The state is colonialism

Debating infrastructural colonization and the roots of socioecological catastrophe

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liberatory struggles. Quite the opposite, it is to locate patterns, generate knowledge, connect, strengthen and find common ground from which to expand liberatory struggles.

2. Identifying the colony

The infrastructural colonization approach critically assessing the relationships, infrastructures, and the institutions imposed on territories. 'Colonization' extends beyond settler colonial and national liberation struggles. Work on infrastructural colonization provides an opportunity to understand how habitats are colonized on the ground, locating the common, systemic and accumulating roots of socioecological catastrophe that are colonial and civilizational at their core (Dunlap, 2022). The concept indicates the physical material expression through which coloniality persists, which has deep, and frequently ignored, roots in statism. Continuities between modernist infrastructure, (neo)colonialism and statist domination deserve recognition, solidarity and collective struggle. The line between 'engaging' and 'collaborating' with colonial institutions is blurred and persists with how people identify colonial values, infrastructures and relationships. The concept of infrastructural colonization seeks to create material and political clarity regarding the extent of the present socioecological crisis, its expression through statism and how people reproduce it.

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inhibits greater socioecological detail, not only on the deleterious impact of infrastructures but the political technologies of colonial occupation and statism. This rejection of statism, however, has generated tensions between national liberation movements and anti-authoritarians (Anderson, 2021; Bonanno, 1976, 1995; Esteva, 2023; Gordon & Grietzer, 2013; Perlman, 1985). 'The answer to state violence,' Anderson (2021: 157) reminds us, 'is not a new or reformed state, it's operating beyond and surpassing the expired relevance of such a destructive formation.'

The European energy grids stretch to the Western Sahara, Palestine and Iraq (ENTSO-E, 2019). While their efforts so far are not enough to stop them, anarchists and autonomous in France and Catalonia are sabotaging complicit institutions, burning machinery and inhabiting infrastructural sites connecting local and international struggles (Dunlap & Laratte, 2022).[1] Recognizing the state as colonialism (Dunlap, 2022), moreover, breaks with civil compliance and Euro-American hegemony. Infrastructure colonization is social warfare (Dunlap & Correa-Arce, 2022), which frames infrastructures as weapons of political control that combines organized segregation and confinement with captivating social engineering technologies related to civil amenities, mobility, market access, consumerism and, in a word, 'development.' Technologies of infrastructural colonization, taken together, progressively regiment dependence(s), addiction(s), indifference(s) and fear(s). The lens of infrastructural colonization aims beyond the state to uncover the collective roots sustaining and reproducing socioecological domination and oppression. Locating commonalities in (environmental) conflicts—nonhuman extermination, statist control technologies and psycho-political mechanisms—in no way seeks to compare, let alone diminish,

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[1] See Contesting energy transition map: https://www.sum.uio.no/english/research/projects/the-rural-transformations-behind-the-renewable-ene/index.html.

Abstract: Replying to criticism to the term infrastructural colonization, this commentary article discusses the colonial and how colonization is conceived. Infrastructural colonization, as opposed to colonialism, takes a literal approach to territorial control, landscape and socio-cultural change, exploring the literal colonization of habitats, people, social fabrics and more-than-human networks. Colonization—discrimination, control and extraction—operates on numerous scales and across various actors and places, accumulating into large-scale irreparable socio-ecological consequences. While it should not be conflated with (settler) colonialism, infrastructural colonization seeks to identify the roots and mechanisms of the colonial model, specifically how habitats and peoples are captured, psycho-politically captivated and together accumulated into an extractivist political economy. As an approach, infrastructural colonization implicitly recognizes state formation as colonialism, statism as (neo) colonialism and the state as colonial model(s). States, in their relative diversity, are understood as a structure of political and socioecological conquest.

> What concentration camp manager, national executioner or torturer is not a descendant of oppressed people? —Fredy Perlman

What is the colony or colonial model—exported and spread through colonialism—and how has it mutated? Identifying this model remains instrumental to uncovering the sources of socioecological degradation, servitude and destruction. Internal colonialism, (neo)colonialism, carbon colonialism, and climate and energy coloniality proliferate within discussions on climate change mitigation and low-carbon infrastructural development (De Onís,

2018; Andreucci & Zografos, 2022; Sultana, 2022; Kallianos et al., 2022). Wind, solar and hydrological extraction projects spread aggressively, reproducing colonial and, consequently, statist realities. The recent article, 'The enduring coloniality of ecological modernization: Wind energy development in occupied Western Sahara [oWS] and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights [oSGH],' by Alkhalili et al., 2023 emerges as one example contributing to this research.

Alkhalili et al. (2023) demonstrate how the 'investments in RE [renewable energy] are yet another extension of a logic of colonial extractivism which produces infrastructures that cause harm to the communities, nature, political and cultural sovereignty' of people (p. 2). The authors, moreover, take issue with the use of the terms 'infrastructural colonialism' (p. 2) and 'infrastructural colonization' (p. 6), the latter term I coined (Dunlap, 2020). The most forceful part of their critique explains:

> [A] sharp and a careful distinction needs to be made with green neoliberalism being pursued in the European countryside, framed by Dunlap (2020, 2021, Dunlap[& Laratte] 2022) as 'infrastructural colonization'. While several communities in the west are fighting against the neoliberalization of the energy sector, such categorization ignores the systematic difference between the experiences of the Sahrawis and Jawlanis resisting infrastructural colonization as non-sovereign entities to that of Europeans living in sovereign nations and whose experience, no matter how intrusive, *can't be compared to communities seeking self-determination on their colonized lands.* Awareness of how problematic such framing is should be noted as it risks reducing the struggles of *the colonized* to achieve their liberation and self-determination. Moreover, the colonial legacy that

and politico-military stabilization strategies that European populations have come to regard as standard practices (e.g. policing, planning and securitization schemes). These European based liberation struggles should be critiqued, not demeaned or erased as implicitly suggested by the authors—'*which hasn't been* and is not colonized' (p. 6, emphasis added). Struggles in Europe, of course, are in different phases of the colonial process (Dunlap, 2018, p. 556). Colonial power, we must remember, first had to organize an internal process of trade, domestic conquest, internment, Othering, disciplining, extraction and education to establish a self-sustaining network of political control to forcefully organize populations dedicated to nation-states, (colonial) warfare, factories, commerce and overseas extractivism.

Internalizing and reprojecting colonial structures, relationships, and values—often introduced through genocidal occupation—remains an enduring problem (Fanon, 1963; Nandy, 2014). Infrastructural colonization, as a concept, highlights the embedded colonial reality of modernism, linear perspective vision, hierarchical governance structures and modalities of development that mimic and/or superficially alter Euro-American development standards and trajectories (Esteva, 2023; Nandy, 2014). 'We must recognize that the nation-state,' explains Esteva (2023: 171), 'be it the most generous dictatorship or the gentlest and purest democracy, has been and remains a structure for dominating and controlling the population, to put it at the service of [statist or liberal] capital' (see also Anderson, 2021). While discussing the invasion of wind turbines, Alkhalili et al. (2023) focus on international institutions (e.g. international law and European courts), land claims and economics. Their approach results in minimizing the voice of research participants, understating the socioecological impacts of wind turbines (and their supply webs) and, unfortunately, still upholds the myth of 'renewable energy' by continuing to employ the term. The focus on geopolitical scale, common in academic decolonial research (Dunlap, 2022, p. 11),

this assumption acknowledges existing insurrectionary tensions within those countries, rejecting how a particular politics or regime essentialize entire peoples, or identities, to claim political legitimacy and solidify some version of authoritarian rule. The infrastructural colonization lens begins 'from the soil up,' seeking to identify the mechanisms that sustain (neo)colonialism/statism. This approach, guided by ideas of total liberation, entails challenging the enduring ideology of human supremacy (Springer et al., 2021), which normalizes the extermination of non-human existences (e. g. trees, rivers, mountains, plants, and animals). Infrastructural colonization is not restricted to a particular geography, and is rather designed to locate the material source of local and global socioecological catastrophe. The destructive effect of infrastructure remains extensive and extends beyond humans.

The area demarcated as 'Europe,' moreover, has undergone an exterminating and ecocidal colonial process in earlier times (Churchill, 2003; Foucault, 2003; Turner, 2018). States, to various degrees, applied indiscriminate terror, 'Othering,' interment and policing to execute strategies of land control and 'national' development (Foucault, 2003; Perlman, 1985). English colonization of Scotland, Wales and Ireland, Turner (2018: 774) reminds us, 'developed and refined' the 'ideological and governmental apparatuses' exported in 'overseas colonialism,' which applied the 'monopolization of commerce and trade, strategies of (under)development, primitive accumulation, marginalization and the hierarchisation of colonized people.' European state formation, moreover, was not isolated from Asian and African Empires and states (Turner, 2018). Whether the Occitania region and language subject to Roman and, later, French colonization or the ongoing struggles in Catalonia (Galiza, and the Basque country) for independence, which experience violent repression, counterinsurgency operations and still have a long list of long-term prisoners. Colonialism and national liberation struggles exist in Europe at lower conflict intensities and they are negotiating different forms of elite collaboration

persists in both the oSGH and oWS is not at all the case for the European context, which hasn't been and is not colonized. Through his several studies on the RE infrastructure in the European countryside specifically in Catalonia, Spain and France, scholar Dunlap (2020, 2021, Dunlap [& Laratte] 2022) is not taking into account that the indigenous communities are struggling with such an infrastructural colonization as an extension of the settler colonial project imposed on them, of which its mere aim is the replacement of the indigenous people through an institutionalized project of elimination (p. 6, emphasis added).]

The authors raise an important issue. Infrastructural colonization should not be interpreted to harm any movement for self-determination—quite the opposite: I want to see liberation struggles networked, thriving and learning from the past. While never having lived in the contexts discussed by Alkhalili and colleagues, infrastructural colonization expresses common features that I have observed by being embedded in lightly armed infrastructure conflicts in Zapotec and Ikoot territories (Mexico) and in committed autonomous and anti-extractivist struggles and research in Peru, Germany, France, Catalonia, and Portugal. Alkhalili and colleagues' reading of infrastructural colonization limits 'colonization' to peoples fighting for 'sovereign nations' within earlier phases of the colonial process. This limiting reduces political struggles and denies the genocidal and ecocidal history that formed 'Europe' and the European state system.

Infrastructural colonization, as opposed to *colonialism*, takes a literal approach to territorial control, landscape and socio-cultural change, exploring the literal colonization of habitats, people, social fabrics and more-than-human networks. Colonization—discrimination, control and extraction—operates on numerous scales and across various actors and places, accumulating into

large-scale irreparable socioecological consequences. While it should not be conflated with (settler) colonialism, infrastructural colonization seeks to identify the roots and mechanisms of the colonial model, specifically how habitats and peoples are captured, psycho-politically captivated and together accumulated into an extractivist political economy. Complementing the concept of coloniality—the persistence of colonial values by 'Othering' people and imposing Western knowledge, developmental practices and standards (e.g. modernism) (Andreucci & Zografos, 2022; Sultana, 2022)—infrastructural colonization places greater emphasis on infrastructure, planning and governmental models. As an approach, infrastructural colonization implicitly recognizes state formation as colonialism, statism as (neo)colonialism and the state as colonial model(s). States, in their relative diversity, are understood as a structure of political and socioecological conquest. The identification of colonial models has consequences for how people relate, use, engage and collaborate with (neo)colonial institutions in general, but also how people position themselves in their struggle to compost, or decompose and transform, colonial systems into sociologically harmonious political ecologies.

1. Against the state, towards dismantling (neo)colonial roots

The struggles referenced in Europe are mischaracterized, reducing people and struggles to 'fighting against the neoliberalization of the energy sector' (p. 6). The research criticized by Alkhalili and colleagues relies on a large multi-sited interview pool and, while some people 'are fighting against the neoliberalization of the energy sector' (p. 6), there were strong anti-state, anti-capitalist and, consequently, strong autonomous and self-determining tendencies rejecting extractive infrastructure and 'the world' it creates. Zone-to-Defend (ZAD) struggles, inspired by the Zapatistas, are organiz-

ing a network of autonomous spaces to block megaprojects and reinhabit, de-civilize, and defend those lands against the French (colonial) state. ZADs, moreover, are linked with reviving traditional agroecological and spiritual practices (Fremeaux & Jordan, 2021). These struggles have and continue to confront police raids, surveillance, exorbitant legal fees, beatings, jail time, tear gas and occasional murders (MTC, 2018). While ZADs and dispersed anarchist combatants are organizing and fighting for total liberation—liberation for humans and nonhumans from statism and capitalism (Dunlap, 2022; Springer et al., 2021)—there are radical temporal, contextual and political differences from national liberation struggles fighting for 'sovereign nations.'

Research into infrastructural colonization is not comparing these land conflicts to settler colonial and national liberation struggles (e.g. Palestine, occupied Western Sahara and Golan Heights). The intensity and modality of exterminating violence in these cases, and the 'civilizing' settler colonial practice in general, is drastically higher and racialized in those areas. The term, however, does remain expansive, seeking to situate 'the local, embodied, material, lived experiences' of humans and nonhumans subject to state formation, expansion and infrastructural control (Sultana, 2022, p. 4). The infrastructural colonization approach comes from 'the soil up,' rooting understandings of socioecological degradation from within habitats to understand, despite all the popular public attention, how socioecological and climate catastrophe accelerates. Identifying modernism as an enduring culprit, infrastructural colonialization highlights the material expression through which coloniality persists through infrastructures, statism and political economy.

In fact, *state formation is colonialism*, which is reproduced and affirmed by localized infrastructure projects. Rooted in an autonomous and anti-state understandings, the infrastructural colonization approach does not assume that governments accurately represent the claimed populations or territories. Refusing