

I.L.A. Kollektiv



AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS?

How the imperial mode of living
prevents a good life for all

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Wissen

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A short history of the imperial mode of living

Where did the imperial mode of living originate and how did it develop? This chapter provides a historical overview from a European perspective, revealing a history that is as much characterised by inventiveness, material expansion and emancipation as by repression, exploitation and violence.

The imperial mode of living, i.e. the essentially unlimited access to labour and resources on a global scale, developed over the course of the last 500 years. At first a luxury afforded only to the European and North American elites, it eventually became the norm for the middle and upper classes. Initially, global political and economic relations of power were manifested in explicitly despotic forms of rule (colonialism and imperialism). But eventually these were replaced by more subtle forms of exploitation (dependency on and mediation by the global market).¹ Today, the imperial mode of living is supported by a broad social consensus and often appears quasi natural. This system maintains dependencies and social constraints and thereby effectively blocks the road to a socio-ecological society.

Colonialism: the early stages of the imperial mode of living

Following the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, European expansion took hold in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Different factors encouraged this development. Economic power had grown in the late Middle Ages, and banks and large trading companies had developed. Reformation provided a further boost to the economy, as many highly qualified individuals were no longer bound to the church and could take up secular occupations. This promoted administrative, technological and scientific innovation. Christian missionary zeal provided European expansionism with its readiness for violence and bloodshed. In particular, the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, where the drive to “subjugate the world”² originated, had long been warring with Muslims and Jews. Reformation then created a schism within Christianity and led to a series of religious wars. In the course of these and other military conflicts, many of the smaller kingdoms were subjugated and absorbed into larger dominions. Increasingly, absolutist regimes began to appear in Europe that depended

on large sums of money to maintain their expensive symbols of power and finance numerous wars. The combination of technological innovation in the fields of sea travel and weaponry, the need for money, a culture of violence and a missionary zeal created an explosive mixture that was about to be unleashed on the rest of the world.

Europe expands ...

Portugal and Spain were the first to go forth in search of new roads to the riches and markets of the East, thereby venturing into uncharted territories, particularly the ‘New World’. Other European nations, among them the Netherlands and England, soon followed suit. In these faraway places, the political situation often favoured European expansion: power vacuums in certain regions provided opportunities that European powers could exploit. This was also the case in South-East Asia, where China, the dominant power, had only recently cut its external ties and disbanded its huge fleet.³ Europeans were also often able to take advantage of local and/or transregional conflicts. In other parts of the world, such as in the Americas, one of the main reasons they were able to quickly assert their dominance was because of the diseases they brought, such as influenza, which soon decimated the indigenous populations. Most importantly, however, was the fact that European invaders had more advanced military technology, particularly in terms of firearms (cannons being just one example) that enabled them to brutally rise to the top in many, yet by no means all, regions of the world (the powerful Ottoman Empire remained a feared opponent until well into the 17th century). European powers also posed no serious threat to the Chinese empire or the Indian Mughal emperors.⁴ Technologically, scientifically and economically, Europeans lagged behind in many areas.¹ A key factor of European expansionism was its reliance on violence and the ruthless exploitation of humans and the natural world.⁵ Indigenous peoples — in particular, from Africa — were forced into labour and enslaved, worked under catastrophic conditions and perished by the thousands. The colonial masters met resistance with brutal force and exterminated numerous tribes and ethnic groups. As late as the early 20th century, German troops committed genocide against swathes of the Herero and Nama in German South West Africa.

» Following the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, European expansion took hold in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.«

i Up to the 18th century, the British textile industry continued to copy the Indian model and Europeans only managed to make porcelain around 900 years after China. Before that, during the Middle Ages, Europeans used techniques to produce silk, paper and gunpowder that they had learnt from the ‘Middle Kingdom’.

State and private actors collaborated closely to force the world into submission. The monarchic or oligarchic governments of colonial states created incentives, provided the framework conditions, and gave legitimacy to treaties or action to protect their ‘enterprises’, using military force where necessary. In exchange they received important revenue, e.g. through taxes. Private and semi-private actors, such as businesses, governors and stock companies—the British East India Company is one famous example—in turn financed colonialism and were often in charge of the ‘dirty work’. They (and their shareholders) received a large share of the profits gained through exploitation. States granted their large national trading companies monopolies, and empowered them to wage war and execute “punitive measures”.⁶ Soon shares and bonds were financing this expansion. We practically owe our modern system of stock exchanges and central banks (see MONEY AND FINANCE) to this structure created to finance exploitation,⁷ which has also been described as “war capitalism”.⁸

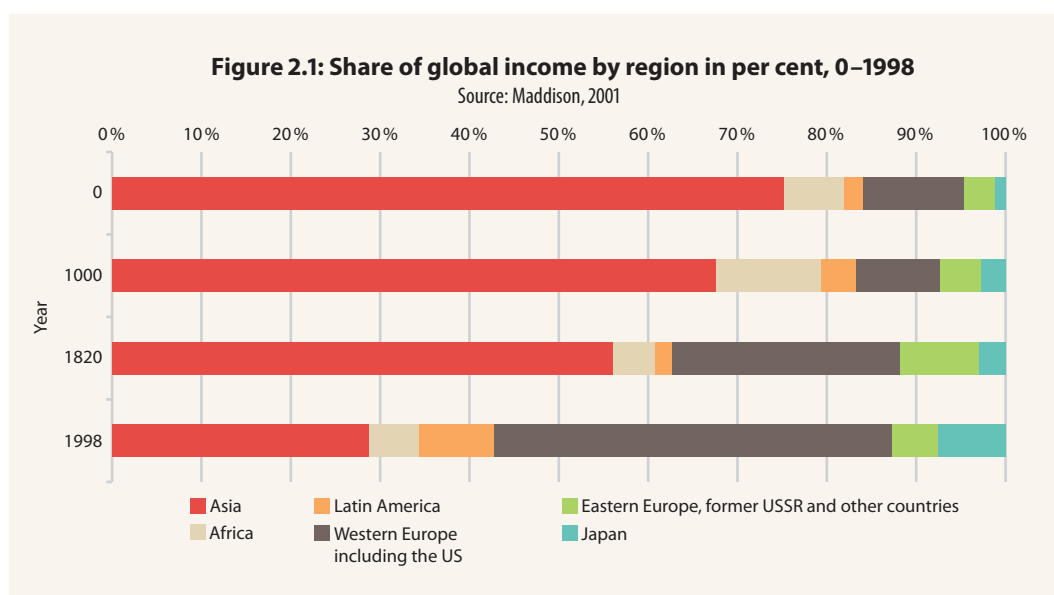
... and gives birth to the first global market

With their heavily armed ships, European traders “shoved competitors off the field and [...] quite literally hunted for workers”.⁹ They took over existing international trade routes and created new ones. A gigantic trade system dominated by European powers and maintained by armed force developed. The first global market came into being and it was shaped by a European elite hell-bent on preserving their interests. On one occasion, the Dutch East India Company murdered an estimated 15,000 people—nearly the entire population of one island group—in order to gain control of the profitable nutmeg trade¹⁰ before establishing a slave-based plantation economy. To secure an exploitive system that benefited a small elite, Europeans established such ‘extractive institutions’ everywhere in their colonies. In many countries of the Global South, the legacy of these institutions continues to have a destructive effect on economies and political systems. For

the colonial masters, however, this not only provided a means to stabilise and expand their hegemony, it also increased their profits from trade and exploitation, and hence their access to ever more goods from all over the world. The global market thus became the backbone of the imperial mode of living during this early phase. In exchange for the silver they had robbed from the colonies and the ‘profits’ reaped from the slave trade, European elites were able to buy sought-after goods in Asia (predominantly China and India), such as tea, metals, precious stones, porcelain, silk and cotton fabrics. And America provided them with tobacco, sugar and other goods.¹¹ Tellingly, while sugar production was concentrated in Brazil and the Caribbean, the commodity itself was almost exclusively consumed by people in Europe and North America. Sugar was cheap enough that it was even affordable to the lower classes, for whom such luxury goods were entirely out of reach and who were often no better off than the indigenous peoples in the colonies. Until well into the 20th century, the access to goods from around the world was a privilege that remained unattainable for large parts of the European population.

Colonial knowledge shapes the world

Legitimised not least by blatant racism, violent exploitation provided the imperial mode of living’s intellectual basis. ‘Wild’ indigenous peoples were allegedly more animal than man, and could therefore be treated and exploited as such.¹² From the Middle Ages came the deep conviction that non-Christian religions had to be opposed. Europeans interpreted their great success in subjugating, massacring and pillaging other peoples as a heavenly blessing. It also led the colonial powers and elites to invest in the technologies and sciences that their increasing wealth, success and capacity to exploit the world relied on.ⁱⁱ The colonial ‘success story’ and imperial mode of living are therefore deeply inscribed in the practice and theory of Western science and continue to inform our understanding of sensible



ii Such as engineering, earth science, land surveying, shipbuilding and nautical science, as well as, in particular, weapons and military technology or the considerable collection and organisation of encyclopaedic knowledge on the different parts of the world.

and rational ways of dealing with the world. For subjugated and exploited peoples, the strength and wealth of their foreign masters were often seen as proof of the 'objective correctness' of their worldview and methods. Thus success could only be brought about using the same approach. This devalued non-European cultures and their knowledge—to the benefit of Western concepts (see EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE).

Industrialisation and imperialism

Europe's global dominance only developed in the wake of a second wave of colonial expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries, and in the 20th century, this then led to the division of the world into 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' nations.¹³ For centuries, it was non-European countries such as China, India and a few others (today referred to as 'developing nations') that held the largest share of global income (Figure 2.1).¹⁴ This, however, changed quickly. Competing European colonial powers expanded their grip on global resources—land (see FOOD AND AGRICULTURE), labour (forced servitude or slavery) and raw materials—and violently divided up the world between them. This era, when Europe subjugated and suppressed most of the world, has become known as the Age of Imperialism. Imperialism fundamentally altered international relations and its effects continue to be felt in many aspects of life today. Whereas the countries of the Global South still controlled around 63 per cent of global income at the beginning of the 19th century, this share had dropped to a mere 27 per cent by the middle of the 20th century.¹⁵

Industrialisation and its colonial dimension

Agriculture had long been the dominant sector, yet over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, industry, business, trade and transport gradually took over. These sectors now drove economic growth and the development of society.¹⁶ Increasingly, mechanisation and the steam engine's rhythmic hissing drove production and ensured the growing productivity of the emerging factories. Mechanical looms, for example, meant cloth could be produced faster than ever before, while steamships and railways could transport people and goods at unprecedented speed. New technologies and fossil fuels—predominantly coal at first—liberated production from natural constraints. Production could take place where there were large pools of workers. This was the beginning of the fossil era.¹⁷

All too often the West interprets these developments as the logical consequence of superior Western inventiveness and entrepreneurial spirit. However, such a perspective overlooks the fact that European industrialisation was by no means solely the result of technological innovation. Globally, it was the work of millions of slaves, forced labourers, and *coolies* (day labourers) who helped bring about the economic rise of the imperial powers. They also provided the cheap raw materials for Western industries.¹⁸ The official abolition of slavery did little to change this.ⁱⁱⁱ In many cases, European technology was based on the knowledge that

Europeans appropriated from other peoples. The British textile industry—the ultimate symbol of industrial capitalism—spied on the then leading Indian textile producers and copied many of their techniques and patterns¹⁹. Whereas the key goods during the initial phases of colonialism were silver, sugar, tea and spices (see above), industrialisation created a growing demand for cotton (for the textile industry), rubber (for wheels and car tires) as well as iron ore, nickel and other metals (e.g. to produce steel), particularly over the course of the 19th century.²⁰

Europe's new class society

Industrial capitalism led to a social order fundamentally characterised by salaried labour and new social inequalities. A small and ever wealthier bourgeoisie that owned capital and the means of production, such as factories, was faced by a rapidly growing number of salary-dependent workers who had little more than their own labour.²¹ Men, women and children worked under the harshest conditions in factories—often between 12 and 16 hours per day, without healthcare or pensions—all for a pittance. Hard physical labour was the harsh reality for Europe's lower classes, much like for the people in the colonies. Often, people were left with no other choice than to work in the factories. In the United Kingdom, the nobility drove large parts of the rural population from common land to use it for the more profitable production of wool.²² As a result, many living in rural areas could no longer feed their families and so moved to the cities to earn at least a meagre salary in the expanding factories. For women, this led to a double burden. Not only did they work in textile factories, or in private households, for a salary that was significantly lower than that of their male colleagues, but they still had to perform household chores, which were considered the natural domain of women, i.e. it was work that was neither remunerated nor valued (see CARE).²³

The early stages of the growth society

From the 18th century onwards, the population and the economy both grew rapidly, with one factor driving the other. Between 1700 and 1800 alone, the European population nearly doubled.²⁴ This development contributed to the spread of the imperial mode of living not least due to the important migratory wave it caused. Seeking economic success, or simply fleeing repression, millions of people migrated from Europe to other parts of the world and spread Western forms of thinking and Western economic habits. Population growth in Europe also provided industrialists with a huge pool of labourers in search of work. It also drastically increased the pressure to improve the infrastructure and provide affordable food, which promoted innovation in agriculture. The improvement or introduction of novel forms of cultivation, fertilisers and agricultural crops (such as maize, potatoes and pumpkins from North and South America) helped stimulate further population growth and boost agricultural

iii The same applies to the 4th Industrial Revolution (see DIGITALISATION).

productivity. Towards the end of the 18th century, a revolution in transport also took place. The construction of transportation canals boomed—first in the UK, and later in continental Europe and the US. An increasing number of goods from regional and global trade were transported on inland waterways, providing links between the new urban centres. During the second half of the 19th century, railways revolutionised the transport of people and goods as they freed transport from its dependence on river courses.²⁵ Both from an economic and military point of view, this was highly important, and so states overwhelmingly supported the development of this new infrastructure, even going so far as to implement measures against local resistance. More often than not, the necessary capital for these investments stemmed from the exploitation of the colonies. Towards the end of the 19th century, railway construction had become the largest economic sector in Europe and North America—and therefore a driver of industrialisation in two ways: whilst it created brand new means of communication, logistics and transport, it was also a booming economic sector in its own right. The price for the industrial age was paid for dearly by large segments of the population and ecosystems, as this new-found productivity and mobility relied heavily on large-scale exploitation and fossil energy—at first, coal and then mainly oil in the 20th century.

Fordism: Wealth for everybody?

During the early stages of industrialisation, it was almost exclusively members of the elite, such as factory owners, who profited. However, over time unions won higher salaries and shorter working days for labourers in fierce struggles. The emerging welfare state also significantly owes its existence to the strength of the organised interests of the wage-earning population. At the same time, technological innovation and improved workflows (such as assembly line work) increased productivity, leading to lower unit costs and therefore also lower prices.²⁶ For many companies, state market regu-

lation was acceptable as long as it still facilitated higher profits. Furthermore, towards the end of the 19th century, the new advertising industry promoted a culture of consumption that over the course of the 20th century took hold among most of the population.²⁷

A salient feature of this new consumer society was that it was no longer merely the economic, political and religious elites, but rather the “majority of the population that had access to these new forms of consumption”.²⁸ Large swathes of the working class in the Global North enjoyed an imperial mode of living and gained a share in the new wealth which continued to rely on the global appropriation and exploitation of labour and resources. Take cars, for example. At the end of the 19th century, they were an exclusive means of transport reserved only for the upper classes; by the 20th century, they had become a mass product. This period of mass production and mass consumption is called Fordism, a name derived from the car manufacturer Henry Ford.^{iv} As this period also saw workers become consumers too, some speak of the “emancipation of the proletariat”,²⁹ whereby relatively poorer individuals were able to accept the imperial mode of living in spite of the inequalities that persisted.

The downside of new wealth

However, the fruits of these developments were reserved mainly for the white population. Particularly in the US, the ‘new top dog’ of the global economy, the struggle for equal rights became a defining factor in the everyday lives of black people. Moreover, traditional gender roles initially remained almost fixed. Care remained the domain of women and was not recognised as real work. Often, the social market economy is seen in a positive light; however, it could only function—and this fact often goes unmentioned—“at the expense of women’s independence and their opportunities for progress”.³⁰ Until 1977, married women in Germany were barred from signing an employment contract without first obtaining permission from their husbands. In many cases, activists had to fight for

Figure 2.2: Timeline



iv Allegedly, his workers were able to afford one of his cars after only a few months of work.

women to be granted the right to vote, study at university or even run a marathon.

Even though Fordism helped generalise the imperial mode of living to a certain degree, by and large this trend remained restricted to the former colonial powers (the USA, the UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Japan). Following World War II, many societies of the Global South were occupied by their battle to gain independence from these countries (in particular, from France and the UK). These struggles against persisting injustices went more or less unnoticed by broad segments of the German population during the postwar period — Germans were fixated by the idea of growth-based wealth for all.

Growth as the central goal of economic policy

In the 1950s and 1960s, Germany experienced what came to be known as the “elevator effect”³¹. Overall, inequality did not decrease, but economic growth led to a situation where people of all social classes gained increasing material wealth — as a whole, society was *elevated* to the next level.³² Extreme mass poverty, which characterised the early phases of industrialisation, was almost entirely eradicated. For this reason, economic growth remains the highest economic policy goal in Germany and most other societies and is still a widely accepted objective; it created new demand and led to a belief in the need for permanent growth.³³ In some of the earliest nations to become industrialised, the imperial mode of living became a mass phenomenon: nearly everybody gained the purchasing power to buy goods and services and thereby, mediated by businesses and global markets, acquired access to the labour and ecosystems of the countries of the Global South. Following independence, neocolonial trade regimes often developed on the global markets, reducing the countries of the Global South mainly to providers of resources, food and labour for the Global North.³⁴ Most of the former colonies developed industrialisation strategies to achieve similar levels of wealth as the countries of the Global North. Yet the rules of the global economy

were still being written by the former colonisers. Since the 1960s, the difference in the degree of industrialisation³⁵ between countries of the Global North and South has effectively decreased. However, large discrepancies between these countries persist in terms of income.³⁵ It was only as the dominance of Fordism began to wane in the 1970s that the “limits to growth”³⁶ entered public debate. The consequences of highly resource- and emissions-intensive mass consumption and mass production became too evident. Mobility continued to rely heavily on oil, in particular, but also coal. Moreover, an increasing number of products were being made from plastic. Cement, steel, sand and gravel were also needed for the rapidly developing road infrastructure, which, compared to railways, required nearly ten times as much area. Under Fordism, the transport sector therefore became the greatest energy consumer, ranking even ahead of industry.³⁷

The means for growth, for example, the industrialisation of agriculture, relied on monocultures, an excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers that destroyed soil fertility and biodiversity. These new methods often also led to rural exodus, impoverishment and, increasingly, the destruction of non-industrial, regional and ecological forms of farming (see FOOD AND AGRICULTURE).³⁸ Following the 1960s and 1970s, this led to the spread of new social movements that searched for alternative forms of consumption and production that did not burden people and the environment. However, these ideas never took hold on a global scale.

Neoliberal globalisation

The 1980s wave of globalisation (see GLOSSARY) made it possible for the broad mass of the world’s middle and upper classes — even beyond the former colonial powers — to enjoy the imperial mode of living. Most everyday commodities, such as sports shoes, computers or supermarket food items, were now no longer standard products produced by a single business, but derived from a complex network of supply and production that spread across diverse locations throughout the



v Regarding the manufacturing industry’s share of GDP.

world. Not only was this change linked to a process of relative deindustrialisation in the Global North, and China's rise to become the 'workbench of the world', it was also accompanied by global markets dominated by a handful of transnational corporations and the widespread acceptance of a new economic policy ideology: neoliberalism (see GLOSSARY).

Influential politicians such as US President Ronald Reagan or British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher became the symbols of a political and economic doctrine that placed the freedom and efficiency of markets at the heart of every political agenda and also largely dominated academic thinking (particularly in terms of economics) and civil society (see EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE).³⁹ Even social democratic parties, who had previously appeared to defend the interests of the wage-earning population, followed the new trend: privatisation, deregulation and scaling back the state's responsibilities (especially regarding welfare provision) were now seen as the medicine to all economic ailments. Instead of promoting democratic control over markets, which had, to a certain degree, characterised the Fordist era, neoliberal theorists advocated the 'market-conforming democracy'. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union and Real Socialism, this concept made its breakthrough in the 1990s.⁴⁰

'Development' – but for whom?

Convinced of the market's self-regulating capacities, influential providers of financial assistance, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank or the G8 (Group of Eight), implemented so-called structural adjustment programmes as a form of 'development aid' during the 1980s and 90s.⁴¹ They aimed to open up economies for the private economic benefit of transnational corporations, promote an export-oriented agriculture (see FOOD AND AGRICULTURE) and decrease the state's involvement in spheres such as healthcare and education (see CARE). Moreover, since the 1990s, to institutionally anchor this trend and grant private investors enforceable rights, numerous international free trade agreements have been concluded.^{vi} For the countries of the Global South, many of which had only very recently freed themselves of the colonial yoke, neoliberal policies led to new dependencies — on international donors in the form of huge unpayable debts (see MONEY AND FINANCE), and also on the fluctuations of global markets. In many cases, this crippled entire sectors of local economies.⁴² Many people, in particular those from rural areas, were forced to leave their homes and seek new prospects for themselves and their families — taking on precarious jobs as migrant labourers on the fields, as well as in the factories or the households of the globalised world (see FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, DIGITALISATION and CARE).

Over the past 30 years, this 'globalisation from above'⁴³ has exacerbated global income and wealth inequalities, which are today greater than at any time since

World War II. Since the 1990s, inequality has particularly increased within most countries, as much in the Global South as in the Global North.⁴⁴ Overall, the global economy has grown, mainly due to the emerging middle and upper classes in countries such as China, India and Brazil who emulate the imperial mode of living of the Global North. Growth, however, does not necessarily lead to wealth, especially not for everybody. Instead of benefiting the entire global population, as the dominant economic theory predicted, globalisation has increased the power of elites and impoverished and wrought precarious conditions (see GLOSSARY) on large swathes of the population in many countries of the world.⁴⁵ Today, the richest one per cent of the global population owns nearly half of the total global wealth.⁴⁶

The (daily) rule of the market

These increasing inequalities are attributable not least to the rise of financial markets. Neoliberal globalisation policies not only 'unleashed' global trade, but also led to business models where more and more corporations generally take decisions based on how they will affect a company's share price, and are increasingly involved in financial markets themselves.⁴⁷ For

the wealthy, investments in the real economy, and thus jobs and salaries, are mostly less profitable and less attractive, creating an incentive to invest in innovative financial products (see MONEY AND FINANCE). Since the crisis of Fordism and the breakup of the system of fixed exchange rates at the beginning of the 1970s (the so-called *Nixon Shock*), finance has morphed from a 'servant' of industrial production to the sector calling all the shots on the global economy.⁴⁸

Since then, the logics of (financial) markets have come to dominate more and more aspects of our lives. Having access to labour and resources, which is the basis of

the imperial mode of living, this shift has, in particular, increased the depth of this logic's penetration and its versatility. Whether it is education, family life, leisure time or our relationship with nature, nearly all spheres of our lives are today based on a logic of profit and organised through markets.⁴⁹ Critical voices therefore speak of a 'market civilisation'.⁵⁰ Hundreds of thousands of young people today leave university shouldering a debt that they will need years to repay (see MONEY AND FINANCE). Pension funds turn into institutional investors that speculate on food (see FOOD AND AGRICULTURE) and we are made to believe that CO₂ emissions have a monetary value that we can simply 'pay off' each time we fly (see MOBILITY). It is almost impossible to elude the grip of the market. Money has even seeped into the most fundamental areas of life, such as providing care for our loved ones (see CARE).

» Over the past 30 years, this globalisation from above has exacerbated global income and wealth inequalities, which are today greater than at any time since World War II.«

vi In 1991, for example, the establishment of Mercosur created a Latin American internal market, followed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 and in 1995 the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was established as the global political free trade institution.

History is made by us

Already this short overview of the history of the imperial mode of living highlights how closely-knit exploitation and innovation, growth and inequality, wealth and violence are—even today. This historical overview not only provides important background information for the analysis of individual elements that now follows, it is also key to developing a perspective for a future worth living for all mankind. Even the wealth that has been accumulated in the past endangers any truly sustainable society due to the large amounts of resources required to make it happen. Globally, industrial mass

production is expanding and could grow even further in the not too distant future thanks to industry 4.0 (see DIGITALISATION). But in spite of these gloomy predictions, a transition to a different, social and ecological global society is nonetheless possible. The historical injustices described here were always unacceptable, and people have consistently fought to improve their lives, achieving enormous progress and leaving their mark on global history (the abolition of slavery being just one example). Ultimately, history is the outcome of human acts, struggles and discussions. History is made. By us.

Endnotes

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| 25 | Wolf, 2009, pp. 48–51 | 49 | Gill, 2003a, p. 66, 2003b, p. 128 |
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GLOSSARY

This glossary provides short explanations of some of the terms used in the text. However, the list is by no means exhaustive.

Agroecology describes a social movement, academic discipline and agricultural practice. They all share the notion of adapting agriculture to prevailing natural conditions, cycles and local needs. As an approach, agroecology combines traditional and local knowledge with modern scientific methods.

Biodiversity: biological diversity, diversity of species.

Biosphere: the earth's 'life zone', i.e. the totality of all organisms, living creatures and ecosystems on the planet. Often we consider terms such as 'nature' to be a realm entirely separated from humans, and words such as 'resources' implicitly view nature merely with regard to the benefits it provides to people. The term biosphere attempts to avoid these shortcomings.

Capitalism: under capitalism, the market principle largely defines the social fabric. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of a few, thus forcing the majority of people to work. Competition and profit orientation lead to an intensification of the global exploitation of people and nature.

Carbon Capture and Storage: the process of capturing and storing CO₂. The aim is to capture, liquefy and store underground the CO₂ from industrial processes—in spite of considerable risks and the fact that the technology still needs to be further developed.

Climate justice: a political concept that serves to highlight that the climate crisis does not affect all people equally. While the global upper and middle classes, in particular, contribute towards climate change, those who suffer its consequences most acutely tend to contribute the least to global warming.

CO₂: carbon dioxide.

Colonialism: the violent subjugation of foreign territories (in particular in the Americas, South and South East Asia as well as Africa) by European countries. The structures and relations of power that developed during this era persist until today (see also 'neocolonialism').

Commons: goods such as water, seed or software that are used by a community. It describes forms of property, organisation and production that are not based primarily on private or state ownership and competition, but on community ownership, co-operation and participation.

Data mining: the systematic statistical analysis of large amounts of data or 'big data'. The method aims to produce (economically exploitable) knowledge or predict future developments.

Ecological footprint: the space that would be required to maintain the lifestyle and living standard of one person (under the current conditions of production) for all of humanity permanently.

Externalisation: the process of outsourcing social and environmental impacts to other places, or leaving them for future generations to solve. For the imperial mode of living and production, this constitutes a fundamental process.

Food sovereignty: the right of all people to decide over the processes of food production, distribution and consumption. Key to this concept is the development of a socially just and sustainable form of agriculture.

Genetic engineering: the transfer of isolated DNA sequences across different species. Genetically modified seed has drawn criticism because of the way it affects biodiversity, the unknown impacts it has on health and the environment, its emphasis on monoculture production without reducing the need for pesticides and seed patenting instead of promoting free seed exchange.

Global North/Global South are not geographic terms and describe the distinct position of countries in the global political and economic order. The terms also highlight the different experiences with colonialism and exploitation that underpin today's order.

Globalisation: the age of globalisation describes the recent great increase in mobility of information, goods and people. While this mobility has existed for thousands of years, its intensity has increased sharply since the middle of the 20th century.

Good life for all: the realistic utopia of a peaceful and solidary society that includes all people living in harmony with the biosphere. Today, pessimism and fear rule, making the concept seem utopian. From the standpoint of civilization and technology, however, it is a realistic vision.

Indigenous peoples: the descendants of a region's original inhabitants. The term stresses the self-identification of culturally, socially and economically distinct groups in society that may even have their own language. Human rights specifically for indigenous peoples guarantee their right to self-determination and to land.

Industrial agriculture: aims for efficiency in production instead of caring for animals, the environment and people. Monoculture fields and mass production as well as the use of chemical fertilisers characterise the system. It promotes large agricultural corporations instead of smallholder farming. Often, instead of catering to regional demand, this form of agriculture is strongly export-oriented.

Industry 4.0: the Fourth Industrial Revolution after mechanisation, mass production and automation. It aims to 'intelligently connect' digital technology and the physical systems of production. The German government, industry associations, unions and researchers drive this process forward.

Institutions: long-term established organisations that shape society such as parties, unions, churches, international organisations or education establishments. Some definitions will also include institutions with unique characteristics, for example, companies, the (mass) media, as well as parliaments, courts and ministries.

Land grabbing: a colloquial term for the heightened economic interest in agricultural land and the global increase in large-scale land buy-ups. Frequently, while legal, they lack democratic control over land access.

Market-based: according to economic logic or the fundamental principles of the market, i.e. driven by prices, supply and demand, etc.

Modern slavery: all forms of forced labour, human trafficking and debt bondage that (illegally) continue even over 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Globally, an estimated 30 to 50 million people work in slave-like conditions, in particular in agriculture, households and care, as well as forced prostitution.

Neoclassical economics: mainstream economic school of thought taught at universities since the middle of the 20th century. The concept is based on assumptions such as profit and utility maximisation, perfect competition and complete information. It omits or only insufficiently considers aspects such as questions of distribution, differing degrees of power, ethical concerns and environmental issues.

Neocolonialism highlights the economic and politico-structural dependencies that persist in spite of the formal independence of former colonies. Certain trade agreements, for example, force countries of the Global South into the role of suppliers of cheap raw material.

Neoliberalism: an ideology and economic policy model that purportedly promotes a 'free market' and insists that it is best for society to limit political interference in business and the economy as far as possible. Examples of neoliberal policies include demands for liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. Originally, the term described ordoliberalism, the theoretical basis of the social market economy.

Network effects: an effect particularly prominent on internet platforms and in digital services whereby the attractiveness of a particular site increases with the number of its users (as seen with Facebook, Airbnb, Wikipedia and others).

Precarious employment: a job is considered precarious when the worker earns below a certain threshold, is not sufficiently protected and their salary does not allow them to participate fully in society. Gainful employment is also deemed precarious when it stops being meaningful, lacks social recognition and offers people no security to plan for their futures.¹

Privatisation: the transfer of community property (owned, for example, by the state, communities or indigenous peoples) into private hands (owned, for example, by individuals, companies or corporations).

Racism: a balance of power that exists within society globally that sees people differentiated and hierarchized based on physical and/or cultural attributes and/or their origin or nationality. Being 'white' and 'Western' is judged to be superior to being 'black/non-white' and 'non-Western'.²

Re-feudalisation: the global trend towards the unequal distribution of money and power that resembles feudal medieval societies in which only a tiny elite enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living.

Rebound effect: the phenomenon of absolute energy and resource consumption not dropping in spite of efficiency gains in production, management and logistics. When productive efficiency increases, this leads to goods becoming cheaper, potentially causing consumption of that good to increase.

Sharing economy: a broad term for a growing economic sector that emphasises the shared use of goods or services (either on or offline). For successful companies in this sector, profits and not sharing are the main goal.

Sinks: parts of ecosystems that people use as deposits, for example, the atmosphere, seas or the soil under landfills.

Socialisation institutions: the reciprocal and open process, which shapes people and turns them into members of a society that is, in turn, shaped by its people, is called *socialisation*. In many societies, this process begins in families and schools, which would in this case be *institutions of socialisation*.

Transformation, socio-ecological: a fundamental transformation of political and economic systems away from fossil fuels and the growth logic and towards an economy that ensures a decent life for all. This goes deeper than a reform, yet is less abrupt than a revolution.

Transnational consumer class: includes the global middle and upper classes that follow a consumption-oriented lifestyle. When considering this concept, it is important to remember that discriminating structures such as racism and sexism persist.

Transnational corporations: since the end of the 20th century, the largest and most profitable companies are no longer bound to a particular country. Rather, they act as a network and secure advantages in production (cheap labour and resources or lower taxes) on a global scale across numerous countries.

Virtual emissions: emissions produced in third countries that are ‘imported’ by importing goods from these countries for further processing or consumption. Whereas production-related emissions in the Global North have stagnated or even declined, the imported emissions from the Global South are rapidly increasing.

White and black do not describe the colour of a person’s skin but political and social constructs that underpin both discrimination and privilege in our racist societies. The term ‘white’ is mentioned here explicitly to underline its dominant position, which otherwise often goes unmentioned.³

Endnotes

- 1 Brinkmann, Dörre & Röbenack, 2006
- 2 global, 2013, pp. 12–13
- 3 global, 2013, p. 10

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THE PROJECT AND THE AUTHORS

The I.L.A. Werkstatt, a project organised by the non-profit association Common Future e.V., began on 1 April 2016 and ended on 31 May 2017 under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Kopp. The I.L.A. Werkstatt is an interdisciplinary collective of 15 young researchers and activists. We jointly developed this text over the course of a year. As a group, we hold university degrees in economics, development and agricultural economics, political science, political economy, international relations, pedagogy, environmental sciences, sustainability studies, history and law. In addition to participating in the I.L.A. Kollektiv, we study and work at universities, in non-governmental organisations, social movements as well as in and alongside trade unions. We are part of a diverse set of emancipatory movements within the broader field of global justice. This text aims to make the concept of the imperial mode of living accessible to a wider public and contribute towards a community-oriented mode of production and living.

If you have questions regarding content, feedback on specific chapters or would like to request a speaker or arrange a workshop with us, any of the members listed below would be happy to help. Please direct your queries to ila_info@riseup.net. Further information is available at: www.aufkostenanderer.org.

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Historical overview:

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Today it feels like everybody is talking about the problems and crises of our times: the climate and resource crisis, Greece's permanent socio-political crisis or the degrading exploitative practices of the textile industry. Many are aware of the issues, yet little seems to change. Why is this? The concept of the imperial mode of living explains why, in spite of increasing injustices, no long-term alternatives have managed to succeed and a socio-ecological transformation remains out of sight.

This text introduces the concept of an imperial mode of living and explains how our current mode of production and living is putting both people and the natural world under strain. We shine a spotlight on various areas of our daily lives, including food, mobility and digitalisation. We also look at socio-ecological alternatives and approaches to establish a good life for everyone – not just a few.

The non-profit association **Common Future e.V.** from Göttingen is active in a number of projects focussing on global justice and socio-ecological business approaches. From April 2016 to May 2017, the association organised the I.L.A. Werkstatt (Imperiale Lebensweisen – Ausbeutungsstrukturen im 21. Jahrhundert/ Imperial Modes of Living – Structures of Exploitation in the 21st Century). Out of this was borne the interdisciplinary I.L.A. Kollektiv, consisting of 17 young researchers and activists. Their goal: dedicating a whole year to the scientific study of the imperial mode of living and bringing their results to a wider audience.



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