

Notes

1] Throughout the history of political economy, landed property represented a theoretical challenge: not itself a product of labour, it has no value. What role should be attached to this resource given by nature in the economic process?

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Imperial Mode of Living

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Despite increasing geopolitical and geo-economic rivalry, the further exploitation of natural resources and the use of global sinks are considered as the basis of global capitalist development and the overcoming of its various crises. Behind this stands a global consensus about the attractiveness of modern capitalist everyday practices: what we call the "imperial mode of living" (hereafter IML; cf. Brand & Wissen 2017; 2018).

The concept of the IML highlights a fact that has been emphasized by Marx and Marxist thinking: capitalism implies uneven development in both time and space as well as a constant and accelerating universalisation of a Western production model. The logic of liberal markets since the nineteenth century, and especially since World War II, has been normalised through its unconscious reproduction in everyday practices. This is a main driver of the ecological crisis.

The IML implies that people's everyday practices, including individual and societal orientations, as well as identities, rely heavily on: (i) the unlimited appropriation of resources; (ii) a disproportionate claim to global and local ecosystems and sinks; and (iii) cheap labour from elsewhere. The availability of commodities is organised through the world market, backed by military force and/or the asymmetric

relations of forces as they have been inscribed in international institutions. The concrete production conditions of the consumed commodities are usually invisible. In the global North the IML contributes to safeguarding social stability. Moreover, it provides a hegemonic orientation in many societies of the global South. In recent years, it has been partially globalised. A large group of “new consumers” (Myers & Kent 2004) has emerged in countries like China, India, and Brazil. However, the IML is not socially neutral. People with relatively high levels of education, incomes, and environmental consciousness tend to use more resources than lower classes.

In conceptualising the IML we benefit from, and build upon, various theoretical concepts in the tradition of Marx. The starting point is that the capitalist mode of production is expansive and geared towards increasing surplus value, production and consumption. This goes hand-in-hand with an extension of the capitalist (world) market and a capitalist valorisation of ever more areas of life.

Theoretically, we refer to various neo-Marxist approaches:

(a) Political ecology emphasises the unequal appropriation of nature. The ecological crisis is understood as a medium and a result of an unequal distribution of power along the lines of class, gender and ethnicity. Consequently, the key to overcoming the ecological crisis is neither the market nor technological innovation but the struggle against social power and domination. Democratising “societal relations with nature” (Görg 2011) and rejecting exclusive property rights – in support of, say, extractivist practices or privatisation of genetic resources – is not only an aim in itself but also a means of ecological sustainability. An important component of such transformation would be the overcoming of destructive patterns of production and consumption which are at the heart of the IML.

(b) Regulation theory attempts to highlight the temporary coherence between the historical development of a mode of production and distribution on one hand, and a mode of consumption on the other (the regime of accumulation), which is safeguarded by a range of institutional forms that together constitute a mode of

regulation (Jessop & Sum 2006). Aglietta argued in his seminal work that after World War II the emergence of a working-class mode of consumption, centred around standardised housing and automobile transport, became “an essential condition of capitalist accumulation” (Aglietta 1979, 154). This is an important factor for the generalisation of wage labour in Fordism (Huber, 2013 links fossil capitalism and the wage relation). It points to the social spread of the IML, which had been an upper class-phenomenon before the rise of Fordism (Brand & Wissen 2018, chapters 2 and 4).

(c) The concept of hegemony originated in the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1929–30). A hegemonic (i.e. broadly accepted and institutionally secured) mode of living is deeply rooted in the everyday practices of people and safeguarded by the state. As a consequence, domination (along class, gender, race, international and post-colonial lines) is then largely accepted by the dominated. Hegemony can imply different modes of living. However, alternatives remain at the margins and may gain strength mainly in situations of crisis. Modes of production and consumption that become hegemonic in certain regions, or countries can be generalised globally through a “capillary” process, i.e. in a broken manner and with considerable gaps in time and space. This process is associated with concrete corporate strategies and interests in capital valorisation, trade, investment, and geopolitics; with purchasing power; and with dispositions of an attractive mode of living that predominate in, and diffuse into, many societies.

(d) Feminist economics, ecofeminism and other feminist social sciences make important contributions to a broader understanding of economies and societies (Biesecker & Hofmeister 2010; Salleh 2017). Beyond the formal economy, capital investment, financial markets, and wage labour there are other structures and processes which are the preconditions for the functioning of the formal economy that is mediated by money. Predominantly, children are raised and the elderly are cared for outside the formal market economy.

(e) Practice theories are a cornerstone for the concept of IML (Jonas 2017). They argue that social practices are shared behavioural routines that are constituted by

sets of interconnected elements. The elements include: social and political institutions, socio-technical configurations such as physical infrastructures, available knowledge, and prevailing symbolic orientations and forms of power. Environmentally detrimental social practices, such as driving a car, are hard to steer intentionally and to manage or influence via consciousness-raising campaigns.

Since the financial collapse of 2008 the IML has constituted an important element of societal consensus. In the capitalist centres of the world system, the reproduction of wage-earners has been challenged by neoliberalism. However, the costs of reproduction can be reduced through enhanced access to globally-produced commodities traded in liberalised markets that exploit labour elsewhere, i.e. by increasing relative surplus value in the global North. This process occurs along structural lines of class, gender and ethnicity but it is broadly accepted, and its deepening is a crucial strategy of crisis management.

Furthermore, the IML is unevenly universalised in many countries of the Global South. There, development is defined as capitalist modernisation with a more or less selective world market integration, and this is broadly accepted by elites and urban middle classes. Some regions of the global South have adopted the IML through rapid economic growth due to industrialisation and proletarianisation, as in China, and the development of a globally oriented service economy, as in India.

Ecological crisis phenomena – like the loss of biodiversity and climate change – have been caused by the spread of industrial production and consumption patterns. These create conflicts over resources and the use of land, geopolitical tensions, and intense capitalist competition. Exclusive access to resources, guaranteed by contracts or through open violence, and the externalisation of social-ecological costs that the use of these resources entails, are the *conditio sine qua non* of the global North's mode of production and living, and constitute its imperial character.

In sum, the concept of the IML helps to understand:

- i. Why, despite the crisis of neoliberal imperial globalisation, resource- and energy-intensive everyday practices persist and continue to have severe socio-ecological consequences;
- ii. how forms of living are closely linked to the dominant mode of production and capital's valorisation strategies, politics and structures of the state, and prevailing orientations and dispositions of action;
- iii. why environmental politics is largely ineffective and why we experience a severe "crisis of crisis management". The very structure of national and international politics is deeply linked to the dominant mode of production and living;
- iv. why (neo-)imperialist strategies with respect to natural resources and sinks have recently gained importance;
- v. that in the current economic crisis, the challenge is to develop and strengthen resistance and alternatives to dominant crisis politics and to promote a fundamental socio-ecological transformation;
- vi. how countering the hegemonic IML by transforming modes of living can be a starting point but that such transformation requires the blocking of unsustainable capital and state strategies.

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Infrastructure

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As far as I know, the word *Infrastruktur* never appears in the writings of Karl Marx.

Marxists have sometimes substituted “infrastructure” for “base” in the famous “base and superstructure” couplet derived from the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: “The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis (*Basis*) on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite form of social consciousness” (Marx 1972, see Wuthnow 1993). In popular usage, infrastructure tends to connote physical systems and structures, especially those that facilitate transportation, communication, and the provision of services, but its resonance with the Marxist category of *Basis* is instructive. Just as the economic base of society is comprised of material *relationships* – wage relations, property relations, class relations – as much as it is of material objects, contemporary infrastructure studies take for granted that the “peculiar ontology” of infrastructures “lies in the fact that they are things and also the relation between things” (Larkin 2003).

Infrastructure also bears the qualities of what Marx described as constant capital: “that part of capital which is represented by the means of production, by the raw material, auxiliary material and the instruments of labour [which] does not, in the