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# Energy Transitions: Just and Beyond

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**RODRIGO NUNES** is a Senior Lecturer in Political Theory and Organisation at the University of Essex. He is the author of *Organisation of the Organisationless: Collective Action After Networks* (Mute, 2014), *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organisation* (Verso, 2021) and *Do Transe à Vertigem: Ensaio sobre Bolsonarismo e um Mundo em Transição* (Ubu, 2022), as well as several articles in academic journals and media outlets around the world. As an organiser and popular educator, he has been involved in several initiatives and campaigns over the years, including the first editions of the World Social Forum. Rodrigo is a research associate at the Alameda Institute.

# Organising transitions in the climate emergency

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**WHY TALK ABOUT** transition today? The answer hardly needs explaining. Five years ago, a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that humankind had essentially one decade left to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 45% relative to 2010 levels if it did not wish to see the rise in global temperature exceed the already potentially catastrophic 1.5° C mark.<sup>1</sup> The decade in question was, of course, the one that we are already almost halfway through; since then, a new report has indicated that the planet is already certain to hit a 1.5° C rise by 2030, there being only one scenario, that of global net-zero emissions by 2050, which would bring us back to 1.4° C by the end of the century.<sup>2</sup>

1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 'Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C', 8 October 2018, [ipcc.ch](https://www.ipcc.ch).

2 A recent survey among IPCC participants shows that, all things remaining equal, 80% predicted global temperatures to rise as high as 2.5° C, with almost half foreseeing at least 3° C; only 6% believe the 1.5° C limit could still be met. See Damian Carrington, 'World's Top Climate Scientists Expect Global Heating to Blast Past 1.5C Target', *The Guardian*, May 8 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com>.

It is in this context that we have heard a growing buzz in recent years around notions such as energy transition (narrowly understood as decarbonisation, i.e., the replacement of a fossil fuel-based energy regime with one reliant on renewable sources); just transition (the effort to ensure “no people, workers, places, sectors, countries or regions are left behind in the transition from a high-carbon to a low carbon economy”<sup>3</sup>, as per the IPCC; trade-union movement institutions like Brazil’s CUT tend to adopt a more ambitious approach<sup>4</sup>); ecological transition (broadly construed as a more far-reaching transformation of our relationship with the environment, encompassing energy, industrial and agricultural transitions, as well as what the original *Limits to Growth* report from 1972 dubbed “the transition from growth to global equilibrium”<sup>5</sup>); and ecosocial or socioecological transition (as advocated for instance in the ‘Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South’<sup>6</sup>).

As this short sample suggests, transitions may come in very different shapes and forms, primarily determined in each case by exactly what one is understood to be transitioning from and to. Is it just from one energetic regime to another, but broadly within the same social relations? Or are we referring to full-scale systemic change, with the substitution over time of one set of social, economic and political relations with another?

For those of us who believe that the ecological crisis is irresolvable within the coordinates of a global system that is premised on constant, infinite growth, it is obvious that the challenge today is to make sure that the first kind of transition – the replacement of fossil fuels by other energy sources – will not be severed from the more substantial transformation that is needed; or rather, that the urgent need for it can serve as leverage for the latter. And yet, it is reflection on this latter kind of transition that has, until recently, figured fairly low on the agenda.

- 3 Hans-Otto Pörtner and Daniel Belling (ed.) *Climate Change 2022. Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 2925.
- 4 See Central Única dos Trabalhadores, *Just Transition: a Trade Union Proposal to Address the Climate and Social Crisis*. São Paulo: Central Única dos Trabalhadores, 2021, [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/220411\\_web-booklet-just-transition-cut-eng.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/220411_web-booklet-just-transition-cut-eng.pdf).
- 5 Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jürgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *Limits to Growth* (Potomac Associates: 1972), 24.
- 6 Peoples of the Global South, ‘Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South’, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, February 9 2023, <https://fpif.org/manifesto-for-an-ecosocial-energy-transition-from-the-peoples-of-the-south/>.

## *Whither transition?*

When the Hungarian Marxist philosopher István Mészáros published his hefty doorstopper *Beyond Capital: Toward a Theory of Transition* in 1995, the book cut a lonely figure in the dominant intellectual climate of the time. At least since the Brezhnev era, it had become evident that the Soviet bloc was not in fact transitioning towards anything other than what it was, whereas the reforms adopted by China in the 1980s appeared in many ways to point in a direction that was contrary to the one adopted in the revolution's early years. The decline of social democracy from the mid-1970s onwards, the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the sudden collapse of the majority of socialist regimes around the world meant that, in the 1990s, the word "transition" indicated, more often than not, something like the opposite of what Mészáros had in mind. That is, not a movement away from capitalism and towards a post-capitalist system but, rather, from so-called 'actually existing socialism' back to the supposed 'normalcy' of a free economy and a liberal political system into which one assumed – falsely, as would soon become clear – those countries would easily and naturally slip into.<sup>7</sup>

It is true that the word never went away entirely, and remained a touchstone, for instance, in ecosocialist debates. Yet the fact that the conditions on which systemic transition had for a long time been premised seemed no longer available – there were no longer any heroic 'workers' states' attempting that risky leap into the future, the left was in retreat and disarray in most of the world, and even national sovereignty appeared to be on its way out – unmoored those debates from any immediate applicability, making them tentative and abstract. As late as 2009, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri sounded almost apologetic when they closed their book *Commonwealth* with an extended reflection on a form of 'democratic transition' that moved beyond the impasses that actually existing socialism had run up against to consolidate an 'insurrectional event ... in an institutional process of transformation that develops the multitude's capacities for democratic decision making.'<sup>8</sup>

It is no doubt the pressure created by looming ecological collapse, rather than any major shift in the conditions noted here, that has been progressively pushing the problem of systemic transition back on the agenda.

7 Elsewhere, the word was used to describe the shift from apartheid to majority rule in South Africa and, in Latin America, the re-democratisation periods that followed the end of military dictatorships.

8 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2009), 363.

For instance, Andreas Malm's recent analogy between 'ecological Leninism' and war communism, which on the face of it could be interpreted as a rejection of the problematic of transition, is in fact conceived as a way of speeding the latter up using every resource (not least the actually existing capitalist state) that social movements can lay their hands on.<sup>9</sup> Ironically, however, one of the most sustained theoretical engagements with the question of systemic transition in the last decade has taken the form of its ostensive negation in the current of thought that has become known as communisation theory. Since, for the latter, the communist content of a process of transformation is decided by the immediate 'application of communist measures within the revolution – as the condition of its survival and its principle [sic] weapon against capital',

[a]ny 'period of transition' [must be] seen as inherently counter-revolutionary, not just in so far as it [entails] an alternative power structure which would resist 'withering away' [...], nor simply because it always [seem] to leave unchallenged fundamental aspects of the relations of production, but because the very basis of workers' power on which such a transition was to be erected [is] now seen to be fundamentally alien to the struggles themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Such outright rejection is not without sense in the face of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's extensive record of failed emancipatory projects, which is what makes a somewhat niche intellectual concern like communisation representative of broader trends. For a long time, 'transition' became identified with the theoretically finite but in practice seemingly endless historical span in which the great disillusionment of actually existing socialism played itself out. No surprise, then, that ever since it started being clear that socialist countries were not in fact transitioning towards anything else, the notion should come to be seen with suspicion.

9 See Andreas Malm, *Corona, Climate, Chronic Emergency: War Communism in the Twenty-First Century* (London/New York: Verso, 2020). For a response that explicitly picks on this thread (and names transition 'the problem of our times'), see Kai Heron and Jodi Dean, 'Climate Leninism and Revolutionary Transition', *Spectre*, June 26 (2022), <https://spectrejournal.com/climate-leninism-and-revolutionary-transition/>. Another overt foray into the problem of systemic transition can be found in: Alberto Toscano, *Terms of Disorder: Keywords for an Interregnum* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2023).

10 Endnotes, 'Bring Out Your Dead', *Endnotes 1* (2008), 14.

This then leads, by the sheer weight of logical necessity, to the somewhat desperate conclusion that revolution will either be immediate or it will not be – and anything else in between will either be working towards revolution or will be counter-revolutionary. This is the case even if communisation theorists, such as Gilles Dauvé, state that the problem lies not in the ‘obvious’ fact that ‘communism will not be achieved in a flash’, but in that, in its history as a concept, ‘transition’ has come to imply not just a mere ‘transitory *moment*’ but ‘a full-fledged transitory *society*’.<sup>11</sup>

Given this, it is maybe worth returning to the question with which we started: seriously, why talk of transition? This time, however, the query does not concern the topicality of the issue but rather the seemingly banal, yet perhaps not entirely trivial issue of where the problematic of transition – as a practical rather than exclusively theoretical challenge – arises from.

### *Why transition?*

We can more readily grasp the meaning of this problematic if we conceive of social transformation as a problem of relative speed akin to what is known in celestial mechanics as escape velocity. Just as a body must be travelling faster than it can be pulled back by the gravitational force exercised by a planet if it is to escape the latter’s orbit, social relations need to change faster than the existing order is able to absorb, co-opt or repress those transformations. If that is so, the solution seems perfectly obvious: to change as quickly as possible, to change everything at once. Hence the insurrectionist wager, but equally the faith in a revolution that takes over and wields the state apparatus as a lever from which the modification in social relations can be accelerated: since differences in speed amount to differences in gradient, the distinction between insurrection and the Leninist model appears from this perspective not as a difference in kind but merely as one in degree.

11 Gilles Dauvé, *From Crisis to Communisation* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2018), 29. Italics in the original.

Obviously, however, the problem is that such rapid change requires conditions that are almost impossible to obtain: enormous accumulated social energy, a social order no longer capable of reproducing itself, a high degree of clarity about the direction of travel, sufficient homogeneity across all the regions through which the modification must spread. The case could be made that, properly speaking, such conditions have actually *never* been given to the necessary extent; and that this, rather than subjective unwillingness on the part of revolutionaries, is the reason why a total historical makeover has never been seen. What we are left with, then, is a process of social transformation that does not happen all at once – and is forced, therefore, to strike a balance, however dynamic, between rupture and continuity, movement and stasis, conquest and caution, the new and the old; or, in other words, to pose itself the question of how to *transition* from one state to the next.

To underscore this somewhat obvious point – one transitions not because one does not really want to change things but because one cannot change them *all at once* – is to emphasise that we are dealing with something that cannot be confused with the reform versus revolution opposition. Whether its agents define themselves as

revolutionaries or reformists, whether it is more or less radical, *whether it moves faster or slower*, a process of social transformation, in practice, will always involve the problem of transition. As a consequence, it will necessarily be open to the risk of ‘internal decay or destruction from outside’<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, to something much thornier than subjective betrayal: the *objective* betrayal that consists in realising after the fact that the speed at which one thought it was necessary to move was too slow to escape the gravitational pull of the previously existing order or of a different, undesired new attractor. In this light, the wish to simply do away with the problem of transition – that is, to treat its objective necessity as a matter of subjective choice – can appear as an understandable attempt to pre-emptively immunise one’s own action against the risk that it could fall short or turn against itself. That move, however, is ultimately vain, as the risk is the inevitable consequence of an inevitable temporal lag; in a certain sense, we are all reformists, or at least run the same risks as self-avowed reformists do.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> As Rosa Luxemburg once put it, a revolution is like a locomotive traveling uphill: either it ‘drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent, or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom’. Rosa Luxemburg, ‘The Russian Revolution’, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 298.

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### *Transition and the state*

For as long as transition was understood as referring to the period of transformation that opened up after a revolutionary takeover of the state apparatus, *world* revolution could be broken down, for the sake of strategic expediency, into a sequence of revolutions *within nation-states*. When the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, they expected the German working class to soon come to their rescue, and then the French and other developed capitalist nations, until eventually the whole world had broken with capitalism. Much of the late 1910s and the 1920s was spent in anticipation of this succession of events, and it was the dawning realisation that it would not come to pass that led to the Stalinist fiction of 'socialism in one country'. Early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century revolutionaries understood that, from the inception of a world market, capitalism was a global system, and it was on that scale that it would ultimately be dismantled; still, even as late as the 1960s, it was still possible to imagine that such dismantling could take place piece by piece, as country after country delinked from that system and constituted an alternative bloc.

Our present predicament rather complicates this imaginary. To begin with, decades of neoliberal restructuring have severely curtailed the scope of action available to nation-states, not only by substantially reducing their capacity for intervention at the domestic level, but also by subjecting them to the yokes of transnational finance, trade and infrastructure, as well much more concentrated economic and political power at home and abroad, in ways that would make “transition in a single country” much harder to envisage. (The treatment of the Syriza government in Greece at the hands of the country’s international creditors in 2015 offers some sense of what could happen to a country that tried it.)

Even more importantly, once we connect the question of transitioning to a different system back to the urgent question of the ecological emergency, two major differences become evident. Firstly, there is no Archimedean point such as a state apparatus at the global level: no single executive centre, no unitary deliberative and executive structure that could decide on a course of action and implement it. Secondly, the challenge of promoting a just ecological transition on a planetary scale is one that is *immediately* global in both the logical and the chronological senses.

The sort of action that is needed today requires a degree of coordination across borders, territories, communities and populations quite unlike anything we have ever known.

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There is no delinking from the global climate, and hence no option of setting up a parallel system of allied nations to compete with the hegemonic one; not only is there no time for that kind of waiting game, there is no way to fully shield any part of the world from the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of what is done in any other part, nor any way in which different parts could entirely sever the ties that make them dependent on others from the point of view of resources, production, consumption, distribution and infrastructure. This means that the sort of action that is needed today requires a degree of coordination across borders, territories, communities and populations quite unlike anything we have ever known.

Following Erik Olin Wright's tripartite distinction between ruptural, symbiotic and interstitial logics of transformation – in short: smashing the state, working within and against it, building alternatives outside of it – it would be easy to see a favouring of transition over revolution as a choice for the latter two over the first approach. Yet, as we have seen, not only is it wrong to confuse transition with the 'reform' end of the reform versus revolution dyad, but it is also that very opposition that comes undone once we move from the national to the global scale, given that the crucial reference to the state apparatus is lost.

As a matter of fact, the situation with which we are faced today combines elements from three different contexts in which the problematic of transition has been at play: the practical and theoretical debates surrounding the transition from capitalism to communism that took place from the time of the Russian Revolution to the mid- to late-20<sup>th</sup> Century; the historiographical and conceptual arguments concerning the transition from feudalism to capitalism that roiled from the 1950s to the 1970s; and the efforts of cyberneticians and systems thinkers like Donella Meadows, in the context of an emerging awareness of to conceive of a path towards systemic change alternative to that advanced by the Marxist tradition.

On the one hand, the transition that we require must happen at a pace that is usually associated with revolutionary ruptures, and could hardly take place without a degree of coordination and planning similar to or even greater than the one once expected from a socialist economy. On the other hand, revolution does not seem to be on the cards, not only because the agency that could promote it appears to be missing, but also because, on the global scale at which the problem is posed, there is no apparatus of government to be appropriated for different ends (or even smashed).

The task therefore seems to be more akin to thinking how conflict, alternative-building and state intervention could combine to induce a ‘spontaneous’ process like the one that led from feudalism to capitalism through the identification of systemic leverage points (to borrow Meadows’ expression<sup>14</sup>) and the promotion of negative and positive incentives that are adequate to modifying structural conditions as well as the choices of individual and collective agents.

Hollowed out and unfit for a challenge pitched at the global scale as it may be, the nation-state no doubt has a role to play in this process; this becomes clear when we contrast it with the market’s signal failure to coordinate responses to climate change. What decades of negotiations that entrusted market mechanisms with that responsibility have proven is that there is no way the “spontaneous” interplay of economic interests can produce transformation as huge as we need in as tight a window of opportunity as we have. Without active intervention in order to change the parameters of what is economically viable and what is not – via direct investment in infrastructure, decommodification, de-risking, capacity-building, expanding

protections and services, taxation, legislation and oversight – economic actors will just continue to look for gains where they are more easily found, to cut corners and to engage one another in a social and environmental race to the bottom. Even if we find it at a historical low, in other words, the state is still a far more effective instrument for the task at hand than the market could ever be, and it must be wielded as powerfully and consequently as we can muster. Using and expanding that capacity to act, however, will require not only overcoming the existing constraints that are placed on it but also facing the active resistance of sectors that stand to lose from it. And the strength for that fight, in turn, cannot come the state itself; it must come from shifts taking place elsewhere and from below.

### *Ecology against capital*

The imaginary of seizing the state apparatus in order to implement a transitional programme was premised not only on a vision of the state as an immensely powerful lever, but on the idea of a historical subject (the proletariat) that could coalesce into a single collective agent with a unified strategy (the party).

14 Donella Meadows, *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (Hartland, VT: Sustainability Institute, 1999).

Yet the material conditions on which this idea was in turn premised have changed substantially, probably forever. The majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's great trade unions and mass workers' parties have long been in decline, sometimes terminally so; much of what lent the identity of the worker its power of interpellation and strategic clarity – large industry, a certain homogenisation of living and labour experience, the economic and political circumstances of Fordism – has disappeared or been radically reconfigured in most parts of the world. What is more, it has since become evident that the passage from a socioeconomic position (worker) into a specific political subjectivity (proletarian, communist) was nowhere near as automatic and straightforward as it was once thought.

The resulting scenario is one of fragmentation, both social and political. For a long time, the two most common responses to this shift were to either celebrate the liberatory powers of fragmentation, which ensured that authoritarianism and bureaucratisation could not take hold, or to close one's eyes and pretend that, if only one insisted for long enough, the old certainties could come back – as if the change were only at the level of ideas and not also in material conditions.

More recently, however, some movements have started to pose this problem in a different way. It is clear, on the one hand, that there is only so much that fragmentation can do, especially in the face of a problem of the magnitude and complexity of the ecological crisis, which demands coordination and action at levels way above that of small-scale local interventions. Some unification is necessary, therefore; but this does not mean it need be conceived in the same terms as before.

Taking a lesson from nature itself, this approach considers diversity as not only a given, but potentially also an asset. It is not essential that everything be brought under the roof of a single organisation if a sufficiently vibrant ecology of organisations and initiatives exists that is at once internally differentiated and integrated enough to perform a variety of roles and pursue a range of at least partially convergent strategies. For a long time, the party was imagined as the structure that could concentrate within itself all major functions that were necessary for a political process: leadership, deliberation, participation, training, cadre-building, strategy and policy formulation, protest, direct action, and so forth. (Reality, of course, was always more complicated than that.)

Those who celebrated fragmentation for its own sake often believed – or tried to convince themselves – that such functions had become redundant, or that a new way of doing politics would emerge that would make them unnecessary. The ecological approach to political organisation does not make the mistake of assuming that these functions could be done away with, but neither does it assume they need to be concentrated; what matters is that they are fulfilled at all times, even if they are dispersed across an ecology.

Whereas the pretension to be ‘the true vanguard of the proletariat’ leads to behaviour that is competitive and damaging (because it supposes that what is good for the ecology is what is good for one’s own organisation), thinking organisation ecologically fosters an attitude of cooperation, in which people are looking for points of convergence and synergy even if they do not agree on everything, and ways of sharing resources instead of trying to be or do all things for all people. What is more, the fact that these functions are fulfilled by different actors, in different ways, with different constituencies, is potentially an advantage in a social world that is complex and fragmented, and when facing a problem like the ecological crisis, which is more complex and involves more moving parts than anything humankind has ever dealt with.<sup>15</sup>

An ecological approach is, in fact, key to any possibility of making something like the energy transition happen — let alone using it as leverage for systemic transition. This is because any such process can only be conceived as a mix of different strategies and tactics. Dismantling the system that produces climate change while simultaneously building another one in its place necessarily calls for the *obstruction* of attempts to expand commodification and extractive infrastructure with partial *disconnection* from the ‘long networks’ of capitalism and the targeted *destruction* or *refunctioning* of existing infrastructure and institutions. In other words: what directly causes climate change or feeds the imperative of endless growth must be *stopped*, dependency on energy and extraction must be *decreased* (gradually, so as not to endanger social reproduction, but by no means slowly, and in a just and differentiated way given diverse capacities across the globe); and everything else must be either *put to a different use* (if it can be) or *abandoned* (if it cannot). This, in turn, no doubt requires a combination of state intervention, direct action and the construction of autonomous infrastructure.

15 For a more in-depth exploration of what it means to think political organisation ecologically, see Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal: A Theory of Political Organisation* (London: Verso, 2021).

State intervention, as we have seen, can take several forms, but its general direction must always be: (1) to reduce the demand for and profitability of fossil fuels in the short run (through stricter regulation, taxation of profits and subsidies for alternatives, for example); while (2) lessening demand for energy in general, and distributing it more equitably, in the medium (through investment in energy efficiency and public transport, for instance, or measures to relocalise and delink commodity chains); and (3) expanding social control and shrinking the sphere of the profit motive in the long term (by relocalising energy production and universalising basic services, among many other things). All of this would, of course, run in parallel to measures towards mitigation and adaptation in the face of the effects of climate change that are already in place or locked in over the coming decades. The problem is that, while the interests of capital can align with the first goal, they run counter to the other two; and left-leaning administrations, generally seeing themselves as managers of the national economy, will tend to prefer to avoid that confrontation. They must be made to act in such a way that efforts towards the first will also contain an impulse towards the latter, and this is

where direct action (stopping pipelines and airport expansion, for instance, or disrupting logistical chains) and the building of autonomous infrastructure (locally managed energy initiatives, environmentally responsible cooperatives, territorial governance structures etc.) come in. This is not just a matter of putting pressure on governments, but of putting it directly on capital, contesting the legitimacy of its interests and attacking its capacity to reproduce itself. In short: ‘Green New Deals’ are not just investment plans but, as Thea Riofrancos put it, battlegrounds.<sup>16</sup>

One thing that follows from thinking organisation ecologically is the idea that, since strategy is always the emergent outcome of different agents pursuing different courses of action, it is often possible to walk part of the way with people with whom we disagree, seeking to build upon and inflect their strategy rather than simply opposing it or refusing any collaboration. Once again, plurality can be an asset, and we must always calibrate between the correct line we have in mind at any one time and the overall ecology’s health and capacity to continue advancing.

<sup>16</sup> Thea Riofrancos, ‘Plan, Mood, Battlefield: Reflections on the Green New Deal’, *Viewpoint*, 16 May 2019, <https://viewpointmag.com>.

In the case of the kind of process we are discussing here, this is further complicated by the fact that it takes place across multiple locations that are potentially impacted by one another in various ways. The easiest thing to do, when faced with a puzzle of this magnitude, is to centre the interests of one's immediate constituency even if they come at the expense of others; this is how decarbonisation in the Global North can be used to justify green colonialism in the global South, or sustaining the material wellbeing of workers in cities warrant the growth of sacrifice zones in the countryside. Clearly this is not the basis on which the sort of transition we are talking about can be constructed. No doubt what will work or what social forces will be involved in making it work will vary considerably from place to place. But we can begin to establish the limits of our flexibility by setting two essential guiding principles: not only there is no solution to any question that is not also a solution to the climate question, no solution is acceptable if it prevents change or entrenches existing patterns of exploitation and oppression elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

The struggle to defend the planet's ecology from the depredations capital must itself be understood in ecological terms; only this can give us the tools to envision the kind of transition we need.

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<sup>17</sup> Or, as Sabrina Fernandes has recently summarised it: 'just' must mean 'just' everywhere. Sabrina Fernandes, "'Just' Means 'Just' Everywhere: How Extractivism Stands in the Way of an Internationalist Paradigm for Just Transitions", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* (2024).

The struggle to defend the planet's ecology from the depredations capital must itself be understood in ecological terms; only this can give us the tools to envision the kind of transition we need – one which, contrary to the connotations that the concept accrued through its connection with the 20<sup>th</sup> century's actually existing socialism, is non-linear, uneven and conflictual instead of continuous, homogeneous and managed from above. This is not a 'transitory society', if by that we understand a social formation instituted in the aftermath of a major societal break in order to mediate between the social formation to be destroyed and the one to be created by combining characteristics of both. Rather, it is a process involving a plurality of timelines and rhythms of change running at variable speeds, an irregular patchwork of continuities and discontinuities that do not miraculously combine to produce structural transformation but are the object of a *constant, deliberate effort* to play them both *in support of* (to reinforce) *and against* (to correct the course of) *one another*.<sup>18</sup> If, as suggested above, the challenge of transition is fundamentally that of managing the speed of transformation – not so slow that one cannot escape the reproduction of existing social forms, not so fast that

social reproduction completely breaks down – the problem here becomes one of coordinating multiple temporalities. This means that the question of how to get to where we want to be from where we are is posed not once, about a single general mediation between two historical stages, but multiple times, and differently, by multiple agents. It is, so to speak, fractally distributed across strategies and scales, and is equally asked of the relations *between* strategies and scales so as to test their compatibility.

While evidently not all alternatives are compossible or even desirable, it is hard to imagine from where we stand today that any one tactic or strategy could single-handedly avert catastrophic climate change and create an egalitarian global system in the process. Rather than looking for one basket in which to put all our eggs or endlessly fragmenting action in innumerable individualised decisions and hyperlocal initiatives, our most reasonable bet appears to be maximising the structural impact that our limited capacities to act can have by combining them at different levels.



18 For a few recent debates on multiple temporalities in relation to the transition problem, see: Jodi Dean and Kai Heron, 'Climate Leninism and Revolutionary Transition: Organization and Anti-Imperialism in Catastrophic Times', *Spectre*, June 26 (2022), <https://spectrejournal.com>; Jason Hickel, 'The Double Objective of Ecosocialism', *Monthly Review*, September 1 (2023), <https://monthlyreview.org>.

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Amir Lebdioui  
Breno Bringel  
Bruce Baigrie  
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Katrín Geyer  
Lala Peñaranda  
Neto Onirê Sankara  
Olena Lyubchenko  
Paris Marx  
Rodrigo Nunes  
Sabrina Fernandes

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Beliz Boni  
Chantal Meza  
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Thais Trindade



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