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Explorations in Climate Psychology Journal

Issue 6: September 2024

Beyond Western Rationality

FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS

Climate Psychology Alliance

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Cover photo by Paul Hoggett

Beyond Western Rationality

By the Editorial Team

Issue 6 casts a critical eye over what has passed for rationality in modern Western-type societies. By rationality, we mean a way of seeing, feeling, thinking and doing that feels self-evident: for, after all, how else could things be? To interrogate something that seems self-evidently true is a bit of a conundrum. Looking inside the cracks of reason is not easy and it poses the question whether one can understand Western thinking through Western thinking. Hence, we have asked for different perspectives and contributions to the theme from different traditions and different continents.

Of course such criticism is as old as Western philosophy itself. In relation to the climate crisis, and crisis of the natural world, some traditions, such as phenomenology, did not take the origin of the natural sciences for granted. It demonstrated the flaws in the idea of *cogito ergo sum* (that one's being could be reduced to thought). More recently, the Frankfurt School of social theory critiqued what they called the 'instrumental rationality' of Western capitalism; the way in which it left neither nature nor humanity with any intrinsic value. Even more recently, the Club of Rome and the Brundtland Commission were clear that the Western economy (based on Western thinking) was not a sustainable way forward.

For a while now the Editorial Team have wanted to create an issue for the *Journal* that explores the psychology of Western thinking and its connections to the climate crisis. Here it is.

The issue opens with Dutch climate scientists Marthe Wens and Aashis Joshi, criticising optimism regarding techno-fixing the climate crisis. They write as if talking to their scientific colleagues, telling them why keeping the status quo in science – as if science is neutral – is dangerous. Several contributions take us on a deep dive into other dimensions of the prevailing rationality. Elspeth Crawford considers the nature of money in modern capitalist economies and the way in which it creates its own logic; something Crawford likens to living in a prevailing wind. Writing from India, Soumyajit Bhar considers the reasons why many countries in the Global South seem to follow consumerist pathways towards economic and social development and wonders whether this route is inevitable or could, in some way, be bypassed. Toby Chown explores whether the psychological roots of Western rationality might be understood through the work of Iain McGilchrist. McGilchrist suggests the mind contains two different rationalities; one focused and mechanistic corresponding to the left hemisphere, the other contextual and holistic corresponding to the right.

Several contributions to Issue 6 examine innovative practices which both challenge prevailing Western models and offer alternatives. Wayapa practitioners and researchers Jem Stone, Sara Jones and Melissa O'Shea, in conversation with Sally Gillespie, explore a wellbeing practice named Wayapa Wuurrk, which has emerged out of the Australian Indigenous principle of 'Caring for Country'. Shifting to Central America, Erin Araujo talks to Rembrandt Zegers about how the people of the Chiapas, a region in the south of Mexico, have maintained resistance to Western models of development over decades. She describes how her own involvement in a moneyless economy, El Cambalache, drew inspiration from these communities.

Image by Seamusin

Issue 6 also contains a story and two reviews. Our one-dimensional relationship to the more-than-human world is the focus of both a short story by Trang Dang and a review of the films by the Italian director Michelangelo Frammartino. Finally Els van Ooijen reviews the new book by Paul Hoggett, *Paradise lost? The climate crisis and the human condition*.

A final note. *Explorations* has sought to be innovative by blending text and imagery. In this issue we go one step further by introducing sound. Simply click on the link below to listen to a track called *Skylark* created by Big Pond:
https://on.soundcloud.com/iQwT2zYPhGxzGVDm7

Why we think optimism regarding techno-fixing the climate crisis is harmful

By Marthe Wens and Aashis Joshi

In our urgent aim to address the climate crisis, the dominant narrative of techno-solutionism, prevalent among many of our colleagues in the beta sciences,[1] has overshadowed deeper ethical and systemic considerations. Both 'carbon tunnel vision' and Euro-centric science are hampering urgently needed research into how to achieve a fast and fair transition towards environmental justice and a liveable future for all. As researchers with backgrounds in water risk and energy transition, we reflect on how beta science can be an obstacle to the transformations needed to ensure human-ecological wellbeing and discuss necessary changes in the current prevailing thinking present in Dutch academia.

Photo by ThisIsEngineering on Pexels.com

Starting point: the climate crisis is part of a planetary polycrisis

Global temperatures have already surpassed the 'safe' limit, with the last 12 months being the hottest on record.[2] Ocean temperatures have reached uncharted highs,[3] and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is one of the climate tipping points headed towards collapse.[4] Several regions around the world are reeling under devastating floods and brutal heatwaves, with people and animals dropping dead from heatstroke. At the current level of global warming, tens of millions of people are already exposed to additional significant harm, raising concerns of inter- and intra-generational injustice. We have passed both the safe and the just boundaries for climate.[5] Ecosystems are under relentless human assault from myriad fronts, and biodiversity is in free fall: both the just and safe boundaries for this earth system are breached too. The same applies to surface and groundwater, nitrogen and phosphorus; we are out of the safe and just boundary. These indicators paint a bleak picture of our modern civilisation's trajectory towards irreversible and catastrophic earth system-wide collapse.

Plans are underway in the Netherlands and Europe for a vast energy transition to renewables. Universities, often in partnership with fossil fuel and other corporations, are busy designing the net-zero economy of the future and training its workforce. The media primes us to welcome and support this green transition, selling promises of green growth[6] and green technological solutions. The message from our political and social-cultural institutions is essentially that techno-solutions will save the day and we, the privileged of the Global North, won't have to change our lifestyles and consumption habits all that much. The underlying

1. Editorial Team comment: A broad definition of 'beta science' includes all natural sciences and technical sciences, as well as mathematics and computer science. A narrower definition excludes, for example, (parts of) biology and earth sciences and largely limits the notion to mathematics, physics and chemistry. The Dutch term 'beta sciences' refers to these definitions and, in general, the same holds for Flanders (northern part of Belgium).

2. Younger, S. (2024). NASA analysis confirms a year of monthly temperature records [Online]. Available at: https://www.nasa.gov/earth/nasa-analysis-confirms-a-year-of-monthly-temperature-records [Accessed 1 August 2024]. *Also* Copernicus (2024). May 2024 marks 12 months of record-breaking global temperatures [Online]. Available at: https://climate.copernicus.eu/may-2024-marks-12-months-record-breaking-global-temperatures [Accessed 1 August 2024].

3. Sanders, M. (2024). Record-breaking ocean temperatures: what they mean for your life [Online]. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/monicasanders/2024/06/12/record-breaking-ocean-temperatures-what-they-mean-for-your-life [Accessed 1 August 2024].

4. Watts, J. (2024). Atlantic Ocean circulation nearing 'devastating' tipping point, study finds [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/09/atlantic-ocean-circulation-nearing-devastating-tipping-point-study-finds [Accessed 1 August 2024].

5. Rockström, J., Gupta, J., Qin, D. et al. (2023). Safe and just Earth system boundaries. *Nature* 619, 102–111 [Online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06083-8 [Accessed 1 August 2024].

6. Parrique, T. (2023). A response to Paul Krugman: growth is not as green as you might think [Online]. Available at: https://timotheeparrique.com/a-response-to-paul-krugman-growth-is-not-as-green-as-you-might-think [Accessed 1 August 2024].

belief is that the modern techno-capitalist enterprise is capable of addressing the climate crisis, even as it continues to accelerate. The boom in solar PV, EVs, aviation and other 'green' tech deployment is often cited as evidence that we're on track to wean ourselves off fossil fuels and halt climate destruction.[7]

Except that pretty much every indicator of the health and integrity of the climate and the biosphere disagrees.[8] Let's highlight a few of the blind spots we see in techno-solutionism.

Problem 1:
Ignorance of the earth system as one system of systems/the carbon tunnel vision

Current research often dismisses the interconnectedness of earth system boundaries and the fact that we are overshooting many of them. Solutions to mitigate or adapt to climate change should not merely shift problems from one earth system to another. After all, it's not just the climate our industrial capitalist enterprise is wrecking via greenhouse gas emissions; it's the entire biosphere, the living and life-supporting systems of our planet. And we're doing it on many fronts all at once[8] – deforestation, overfishing, pesticides, freshwater depletion, soil erosion, pollution including plastics and PFAS 'forever' chemicals, to name but a few. In the six years between 2016 and 2021, the global economy consumed 582 billion tons of materials,[9] nearly 80% of the 740 billion tons consumed over the entire 20th century.[10] Under current climate and economic plans this is set to increase a further 60% by 2060. A critical understanding of these system-wide assaults and impacts is often missing in techno-solutionist climate research, which overwhelmingly lacks action plans. The techno-solutionist worldview that sees the climate crisis, but which misses the broader underlying problem of ecological overshoot exceeding the carrying capacity of ecosystems, is often called 'carbon tunnel vision'.

This narrow focus on addressing emissions and climate change, which fails to grasp ecological impacts, is the result of the 'engineering mindset' in beta sciences, where single problems are solved with single solutions. And so solutions to climate change tend to be materials-, energy-, and ecology-blind. For instance, in the study of renewable energy, the critical material needs and environmental impacts of manufacturing, deploying, maintaining and disposing of renewables are often overlooked. This ignorance extends to waste management, where waste is seen as an environmental externality, sometimes ignoring its cascading impacts on ecosystems and communities. Many educational programmes in beta sciences do not educate in complexity thinking, discussing wicked problems and understanding that most current world problems do not have a single direct cause nor one best solution. Consequently, researchers are not accustomed to looking into root causes nor the societal effects of their research. This narrow focus can result in solutions that are blind to indirect effects and societal feedbacks, which dismisses social solutions to systemic crises.

Problem 2:
Ignorance of societal influences

While any academic aims to pursue research towards progress, there is often a lack of reflection on the broader societal and political context in which this research happens and how the mere act of conducting such research can harm societal progress. Moreover, there is a false sense of 'neutrality' and 'distance' in research within beta sciences; a notion long dismissed as impossible in social sciences and humanities. This claim that research should be neutral and independent from policy is both ignorant and irresponsible. It perpetuates the dangerous illusion that science is objective rather than serving the vested interests of the status quo. Most current research focuses on solutions that maintain the current world order, excluding options for behavioural or economic change.

For example, collaboration with the fossil fuel industry often perpetuates the systems causing environmental degradation. Not speaking up, not changing how we work and who we work with during this planetary crisis, is as political as doing the opposite; the former leads to (seemingly) agreeing with the current policies, legitimising companies' behaviour. Similarly, investigating geoengineering and carbon capture and storage (CCS),[11] and not

Photo by Chokniti Khongchum: https://www.pexels.com/photo/person-holding-container-with-seaweed-2280568

7. Fictitious Capital (2022). Comment #2: Understanding energy. To understand everything else, follow the molecules. You can't print them [Online]. Available at: https://www.thefictitiouscapital.com/p/2-understanding-energy [Accessed 1 August 2024].

8. Fletcher, C., Ripple, W.J., Newsome, T., Barnard, P., Beamer, K., Behl, A., Bowen, J., Cooney, M., Crist, E., Field, C., Hiser, K., Karl, D.M., King, D.A., Mann, M.E., McGregor, D.P., Mora, C., Oreskes, N., and Wilson, M. (2024). Earth at risk: an urgent call to end the age of destruction and forge a just and sustainable future. *PNAS Nexus*, Volume 3, Issue 4, April 2024, p.106 [Online]. https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae106 [Accessed 1 August 2024].

9. Circle Economy Foundation (2024). *The circularity gap report 2024* [Online]. Available at: https://www.circularity-gap.world/2024 [Accessed 1 August 2024].

10. Nelsen, A. (2024). Extraction of raw materials to rise by 60% by 2060, says UN report [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/31/raw-materials-extraction-2060-un-report [Accessed 1 August 2024].

11. Limb, L. (2024). World's largest air capture plant opens in Europe. Is it really a 'misguided scientific experiment'? [Online]. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/green/2024/05/09/worlds-largest-air-capture-plant-opens-in-europe-is-it-really-a-misguided-scientific-exper [Accessed 1 August 2024].

loudly proclaiming their limits and consequences,[12] leads to these topics being framed as future climate solutions, which they are not and cannot be. The lack of awareness of, or indifference to, ecological impacts in techno-solutionist visions is also evident in plans to mine the deep sea floor for the metals needed to realise 'green' technological ambitions. Beta scientists are researching technologies that US climate envoy, John Kerry, acknowledged do not yet exist,[13] but which he claimed we will need in order to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. This gives policymakers the idea that an 'easy way out' is possible. Without addressing their potential to reinforce a harmful status quo, this gives rise to problematic optimism.

Researching solutions that help perpetuate global inequality is a political statement in itself. Backing some of these techno-solutions not only helps maintain the industrial capitalist status quo by kicking the emissions reduction can down the road but also betrays carbon tunnel vision.

Problem 3:
Ignorance of the colonial, extractivist history and present

Western scientists are often blind to the propagation effect of their research regarding existing power imbalances and colonialist injustices that prop up extractivism and techno-solutionism. The modern industrial-capitalist global economy is a legacy of European colonialism.[14] EU nations and the US are responsible for half of the world's material consumption, despite having just a tenth of its population. Much of their wealth derives from the massive amount of resources they plunder from the Global South to this day.[15] Extractivism and colonialism[16] fuel the engine of industrialism and capitalism, devouring ecosystems for resources and exploiting people for labour.

Techno-solutionism does not address these ideologies that are the root of our accelerating social-ecological polycrisis. Instead, it further entrenches the exploitative and ecocidal colonialist hegemony of the West and Global North. The world is very unequal now, and hidden in the assumptions of the most important climate models, made by mostly Western scientists, there is the expectation that this inequality can remain intact in this century. For example, models assume that the metals and minerals needed for a vast energy transition to renewables[17] will mostly be extracted from the Global South under unequal rates of exchange, or that all countries should have the same relative reduction in emissions. Such climate models, for example those used by the IPCC in their energy transition pathways, thereby endorse inequality. And because the modelled pathways serve as important policy input (presented as the only possible futures), this perpetuates injustices. Techno-solutionist policies, hard-coded into our climate models, risk Global South regions being marked as sacrifice zones[18] to extract resources, with their populations and ecosystems consciously overlooked.

We see such green colonialism already playing out in places such as Congo[19] and West Papua,[20] among others, where global mining interests drive poverty, violence, political instability and ecocide to obtain critical metal and mineral resources on the cheap. Indeed, the West has a long history of using its financial and military power to destabilise and dominate the Global South nations to exploit their resources and labour at will. Tellingly, as climate and ecological breakdown intensifies, Western nations are expanding their armed forces and investing heavily in advanced weapons and tools of violence and control, including AI systems, robots and

12. Dunne, D. (2018). Geoengineering carries large risks for the natural world studies show [Online]. Available at: https://www.carbonbrief.org/geoengineering-carries-large-risks-for-natural-world-studies-show [Accessed 1 August 2024].

13. These include carbon capture to the tune of several billion tons per year, and geoengineering being envisioned in various forms such as stratospheric aerosol injection[a] to dim sunlight, iron fertilisation of the oceans[b] to stimulate phytoplankton growth and carbon uptake, and attempting to refreeze polar ice sheets[c] to maintain our planet's albedo.
a. Kerry, J., Gupta, A., and Hughes, T. (2024). Not such a bright idea: cooling the Earth by reflecting sunlight back to space is a dangerous distraction [Online]. Available at: https://theconversation.com/not-such-a-bright-idea-cooling-the-earth-by-reflecting-sunlight-back-to-space-is-a-dangerous-distraction-223353 [Accessed 1 August 2024].
b. Klinsky, J., and Satterfield, T. (2022). Geoengineering the ocean to fight climate change raises serious environmental justice questions [Online]. Available at: https://theconversation.com/geoengineering-the-ocean-to-fight-climate-change-raises-serious-environmental-justice-questions-188340 [Accessed 1 August 2024].
c. Boztas, S. (2024). Pumped up: will a Dutch startup's plan to restore Arctic sea-ice work? [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/feb/27/climate-crisis-arctic-ecosystems-environment-startup-plan-pump-restore-melting-sea-ice-caps [Accessed 1 August 2024].

14. Bernards, N. (2020). How do colonial legacies shape the contemporary global political economy? [Online]. British International Studies Association. Available at: https://www.bisa.ac.uk/articles/how-do-colonial-legacies-shape-contemporary-global-political-economy [Accessed 3 August 2024].

15. Hickel, J., Dorninger, C., Wieland, H., and Suwandi, I. (2021). Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: drain from the global south through unequal exchange, 1990-2015 [online]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2022.102467 [Accessed 3 August 2024].

16. Gupta, J. (2021). Review: 'The nutmeg's curse' challenges dominant view of development [Online]. Available at: https://dialogue.earth/en/climate/review-the-nutmegs-curse-shines-a-light-on-exploitation [Accessed 03 Aug 2024].

17. Hunzinker, R. (2022). Is there enough metal to replace oil? [Online]. Available at: https://www.counterpunch.org/2022/08/23/is-there-enough-metal-to-replace-oil [Accessed 3 August 2024].

18. Hamouchene, H. (2023). How renewables corporations are exploiting Global South [Online]. Available at: https://newint.org/story/climate/2024/01/02/how-renewables-corporations-are-exploiting-global-south [Accessed 3 August 2024].

19. Audu, V. (2023). The back end of genocide: how the rush for Congo's cobalt is killing thousands [Online]. Available at: https://republic.com.ng/october-november-2023/congo-cobalt-genocide/ [Accessed 03 Aug 2024].

20. Lundström, K. (2024). In West Papua, the birth of a 'lost generation' [Online]. *The Diplomat*. Available at: https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/in-west-papua-the-birth-of-a-lost-generation/ [Accessed 03 Aug 2024].

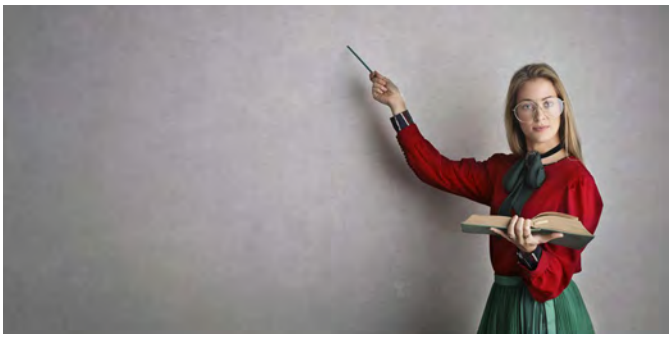


Photo by Andrea Piacquadio: https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-in-discussing-a-lesson-plan-3772511

drones. These are serious statements of intent from the ruling class of these nations that they will seek to maintain an extractivist-colonialist global hegemony in a world facing massive upheavals such as food and resource scarcities, unliveable conditions and mass migrations due to ecological overshoot and climate breakdown.

Problem 4:
Ignorance of other world frames/views

Beta scientists and economists often rely on cost-benefit or effectivity frameworks. These frameworks adopt a problematic stance; that economic growth is necessary and beneficial for all, and that technologies and corporations can fix our problems through voluntary measures. Scientists often (unconsciously) contribute to this narrative. While researching carbon emissions of vehicles, maybe adding a lens on the societal effect of promoting public transportation or improving life expectancy of materials might help society move forward better. In science communication, there is a tendency to be either too naive due to over-specialisation in one discipline or to a lack of understanding of the humanities, making it hard to discuss systemic problems without causing harm. For instance, asserting that it is possible to stay below 1.5°C of warming without addressing political realities ignores the importance of behavioural and policy changes. Similarly, claiming that adaptation to 2°C is feasible fails to consider the unequal impacts and harmful secondary consequences of proposed solutions.

Eco-modernist interpretations maximise economic benefits, with science playing the role of calculating how much of nature can be extracted without jeopardising resource bases, providing technical solutions to enhance effectiveness and efficiency. Beta scientists should be made aware of, and be familiar with, research on the needed radical cultural and political reorganisation[21] of our societies to address overconsumption,[22] so as to stop colonialist exploitation and ecological overshoot resulting in climate and biodiversity breakdown.

Problem 5:
Research-as-usual is not going to get us there

Today, standing on the edge of the climate and ecological precipice, we have to ask ourselves and one another, which is the safer and more responsible path for our societies to chart if we are to navigate the social and ecological upheavals to come without continually making things even worse?

We advocate that research into climate solutions should always reflect on environmental justice and be fair, inclusive and equitable in its approaches. This requires a break from business as usual, as modern education and research conditions largely want us to uphold the techno-industrial status quo rather than question it and imagine better alternatives. Engaging in networks to learn and unlearn is essential to avoid being blind to the power imbalances and colonialist injustices that underpin our societal systems and academic thinking. This involves brainstorming alternative ways of organising our societies, as suggested in works like *The dawn of everything*[23] and the degrowth movement. It involves calling out problematic frames in current research practices and topics, and considering which industry money not to accept to avoid being used as a greenwashing tool.

We, the public, have to realise that the modern industrial capitalist era represents just 0.1% of our species' history, and that we don't have to continue with this system[24] which has led to widespread global injustices and climate and ecological breakdown. It is not a *fait accompli*, and we would do well to take inspiration from the ways in which ancient and indigenous societies organised themselves. Facing civilisational collapse, there has never been a more urgent need for cultural and political innovation.

We should teach our students from the start to recognise the interconnectedness of environmental and social justice, and the powerful, symbolic role of doing science. Only that way can sustainability solutions address the common underlying causes of our intersecting crises of inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss; adopting humility to ensure our science does not undermine systemic change rooted in justice, equity and solidarity.

More interdisciplinary science and transdisciplinary research questions are needed. 'Business as usual' also applies to academia and must be systematically challenged. If the dominant frame contributes to climate and environmental injustice, questioning it should be at the core of science. However, this is often seen as political, risking loss of authority and policy relevance. Being neutral in the face of unequal power relations means siding with the powerful, which is no different in the case of science than in any other discipline.

Aashis Joshi is a PhD candidate at TU Delft undertaking research at the intersection of climate change adaptation, ethics and justice. **Marthe Wens** is an assistant professor at VU Amsterdam, researching the societal impacts of droughts, water security and climate risks.

21. Sutoris, P. (2022). Our environmental crisis requires political fixes, not technological ones [Online]. Available at: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/our-environmental-crisis-requires-political-fixes-not-technological-ones [Accessed 2 August 2024].

22. Donald, R. (2024). Human 'behavioural crisis' at root of climate breakdown, say scientists [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/13/human-behavioural-crisis-at-root-of-climate-breakdown-say-scientists [Accessed 2 August 2024].

23. Graeber, D., and Wengrow, D. (2022). *The dawn of everything: a new history of humanity*. London: Penguin Books.

24. Steinberger, J. (2024). What we are up against [Online]. Available at: https://jksteinberger.medium.com/what-we-are-up-against-2290ba8c4b5c [Accessed 2 August 2024].

Wayapa Wuurrk – an Earth connection practice

A conversation with Wayapa practitioners and researchers Jem Stone, Sara Jones and Melissa O'Shea

Facilitated and edited by Sally Gillespie

Wayapa Wuurrk[1] was co-founded by Gunaikurnai Maara descendant Jamie Thomas and Canadian Welsh Australian Sara Jones in 2014. Wayapa is an internationally-accredited Earth connection wellness modality, based on Indigenous and ancient peoples' knowledge about Earth-mind-body-spirit wellbeing. It was created to change thinking around the idea of what it means to be well, nurturing the development of holistic wellbeing and sustainable behaviour. Wayapa's philosophy acknowledges and honours the fundamental Australian Indigenous principle of 'caring for Country'.

While Wayapa's formats change according to context and participants, its core practices are Earth mindfulness and reciprocity, yarning circles, narrative meditation, storytelling, a movement embodiment practice based on 14 Wayapa elements, and empowering people to look after the planet. Wayapa is practised everywhere, from Mums and Bubs programmes through to palliative care. It's for people of all ages and all capacities.

A recently published research study[2] brought together Wayapa Wuurrk practitioners and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) practitioners to share perspectives, insights and stories on their own and each other's practices through a series of yarning circles (guided focus groups). In this group interview, Wayapa Wuurrk's co-founder Sara Jones, training manager Jem Stone, and practitioner and psychologist Melissa O'Shea, talk about their perspectives and experiences of Wayapa Wuurrk, along with the learnings and opportunities that have emerged from this research project.

Sally: I want to acknowledge that I'm meeting with you from the unceded land of the Gadigal and Wangal people of the Eora Nation and to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and to acknowledge the vast cultural knowledge embedded in Country through First Nations' custodianship and ecological knowledge. Landscapes have been very changed since the time of Australia's colonisation, which is such a blip of time, compared to the enormity of time in which First Nations people have cared for Country on this continent in such intimate and deeply informed ways.

Welcome Jem, Sara and Melissa. Can you introduce yourselves and your relationship to Wayapa Wuurrk?

Jem Stone: I am a First Nations woman with mixed heritage, a cultural consultant, trauma-informed therapist, and Wayapa Wuurrk practitioner and training manager. Primarily, my role is to help people gain connection to the Earth as a starting point for their wellbeing, but also to remind them of their purpose and place as contemporary Earth custodians. We are all part of our home, the Earth and all have a place. When we remember that we belong, we have a role and responsibility for finding wellness for the planet, for each other, and when we embody that, we can weave a more

Two gunngang (goo nung) – two streams by Mark Lumley (Artist, Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri)

1. For more information, visit https://wayapa.com

2. O'Shea, M., Klas, A., Hardy, T., Stone, J., Frangos, T., Jacobs, T., Mitchell, F., Charles, J., and Jones, S. (2024). Weaving Wayapa and cognitive behaviour therapy: applying research topic yarning to explore a cultural interface between Western and Indigenous psychology practice in Australia. *Australian Psychologist,* 2024, Vol. 59, No. 3, 228–244. Availabile at https://doi.org/10.1080/00050067.2024.2322710 [Accessed 2 August 2024].

positive future for ourselves and the next generations. As Wayapa Training Manager, I remind new practitioners of the importance of both remembrance and learning, and that knowledge also comes with the responsibility of passing knowledge on to others, to ensure it continues.

Sara Jones: I'm the co-creator and Executive Director of Wayapa Wuurrk. We talk about Earth-mind-body-spirit wellbeing, based on reciprocity with Mother Earth who gives us everything, so we need to look after her in return. While Wayapa honours First Nations' knowledge, it is super inclusive, bringing in everybody's knowledge by inviting everyone to tap into their own ancestral knowing, because we have all descended from hunters and gatherers somewhere in the world. We all walk in the footsteps of our ancestors.

An important part of Wayapa is that you can do it anywhere. People often think that they have to go to a beautiful place to be able to connect with nature, but nature is with us at all times. Once you are in the Wayapa way, you can tune in to that wellbeing at any point, because our connection is wherever we are and it's inherent in who we are. We've trained up about 350 Wayapa practitioners since 2016; many in Australia, one in Canada and in the U.S., and we have a UK practitioner and trainer, Debbie Mace, who is an occupational therapist. Our hope is to deliver practitioner training in the UK, either remotely or in person, within the next 12 months.

Melissa O'Shea: I am a Wayapa Wuurrk practitioner, I work and live on Wadawurrung Country and pay my respects to the Custodians of the Country here.

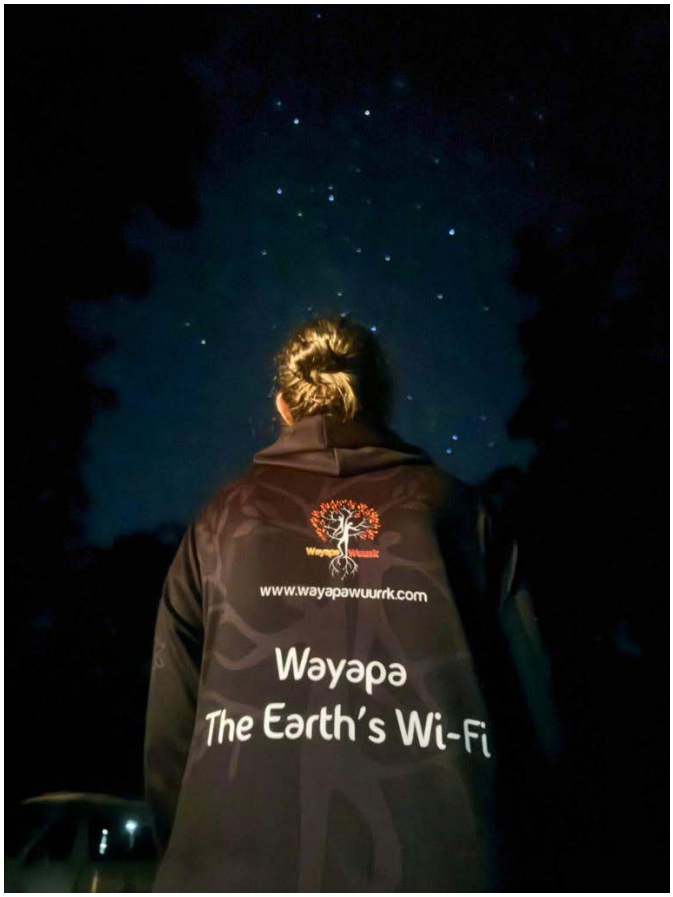
In my professional role, I'm a clinical psychologist and academic at Deakin University. I oversee the training of clinical psychology students and my research interests are in complementary integrative practices alongside psychology practices. I am also a yoga teacher and I have explored how this modality works with clinical psychology, particularly for anxiety and depression, and more recently for eating disorders. I also have a strong passion for decolonising psychology, so teaching my students in a way that allows them to consider Indigenous psychology is very important to me. Through this work, I established a relationship with our local Aboriginal Health Cooperative, where I connected with Jamie and Sara as Wayapa practitioners. I was immediately inspired by the practice, with its embodied focus and focus on the Earth. I was interested to explore how Wayapa could inform and potentially augment CBT, the psychological modality that I predominantly teach. From here, we said: "Let's slow down, take a step back, and bring CBT practitioners and Wayapa practitioners together, let them yarn, and think about whether there are already aspects of practice that are similar, as well as how our practices contrast with each other."

Sally: So what's it like to be a Wayapa practitioner? And what are Wayapa's core principles and practices?

Jem: What I particularly love about Wayapa is that it is a really inclusive space. We have some speaking events on stage, but mostly Wayapa Wuurrk is shared within a circle space where everyone has a place. We share within yarning circles, because knowledge has been shared in circle for thousands of years. Through Indigenous perspectives, we know that everybody brings a different pathway and unique gifts to the circle. No-one's in front or behind in circle; except we do leave space behind us for our ancestors – they're walking with us all the time. And we leave space in front of us for all future generations. That's such an important aspect of the sharing. Wayapa is a trauma-informed space. I've learned through the research we did with Melissa that Wayapa is practising many things that psychology does, but has a different language for, so it's been amazing through this research to realise how much we're already doing. Most importantly, people can come in and, sometimes for the first time in their lives, feel at home on the land in which they live. There's great healing in that sense of belonging. Within the climate distress space, where a lot of apathy and overwhelm happens, Wayapa asks us to focus on what we can do. Nobody's denying what's out there, but we look for solutions by starting with what we can do personally, and allowing that to ripple out into the world. Unfortunately, we are living in times where a lot of people aren't getting together and sharing stories, or even techniques or different little things that they're doing in their life to care for the planet. Knowledge is lost when it's not shared. A Wayapa workshop is two-thirds sharing stories and knowledge through yarning. When nobody's sharing the simple stuff and nurturing the richness of relationship and collaborations, how can we expect to find ways together for the big stuff? In a Wayapa Wuurrkshop, people bring their cellular memory, that ancestral wisdom. We always hear about intergenerational trauma, but we often forget that we have intergenerational wellbeing that we all have access to as well. The more that we connect, the more that is able to come through. So when people share what their Grandma used to do to stay well, or stories she passed on, or even her recipes, this activates cellular memory.

In Australia, we have such diversity with First Nations people, settlers whose families have been here for generations, as well as recent immigrants. A lot of the time, there's great loss and grief from

Image by Jem Stone, Wayapa Wuurrk



people not knowing much about their ancestry, not knowing where they fit in, and being too afraid to engage with First Nations people because they don't want to get things wrong. I've found working with individuals and in groups that Wayapa brings us all back to human experience and that's what the world needs. We're always at home if we know we are Earth people and that we can do something to care for our favourite place in nature, for one little patch of Earth. Then that sense of overwhelm and apathy tends to go because it brings back a sense of purpose and contribution, knowing we can do something each day.

Melissa: Jem led our students in a Wayapa training recently. Part of the training is sharing around ancestry. We talk about the Indigenous Social Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) framework, but actually experiencing sitting in a circle sharing, reflecting on ancestry and points of connection and difference is incredibly powerful.

Jem: The power of circle work is it takes away hierarchy. When we're all sitting in circle, regardless of who is sharing or speaking, we are learning. We are all the teacher and the taught. One of the things that Wayapa co-creator Jamie Thomas taught me was that humans have sat around fires for 1,000s of years, but we've only sat around TV for a few generations, so we have more connection to this way of sharing knowledge within our cellular memory than through screens. It's about getting back to these basics of human experience, recognising that it's not about romanticising the past but that these ways are relevant today because how we've been operating recently isn't working for the planet or for people.

Sara: Wayapa is a lifestyle, it's in everything you do. You understand that you are nature, and that you have impact through everything that you do, which is very empowering in this age of eco-anxiety. I'm not a huge fan of that word because it puts eco next to anxiety, whereas we find that it's nature that brings healing and soothing. Wayapa teaches that we can do many things, from food choices through to how we interact with people, to the knowledge we share. We celebrate any steps. We say we need to take out our egos and our judgement. A lot of the time we get into that comparison mode: "It's got to be home beautiful, we've got to keep up with the Joneses." When you start learning Wayapa ways, you ask, is that really important? Probably not. You can bring in different thinking around your choices about how we're living and do I need this? Or do I want it? Usually it's wanting.

Jem: There is a lot of shaming for people who aren't living zero waste, riding their bikes and things like that. The Wayapa way is more about knowledge-sharing. Our way, rather than looking to save the Earth, is to help people love and care for the Earth, so they want to do all they can to help her. It's about creating connection, remembering we are nature rather than telling everyone how they have to do something. Even those smallest steps can have a big impact when they're done consistently. When people are living in such overwhelm, knowing that small consistent steps can make a big difference enlivens the spirit. Community mindedness is a huge thing. People are feeling so isolated and alone at the moment. Knowing they can be part of a community of people who love and care for the Earth is huge. The Wayapa community has people from every walk of life, who may not connect ordinarily but come together because of deep caring and connection with Earth.

Sally: Melissa, how has coming into Wayapa Wuurrk, having been trained in the Western modality of psychology, been for you?

Melissa: One thing that comes to mind is pushing against evidence-based practice and the thinking that unless something has Western-based evidence it doesn't have value, or that we can't promote it within our psychological work. When you step back, you recognise there's so many ways that we 'know' and have understood things for millennia. Modern science didn't get discovered until 300 or 500 years ago, and there's been a forgetting and a downgrading of certain types of knowledge. It's very important as a psychologist, with the resurgence of evidence-based practice, to appreciate what works and needs to be promoted. There are aspects that have been missing in our frameworks. One conspicuous absence is the body; perhaps because of the concern around crossing boundaries. We've separated mind and body. As a psychologist, being able to think about how clients are or are not embodied, and about their connection to their environments and the natural world is really important. Our students are really hungry to understand how they can do this and to work in more holistic ways. Wayapa is an incredibly accessible way to support this understanding, with its mindful movement practice along with the sense of purpose and activation that comes from advocating for the Earth. The understanding that our health is reciprocally related to the planet is something we can't ignore any longer, and must incorporate into the work that we do as psychologists.

Jem: We're so grateful to Melissa for leading this research to see the value of Wayapa; how it is not an afterthought or an add on, or to be treated extractively, as has happened in the past with Indigenous knowledge. It's a true recognition of how Wayapa can contribute to psychology. It's wonderful we were able to do our research, to see what becomes possible through collaborating, and the benefits of thinking about being two rivers of practice entwined together.

Sally: Can you tell us about this research which brought Wayapa Wuurrk and CBT practitioners together?

Melissa: This process came together serendipitously, like anything when you get out of the way of yourself! Our interest was around bringing practitioners together from the different modalities, to think about what happens when you create a safe cultural interface and allow magic to happen; to allow people to yarn together about their practices, with no expectation about what would emerge. Also to give the opportunity for psychologists to practise Wayapa, and for Wayapa practitioners to learn a bit about CBT.

We used a methodology called Research Topic Yarning, embracing concepts such as sitting in circle, talking with one another about their practices, where there were synergies that were surprising, or about how different things were. What emerged is a lot of similarities in practice. There are ways that Wayapa works which already incorporate what might be seen as traditional CBT ideas but enacted in a different way, while CBT practitioners could recognise some gaps in their own practice that were filled by Wayapa practice. Importantly, they could reflect on the holistic nature of Wayapa, not only as a modality you do as a movement practice, or the narrative mindfulness which was very accessible, but with its recognition of reciprocity between mental health and the health of the Earth. What emerged was this desire for co-creation. What would it look like if we were to take this further? This is where we're now operating. I'm really excited about the possibility of an Indigenous CBT that's homegrown in Australia, where we use the language of Wayapa and draw on elements which are accessible to everybody, which we need now we're in a mental health pandemic.

Many people can't access CBT, for lots of reasons including that its language can be difficult. There's an absolute desire from both Wayapa and CBT practitioners to co-create a programme.

Sally: Jem and Sara, what would you like to add about the research?

Jem: There's much discussion about CBT being in conflict with a lot of the Indigenous worldview. So there was a little bit of hesitancy from some of the First Nations practitioners, until we actually sat in the space and were able to see how beautifully the research was done using some Indigenous healing practices, like sitting in circle, deep listening and everyone having an equal place. This introduced the possibility of dismantling some of the barriers for First Nations people even being able to access CBT services. This in itself, if nothing else is done, may help overall mental health for First Nations people. I'm just as excited as Melissa to think about what could be co-created moving forward. The Wayapa philosophy is for everyone on the planet. We're looking at the best of both those worlds and how that can support humans moving forward.

Sara: Our Wayapa practitioners were hugely excited because this research was done the Indigenous way, with the entire project co-designed from the beginning. It has been really acknowledging and honouring of First Nations ways, bringing CBT practitioners into our training and then all of us creating a collective offering in circle. A lot of us have been CBTing for a long time. It was just putting a different language to it, honouring different CBT techniques and bringing in all the Wayapa elements. For example, we would ask ourselves a series of questions around CBT, then ask what's happening with the moon? Is it full or new? Is it windy out, are you being stirred up emotionally? Is there an eclipse that's just happened? What's the impact of the cosmology? What's the impact of our environment? Who are our ancestors? Where's ancestral knowing coming into this? Once you start knowing how to be Wayapa, you bring that into your life. It's all about your relationship with the Earth, your community and your true self, working out who that is.

Jem: And also for future generations. There's so much out there telling us that we need to work on ourselves, but there's not many spaces that are truly talking about the next seven generations. That's integral in Wayapa. This new model we hope to weave together, not only do we believe that it will benefit mental health, it will also benefit Earth because caring for Earth is part of our wellness practice. This is why I've been a huge advocate for Wayapa for so long, because in what are called eco-anxiety spaces, there's again this separation from the Earth with the idea that we need to go in and fix all these problems, when the truth is we are part of everything so we just need to strengthen our relationship with the Earth with our actions. It's a completely different mindset.

Image by Shelly Hood Photography

Sally: Melissa, what did you see happening for CBT practitioners participating in this research?

Melissa: My observation was that CBT practitioners were a bit surprised at how much they resonated with Wayapa practice, the possibilities it seemed to have for their own practices, and how it brought them wellbeing through their engagement. It perhaps provided a reconnection with why they became psychologists to begin with, or with the promise of being more creative in their practice. There was also a real respect for this new way of knowing, the Research Topic Yarning approach, which was exciting because of the dominance of quantitative research methods and ways of knowing in psychology.

Sally: It sounds like decolonisation in practice.

Melissa: Absolutely. It is valuing Indigenous psychology, which maybe wasn't even a concept that the CBT participants recognised before, but suddenly became real to them. It starts with: "Oh, my goodness. How have I not got this before?" and probably some despair, but then this hopefulness about what's possible.

Jem: I love that you said that Melissa, because in the past these methods may not have been even recognised, or could have been completely ignored. But Indigenous wellness practices work. The knowledge has been tried and tested for so long. Wayapa is an incredible tool and, as Melissa said, some of the CBT practitioners realised this is something they had been missing or it helped them regain an excitement for what they're already doing. It's not about creating hierarchy, it's about how Wayapa can be embedded in absolutely every area of life, helping set a stronger foundation for what we're already doing. It's a big missing piece of the jigsaw puzzle for most people to understand what it truly feels like to have that sense of belonging with the Earth. Once that's integrated and it's not just a concept, that's where the movement practice comes in, embodying the knowledge. It becomes every part of what we do. That's the important message with Wayapa.

Sara: We talk about how our relationship with the Earth is the longest relationship we're going to have in our life, so when we become disconnected from that, we start having issues. With reconnection, we remember who we truly are as children of the Earth, putting holistic wellbeing back into place.

Sally: Is there anything you would like to add to finish?

Jem: I am excited to hopefully be living in a time where Indigenous wisdom is going to be valued in places like psychology, not just at Deakin University and other spaces, but for its value to be seen and acknowledged across the board.

Sara: I agree. Acknowledging Indigenous ways is so important because it's got time and evidence behind it, whereas new approaches, like psychology, have only been around for a little bit. So it's an important weaving in. It's not about ditching anything, it's

Image by Shelly Hood Photography

about looking at how everything can be woven together to create true wellbeing.

Melissa: There's also something around the permission that Wayapa gives psychologists to think about their own self-care as practitioners. This sharing of an Indigenous wellbeing practice that has benefits for everyone is both humbling and decolonising.

Sally: Yes, it's so vital in this time of increasing climate disasters and stresses which affect everyone to have reciprocity and renewal in healing practices that can support all alike. I want to thank you all very much for bringing your experience, passion and research to our readers; introducing us to Wayapa's wisdom ways for individual, community and Earth healing.

Sally Gillespie, PhD, lives on the unceded lands of the Gadigal and Wangal people in Sydney, Australia. Her book: *Climate crisis and consciousness: reimagining our world and ourselves* (2020, Abingdon: Routledge) explores the psychological challenges and developmental processes of climate engagement. She is workshop facilitator and trainer for Psychology for a Safe Climate.

Can attention to the truth renew a collapsing world?

An introduction to Iain McGilchrist's neuro-pragmatism and the nature of a world in metacrisis

By Toby Chown

"The border between the real and the unreal is not fixed, but marks the last place rival gangs of shamans fought themselves to a standstill" Robert Anton Wilson[1]

"We need to redirect our attention to 'what out there is not us…' " Iain McGilchrist[2]

Iain McGilchrist has a formidable CV. Having read and then taught English and Philosophy at Oxford to PhD level, he retrained in medicine, becoming a psychiatrist, and clinical director of the Bethlehem and Maudsley Acute Mental Crisis Service. His chief area of interest came from his studies into the nature of the two hemispheres within the brain. In this sense, McGilchrist is already quite unusual; an Oxford Don, with the ability to move between the language of psychiatry, poetry and philosophy, with experience of working with extreme and acute mental distress.

His two major books[2,3] are addressed not only to further an understanding of the brain and mental health, but to the crises of the world at a broad scale. McGilchrist's call is for a paradigm shift to return value to the perspective given by the right hemisphere of the brain. But what does that mean – especially for nature and the ecological crisis? I want to unpack McGilchrist's thesis and then 'think with it' in the face of the ecological crisis; a crisis of meaning so deep as to trouble the world's future. Or, as he writes:

> *"…we should be appropriately skeptical of the left hemisphere's vision of a mechanistic world, an atomistic society, a world in which competition is more important than collaboration, a world in which nature is only a heap of resources there for our exploitation, a world in which only humans count, and yet humans are only machines – not even very good ones at that; a world curiously stripped of depth, colour and value"* (McGilchrist, 2009, p.xxvi)

The divided hemispheres

McGilchrist tells us that the brain is divided in all animals. Even simple-celled creatures with basic nervous systems show signs of a kind of separation into two hemispheres. The structure of brain division is clear in animals and birds; if we took a brain out of its skull casing we would see grey crinkled matter that appears to be

Photo by Paul Hoggett

divided into two roughly symmetrical halves. McGilchrist tells us that this division is in fact not symmetrical but subtly yet distinctively and importantly asymmetrical. He argues that at the core of our experience and our world lies a doubleness and a divided nature. This doubleness is inscribed into the very structure of our bodies and minds.

McGilchrist reviews the evidence for the idea that the different hemispheres have different functions; an idea that was briefly in vogue during the 1970s, leading to a pop psychology which said the left hemisphere is to do with language and logic, and the right to do with creativity and emotion. This, McGilchrist suggests, is not true. The different hemispheres do not have different functions. Both hemispheres, he tells us, are involved in all kinds of functions.

1. Wilson, R.A. (1997). *Cosmic trigger I: the final secret of the Illuminati.* San Francisco: And/Or Press.

2. McGilchrist, I. (2009). *The master and the emissary: the divided brain and the making of the world.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

3. McGilchrist, I. (2021). *The matter with things: our brains, our delusions and the unmaking of the world.* In two volumes. London: Perspectiva Press.

However, when one dominates, it precludes the other. The *corpus callosum*, which separates the hemispheres, has developed not in order to connect the hemispheres, but to inhibit them. It seems that we need to predominantly use either one or the other, depending on the task or situation, but not both at the same time. Why would evolution prefer less connectivity rather than more at this primary neurological level? The answer, according to McGilchrist, is to do with a primordial need to be able to wield different kinds of attention. "Inhibition," he writes in relation to hemisphere specialisation "is creative" (McGilchrist, 2021, p.60).

Think of a heron, how it needs to focus its beady eyes and sharp beak on a narrow area below itself with total attention, in order to suddenly thrust downwards with the utter certainty necessary to capture its prey. Think also that, in this moment, the heron is most vulnerable to attack from a large predator. It needs a broad attention style that can take in whatever is happening in a wide field surrounding it.

As for herons, so for humans. Rather than a sharp beak, we have a strong and dominant right hand. The right hand, connected to the left hemisphere, manipulates, controls and uses tools. It allows us to focus on things in fine detail, break down complex things to smaller parts and grasp hold of them. The right hemisphere's understanding, McGilchrist writes in contrast "is based on complex pattern recognition" (McGilchrist, 2009, p. 47).

This sounds very much like a description of a set of functions. What then is the difference between the two hemispheres, if not one of function? McGilchrist, reviewing the evidence from brain-damaged patients, suggests that it may be more illuminating to consider them as having different kinds of personalities that allow different kinds of attention.

What happens when there is only one hemisphere?

Over time, those close to people relying on the left hemisphere, due to right hemisphere damage, notice a profound change in character and personality of their loved one. The traits that McGilchrist says define left hemisphere dominance are an unwarranted over-confidence, a sense of grandiosity and irritability. He also says that the left hemisphere has a strong tendency towards delusion; that it cannot admit to being wrong – it is, McGilchrist tells us, "crippled by naively optimistic forecasting of outcomes" (McGilchrist, 2009, p.85). Reviewing psychological tests, he concludes the left hemisphere "is the equivalent of the sort of person, who, when asked for directions, will prefer to make something up than admit to not knowing" (McGilcrist, 2009, p.81).

In experiments where those with right hemisphere damage (left hemisphere dominant) are asked to draw their own body, they very often only draw the right-hand side, as if the left did not exist. When asked, they will narrate psychotic-sounding or bizarre-seeming explanations for what is happening on their left side – confabulation. This, McGilchrist suggests, reveals what happens when the left hemisphere is dominant – it ignores or is unconscious of whatever does not fit its agenda. It cannot admit this, but constructs a narrative that defends its understanding regardless. And the left hemisphere can dominate not only individuals but entire cultures and periods of history – the second half of *The master and his emissary* is a book of neuro-historical criticism, seeing shifts in hemisphere dominance over large periods of time, shown in

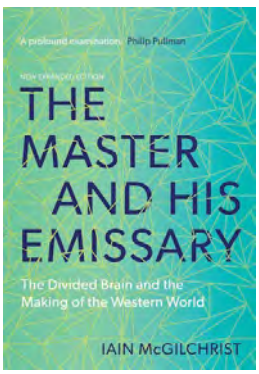
Photo by Toby Chown

cultural patterns, politics and art with the left preferring dominance, abstraction, hard shapes and forms.

McGilchrist implicates left hemisphere dominance in both schizophrenia and autism, although in very different ways, saying that each are characterised by fixation on a narrow object to the exclusion of a broader context or meaning.

McGilchrist shows us the evidence from split-brain studies that the right hemisphere takes in a very different world than the left – it tends to hold provisional, embodied, contextual understandings of the world that are less detailed but more accurate, less certain but more true, more able to deal with apparent paradox and complexity and to understand wholes rather than parts. McGilchrist writes: "one way of putting this is that the left hemisphere is concerned with what it knows, the right hemisphere is concerned with what it experiences" (McGilchrist, 2009, p.78).

The master and his emissary



Why would we have two such different 'personalities' in the structure of our brain? In McGilchrist's analogy, the right hemisphere is the master, and the left the emissary. The master delegates to the emissary, whose skill lies in fixation, focus and repetition. This act of delegation is essential to prevent overwhelm. But the emissary

wants total control. When knowledge replaces experience, the master is imprisoned.

The problem with seeing the hemisphere as having functions, rather than styles of personality, is that this is a left hemisphere way of seeing things. The style of the left is to take things apart to understand how they work. Or, as E.E. Cummings[4] put it:

Given the scalpel they dissect a kiss

If the hemispheres don't have different functions, then what do they do?

Does the brain have functions or bring worlds into reality?

So far, this may seem like a very interior model, looking at brains and how they work. However, it's not simply individuals that have been "captured by left hemisphere dominance" but the human world itself. We are living in the emissary's world. This is fatal, as it only knows how to dismantle and manipulate things and can't admit it's wrong. We are living in a tyranny of our own making, one that has the same source, whether it be at an individual, institutional, cultural or political level. We bring into being the world we perceive. At the moment that's an overwhelming, dissociated world stripped of meaning that, even when it thinks it's doing good, knows only how to manipulate and finds no meaning outside of itself.

I stare at lush images
as dust storms gather around us
wash the bodies of dead insects
into bleached oceans,
as birdsong falters.
In this split world, we measure
dimensions of goddess body
as if a factory to be made more effective
whilst sharing stories
we think we have created –
as if the world has no language,
as if the world were not
the source of all our origins[5]

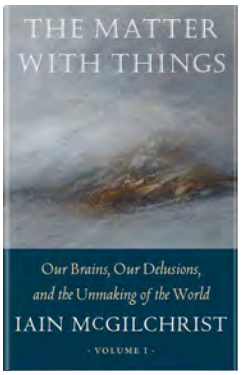
The world as source of all our origins

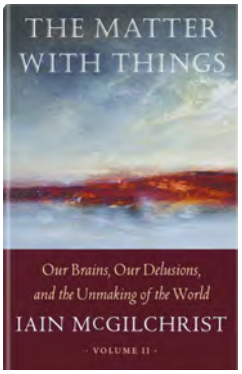
The world is the source of all our origins – we are inescapably woven into an ecological matrix that we can either embrace or deny. There is nothing around us that is not a re-packaging and shaping of something that has its origins in nature. As a wooden door is to a tree, so our language is to the language of nature. The case of much language use, especially writing, is effectively manipulation, through the replacement of a real world for a symbolic one. On the internet, text-dominant communications quickly become heated, grandiose and conflictual. Yet language has poetic origins. Metaphor is not simply pretty, but the way we understand the world.

So when Ezra Pound sees:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a black wet bough[6]

as he watches people walk up the steps from the Paris Metro, it brings a world into being – one in which petals and faces find meaning through a shared moment of illumination. What do I mean though by bringing a world into being? McGilchrist here turns to phenomenology – but I would like to take a digression into what a world is.





The word 'world' is a Saxon word that comes from putting two words together – *wer* and *eld*; *wer* meaning man or mankind, which shares the root meaning of *vir*, as in vitality or virility. *Eld* means age, in the sense of 'an age' or 'a lifespan' – a process of time. The original meaning of 'world' then is something like 'the lifespan of a living person'. At its root, then, the word 'world' suggests not an objective object, but one that deeply implicates participation. This understanding of world, something that involves human perception, process, time, ageing and lifespan, stands in stark contrast to the conception of world that we might have from imagining an 'objective' blue and green sphere spinning in the vastness of space; the view from nowhere favoured by the left hemisphere.

McGilchrist shows us how frequently we fall into a left hemispherical vision of the world, from the reliance on 'mechanisms' in biology to 'functions' in cognitive psychology. To the left hemisphere, if you think you are a hammer, then everything else has to become a nail. It's no accident that hyper-technology that's supposed to make us happier and more efficient is instead destroying our living world.

The science of 'Science'

Much of McGilchrist's work is focused on methodology – how we find what's true. He suggests intuition, imagination, reason and science as our best bets. However, as the huge levels of anxiety over vaccinations and the climate crisis have shown, 'science' offers a highly contentious position within the status quo. At a population level, 'science', as a concept rather than a practice, offers the reassurance of existing or potential mastery of whatever we chose to deal with. On the other hand, when high levels of anxiety are present, 'knowing the data' doesn't help. Large populations split between either accepting the data or seeing the data as corrupt. 'Science' becomes either a fetishised and disembodied practice, or people find alternative scientists to support their anxious beliefs – such as big oil companies funding scientists who would appear to offer alternative perspectives, to give the illusion of opposition in the field.

McGilchrist makes the penetrating observation that a science possessed by the materialistic reductionism of the left hemisphere alone can only bring a fragmented world into being.

This doesn't mean that 'anything goes' or that science should be

4. Cummings, E.E. (1926). Since feeling is first. In *Is 5*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

5. Author's own words.

6. Pound, E. (1913). In a station of the Metro. In Monroe, H. (Ed.) *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. Chicago: The Poetry Foundation

abandoned, rather, that the experience of a relationship with what's studied deepens the study, not in incidental ways, but in ways that yield truths that machine learning simply cannot. The left hemisphere can only work from assumptions it already has, which it prefers not to acknowledge it has made. Therefore, science cannot put forward a clockwork world that is a fascinating collection of mechanisms and expect to find the truth. The unpredictability within the world, its sheer flexibility and complexity, is such that we cannot hope to break it apart to understand it.

Cut apart leaf from leaf
You will not find out what's beneath

McGilchrist suggests it's not cognition that underscores our means to understanding what's true, but attention – the kind we find like Pound at the Metro station. Attention means being drawn towards something of value, rather than creating it as if from oneself. It's not that doing this is 'better' than an exertion of will, it's closer to what is actually happening at a given moment. I cannot 'think myself' into a solution to the climate crisis, I can give it my attention; a painful thing to do given the immensity of it.

The presence of a place

Yet if, as Kipling[7] once did, I enter the woods, on a summer evening late…
When the night air cools,
On the trout ringed pools
Where the otter whistles his mate
I find something that has presence, and a beauty and unyielding truth
The collapsing oaks,
The talons of an owl,
The sudden death of mice

I experience the woods through my own story as it arises through my memories and my new experiences. If I return to that place, my familiarity with it becomes entangled with the feelings I had in the place, or moments when the equilibrium was disturbed either by the intrusion of an animal, or weather, or by the flow of my own fantasies, memories and feelings. It's this interplay between my imagination and the attention I give it that gives the place meaning. For McGilchrist, much of the time when we think we should heroically will things into action, we are actually being drawn towards things that we give value to.

Robert Anton Wilson[8] describes metaphysicians as "gangs of rival shamans", because they have the power to draw borders that delineate what's real:

Between a dead world
And the loneliness of a mind
That thinks only it creates the meaning
Of the world

For McGilchrist, one of the left hemisphere's signature moves is to deny reality to that it can't see or measure. Yet the fate of our World, (wer-eld) lies on attention to intangibles – to values, to presence to beauty, transience, truth.

Psychology itself is just as poorly prepared to deal with the climate crisis as any other discipline. It is stretched between a naive materialism that wants to find all answers to life in the brain on the one hand and, on the other, an anxious idealism intensely focused on identity as the source of meaning on the other. Both postmodernism and scientific reductionism, for McGilchrist, show signs of the left hemisphere's desire for abstraction, its narrow focus on the human as measure of all things, of breaking the world into parts to try to make it work better.

If we refuse to put together a sense of the whole, we will continue to have a Humpty Dumpty world full of millions of pieces we cannot put back together again.

What I give attention to brings
A world into being

The ecological crisis threatens to unravel our world at the level of meaning as well as matter. As we have a secret and deep connection to the world's psyche, as well as to its matter, it affects us all deeply. McGilchrist's work redraws the boundaries of the real, using neuroscience, art history and phenomenology. At times, his reliance on the hemisphere theory could make one wonder if this is simply a way of his asserting what he likes (balanced and fair-minded judgments, romantic art, neuroscience) and denigrating what he doesn't (modern art, identity politics, overbearing scientific materialism). Yet the detail and scope of his vision go beyond this; he offers us a new way of seeing within the wreckage of the postmodern techno-industrial landscape. He also offers an unusual sense of the power hidden where we don't always see it; the master, in touch with embodied body, nature, reflection and art is the only one who is really able to be the master. He shows us that within our neurological tendencies we can find gateways to a deeper, more mysterious and beautiful living world. We can only pull that world into being when we pay attention to it.

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7. Kipling, R. (1906). *The way through the woods. Rewards and fairies*. London: Macmillan & Co.

8. *Op. cit.* See page 13.

Filming the more-than-human: the films of Michelangelo Frammartino

Reviewed by Paul Hoggett

Le quattro volte (*The four times*, 2010)[1] and *Il buco* (*The hole*, 2022)[2] are two films by the Italian director Michelangelo Frammartino. Both films are virtually without human dialogue and both are what might be called 'slow' films; *Le quattro volte*, in fact, very slow. Some would say that these are films in which nothing happens. In one sense this is true, but it would also be true to say the whole world is present in them. *Le quattro volte* purports to depict four phases of being – an old goatherd dies, becomes animal, becomes tree, becomes mineral. *Il buco* depicts the exploration of a cave in 1959, which turned out to be one of the deepest in Europe. Both films are set in deepest Calabria in southern Italy. They have an extraordinary beauty.

Frammartino uses distance wherever possible: looking down on the roofs of a Calabrian village, or upon a crowd setting off on a religious procession down a road; looking across a vast mountain plain where a herder's stock grazes and where the cavers set up camp. Even inside the claustrophobic space of the near-vertical cave we see the cavers' headlights hundreds of feet below us. Through this device, we see the smallness of humans as we go about our routines and our plans.

A second device Frammartino uses concerns the role that he gives to animals. Whether a goat, cow, horse, ant, snail, donkey or dog, they become living characters in his films, at times curious, sometimes stupefied, sometimes engaged in joyous play, sometimes lost and terrified. The goatherd's dog in *Le quattro volte* precipitates one of the most wonderful pieces of slapstick to have been captured on film; one which leads both to the deathbed hallucination of the goatherd and the invasion of a village by his goats. In *Il buco*, when a team of cavers arrive in a noisy lorry in a remote mountain pasture, the local cows stand stock still in wonder, just as a group of villagers had done upon the arrival of the same team the previous day. And as the dead herdsman is carried off on a stretcher, his herd stand and watch as if paying homage. Except for the dog, who was evidently trained to perform the action that triggers the ensuing slapstick, none of the animal behaviour is contrived, they are all just being themselves.

Photo by Gül Işık: https://www.pexels.com/photo/back-view-photo-of-shepherd-walking-his-flock-of-sheep-in-grass-field-2452321/

The non-human also features prominently in Frammartino's films, particularly the extraordinary landscape. In *Le quattro volte*, a single pine tree is the scene of a heart-breaking animal tragedy, the totem pole for an obscure village ritual celebration and part of the material consumed in an extended observation of the making of charcoal by local villagers. In *Il buco*, as the cavers descend several hundred feet into the narrow tube-like abyss, the cave increasingly resembles a living, moist, fleshy oesophagus.

What is alive and what is dead, what is human and what is animal, what is animate and what is inanimate? Frammartino constantly pushes us to question the boundaries we take for granted and he achieves this without any tricks (dog excepted) – just by drawing us in to close observation.

Finally, there is the theme of death and time. In both films an old man dies. I say 'old' but their features are so incredibly worn and wizened that, as the camera dwells on their faces for several minutes, it is difficult to know whether the men we see are 50 or 80. Time plays itself out through the old men's routines, alone with their animals in the hills and mountains of Calabria. It is also present in the roar of the forest and the silence of the abyss, something both ancient and terrifyingly present.

If you can immerse yourself in these films on the big rather than small screen, then do. I hope I've managed to describe some of the wonder they evoked in me.

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1. *Le quattro volte* (2010). [Film]. Directed by Frammartino, M. Rome: Istituto Luce Cinecittà.

2. *Il buco* (2022) [Film]. Directed by Frammartino, M. Rome: Istituto Luce Cinecittà.

Money matters

By Elspeth Crawford

Readers who are interested in exploring the numbered notes that are listed in this text are encouraged to go to: https://transitionalspace.wordpress.com/money-matters-notes-and-bibliography, which also contains a bibliography

Introduction

This essay is about money and what I will call the 'Monetary System' that functions in the background of our everyday lives. This system exercises a hegemony throughout the world, almost invisibly. It is the water in which we swim. My use of capitals, as in Monetary System, is to indicate the hegemony of this system; one Jem Bendell calls money-power.[1] There are, and have been, other possible monetary systems that could serve our needs much better. The Monetary System rose to dominance during the last three to four hundred years, and is a major driver of the changes many now recognise as contrary to well-being and deeply unjust. It also works against our capacity to take essential action to mitigate present world crises, especially that of climate warming.

In a later section, I will share thoughts about the psychology of how, why, the Monetary System arose and persisted, as it is unlikely that transition to other systems can happen without the deeper understanding that brings wider awareness. Many writers have pointed out the serious consequences of the Monetary System, but are not heard, just as the work of Rachel Carson, Schumacher[2] and others warned of environmental dangers, but even now are unheeded by many. To change the entrenched Monetary System that causes harm, we require more than economic analysis of its effects. We need a gut awareness of its role, and of our role, in driving the harms, so we can bring about a needed transition. But first I will try to explain some of the dynamics of the Monetary System, how it works and why it is harmful.

Money creation and the Monetary System

Money has to be created within an agreed monetary system. Well known to economists and bankers, but rarely mentioned or queried, is the fact that the Monetary System used in most countries of the world is one in which money is created from nothing. When first encountered, this fact seems impossibly ridiculous, but even the Bank of England agrees.[3] What happens next is that money, newly created from nothing, is placed into the world's economy as a form of debt. I use the single word 'debt' here to encompass all of the dominant ways in which money is created, because the various methods, however different in detail, each bring with them the requirement to pay back. Debt, this pot of created money, includes everyday borrowing, mortgage and credit cards etc., the capital investments needed by businesses, and governmental money-creation processes like bond issuing, quantitative easing and furlough payments during pandemics. Economists know that government 'borrowing' is in effect governments lending to themselves via the financial industries and banking. Most borrowings and returns occur across many years, so that at any point in time this loaned money circulates in the economy, enabling our economic

Photo by Michael Steinberg: https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-of-coin-318820

activities (trade, exchange, investment, tax-payment, satisfaction of needs, and so on).

Until about 2014, I had assumed I was competent, knowledgeable and OK with money. It had never even occurred to me that money was somehow created.[4] The 'Oh Sh*t' moment was when I realised there is a catch.[5] Because money is put into the system in this way, as debt, the return requirement has to be added to the amount of money used to serve the original need. The money created is serving two ends. Because return is required as well as servicing need, the consequence is that for any individual, group, organisation or government there is never enough. There is always scarcity, and in order to satisfy present need and also make the return in the future, it is necessary to exploit or expand in the present or borrow more, pushing the problem to the future, where more exploitation or expansion can ensue.

From Bank of England Statistical Releases, it is known that debt growth is increasing; an increase of an increase. Regardless of the ethics or morals of exploitation processes, there is less and less space within which we can recover a better sharing of the earth's gifts, acknowledging that although abundant, they are finite. Extraction is a one-way process, there is no returning curve, there are only tipping points, some possibly already reached.

The contrast between the consequences of this system in which we are mired, and other possible systems, is stark. Some of us do understand that we live in a hegemony of money where bit by bit

everything is losing its intrinsic value, becoming a commodity. Many now understand that the financial pressures of neoliberal economics are related to a sense of separatism and a dominant colonial form of thinking – 'exceptionalism' – the effects of which further exaggerate the many problems interlinked with the climate crisis.[6] We say we will resist. But, can we see that neoliberalism, the rule of the 'market', is itself a consequence of the way money has been created? Can we see that the exigencies of daily living within this hegemony push us towards separatism where a competitive individual self, or family or nation, becomes insensibly more necessary because we are now bound up in 'growth' to live in an ordinary way? Our resistance is trammelled. I recently heard Dionne Brand speaking of institutional racism, say we are turning into something necessary to live in this.[7] In any hegemony, even when we see and say we will resist, we find that this takes an ongoing effort. Like Dionne, making this effort in this place, trying to resist, we change in line with the hegemony, not in ways we might wish. This personal change can remain unseen, denied or disavowed, just as a tree grows according to the prevailing wind. The cup of coffee; the loaf of bread; the pencil with which I write; the cost of each contains a part that drives growth and exploitation elsewhere. And so I feel both helpless and ashamed and would run away… or just enjoy another cup of coffee.

In summary, money creation now practised worldwide is a process by which credit is issued from nothing, the ensuing debt to be returned in the future. Most money exists as debt, balanced by figures in ledgers; now digital ledgers in computers (notes and cash are a tiny proportion, about 2-3%). There is more countable money now than there was 10 years ago, and much more than in 1912, even though when a loan is returned, one entry in the ledger disappears. Way back then a loaf cost one penny, now it might be 200 pennies, but it is still only one loaf, and there are more loaves as we have more people on the planet and more grain is grown. My home has the same bricks and roof, but it is worth thousands more in money than when it was built. My mind no longer knows how to make a statement, or wants to track how this happens, it only wants to skitter away from numbers and thoughts and changes and processes and dynamics I simply cannot encompass with value. In this Monetary System, so hard to understand and see, money grows, but resources, even food and shelter, become more scarce, out of reach. This topic is very uncomfortable, difficult to raise, and to stay with. It is not surprising that even standard economic theory avoids it.

Seeing how the Monetary System became established in the world, how in global economies we came to use this very particular and damaging form of money might help resistance turn to flourishing. Systems understanding shows that ever-increasing detail and complexity, endlessly needing adjustment, is a sign that there is a flaw in the system. We have a monetary hegemony, manifestly ever more complex, that demands growth on a finite planet.

So this is the situation we are in: a hegemony of money creation that serves us all, badly. That 'all' includes our policy makers, bankers, and corporations (not 'us' and 'them'). Psychological and cultural effects have been documented: separation, exceptionalism, inequalities, the growth of financial industries, and the economic market of neoliberal capitalism.[8] Could we begin by understanding why the process seems to have been welcomed as a good idea at the time, and following that, why it has been so favoured above alternatives, and tenaciously held?

Claude Monet, Seacoast at Trouville.

Speculation on psychological causes

I wonder if the creation of and adherence to the systemic flaw lies in psychology rather than in the discipline of economic thought. Suppose we consider it in the light of psycho-social intertwining of our inner worlds and the cultures we inhabit. Speculating on the psychology of how or why this system arose in the first place, it seems to me that living with giving, borrowing, trading, supplying need, conditionally or unconditionally, will all involve attention to the yin and yang of trust and risk. There is no need for trust and its attendant risk, if we are already safe. So, if life is particularly unstable, or traumatic, we live in the territory of uncertainty, and fear of the future. If something is too much to bear, and another something (somebody) that would bring reparation is absent, we are traumatised. A need for safety and certainty may be why the money creation system became fixed. In inner life, at certain moments in the lives of individuals and societies, the tendency to seek safety takes priority over risk. The inability to bear too much uncertainty is prevalent in us all. Both individual exceptionalism and hegemonic culture outsource risk and uncertainty. This is different from the safety of a caring context where difficulty is followed by reparative experience. There we learn to play and risk, become adventurous, care and repair. This is an alive safety negotiated in relationships, not a safety objectified in entitlement.

I wonder if, after the long reign of Elizabeth I, the 17th century felt particularly unstable. This was at the height of the Little Ice Age when living conditions across Europe were particularly desperate. Historic events in Britain included the Gunpowder Plot, the execution of Charles I, the Cromwellian Republic, the Restoration, the antagonism of Protestantism and Catholicism. The century was fraught with fear, violence and uncertainty. War is traumatising. Civil war destroys trust within communities. The 18th century may have begun with an attempt to bring stability and safety that was well served by the law of 1704 establishing the Bank of England. Money is an object. Loans will be paid back and there is an exception to risk. It must have seemed like a good idea at the time. There was an increase in the slave trade and colonialisation; forms of exploitation that had always existed but became more entrenched.[9]

How does cultural and national trauma play out? Too much to bear, we avoid uncertainty, seek safety, strong authority. Money, seen as the promise to pay, backed by legal authority, avoids risk. By

the Act of 1844, the banks are made safe. The British Empire flourishes. As the world map turns 'pink', this 'safe' banking system was exported. Then the Monetary System, with its inherent scarcity, pushes us, as it has pushed our ancestors, to exploit rather than relate to the world. This is a change that has happened to us, in us, all around and through us. We do not notice the structures that de-contextualise relationships and pressure us to become individual achievers, 'exceptions'.

What can we do?

First we can talk about it, we, everyone, should know of this flaw in money creation and the damage it does. I think of the money hegemony in terms of Resmaa Manekem's metaphor from the wrongness of slavery called 'living in the plantation'. He said when the plantation is too strong, and direct resistance leads to destruction, it does not mean do nothing. Instead, he said: disappoint the plantation.[10] In my interpretation, this does not mean ignore its demands, like the tree in the prevailing wind we have to comply, and bend. What it means is, disappoint its expectation that we will be diminished by enslavement; celebrate our humanity and creativity and open ourselves to new and alive ways of being. The plantation will die eventually from its own inconsistencies and damaging ways of functioning. When we can, we can point these out, hastening its end. We can begin to understand and speak of alternative systems. Consider, for example, the alternative concept of 'honourable harvest' described by Robin Wall Kimmerer,[11] with its underlying belief that engagement with resources (of any kind) must be regenerative, imbued with respect and thought for the future. Or proposals to develop commons or mutual credit practices, or various forms of social credit movement.[14]

Until such a system change comes into being, we can operate under the radar of money and reject its commodification of so much that we value. In many areas, we can live in terms of gift, free exchange, mutuality of help, re-purpose, reuse, recycle, create non-commercial entertainments, and small enjoyments such as harvesting vegetables from the back garden. We can talk about free things, and the fun in them, not about how they make money or save money, nor about 'doing without', but simply about the joy of living in a common space under the sun. Then a life of small pleasures is a big-hearted life that creates lasting foundations for ways of being when the plantation has moved, destroyed itself or been replaced. Being lively, we will be better able to pick up pieces and communally evolve towards other forms of monetary system where money, a useful tool, does not own us.

While living as well as we can, we should speak of the damage done by the current Monetary System and its creation of money as an object from nothing. This needs to be known. Mitigation of the system's effects are undermined by the Monetary System itself. Speaking out is similar to raising climate crisis awareness, carries the same kinds of risks, and worries, such as being evangelistic, putting people off, or being thought disruptive. It brings uncomfortable conversation and self-doubt, as we suffer moral injury in satisfying everyday needs. Psychological help is needed to move away from exceptionalism, beyond the disavowal of both seeing and not-seeing the existence of the hegemonic plantation: money is created from nothing, as debt to be returned; this is destructive. Can we explore the psychology that supports the plantation as we talk about it? Can we relate with dependence on others, sharing and owning risks? Can we find the psychology that allows this flourishing? If we can do this, we might come to know what living could be like beyond the money plantation. As Anthony Gormley has said, "each of us is a co-producer of a world, each of us is a co-producer of a possible world".[12]

Anthony Gormley's Quantum Cloud, photo taken by Andy Roberts from East London, England, CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons

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Coming into the economy rich

An interview with Dr Erin Araujo from El Cambalache

By Rembrandt Zegers

El Cambalache[1] is a space for moneyless exchanges of all different kinds. It is a form of bartering/trade that persists among Mayan communities in Chiapas (as well as many other places), in response to being marginalised by capitalism/coloniality. El Cambalache was started by five women from Mexico and one from the US. The founders put into practice the idea that: "In order to understand how an alternative (anarchist) economy transforms social relationships, such an alternative has to be created to be studied." Furthermore, the founders stated: "We believe that each person has a great deal to exchange, teach and share. Because, in Chiapas, most women and dissident gendered people have very low access to money, our riches lie within our hearts and minds." In this interview, I speak with Erin Araujo[2] about where the idea came from to start El Cambalache, why she feels it is so important and what her experiences have been in setting it up.

RZ: Can you tell me what you mean when you speak of a decolonial or decolonised economy?

EA: I don't think it's a good term, but we use this term when we work with academic audiences. In a lot of the communities in Mexico and also in Peru (and around the world), people have all sorts of practices such as Trueque, that is like barter, or Minka that is collective work, and Ayni, that is the notion of reciprocity. You have all of these different ways that Indigenous communities work together and create well-being, but they don't call themselves decolonial economies. When we started the project as a moneyless economy located in a small city, we looked at how women and specifically Indigenous women have low access to money. In spite of that, they're able to do many things; take care of their home, participate in their communities, do all these things that are important for creating wellbeing. They also have large networks of friends and family. So we decided that our project would be a moneyless economy. We started creating networks of moneyless exchanges of goods and exchanges of knowledge and skills. That is a way to create wellbeing immediately. When we talk about decolonial economies, we're looking outside of the capitalist economy at different kinds of economic practices that have roots in other cultures. Many Indigenous cultures maintain moneyless exchanges to this day, as a large part of their economies.

RZ: Do people doing this know of each other's practices?

EA: One of the things that unfortunately characterises a lot of Indigenous communities is that they have low access to technology and some people don't even have access to electricity or running water. There are some connections to the internet. Definitely a lot of people have cell phones, and more people are connected to different social media. But a lot of people have access to these technologies; they know that the communities around them are, in part, moneyless communities because it's an essential part of their culture. It's just their life. Because of how capitalism works, a lot of people consider not having money or not being involved with money as poverty. A lot of moneyless practices are lost because of new generations wanting more access to money. Also, people lose access to their land, are displaced or maybe sell their land and leave their communities.

RZ: What was your longing or trigger to start this moneyless economy project in Chiapas, Mexico?

EA: I'm originally from New York. I grew up in Long Island. I never felt comfortable with how middle-class white America felt. I was never really comfortable with the materialism or that people are judged on what they have while they're emotionally suffering. You know, terrible stress and precarity, and the only solution that's offered is to make money, make money, make money. That will solve your problems, which it really doesn't. People continue to live highly anxious lives, and that experience isn't just within white middle-class America. Then, seeing structural racism play out

1. The moneyless economy of El Cambalache (the swap) is located in Chiapas, Mexico. The project came out of a collective need to transform the economy.

2. Erin is a Generator at El Cambalache, where she practises and teaches about decolonial action research. See: Araujo, E. (2020). Moneyless economics and non-hierarchical exchange values in Chiapas, Mexico. *Journal des anthropologues* 152-153 | 2018 [Online]. Available at: http://journals.openedition.org/jda/6907; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/jda.6907El Cambalache

every single day, how immigrant communities are discriminated against and have low access to high-paying jobs, or black communities being treated differently than white communities. The space was just incredibly violent against most people. I left when I was 17. I was an activist actually before leaving. I went and did my undergraduate work at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I studied geology and tropical butterflies, which gave me the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica. Later, I lived in Bolivia and travelled to Mexico in my early 20s. In 2007, I moved to Mexico to accompany the Zapatistas and their social movement. I learned an incredible amount from participating in that movement. Mexico has a large history around social movements and recognising Indigenous communities; that their cultures are essential for their wellbeing and for the wellbeing of their territories.

RZ: Not everybody knows about the Zapatistas. The Zapatistas are an Indigenous social movement located in Chiapas, Mexico. In 1994, they had an armed uprising because Chiapas was basically a forgotten landscape for the government of Mexico; the people were condemned to a slow genocide, dying from curable diseases, without access to most modern infrastructure, whether electricity or water or you name it. In the early '90s in Chiapas, Indigenous people still couldn't walk on the sidewalk if there was a white person or a *mestizo* person walking there. The Zapatistas took over a lot of *haciendas* and occupied them. To this day, a lot of Zapatista territory is located on the land that they recuperated. In 1994, they started initially negotiating with the Mexican government. Some of those issues are still in play, like people having the right to their uses and customs, practising their own forms of justice and decision making, and maintaining their land.

One of the things that's amazing about the Zapatistas is that they built their own infrastructure. They didn't wait for the state to do that – and we are talking about an entire electrical infrastructure, roads, access to water, their own educational system, their own system of governance. They just had the 30-year anniversary of that uprising. They're also very clear about who is able to talk about them. They control the messages, they govern themselves. They resist the massive pressure from outside corporations to develop mineral mines[3,4] within the Zapatista communities in their autonomous zones. Myself and the other people that formed El Cambalache learned a lot from them, how to create autonomy, what it means to take things into your own hands and decide that we're going to make it work and we don't need much to do it. The Zapatistas created all of their infrastructure and their health and educational system without having huge access to money. Most of it was done through collective work, donations, connections.

RZ: How did your idea for El Cambalache come up?

EA: When I was doing my doctorate, I was studying the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham[5,6] and was involved in that network. Because of all of this, I wanted to create an alternative economy. I formed a collective with five other women. After many attempts at bringing people together, we finally consolidated a group. We wanted to create a space where women, especially Indigenous women, could come into the economy rich. The only way to do that with a group of people that have low access to money is by having a moneyless economy. An important part of anti-capitalist practice is saying because we are alive it doesn't matter if we're productive or not, it doesn't matter how much money we have, because we have value because we exist. An essential part of the project is recognising that every experience counts and all different forms of knowledge

are important. As soon as somebody walks in the door, they should feel valued. We see you as an essential part of our economy because of all the knowledge that you bring. That is how we started.

We were meeting for nine months, eight hours a week, doing moneyless exchanges among ourselves, talking about how it feels to not have money. We asked, "What does that mean? How do we get horizontal decision making in a mixed group of women, coming from different countries, different classes, different cultures?" I am from the United States originally, but even among Tzotzil communities, there are cultural differences and differences with the rest of Mexico. Mexico is a huge country. We decided it was going to be a moneyless economy. In March 2015, we opened our doors to the public and people started to have moneyless exchanges. We had workshops and people exchanged clothing and things for construction and all different sorts of things. I have fixed people's laptops in exchange for a massage. I have made a cake in exchange for the things that you put on your bicycle so that water doesn't spray you. We exchanged painting a house for everything that you could need to make a small restaurant. A lot of people have things accumulated in their house that are in a good state, but aren't doing anything. We have developed the idea that everything should be constantly flowing and moving between people. Things have utility as opposed to just gathering dust.

At one point, we opened a cinema, had debates and showed all different kinds of movies. We have a library. People give workshops. Then, in 2019, we opened up the Department of Decolonial

3. The region holds gold, silver, copper, zinc, iron, lead, titanium, barite, tungsten, magnetite, molybdenum and salt.

4. Camacho, Z. (2023) Transnationals covet resources in Zapatista territories: SEDENA. [Online]. Available at: https://schoolsforchiapas.org/transnationals-covet-resources-in-zapatista-territories-sedena [Accessed 6 June 2024].

5. Interviewer's note: J.K Gibson-Graham is the pen-name of Katherine Gibson and the late Julie Graham.

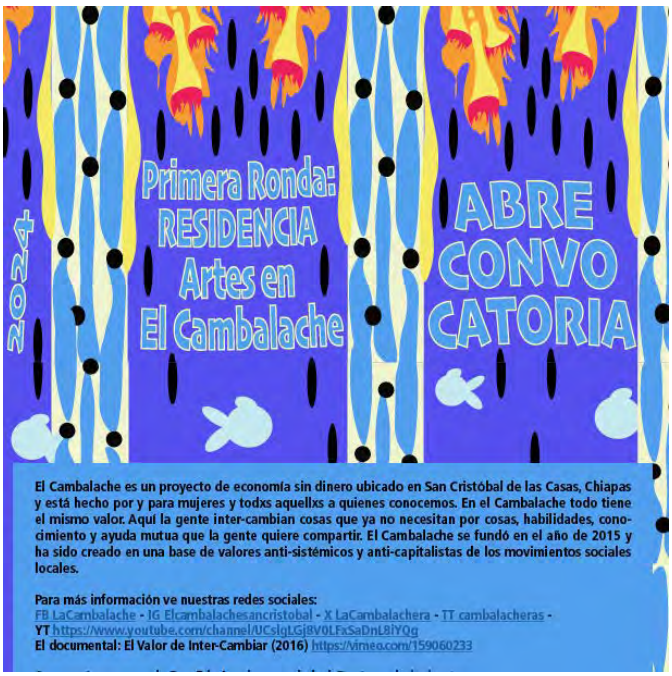
6. J.K Gibson Graham. Wikipedia page: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._K._Gibson-Graham [Accessed 06 June 2024].

Economics. We now also give classes around creating non-capitalist economies, anti-colonial or decolonial economies and also classes about collective thought as practice and thinking about generating social power. That's non-capitalist because of how moneyless exchanges work. You immediately create networks with other people. You have to talk about things. You have to have relationships and connections. Long-term relationships create well-being and the persistence of cultures of care. That is where we're at now, having connections with people and taking care of those connections.

RZ: Can you say how you have changed? What does it mean for you to live in a moneyless economy? Do you feel you're more empowered than when you were in New York?

EA: I live in a hybrid economy. I try to decrease my dependence on money so I exchange a lot. But I also still use money. In some ways I'm very different and in some ways I'm not. If I had told myself 20 years ago that I would be living this life, I would have been much more relaxed. I would have had a lot less anxiety about how to live in the world. I've always been intensely uncomfortable with capitalism and coloniality. I didn't know that because I didn't have that language at that time. I think most people thought that I was out of my mind, an idealistic young person. I think that's part of the benefit of being a little bit stubborn and demanding as well. We need to be able to combat racism and capitalism at the same time. There are practices to do that. I am now in a position where I feel very comfortable talking about these sorts of things and supporting other people in doing them. When I was younger, I just felt so out of place living in New York. How do you find your place in this world? Sometimes you have to create it.

We try to do non-hierarchical collective decision making. I have been participating in anarchist collectives for a long time. I have a lot of experience with consensus decision making with large and small groups of people. It is hard to work collectively if you've only ever lived in a hierarchical society. You have to unlearn a lot of things about yourself when it comes to your ego, your power, your voice. I call it unlearning whiteness. Working with a racially mixed, culturally mixed group, we have different perspectives around



hierarchy, and who we are in our identities as people. You really have to like to work well collectively. You have to question a lot of things. You have to know yourself really well to work collectively.

One of the things that is often misunderstood about anarchist practice, and I'm not necessarily an anarchist anymore, is that there is a lot of structure. The reason for that is that everyone has access to make decisions in the same way. That is incredibly important, bringing proposals, having discussion periods for those proposals to come to consensus. I think this often is missed in the urban areas of the Americas, while in rural communities, this has been going on for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. An assembly, as a form of decision making, is easily incorporated into a lot of different spaces, because it is actually the normal way of making decisions for large groups of people. And so, it's not only people of one class or one ethnicity, or one or several families that are exchanging and gifting, but a huge number of people; here in El Cambalache, it's several thousand people. The economy gives access to all kinds of things and knowledge, abilities and mutual aid because you're connecting people from all different walks of life.

RZ: Is part of your economy saying, if we do this, we can take much better care of the planet?

EA: Definitely. It is just a little bit of a different perspective that goes towards the same goal. Because massive consumption and production creates a situation where we're looking at the imminent destruction of the planet or at its inhabitability for most forms of life. Creating non-capitalist economies that respect life and are built towards creating life are an essential part of the wellbeing of the planet. In many Indigenous cultures in the Americas, and I'm sure around the world, there is no difference between the wellbeing of the land and the wellbeing of the culture. They are essential for each other. Supporting people's right to access their land, to access their culture is part of resisting capitalism, resisting coloniality, resisting violence in all of its forms.

How do we make spaces of wellbeing? When the capitalist economy collapses like recently happened in Argentina, you immediately have barter markets that pop up. People learn how to collectively make decisions and to collectively trade things, interact and take care of each other. Whatever the change that we're going through is going to look like, we're going to need these abilities. There is never a moment now, or post-apocalypse, that we're not going to need to know how to make decisions collectively; not only among humans but also taking into account all life and wellbeing – because it's all the same. There's no difference between one or the other. I cannot live and be well if everything else around me is destroyed.

RZ: The one thing that is fascinating for me is that in your economy there are only women.

EA: No, no, there are men, just the decision making is done by women. There is this aspect of how men and women interact that's an essential part of hetero-patriarchy capitalism and coloniality, which is that in general men oppress women. That is part of the system that creates ruptures in society, within the home, among people. This divides us from the people that we love. It keeps conflict and violence ever present in our lives. It is an overarching practice going on in most parts of the world. One of the aspects of women having low access to money is that we need to create communities. We need help to raise children, create wellbeing, and care for each other. We help each other and we need help. There is a level of collectivity that is necessary when you have little access

to money. That is part of this community, but that women created this community doesn't mean it always feels good. For instance, there is no male-female romanticising, although there is female-female romanticising, but that is different. There is also patriarchy that goes on among women, how we embody masculinity and everything else. You can't necessarily say it's perfect.

All the different hierarchies that are present among us are incredibly complicated for us to even tease out. When you incorporate men into a women's space, there's – I'm trying to find the right word – an impetus on the part of men to dominate that space because that's part of how hetero-patriarchy functions in a capitalist system. If you are creating spaces that are anti-capitalist and anti-colonial, you need men who are interested in not taking power in that space. That is really hard to find because it is involved in our identities. There is a sense of who we are that has to do with how we move, what kind of power we have in our social relationships, and so it can be incredibly disruptive. This is not only on the men's side, as women we might not talk as much, we might not be as expressive or creative when men are present. For a lot of women in the collective, if a man is present, they wouldn't talk as much when we've had men participate in our spaces. There is a level of underlying emotional violence that goes away as soon as you take out men from our spaces, like, "Wow, it feels so different now that so and so is not here". It's unfortunate.

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The bloody lawnmower

By Trang Dang

An moved to a new town last week because she could no longer afford the old house in the old town. She wanted another shared house with a garden which she could turn into some kind of refuge for wildlife, like she did with the old place; but all similar options in this so-called affordable town were still too expensive. Eventually, she settled on a tiny ground-floor flat with floor-to-ceiling windows that opened onto two parallel strips of grass separated by an asphalt path.

That would do for now, she comforted herself as she unpacked the last box of books she needed to finish reading before the teaching term started. At least spring is here, she continued talking to herself, smiling slightly every now and again, and glancing curiously at the two strips of grass full of hawkweeds, daisies, dandelions and sow thistles. A couple of bumble bees were out, buzzing near her windows, stopping at a flower, buzzing near her windows, stopping at another flower. A blackbird landed at the end of the strip closest to her windows, tilting its head to listen out for earthworms; couldn't find anything, flew off. A pigeon wandered along on the other strip, plucking at new shoots, wiggling its head, plucking at some more new shoots, wandered off. Behind the fence and through the gaps between the trees that closed off the two strips of grass from public access, occasional cars drove past, parents pushing their buggies, people walking up and down the road with shopping bags in their hands. Everyone went about their business and so did the grass, the flowers, the bumble bees, the blackbird and the pigeon. There was something quite peaceful about this place.

A week after moving in, An woke up one morning to the brrrm brrrm sound of a lawnmower. She lived in an apartment block. She knew people would come to cut the grass if it was too tall because in this foreign country grass equalled weeds, somehow. She wasn't surprised but she was still angry. With every brrrm she felt a pain in her chest as though a blade had made a cut in her heart, unless she stopped thinking about it, feeling it. She slowly got off the bed and moved to the windows, opening the curtains. A guy in a green uniform was pushing a green lawnmower up and down the strip of grass nearest to her windows, undisturbed by her presence.

After a short while of standing there, intensely watching the lawnmower, she started hearing a low buzzing sound on top of the brrrm brrrm. She thought it was a sign of temporary tinnitus, something she'd had before. But the more she listened, the more it seemed to her like a moaning voice, a small cry, a hoarse, muffled groan, all mixed together. Then, the lawnmower stopped. Then, concurrently, the tinnitus (or was it?) stopped. The guy was at the end of the other strip near the gate now, starting to pack away his lawnmower. An felt cold, a rush of blood to her head, some dizziness, her hands and back filled with sweat. What the hell just happened? She turned away from the windows, quickly walked to the kitchen counter, grabbed a glass, filled it up with water, and downed it. She inhaled and exhaled, trying to calm down, turning her head towards the windows, staring intensely at the grass, trying to focus on her breathing, on what she could hear. Nothing. The odd tinnitus she tried to convince herself it was, didn't come back. Maybe I didn't sleep enough, she thought. She did stay up until four last night to finish up her paper. She shook her head. It's okay…

It was not okay.

The second week, the same guy in the same green uniform came to mow the two communal strips of grass with probably the same green lawnmower. The third week, the same guy in the same green uniform came to mow the two communal strips of grass with probably the same green lawnmower. Every time without fail, the

Photo by Skitterphoto: https://www.pexels.com/photo/lawn-mower-vehicle-on-grass-589

sound started as soon as she heard the brrrm brrrm. Each time, it became louder. Something was screaming, and screaming for help! The thought frightened her, sent shivers down her spine. But what surprised her even more was the utter conviction that the sound she heard wasn't coming from inside her, wasn't her hallucination. It was a communication from the outside, something outside, to her. It was saying something she could not decipher. For the voice moaned, the voice cried, the voice groaned, in some alien language. As it became louder, it became more structured. She could make out the stop and the start, but no human words, just a voice, multiple voices, making sound.

An waited until the fourth week. There he came, preparing his lawnmower, starting the engine. The sound started. She opened the windows, stepped out barefoot. "Excuse me."

The guy stopped the engine. The sound stopped. "Hello. Hi. How can I help?"

"Ah… um… well, do you hear a weird, well, weird… it's okay…"

The guy stared at her, confused, but a polite kind of stare and display of confusion.

"Yeah, well… actually, do you mind starting the lawnmower and then stopping it when I ask you to? Sorry, sounds a bit weird, but I just wanted to check something."

She had been sounding weird, had been acting weird, indeed had been intensely watching the lawnmower whenever it came. If anything, this rather coherent request might have sounded the least weird.

"Okay… sure…" He clearly just wanted to get on with his job and get out of this odd situation that she put him in.

"Start now, please."

The lawnmower started. The voice, voices, started. So loud this time. Was it because she was outside so she heard it – them – more clearly? Still indecipherable though. "Stop now, please."

The lawnmower stopped. The voice, voices, stopped. Was it… was it the grass… was it the grass, the hawkweeds, the daisies, the dandelions, and the sow thistles moaning, crying, groaning, screaming? Shit!

Not possible. Without saying thanks, without saying goodbye, without anything, An stumbled back into the house, closed the windows, closed the curtains. She felt cold. Her heart was thumping in her ears, wanting to burst out of her chest. She stumbled towards her desk, picking up her phone to call her GP. There was blood under her feet, all over the carpet. She dialled the local surgery's number, checking her feet. The blood didn't come from her feet. She wasn't wounded anywhere. The grass is bleeding. The hawkweeds, the daisies, the dandelions, the sow-thistles are bleeding. STOP! She wanted to believe all this was her hallucination now. Maybe I've been working too much. Maybe none of this is real. The guy had looked at her like she was crazy. He mowed the two communal strips of grass every week. He could not have heard the voice, voices. There was no blood on the grass. The grass was green.

She got an appointment with her GP soon enough. They did various tests on her. The result came out. "You have been overworking yourself. I'd recommend you taking some rest and booking an appointment with a therapist if the situation…" She had stopped listening. All this time and all the time the doctor was talking to her, all she could think of was the scream from the grass, the blood from the grass. She was sure now, that that was where they came from. They came from the nonhuman. She couldn't hear it, its voice, voices, because there was no lawnmower here, at the doctor's office, but she remembered it, the desperation in its tone, the way it wailed. Had she been home at this time, she would have heard it, because there was a lawnmower there, this time of the week, working its way through the grass.

An went home, opened the windows, stepped out onto the freshly cut grass with her bare feet. Underneath, a sensation of wetness. She looked down, her feet sinking into the ground, red streams flowing through her toes, onto other parts of the grass. Behind the fence and through the gaps between the trees that closed off the two strips of grass from public access, occasional cars drove past, parents pushing their buggies, people walking up and down the road with shopping bags in their hands. Everyone went about their business. The grass, the flowers, the bumble bees, the blackbird, and the pigeon did not. Their worlds were disturbed, destroyed, ruined, some more severely than others. An thought she could hear other lawnmowers now, from afar, hearing other screams that blended together yet also distinct in the ways they talked to her.

There was no peace. There is no peace. Because of the bloody lawnmower.

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A socio-psychological inquiry into consumption, freedom and wellbeing: towards leap-frogging pathways for the Global South

By Soumyajit Bhar

Writing from Delhi, where temperatures are currently approaching 50C degrees, I am acutely aware that humanity faces three fundamental challenges. First, while 15% of the global population enjoys excessive consumption, the remaining 85% lack basic necessities. Second, addressing affluence is crucial to tackling the climate crisis and other environmental threats. Third, despite their material wealth, the top 15% often do not experience lasting wellbeing.

Because the Western conception of wellbeing is closely tied to materialism (Bhar, 2019, 2023),[1,2] pro-environmental behaviour such as not driving a car can feel like a private sacrifice. Modern consumerism promotes wellbeing through freedom of choice. In a country like India this freedom can, for example, enable me to buy my own air conditioner, and buy my own food rather than have to grow it, or pay for music tuition. The first kind of freedom, sometimes referred to as 'negative liberty', frees us from constraints. The second, positive, freedom opens up new possibilities. In the Global South, great value is attached to negative liberty and this can make people resistant to sustainability efforts, making it appear that they compromise individual freedom.

Globalised consumer culture shapes these nations' developmental aspirations. The sustainable consumption narrative in the Global North, based on post-materialistic perspectives and an ethic of sufficiency, aims to encourage pro-environmental behaviours (Mathai *et al*, 2021).[3] But in the West, post-materialistic values have typically presupposed material affluence (Booth 2020; Inglehart, 2008).[4,5] They become values usually held by the affluent middle classes, rather than those struggling to survive. Is there a way in which such values could drive the Global South's development trajectory? Perhaps the three challenges I mentioned at the start of this article require what might be called 'leap-frogging pathways', that is, pathways which shortcut or leap over the neoliberal, economic policy-driven, developmental trajectories of the Global North.

Structural factors such as the economy and society interact with individual motivation, continually shaping each other. Neoliberal policies, for instance, may orient our conception of the good life towards materialism, and this reorientation, in turn, legitimises these policies and their expansion, creating a self-sustaining cycle. This dynamic challenges the potential for leapfrogging to post-materialistic values in the Global South.

Using case studies, this article demonstrates how the expansion of consumer culture, despite offering short-term wellbeing, uses the allure of greater freedom of choice to become an integral part of developmental aspirations. These emerging aspirations hinder the Global South from leapfrogging to post-materialistic, pro-environmental values, bypassing the material saturation path observed in the Global North.

Photo by Bhavesh Jain: https://www.pexels.com/photo/rickshaws-and-people-on-street-in-delhi-india-3559738

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Freedom of choice, wellbeing and developmental aspirations

To alter people's consumption choices towards socio-environmentally desirable directions, we need to carefully understand why one consumes what one consumes. The environmental impacts of the consumption-production nexus are always unintended consequences (Akenji, 2013).[6] No-one consumes to harm the environment, it is always an externality of one's choices and preferences, which often one does not fully understand. Hopefully, this article will shed light on the human motivation that makes the prevailing developmental aspirations the overwhelmingly obvious choice.

Neoliberal economic policies focus on providing individuals with freedom defined as unrestricted access to consumer choices (Windegger and Spash 2022).[7] Consumption has become central to contemporary existence, playing a crucial role in defining individuals (Roubal, 2022).[8] Alongside freedom of choice, consumerism offers hope for a better life and individual wellbeing. In a performance-oriented consumer society, active participation in consumption indicates success, prestige and recognition (Roubal, 2022).[8] Consumption constructs and reconstructs identities and social roles (Varman and Vikas, 2007),[9] becoming a source of self-reflection and symbolic worlds. Abundance fosters a belief that individual freedoms are continually increasing in both material and symbolic realms. Socio-economically marginalised consumers in the Global South often live in abysmal material conditions, limiting the role of consumption in contributing to freedom (Varman and Vikas, 2007).[9] For these individuals, the freedom of consumer choice feels rewarding and tangible. This overwhelming connection between sense of wellbeing and freedom of consumer choice makes consumer persuasions integral to development aspirations in the Global South.

Two key concepts from social psychology related to freedom of choice are 'learned helplessness' and the 'exit option'. Schwartz (2005)[10] explains that learned helplessness, a concept from Martin Seligman, occurs when individuals can't leave an exploitative or oppressive situation, forcing them to accept their pain and discomfort. This lack of choice harms their wellbeing, making the option to leave very appealing when it becomes available. When unhappy, people can either leave (exit) or try to improve the situation (voice). The exit option helps individuals escape learned helplessness and gain freedom of choice, while the voice option focuses on collective action and improving the situation for everyone.

Joint family vs. nuclear family

In the Global South, fossil-fuelled technological development provides individuals with material-driven exit options from situations that lack individual freedom of choice. Household appliances and consumer goods offer the freedom to avoid collaborating with others to meet needs traditionally managed without these goods. For instance, joint families[11] often rely on the division of labour for household chores like cooking and laundry, necessitating collective action. This structure requires negotiation to resolve conflicts and make decisions, leading to power asymmetries and feelings of learned helplessness for those on the receiving end. In contrast, nuclear families typically experience fewer power asymmetries and conflicts, offering greater individual freedom of choice, ranging from daily chores to important life decisions for their members. No matter how much we value equality, power asymmetries are always present. For those on the disadvantaged side of these asymmetries, differences of opinion, and the outcomes of negotiations, can feel like a lack of individual freedom or even a situation of learned helplessness. In contrast, nuclear families are likely to have lower instances of power asymmetry, resulting in fewer disadvantaged outcomes. Additionally, with fewer individuals in each household, conflicts are significantly reduced.

The availability of consumer goods and appliances provides material-driven exit options, allowing individuals to avoid the constraints and negotiations inherent in joint family structures. But this undermines the binding forces that keep communities and joint families intact, as these material options reduce the need for collaborative efforts. Consequently, the increased individual freedom of choice afforded by consumer culture challenges the necessity of engaging in power-asymmetric negotiations in community settings. This theoretical perspective can be further illustrated through case studies.

In the last few decades, India has witnessed a phenomenal decline in joint families. The National Family Health Survey from 2019 to 2021 shows that nuclear families are now the norm, accounting for 58.2 per cent of total households (Goyal, 2022).[12] This trend is evident not only in urban areas but also in rural regions (Shaikh, 2017).[13] Goyal (2022) also notes that the remaining joint families in India are primarily business families, which stay together to avoid the excessive division of economic capital. Historically, joint families were not only the norm but also a central aspect of Indian culture and tradition. However, these families were typically headed

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9. Varman, R., and Vikas, R.M. (2007). Freedom and consumption: toward conceptualizing systemic constraints for subaltern consumers in a capitalist society. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 10(2), 117-131.

10. Schwartz, B. (2005). *The paradox of choice: why more is less.* New York: Ecco.

11. Author's note: Joint families are extended family arrangements common throughout the Indian subcontinent, where multiple generations live together in the same home, all connected by close relationships. This system ensures the sharing of labour and material resources among family members.

12. Goyal, D. (2022). Is the Indian joint family hurtling towards its eventual demise? *Vogue* [Online]. Available at: https://www.vogue.in/culture-and-living/content/is-the-indian-joint-family-hurtling-towards-its-eventual-demise [Accessed 23 April 2024].

13. Shaikh, Z. (2017). Rural India starts to go nuclear, urban families grow in shrinking space. *The Indian Express* [Online]. Available at: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rural-india-starts-to-go-nuclear-urban-families-grow-in-shrinking-space-4737882 [Accessed 14 April 2024].

by a patriarch, offering limited freedom of choice to women and younger members. Goyal (2022) identifies the spread of feminism as a driving factor that enabled women to claim greater individual autonomy and control over their life decisions, contributing to the disintegration of the joint family structure. While feminism definitely acted as a catalyst, it could only function within the context of material opportunities provided by the neoliberal economic policies and consumer culture of the era. Consequently, developmental aspirations are shaped by individual motivations to embrace lifestyles of higher material and energy throughput, offering the necessary conditions for individualised freedom of choice and selective collaboration with others.

Not only have joint families declined, but traditional communities also show a similar trend. Community-oriented living, where families reside in close-knit arrangements to support each other, remains reasonably common. However, these traditional societies often suppress individual freedom and autonomy, and perpetuate systemic oppression against specific sections of society (Kanjilal 2022).[14] Various traditional structures create stark power asymmetries along the lines of caste, gender, religion and age. For individuals oppressed by these power structures, the materially-driven exit options offered by consumer culture are appealing as a means to escape their learned helplessness and gain a greater sense of individual wellbeing.

Folmann (2017)[15] discusses the spread of aspirations for a materially-enabled good life among young men in Northern Uganda. Having a 'lifestyle' means being able to choose and consume, reflecting an aspiration for social mobility. These young individuals engage in aspirational consumption despite limited resources, as making progress along this path fuels their ongoing aspiration for a better life. Similarly, Brown-Luthango and Rooyen (2022)[16] show that aspirations for a better life in South Africa are linked to the freedom of choice offered by consumer culture. Godefroit-Winkel and Peñaloza (2023)[17] demonstrate how Moroccan women use consumer choice to enjoy negative freedom and overcome their regimented social reality.

Unequal living realities and opportunities result in a lack of justice in traditional societies. For those facing such unjust arrangements, the freedom of consumer choice offers a tangible sense of freedom, even if it is negative freedom in the form of being free from

Photo: Hyderabad Cycling Revolution. https://www.hyderabadcyclingrevolution.com

restrictions (Godefroit-Winkel and Peñaloza, 2023).[17] Those who have not experienced severe physical deprivation or gender limitations may struggle to understand why development aspirations in the Global South are centred around consumer culture. Therefore, reimagining alternatives is necessary to achieve better socially just outcomes and create pathways for community living, where individuals choose to live in communities rather than doing so out of necessity. The question arises whether marginalised individuals must go through extreme individualisation, grounded in material wealth, leading to a sense of meaninglessness that can only be resolved through community living. Resolving this question is crucial for developing leap-frogging pathways for the Global South.

Cycling, widely regarded as the greenest form of transport, offers not only environmental benefits but also significant health advantages. Across Western Europe, cycling is becoming more popular by the day and, even in India, cycling is taken up by the elite sections of the population for better health or as pro-environmental consumption behaviour. Anantharaman (2017)[18] explores how elite cyclists in the cosmopolitan city of Bengaluru, touted as the Silicon Valley of India, use cycling as both a status symbol, through imported bikes and gears, and a statement of environmental consciousness, thereby deriving considerable individual wellbeing benefits from this practice. The sheer presence of both instrumental and expressive choice for this elite section enables them to achieve this heightened sense of wellbeing out of cycling.

However, for a large segment of the population, cycling is not a choice but a necessity, due to limited access to other modes of

Photo by Saba Serkhel. See footnote 24 on p.31.

14. Kanjilal, R. (2022). Jallikattu: vigilance and violence. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 57 (26-27).

15. Folmann, B. (2017). The social contagion of aspirations: on the happiness of having a 'life style'. *Tidsskrift for forskning i sygdom og samfund*, 14(26).

16. Brown-Luthango, M., and van Rooyen, R. (2022). 'Do you own your freedom?' Reflecting on Cape Town youths' aspirations to be free. *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement*, 15(2).

17. Godefroit-Winkel, D., and Peñaloza, L. (2023). The ethics of freedom in consumption: an ethnographic account of the social dimensions of supermarket shopping for Moroccan women. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-28.

18. Anantharaman, M. (2017). Elite and ethical: the defensive distinctions of middle-class bicycling in Bangalore, India. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 17(3), 864-886.

transport.[19] Gupta and Puntambekar (2016)[20] note that over 50% of cyclists in India use bicycles out of necessity, not preference, and aspire to own motorised vehicles like motorcycles or scooters. Munjal (2018)[21] highlights that despite its affordability and eco-friendly nature, bicycles are often viewed negatively among aspiring rural youth. Similarly, Jain (2012)[22] describes how urban poor use bicycles due to economic constraints, positioning them as 'captive users' rather than aspirational consumers. A survey of slum dwellers and the low-income working class in Delhi by IIT Delhi (Anand *et al*, 2006)[23] found that certain occupations such as home-based service providers (such as sweepers and stove-cooker repairers), delivery men (such as newspaper and courier deliverers), and vendors (such as those selling cloth or cooked food) depend on cycles for mobility (Gupta and Puntamebekar, 2016).[20]

Serkhel (2022)[24] highlights a stark divide in Mumbai between cyclists who ride for livelihoods and those who ride for lifestyle. Those who cannot choose cycling and must do so due to disadvantaged material conditions often feel shame and embarrassment, which hampers their sense of wellbeing.

As shown, the ability to make choices, which helps counter learned helplessness, stems from the material benefits of consumer culture. These benefits are expensive and accessible only to wealthier individuals. However, because this system links material wealth to personal choice and wellbeing, it appeals to those who cannot afford these choices. Consequently, many people striving for material wealth come to view a good life in materialistic terms.

Conclusion

The ecological crisis highlights humanity's disregard for natural limits, showing the consequences of viewing freedom simply as liberation from natural and socio-economic constraints. The article argues that consumption, freedom and wellbeing are interconnected in a way that ultimately harms collective action and individual wellbeing. It argues that among the values of the French Revolution – liberty, equality, and fraternity – liberty has taken centre stage; often interpreted narrowly as consumer choice or other forms of negative freedom. This interpretation aligns with neoliberal economic policies that promote consumerism (Bhar, 2021 and 2023).[1,2] For many living in poverty, the lack of choice, experienced as a kind of learned helplessness, pushes them to accept certain consumption patterns.

Are we then doomed, or can we halt this dependence between human motivation and structural priorities? The literature shows that freedom of choice often reflects negative freedom – 'freedom from' constraints – rather than positive freedom as 'freedom to'. Positive freedom entails responsibility, leading to political freedom where one experiences the freedom of the chooser, not just the freedom of choice (Windegger and Spash, 2022).[7] However, the question remains: what or who will drive this change, and on what shared basis will it be anchored?

Given these challenges, the best way to mitigate the negative effects of choice overload, while retaining its liberating aspects, may lie in changing individual awareness, sensibility, and aspiration rather than relying solely on public policy. If people understand that unlimited choices can be paralysing, while limited choices can be freeing, they might embrace constraints in their lives instead of avoiding them. This could involve integrating constraints into their notions of a good or desired life, whether these constraints are imposed by the state, family, schools, or religious institutions. Socio-psychologists who are willing to explore what constitutes a good life can empower individuals by suggesting which kinds of constraints are beneficial and why.

In the context of India, there are sporadic examples of alternative community arrangements, as documented by Kalpavriksh and other organisations through initiatives like Vikalp Sangam.[25] These communities focus on community-based living and ties, resisting the standard developmental trajectory that emphasises materialistic living. They manage to uphold progressive values, leading to more participative decision-making and sustainable, just outcomes. However, the challenge lies in their inability to manage individual developmental aspirations as effectively. As a result, these examples remain alternative and often fail to become as aspirational as the prevailing developmental models, which continue to spread rapidly. The question that then remains is how these alternatives can become mainstream and challenge the prevailing neoliberal developmental trajectory. To that end, a more comprehensive socio-psychological understanding of human motivation structures is needed; particularly focused on how they interact with structural factors to shape developmental aspirations.

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Paradise lost? The climate crisis and the human condition, by Paul Hoggett

Reviewed by Els van Ooijen

We live in unprecedented times. Although there have been many wars and disasters, we have never before had to deal with a situation where the Earth could become uninhabitable. To make matters worse, we know (but try to ignore) that we have caused this ourselves. In *Paradise lost?* Paul Hoggett[1] reflects on how we are affected psychologically and how we can help ourselves.

The book is in four sections. In the first, Hoggett suggests that the Judeo/Christian myth of being given "dominion over the earth" forms the basis of 'human exceptionalism', our belief that we are separate from nature; a view later reinforced by Enlightenment thinkers. He discusses how modern society is in thrall to neoliberal capitalist dogma, in which everything (and everybody) is exploitable, separating us not only from nature, but also from ourselves and each other. We live in constant fear of not measuring up to whatever targets or objectives are the current ideal, which causes shame that we then project onto others. The middle class projects onto the working class, the working class onto immigrants, and so on. Yet, at the same time, the modern self also has a sense of entitlement, to, say, a decent standard of living, or perhaps a holiday in Greece.

In part two, the focus is on how people respond to accelerating climate change. Despite clear evidence, many of us engage in denial and refuse to believe what is happening. We don't want to change our way of life, so look towards 'strong' men (such as Trump), to protect it, fuelling the growth of right-wing authoritarianism.

Hoggett suggests that capitalism based on fossil fuels is dying. I sincerely hope that he is right, but do not see much evidence of it yet. Rather than reducing output, fossil fuel companies appear to be doubling down on their activity. In his latest co-authored book, Monbiot[2] suggests that capitalism will never stop while there are still profits to be made. Meanwhile, the evidence of the climate crisis is getting stronger, making denial increasingly difficult, so we shift to disavowal, creating a split within ourselves "between knowing and believing and between thinking and feeling".

The third section focuses on facing and processing difficult truths. Climate anxiety/distress is on the rise, including in psychotherapists' consulting rooms. After denial and disavowal comes anger, anxiety, grief, guilt and sometimes despair. Hoggett sees psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as products of modernity, taking an individualistic view of clients. However, there is now a growing realisation that this view may not be shared by other cultures who may prefer a different, more communal model of support. But however people seek help, being able to talk freely about their anxiety with someone who can contain it, is helpful. It also means that they no longer feel alone with their worries.

Hoggett writes that, as psychotherapists, we have "a responsibility to think the unthinkable and speak the unspeakable". I agree, this is our moral duty, we need to be climate realists. However, even within therapy, facing the truth takes courage and often involves loss. We long for a magic cure that makes it all go away and; only when the 'cure' does not work do we accept the need to change. In this context, I was excited by Hoggett's mention of a feminine ethic of care that includes the non-human. In the UK I had only heard this discussed within university philosophy departments, never in therapy circles. Yet what could be more relevant to any helping profession than a relational ethic of care that values relationship rather than individuality?

The final part of the book is entitled 'Less is more: a new ethic' and focuses on hope. Hoggett writes about two young Jewish women, Etty Hillesum (pp.155-159) who kept a diary about the persecution of Jewish people in Amsterdam, and Hannah Ahrendt (p.169), who both experienced concentration camps but continued to believe in love, goodness and a new beginning. These are examples of 'radical hope', a belief or rediscovery of all that is good in the world, irrespective of seeing and experiencing the opposite. For Hoggett, this involves holding the tension between optimism and pessimism, thus avoiding polarities.

Regarding the title, Hoggett does not regard 'Paradise' as lost, nor as yet to come. Instead, he says, it is right here, in front of us, "present in the mundane and the ordinary" if we are able "to live in the moment". This is indeed Zen!

The book could have been intimidating, but the brief chapters and accessible style make it easy to navigate. I particularly enjoyed the accounts of the author's walking excursions, as well the inclusion of his own photographs. Overall, Hoggett's writing encourages us to look our current situation squarely in the eye, yet dare to hope and take action.

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2. Monbiot, G., and Hutchison, P. (2024). The invisible doctrine: the secret history of neoliberalism (& how it came to control your life). London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books.

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