to counteract the effects of this environmental crisis. The Pact takes a very critical stance on the role of extractivism in the region, and the need to critically address it as part of any solution. On the other hand, some governments in the region are proposing “solutions” such as Green Development, which imply profiting from the contamination of territories and taking advantage of the opportunities provided by initiatives in the core countries, without proposing real solutions to the environmental crisis. These developmentalist proposals pretend to embrace extractivism as an opportunity for the region in the face of the climate crisis and the transition to a greener capitalism. Finally, many social organisations, intellectuals and movements are pushing for a more radical ideal, to be built from below and in-and-beyond the State, and struggle for a revolution in the form of society as a whole.

Focusing on the case of Argentina, in this article we will provide a critical discussion of these alternatives in Latin America, starting from a perspective that has been largely absent from the debate. We will work within the marxian dependency framework (Marini, 2022) to explore the new modalities of dependency in the current stage of capitalism and its ties to the proposed solutions to the climate crisis. On the other hand, we will make use of the framework provided by the literature on racial capitalism that accounts for how extractivism and pollution differentially affect people based on the racial and class lineages (Pulido, 2009, 2017; Melamed, 2015). By making use of a combination of these theoretical approaches, the aim of this article is to critically analyse the responses currently being debated in Latin America to confront the environmental crisis.

In order to carry out this objective, we will use the technique of bibliographical and documentary review (Valles, 1999). Within the framework of this technique, we retrieve programmes, policies, journalistic and academic articles in order to trace the ideas and proposals that the different sectors have outlined, making a critical reading and putting them in dialogue with our theoretical framework. At the same time, we seek to relate the lines proposed in the framework of these alternatives with actual transformative initiatives from below, in order to discuss the proposals in context.

On the other hand, we have taken Argentina as a paradigmatic case. Over the last three decades, despite changes in governing coalitions, Argentina’s State has made a very strong commitment to economic development linked to extractivism. At the same time, there are numerous resistances, struggles and articulations in the country against the multiple extractive activities that are being developed in the national territory. Thus, in Argentina, gas extractivism (especially through

fracking) and mining (especially lithium), the installation of ‘clean’ energy production plants and other initiatives are intensifying. The aim is to develop a new export platform for the raw materials that are becoming the focus of the green transition being promoted in the North (gas, lithium, hydrogen). Proposed alternatives in the core countries require the renewed exploitation and pollution of the Global South, and a new wave of developmentalist governments is poised to put dependent territories on the ‘correct’ side of this equation.

The article is structured as follows. After this brief introduction, we present our analytical framework, providing a succinct discussion on marxian dependency and racial capitalism as key elements of our analysis. Then we engage in a critical dissection of the green developmentalist initiatives to tackle climate change from Argentina. Afterwards, we discuss the strengths and limitations of the Pact, and later on we present some of the main ideas being stressed by radical eco-social collectives and organisations in Argentina. We finish our work with some brief reflections.

2. Towards a critical framework of dependent, racial capitalism to tackle climate change

It is common knowledge now that core countries’ approaches to climate change fail to stress the importance of stopping the commodification of life in general and nature in particular to avert climate change. They take for granted that market solutions, with more or less state intervention, can confront the planet’s destruction. As Enrique Leff (2005) argues, this implies that in the era of the green economy, nature ceases to be an object of the labour process and is codified in terms of capital. It transmutes into a form of capital - natural capital - generalising and expanding the forms of economic valorisation of nature (O’Connor, 1993). This paradigm not only deepens the processes of appropriation of natural goods but also modifies the forms of intervention of nature and pushes the logic of capitalist rationality to its limits, leading to a denaturalisation of nature and promoting a strategy that aims to “naturalise” the commodification of nature through the discourse of sustainable development (Leff, 2005).

However, it is rarely stressed that with a varying mix of technological (e.g. circular economy), fiscal (e.g. green taxes), communication (e.g., strengthening spaces for information and communication from society), or infrastructural (e.g. biofuel production) solutions, these proposals tend to perpetuate relations of dependency between core and peripheral territories, mediated by global value chains and unequal exchange (of value and materials), and interpenetrated by forms of racism and patriarchy that co-constitute capitalism. These relations are at the center of the current climate crisis, and thus, any solution should attempt to radically transform them. Our discussion of the alternatives being debated in Latin America (with our specific focus on Argentina) will be underscored by this particular analytical framework.

2.1. Green capitalism and the continuation of dependency

At the core of marxist dependency theory, Ruy Mauro Marini’s approach places at the centre of the problem of “development” the place of national territories, now formally decolonised, in the international division of labour (Marini, 2015).¹ Marini shows how these territories are subject to the permanent plundering of their wealth through

¹ Dependency theoretical underpinnings have gained new momentum in recent years in direct debate with feminists, anti-racist, and socio-ecological approaches. Dependency theory has become a renewed research program (Kvangraven, 2020) that is key to current climate change debates (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021; Kvangraven, 2020; Madariaga & Palestini, 2021; Féliz, 2021b). Within this rebirth of dependency as a research program, here we will focus on the marxian dependency paradigm, especially on the work of Ruy Mauro Marini (Marini, 2022).

processes of unequal exchange (Féliz, 2021b). Nation-States in the peripheries remain critically entangled in different forms of coloniality (Quijano, 2020; Wynter, 2003) that co-constitute dependency, blocking the development of radical strategies to break with the capitalist foundation of the climate crisis. Indeed, in the case of Latin America, despite having achieved political independence, nation-States continue to be disadvantageously integrated into global capitalism based on relationships, regulations and institutions dominated by the North, under the supervision of transnational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (González, 2020).

The relations of dependency between the current nation-states were constituted by placing the populations of the 'colonised' nations as second-class populations and territories, liable to having their labour super-exploited and their common goods plundered. As Laura Pulido points out:

Differential value refers to the production of recognised differences that result in distinct kinds of values. These differences in value become critical in the accumulation of surplus – both profits and power. Just as uneven space is essential to the unfolding of capitalism, the human difference is essential to the production of differential value. (Pulido, 2017, p. 4).

In this set of relations, through concepts such as circular economy, the different blueprints to tackle climate change in the North push for the capitalist internalisation of waste and emissions, thus turning them into profitable capital (Cerdá and Khalilova, 2016; Genovese and Panzera, 2021). The perfect complement of this is the idea of zero-net emissions (*Making Mission Impossible. Delivering a Net-Zero Economy*, 2020). This means that whatever garbage the system produces somewhere (mainly in the core countries, by global corporations owned by the 1 %) should be compensated somewhere else: namely, in the global South, in a renewed drive for imperialistic impositions. Thus, carbon emissions in the North (and China, the 'forgotten polluter') should be absorbed through carbon 'sinks' in those areas of the rest of the world deemed helpful for this purpose. In this sense, for example, the policies of building carbon markets create an easy way out for core countries to fulfil formal commitments without real emissions reductions.

The 'net zero' proposal means that companies can continue to explore, drill, extract and burn fossil fuels. In contrast, 'others' elsewhere must absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and thus 'magically' offset emissions. However, whose land, whose forests will be used to absorb that carbon? (Amigos de la Tierra and Tierra Viva, 2021).

These reflections imply that behind the unequal exchange there is an unequal valuation of life. A clear example of this is the fact that, given the scarcity of oil, many governments of countries in the global North are betting on so-called biofuels as if they were a green solution to their dependence on fossil fuels, ignoring or making invisible the negative effects that the advance of monocultures has on ecosystems and on the populations that are affected by the continuous spraying of agrotoxins (for the case of Argentina, see Córdoba et al, 2017). In order to develop these biofuels, the agricultural frontier -linked to the monoculture of Genetically Modified crops- has to expand, destroying not only the fertile lands of the countries of what Syngenta has called the "United Soy Republic" (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) but also bringing devastating socio-health effects: increased incidence of different types of cancer, spontaneous abortions, infertility, congenital malformations, among others (Oliva, 2016).

Dependency relations between different territories imply a leakage of value in international relations (Marini, 2015) and a persistent unequal exchange of use-values. In this sense, countries historically constructed as dependent suffer the systematic plundering of their natural wealth and common goods (Féliz, 2019), implying an unequal environmental exchange (Clark and Foster, 2009; Oulu, 2016; Rice, 2009;

Timmons Roberts and Parks, 2007). Ecological imperialism is the backbone of the current metabolic rift that appears the "disproportionate (and undercompensated) transfer of matter and energy from the periphery to the core, and the exploitation of environmental space within the periphery for intensive production and waste disposal" (Clark and Foster, 2009, p. 313). The mechanism of unequal exchange offers a safe-conduct to exonerate the countries of the North from their ecological debt (Leff, 2005; Azamar-Alonso and Carrillo-González, 2017), as a result of a disproportionate flow of energy and materials from the Global South to the Global North through the chain of commodity production, extraction of resources and energy (Roberts and Parks, 2009).

2.2. Racial capitalism at the core of greener capitalism

Dependency implies the expanded reproduction of racialized global relations of exploitation. The memorandum released in the early 1990 s, signed by Lawrence Summers, when he served as Chief Economist of the World Bank, only expresses the racism that has historically structured dependency relationships (Summers, 1991). In that memo, Summers defended the migration of polluting companies from the North to the countries of the South, arguing that "a given amount of health-impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages" ('Furor on Memo At World Bank', 1992). The racist tone of the statement was completed with "I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that". In this line of thought, the global south is just a source of raw materials and sink for waste for production in imperialist countries (Rice, 2009). This is the underlying basis for most of the imperialist proposals of green capitalism and GND.

Pulido (2017) underlines that environmental racism is not a product of neoliberalism but is an essential part of racial capitalism. This type of racism can be understood under the idea that racialised and low-income groups "are disproportionately exposed to pollution, but it also includes biases in natural resource policy, uneven application of environmental regulations and nature excluding conventional environmentalism" (Pulido, 1996, p. 377). In the same line of thought, decolonial approaches critically expose how coloniality of power codifies racial differences between people from the core and the periphery, making the latter appear as naturally inferior, thus taking advantage of this process to plunder their labour and nature (Álvarez and Coolsaet, 2020, p. 3). In the same line of thought, the concept of territorial coloniality (Betancourt, 2021) states that social, economic, political, environmental and cultural devastation/domination/exploitation is linked to a matrix of subalternisation of people and territories in a differentiated manner. The advance of extractivism and domination over territories affects with greater force and violence the most vulnerable sectors and regions. This matrix of subalternisation has been applied not only to many people, but also to nature and its essential elements.

Racial capitalism explains that racialisation, and thus racism, are at the core of capitalism's existence and not just a derivation of capitalism itself (Gill, 2021, p. 2). This is central to the super-exploitation of both labour and nature (Burden-Stelly, 2020). As Issar explains, at the core of the process of primitive accumulation are processes of racialization and violent appropriation of bodies and nature (Issar, 2021). Within neoliberalism, certain facets of capital's exploitation are enhanced or made more explicit, such as racial and gender inequality. In this stage, the destruction of nature becomes ever more present.

The proposals emanating from the imperialist centres (which until not long ago were also imperial or colonial centres) reproduce a vision of the international division of labour that places populations on the frontiers of exploitation (on the peripheries), as surplus and expendable populations (Pulido, 1996). In these territories, racialized communities are "displaced not only by climate change, military interventions, and neoliberal economic policies, but also by the measures deployed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions" (González, 2020, p. 117). In fact,

“many responses to climate change are, in fact, amplifying systems of discrimination, segregation, and displacement as they attempt to adapt to the climate crisis and safeguard dominant economic and socio-political structures.” (L Rice et al., 2022, p. 2). In these sacrificial zones of racialized capitalism, populations are “particularly susceptible to harm due to their classification as surplus and disposable. Racialisation justifies and naturalises violence and dispossession” (González, 2020, p. 117). Some are even talking of a global system of climate apartheid (Rice et al., 2022). As Melamed suggests:

Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups - capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires (Melamed, 2015, p. 77).

At the limit, these processes of racialisation are expressed in what Leff calls the ultimate form of the class struggle: the point at which what is in question is who has the right to make use of the world to “discharge into an environment privatised the waste of life” (Leff, 2005). Indeed, it will be the world’s poor who will get the brunt of the policies to tackle climate change.

The different valuation of life is reproduced within the dependent capitalist States themselves. The advancement of extractive activities is prioritised over the reproduction of life in some territories. A clear example of this is the militarisation, during 2020 and 2021, of the town of Andalgalá, in the province of Catamarca in the central region of the Argentine mountain range, in order to limit the social mobilisation unleashed in the face of the start of an open-pit mega-mining project using the pandemic and enforced isolation as an excuse. With this intervention, the State defended the interests of the transnational mining corporations, repressing and criminalising those who were fighting for life and territory. This is yet another example of how dependent states operate in racialized capitalism, given that Catamarca is one of the poorest provinces in Argentina, and government discourse has focused on the idea that the solution to the structural poverty in this region would come from mega-mining. However, after 20 years of mega-mining activity in the region,² the province’s economic wellbeing has not improved, while the region’s water has been poisoned, disease rates have risen, and droughts have deepened (No a la mina, 2015).

Another example of how racial capitalism operates within dependent countries is the case of the advance of extractive activities in the territories of indigenous communities in Argentina. Despite the existence of a 2006 law that declares the emergency of the native peoples, proposing a survey of the territory of indigenous communities and the prohibition of evictions, not only has this survey not been carried out, but multiple evictions have also been executed. Thus, for example, the Mapuche people in the southern provinces have been dispossessed of their ancestral territory to allow the advance of mega-mining and the oil industry through violence and criminalisation, in combination with a media campaign that seeks to construct the image of the Mapuche as terrorists.

Even self-proclaimed progressive governments (such as that of Alberto Fernández, in office in Argentina since late 2019) reproduce repressive strategies in order to move forward with extractive projects that are expected to feed the inflow of dollars into the economy.

² Bajo La Alumbrera mine, which extracts copper and gold, is located in the department of Belén (Catamarca), 85 km from Andalgalá. After more than twenty years of operation and after multiple complaints of pollution, in 2017, the company that manages the deposit, Minera Alumbrera YMAD-UTE, announced its closure, given the exhaustion of the reserves.

Increasingly explicitly, they link the development of mining extractivism (gold or lithium, for example) to insert the local economy into the circuits of the new green capitalism (Kulfas, 2021).

2.3. The limits of greenwashing

In the face of all this, it becomes clear that without a strategy aimed at exiting capitalism, the hegemonic proposals are nothing more than greenwashing, with enormous costs for the world’s peripheries. How many minerals will have to be extracted from the territories of dependent countries to sustain the transition to renewable energy if unbridled growth in the North is not curbed? (Hickel, 2020).

The hegemonic transitional proposals, even the most progressive ones, assume that overcoming the environmental crisis does not require radical transformations in the way human life is produced and reproduced and the ways of consuming and organising society. In this line of thought, the Gates Foundation and Elon Musk invest in the search for “technological solutions” to the climate crisis, which will only make it manageable, without questioning or attacking the causes of climate change. These technological developments propose two main paths: removing carbon from the atmosphere –on the one hand-, and blocking part of the sun’s rays to lower the temperature, on the other (Ribeiro, 2020). The first path proposes the installation of carbon capture plants that would filter the air and separate carbon dioxide using chemicals and involving the use of large amounts of energy; however, this solution has not yet proven to work on the scale needed to contain climate change. Within the second pathway, there’s the idea to whiten sea clouds or block the sun’s rays with artificial volcanic clouds, which -if carried out on a large scale- could have substantial negative impacts, such as drought and rainfall disruption (Lawrence et al., 2018).

As we see, the imperial mode of production and living (IML) persists as an articulating pattern. As Brand and Wissen suggest:

A core mechanism of the functioning of the ... the imperial mode of production and living ... is that worldwide relationships of domination, power and exploitation remain intact and at the same time invisible, that means that they are in a way normalised within Northern societies. The crucial contradiction is that in times of globalising capitalism, the IML means a “good living” for parts of humanity at the cost of others – which means it restricts the opportunities for a decent life for many (Brand & Wissen, 2018, p. 288).

As we pointed out earlier, the last few decades have seen a deepening process of exporting polluting activities to dependent regions. Moreover, the transnationalisation of these activities and foreign investments in infrastructure linked to the extraction of commodities for central markets have multiplied. In this way, the dependent regions have consolidated themselves as suppliers of new (and old) raw materials to the central countries, having to bear the environmental liabilities, the social and health impacts and the destruction of community livelihoods that these productions entail.

Repaying the foreign debt has become one of the fundamental driving forces behind developmental governments promoting new extractivism. In Argentina, the weight of external debt has become a fundamental factor in articulating the extractivist project. On the one hand, paying the debt in foreign currency ‘requires’ increasing exports of commodities. On the other hand, the need to pay the debt becomes the excuse to increase multiply extractive projects essential in the strategy of transnational corporations and imperialist countries. The fact is that the sustainability of the debt opposes the sustainability of life (Féliz, 2021).

In Latin America, these ideas have been combined with what Alberto Acosta (2009) has called the “curse of abundance”, i.e. countries with many natural common goods: freshwater, minerals, oil, natural gas, lithium, among others. Thus, the extraction and exploitation of these natural common goods, together with the pressure mechanism implied by the external debt, has consolidated “rentier” mentalities. These rentier mentalities have converged with the ideas of developmentalism

in the region, which understand that the condition of underdevelopment can only be overcome through the adoption of a capitalist State-led national development strategy. Thus, those who defend these postulates understand that the natural commons are a lever for development and that development must be led by a strong state that controls companies. However, these approaches ignore the fact that there may be some situations that escape such control. A clear example of this is the disadvantages that the hydraulic fracturing (fracking) technique for oil and gas extraction can produce: by exploding with use of dynamite the rock to connect the capillaries where the unconventional oil and gas is housed, fractures can be produced that lead to the contamination of a water source, which would imply irreversible damage (Melón, 2015).

As part of the Global North's energy transition, Latin America is supplying the raw materials to sustain those policies. A clear example of this is the extraction of lithium in northern Argentina, a portion of Chile and Bolivia. In Argentina, this mineral is extracted in an area where water is scarce, taking into account that the process of extracting this mineral requires large amounts of water. At the same time, the lithium extraction and production chain is linked almost entirely to Chinese capital.

3. Latin America: Between top-down and bottom-up approaches to the environmental crisis

Faced with the global climate crisis, a debate has opened up throughout the Global South on how to tackle it. Many of these responses seem a carbon-copy of some of the proposals put forward in the North, with a limited critical reading of them and with a superficial understanding of the dependent conditions that exist in these latitudes. Some of them are nothing but the other side of the reforms proposed at the core, while others are more radical ideas to confront the realities of dependent capitalism. Furthermore, still other proposals go several steps into suggesting ideas for radical change to actually uncover the real causes and effects of the global climate crisis. In the next few pages we'll critically engage with the different proposals that traverse the Latin-american debate, with examples from Argentina's recent experience.

3.1. Green developmental state: surfing the green capitalist wave from the south

As a wave of progressive governments has been spreading, Latin American States have presented several initiatives that mostly draw on the left-liberal and/or social democratic alternatives. In general, these proposals appear as the greener version of the traditional State developmental approach of the ECLAC (CEPAL/ECLAC, 2021; Prebisch, 2012).

Developmentalism has been historically presented as the southern version of the social democratic/keynesian proposal where the State had a key role in moulding the conditions for capitalist reproduction. However, in Latin America developmentalism was an original response to the core's proposals for modernisation (Preston, 1999), aiming more at disarming the restrictions to capitalist development in an unequal world rather than just simply achieving full employment. In the last twenty years, most progressive governments in Latin America have attempted to recreate this developmental strategy in the era of transnationalization. Thus, they have presented neodevelopmental strategies that have been deeply penetrated by neoliberal theoretical domination (Féliz, 2014).

In the midst of the current environmental crisis, in recent times the neodevelopmentalist initiatives of the progressive governments attempt a combination of traditional social democratic State intervention with the promotion of new economic sectors that can help dependent and peripheral economies take a cut into the green turn within capitalism. These initiatives claim that by promoting new extractive industries, Latin American economies can develop by benefiting from the need for novel materials and energy sources in the current era. The region is

moving from the Commodities Consensus (Svampa and Viale, 2014) to a newer Extractivist Consensus (Artiga-Purcell, 2022). In a sort of ecological modernization (Oulu, 2016, p. 447) this strategy stresses that economic growth based on extractivism and technological innovation will solve any social and environmental problems caused by capitalism.

In the case of Argentina, the government of Alberto Fernández recently presented a proposal for a Green Developmentalism (Kulfas, 2021; Gobierno de Argentina, 2021). The "Plan de Desarrollo Productivo Verde" (*Green Productive Development Plan, GPDP*) declares the need for a path towards decarbonisation and ecological transition and states that Argentina can aid in the areas of renewable energies, providing hydrogen, lithium, copper and other minerals, and the production of batteries and electric vehicles, amongst other solutions (Kulfas, 2021, pp. 2–3). The GPDP pretends to articulate the need to guarantee at the same time macroeconomic, social and environmental sustainability through four main goals: to promote industrial production for the green economy, to transition to a circular economy, to induce sustainable production for better competitiveness, and the sustainable industrialisation of natural resources.³

Such plans ignore -or seeks to make invisible- the effects of the extractive activities that are being carried out. For example, in some countries of the global South, the effects of pesticides have had devastating effects in socio-health terms (Oliva, 2016). Nevertheless, the response of States has been to continue promoting the agro-industrial model. A clear example is the approval of GM wheat in Argentina, resistant to glyphosate and glufosinate-ammonium, despite the existence of multiple studies demonstrating its toxicity, such as the one led by Argentine neonatologist Andrés Carrasco⁴ on the health effects of glyphosate spraying (Paganeli et al., 2010). Despite the proven socio-health impacts of GM agribusiness, "biofuels" continue to be considered a sustainable option at the global level, thus accounting for the racial bias of the energy transition proposed by the global North.

The position of Green Developmentalism is that the coexistence of the two production models -agribusiness and agroecology- is both possible and necessary.⁵ It holds that the agribusiness-based food regime is key to underpinning development in the global peripheries. According to this view, agribusiness risks are minor and manageable through the appropriate use of good practices and adequate regulations (*Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería y Pesca*, 2019). However, this proposal ignores the fact that agribusiness advances by actually destroying fields and soils (Salizzi, 2020). Moreover, considering that agrochemical spraying has a 75 % drift (i.e. the pesticides distributed are spread beyond the piece of land for which they are intended) (Tomasoni, 2013),

³ Implicitly, this strategy aims to produce a substantial surplus of foreign currency to ease the 'external constraint' that usually drags economic growth (Diamand, 1972). Besides, a current account surplus is a critical element in the developmental strategy to confront a growing foreign debt (Cantamutto & Féliz, 2021).

⁴ Argentine doctor specialising in molecular biology, president of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONICET) between 2000 and 2001, and head of the Embryology Laboratory at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). In 2009, while researching with his group the effects of Round-up (a herbicide marketed by Monsanto, whose active ingredient is glyphosate), they found that, with doses up to 1500 times lower than those used in soybean spraying, intestinal and cardiac disorders, malformations and neuronal alterations occurred. Faced with this, instead of publishing it in a scientific journal, as required by the academic system, he contacted a journalist from the national newspaper *Página/12*, so that the devastating results generated by this agro-toxin could be disseminated.

⁵ Agroecology incorporates the relationship between agriculture and the global environment and its social, economic, political, ethical and cultural dimensions. It seeks the maintenance and recovery of natural resources at local, regional and global levels from a holistic and systemic approach that pays attention to all components and relationships of the agroecosystem, which are susceptible to being impacted by human action (Flores and Sarandón, 2014).

this coexistence becomes impossible.

Besides, the promotion of a green developmental strategy based on extractivism is an attempt to guarantee the ability to generate the foreign currency necessary to repay the debt (Félix, 2021). For Green Developmentalism the external public debt is assumed as an obligation that the State must face, beyond the current questions about its legitimacy and legality (Debt Collective, 2020).

Furthermore, Green Developmentalism has a discourse of sustainability without clearly taking a critical stance on the hegemonic paradigm of sustainable development. In that sense, the production of green hydrogen appears as a key example of the main tenets of Green Developmentalism in Argentina (Kulfas, 2021, p. 3). The proposal points to a substitution of oil-based energy production by recreating extractivism for new electrolyzers and energy generation and transport and not considering the fossil capitalist waste of materials and energy (Salgado and Scandizzo, 2021). The main concern with the advancement of green hydrogen production is the use of large amounts of water. Although in Argentina it has been announced that seawater will be used, the water harvesting and brine return can have a major impact on marine life. The green hydrogen will be destined for export. In this way, Argentina is taking on environmental liabilities to sustain the energy transition in some core countries.

On the other hand, there is a tendency to conceal the operation carried out by racialised capitalism by penetrating, for example, the territories of the ancestral Diaguita communities of northern Argentina⁶ to extract lithium for the production of batteries in the North, or the advance on the territories of Mapuche communities⁷ and other populations settled in Argentine Patagonia to extract the gas accumulated in Vaca Muerta shale oil and gas geological formations.⁸ In these cases, environmental pollution and excess water consumption in predominantly arid regions put the lives of local populations at risk, even against their resistance and refusal.

As noted, Latin American green neodevelopmentalism stresses that technology and science are fundamental to solving current environmental problems. There is an exacerbated technological optimism, in line with Global North's GND or green capitalism approaches. This approach ignores the fact that technology cannot solve all human problems and that, on the other hand, technological development is not neutral. In fact, in Latin America, companies such as Monsanto-Bayer invest money in universities and research centres to promote their own agendas. Research is oriented towards agribusiness and not towards detecting the effects of the biocidal products they develop. A clear example of this is the news, which came to light in 2018, that the Faculty of Agronomics at the University of Buenos Aires, in Argentina, not only had signed agreements with Monsanto, Bayer and Syngenta, but has been sponsored by these companies to help to improve the public image of pesticides in the country (Aranda, 2017; 2018).

3.2. Social movements and intellectuals against climate change: The Social, Ecological, Economic and Intercultural Pact for Latin America

At the grassroots in Latin America, the critical debate on confronting the climate emergency has been ongoing for many years; some even talk of an eco territorial turn of social struggles (Svampa, 2011). In 2020, as the COVID-19 capitalist pandemic placed the environment, health and food at the centre of the political scene, a group of academics and members of social organisations presented the Social, Ecological,

Economic and Intercultural Pact for Latin America.⁹ The Pact, which was presented in a remote session on June 24, 2020, outlines the main proposals for taking it forward, inviting civil society organisations to join (Pacto Ecosocial del Sur, 2020).

The Pact draws on a variety of proposals from the GNDs of the global North and alternatives emerging from regional debates. It invites people "to build collective imaginaries, to agree on a shared course of transformation and a basis for platforms of struggle in the most diverse areas of our societies" (Por Un Pacto Social, Ecológico, Económico e Intercultural Para América Latina, 2020). The main point we can rescue from this proposal is that it underlines the need to prioritise a change in the model of food production, moving away from agribusiness in favour of the agroecological model. This is a fundamental point in the context of the current climate and environmental crisis since food production is one of the sectors that contribute the most to global warming (Clapp et al., 2018; Garnett et al., 2017). In 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change presented a document in which they pointed out that agriculture, livestock and forestry generate 23 % of total greenhouse gas emissions each year. Soils absorb 30 % of carbon dioxide, but given the degradation of soils due to the advance of agribusiness and industrial agriculture, their absorption capacity is being reduced (Nadal, 2019).

Beyond the food production model change, the Pact proposes the need to cancel the foreign debt of national states and the construction of a new global financial architecture. This last bit is much in line with the GND proposals coming out of Europe. Cancelling the external debt of the global South countries: "constitutes a first step in historical reparation for the ecological and social debt contracted by the central countries since colonial times" (Por Un Pacto Social, Ecológico, Económico e Intercultural Para América Latina, 2020). Foreign debt has become one of the most powerful mechanisms of Northern control over the global South. This brings to the centre of the debate a necessary element, as it makes visible the new forms of coloniality that prevail in these territories (Perry, 2021; Wynter, 2003; Zambrana, 2021).

We think that one of the weakest points of the Pact is the defence of a transitional programme of tax reform and environmental taxes under the slogan "who has more, pays more". This is a solid point of contact with the green developmental proposal in Argentina, and most of the initiatives in the North. The promoters of the Pact promote taxes on inheritances, large fortunes, mega-businesses, financial income and, as a transitional measure, environmental damage. These measures would imply a more equitable redistribution of income and, within its limits, a progressive measure. However, they do not represent a transformative horizon as they do not fundamentally question the capitalist system by only proposing measures to partially compensate for structural inequalities.

Furthermore, the proposed taxation of environmental damage raises questions about how it would be carried out. For example, in 2015, in the town of Jáchal (San Juan province, Argentina), a pipe burst at the Veladero mining site, operated by Barrick Gold, causing millions of litres of cyanide water to spill into the Jáchal river, from which the population draws its drinking water. The population consumed the contaminated water; it was later revealed that this was not the first spill but that the company and the government had hidden the previous ones. In this case, how would the tax be estimated, would the contaminated water source be counted, would the social and health impact of Barrick Gold's actions be measured, and how can we price nature and life? Furthermore, finally, if it is a transitional measure, what comes next?

⁶ The Diaguita are an indigenous people located in north-western Argentina, which pre-existed the constitution of the Argentine State.

⁷ The Mapuche are an indigenous people located in the South of the current territories of Argentina and Chile, which existed prior to the constitution of these states.

⁸ Vaca Muerta is a geological formation of shale oil and shale gas is located in the Neuquén basin in Neuquén, Río Negro, La Pampa and Mendoza, Argentina.

⁹ Activists, intellectuals, and organizations from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Perú, Venezuela and Uruguay. Organizations like Asociación Latinoamericana de Medicina Social, Grupo de Trabajo sobre Agroecología Política (CLACSO), Observatorio Minero de América Latina, Red Eclesial Panamazónica, Red Internacional Oilwatch, Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Sociales y Ambientales, as well as several organizations from each country.

While it is true that the Pacto stresses the need for green taxes as a transitional element, it is also true that it does not express an evident concern for the role of imperial rule in Latin America (except with foreign debt, as we have stressed). In addition, many socio-environmental popular assemblies question the push for pollution taxes (which were first proposed by the World Bank) on the grounds that they would legitimise pollution and consequently existing processes of racialisation. At the same time, they consider that this tax mechanism would allow companies to avoid measures that could contain environmental impacts, if these were more costly than paying the tax itself.

As a complement, the Pact proposes the implementation of universal basic income as a central element of radical change. Again, this proposal operates at the level of income redistribution by consolidating market-based production processes and appropriation of social and community wealth. Instead of promoting and sustaining new social production and reproduction processes, basic income extends the commodification of life. In particular, it has been challenged to strengthen the capitalist State's role while accentuating the commodification of everyday life (Dinerstein and Pitts, 2021). Without fundamentally questioning the reproduction patterns of racialized capitalism, tax reforms and cash-transfers only contribute to multiplying the commodification of nature.

The text of the Pact states that the proposals are not demands on the governments of the region. On the contrary, it asserts that they seek to build collective imaginaries of a shared course of transformation with the aim of "changing power relations, through plebiscites, law proposals, or many other strategies with a real impact in order to impose these changes on existing institutions by an organised and mobilised society". In turn, the Pact points out that some of these issues require a more proactive role for State institutions. Here, there is a solid common core with green developmental proposals, which assume that State action will lead social change.

While some of the Pact's proposals could make the world we live in more liveable, we understand that it expresses an overly optimistic view of the capitalist State's role in bringing about substantial transformations. For us, the bourgeois State is a social form that arises as a necessary condition for the extended reproduction of capital (Hirsch, 1978). In this sense, the state "reflects in its concrete structure relations of social forces, but simultaneously also shapes and stabilises them" (Hirsch, 2005, p. 170). While State apparatuses are linked to all classes and class fractions, this articulation is highly differentiated and selective in the sense of favouring and imposing specific interests. For this reason, the State operates with structural selectivity, which consists of "a complex set of institutional mechanisms and political practices that serve to advance (or obstruct) particular class or factional interests" (Jessop, 1999, p. 57). For its part, Mabel Thwaites Rey, while analysing the State in Latin America, argues that it can be thought of as "a specific node of contradictions and social power relations that are unavoidable in this stage of global reconfiguration of the spaces of production and circulation of capital" (Thwaites Rey, 2010: 9).

Given the specific nature of the capitalist State, its action tends to create conditions that favour the extended reproduction of capital. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the national State in Argentina declared a compulsory quarantine, establishing that specific jobs or activities were essential. While a cartonero/a¹⁰ or a sex worker was forced to stay at home -at the risk of being fined or even imprisoned-even though they needed their daily work to feed their families, activities such as mining or agro-toxin spraying were declared "essential". In this way, the State in capitalist Argentina reproduces in its actions the racialised practices that permeate capitalism.

To sum up, both the Pact and green developmentalism propose to address the civilisational crisis we are experiencing based on proposals that assume that the capitalist State will be the central subject of change

and establish measures that function as a stopgap for racialized capitalism that delegates extractive activities to dependent countries. We consider that both positions do not question the root of the situation of dependence in which the Latin American region finds itself in relation to the international division of labour and the global chains of production and value. At the same time, although the Pact proposes some more transformative measures, neither of the two positions proposes possible solutions to the new forms in which racial capitalism is currently expressed in these territories. Thus, we understand that it is necessary to rethink the system as a whole, seeking to propose new modes of production and reproduction that put life and nature at the centre.

4. Building alternatives from below

Faced with positions that propose partial reforms in the face of the ecological and social disaster that the current state of capitalism is generating, many environmental assemblies and social movements have begun to outline alternative political projects to the prevailing model. For more than a decade, they have promoted the idea of abandoning defensive positions in the face of the advancement of extractive activities on the territories. On the contrary, they foster the need to adopt proactive positions to construct viable alternatives to extractivism, in contrast to the discourses of some governments of the global South. With their own practice these initiatives confront the racialisation process of capitalism. As they propose and act on alternative modes of living, these organisations uncover and put into practice knowledge from below, generally hidden and destroyed by capitalist practices.

In this line of action, and in the face of the advance of the agribusiness model, which is highly polluting and dependent on technological packages that involve the purchase of seeds, pesticides and fertilisers, the peoples of the global South have begun to raise the banner of agroecology. This perspective promotes the maintenance and recovery of the natural commons at local, regional and global levels from a systemic approach that focuses on all the components and relationships of the agro-ecosystem, which can be impacted by human action, understanding as fundamental the dialogue of knowledge, sciences and techniques to articulate ecological, anthropological, economic and technological knowledge (Sarandón and Flores, 2014). A clear example of this is the creation, in Argentina, of the Red Nacional de Municipios y Comunidades que fomentan la Agroecología (RENAMA),¹¹ a space that seeks to accompany municipalities seeking to promote this type of agricultural production, give talks and disseminate knowledge.

Besides, in the face of the State's discourse on the need to generate more energy in order to advance "energy sovereignty", promoting nuclear energy as clean energy, advancing in the construction of hydroelectric dams - with the environmental and social impacts they entail - and promoting agreements with foreign companies to advance in the exploration of unconventional gas and oil, many environmental assemblies have begun to respond by posing the question: "energy for what?" given that mega-mining, agribusiness and hydrocarbon industries consume much of the energy potential that is produced (Melón, 2022). It is, therefore, necessary not only to diversify the energy matrix, moving towards clean energy but also to analyse how this energy is distributed. In Argentina, this is one of the proposals put forward, for example, by the Movimiento Antinuclear de la República Argentina (MARA), which organises talks and meetings to raise awareness of the effects and impacts of nuclear energy. In addition, some environmental organisations have begun to build a People's Energy Transition platform, based on socio-environmental, participatory and cooperative justice (web site of Transición Energética Popular¹²). This seeks to oppose the corporate energy transition, focused on capitalising on the energy and climate crisis for a new cycle of accumulation, its main

¹⁰ A person whose job is to recover certain materials that people throw away and sell them to recycling companies.

¹¹ <https://www.renama.org>.

¹² <https://transicion-energetica-popular.com>.

objective is to emit less greenhouse gases and to generate some geopolitical support in the face of growing public concern about climate change, while maintaining existing relations of inequality. Thus, from a different perspective, the popular energy transition is based on the premise of building the right to energy, questioning the idea of energy as a commodity. It therefore proposes a process of deprivatisation, strengthening participation and democratisation of the energy system, seeking to reduce inequalities in access (Bertinat, Chemes, and Forero, 2020).

Furthermore, to confront the growing transnationalization of the economy, many environmental assemblies in different parts of Argentina have proposed strengthening local markets, arguing that extractive industries are destroying local productive activities. In response to this, the assemblies have insisted on the need to recover ancestral knowledge and know-how in producing natural fabrics, handicrafts and food, strengthening fair trade networks and avoiding intermediaries in the production chains. Thus, fair trade networks have developed -such as Puente del Sur, Estrella Verde-Autonomía Alimentaria, la Red de Comercio Justo del Litoral, among many others- in different parts of the country that market products from social organisations such as the Peasant Movement of Santiago del Estero-Via Campesina (MOCASE-VC) or from small producers committed to agroecology.

At the same time, some social movements and environmental organisations have begun to raise the need to build alternative forms of social organisation that transcend National States. To this end, they have taken up the notions outlined by Bookchin's Libertarian Municipalism, Abdullah Öcalan's Democratic Confederalism or the Good Government Councils of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), who thought (and even in the case of the EZLN have been realising) alternative societies, organised in small communes in which political decisions are taken in an assembly form and through the participation of the social whole. In this context, we consider that substantial systemic transformations require rethinking the States' structure. In line with Bookchin (1982), in his proposal for an ecological society, we argue that it is necessary to debate whether institutions will take libertarian or authoritarian forms. He argues that libertarian institutions would be structured around direct rather than representative relationships; they would be based on participation rather than delegation of power; and the cardinal principle would govern them that all individuals are capable of managing social affairs directly and possess the freedom to participate in social decisions. However, the current structure of States proposes and sustains delegative democracies, in which citizens' participation is limited only to the election of representatives.

Finally, in recent decades, South American governments -in partnership with international financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Andean Development Corporation (CAF)- have opted for a regional integration forum called *Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana* (IIRSA, Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America). Its main objective is not integration, but rather the interconnection between extraction centres and central markets -overcoming the "natural barriers" that exist within the South American region-. Many assemblies and organisations understand that the initiatives proposed within the framework of the IIRSA only reinforce the region's place in the international division of labour as a supplier of raw materials, largely linked to extractivism. In consequence, this integration initiative seeks to reinforce the racial component of capitalism, plundering the commons and plundering regional territories in the service of the global market.

In opposition, numerous activist groups have understood that the environmental problems are not national but regional, so resistance and struggles must also be regional. Assemblies and social movements have come together in meetings, forums and sub-continental movements that propose a joint struggle beyond the imaginary borders promoted by states, understanding that pollution and socio-territorial impacts have

consequences for the region as a whole, and realising that alternatives must be built from below and collectively. Spaces such as the Latin American Network against Dams and for Rivers, their Communities and Water, the Latin American meetings on agroecology, the joint struggle between assemblies in Argentina and Uruguay against the paper mills located in Fray Bentos, among many other examples have been promoted.

5. Conclusions

The climate crisis is part of the civilisational crisis of capitalism. The magnitude of the crisis has led to the emergence of numerous proposals for action in the face of changing environmental dynamics.

The alternatives born from the bowels of imperialism essentially propose maintaining the structures that have led us to the current situation. The options of green capitalism or various forms of Green New Deal can only reinforce the commodified and unjust social reproduction patterns of dependent, racialized capitalism. Based on options that expand the spaces of capital, they do not take on board what is increasingly evident: dismantling the climate crisis means retracing the path of dependency, racialization and oppression that territories and populations throughout the global South have historically suffered. Contrary to hegemonic common sense, we show that the environmental crisis can only deepen without dismantling the relations of unequal exchange traversed by, and constituted in, racial capitalism and capitalist patriarchy.

These debates in the capitalist centres have their counterpoints in the peripheries. In Latin America in particular, the Social, Ecological, Economic and Intercultural Pact and green developmental initiatives operate as the main poles of attraction of the debate in the progressive and right-wing camps. The Pact presents itself as an option at the centre-left of the political spectrum. It puts forward proposals that could promote partial, progressive and redistributive reforms but are insufficient in the face of current challenges. Green developmentalism reproduces the traditional industrialist discourse, which sees the expansion of extractivism (now disguised as green industries) as the only way to overcome backwardness.

Racial capitalism and marxian dependency perspectives allow us to better understand the limits of these top-down initiatives in the global south. On the one hand, they help us grasp how green neodevelopmental approaches negate the impact of its transitional initiatives on local communities. Much in line with the green transition approaches from the north, neodevelopmentalism presents any resistance as mere backwardness, disregarding critics, in many opportunities by using openly racist undertones. Of course, this developmentalist view results in epistemic obliteration of alternative paths, and builds momentum for State and *para-State* repression of popular mobilization and participation. On the other hand, the Pact advances better initiatives for a popular green transformation. However, the implications in terms of processes of racialization of the populations are not made clear. Proposals for fairer green taxation and regulations, keep ignoring the fact that local populations affected by the extractivist activities of transnational corporations suffer the consequences on their bodies and no amount of monetary compensation can offset that.

In our opinion, in both cases, the main weakness is the image of a capitalist state capable of reorienting the social reproduction of capital in a progressive direction, generating jobs and sustainably redistributing income. In our view, the capitalist State cannot lead the necessary change. It is more of an obstacle than a facilitator, particularly in dependent territories where populations face the worst of racialised capitalism. Policies favourable to extractivist transnationals and the repression and criminalisation of popular resistance are the fullest expression of these limits.

The concrete struggles, anchored in the territories, present the actual radical alternatives to the environmental debacle of the present. The articulation of these struggles, the projection of their experiences

beyond capitalism, contributes to building horizons of radical change necessary to confront the environmental crisis and make the world a more liveable place. These struggles and initiatives from below not only signal towards a better future, but mainly disarm in practice the racialization processes through which capitalism tries to disband resistance and contestation. In this sense, focussing on capitalism's racialization processes also helps bring to the fore the dreams, practices and knowledges of those who are always forgotten, disappeared and hidden by hegemonic discourses and initiatives.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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