



**Dependency, Imperialism, and the Super-Exploitation of Labour-Power and Nature  
in the Global South**

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## LDPI Conference Paper

### Title:

***Dependency, Imperialism, and the Super-Exploitation of Labour-Power and Nature in the Global South***

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### Abstract

This paper explores the continuing and deepening theoretical and political relevance of the work of Ruy Mauro Marini on dependency and imperialism (Marini 2022) to the issue of super-exploitation of labour-power and nature in the Global South (and more specifically Latin America), a process of neo-extractivism in which 'land-grabbing' plays a key role. Contemporary dependency and imperialism, embodied in neo-extractivism, takes place, it is argued, through three mechanisms: the super-exploitation of labour-power (Surplus Extraction 1) and the super-exploitation of nature (Surplus Extraction 2), and on the disproportionate claim by the imperium and sub-imperium upon ecological sinks differentially located in the Global South (Surplus Extraction 3). In relation to Surplus Extraction 1 and 2, the main focus of the paper, what we appear to be witnessing is 'disarticulated' accumulation through two principal, juxtaposed mechanisms: Surplus Extraction 1 comprises super-exploitation 'within' the capital-labour relation, comprising selective zones of industrialisation, and labour-intensive plantation production, and reliant upon the labour force's continued status as a semi-proletariat, affording capital a 'subsidy' by remunerating labour-power below its value; Surplus Extraction 2 takes place through 'accumulation by dispossession', whereby land cleared of its previous inhabitants through 'land grabbing' affords, through the accumulated labour of those prior inhabitants embodied 'nature', a massive boost to surplus value production by capital-intensive agro-extractive activity. These surplus extractive mechanisms, it is argued, may be understood on the basis of Marini's highly innovative development of the Marxian labour-theory of value, which the paper seeks to further develop in relation to the labour-power/nature nexus of contemporary extractivism.

### Introduction

This paper, first, presents a framework for understanding capitalism and land deal politics as neo-extractivism, in particular, its causes in the global capitalist system generated by imperialism.<sup>1</sup> High consumption capitalism in the global North (imperium) and China (sub-

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<sup>1</sup> Carchedi and Roberts (2021) suggest that imperialism may be defined as the appropriation by capitals in the imperialist states (USA, Canada, EU, UK, Japan) of the surplus value produced by capitals in the 'periphery' (global South) through trade in commodities with high technological content produced in the former for capitalistically produced raw materials or industrial goods produced with lower technological content in the latter. The result is unequal exchange, the appropriation of international surplus value through international trade. While correct, this rather narrow definition needs, we argue, to be supplemented by consideration of additional means of surplus extraction and value transfer. First, even where goods are produced with high

imperium) are premised on a world resource system hugely biased towards these accumulation centres. Neoliberal international division of labour has intensified imperial and sub-imperial access, not only to the labour power of global Southern states, but also to their resources, including fossil fuels, *and* to their sinks. While the global North and sub-imperium are overwhelmingly responsible for high consumption founded on extractive imperialism, they also externalize onto the global South, through 'spatio-temporal fixes', the 'political' and 'ecological' costs of accumulation. Thus, in addition to extraction from the global South of surplus labour (which we term 'political', or Surplus Extraction 1) and the 'ecological surplus' underlying this (which we term 'ecological source', or Surplus Extraction 2), the third dimension of what may be termed the 'imperial mode of living' is the disproportionate claim of the global North and sub-imperium on the Earth's sinks (which we term 'ecological sink', or Surplus Extraction 3), located differentially in the global South. These three extractive mechanisms, we argue, are founded on imperialism and dependency, their adverse impacts felt differentially by those from whom surplus value is taken through super-exploitation – the global Southern subaltern classes.

This presentation of the three imperial surplus extractive mechanisms acts as a prelude to our second aim in this paper – to explore the relevance of the work of the Brazilian radical political economist Ruy Mauro Marini to expanding the conceptual basis of Surplus Extraction Mechanisms 1 and 2 and, hence, to explaining the imperialist rationale behind neo-extractivism and land deal politics.

Finally, we draw together the arguments of the paper in a discussion focused around the politics of agrarian struggle in contesting imperialism, dependency, and neo-extractivism. Here we counterpose the more orthodox and 'Eurocentric' categories of E.O. Wright's 'anti-capitalism' with the global Southern, *dependendista*, and anti-imperialist perspective of Marini. We suggest that Wright's categories ('smashing', 'dismantling', 'taming', 'resisting', and 'escaping' capitalism) may be understood in terms of our definition of 'class' interest groupings identified, respectively, as 'counter-hegemonic', 'sub-hegemonic', and 'alter-hegemonic'. In so doing we suggest, however, that Wright's analysis has limitations in at least two important respects. In identifying these limitations, we suggest that a counter-hegemonic eco-socialism needs to be founded on far lower levels of resource consumption than are currently characteristic of the global North, and, as such, needs to be focused on 'degrowth' and meeting 'fundamental human needs' (and those of non-human nature) on an equitable basis. By the same token, following Marini and others such as Osorio (2021), we suggest that the hegemony of the imperial mode of living in the global North implies that the gravitational centre of counter-hegemonic political action is likely to be located amongst subaltern classes in the global South.

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technological content in the 'periphery', surplus value extraction is enhanced by the 'super-exploitation' of labour power (Surplus Extraction 1); second, where capital intensive technology is employed to extract primary commodities in the 'periphery' without significant recourse to labour power, 'appropriation by dispossession' and lax/unpoliced environmental/social regulations enable capitals to reduce costs/enhance surplus value extraction through these de facto subsidies (Surplus Extraction 2); third, uncommodified socio-environments, differentially located in the global South, act as a sink for capital's waste, functioning as a de facto subsidy for imperial capital, the source of most waste (Surplus Extraction 3).

## **Developing a Conceptual Basis for Understanding Neo-Extractivism and Land Deal Politics: Combined and Uneven Development, Imperialism, and Dependency**

Capitalism and the state (the 'state-capital nexus') are differentiated, principally between the global North (imperium) and the global South (periphery), with the sub-imperium (China, India, etc.) occupying an intermediate position. Such 'uneven development' acts as the causal basis for differentiated agrarian politics, and for the differentiated progenitors and impacts of labour and resource exploitation between the imperium (and sub-imperium) and the periphery. The fundamental basis of this differentiation began with the development of particular capitalist social-property relations, founded on market dependence and primitive accumulation, that arose from specific class relations within the English polity, having the effect of subverting preceding feudal social relations (see Wolf 1982; Brenner 1985; Wood 2002; Tilzey et al. 2023). This process occurred in parallel with the modernization of the British state, reaching 'maturity' in the eighteenth century (following the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688), and then extending, through geopolitical, 'competitive emulation', to other 'core', or imperial states in Western Europe and North America (see Tilzey et al. 2023 for detail) during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although the appearance of capitalism depended importantly on the pre-capitalist colonial plunder of wealth through commercial or mercantile capital, once capitalism proper had emerged, its 'laws of motion', grounded in class struggle and bounded by the enabling and protective structure of the state, began to demand what we may term here 'combined and uneven development', or imperialism (Tilzey 2018a). This term is a deliberate reversal of Trotsky's (2008) 'uneven and combined development' since Trotsky 'still defined capitalism as uniform in its "law of motion" and therefore uniform in its effects. What, however, if the capitalist mode generated variability and differentiation not only through its combination with other modes but also in the very course of its own operations?' (Wolf 1982: 303). Like Wolf, we see the capitalist state and imperialism as the key bases for this differentiation. One crucial outcome was that, in articulation with their own internally driven 'growth' dynamic, the states of the imperium became 'developed' through a relationship of 'combined and uneven development' with a resultant 'periphery', the 'development' of which was, in turn, distorted in favour of the imperium *and* its peripheral collaborators, the comprador elites who managed and benefitted from extractive activities on behalf of the imperial powers. The periphery did not 'develop' in the same way as the imperium, therefore, precisely because of the former's subordinate relation to the latter, a relation which often reinforced *non-capitalist* or only *partially capitalist*, forms of production and exploitation where these could deliver higher rates of surplus value extraction (Bettelheim 1972; Marini 1972, 1974, 2022; Higginbottom 2014; Smith 2016; Tilzey 2018a). From the perspective of the imperial state-capital nexus, it was, and remains, rational, for reasons of both accumulation and legitimation, to externalize political and ecological costs onto a periphery as a means to secure super-exploitation. The periphery is the site of imperialism and colonialism (the formal annexation of territory by an imperial power), therefore, because it is here that the capitalist imperium attempts to maximize surplus accumulation and cost externalization through the minimization of wages, the deployment of non-capitalist forms of labour exploitation, the neglect of citizenship and human rights, and the super-exploitation of nature. In the imperium, by contrast, higher wages, citizenship and human rights, environmental legislation (typically *following* the exhaustion of exploitable resources and the severe degradation of

ecosystems), can be enacted through the subsidy afforded by such enhanced global accumulation, while simultaneously legitimating and mitigating capitalism's contradictions at home. As Wolf (1999: 278-279) observed incisively in *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, '...success in plundering the world offset the internal dislocations occasioned by the conversion of [people], land and money into commodities within the homeland and gave citizens a stake in overseas expansion'.

An essential part of this capacity to 'offset the internal dislocations' within the imperium engendered by capitalism thus derives from the capitalist world system's broadly bipolar structure: the socially 'articulated' states of the global North and the socially 'disarticulated' states of the global South (Amin 1976, 1977; de Janvry 1981). Social articulation implies a complementarity between the role of the labour force as producers and consumers and a situation in which its role as a source of consumption outweighs its function as a workforce. As noted, this entails the co-optation of non-capitalist classes as 'consumers' within the hegemonic influence of capitalism. However, as the 'imperial mode of living', such hegemony is possible only through imperialistic relations with the global South, whence surplus value is appropriated to feed generalized consumerism in the global North (and, increasingly, the sub-imperium) (Tilzey 2018a, 2018b, 2020b; Hickel et al. 2021<sup>2</sup>). Tendentially, therefore, oppositional relationships between capitalist and non-capitalist classes in 'articulated' states have been defused or ameliorated by 'flanking' measures based on material and discursive rewards based around redistributive, social welfare, nation-building, environmental, and other policies, together with the bestowal of 'liberal' citizenship rights (Moyo and Yeros 2011; Chibber 2013; Mooers 2014). This implies that opposition to capitalism under such circumstances amounts at most to 'taming' on Wright's (2019) classification.

In contrast, social disarticulation occurs when the state-capital nexus is interested in its labour force primarily from the perspective of production (its ability to generate surplus value) and not principally from the perspective of consumption (the realization of surplus value through the sale of commodities). In other words, the labour force is significant as a source of surplus value, but not as a source of consumption (Bettelheim 1972; Marini 1974; de Janvry 1981). Typically, therefore, the global Southern state-capital nexus has only weakly developed 'flanking' measures, or modes of regulation, through which to embed capitalism materially and ideologically. Its producers, the subaltern classes, are only weakly subsumed within capital's hegemony as consumer beneficiaries, therefore, and the state-capital nexus has low legitimacy (Tilzey 2018a, 2018b). This implies, in turn, that oppositional movements tend to deploy more radical anti-capitalist imaginaries, such as 'smashing' or 'dismantling' capitalism on E.O. Wright's (2019) typology (see below).

The real subsumption of non-capitalist classes as a 'labour aristocracy' in the imperium reached its height during the post-war Fordist era. In the face of increased class exploitation since the advent of the neoliberal era in the 1980s, attempts to sustain this compact between capital and non-capitalist classes in the global North have been undertaken increasingly by

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<sup>2</sup> We should note, however, that this relation is established not so much through 'unequal exchange' as between the establishment and perpetuation of 'disarticulated' *social relations of production* in the periphery, whereby multinational capital, peripheral oligarchic, and comprador bourgeois classes drive down the remuneration of subaltern labour power to below the cost of its reproduction (Bettelheim 1972; de Janvry 1981; Higginbottom 2014; Smith 2016; Marini 2022).

means of (renewed) imperial relations with the global South. Surplus value from peripheral subaltern classes now flows from South to North, 'subsidized' by the destructive and massive haemorrhage of 'ecological surplus' that lies behind this relationship (Exner et al. 2013; Moore 2015; Smith 2016; Tilzey 2018a, 2018b; Hickel et al. 2021). Burgeoning levels of social and ecological dislocation in the South increasingly characterize the consequences of this neo-extractive imperial relationship. This has been, and continues increasingly to be, associated with resurgent neoliberal primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession (see below), undermining the incipient legitimacy, employment, and welfare functions that had been, at least in some degree, undertaken by the peripheral state in the brief interlude between the 'old' and 'new' imperialisms. The outcome of this 'new' imperial relationship between North and South (Biel 2000; Smith 2016; Tilzey 2018a, 2020a; Hickel et al. 2021) is that the citizens of the former, despite certain attenuation, continue to be accorded material, welfare, legal and other privileges largely denied to those in the capitalist periphery (Mooers 2014). The ability of this exploitative relationship between imperium and periphery to support generalized consumerism (social articulation) may be termed the *imperial mode of regulation* or the *imperial mode of living* (Tilzey 2018a; Brand and Wissen 2021).

The imperial mode of living in the imperium (and selectively in the sub-imperium) is sustained by the state-capital nexus on the basis of '*imperialist rent*', that is, the above average or extra profits realized as a result of inequality between the North and South in the global capitalist system (Marini 1974, 2022; Biel 2000; Higginbottom 2014; Smith 2016). We suggest that this is undertaken through three mechanisms: the super-exploitation of labour power (Surplus Extraction Mechanism 1) and the super-exploitation of resources, or 'ecological surplus', (Surplus Extraction Mechanism 2) from the periphery, and on the disproportionate claim upon global ecological sinks, that is, the capacity of the environment to absorb waste (Surplus Extraction Mechanism 3). In respect of the first two forms Surplus Extraction 1 and 2, what we appear to be witnessing is 'disarticulated' accumulation through two principal, juxtaposed, mechanisms: Surplus Extraction 1 comprises super-exploitation 'within' the capital-labour relation, confined largely to the highly selective zones of industrialization, and to labour-intensive horticulture and fruit production, embodied in commodities exported to the imperium (or produced in the imperium using super-exploited labour from the periphery). In this case, although industry and agro-industry absorb significant quantities of labour power, super-exploitation relies in key respects on that labour force's continued status as a semi-proletariat, thereby affording capital a 'subsidy' through unremunerated costs of individual and family reproduction (in other words, capital benefits, through 'primitive accumulation', from the partial expropriation of the means of peasant production, thereby capturing labour power below its value); Surplus Extraction 2 takes place through what may be termed 'accumulation by dispossession', whereby surplus value is accumulated not principally through the super-exploitation of labour power (as in Surplus Extraction 1) but rather through the exploitation, by capital-intensive means, of socio-natural 'capital' built up by non-capitalist societies in conjunction with nature, for example, the fertility of the soil. Such land is typically expropriated from its former inhabitants, its 'semi-natural' vegetation destroyed, and (in the case of agro-extractivism) its soils mined until exhausted. Such 'neo-extractivism', entailing the extraction of mineral, fossil fuel, and agricultural commodities such as soya and palm oil, is predicated on expropriation of lands often covered only by informal use rights (frequently communally held by indigenous people), and then exploited on the basis of minimal investment (other than land lease/purchase and capital-intensive equipment) and

minimal labour absorption, and on the maximal externalization of ecological and social costs (Petras and Veltmeyer 2014). The dynamics of Surplus Extraction 2 (and a fortiori Surplus Extraction 1) can, however, still be understood according to the Marxian labour theory of value, as elaborated by Marini (2022) and Higginbottom (2023) (see below), although the determination of the level of 'ecological surplus' also requires reference to the 'more-than-human' ('objective') characteristics of the biophysical resources being exploited (see Tilzey 2018a).

This extractive model differs, then, from 'primitive accumulation' (Surplus Extraction 1) in that capital is interested, principally, not in the employment (super-exploitation) of the resulting expropriated labour, but rather in the land and resources occupied by those former inhabitants (typically, indigenous/peasant people) from which commodities are now to be extracted and exported to the imperium (or sub-imperium), with little or no local manufacture/processing (and therefore employment) being entailed. The commodities so produced are 'cheap' by token of reduced costs entailed in 'land grabbing', the low labour costs of production (in agro-extractivism) conferred by the 'mining' of accumulated socio-natural 'capital', and the externalization of costs entailed in extraction (fossil fuel powered mechanization, pollution, soil erosion, destruction of biodiverse, carbon sequestering, and climate stabilizing natural vegetation), with further negative consequences for climate change (Haarstad 2012; Svampa 2015; McKay 2017; Tilzey 2019a). In short, Surplus Extraction 1 and 2, together, enable the imperium and sub-imperium to engage in the high consumption of 'cheap' commodities and resources on the basis of super-exploited labour power and nature in the global South, resulting in the imperium/sub-imperium's massively differential contribution to waste production, including climate changing GHGs; Surplus Extraction 3 refers to the dependence of the imperium and sub-imperium upon 'sinks' for the absorption of their waste (including GHG emissions) located differentially in terrestrial terms, naturally or by design, in the global South. In the case of climate change mitigation, this is enabled through the differential intactness, and consequent huge sequestration capacity, of ecosystems, including more traditional agroecosystems managed by indigenous and peasant populations, in the South (see WWF 2006); and through direct interventions by imperial, and sub-imperial capital, by means of 'land grabs', to establish carbon 'offset' and biofuel plantations (Fairhead et al. 2012; Wolford et al. 2013; Lyons and Westoby 2014), the latter being, at best, neutral, and at worst, negative, in their impacts, since not only do they tend to displace 'natural' ecosystems and sustainable agroecosystems, they also simply legitimate the continuation elsewhere of GHG emissions, specifically, and the imperial mode of living, more generally (Brand and Wissen 2021).

Thus, in the multiple crises of late capitalism, political and ecological, the imperial mode of living helps to sustain social stability in the global North through the continuing supply of 'cheap' consumer rewards founded on the three surplus extractive mechanisms identified above, whilst also affording a hegemonic orientation (the aspiration to consume) on the part of those not yet on, or on the lower rungs of, the capitalist 'career ladder' (Tilzey 2021a). It thus refers to the dominant patterns of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption that are deeply rooted in the everyday practices of the majority in the imperium (due to their earlier 'development' at the expense of the periphery), and increasingly in the sub-imperium. It also comprises an aspiration for many millions of the global precariat, but one that cannot be realized within capitalism for 'political' reasons given the nature of imperialism (see



Bettelheim 1972), and more generally, for ‘ecological’ reasons (see Tilzey 2018a). The imperial mode of living thus explains the relative political and social quiescence of workforces in the imperium in the face of increasing global turbulence (and the general absence of radical anti-capitalism), whilst simultaneously explaining the very basis of that turbulence in terms of capital’s unlimited call upon surplus labour, ‘ecological surplus’ through neo-extractivism, and ecological sinks, all now differentially located in the global South (Brand and Wissen 2021).

The development of ‘social articulation’ in the imperium, and increasingly in the sub-imperium (manifested most particularly in the growth of ‘middle classes’) is thus premised on a world resource system biased hugely in favour of these centres of accumulation. Where Fordism was based on a form of intensive accumulation associated with an increase in relative surplus value secured through permanent intensification of the labour process and expansion in labour productivity through capitalization (based in turn on the ‘ecological surplus’ arising through intensified exploitation and consumption of fossil fuels), post-Fordism, since the 1980s, and particularly since the 1990s, has witnessed a refocus on *extensive* forms of accumulation. This involves a partial reorientation, in combination with relative surplus value, towards *absolute* surplus value such as the flexibilization and expansion of the working day, *and* the suppression of wages *below* the reproductive needs of the workforce, increasingly a precariat (Bettelheim 1972; Marini 1972, 1974, 2022; Higginbottom 2014; Smith 2016; Tilzey 2018a, 2018b). This has been accompanied by a massive increase in ‘neo-extractive’ activity (Petras and Veltmeyer 2015), including extraction and consumption of climate-change inducing fossil fuels. It is the global South, however, that has borne the overwhelming brunt of this trend, while the North has differentially continued to focus on relative surplus value generation in ‘high value-added’ industries (those with higher organic composition of capital) and selective attempts to ‘green’ capital accumulation (Smith 2016; Brand and Wissen 2021; Carchedi and Roberts 2021). The latter, while reducing GHG emissions at the point of consumption (for example, electric vehicles) remain, as yet, centrally dependent on intensive fossil fuel use in production (this includes, for example, wind turbines embodying huge quantities of fossil energy use in steel and cement manufacture). Even were fossil fuels to be eliminated in production, many of the materials required for the capitalist ‘green’ economy derive from the Southern extractive frontier (rare earth minerals for solar panels, lithium, cobalt, and nickel for electric car batteries, etc.), perpetuating neo-extractive and imperial relations between imperium, sub-imperium, and the periphery (Exner et al. 2013; Riofrancos 2020).

This neo-imperial restructuring of the international division of labour has succeeded, therefore, in intensifying Northern access, not only to the labour power capacities of peripheral states (Surplus Extraction 1), but also to their resources (Surplus Extraction 2), and to their sinks (Surplus Extraction 3), the latter operating by means of reducing the cost of climate change mitigation for the main producers of GHGs through parasitic reliance on those parts of the world where people have retained their [agro]ecosystems relatively intact. These three surplus extractive mechanisms generate the overall background turbulence manifest in ‘capitalogenic’ climate change, the adverse impacts of which are felt differentially by those most vulnerable and least culpable – the subaltern classes of the global South (see, for example, Covarrubias and Raju 2020). Surplus Extraction 1, as noted, is undertaken by ‘super-exploitation’ of the workforce, involving the remuneration of labour power below its cost reproduction, subsidized by non-commodified (unremunerated) family reproductive

activities routinely conducted by women, while Surplus Extraction 2 is enacted through the unsustainable exploitation of previously uncommodified socio-environments, generating an unrepeatable surge in ecological surplus and, therefore, of surplus value. Such surplus value extraction through super-exploitation of labour power (Surplus Extraction 1) and the multinational capitalist and agrarian oligarchic appropriation of land for extraction (Surplus Extraction 2) are founded on the *formal*, rather than *real*, subsumption of labour within capital, and the perpetuation of a *semi-proletarian* peasantry with partial, but inadequate, access to land, in a functionally dualistic relation to capital (de Janvry 1981; Higginbottom 2014). This is key to the neo-imperial subordination of the periphery to the imperium and sub-imperium – by the same token, however, it represents the weakest link in the chain that comprises the imperial mode of living, spawning radical anti-capitalist practices and imaginaries largely absent in the global North (Tilzey 2021a; Osorio 2022; Tilzey and Sugden 2023).

Thus, not only is the relationship between imperium and periphery characterized by the ‘political’ super-exploitation of labour power (Smith 2016; Tilzey 2018a), it is also typified by unequal ‘ecological’ exchange through Surplus Extraction Mechanisms 2 and 3 – resources are extracted from the South with minimum heed to ecological and social consequences for indigenous and peasant populations occupying (or formerly occupying) the lands in question, the resources are then consumed overwhelmingly in the imperium and sub-imperium (Svampa 2015; McKay 2017), and the resulting waste from such consumption relies for absorption or mitigation on the ecological sinks located differentially in the periphery, and especially (and tragically) in territories managed by the very indigenous and peasant peoples subject to plunder under Surplus Extraction Mechanism 2.

An important aspect of the imperial mode of living at the consumption end of these extractive relations is the reproduction of the workforce in the imperium, and to a lesser degree in the sub-imperium, as a ‘labour aristocracy’, the complex division of labour associated with post-agrarian and urban-dominated capitalism (the real subsumption within capital of the labour force as full proletarians), and the hegemonic legitimation of this material and ideological constellation. This constellation, again, is predicated on access to ‘cheap’ labour power and raw materials (Surplus Extraction Mechanisms 1 and 2), overwhelmingly located in the global South, together with the ability to use global ecological sinks for the absorption or mitigation of waste (including GHGs) (Surplus Extraction Mechanism 3) in a disproportionate way. The imperial mode of living thus explains why neoliberal policies in the imperium have not yet exhausted their legitimization potential, or are turning in ‘authoritarian populist’ or ‘national populist’ directions (Brexit, Trumpism), as citizens of the North demand their ‘right’ to continue, or aspire to, high consumption lifestyles in the face of burgeoning threats (immigration, terrorism, climate change, etc.) induced by, but causally disassociated from, that very mode of living (Brand and Wissen 2021; Tilzey 2018b, 2021a).

The state-capital nexus plays a major role in constituting and stabilizing the imperial mode of living by not only securing access externally to strategic resources, but also guaranteeing internally a certain standard of living of the masses through social insurance systems and labour market regulations (even if these have suffered, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, relative attenuation and degradation under neoliberalism). The state acts to implement a mode of regulation as the hegemonic normalization of consumer affluence as

the key denominator of the 'good life', while the ability to promise and secure growth and 'progress' (the regime of accumulation) is particularly important since it constitutes the material basis of the imperial mode of living (Brand and Wissen 2021; Tilzey 2018a, 2021a).

In the next section, we examine the continuing and, indeed, deepening relevance of the work of Ruy Mauro Marini (2022) to understanding dependency, imperialism and the operation of the exploitative means we have identified above as Surplus Extraction Mechanisms 1 and 2.

### **Marini, Dependency/Imperialism, and Super-Exploitation**

Marini understood the underdevelopment of Latin America to be an essential component of a world system of capitalism, in which its capitalist underdevelopment was, and is, dialectically related to the development of the imperial 'state-capital nexus'. Stated simply, the relationship of dependency between Latin America (and the global South more generally) and the imperial powers is expressed as the transfer of value from the 'poor, subordinated countries' (the former) to the 'rich, dominating countries' (the latter) (Higginbottom 2023:2). Marini's original contribution lies in identifying the *social relations of production* as underpinning international value transfer, thereby developing a distinct labour theory of imperialism as the foundation of Marxian dependency theory (this is distinct from 'unequal exchange' between nations in the sphere of commodity circulation as theorized by Emmanuel [1972] and latterly by Hickel et al. [2021], in which it is *not* class and social productive relations which underlie value transfer).

Marini's systematic analysis links labour super-exploitation with unequal international exchange, imperialism, and dependency through the perpetuation of a 'fractured' internal market in peripheral states (de Janvry [1981] described this 'fractured' internal market as 'sectorally and socially disarticulated accumulation'). Labour super-exploitation conceptually captures the real condition of the subaltern classes in Latin America (and elsewhere in the global South) arising from socially disarticulated accumulation (de Janvry 1981) whereby these 'classes of labour' have value to capital only as producers of surplus value, not as consumers (the latter, globally, located largely in the global North). Super-exploitation of peripheral labour power involves three elements: low wages, long hours, and intense work to the point of exhaustion (Higginbottom 2023:2). Most importantly, it is characterized by 'the greater exploitation of the worker's physical strength, as opposed to exploitation resulting from increasing productivity, and tends normally to be expressed in the fact that labour power is remunerated below its real value' (Marini 2022:161).

Marini emphasizes that labour super-exploitation reveals another way to increase surplus value, reducing the cost to capital of labour power through lower wages and less commodity consumption by subaltern classes. In other words, this is 'cheap' labour power, which provides living labour to capital at a lower cost, and is therefore a basis for a higher degree of exploitation – a greater rate of surplus value due to a shortening of the labour time needed to produce the equivalent value of labour power. The lower cost is due to harsher and more oppressive exploitation of the relevant sections of subaltern classes. The increase in the rate of surplus value is distinct from *absolute* surplus value, which, according to Marx, is due to longer working hours. The decrease of variable capital in this way is not *relative* surplus value

either, however, since this, according to Marx, depends solely on the increase of productivity in those sectors that produce the commodities consumed in the reproduction of labour power. Since it is neither absolute or relative surplus value as defined by Marx, increasing surplus value by reducing the remuneration of labour power is, as argued by Marini, an additional category of surplus value extraction, involving more oppressive conditions of exploitation of labour forces by capital in which surplus value is achieved through the payment of lower wages, or even no wages at all. Marini argued that labour super-exploitation is the essence of capitalism as imperialism. Higginbottom recognizes (2023:5) 'the revolutionary impetus of Marini's work, which is that the imperialist character of capitalism *is inherent at the most essential level of definition of the capitalist mode of production*. It is supremely important politically that labour super-exploitation in the global South and the corresponding mechanisms of value transfer are recognized by workers in the global North as the general condition of their *relative privilege*'. We suggest that that this form of surplus value generation through the super-exploitation of labour is equivalent to Surplus Extraction 1 identified earlier and forms one of the key bases of the imperial mode of living.

The super-exploitation of labour power, or what we choose to term Surplus Extraction 1, has its basis, as suggested, in the class and social production relations of the peripheral state-capital nexus, underpinned by subordination to the imperial powers. These class and social production relations are expressed in the contradictions of the 'fractured' or 'disarticulated' internal market of the peripheral state-capital nexus. These contradictions of peripheral capitalism first became widely evident during the period of so-called 'national developmentalism' when Latin American states began to attempt to mimic the 'unfractured' or 'articulated' capitalism of the imperium by means of import substituting industrialization. Thus, from the 1930s, Latin American states, temporarily freed from the oppression of the imperium due to the inter-imperialist conflict surrounding the Second World War, attempted to direct resources into industry, allocating foreign exchange earned by the primary sector to the importation of capital and intermediary goods for the growing consumer goods industries. The aim was to construct an independent industrial base to produce those manufactured commodities that had formerly been imported from the global North (de Janvry 1981, Marini 2022). This required simultaneously the development of an agricultural sector that could supply the home market, act as a source of surplus transfer to industry, *and* function as a source of consumption for industrial goods (Kay 2000). This constituted an insuperable contradiction for the peripheral agrarian oligarchic-dominated class structure, since both the supply of the home market and, more particularly, an extension and deepening of the home market required the creation of a large class of wealthier and market-oriented family farms, as in the global North (Tilzey 2020b). The oligarchy was very reluctant to permit such a 'farmer road' to capitalism to occur, however, since it would inevitably compromise its power and landholdings. Moreover, the continuing demand for foreign currency to finance import substitution entailed maximizing primary commodity exports, which in turn relied on the minimization of labour costs. Thus, if peripheral states were to maintain accumulation in their industrial sectors, sources of 'cheap' (super-exploited) labour, surplus transfer from agriculture, and external capital had to be found (reliant on maximizing exports and exploiting cheap domestic labour), while simultaneously attempting to expand and deepen the national market for consumer goods. These necessary prerequisites for sectorally and socially articulated ('unfractured' internal market) development were irreconcilable, however, in the

absence of the imposition of imperial relations with a periphery on the part of Latin American states themselves (something attempted by Brazil itself, of course [see Marini 1972]). Here, of course, the imperial states of the global North had been able to draw on either peripheral, and super-cheap, sources of supply to subsidize their own 'autocentric' growth, or, later in the case of post-war Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, were able to benefit from US largesse in the latter's bid to fend off the threat of communism. While the oligarchy may have conceded relative political power to the national bourgeoisie in Latin America during this period, it nonetheless retained control at rural regional and local levels, and sustained its economic power by continuing to be central to the national objective of foreign exchange maximization, premised on the super-exploitation of an increasingly semi-proletarianized peasantry (Marini 1974, 2022; Tilzey and Sugden 2023).

These 'internal' contradictions of peripheral capitalism, together with the collapse of the social democratic consensus in key imperial powers, led to the demise of national developmentalism and the emergence of neoliberalism from the 1980s. The debts incurred by many states in the global South during the era of national developmentalism were now called in by the global North, embodied in a period of renewed financial imperialism, and placing a heavy onus on peripheral states to maximize foreign exchange earnings to service their international debt. Economically and politically, this served well the interests of the agro-export oligarchy, together with other primary commodity exporters, and export-oriented industry (increasingly confined, however, to trans-nationally owned, low tax, export zones such as the *maquiladoras* along the Mexican-US border), while deeply compromising the interests and influence of nationally oriented bourgeoisies and others, notably the peasantry, producing wage foods for the national workforce. Such export-oriented capital relied heavily upon the super-exploitation of a predominantly semi-proletarian peasantry, offering super-cheap labour power through partial dispossession of the agrarian means of production, and formal subsumption within capital as part of a continuing process of primitive accumulation. In short, this period was the graveyard of any ambition towards nationally 'articulated' development that may have been harboured by Latin American states. This period saw a deep retrenchment towards sectorally and socially disarticulated 'development', and a reassertion of the 'Junker road' to capitalism, with agro-export oligarchy, in alliance with imperial transnational capital, in the vanguard and deploying Surplus Extraction 1 as a major means of accumulation (Tilzey and Sugden 2023). According to Dunning and Lundan's (2008) classification of multinational investment strategies, it is possible to identify Surplus Extraction 1 with an 'efficiency seeking' strategy, one concerned with cost cutting and corresponding to the super-exploitation of labour as theorized by Marini (1974, 2022; Smith 2016; Higginbottom 2018, 2021).

During the course of the 1990s, however, and accelerating in the new millennium, the rise of China (and subsequently other Asian states) as the 'workshop of the world' began to undercut Latin American non-agrarian export-oriented industry. Surplus Extraction 1 continued to be the primary mechanism through which capital accumulation proceeded in China and other newly industrializing Asian states. While the *maquila* manufacturing system (and Surplus Extraction 1) continued (and continues) to be one of the pillars of capital accumulation in Latin America (Katz 2015), a shift became evident in the form of capitalist 'development' and imperialism in Latin America towards what can best be described as 'neo-extractivism', or economic 'development' predicated on the extraction of natural resources such and fossil

and bio-fuels, minerals, and agro-food commodities acquired through 'large-scale investment in land acquisition' or, more accurately and descriptively, as 'land-grabbing' (Borras et al. 2012; Petras and Veltmeyer 2015). The financial crisis of 2007-2008 in the global North considerably reinforced this trend, as foreign direct investment (FDI) from this source and from the sub-imperium of China became attracted by the huge reserves of natural resources (minerals, fossil and bio-fuels, agro-food products especially soy and palm oil) which Latin American states were keen to make available for foreign (and national oligarchic) exploitation in order to maximize both capital accumulation and, in the case of the 'pink tide' states, fiscal revenues to support enhanced welfare provision (Zibechi 2012; Petras and Veltmeyer 2015; Tilzey 2019a). By 2011, FDI into Latin America had reached US\$ 150 billion, some fifteen times greater in absolute terms than in the early 1990s (Petras and Veltmeyer 2015). The Brazilian experience is exemplary in this regard: the strong demand for primary commodities in the imperium and sub-imperium (principally China), the expansion of large-scale foreign investments in land for agro-food extraction and bio-fuels, and speculation in food, land, and minerals, have wrought a profound change in the structure of FDI inflows. In 2012, Zibechi (2012) indicated that FDI in services had fallen from some fifty percent of investments to thirty percent, the share of industry (the main source of Surplus Extraction 1), with a decline in exports in the face of Asian competition, to thirty-five percent, while mining and agri-business has tripled their share of FDI flow to thirty percent. The trend towards investments in the latter has continued subsequently, especially under the rampant resource extractive policies of the right-authoritarian president Bolsonaro.

Borras et al. (2012) rightly regard this as a new phase of capitalist 'development', which in certain important respects is post-neoliberal since its motivations are no longer simply confined to accumulation (having also security and legitimacy functions [see Tilzey 2019b]) and its operation is reliant on overt actions by the imperial state in collaboration with peripheral states to enforce acquisition of land and extraction of resources (it is also post-neoliberal in terms of the turn by 'pink tide' states to undertake 'inclusionary activism' to alleviate the symptoms of poverty and precarity, induced by neoliberalism, through the recycling of resource rents). Thus, 'land-grabbing' has been stimulated both by food and resource insecurity in certain imperial, sub-imperial, and oil-rich states, and by the more orthodox capitalist motivation to make extraordinary profits (through Surplus Extraction 2) by extracting and selling primary commodities for which there is strong demand on the world market (including, increasingly, the minerals demanded by the de-carbonizing 'green' capitalist economy). Additionally, the financialization of these markets has provided lucrative new investment opportunities for sovereign wealth funds, hedge funds, and agri-business (Petras and Veltmeyer 2015).

While the imperial powers and their corporations and investors continue to dominate foreign investment in the acquisition of land, the sub-imperial states (especially China) and the food-insecure Middle Eastern oil states are also active competitors. The latter two categories are primarily concerned to acquire land to meet their security need for food crops, livestock and/or livestock feed, and energy (in the case of the sub-imperial powers) for domestic national consumption (thereby fulfilling the legitimacy function of the state), bypassing unreliable and expensive international food markets (Petras and Veltmeyer 2015; Tilzey 2018a, Tilzey 2019b). By contrast, the transnational corporations of the imperium are concerned primarily to feed the lucrative biofuel and agri-food markets by means of 'flex-

crops' such as palm oil, sugar cane, and soy. Additionally, investors are seeking land for carbon credit and offset schemes (operating through Surplus Extraction 3). The common denominator for all these motivations for land acquisition, however, is that the land in question must be cheap and extractive activities must be subsidized by the host state through duty-free import of capital-intensive equipment, duty-free export of extracted products, tax-free status of extractive industry staff and production, and the provision of low-interest loans.

The land in question is 'cheap' to purchase because much is in the form of 'commons', lands utilized by peasant/indigenous 'commoners' to which such people typically have no formal title according to host state law. Land defined as 'commons' in contemporary development discourse generally excludes permanent farms and settlements. 'Land grabbers' prefer to avoid privately-owned or settled lands since their dispossession is most likely to provoke resistance and demands for compensation, or for relocation. It is only the uncultivated commons (or lands subject to cyclical cultivation by shifting [swidden] agriculture) which can supply the huge areas required by large-scale investors (Borras et al. 2012; Petras and Veltmeyer 2015). As such, these 'commons', despite being essential to the livelihoods of peasant and indigenous people, are deemed *terra nullius*, vacant and available for purchase. This is so because the laws of most lessor states construe customarily owned or occupied land to be unowned, unoccupied, and idle (ibid.). As such, they remain the property of the host state and thus potentially alienable to would-be 'land grabbers'. Thus, while foreign investment in the acquisition of land may often be 'legal' according to the laws of the host state, de facto it involves the expropriation of land from its customary users and occupiers. This constitutes a process of primitive accumulation, but since the expropriated, or partially expropriated, peasant/indigenous people are commonly supernumerary to the needs of the new extractive industries (due to the latter's capital-intensive character and/or requirements for little or highly seasonal labour), we may, following Harvey (2003), term this 'accumulation by dispossession'. In contrast to primitive accumulation 'proper', where former peasants become proletarians (or peasant semi-proletarians), are employed in capitalist industry or agriculture, and become the source of surplus value (Surplus Extraction 1 in the periphery due to super-exploitation), in the case of 'accumulation by dispossession' expropriated people are of little or no value as labour power to extractive accumulation. How, then, do we explain the source of surplus value underlying extractive capital accumulation – in this instance what we choose to term Surplus Extraction 2?

Surplus Extraction 2, which we may for the purposes of convenience term the 'super-exploitation of nature', may be seen to conform to 'natural resource seeking' strategy of multinational investment in Dunning and Lundan's (2008) classification, and aligns with Marx's (1981) theories of *differential rent*. Marx's theory of differential rent concerns the way in which capitalism takes advantage of particularly favourable conditions found in 'nature' (and/or built up by people previously in occupancy of expropriated land), to which he gives exhaustive treatment in *Capital* and again in *Theories of Surplus Value*. There is a persistent and common error that assumes that rent comprises only the *distribution* of realized surplus value between capitalists and landowners. What is omitted here is the reality that capitalist exploitation in agriculture (and other extractive industries) also affects the workers employed in these sectors whose production of surplus value depends, ceteris paribus, on the particular variation in conditions of production in 'nature'. Marx anticipates his thorough examination of differential rent in Volume 3 of *Capital* in a summary of his position in Volume 1. This begins

with his recognition of the importance of nature as the source of wealth for all societies, and continues by stating: 'if we assume capitalist production, then...the quantity of surplus value will vary according to the natural conditions within which labour is carried on, in particular the fertility of the soil' (Marx 1976:135). To clarify this statement, the differentiations found in nature relate to the *production* of surplus value in addition to its distribution. In other words, the labour applied to nature becomes more or less productive of surplus value in accordance with more or less favourable natural conditions for commodity production that capital encounters and moulds to its purpose (Tilzey 2018a; Higginbottom 2023). Thus, the more favourable the particular conditions of production, the greater the extra surplus value produced, which is then available for capture as differential rent.

Capital thus exploits and exhausts nature, but can only do so by employing labour power and the means of production to process what is naturally embedded and convert it through primary sector process activities into the secondary stage of usable, commodified use values (Higginbottom 2021). Again, Marx conceives differential rent in terms of locally available 'gifts of nature' (or the work of countless generations of now expropriated pre-capitalist people building up the fertility of the soil) enhancing labour productivity and, thereby, cheapening production and increasing surplus value through greater labour productivity. This type of variation generates surplus profits available in the first instance to the capital operating, or making use of, that specifically available extraction of use values from the natural world. This is key to Surplus Extraction 2 undertaken by extractive capital in fields such as mining, oil, logging, and agriculture (with pre-capitalist socio-ecological augmentation of 'natural' features such as soil fertility highly relevant in the latter case particularly). The surplus profit may be augmented by the application of further capital such as, in the case of extractive agriculture, capital-intensive machinery powered by fossil fuel, synthetic fertilizers, and agro-chemicals. Thus, capital not only exploits the 'gift from nature' in the form of 'natural soil fertility', it further reduces costs through the high embodied energy of fossil fuels without having to cover the costs of their adverse ecological impacts. Costs are further reduced, and differential rent augmented, as we have seen, by expropriating land from indigenous occupants without compensation (primitive accumulation as accumulation by dispossession).

The combination of these contributions by nature and capital render more productive the collective of living labour using these elements, producing more volume for a given expenditure of effort. The enhanced labour (arising from the 'free gift of nature' in combination with the high embodied energy, but unaccounted costs, of fossil fuel) reduces the cost of production, creating an extra surplus value that is the source of surplus profit once this is realized through the sale of the extractive commodities (Higginbottom 2021). The type of surplus profit that such an arrangement makes possible may be retained almost wholly by the capitalist, or the capitalist may have to surrender a percentage to the landowner, depending upon ownership of the natural resource in question. Where the state is landlord or extracts resource rents, this may then form the basis for state disbursements for social security and welfare programmes, as in the 'compensatory states' of the 'pink tide' (Tilzey 2019a). Marx, as we have seen, terms this form of rent generated in production *differential rent* since it differentiates the price of production of competing producers in a given sector (Higginbottom 2021). The lower cost producers are able to sell their commodities at a higher margin over their costs than competing higher cost producers (on marginal lands or without cheap capital inputs) who are able to make no more than average profits (Marx 1981). This,



then, is the source of what we choose to term Surplus Extraction 2, entailing the super-exploitation of nature as the basis of enhanced labour productivity and, hence, surplus profit, the majority of which is repatriated to the imperium or sub-imperium. Contra Harvey (2003), then, this surplus value generation, although enabled by accumulation by dispossession, *does* take place within the capital-labour productive relation.

It needs to be emphasized that this form of surplus value generation also relies on the particular characteristics of nature (or of socio-nature in the case of agriculture) as key determinants of how productive human labour power will be; these particular characteristics are, however, irreducible to human labour power itself, and have inherent properties that profoundly influence the dynamics of human utilization, whether sustainable or unsustainable. If we are really to understand what the 'super-exploitation of nature' means, then, the term must have reference to the intrinsic characteristics of 'more-than-human-nature', rather than simply being understood through the mediations of human labour power. The abrogation of capitalism must entail, therefore, not merely the end of the exploitation of human by human, but also that of more-than-human-nature by humanity – an eco-socialism.

### **Conclusion: the politics of agrarian struggle in contesting imperialism, dependency, and neo-extractivism**

In this final section we deploy the work of E.O Wright as a foil to point up the differences between his Eurocentric Marxism as counterposed to Marini, together with his failure to appreciate the implications of imperial super-exploitation and the imperial mode of living as differentially influencing the potentialities for a transition to eco-socialism. Thus, we suggest that Wright fails to appreciate fully the imperialistic and inherently combined and uneven developmental nature of capitalism. Given that any attempt under socialism to sustain the complex divisions of labour and high levels of affluence in the global North (which Wright seems to reify as the 'natural' endpoint of development), even when premised on 'green new deal' scenarios, will entail a continuation of extractive relations with the global South, this immediately undermines the claims of any 'post-capitalist' configuration of this kind to be truly 'socialist'. Rather, any such 'socialism' will entail, in reality, the perpetuation of the imperial mode of living, effectively normalizing and 'invisibilizing' high consumption lifestyles and their dependence on exploitation 'elsewhere'. Ecological sustainability implies that social equity and human development (as measured by the Human Development Index [HDI]) need to be fulfilled at far lower levels of resource consumption than are currently characteristic of the global North. This need to fulfil HDI criteria while keeping resource consumption to a minimum has been defined by the WWF (2006). In its 'Living Planet Report', WWF indicates that the progress of states towards sustainable development can be assessed by using the UNDP's HDI as an indicator of wellbeing, and the (ecological) footprint as a measure of demand on the biosphere. The HDI is calculated from life expectancy, literacy and education, and per capita GDP. The UNDP considers an HDI value of more than 0.8 to be 'high human development'. Meanwhile, an (ecological) footprint lower than 1.8 global hectares per person, the average biocapacity available per person on the planet, could denote sustainability at the global level (WWF 2006:19). Successful sustainable development requires that the world, on average, meets at a minimum these two criteria. The report goes on to

note that ‘no region, nor the world as a whole, met both criteria for sustainable development. Cuba alone did, based on the data it reports to the UN’ (WWF 2006:19). Cuba has achieved an HDI of over 0.8 while having an ecological footprint of only 1.8 global hectares per person. The USA, by contrast, has achieved its HDI of over 0.8 only by imposing a grotesque footprint of nearly 10 global hectares per person on the rest of the world, meaning that it lives beyond its means (by taking other nations’ resources) by a factor of over five (WWF 2006) (meaning, in turn, that were all the Earth’s inhabitants to consume and discard resources at the level of the USA, we would require more than five additional Earths to supply the goods and absorb the waste).

Scaling back resource consumption in the global North by the required magnitude to meet the criterion of less than 1.8 global hectares per person is likely, however, to be strongly resisted by the majority here, due both to the ideological ‘embeddedness’ of the imperial mode of living and to the structural constraints (highly complex divisions of labour, reliance on commodity production for employment, urban/industrial orientation, lack of access to land, etc.) on the pursuit of such a degrowth strategy. Wright does not address the hegemony of capitalism as expressed in the ‘embeddedness’ of high consumption lifestyles and their structural underpinnings – the imperial mode of living. Thus, even were the state to be truly democratized in the global North, there is still likely to be a strong consensus around the retention of the consumer ‘good life’, despite its dependence on imperial relations with an ‘outside’ in order to claim those additional global hectares through ‘imperialist rent’. In other words, the categories of ‘identity’ and ‘interest’ deployed by Wright (2019:125, 129) are ‘really subsumed’ within capital, even if ‘values’ (Wright 2019:131) show anti-capitalist tendencies. The former two categories tend to ‘trump’ the latter, since the complete severance of the great majority in the global North from the means of subsistence/production in land implies market dependence and/or reliance on complex divisions of labour that are in turn predicated on high levels of energy and resource consumption.

In the global South, however, capitalism does not entail widespread hegemony. Rather, ‘domination’ or ‘minimal hegemony’ are commonplace (see Tilzey and Sugden 2023). Here, the use of the term ‘subaltern classes’ applies to the great majority, referring to populations lying outside the hegemonic influence of capitalism due to their continuing material and cultural attachment to an independent means of production/subsistence, most especially land (Tilzey 2018a, 2020a). ‘Identity’ and ‘interest’ are here weighted heavily towards ‘peasantness’, ‘indigeneity’, and self-provisioning, since subalterns are only ‘formally subsumed’ within capitalism. ‘Peasantness’, ‘indigeneity’, and self-provisioning afford the tradition and normative aspiration that comprise the ‘values’ encapsulated in the pursuit of stable autonomy from capitalism (Wolf 1999). The result is that ‘anti-capitalism’ as a path to ‘post-capitalism’, pursued on an ecologically and socially equitable basis, is far more attainable in much of the South due to continuing high levels of ‘peasantness’ – the aspiration to secure autonomy from capitalism can still be achieved by ‘smashing’, or better, *subverting*, the state-capital nexus because of the latter’s narrow class and institutional basis. This, again, is not the case in the global North, where ‘real subsumption’ of the population within capitalism, materially and ideologically, making ‘smashing’ or subverting the state-capital nexus both actually and normatively much more problematical – hence Wright’s preferred option of ‘eroding’ capitalism.

Consequently, we consider the precariat of the global South, comprising the middle and lower peasantries, indigenous people, and the wider semi-proletariat, to constitute the main counter-hegemonic agent for emancipatory politics as 'livelihood sovereignty'. This is so because the precariat views access to non-commodified land, the escape from market dependence, and the equitable and ecologically sustainable production of use values to meet fundamental needs, as the key objectives of social relational transformation. In this, the potential for mass mobilization by the precariat for an agrarian solution to the contradictions of capitalism, both 'political' and 'ecological', does not seem too quixotic – indeed, the history of 'peasant wars' (Wolf 1999) and the wave of agrarian-based anti-neoliberal uprisings in Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nepal, and elsewhere (Moyo and Yeros 2005, 2011; Vergara-Camus 2014; Tilzey and Sugden 2023), appears to indicate ample precedent. Such mass mobilization does not appear unrealistic precisely because capitalism, whether neoliberal or national developmentalist, cannot, even were the burden of imperialist extraction to be removed, represent a solution to the agrarian question of the peasantry, either through the creation of a class of commercial farmers and/or through the 'real' subsumption of the peasantry as proletarians, as in the global North. Only a fraction of the huge 'peasant' precariat can be absorbed within capitalism as either, for both 'political' and 'ecological' reasons.

'Politically', therefore, if UN recommended levels of HDI are to be secured, necessity requires a 'peasant' (or 'radical' food sovereignty) resolution to the agrarian question, since this represents the only realistic, socially acceptable solution to burgeoning precarity. It is precisely because the peasantry and precariat are located overwhelmingly in the global South that a peasant 'revolution' and resolution to the agrarian question seems likely to occur here. 'Ecologically', moreover, capitalism cannot represent a resolution due to the resource intensity of consumption and wastage that has been set out at length in this paper, and which, sooner or later, generates the predatory behaviour, by some states and classes in relation to others, underlying the operation of 'imperialist rent' and combined-uneven development. Together, these capitalist tendencies have generated appalling inequalities in the midst of a spiralling ecological and climate crisis. The only realistic way in which the dual objectives of high human development and low ecological footprint may be achieved is through agroecology and food sovereignty. This implies an abrogation of capitalism, the imperial mode of living, and a drastic programme of degrowth with equity in the global North. This programme seems unlikely to derive from the North itself, however. Since the global South, historically and currently, is the differential locus of counter-hegemonic mobilization, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that radical solutions to our existential politico-ecological crisis will arise primarily from this quarter.

As Osorio (2022: 160), following Marini (1974, 2022) states: 'Here it is important to address why the major attempts to end capitalism have taken place in these [dependent] economies rather than in developed ones. It is in dependent capitalist areas that the weak links of the imperialist chain of world dominance are apparent. The revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba, and Vietnam attest to this, as do the continued crises of dominance in Latin America of the twenty-first century. It is there that exploitation that takes over workers' consumption and life funds generates rupture. It is also there that the contradictions of the global system are concentrated through the appropriation of the value of these economies in favour of the developed ones so as to slow the tendency toward crisis due to the decline in the profit rate.'

It is there that the presence of sub-sovereign states under the leadership of local capitals, but associated with and subordinated to imperial capitals, has fostered a tendency for purely democratic struggles for better living conditions to quickly turn into anti-capitalist struggles, and these into anti-imperialist struggles’.

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## LDPI Working Paper Series 2024

More than a decade ago, the Land Deals Politics Initiative ([LDPI](#)) was launched as a loose network of scholars and activists concerned about the rise of land, water and green grabs across the world and the consequences for rural livelihoods and agrarian relations. A massive wave of investment in land, resulting in expropriation and displacement had emerged following the financial, food and energy crises of 2008-09. We wanted to understand what was going on and how best to respond. Between 2009–2019, LDPI organised a series of events to analyse the social, economic, political and environmental dynamics of large-scale land deals and their implications for policy and social movements. LDPI funded significant research and contributed to a considerable body of published scholarly research on land deals, all of which shaped policy discussions and informed numerous initiatives such as the FAO's Tenure Guidelines. The global debate around land deals has diminished in the last several years, but important research and political questions remain. What happened to the thousands of land grabs documented by researchers, non-governmental organisations, activist groups, news media, and aid agencies? What new configurations of land, labour and capital have emerged since? How has the rise of authoritarian, state-led populism and politics re-shaped the tensions between 'foreignisation' and extraction?

The 2024 Global Land Grabbing Conference addresses urgent challenges related to land, water, and natural resource grabbing. It provides a space for exchange and action that brings together diverse perspectives, including academics, social movements, and government entities. This event is organized by the Land Deals Politics Initiative (LDPI) to study and confront landgrabbing. The selection of Bogotá as the venue for 2024 stems from the significance of land debates on the Colombian public agenda.

For more information about the 2024 Global Land Grabbing Conference, see the conference website: <https://cisocial.es/land-grabbing-2024>

### Dependency, Imperialism, and the Super-Exploitation of Labour-Power and Nature in the Global South

*Mark Tilzey*

This paper explores the continuing and deepening theoretical and political relevance of the work of Ruy Mauro Marini on dependency and imperialism (Marini 2022) to the issue of super-exploitation of labour-power and nature in the Global South (and more specifically Latin America), a process of neo-extractivism in which 'land-grabbing' plays a key role. Contemporary dependency and imperialism, embodied in neo-extractivism, takes place, it is argued, through three mechanisms: the super-exploitation of labour-power (Surplus Extraction 1) and the super-exploitation of nature (Surplus Extraction 2), and on the disproportionate claim by the imperium and sub-imperium upon ecological sinks differentially located in the Global South (Surplus Extraction 3). In relation to Surplus Extraction 1 and 2, the main focus of the paper, what we appear to be witnessing is 'disarticulated' accumulation through two principal, juxtaposed mechanisms: Surplus Extraction 1 comprises super-exploitation 'within' the capital-labour relation, comprising selective zones of industrialisation, and labour-intensive plantation production, and reliant upon the labour force's continued status as a semi-proletariat, affording capital a 'subsidy' by remunerating labour-power below its value; Surplus Extraction 2 takes place through 'accumulation by dispossession', whereby land cleared of its previous inhabitants through 'land grabbing' affords, through the accumulated labour of those prior inhabitants embodied 'nature', a massive boost to surplus value production by capital-intensive agro-extractive activity. These surplus extractive mechanisms, it is argued, may be understood on the basis of Marini's highly innovative development of the Marxian labour-theory of value, which the paper seeks to further develop in relation to the labour-power/nature nexus of contemporary extractivism.