# Re-framing the mess we're in: ideology-action-structures and coloniality[i].

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I'm going to set down a few ideas I've been exploring, some for a long time and others more recently.  The idea is to suggest an integrating framework for some diverse and very acute issues.  I am going to draw on some frameworks that come from a number of struggles and a number of intellectual

traditions.  I'll try (but might not succeed) to keep the language clear and non-academic, even when the ideas are unfamiliar or complicated[1].  It aims to be part analysis, part re-framing and part practical proposal.

## 21st Century malaise

***Organised exploitation.  Organised inequality.***

We live in a world where it is seen as normal for there to be vast inequalities.  While the UK minimum wage of £6.19 per hour would yield £11,266 p.a. if a full 35 hour week were worked, top pay in UK companies was as high as £4,452,624 in the case of BP, itself sixty-three times the average salary in the company[2].  Even in the public services, inequality is taken for granted.  In a municipal council in the UK, there can be salary differentials of 16 times between the top and bottom salary[3].  Already in 1992 (and the situation is worse now), according to the World Bank, the richest fifth of the World's population commanded 82 per cent of the wealth, the three fifths had just 5.6 per cent[4].  More examples could be given, but the important point is that this inequality is not accidental but organised.  Different countries have different roles in the division of labour, and the wealth flows from the periphery to the core of the world system[5].  And in each country there is a division of class, superimposed on specialisation of function, but based on distinct roles in the extraction of value.  Wealth is extracted through two main processes, outright robbery, what Marx called primitive accumulation, such as the seizure of land or water sources, the privatisation of common goods, and through more subtle robbery whereby exploitation is organised and concealed through the labour contract.  And in both these interrelated processes, the primitive and the subtle, there is

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1  I'll use footnotes to reference claims and points made and to credit quotations and ideas.

2  http://highpaycentre.org/img/Cheques_with_Balances.pdf

3  http://www.sussexequalitygroup.org.uk/#!campaigns

4  https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2001/12/wade.htm

5  Amin, S. (2010). *The law of worldwide value*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

hidden labour, mostly of women, much of it outside the formal system of exchange, subsidising the systems of exploitation, reproducing the workforce and providing subsistence-based wealth into the globalised system of organised exploitation, or theft[6]. But what is new is the greater level of interconnectedness of these circuits of exploitation whereby notions of stages of economic evolution do not capture the contemporary multiple colonisations of all systems of production and reproduction by global capital[7].

### Racism, disable-ism and sexism

Despite enormous struggles against discrimination on the basis of the obvious markers of race/ethnicity, impairments and gender, (to name but three) these 'other-ist' ideologies still exist with real ferocity. They are not just ideologies either, but are embedded in the relations of production and reproduction that suffuse all human institutions from family to nation state and beyond. These systems of embedded injustice defy analytic dissection, being connected to every aspect of our human systems. They connect to layers of social organisation that co-exist in the contemporary world but are not reducible to either capitalism or modernity, even though those systems of systems have given a particular complexion to them.

Such is their persistence that they continue to 'jump out' and surprise us all. We hear about racist attacks in nice neighbourhoods and racist discrimination in the heart of public institutions. We find that women are still silenced in many ways and in most jurisdictions continue to under-represented in nearly all the sites of influence and decision-making. And as we will see below, disable-ism continues to be a fundamental fact in the lives of people with a variety of impairments.

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6   Mies, M., & Bennholdt-Thomsen, V. (1999). *The subsistence perspective : beyond the globalized economy*. London: Zed Books.

7   http://decolonial-studies.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/ramon-grosfoguel-transmodernity-border.html

### Crisis of welfare systems

Over the course of the 20th century, collective systems of welfare were constructed to a greater of lesser extent in most countries.  These included benefits for people with no other income, retirement benefits, subsidised health and education, and so on.  The first wave of erosion came with the Structural Adjustment policies of World Bank and IMF, leading to the collapse of many services in the poorest countries.  This was followed by the collapse of the socialist bloc with varying degrees of erosion of the previous generous levels of social provision.  The triumph of the neoliberal model of capitalism then further eroded collective provision so that, for example, in almost every health system worldwide, some elements of neoliberal formulae (privatisation, co-payments, restriction of eligibility, compulsory insurance, etc.) were introduced[8].  This process is continuing, with in the UK, the removal or reduction of benefits (incapacity benefit, housing benefit), and the continued delivery of more and more of hitherto public services (schools, universities, health services, social care, housing) into the hands of private capital.  The counter to this trend is in contemporary Latin America where from Nicaragua to Bolivia, Brazil to Ecuador, there is a significant growth in welfare provision,   often funded by the nationalisation of previously privately controlled assets[9].  Elsewhere the idea of a society that pools social risks, that looks after the weak, is being subjected to an ideological onslaught, on grounds of affordability, which is laughable given the recent transfer of private debt to the public accounts and the continuing squandering of public money on armaments.

### Abuse of the vulnerable

Perhaps given the marginalisation of the ideologies of care and solidarity it should be little surprise that we find frail and disabled people subjected to hate crimes.  But in the heart of

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8   Lister, J. (2005). Health policy reform:  driving the wrong way?  A critical guide to the global "health reform" industry. Enfield: Middlesex University Press.

9   Although this has largely been on the back of the unsustainable global trade in hydrocarbon fuels.

what was the lynch-pin of a counter-capitalist meeting of need above profit (the British National Health Service), we now find more than isolated cases of neglect and cruelty, in the very places supposed (the adjective has a dual meaning) to be meeting their needs.  My first reaction to this (the Mid Staffs scandal where elderly people were treated with contempt, starved, left lying in excrement, not given prescribed treatment), killed was that this was a result of the constraints on the hospital service, (high bed occupancy, skeleton staffing, high levels of paperwork and IT for qualified staff, inappropriate performance targets, poor design of environments, casualisation and outsourcing) and these will certainly have created the situation where abuse and neglect occurred.  But that people could be treated with such disregard, such effective contempt suggests another set of processes, not reducible to the corruption of a public system of welfare provision by economic rationalism (to use an Australian term for what we now call neoliberalism).

I was asked by my previous Director of Adult Social Services, in the wake of the Winterbourne View scandal (physical and emotional cruelty to which intellectually disabled and autistic young people were subjected in a so-called private hospital) how this could happen after 10 years of Valuing People (the UK policy framework that emphasises social inclusion and personally tailored care and support, and the civil rights of intellectually disabled people).  She might have added that it followed a longer evolution, coterminous with my career, from a situation of incarceration in large institutions with multiple infringements of rights and little possibility of needs being met, to a situation where people are present in our communities, with a more comprehensive menu of support options and some toothsome safeguards for personal rights.  The answer is pertinent to both Winterbourne and to Mid Staffs, and has a wider relevance.  It is that overturning the long history of devaluation and discrimination against severely disabled people, their systemic and pervasive disadvantage, is not something that will be achieved overnight, nor even in a

generation[10].  This is not to say that the attempt is hopeless, far from it: I have seen changes that would have been deemed impossible 30 and 40 years ago.  But the task of undoing history should not be under-estimated; that history is with us and in us all, and it is there in the productive systems of an economy (and society) that has little place for those who cannot work at the same pace or with the same discipline as others.

Just what is this conjuncture of systemic and pervasive disadvantage and devaluation?  It starts from the way that we (all of us) see and react to disability and difference.  It is there as much in the romantic minimisation of disabling conditions (which leads to ignorant interactions and the denial of necessary support) as in the casually cruel dismissal of opportunity for, and worth of, the disabled person, in the big and in the small acts of everyday life.  It lies in the construction of the disabled person as 'other', a construction that is not a psychological process but an embedded and embodied social process that has its psychological dimension but is not reducible to such terms.

### Ecological overstretch / ecological crisis

Until quite recently it would have been possible to refer to the ecological crisis as just one more dimension of our present predicament.  Now, however it is the central problem.  The Arctic is melting, methane is being released, reflectivity is reduced and we have $CO_2$ concentrations of around 390ppm, unprecedented in human history and prehistory.  We are at the threshold of runaway global warming[11], and that is just one of the 3 planetary limits that we are now crossing[12].  This is an

10 Any more than a society founded on slavery is likely to eradicate all traces of racism in the period of a lifetime.  To illustrate, at the time of the Cuban revolution in 1959, people were still living who had been born slaves.  Now there are blacks in all positions of authority and influence, but common racist attitudes are still encountered and there is a relative economic and social disadvantage experienced by Cuban blacks.  A similar story could be told about the persistence of machismo despite the unparalleled advances made by Cuban women.

11 Anderson, K .and Bows, A. "Beyond 'Dangerous' Climate Change," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, no. 1934 (January 13, 2011): 20–44, http://rsta.royalsocietypublishing.org.

12 JRockström, J. et. al., A Safe Operating Space for Humanity *Nature* 461, no. 24 (September

emergency that puts all the other elements into relief.  We don't know what window might remain to mitigate climate change, probably none, nor do we no what window there might be to adapt.  But we are very likely on the threshold of the greatest population crash in the life of our species.

*Economic crisis*

So what is the economic crisis?  It is interesting to look back at the terms used to describe it: the 'credit crunch', the 'banking crisis', or the 'recession'.  Each of these under-estimated the extent of what is a major systemic collapse (just as the fragility of the edifice was denied by all but a handful of commentators), a crisis of the accumulation regime of global capitalism.  Every time capitalism has confronted its contradictions, its inherent tendency to stagnate, it has found solutions.  It was the response to the crisis of the 1970s that led to the last decades of neoliberal global expansionism, the financialisation of assets and the re-capture and subjugation of the State.  But this 'solution' too has met its contradiction, and it seems likely that there will not be a way out of this one, at least not one that does not make matters even worse, ecologically, socially and indeed eventually economically[13].

## Some underpinning dimensions

So if the above are some of the phenomena of "The mess we're in" what connects them all?   To explore this I will look first at some ideological manifestations of what seem to be the overall generative mega-processes.  This is not to assert that ideology is in any way fundamental. Instead it is one point of entry to a conjuncture of linked phenomena that include structure and action patterns.  By ideology here I mean a way of interpreting and orienting to the world and what is in it.  In each case I will define the manifestation and give some examples.

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2009): 472–75, and Planetary Boundaries. *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009).

13 Bellamy Foster, J; Clark, B; York, R. (2010). *The ecological rift : capitalism's war on the earth*. New York: Monthly Review Press.;  Harvey, D. (2010). *The enigma of capital : and the crises of capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### The rational administration of complexity

An administrative impulse is to order and simplify.  Rather than describing the dimensions and layers of complexity, and work with the flow, using the energy in such a system (as in permaculture, or surfing) the tendency is to reduce it to few elements, in the hope that by controlling them the complex system itself can be managed.

- Prediction of the performance of an economy by extrapolating trends to date.

- Stereotyping and diminishing those from a different cultural and ethnic background, traducing their cultural experience in the terms of the alien observer.

- Treating complex social phenomena (such as crime, or multiple social deprivation) as if they were simple machines, responsive to simple interventions (e.g. tougher sentencing, promotion of independence).

- Reduction of human consciousness, emotion and action to the measurable (intelligence, well-being, happiness).

### Taming natures

The wild, the natural is to be controlled, to be mastered.  It is to be enclosed and channelled, or suppressed.  It is seen as or turned into resources.  It is seen as separate from humanity, and humanity as separate from it.  If it is valued it is appreciated in a distorted version of itself.

- The twin myths of the noble savage and the cannibal.

- Mono-cultural re-afforestation, mono-cultural cultivation.

- Exclusion of indigenous peoples from National Parks.

- Agribusiness.

- Hard flood defences.

- Genocidal wars.

- Theft of indigenous knowledge through patents and intellectual property rights.

- Terminator seeds.
- Lawns.

### Linear progress

The very idea of progress is a culturally located one.  Some languages have no term for it, and its modern meaning is quite recent.  It implies a linear path from the primitive to the modern, a path that is unidirectional and has no detours, but also no end.  It is authoritarian in nature since it defines "out of scope" other paths and this applies to the "progress that you can't beat" in capitalist modernist rationalisation and to the social progress of the left side of the enlightenment tradition.  The one has led to the destruction of working class communities and the other to the destruction of rural ways of life.  Both abhor the idea of subsistence, and both lead to technocracy, productivism and waste.

- High Speed Rail rather than integrated public transport.
- The fetish of economic growth.
- Social engineering.
- Just in time supply chains.
- This year's model.
- Built in obsolescence.
- Advertising.
- "Modernisation" as a buzz word in government policy.

### The dominance of exchange and posession

"All that is solids turns to air...[14]"... or rather money.  What was once free is subject to exchange relations.  That which was once common is now owned.  All that is intangible is made concrete, possessed, processed, sold.  The logic of the market dominates, in the furtherance of profit extraction of course.

- Personal budgets for social care.

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14 Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto.

- Public space becomes privately controlled.

- Health care becomes a commodity (again).

- Invention of new "needs".

- Insurance of risk.

- Sponsored walks, runs, rides.

- Privatisation of public utilities and the incorporation of mutual financial institutions.

- Sanctions against States that bring assets into public ownership.

- The blockade of Cuba.

- World trade Organisation and European Union competition rules.

- Patenting of indigenous knowledge by corporations.

- Land ownership.  Ground rent.

### *The primacy of exploitation*

The system depends on exploitation – it is its life-blood.  Cheap food, cheap clothing, cheap consumables, cheap technology. All these rely on the savage exploitation of others, these days most typically from outside the core countries of Western Europe, North America, Australasia and Japan, either in industrial cities and maquiladoras in countries of the majority world, or through migrant labour in the core countries themselves.  It extends to the ruthless exploitation of the minerals necessary for the current system of accumulation – a good example being the coltan used in mobile phones that is a key cause of conflict in central Africa, or consider the 'great game' in the Middle East and Central Asia that has to do with the exploitation of oil.  The primacy of exploitation extends to human trafficking and sexual exploitation, another case of all that is solid melting into air as sexuality itself is commodified.

- Casualisation of health and care services.

- Bonded labour in mineral exploitation in the global South.

- Undocumented workers in the catering industry.

- The horse-flesh scandal and ready cut African green beans in shrink-wrapped trays.

- The piles of 'goods' in Pound Shops.

- Declining real wages in the core countries since the 1970s.

- The growth of credit and debt – the circuit of marketing, consumption, debt and the parcelling of debt as an asset for further cycles of accumulation.

- The prison slavery system in the USA.

- Maquiladora and sweat shop supply chains for high street chains.

- Prostitution and pornography.

- The suppression of social movements and governments that pursue an agenda of social justice.

- Collusion of the 'liberal democracies' with absolute monarchies and dictatorships.

### *Monoculturality and the suppression of other cultural systems*

This is about the dominance of particular cultural forms – where culture means the way we live, and pass on and share that way of life through traditions, crafts, arts, rituals and the material trappings of everyday life.  As Raymond Williams pointed out, "culture is ordinary".[15]  Alien cultures are variously suppressed (even in Europe, within living memory the Welsh, Basques, Catalans, Gaels, Lapps, Balts, Roma and so on have been punished for or heavily discouraged from, speaking their own language), trivialised, so they become exotic objects (in tourism, in Orientalism, in film) or co-opted (the assimilation of Maori or Maya symbols into the official imaginary in New Zealand or Guatemala, for instance).  None of this is new, but we are now faced with a greater degree of homogenization just

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15 Williams, R. (1958). *Culture is Ordinary*. .  Reprinted in Resources for Hope, London, Verso, 1989.

as identity politics is celebrated.  And this all relates to the final piece of the jigsaw, assumed superiority.

- Town centres that all look the same.

- Hollywood.

- Calls for the study of the heroes of British Imperialism in school.

- Citizenship tests.

- Commercial football.

- Junk television.

- Dominance of English language and the marginalisation of other languages in school.

- Ridicule of indigenous belief systems as primitive.

- Cheap flights to the Greek islands, Bali, etc.

- The rewriting of history by the victors.

- Latin American children with the names Lediday (Lady Di), Usnavy (US Navy).

- Marginalisation and trivialisation of news stories from the majority world while 'local news' from the US is reported in great detail.

### Assumed superiority

Assumed superiority has many faces.  We see it in the effort to 'bring democracy' to other countries: while this is a disguise for imperialistic pillage, that it can so readily be appealed to relies on the ideology of superiority not so different from the "White Man's Burden".  The harsher manifestations of assumed superiority are less acceptable these days but the more subtle ones are here still.  The idea that "European Civilisation" is the pinnacle and that other cultures (and hence peoples) are inferior is deeply ingrained in our education, culture, foreign and domestic policy.  We see it in the way regions of the majority world are covered in the news media, in stereotyped and de-contextualised ways.  It is there in the attitude to

migrants, but it is also there playing a major role in full support of the acceptance and naturalisation of inequality discussed above.

- The construction of in-groups and out-groups.

- The persistence of private education.

- Demonisation of welfare recipients (the undeserving poor).

- Categorisation of sections of the working class in mainstream media (e.g. "Chavs").

- Payment of low wages to those looking after the vulnerable, disabled and frail.

- Cult of celebrity.

- Tolerance of majority world, unpayable, odious debt.

- Cult of youth, cult of beauty.

- Ridicule of the unintelligent.

- Jokes against minorities, women, disabled people, old people.

- Impunity.

## A historical account

The above is a listing of some of the common ways of orientating to the world, in an ideological nexus defined by dominant interests, in interplay with other forces. Another description could be that these are a set of *ideology-structure-action complexes* (my term), in which ideology, action and structure support one other. This reality is layered and contradictory, so some of the above elements can at times appear to be in conflict even though they hang together as an overall hegemonic ideological complex.

Where though does this come from? Here I'll summarise a fairly new account that comes mainly from critical scholars in the majority world (or whose roots are there), and especially Latin America.

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These ideology-action-structure complexes can be clustered in terms of capitalism (the system whose central purpose is the accumulation of capital), imperialism/colonisation (the domination and exploitation of large regions of the world by a succession of nation states and clusters of states), modernity (the adoption of a rationalistic order in society characterised by a set of divisions: between arts and science, economy, law and humanities, ritual and production, humans and nature) and naturalism (where socially constructed divisions and distinctions are taken to be part of the natural order of things).

Taking these elements together, writers including Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel and Edgar Lander[16] argue that they emerge together at the point of European colonisation of the Americas.  For them, capitalism, modernity and colonialism were co-constructed, for the colonisation of the Americas brought into being an entirely new set of relationships.  They argue therefore that the enlightenment project of Europe had an underside, the colonisation of the Americas (and later of other regions).  This colonisation provided the wealth on which European capitalism was built (in a series of stages which corresponded to its shifting locus from Spain/Portugal via the Netherlands to Britain and then the USA).  It created a new way of looking at the 'Other', initially the Amerindian but later the African and  Asian, as inferior, subhuman, and hence race, racism, and indeed its equation with colour, emerge at this time.  Simultaneously the cultures of the Americas were eclipsed, subordinated, destroyed, and with them alternative ways of understanding the relationships among people and with nature.  This was also the point at which the idea of "Europe" was constructed in its modern form, and with it the ideology we call Eurocentrism.  These colonial ideology-action-structure complexes continued after the formal independence of the Latin American countries: they persisted between the imperialist regions and those subaltern regions

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16 A useful collection, in Spanish is Lander, E (Ed.). (2000). *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericana.* Buenos Aires: CLASCO. http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/subida/clacso/sur-sur/20100708034410/lander.pdf see also note 7.

*and* within each of those zones.

Within the subaltern zones there was a racial hierarchy and the rule by a white or mestizo elite (depending on the country). The ideology-action-structure complexes were the operating system of the republics, and to a great extent still are. This is why in today's Bolivia under the new plurinational constitution there is a vice-ministry of de-colonisation, and it has a de-patriarchalization unit too.

Meanwhile within the imperialist centres similar processes of dispossession, restructuring of relations and the silencing of other ideology-action-structure complexes were taking place. The enclosures which forced peasants off the land, destroying older ties, expectations and obligations, also meant the establishment of a new order and the creation of a new discipline as the importance of subsistence was replaced by the dominance of wage labour. It is not surprising that one of Marx's earliest studies was of the destruction of the rights of peasants to harvest from woodland in late modernising Germany. The struggle of the English revolutionaries, the Levellers and Diggers illustrates how the replacement of the ancien regime was also the imposition of a new proto-bourgeoise one in which the biblical language of justice and sharing used by the likes of Winstanley and Lilburne could have no place.

So the colonisation that took place in the American continent both supported and provided models for the new ideology-action-structure complexes there, in the later regions of colonisation and in the heart and hinterland of the imperialist centres themselves. The model of coloniality did not require a colony any more, but was a model of domination that applied between classes and also in relation to other groups. It is no surprise then that forms of coloniality could be found in the treatment of women or the social administration of inconvenient populations such as the elderly or the disabled. Moreover the comprehensive reach of the dominant system meant that colonised populations could find themselves used

against one another.  Thus those cast into criminality became colonists as did orphaned children.  Populations were moved between colonial zones to serve the purposes of accumulation: Africans to work as slaves, Indians as bonded labourers, peoles who joined the subaltern "others"[17]. And the social technologies that emerged within the ideology-action-structure complexes could be generalised to other contexts.

If this account is taken seriously it means that coloniality is integral to the modern world and to *all* the problem areas described above.  To tackle these problems requires something much more radical than most previous or current reform movements or proposals envisage.  Rather than trying to fix the capitalist-colonial-ecocidic systems that we are all embedded in, it is necessary to work for their replacement, and this requires work that tackles the ideology, the action-systems and the structures of the present systems of domination of populations and nature.

Note that this approach is distinct from the two other responses to the limitations of modernity.  The first is to reform the enlightenment project from within.  This approach can be called a critical modernist project: it seeks to recapture the emancipatory qualities of modernism recovering what it sees as the true spirit of the enlightenment project.  This idea has been articulated by Habermas in these terms but the idea is also present is less explicit form in the mainstream reformist and indeed revolutionary projects of the European tradition which remain locked within a productivist world view[18].  Habermas argued that the dominance of market and State led to what he called the colonisation of the life-world, that is to say the erosion of the implicit social relationships, ties, expectations and understandings that are informal and not subject to steering from the State or market.  Allied with this he argued for a reversal of the erosion of the public sphere where deliberation and debate can take place on a fair basis.  His

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17 Fernández Retamar, R. (1993). Caliban. In *Todo Caliban*. Buenos Aires: CLASCO.

18 Williams, R. (1982). *Socialism and Ecology.* London: SERA.  Reprinted in *Resources for Hope.*  London, Verso 1989.

proposals which draw upon his theory of communication as the basis for ethics have been subject to criticism[19] for their artificiality and neglect of the real power relations, for example between men and women or between elites in the core countries and the mass of people living in poverty in the majority world. While the thesis of the colonisation of the lifeworld is an important contribution, the project of critical modernity remains essentially Eurocentric, failing to recognise the co-construction of modernity and colonialism/coloniality.

The second approach has been to reject the universalist pretensions of the enlightenment project, subjecting them to a critique that starts from the particularities of different varieties of human experience. This approach tends to emphasise the construction of power through language, and to take a relativist position on questions of ethics. In some variants it takes an idealist position, questioning social reality, as it were taking the idea of social construction beyond the recognition that knowledge is a social product to assert that it is no more than a social invention. This approach is the post-modernist approach associated with writers such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard. Like critical modernism it can also been found in a less explicit form in some movements that emphasise identity politics and cultural particularities in relative isolation from the generative social forces and structures – in effect focusing on the ideology element to the neglect of action and structure. Again the approach can be seen to be Eurocentric, breaking down when confronted with extremes of social exclusion , exploitation and deprivation.

The decolonising thinkers referred to above propose a different solution to the shortcomings of modernism or the enlightenment project. It does not try to reform modernity from within – an impossible task since it is based on the

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19 For example, Dussel, E. (1998). *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión. (Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalisation and Exclusion)*. Madrid: Trotta.; Marsh, J. (2000). The material principle and the formal principle in Dussel's Ethics. In L. Alcoff & E. Mendieta (Eds.), *Thinking from the Underside of History: Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation.* (pp. 51–67). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

exclusion of subaltern peoples and their traditions, knowledge, wisdom, pain and experience.  Nor does it reject the positive benefits of modernity and enlightenment (ideas of universal justice, thought freed from dogma, and the legacy of science, medicine and engineering, for example).  Instead it seeks to correct modernity and the enlightenment project from the underside, from the perspective of those excluded by it.  So like the critical modernists, these 'transmodern' thinkers believe in the idea of universal ethical standards[20].  And like the post-modernists they see that the standards proposed by modernity are flawed.  Specifically they are the standards of the European (and North American) elite, masquerading as universals[21].

This transmodern approach, or as some have called it 'border thinking', while articulated by the thinkers identified above, and also by allied writers[22], can also be found in the praxis of some of the most effective and inspiring social movements in the majority world.  Thus the indigenous social movements that are in, or close to power now in Bolivia and Ecuador, and other indigenous movements in other countries (Mexico, Chile, Guatemala, for example), and the peasants' movements allied in Via Campesina, especially the Brazilian MST, all demonstrate this active critique of various of the ideology-action-structure configurations identified above, and practical actions that prefiguratively experiment with alternatives.

Radical manifestos are usually at their weakest, where they confront the problem of what is to be done, by whom, and

20 See Gómez, F., & Dussel, E. (2001). Ethics is the original philosophy; or, the barbarian words coming from the third world: an interview with Enrique Dussel. *boundary*, *28*(2), 19–73.  Online version http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/dussel/artics/gomez.pdf accessed 8 May 2010.

21 The same point is made about social scientific 'knowledge' that has a similarly restricted context of discovery and application yet pretends to universality see Burton, M., & Kagan, C. (2005). Liberation Social Psychology: Learning From Latin America. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *15*(1), 63–78.  -available at http://www.compsy.org.uk/PSLarticle3final.pdf

22 Amin, S. (2010). *Eurocentrism - Modernity, Religion and Democracy: A Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism.* New York.: Monthly Review  / Oxford: Pambazuka Press.; Shiva, V. (1988). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*.

how.  They can fall into the trap of proposing a programme for 'fair minded people' to adopt, or of calling for action from outside of social movements – that is to fudge the problems of praxis and agency[23].  But the transmodern social movements and their organic intellectuals suggest that this need not be so. To illustrate this I will highlight three ideas that can be and are being embodied in social movements and which seem to have considerable potential to help not just to picture what another world could be like but to find the way out of the current mess. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two of them (analectics and right living/buen vivir) come from the context of (Latin) American de-coloniality.

## Some transmodern resources.

### *Analectics*

Analectics is the name that Enrique Dussel gives to his formalisation of the process whereby the perspective of those on the 'underside of modernity' is brought into a critical dialogue with ideas, plans, policies and actions that come from the dominant system (including from those who are dissidents or reformers within that system).  However, this is not a philosophical invention – the process of subaltern critique, leading to a new synthesis can be found in many places. Dussel himself cites the practice of the modern Zapatistas in Mexico, the work of Rigoberta Menchú, as well as the experience of Marx whose perspective was changed by engagement with the Parisian working class in the revolution of 1848.  Other examples include the impact of mental health system survivors and disabled activists on both theorists and policy-makers in those areas, and the impact of the women's liberation movement.

Dussel's term, *"analectic"*, comes from ana-dialectic, where "ana-" refers to "beyond".  As we explained it elsewhere:

> *"Dussel is thereby proposing a resolution of the*

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23  See my Sustainability: Utopian and Scientific
   http://greendealmanchester.wordpress.com/sustainability-utopian-and-scientific/

*fundamental problem posed by the post-modernism debate, how to stand outside the reality within which we live in order to critically understand it, its categories and concepts included.*"[24]

## The following diagram is based on Dussel's summary picture in

the *Ethics of Liberation25*.  Here the two systems equate to 1) the dominant, eurocentric, modern ideology-action-structure complex.  2) The dissident, emergent, anti-hegemonic ideology-action-structure complexes based both on those oppressed within the dominant system and the subaltern "underside of modernity" - which includes all those sectors excluded from the dominant system.  Together these comprise a "critical community".  The "Organic Intellectual" (following Gramsci) is the practical thinker committed to the cause of liberation, who takes the side of the oppressed and excluded, maintaining a critical dialogue with them.  The project of liberation here is the transmodern alternative, rooted in the analectic encounter to both modernism (in normative and critical varieties) and post-modernism.

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24 Burton, M., & Flores, J. M. (2011). Introducing Dussel: the philosophy of liberation and a really social psychology. *Psychology in Society*, 20–39.

25 Not yet available in English:  Dussel, E. (1998). *Ética de la Liberación en la Edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión.  (Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalisation and Exclusion)*. Madrid: Trotta.  See also Dussel, E. (2008). *Twenty theses on politics*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
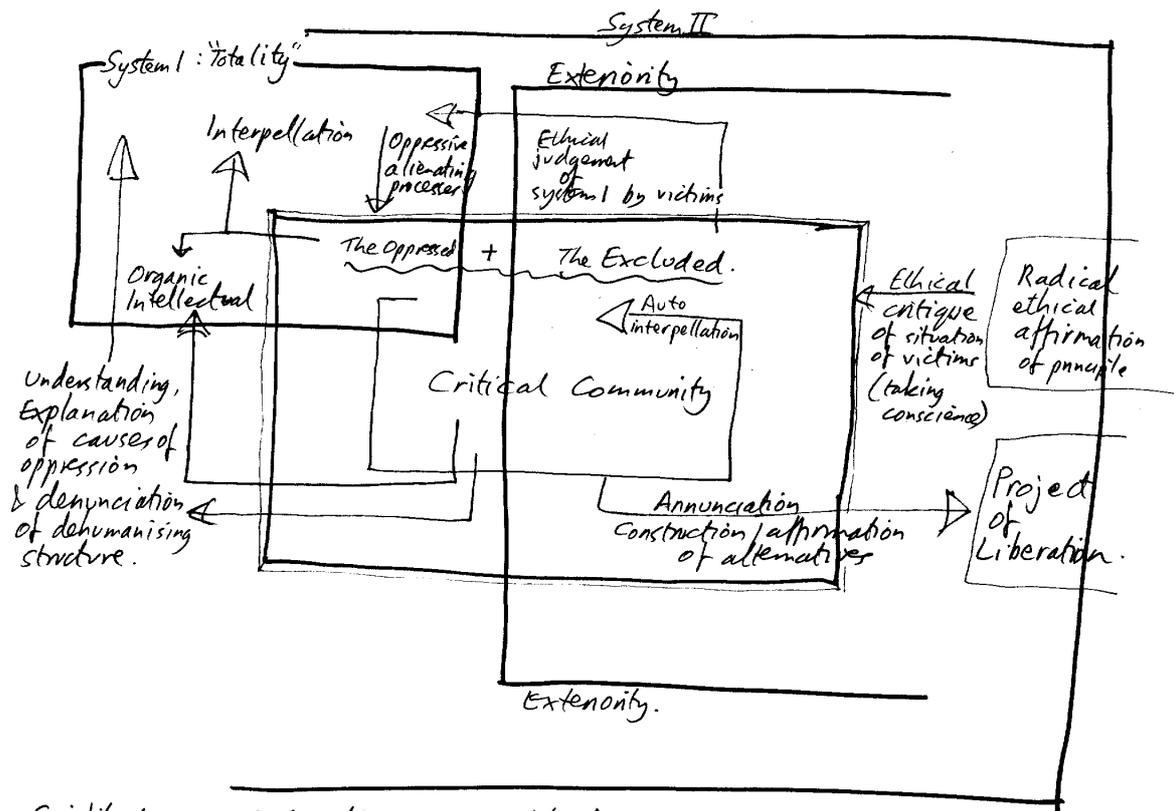
Simplified version of Dussel's general model of liberatory praxis.
—based on Scheme 4.3 of Dussel (1998).

The essence of analectics then is to be open to the critical perspective of those excluded and oppressed through the dominant ideology-action-structure complexes, thereby enabling a new synthesis as praxis.

### Degrowth

Degrowth (from the French *decroissance*) is a growing movement that takes issue specifically with the dominant ideology-action-structure complex that centres on the pursuit of economic growth. The term *de-growth* has been promoted by the French writer, Serge Latouche, following Georgescu-Roegen to emphasise the goal of a complete alternative to a growth economy.

> "We define degrowth as a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society… The objectives of degrowth are to meet basic human needs and ensure a high quality of life, while reducing the ecological impact of the global economy to a sustainable

*level, equitably distributed between nations…Once right-sizing has been achieved through the process of degrowth, the aim should be to maintain a 'steady state economy' with a relatively stable, mildly fluctuating level of consumption".*[26]

While Latouche discusses the concept and its implications widely, drawing on dissident Western thought (Gorz, Castoriadis, Illich in particular) a key element is the adoption of a different value frame.  The title of one of Latouche's books gives the key to this:  "The *society of frugal abundance*[27]".  On reading Latouche and the work of others allied with this movement, it is clear that their orientation is also transmodern: it is not a matter of going back to some mythical pre-modern state, but of correcting the follies of modernist productivism, accumulation and consumerism while retaining a rational orientation, for example to the social and ecological sciences.  However the degrowth perspective is less technocratic than that of the allied approach of ecological economics / the proponents of the Steady State Economy. This perhaps reflects the different origins of these two approaches in France and North America, although both share a common lineage to the Rumanian economist Georgescu-Roegen. Nevertheless both tendencies are part of a critique of that (dominant) model that separates the economy from society, from the everyday life of people and from the planetary systems that support human life.  Conventional economics then tries to cost the impacts of the economy on the ecosystem, rendering that which is not economic into monetary terms.  As Latouche and other ecological thinkers suggest, our approach needs to "leave the economy behind," or "escape from the economy"

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26  Declaration of the first international degrowth conference, held in Paris in 2008, Cited in O'Neill, D. W. (2011). Measuring progress in the degrowth transition to a steady state economy. *Ecological Economics*. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2011.05.020.

27  Latouche, S. (2012). *La sociedad de la abundancia frugal: Contrasentidos y controversias del decrecimiento.* Barcelona: Icaria.  (Spanish translation of the French original).

### Right living – Vivir bien

But a potentially more radical, more comprehensive and more practice-led approach is that which has been emerging in the Andean region. The approach carries a number of names, including *sumak kawsay* in the Quechua of Ecuador and *suma qamaña* in the Aymara of Bolivia. These are translated respectively into the Spanish *buen vivir* and *vivir bien*. However these are not good translations, and even more so, a literal translation from the Spanish to something like 'living well" or "good living" simplifies and distorts what is a very rich conceptual and practical complex[28]. Instead I suggest that *ethical living*, *right livelihood* or (as Myrna Cunningham suggests[29]), *commonweal*, better capture the depth and breadth of the approach. Here I will use the term "*right living*" but in full awareness that any such brief phrase will fail on its own to convey the approach.

Right living draws on the indigenous traditions of the Andean peoples (and similar traditions beyond, for example the Guaraní of the lowlands to the east of the mountains). Martha Lanza, a Bolivian feminist actively involved in developing the approach explains it as,

> "... *a concept under construction [that] aims to shift the mindset of production and consumption against growth-based development. It is a response to years of colonial and neocolonial rule based on the exploitation of natural resources in detriment of the planet and the indigenous communities living in areas rich in oil, gas, minerals, and biodiversity.*"...

> "*Buen Vivir is rooted in communitarian thinking and the key principles are:*

> > *a.    A criticism of the consumer and individualistic society.*

> > *b.    A proposal for ecological awareness that*

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28 I have put together a compliation of writings on Buen Vivir, including translations from Spanish. See
http://anotherworldreal.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/compilation-on-buen-vivir-concepts.pdf

29 Cunningham, M (2012) People-centred development and globalization.
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/SForum/SForum2012/presentations2012/keynote_Cunningham.pdf  p.1.

> *emphasizes the need to build a harmonious relationship with nature.[30]"*

In the same report the following quotation makes it clear how this is both a transmodern and analectic approach.

> *"For us in CONAMAQ\*, we are the promoters and creators of Buen Vivir. ...We have set it out in accordance with the wisdom of our achachilas, our forefathers. Since they lived in harmony with nature, they did not need wealth, minerals, or technology; now, this does not mean that we should not use technology if we have it. For us in CONAMAQ, technology and ancestral wisdom has to be combined in connection with respect for mother earth. Buen Vivir relates to self-government, this is the great struggle of the original indigenous peoples. We want to achieve autonomy, for us to be able to determine what to do with our resources"* (Benito, GMT and Curasavi, AMT, interview with M Lanza 2010).

> *\*CONAMAQ,* The National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu

The concept of ayllú also helps us understand what this is about. Although the ayllú is the basic social unit of the Aymara cultures in the rural areas of Bolivia, it implies an extended understanding of community, including "the geographical environment, kinship relationships, organisational forms, relations with the natural world, social obligations of reciprocity and the psychosocial identification of the members of the Aymara 'community'"[31]. There is also a spiritual dimension in this thinking from traditions that do not split the different aspects of life (as does the colonial-modernist ideology-action-structure complexity) into separated spheres of economy, politics, society, natural world, etc.

Because of its rootedness in traditions of the region and in the colonial experience, the ideas of buen vivir / right living

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30  Lanza, M. (2012). *Buen Vivir: An introduction from a women's rights perspective in Bolivia* (No. 2). Toronto: The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Retrieved from awid.org/content/download/138877/1543706/file/FPTTEC_LivingWell%20March%20ENG.pdf

31 Mendoza, J, & Zerda, M. (2011). Psicología comunitaria social en Bolivia. In M. Montero & Serrano García, I (Eds.), *Historias De La Psicología En América Latina: Participación y Transformación* (pp. 65–90). Buenos Aires: Paidós. (pp71-72).

perhaps cannot simply be lifted in their present form and applied to other contexts, for example my own in the UK. However, the more I read about it (and in my reading I reflect back to what I learned during a visit to Bolivia in 2012) the more it seems that those particularities can be overcome. Indeed the Bolivians acknowledge this, for example in their promotion of vivir bien / right living as a contribution to the climate emergency and other global problems[32].

What is perhaps most significant about the Andean Right Living / Vivir Bien approach is that while offering philosophical orientation it does so from the critical encounter between indigenous traditions and practices, the experience of coloniality and the imperative of offering an alternative to the suicidal development model that is still dominant worldwide.

> *"[It] offers a historical grounding in the indigenous world, but also in principles that have been defended by other Western currents that have remained subordinated for a long time.  It responds to old problems such as how to overcome poverty and defeat inequality, together with other new ones, such as the loss of biodiversity and global climate change."[33]*

## Conclusion: a decolonising socialism

To restate the argument, we are in a terrible mess, a mess that

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32  See for example http://www.energybulletin.net/stories/2010-10-08/concept-%E2%80%9Cliving-well%E2%80%9D-bolivian-viewpoint and Government of Bolivia *El Vivir Bien como respuesta a la Crisis Global* http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/Presentation%20by%20Govt%20of%20Bolivia%20(Spanish).pdf.
This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the possible contradictions between on the one hand the promotion of the Rights of Mother Nature in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions , and the governmental use of buen vivir/vivir bien in official discourse, and on the other hand the extractive nature of the economy and the use of mineral and hydrocarbon reciepts to fund social justice and redistribution.  My view is that the contradictions are there but are subject to struggles within the countries and within the governments themselves.  However I would argue that in both cases the governmental aspiration of reconciling ecological and social justice is genuine.  In Bolivia there is a new framework Law of Mother Nature and integral Development for Right Living (Vivir Bien) which tries to manage the competing demands.

33  Gudynas, E, & Acosta, A. (2011). El buen vivir o la disolución de la idea del progreso. In Rojas, M (Ed.), *La Medición Del Progreso y El Bienestar. Propuestas Desde América Latina* (pp. 103–110). México DF: Foro Consultivo Científico y Tecnológico de México. Retrieved from http://www.gudynas.com/publicaciones/capitulos/GudynasAcostaDisolucionProgresoMx11r.pdf pp 109-110.

has a number of dimensions that can be understood in terms of a number of key ideology-action-structure complexes.  These ways of relating to the world can be traced to the colonisation of the Americas, which unleashed a distinctive set of social relations termed coloniality that also provided the basis for the way in which not just the colonies (Latin America and later other continents) were transformed but for the order that pertains in the core countries of the world system.  And it is that order that has been, and is, turning all that is solid into air – or rather smoke.

There is no simple solution to this mess but the novel approaches that I term transmodern (analectics, degrowth, right living/buen vivir) offer some clues about the parameters of the alternative ideology-action-structures that we need.  That is a revolutionary prescription but the old revolutionary paradigms (Revolutionary Socialism, whether in Leninist or Libertarian forms) are exhausted, just as is the social democratic paradigm that sought to mitigate the dominant system, managing it better.  The contradictions are there to be sure, but the historical subject is fragmented.  It can only be a combination of social movements but for them to work together, going beyond the local and particular, requires a broadly shared ideological orientation, an organising ideology.  That in turn has to be build up from the diverse experiences, finding the common themes, common values and common political proposals.

> " *the internal and increasingly the external contradictions of that system [of ecocidal growth] will push it into a terminal crisis.  However, that crisis will not simply arrive and usher in a new era of sanity.  It will require a broad social movement, broader than any we have seen yet, with an intelligent and strategic leadership.  That leadership will not be based in a traditional political party but in a network of activist thinkers who share a common vision and agreement on the main dimensions of strategy.  That movement and that leadership will gather strength in the months and years to come, and its*

*nature will change over time, in response to changing conditions. But it is the duty of everyone who wants a sustainable and equitable future to build that movement and that leadership and to do that with unprecedented rapidity, for there is no time to lose."[34]*

This has been a contribution to the urgent search for a new counter-hegemonic ideology for a movement of movements.

Mark Burton,   scholar-activist, Manchester , UK
mark.burton@poptel.org

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34 M Burton Sustainability: Utopian and Scientific (2009)
   http://greendealmanchester.wordpress.com/sustainability-utopian-and-scientific/

[i] "The mess we're in" is meant as an ironic reference to Will Hutton's "The State We're In" a classic of Keynesian revivalism.  It seemed radical to many social democrats who had been like rabbits in the headlights under the neoliberalism of theThatcher and Major governments, but its prescriptions were decidedly inadequate to the real mess that I try to describe here.