

# **The Enduring Problem of Statism: Social War, Total Liberation and Postdevelopment in the Decolonization Industry**

Alexander Dunlap

07 November 2025

# Contents

ABSTRACT . . . . .	3
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	3
POSTDEVELOPMENT AND DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE . . . . .	6
MODERNITY, THE COLONY AND (NEO)COLONIALISM . . . . .	8
COLONIALISM IS STATISM: ADJUSTING ACADEMIC COLONIAL DISCOURSE . . . . .	10
SOCIAL WAR AND INFRASTRUCTURAL COLONIZATION: THE ART OF MAINTAINING OCCUPATION . . . . .	13
WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE POSTDEVELOPMENT? . . . . .	16
CONCLUSION: POSTDEVELOPMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY . . . . .	18
References . . . . .	20
Notes . . . . .	20

## ABSTRACT

Confronting statism within the university, this article argues that statism is colonialism. By recognizing statism as the foundational structure of colonialism, the author illuminates the immediate technologies and evolving structures of socio-ecological subjugation across various cultural, historical and political contexts. This lens locates the political roots, and reproduction, of coloniality, identifying the state as an environmental shaping infrastructure and psycho-political technology that penetrates the bodies and minds of people. Rooted in postdevelopment and anarchist thought, the article reviews definitions of imperialism, (settler-)colonialism and genocide/ecocide. The main section discusses how statism is colonialism, locating the general structures and impacts, and recognizing the ‘modernized poverty’ often hidden by (uneven) affluence. This leads to a discussion of statism(s) in relation to pluriversal politics and the struggle ahead for postdevelopment thought.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1966, in the first issue of *Black Mask* — a do-it-yourself political magazine distributed in New York City — the then anonymous author(s) declared:

A new spirit is rising. Like the streets of Watts we burn with revolution. We assault your Gods .... We sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS ... our struggle cannot be hung on walls. Let the past fall under the blows of revolt. The guerrilla, the blacks, the men [sic] of the future, we are all at your heels. Goddamn your culture, your science, your art. What purpose do they serve? Your mass-murder cannot be concealed. The industrialist, the banker, the bourgeoisie, with their unlimited pretense and vulgarity, continue to stockpile art while they slaughter humanity. Your lie has failed. (Morea and Hahne, 1966/2011: 4)

Speaking to university research, and recalling the recent article by Aram Ziai (2025: 508–09), this paragraph written by a small anarchist collective is situated at the intersection of Marxist, anti-developmental and decolonial thought. This anarchist collective advocates for the confluence of Black liberation, anti-imperial guerrillas and bringing an end to the horrors of war and capitalism in a common struggle for freedom. Unusual for the time, the magazine extends to include cultural and political critique, noting the problem of establishment science advancing statist progress and capitalism, but even more emphatically targeting objectification — ‘our struggle cannot be hung on walls’ — and the role museums play in killing cultures and lifeways — a theme increasingly popular within (de)colonial studies (See, 2015; Vergès, 2024).<sup>1</sup> The political clarity and, especially, unity through diversity that *Black Mask* called for remains profoundly lacking within academia — a space which, as Simon Springer (2016) reminds us, anarchists have historically abandoned in protest at its intellectual vanguardism and separation of means from ends.

While affirming the political trajectory outlined by *Black Mask*, this article highlights the enduring issue of statism and modernism. Echoing Wendy Brown (1995), Ida Danewid (2024:

---

<sup>1</sup> For more, see Ben Morea’s (2025) *Full Circle: A Life in Rebellion*.

3) acknowledges that ‘liberals and leftists [have] jettisoned two decades of “Marxist critiques of the state” for a defense of the state’. This has ‘impoverished political imagination which regards the state as the horizon of possibility and writes off other visions as naïve and a deluded form of utopianism’ (ibid.). While Springer (2014, 2016, 2017, 2018) has expressed similar concerns with debates within geography, Anthony Ince and Geronimo Barrera de la Torre (2024: 57) observe ‘statism remains largely uncriticized in comparison with other, mutually constitutive projects, such as colonialism, modernity, and capitalism’. The proliferation of works discussing ‘coloniality’, ‘the colonial matrix of power’, ‘colonial logics’, ‘Eurocentrism’, ‘epistemic violence’ and related ideas of decolonizing development, international relations, globalization and so on, is astonishing (see Mignolo and Escobar, 2010; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Murrey and Daley, 2023). Marxist and decolonial academic positions, explicitly or not, tend towards embracing modernism and the state by imagining the seizure of the means of material and political production – factories and the state. This belief is driven by the idea, vis-à-vis the prospects of imperial invasion by other nations, that *only* states can create the defensive and offensive capacities necessary to defend their claimed territories and people and organize justice. This tendency is exemplified by the implicit or explicit Marxist-Leninism within abolitionist (Gilmore, 2023, 2024) and decolonial geographies (Murrey and Daley, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021), which coincides with the advocacy by Robbins (2020) and Huber (2021) for ‘socialist modernism’.<sup>2</sup> ‘While Black and Third-World Marxist traditions exist’, explains Mohamed Abdou (2022: 60), ‘they equally strive towards state capture for revolutionary ends, failing to contend with the problem of “hegemony of hegemony”,<sup>3</sup> hierarchy’ and ‘a (neo)colonial/imperial product of liberal modernity as much as it strives to contest it’ (see also Anderson, 2021).

Alongside this advocacy for the state, colonialism and coloniality have emerged as popular topics (Gilmore, 2023; Hamouchene and Sandwell, 2023; Lang et al., 2024; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Murrey and Daley, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021), which has been criticized by Táiwò (2022: 26) as creating a ‘decolonization industry’ within universities. Located primarily in Euro-American universities, this decolonization industry tends towards commodifying the struggles of the ‘Global South’, tolerating colonial infrastructures in the ‘Global North’ (facilitating extractivism in the South) and, in some instances, transposing a liberal energy/environmental justice framework onto anti-colonial/autonomous struggles.<sup>4</sup> Highlighting these political disconnections and challenging these academic tendencies, this article argues that statism is colonialism. Recognizing statism as the foundational structure of colonialism illuminates the immediate technologies and evolving structures of socio-ecological subjugation employed across various cultural (e.g. onto-epistemological), historical and political contexts that people are forced to resist, negotiate or comply with, in whole or in part.

Despite emerging from the history of armed struggle, academic decolonial rhetoric tends to combine and, frequently, rebrand statism, modernism and institutional reform (e.g. decolonize the university, museums, international relations, the state, etc.). Recognizing that statism is colonialism not only locates the political roots of coloniality and its reproduction, but also — operating within the (ecological) anarchist tradition (Anonymous, 2021; Benally, 2023; Dunlap,

---

<sup>2</sup> For more on ‘socialist modernism’, see the introduction of Dunlap (2024b).

<sup>3</sup> ‘The logic of “hegemony of hegemony” ... implies the need for an authoritarian vanguard that leads, saves, and ameliorates society as a whole while contributing to Black fugitivity and fungibility’ (Abdou, 2022: 60).

<sup>4</sup> Parts of this literature are cited below, but for detailed examples criticized and/or reviewed, see Dunlap (2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023c).

2022; Perlman, 1983/2010, 1985, 2017) — understands the state as an infrastructural and environmental shaping or ‘cratoforming’ technology (Gelderloos, 2017: 138), which has significant psycho-political impacts that penetrate the bodies and minds of people. The work of Fanon (1954/2008), Nandy (1983/2014) and others (Benally, 2023; Churchill, 2003; Moses, 2008; Short, 2016) on colonialism is instructive here. The state as colonialism rejects conflating the ‘colonial time period’, or era, with colonialism. Instead, this position recognizes the diversity and morphing nature of states, centralized authorities and/or the colony model that was spread and entrenched itself through the colonial era and which continues to plunder the resources of territories for the national and global economy. The geopolitical divisions of labour, facilitated by global and interlinked states, are essential economic and political structures for facilitating (imperial) global unequal exchange.

This article advances a postdevelopment position, which — alongside anti-authoritarian and autonomous politics — attempts to recognize a total liberation struggle in both south and north of the globe (Bendix et al., 2019; Dunlap and Tornel, 2025). Total liberation, Springer (2021: 236) explains, is ‘an intersectional ethos that seeks to contest all forms of inequality and domination’. According to Pellow (2014: 18), total liberation has four pillars: ‘(1) an ethic of justice and anti-oppression inclusive of humans, nonhuman animals, and ecosystems; (2) anarchism; (3) anti-capitalism; and (4) an embrace of direct-action tactics’ (see also Springer et al., 2021). Postdevelopment, Dunlap and Tornel (2025: 239) contend, ‘strives for total liberation, resisting domination across humans, nonhumans, genders, and peoples’. The postdevelopment/total liberation position understands statism as colonialism, acknowledging the unfinished decolonial struggle this entails. Simultaneously, it creates definitional clarity in terms of what is being *de-colonized*; identifies a common oppression consuming the planet; and sharpens political debates to prevent the recuperation of anti-statist/colonial struggle into academic liberalism or Maoist-Marxist-Leninist vanguardism/centralization. Even if universities are factories manufacturing and stabilizing inequality and domination as some have argued (Chatterjee and Maira, 2014; Churchill, 2012; Giroux, 2014; Nocella et al., 2010; Veblen, 1918/1965), this article (however naively) envisions academic production as a place for creating common tools to remediate political violence, socio-ecological harm and discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

After briefly introducing postdevelopment and critiques of academic decolonial thought, the article proceeds by revisiting postdevelopment and, subsequently, reviewing definitions of modernity, imperialism and colonialism. This leads into discussing statism as colonialism, which includes outlining statism as essential to centralized power — ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ — which takes on cultural, historical and context-specific articulations. The article then shifts into briefly discussing the transformation of modernity, creating convivial societies and the importance of degrowth and autonomous/anarchist praxis, especially in the Global North. Recognizing statism as colonialism helps clarify the proliferation of political oppression, the incomplete promise of anti-colonial struggle and the path towards total liberation.

---

<sup>5</sup> Stopping and/or refusing to write for paywalled journals might be considered the first humble step towards this change.

## POSTDEVELOPMENT AND DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE

While overlap exists, notably in the works of Arturo Escobar, postdevelopment is distinct from academic decolonial thought (Dunlap, 2021a, 2022; Dunlap and Tornel, 2025). Postdevelopment fundamentally challenges development as a modality and industry emerging from colonial powers or urban elites. Escobar (1995/2012: 215) famously said, '[w]e are not looking for development alternatives but alternatives to development'. 'Planned poverty', as Illich (1969/1971: 157) originally called it, referred to degrading different knowledges, lifeways and consumption patterns that resisted industrialization and Western consumerism. Different knowledges and sciences – notably Traditional Chinese and Ayurveda medicines – are disparaged, while countries outside, and reservations and neighbourhoods within, Euro-America are regarded as, and/or made 'underdeveloped' by the standards set by industrial powers. Postdevelopment, Kothari and colleagues (2019: xvii) explain, is a 'counter-term' that 'implies a myriad of systemic critiques and ways of living'. Attentive to Indigenous struggles internal to established states, postdevelopment rejects hierarchical authority that enforces extractive development projects, ecological degradation and servitude by direct and indirect means.

In its dictionaries and readers, postdevelopment has included and drawn on various authors (Kothari et al., 2019; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Sachs, 1992). Aside from the resolute postdevelopment scholars, such as Ivan Illich, Gustavo Esteva, Arturo Escobar, we see postdevelopment thinking from Marshall Sahlin, Teodor Shanin, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Vandana Shiva, James C. Scott, James Ferguson and many more. This anti-authoritarian diversity takes on new extremes with *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (Kothari et al., 2019) which lists 85 entries covering different alternative philosophies, economic systems, socio/cultural practices and political movements. These scholars, coming from different and overlapping political tendencies (such as Marxism, anarchism, feminism and autonomy), professions, lifestyles and experiences, defy neat political categorization but largely agree on the harms of development and the necessity of autonomous self-determination (Schöneberg, 2021; Wald, 2015; Ziai, 2015, 2025). Inspiring post-extractivist thought in Latin America (Gudynas, 2017, 2021; Lang and Mokrani, 2013), postdevelopment continues to be debated (see Dunlap and Tornel, 2025; Ziai, 2015, 2025). The three defining features of postdevelopment are: (1) rejecting destructive development processes; (2) advocating for and/or celebrating autonomous lifeways and anti-authoritarian practices; and (3) creating projects working towards socio-ecological harmony (Dunlap and Tornel, 2025; Garcia-Arias et al., 2025; Kothari et al., 2019). This autonomous determination is, and can be read as, anti-authoritarian, but as Aram Ziai (2015, 2025) shows, through these diverse pluriverse perspectives, authoritarian arrangements are tolerated.

Postdevelopment, it should be acknowledged, was never satisfied with formal decolonization. As Majid Rahnema reminds us:

The 'national' leaders of various anti-colonial struggles took over the movements emerging from the grassroots; they succeeded in making them believe that development was the best answer to their demands. As such, for all the victims of colonial rule, it did appear for a while as a promising mirage: the long-awaited source of regeneration to which they had been looking for so long. But the mirage ultimately transformed into a recurring nightmare for millions. As a matter of fact, it soon appeared to them that development had been from the beginning, nothing but a

deceitful mirage. It had acted as a factor of division, of exclusion and of discrimination rather than liberation of any kind. It had mainly served to strengthen the new alliances that were going to unite the interests of the post-colonial foreign expansionists with those of the local leaders in need of them for consolidation of their own positions. (Rahnema, 1997: x)

From a postdevelopment position, development was a (neo)colonial project and the project of decolonization or anti-colonial struggle remains unfinished. The postdevelopment position agitates Táiwò (2022) and other authors who accept, and are not interested in fighting, the current trajectory of extractivism, modernism and capitalism.

Contrary to an ethos of decolonial geography (Murrey and Daley, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndlovu, 2021), the field of postdevelopment challenges the statism implied within Maoist-Marxist-Leninism and National Liberation struggles (Esteva, 2009, 2023; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). Moving beyond development, and statism, remains an enduring challenge, which seeks at the very least to avoid playing a kind of musical chairs, a re-branding of authoritarianism with historically unreflective notions of ‘decolonizing the state’, with the term ‘plurinational state’ and its institutional-scale version of ‘decolonizing the university’ (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018; Murrey and Daley, 2023). While Táiwò’s (2022: 3) definition of decolonization — ‘making a colony into a self-governing entity with its political and economic fortunes under its own direction (though not necessarily control)’ — resonates with this aspect of decolonizing the state, Táiwò vehemently rejects the way that decolonial academia ignores the argument that African nations ‘have domesticated (and not merely by mimicry) many ideas, processes, institutions and practices that are routinely attributed to colonialism, but are in fact traceable to modernity and other causes’ (ibid.). Postdevelopment remains critical of modernism — its ideas, developmental process, institutions and practices, whether philosophical or material — and the acculturation/assimilation process it demands. States, while claiming to represent and protect their people (which they do to varying degrees),<sup>6</sup> also facilitate a structure of political, social and economic conquest to participate in extractive development.

While promoting African modernity, Táiwò’s (2022) intervention is not alone in its frustration with decolonial academia. Originally in Spanish, and later translated to English, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2010, 2012, 2020) confronts how ‘the multiculturalism of Mignolo and company [key Latin American decolonial scholars] neutralizes the practices of decolonization by enthroning within the academy a limited and illusory discussion regarding modernity and decolonization’ (Cusicanqui, 2012: 104). Kiran Asher (2013: 840) identifies the production of arbitrary theoretical ‘de/postcolonial identity politics and nationalism within academia’ (see also Asher and Ramamurthy, 2020). Meanwhile, advancing Cusicanqui’s (2010, 2012) concerns, Ramón Grosfoguel (2016: 135) — a central mainstream decolonial theorist — accuses Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo of ‘epistemic extractivism’. This criticism continues in another work, when Grosfoguel (2021: xviii) claims that Quijano, ‘never cited or recognized these [Black Marxist] authors, whom he read and studied in depth’, which, Grosfoguel argues, ‘gives the wrong impression that coloniality was his original idea, concealing its origins in the Black Marxist tradition’. Overall, Grosfoguel (2021: xviii) concludes that, ironically, ‘Quijano practiced an inexcusable “epistemic extractivism” with Black Marxist intellectuals’. This continues alongside anarchist critiques of academic

---

<sup>6</sup> This leads to greater conversations about nationalism, psychological operations and population management techniques innate to statecraft.

decolonial discourse (Dunlap, 2021a, 2022), which not only homogenizes Europe and ignores militant struggles in the Global North but also bypasses non-academic production of anarchist and Indigenous anarchist theory (Anonymous, 2021; Benally, 2023; Dupuis-Déri and Pillet, 2023; Hill and Antliff, 2021; de Laforcade and Hirsch, 2020).<sup>7</sup> Táíwò's (2022: 26) intervention complements these criticisms of the 'decolonization industry', but drastically departs from the political movement and liberatory concerns voiced by postdevelopment authors.

## MODERNITY, THE COLONY AND (NEO)COLONIALISM

Modernity is, recalling Merchant (1983) and Shiva (2002), the expansive formation of mechanistic scientific knowledge, capitalism and the consolidation of state powers. Beginning in the 15th century, modernity emerges as a 'great transformation' (Polanyi, 1944/2001), which entailed numerous processes and developments. These included the proliferation of Cartesian dualism (e.g. separating mind/body, nature/society); linear perspective vision, map-making and overseas travel, trade and warfare; the enclosure of the commons/public lands into private property; organizing society around (industrial) productivity and profit accumulation; state discipline (e.g. workhouses, clinics, police); rapid urbanization (to dominate nature and prevent insurrections); and, overall, fragmentation of community, erosion of traditions, promotion of intensive individualization and social atomization (Adams, 2014; Foucault, 1995, 2007; Graham, 2011; Perelman, 2007; Romanyshyn, 1989). While there were liberatory features, among them altering patriarchal, transportation, medical and entertainment technologies, modernity, Grosfoguel (2013) contends, emerges from four interconnected and self-reinforcing genocides: (1) Jews and Muslims on the Iberian Peninsula (e.g. Al-Andalus); (2) the Indigenous Americas; (3) the African slave trade; and (4) the European witch-hunts (see also Federici, 2009, 2018; Jones, 2000; Moses, 2008). Essential to modernity, Grosfoguel (2013: 83) shows, is 'the idea of race and institutional racism as an organizing principle of the international division of labor and capitalist accumulation at a world-scale' (see also Danewid, 2024). Modernity, an enormous signifier, was organized through imperialism and colonialism.

Edward Said (1994: 9) defines imperialism as 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; "colonialism", which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory'. Roman states were originally called *imperium*, while their military settlements on conquered territory were branded *colonia* (Moses, 2008). 'Colonialism derives from the Latin word *colere*, meaning to cultivate', explains Veracini (2023: 7). 'A colony is thus often "planted," and "plantation" was once a term designating colonies overseas', while the 'Roman empire planted colonies for all sorts of reasons geopolitical, commercial, and to "pacify" subjected regions'. While the Roman Republic officially instituted the colony model and states, the ancient Greek *Polis*, or city, alongside the patriarchal 'household governance', or *oikonomia*, are the foundation by which the colony emerges (Arendt, 1958/1998; Owens, 2015: 2). The logic of household governance expands to the estate, metropolis and plantation. Guided by racist logic, the plantation model, with its division of labour and emphasis on economic production, would mobilize the Atlantic slave trade (Ferdinand, 2021). Colonialism, while being a geopolitical phenomenon, has national, local and household roots.

---

<sup>7</sup> As a theorist of Indigenous anarchy would likely stress, the definitional claims in the introduction by Dupuis-Déri and Pillet (2023) should be ignored.

Colonialism, according to Dirk Moses (2008: 22), ‘means occupation of societies on terms that robs them of their “historical line of development” and that transforms them “according to the needs and interests of the colonial rulers”’. Meanwhile, Lorenzo Veracini (2013), inspired by Patrick Wolfe (1999, 2006), makes a distinction between colonialism and settler colonialism — the former organized towards assimilation and exploitation of land and people by the dominating country, while the latter seeks to displace and/or eliminate the existing inhabitants to take their land.<sup>8</sup> This ‘logic of elimination’, according to Wolfe (2006, 2013: 258), is not strictly about physical killing but eliminating difference by absorbing people, often Indigenous, ‘within the set of settler social categories’, causing a ‘social death of Nativeness’ (see also Dunlap, 2018, 2021b). The modalities of colonialism and settler colonialism were never completely distinct, and operated side by side. Expressing this in terms of genocide, Raphael Lemkin (1944/2005: 79), famously defines genocide as having ‘two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group: the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor’.

Colonialism is genocide, ecocide and terricide — the latter indicating the extermination of knowledges and spiritualities (Grosfoguel, 2013; Habersang, 2025; Moses and Stone, 2013). The settler-colonial genocidal processes, Wolfe (1999) contends, operate in three non-deterministic phases: (1) initial confrontation (or invasion); (2) carceration period (displacement/resettlement); and (3) assimilation period that aims to integrate Indigenous populations into the colonial system. In North America, boarding schools designed to eliminate difference and instil Christian and utilitarian values (alongside beatings, torture, rape and murder) were instrumental to assimilating Indigenous populations (Woolford et al., 2014: 3). For General Richard Henry Pratt, a later superintendent of an Indian industrial school, the idea was to ‘kill the Indian in him, and save the man’ (Daggett, 2019: 183). Industrial and technical education, Cara Daggett (2019: 183) suggests, was essential for ‘training children for a life of reproductive, care, and manual labor for white households and managers, rather than training them to become managers themselves’. This industrial education, more than anything, taught people to want to become managers and mining engineers and to chase the (American) dream of development. This assimilation phase, Dunlap (2018) shows, becomes so intense that colonial subjects wilfully, or with manageable ‘political friction’, begin to self-manage their exploitation, their social and collective ecological destruction.

The boarding schools, which extended beyond the North American context, acted to hold the children hostage while implementing settler-colonial takeover, which became an economical way (compared to military mobilization) to facilitate extermination (Daggett, 2019; Woolford et al., 2014). ‘[I]f you are to force the enemy, by making war on him, to do your bidding’, explains the influential German military theorist von Clausewitz (1834/2007: 15), ‘you must either make him literally defenceless or at least put him in a position that makes this danger probable. It follows, then, that to overcome the enemy, or disarm him — call it what you will — must always be the aim of warfare’. This internalization and reproduction of colonial systems, or ‘the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor’, indicates subtler forms of social warfare. Asserting that ‘[p]olitics is a continuation of war by other means’, Foucault (1995, 2003: 15) recognized social war in intra-European colonization and the disciplining and regulating (e.g. biopower) of domestic populations. With great affinity for ‘soft’ or ‘indirect’ counterinsurgency

---

<sup>8</sup> The 15th and 16th century extermination versus assimilation debates came to a head with Gines Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas advocating these positions within the Catholic Church (Grosfoguel, 2013).

methods (Dunlap, 2014, 2020a), the term social war originates from the Roman Social War in which diplomacy and inclusionary control — providing rights and citizenship — became, like the boarding and technical schools, a more economical way to advance political control and internalize self-management (Gelderloos, 2017; Kass, 2023; Trocci, 2011). Conducting psychological warfare, internalizing myths (Ince and Barrera de la Torre, 2024), fragmenting social relationships and cultivating ambitions became a more effective way to make war, control populations and, in the words of von Clausewitz (1834/2007: 15), make subjects ‘do your bidding’.

The techniques of social warfare emerge everywhere. People’s ‘acceptance of subordination’, explains Said (1994: 11), ‘whether through a positive sense of common interest with the parent state, or through inability to conceive of any alternative ... made empire durable’. Eliminating existing but also imagined alternatives — instilling the idea that ‘there is no alternative’ — remains essential to the colonial genocidal process and imperial supremacy and is, consequently, a reoccurring concern of postdevelopment. As happened through workhouses, concentration camps, boarding and technical schools (Daggett, 2019; Woolford et al., 2014), the ‘imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor’ progressively erodes the imagination and makes *unseeing* like a state, or engineer and modernist planner, a new challenge for (total) liberation. This internalization, discussed by Fanon (1954/2008), Nandy (1983/2014) and others, is about defeating people, breaking their spirits — which extends to community, knowledge and spirituality (e.g. epistemicide, terracide) — and, most of all, crafting legitimacy and self-identification with the political, material and spiritual occupation (Dunlap, 2021b). In military jargon, this is called ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of target populations (Dunlap, 2020a), whether in the context of military occupation, rural development or the inner city (Moe and Müller, 2017; Williams et al., 2013). Considering the intensity of global colonial waves since 1492 (Neocleous, 2014; Veracini, 2023), as well as intra-European colonization (Foucault, 2003; Grosfoguel, 2013; Turner, 2018), the inside and outside become blurred for defeated and absorbed populations — some people absorbed more recently than others into colonial structures explicitly or implicitly referred to as the state.

## **COLONIALISM IS STATISM: ADJUSTING ACADEMIC COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

The state apparatus, and statism, has progressively spread throughout the world. The ‘very existence of the state — and it does not matter a bit whether it is fascist, liberal democratic, or Marxist in orientation’, explains Ward Churchill (2003: 264), ‘is absolutely contingent upon usurpation of the material and political rights of every indigenous nation within its boundaries’. Autocratic, explicitly totalitarian and fascist regimes, we must observe, target everyone arbitrarily, but especially any political opposition or action (Arendt, 1951/1962; Césaire, 1955/2001). The ‘colony’, Paul Virilio (1983/2008: 166) famously explains, ‘has always been the model of the political State, which began in the city, spread to the nation, across the communes, and reached the stage of the French and English colonial empires’ (see also Dunlap, 2014). The state, and its political economy, is not just a material manifestation imposed by deception, coercion or persuasion, but a psycho-political apparatus that absorbs people, wiping memories and imagination through political violence, imprisonment, bureaucracy and captivating technologies/entertainment. The state ‘usurped the collective imagination’, explains Danewid (2024: 5), ‘where resis-

tance — even when its immediate target is the state — typically articulates itself as a project of redeeming, reforming, and perfecting it'. The extractive dynamics of classical colonial relations, now organized by a transnational capitalist class (Sklair, 1997), continue to operate through the state system (Hickel et al., 2022). While people (and authors) condemn colonialism, statism is largely ignored or even celebrated against the exterminating imposition of settler colonialism in Palestine, Ukraine, Tigray and Sudan.

The state is 'a centralized, hierarchical system of political organization based on coercion and alienation', to quote Gelderloos (2017: 14), depriving 'each person's ability to decide over their own lives', organizing 'the suppression of self-organization so that power could be centralized, delegated, and institutionalized' (see also Bakunin, 1873/1990). Ince and Barrera de la Torre (2024) make a distinction between the state and statism to weave complexity and commonality. They define statism as 'separate from — indeed, prior to — the state as a material "thing"', which, at the same time, 'underpins the way states establish and maintain their centrality in the ordering of society and the cosmos through the repetition and deepening of certain forms, discourses, symbols, and rationalities associated with state rule' (ibid.: 148–49). Statism indicates the outcome or effect arising from 'the combined logics of vertical, geographically bounded, and coercive order that are repeated over time and across space to recreate aggregated effects (such as identifiable institutions) that we commonly call the "state"' (ibid.: 147). Statist logics, they continue, 'may coalesce or be articulated in diverse ways but they create a repertoire that states draw on, to establish their sovereign authority over a given territory' (ibid.: 148; see also Bakunin, 1873/1990). Statism, moreover, remains the implicit acceptance, or belief, that allows 'states to take their central position in our imaginations, and in so doing, violently positions differentially situated groups in authoritarian power relations, institutionalizing hierarchical patterns of relating both within and beyond the space of the state itself' (Ince and Barrera de la Torre, 2024: 5). In challenging these myths of the state, Ince and Barrera de la Torre spend their entire book 'de-ontologizing the state' or dethroning the state as the most advanced form of human organization/governance (ibid.: 4, 24, 86).

For Tom Nomad (2017: 19), the state operates 'as a logistics of force trying to operate as totally and consistently as possible without generating any contingencies'. The state, while creating a culture and mythology, as Ince and Barrera de la Torre (2024) stress, also establishes self-legitimizing institutions — placing itself above the law in the reason of state or declaring states of emergencies (Agamben, 2005; Foucault, 2007). Ideas of democracy and inclusion, predicated on exclusion and discrimination, remain essential (Andreucci and Zografos, 2022; Gelderloos, 2017, 2022). The state operates as a logistical container that, in the words of Bakunin (1873/1990: 12), is designed 'to organize the most intensive exploitation of the people's labor for the benefit of capital concentrated in a very small number of hands'. There is, however, a psycho-political, or even existential aspect, related to religious and political ideology, that organizes this trajectory of modernity, development and progress (Daggett, 2019; Gordon, 2023). This is why (mindful of Wolfe, 2006: 388), statism is the political 'structure' that is introduced through colonial invasion, attaching itself to pre-existing hierarchical arrangements, establishing a legitimate power structure and political economy of extractivism. The state, in other words, is a psycho-political and logistical apparatus that was exported overseas to fuse, corrupt, destroy and reorganize different polities, nations and civilizations through colonialism.

The tradition of postdevelopment, more often implicitly, recognizes colonialism and, later, development as the origin, spread and intensification of statism by various means. Statism is a

political technology that emerges from and within ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia and the Chinese, Roman and Zapotec empires (Dunlap, 2022; el-Ojeili and Taylor, 2020; Frank and Gills, 1992; Gelderloos, 2017; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021; Scott, 2017). This is not a condemnation of all pre-colonial civilizations, but a recognition that variegated and uneven statisms/colonialisms emerge from features within imperial civilization that comprise and solidify into statecraft. Churchill (2003) reminds us that, in order for a colonial power to emerge in the first place – carrying out overseas exploration, trade, warfare and occupation – state powers had to amass power by subjugating peoples/lands, installing legitimate rule, organizing, disciplining and, overall, colonizing their proclaimed ‘homelands’. ‘Just as “undesirable” classes were domesticated and pacified in the metropole’, suggests Turner (2018), referring to Britain:

[so] the logic of civilisational work became central to imperial warfare – such as in Northern Ireland, Malaysia, and Kenya, where counterinsurgency violence (including sanctions, rape, torture, detention and mass eviction) were paralleled with pacification through social and housing programs and the intensification of prior strategies such as ‘domesticating’ African women through ‘Marriage Schools’. (ibid.: 777; also see Owens, 2015).

In the same vein as Turner (2018), the military historian John Grenier (2005) also informs us that British counterinsurgency campaigns overseas, but particular in North America, built from the strategies, tactics and military experience in Scotland, Ireland, Flanders and Central Europe. Contrary to simplistic North/South dichotomies, for monarchies, empires and states to emerge they first had to erect borders, establish territories and discipline a population into accepting their rule, often alongside widespread deforestation and extractivism (Gelderloos, 2017; Scott, 2017; Turner, 2018). Statist, imperial and colonial practices, such as ‘the foundation of scientific racism’ as Grosfoguel (2013: 85) reminds us, were already being carried out within Europe before the invasion of the Americas. Statecraft, and politico-religious extermination, were happening within Europe (Gelderloos, 2017; Grosfoguel, 2013; Turner, 2018); they would be exported to colonies and then, as Arendt (1951/1962), Césaire (1955/2001), Graham (2011), Grosfoguel (2013) and Hönke and Müller (2016) show, would ‘boomerang’ back from the colonies to Euro-American centres, all the while multiplying and continuously cross-pollinating technologies of political, spatial, architectural and psychological control.

Although some authors might disregard it (Alkhalili et al., 2023), European state making was brutal, requiring genocidal and ecocidal processes which varied in duration and intensity, that paved the way for, and co-developed with, colonialism. Those processes included land enclosure (Perelman, 2007), witch-hunts (Federici, 2009, 2018; Jones, 2000; Shiva, 2002),<sup>9</sup> integrating mechanization (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 2014; Sale, 1995) and the social engineering of a proletariat and citizenship (Kass, 2023; Scott, 1998; Thompson, 1963/1991; Vidalou, 2017/2023). Referring to the witch-hunts, Silvia Federici (2018: 31–32) reminds us:

On the flimsiest evidence, generally nothing more than a denunciation, thousands [of women] were arrested, stripped naked, completely shaved, and then pricked with long needles in every part of their bodies in search of the ‘Devil’s mark’, often in the presence of men, from the executioner to local notables and priest. And this was by

---

<sup>9</sup> This included wolves, wild cats, men and non-binary people within the lower classes.

no means the end of their torments. The most sadistic tortures ever invented were inflicted on the body of the woman accused, which provided an ideal laboratory for the development of a science of pain and torture.

Grosfoguel (2013) contends that the witch-hunts were the fourth genocide, and foundational to the creation of ‘institutions of scientific violence’<sup>10</sup> that Walter Rodney (1972/2009: 260) recognized as instrumental in producing (neo)colonialism. The witch-hunts, moreover, set the stage for modern science, intensified colonialism and geopolitical competition. Such exterminating practices continue today in Palestine, and elsewhere, under a high-modernist Israeli regime deploying drones, automated machine-gun sentinels and airstrikes, targeting people (of all genders, ages, sexual orientations, nationalities), trees, water, animals and urban infrastructure indiscriminately (Graham, 2011; Molavi, 2024; Short, 2016). State structures, moreover, have normalized imperial warfare and (neo)colonialism by various means. ‘[T]he hegemony of statism has generated an estimated fifty million corpses from wars alone over the past half-century’, according to Churchill (2003: 22), noting that including the economic extractivism and low-intensity warfare ‘inherent in the world system as it is now constituted would increase the body count at least twenty times over’. Imperial warfare, however, cannot be sustained without domestic pacification and the complicity that is invoked and imbued by statism.

## **SOCIAL WAR AND INFRASTRUCTURAL COLONIZATION: THE ART OF MAINTAINING OCCUPATION**

As mentioned above, Foucault (1995, 2002, 2003, 2007) offers details on European state building through the construction of clinics, prisons and police forces, locating techniques for establishing ‘internal peace and order’ by applying ‘the mechanism of the perfect army, of the disciplined mass, of the docile, useful troop’ to the whole of society (Foucault, 1995: 168). The regimentation would be applied in colonial campaigns (Daggett, 2019; Wolfe, 2006; Woolford et al., 2014), later implementing social warfare to maintain statist organizational forms: planning imperatives, bureaucracies, coercive techniques, diplomatic concessions, ethnic, class and (non-)gendered discrimination (Gelderloos, 2017; Kass, 2023; Scott, 1998, 2017; Vidalou, 2017/2023). Seeing statism as colonialism challenges the trajectory of national and technological development along with people’s self-identification with modernity, the state and its institutions which, as Churchill (2003) suggests, produces immense horrors through sanctions, warfare and market competition.

Ongoing (neo)colonialism continues to institute strategies of extermination, internment and assimilation against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, teaching all people to embrace hierarchical, racist and ecologically devastating political (infra)structures. The term ‘infrastructural colonization’ seeks to indicate the colonial relationship embedded in modernist infrastructures, from regional centre–periphery dynamics between rural and urban areas to the devastation of soils, waterways, flora, fauna and, to a lesser but nevertheless significant degree, humans (see Dunlap, 2020b, 2023a, 2023b; Dunlap and Correa-Arce, 2022). Under infrastructural colonization,

---

<sup>10</sup> Originally referring to military academies, these institutions train in subversion, torture and espionage – the science of subduing and ‘neutralizing’ people.

the scorched earth (exterminating) techniques applied under colonialism are employed as a matter of routine against habitats to build factories, refineries, data centres and spread the tentacles of roads, pipelines and high-voltage power lines. Modernist infrastructure is dominating the planet (Adams, 2014), facilitating statist development through brutal coercion, if not genocidal means (Crook and Short, 2022; Dunlap, 2021b; Goyes et al., 2021). The production of ‘infrastructural coloniality’ then emerges as wider (postdevelopmental) political concern.

Whether people view the state and its institutions as their own – an expression of their ‘will’ and ‘democratic participation’ – or as an inherited (civil–military) occupation has significant ontological/political consequences. This self-identification, or ‘need’, extends to modernist infrastructures. The physical and psychological inundation of urban environments risks producing infrastructural coloniality. The term expresses the psycho-social capture and material dependence on modernist infrastructure in our (post)developmental proposals. Infrastructural coloniality expresses an ‘infrastructural carelessness (or urban bias), privileging the normalized coercive, colonial land and capitalist relations (past and present) in territories where humans and non-humans continued to be plundered for (techno-industrial) development’ (Dunlap, 2023a: 913). Modernist infrastructures, it is true, bring piped water and light at night, and enable flush toilets and jobs, but they also bring extractivism, ‘forever chemicals’ and unimaginable life-altering pollutions (Liboiron, 2021; Marya and Patel, 2021). Infrastructures organize a type of life – and sustain that life – but are also built on death, dependency and servitude, and create the conditions for socio-ecological catastrophe. While not all that different from the relationship expressed through ideas of biopolitics/necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003, 2019), postdevelopment seeks to subvert this trajectory of social/ecological/climatic catastrophe, which manifests the failures of modernity – its perspective, relationship, planning and so on – and the engineering of dependency and ‘needs’.

Statism is the political economy, institutionalized patriarchy, classism and Othering that facilitates ‘progress’, ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ (Danewid, 2024). Thus, (neo)colonialism, with ‘neo’ deliberately in parenthesis (Dunlap and Arce-Correa, 2022), recognizes the organizational, techno-scientific, demographic and developmental changes, but also the ideological, political and infrastructural continuity that evolves from ‘classical’ colonial rule. This recognition of political, material and spiritual occupation can also extend to everyone – settler colonists included – *if they recognize* the state and its political technologies (e.g. sexism, racism, ableism, and other discriminations) with hostility.<sup>11</sup> Religious, ethnic, political and material borders are established to create inside/outside divisions – the barbarian, pagan, Moors, Infidel, Native, anarchist, fascist, communist and terrorist – but the state, and empire, seeks to invade everywhere, constructing enemies internal and external to justify extractive rule and state(s) of exception (Agamben, 2005; Arendt, 1951/1962). Statism remains a political occupation, both internally, as the monarchy, nation and state, and externally, as imperialism, colonialism and development. These imperial operations are justified, or branded, as bringing civility, democracy, ‘the good life’ and, now, ‘sustainability’ to all – which requires local and foreign collaborators and intermediaries to introduce, facilitate and allow statism to develop, mutate and consolidate. Reflecting on settler colonialism in North America/Turtle Island, the conservative military historian, Max Boot (2013: 139) reminds us: ‘Thus in every Indian war, the whites were able to find numerous willing collaborators – ether individual Indians willing to serve as scouts and soldiers for pay or entire

---

<sup>11</sup> Anarchist fighters from different generations, such as Ben Morea (2025), Klee Benally (2023) and Areion (2024), argue for the importance of spirituality, and animist/Indigenous spiritualities, in autonomous struggle.

tribes or factions eager to gain an advantage over traditional rivals' (see also Gelderloos, 2017). This issue of collaboration, of course, operates at every scale of the colonial/statist project, which further hints at the challenges and complications of anti-colonial struggle.

Internal colonization recognizes centre–periphery dynamics, extractivism, toxification, segregation and ghettoization organized unequally within states (Casanova, 1965; Churchill, 2003; Grosfoguel, 2021). While it acknowledges the proximity of colonial relations, structural violence and extraction, it remains a legalistic and nation state-centric approach by demarcating artificial boundaries organized by state powers, implemented over territories and people adhering — by force, persuasion or indifference — to state rule. Russell Means (1983) contends that sacrifice zones are central to internal colonialism and, more recently, Carlos Tornel (2024) has argued that the inverse of sacrifice zones are special economic zones (SEZs). While this logic of 'your wealth is our poverty' (Galeano, 1973/1997: 2; see also Kropotkin, 1892/2015)<sup>12</sup> as applied to geographic zones is certainly correct, extractive zones are radically proliferating at various intensities and being normalized into daily life (Chagnon et al., 2022; Dunlap et al., 2024), leaving a large hegemonic space between sacrifice zones and SEZs unaddressed. The extremities of colonialism, or internal colonialism, conceal its normalized harms or lower-intensity operations in the 'centre'. The structural violence, collective and individual harm of various infrastructures, institutional disciplinary processes and resulting 'civilized' practices of the centre, which are dependent on extreme colonial exploitation of 'peripheries', deserve greater popular attention. High-modernity combines extreme wealth, consumerism and tourism with environmental toxification, racism and poverty.

There is an entire global hierarchical statist/colonial system that operates through states locally. Environmental and climate justice literatures integrating 'green' or 'climate' colonial discourses (Hamouchene and Sandwell, 2023; Lang et al., 2024; Sultana, 2022), recognize global inequality, unequal exchange and geopolitical racism, but ignore the operations, standards, wealth, harm and lifeways produced in the 'Global North'. The postdevelopment school distinguishes itself by recognizing the impact of statism/colonialism on people irrespective of geographical and cultural location. Illich's (1978: 11) take on 'modernized poverty' and 'addiction to paralyzing affluence' acknowledges hegemonic — often unquestioned — harms of material wealth, which inundate the global metropolises and generate widespread existential discontent, rampant consumerism, dependency on markets, terminal ailments and ecological toxification (Alexander, 2008; Lane, 2000; Marya and Patel, 2021). This resonates with Peter Kropotkin (1920: 1025) who, foreshadowing postdevelopment almost 50 years early, wrote: 'Poverty, the existence of the poor, was the first cause of riches'. In addition to the recognizable coercion of police violence, racial, (non-)gender and sexual discriminations (Danewid, 2024), the insidious harms of 'wealth' and the structure of colonial extraction are embedded, and underwritten, in the globalized state system.

This capitalist power (facilitated by statism) is one of the reasons why Leslie Sklair (1997: 531) declares that 'shopping is the most successful social movement, product advertising in its many forms the most successful message, consumerism the most successful ideology of all time'. The culture industries and consumerism were essential to 'soft' US imperial and Cold War strategies designed to contaminate the values of opponents (Berman, 1983; Cullathers, 2006, 2010/

---

<sup>12</sup> The full quotation reads: 'Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others — the empires and their native overseers' (Galeano, 1973/1997: 2). Some 80 years earlier, speaking at a regional level, Kropotkin (1892/2015: 24) said: 'The landlord owes his riches to the poverty of the peasants, and the wealth of the capitalist comes from the same source'.

2013; Herman and Chomsky, 1989/2010; Owens, 2015; Said, 1994; Saunders, 2013). Capitalist social engineering, generating overdevelopment and modernized poverty, are essential features in consolidating (global) capitalist statism. In this light, it would be accurate to conceptualize foreign direct investment – a staple of market imperialism – as the institutionalization of settler colonialism (within ‘independent nations’), which spreads, settles, consolidates and mutates capitalist ideologies and the psychological operations they entail (Alexander, 2008; Bernays, 1928/2005; MacLeod, 2019; Saunders, 2013; Virilio, 1984/2009). Paul Virilio (1979/1990: 35) compares the process of statecraft to ‘the metamorphoses of the hunter: from direct confrontation of the wild animal; to progressive control over the movements of certain species; then, with the help of the dog, to guarding semi-wild flocks; and, finally, to reproduction, breeding’. Said (1994: 11) reminds us that developing ‘a positive sense of common interest with the parent state’, which applies ‘at home’ as well as ‘abroad’, is essential. Infrastructure and consumer capitalism are vital to statist domestication. The ‘outside’ of internal colonization normalizes and standardizes the oppression, inequality and statism of the ‘inside’, which still cultivates an ambition and desire for high-modernism.

Recognizing statism as colonialism targets the developmental roots of civilized and modernist domination. ‘[T]he exact same logics of order that the imperial state uses to colonise other lands becomes the fundamental logic of a “liberatory” decolonial state’, explain Ince and Barrera de la Torre (2024: 114); ‘self-determination struggles of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations have time and again reinstated the universal, abstract place of enunciation to decide over the population and resources, while expanding infrastructures of extractive capitalism’ (ibid.; see also Machado and Zibechi, 2017). Statism as colonialism restores a linguistic meaning to the term by indicating de-colonying/colonizing and affirms the common global problem of social/ecological/climatic catastrophe that empires and states inevitably engender. In contrast to Táiwò (2022), I argue that relegating the living world to ‘resources’, promoting bureaucracy, extreme divisions of labour, extractivism and social/ecological/climatic catastrophe are all issues that must be confronted. Understanding colonialism/decolonization in this way aims to prevent the production of statism within ideas/practices of ‘decolonizing the state’, ‘plurinational state’ and ‘decolonizing development’. This interpretation remains wedded to autonomous and anti-authoritarian values (Springer et al., 2021), seeking to seed total liberation against literal and metaphorical leviathans. While many reasons emerge to cling to statist and modernist hegemony, understanding statism as colonialism unifies a common thread across different societies, while recognizing the various intensities of socio/political/psychological occupations and infrastructures that maintain state and empire. Anti-statism, simply put, allows space for the pluriverse to grow.

## WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE POSTDEVELOPMENT?

The postdevelopment struggle has changed little since the 1970s (Matthews, 2010, 2017). Ziai agrees, quoting extensively from Matthews:

Rather than insisting that those who desire development ought to decolonise their minds, perhaps our attention ought rather to be focused on *other ways of loosening the association between dignity and the lifestyle of those in the industrialised West*. As long as the powerful live in ‘European-style’ houses with flushing toilets, it ought to be regarded as utterly unsurprising that the disempowered might desire such houses

and forms of sanitation. Instead of focusing on getting those in the South to de-colonise their minds so that they reject development, we might push those in the North to recognise the catastrophic environmental implications of continued economic growth in the North and the need for redress and redistribution to address global inequality. (Matthews, 2017: 2659, quoted in Ziai, 2025: 510, emphasis added)

Statism as colonialism contributes to this approach, not only recognizing the brutality that has led to modernist development — and the wealth and power concentrated unevenly in Euro-America — but also that the ‘Global North’ is an essential point of struggle. Statism is the target, and Euro-American centres or metropolises are areas of consolidated statism and extractivism that should be ‘rolled-back’ and transformed. This makes degrowth (Escobar, 2015; Hickel, 2020; Trainer, 2024), but even more emphatically the already existing anarchist and autonomous practices — sabotage, squatting, permaculture and their combination within land reclamation projects, for example, ZADs (*zones à defender*) (Dunlap, 2020b, 2023a, 2024a, 2024b) — all the more significant.

Flush toilets are an environmental catastrophe and enabler of capitalist urbanization (Dunlap, 2017), which necessitates transforming urban and rural planning, policy and action (Trainer, 2024). The same goes for centralized electricity production. To ameliorate this, the distance between consumption and production should be reduced (Andreucci et al., 2025; Brennan, 2023; López-González, 2025; Post et al., 2025), and a range of context-appropriate alternatives should be adopted (Tornel and Dunlap, 2025). Modern technologies are useful and will be here for generations; they should be salvaged and improved. There remains, however, a desperate need for what Illich (1973) described decades ago as ‘tools for conviviality’ to begin mending bonds of respect and care for the water, soil, air and existences that provide us with life and health. Tools for conviviality, according to Illich, requires any technology, infrastructure or developmental process to be in balance between people and their collectivities, which extends to their habitats/ecosystems (see also Sale, 1985/2000; Trainer, 2024). ‘We must come to admit that only within limits can machines take the place of slaves; beyond these limits they lead to a new kind of serfdom’ (Illich, 1973: xii). Convivial development cannot exceed those limits.

Since the 1970s, there have been steady qualitative declines in water (Emoto, 2005), soil (Hokkanen, 2024), food (Shiva, 2013) and global health (Marya and Patel, 2021). The so-called Global North’s *Stages of Economic Growth* (Rostow, 1960) and Chang’s (2003) ‘developmental ladder’ (among others in this genre) have not only led to an addiction to modernist technologies (Alexander, 2008; Glendinning, 1994; Harvey and Knox, 2012), but also to discontent and harms — global increases in suicide rates; alcohol and drug abuse; cancer and pollution-related deaths (Lane, 2000; Marya and Patel, 2021). This also entails social/ecological/climatic catastrophe (Hickel, 2020; Ince and Barrera de la Torre, 2024). The positive development potential of modernity has, in economic terms, reached a point of diminishing returns. The claims of ‘green growth’ and eco-modernism, after critical scrutiny, are unsurprisingly found to be false (see Hickel and Kallis, 2020; Tilsted et al., 2021; Vadén et al., 2020). Despite the marvel of high-rise buildings, bridges, vaccinations, highways and modernist infrastructure, the socio-ecological violence of modernity cannot be ignored just because statism and multicultural (neo)colonialism generate comfort and have rendered alternatives ‘uncompetitive’. From loosely programmatic ideas of Libertarian municipalism (Andreucci et al., 2025; Bookchin, 1991), bioregionalism (Sale, 1985/2000) and ‘The Simpler Way’ (Trainer, 2024), the task of postdevelopment, as Gelderloos (2022) and

Danewid (2024) also affirm, is to begin imagining alternatives — expanding into a pluriverse of alternatives.

The pluriverse, however, risks serving as a conceptual vessel for rebranding statism. The pluriverse emerges from the armed poetics and, later, social struggle of the Zapatistas (Kothari et al., 2019). This is why Gustavo Esteva (2023: 96), an advisor to the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), describes the pluriverse as ‘radical pluralism’ that represents a political horizon beyond the nation state, reformulating the meaning of democratic struggles and recovering autonomous definitions of the good life that emerge from autonomous centres of knowledge production. Even governments that openly opposed the dominant paradigms in the 2000s, such as those of Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, still adopted these catechisms and heretically repressed the grassroots movements that challenged them (see also Machado and Zibechi, 2017).

The pluriverse should not risk creating an entry point for authoritarianism and divorcing postdevelopment from its anti-modernist/developmentalist and statist tensions. Otherwise well-intentioned academic appropriation of the pluriverse is in danger of limiting and erasing the autonomous and anti-authoritarian struggle behind it (Dunlap and Tornel, 2025; Garcia-Arias et al., 2025). Identifying co-existence, maintaining critical (or autonomous) spaces and opening dialogue are central to struggle, as per Ziai’s (2025: 518) reference to Rojava’s Democratic Confederalism that fights patriarchal communities ‘through dialogue and example’. This, however, does not change the fact that anti-authoritarian practices *must be made, purposely constructed and defended*. This will be done through (pluri)diverse ecosystems of struggle, together with clear hostilities aimed at the body of the capitalist hydra (e.g. the state, divisions of labour) and its many heads (e.g. extractivism, patriarchy, racism, capitalist normativity) as identified by the Zapatistas (EZLN, 2016). Otherwise, the pluriverse is simply fulfilling the old promise of pluralism by advocating multicultural statism/capitalism. In other words, the pluriverse without solidarity is just pluralism — resigning an ecosystem of struggle to a statist framework. Global capitalism — which causes great psycho/social harm(s) even amongst its beneficiaries (see Alexander, 2008; Lane, 2000; Marya and Patel, 2021) — must be challenged everywhere, and especially in the Global North. The task of postdevelopment, echoing Matthews (2017) and Ziai (2025), is to inspire, popularize and begin imagining, degrowing, retrofitting and developing a conviviality to reduce the harms and traps of statism and its machinations.

## **CONCLUSION: POSTDEVELOPMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY**

Celebrating postdevelopment and debating decolonization, this article argues for the relevance of statism. Recognizing that statism is colonialism advances imminent conflict with everyday political structures. This entails challenging modernism, national and institutional identification by inhabitants, while at the same time illuminating the immediate technologies and evolving structures of socio-ecological subjugation that spread across various cultural (e.g. onto-epistemological), historical and political contexts. This approach seeks to sharpen political clarity and challenge (identity) authoritarianism and Maoist-Marxist-Leninism within the decolonization industry, but most of all to locate a common challenge to conceptualize political struggle rooted in total liberation (that is anti-authoritarianism, multi-species, anti-capitalist and anti-state). Decolonial academic scholarship risks rebranding (statist) liberal pluralism.

Statism, and its colonial expansions and multiplications, is recognized, following Bakunin (1873/1990), Foucault (1995, 2007), Gelderloos (2017) and Perlman (1983/2010, 1985), as an environmental shaping infrastructure that operates as a psycho-political technology which penetrates the bodies and minds of people. The concept of infrastructural colonization acknowledges the long-term political, psychological and ecological impacts that unite (multi-species) relations of domination enacted by centralized authorities across time periods. This leads to the conclusion that statism is an accurate signifier, or object of study, exemplifying the outgrowth of the colony model, which identifies the oppressive, discriminatory and extractive political structures that sustain human and non-human conquest. This article shows that statism is colonialism and, drawing on anti-civilization theory (Dunlap, 2022; el-Ojeili and Taylor, 2020), acknowledges it as an outgrowth of imperial civilizations.

Understanding statism as colonialism recognizes the unfinished emancipatory struggle of total liberation. This article seeks to advance total liberation (Pellow, 2014; Springer et al., 2021), simultaneously creating definitional clarity in terms of what is being decolonized; identifying a common oppression consuming the planet; and sharpening political debates to prevent the recuperation of anti-statist/colonial struggle within the decolonization industry and beyond. Understanding statism as colonialism is a postdevelopment position, which is not only anti-developmental (and statist), but equally concerned with creating alternatives to statism towards the unfinished, and likely never-ending, struggle for total liberation. This does not imply a romantic ‘return to the past’, but rather identifying the ancient problem of statism/colonialism and, from there, acknowledging existing practices and beginning to imagine, conceptualize and create futures that can break down the colony model and all it entails. Identifying affinity groups, federations and syndicates as important anti-authoritarian organizational technologies, Peter Gelderloos (2024: 23–24) contends that these organizational initiatives, responding to particular territorial needs, should always find a ‘place within an ecosystem of other organizations and initiatives rather than trying to agglomerate them all inside its [one organizational] structure’. While Gelderloos (2013, 2022, 2024) outlines important technologies of organization and successful struggles (that can scale out and not up), the anarchist and postdevelopment position seeks not only to stop the spread of oppressive political technologies, but to work towards a total liberation that can be realized.

The problems of statism and its myriad discriminations (classism, racism, sexism, ableism, etc.) are clear, but in the words of Idris Robinson (2020), ‘how it might should be done’ remains a challenge. This article, echoing Gelderloos (2017, 2022), Ince and Barrera de la Torre (2024) and Illich (1978), contends that to recognize the pervasiveness of statism and to begin imagining beyond it remain essential first steps, to be followed by establishing an anti-statist praxis that develops complicities and enacts solidarities to cultivate pluriversal struggle. This is juxtaposed to the common practice of tokenizing peoples and struggles, advocating instead that people locate their common struggles with others in shared socio-ecological concerns. This entails affirming Indigenous sovereignty, identifying and rejecting the social war – or psycho-social technologies – designed to break social bonds from the inside out, or from the top down, or the bottom up. Churchill (2003: 22) advocates ‘In favor of a devolution of state structures’, arguing that ‘something resembling the interactive clusters of federations of “mininationalism” which were the norm before the advent of European hegemony, restoring human scale and bioregional sensibility to the affairs of people, can only be seen as a positive trajectory’. Churchill (ibid.: 22, 275–300) called this path an ‘indigenist alternative’ that advanced pan-Indigenous politics and ecology,

which reclaimed land, advanced ideas of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy (Haudenosaunee) and, by proxy, retained affinity with ‘anarchism’, which Churchill (*ibid.*: 22) recognized ‘might well prove a more apt descriptor’. All political issues intersect with the state, with which people still self-identify, recognizing it as their own to expand and/or reform; meanwhile, others are attempting to break the cycle, acknowledging the state system as a psycho-political and infrastructural occupation in need of radical and immediate transformation.

## **References**

Currently the references can only be found listed in the original, linked above.

## **Notes**

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Alexander Dunlap

The Enduring Problem of Statism: Social War, Total Liberation and Postdevelopment in the  
Decolonization Industry

07 November 2025

Retrieved on 20 June 2026 from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/dech.70032>  
The reference list has not been reproduced here, but can be found in the linked original.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**