



Spatialising the Imperial Mode of Living – rethinking a concept

DIE ERDE

Journal of the
Geographical Society
of Berlin

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Manuscript submitted: 24 February 2022 / Accepted for publication: 24 April 2022 / Published online: 24 June 2022

Abstract

In the introduction to this special section, we present the core idea of the concept “imperial mode of living” (IML) which attempts to explain why and how the reproduction of capitalist societal relations continues to be hegemonic despite the widespread recognition of its destructive tendencies. It is argued that the IML itself can be understood as a spatial category: the imperial mode of living creates asymmetric interdependencies between various places and territories in the global North and the global South, it structures the relationship between different parts of the globe in a way that the mechanisms of reproduction in one part affect societies in others. Along four dimensions – valorisation, accumulation and reproduction; hegemony and subjectivation; hierarchization; externalization – we present a conceptual and research heuristic on how the working of the imperial mode of living and its socio-spatial implications can be understood. Moreover, it is argued that, given deepening crisis tendencies, the paradigm of a “Green Economy” or “Green Deal” might serve as dominant imaginary that is able to orientate and unite liberal progressive forces to provide for a sufficient degree of economic coherence and to create new terrains of compromising and ways to deal with conflicts that are favourable to the operation of a green-capitalist regime of accumulation. Such an eco-capitalist modernisation of the imperial mode of living in the global North has also severe socio-spatial implications. At the end of the article, we draw a few conclusions, present some criticisms that were made and give a brief outlook of the prospects of a “green capitalism”.

Zusammenfassung

In der Einleitung zu dieser Sektion stellen wir den Kerngedanken des Konzepts der „imperialen Lebensweise“ (IML) vor, das zu erklären versucht, warum und wie die Reproduktion der kapitalistischen Verhältnisse trotz des weit verbreiteten Wissens um ihre zerstörerischen Tendenzen weiterhin hegemonial ist. Es wird argumentiert, dass die IML selbst als eine räumliche Kategorie verstanden werden kann: Die imperiale Lebensweise schafft asymmetrische Interdependenzen zwischen verschiedenen Orten und Territorien im globalen Norden und im globalen Süden, sie strukturiert die Beziehungen zwischen verschiedenen Teilen des Globus in einer Weise, dass die Reproduktionsmechanismen in einem Teil der Welt die Gesellschaften in anderen Teilen beeinflussen. Entlang von vier Dimensionen – Inwertsetzung, Akkumulation und Reproduktion; Hegemonie und Subjektivierung; Hierarchisierung; Externalisierung – stellen wir eine konzeptionelle und wissenschaftliche Heuristik vor, wie die Funktionsweise der imperialen Lebensweise und ihre sozialräumlichen Auswirkungen verstanden werden können. Darüber hinaus wird argumentiert, dass angesichts der sich verschärfenden Krisentendenzen

Ulrich Brand, Markus Wissen 2022: Spatialising the Imperial Mode of Living – rethinking a concept. – DIE ERDE 153 (2): 75-83



DOI:10.12854/erde-2022-613

das Paradigma einer „Green Economy“ oder eines „Green Deal“ als ein dominantes *imaginary* dienen könnte, das in der Lage ist, liberale progressive Kräfte zu orientieren und zu vereinen, für ein ausreichendes Maß an wirtschaftlicher Kohärenz zu sorgen und neue Kompromissterrains und Formen der Konfliktbearbeitung zu schaffen, die das Funktionieren eines grün-kapitalistischen Akkumulationsregimes begünstigen. Eine solche öko-kapitalistische Modernisierung der imperialen Lebensweise im globalen Norden hat auch schwerwiegende sozialräumliche Auswirkungen. Am Ende des Artikels ziehen wir einige Schlussfolgerungen, stellen einige der vorgebrachten Kritikpunkte am Begriff vor und geben einen kurzen Ausblick auf die Perspektiven eines „grünen Kapitalismus“.

Keywords ecological crisis, imperial mode of living, socio-spatial structures and processes, Green Economy, green capitalism

1. Introduction: The “imperial mode of living” as a spatial category

About fifty years ago, the famous Uruguayan author *Eduardo Galeano* (1973: 265) published his masterpiece *The Open Veins of Latin America* and argued there: “In this world of ours, a world of powerful centres and subjugated outposts, there is no wealth that must not be held in some suspicion.” This perspective is a starting point for our work, but we do not understand suspicion as a moralising category. As does *Galeano*, we first of all want to understand why the highly unsustainable and unevenly distributed patterns of production and living are relatively stable over time.

Our argument is based on the concept of an “imperial mode of living”. It can be summarised as follows: in societies dominated by the capitalist mode of (re-) production, hegemony is performed through hierarchical, exploitative and externalising socio-spatial structures and practices. In the early industrialised capitalist societies, deeply rooted patterns of production and consumption that presuppose the disproportionate access to nature and labour power on a global scale are predominant. Developed capitalism requires a less developed or non-capitalist geographical and social “outside”: from there, it obtains raw materials and intermediate products, from there, it appropriates both paid labour and unpaid care services, and it shifts social and ecological burdens to this outside. But within the societies of the global North (and increasingly of the global South), as well, the imperial mode of living is reproduced by the existence of an “elsewhere”, e.g., severe exploitation of a migrant labour force in meat factories, during harvests or in the care sector, as well as heavy overuse of nature.

The structures and practices of the imperial mode of living – or, more precisely, the imperial mode of production and living – are constantly reproduced by powerful actors and their strategies. But they are also habitualised and lived in practice by its subjects. In that sense, the imperial mode of living is normalised in countless acts of production and consumption, and it enlarges the sphere of action for many people. This goes hand in hand with a broadly shared understanding of “good living”.

The imperial mode of living shifts its costs to nature and to others in space and time. Its problematic preconditions are usually made invisible in the everyday practices of people or normalised through neo-colonial world views. It is exclusionary and exclusive and presupposes an imperialist world order. Social relations in other places – through their inclusion in the world market – are structured by the mode of living and production in the capitalist core countries.

In that sense, global capitalism unleashes enormous productive and destructive forces and, through them, reproduces wealth and poverty, hierarchies and inequalities, more or less attractive practices and everyday lives of some people and more or less brutal exploitation of others. Capitalist hegemony – and intrinsically linked to this: the hegemony of the imperial mode of living – in the global North and the global South produces asymmetric dependencies within societies and at a global scale. And it constantly produces crises such as the overuse of land or water, the devastation of living conditions that force people to migrate, the climate crisis or the accelerating loss of biological diversity. The concept helps to understand why, despite a relatively strong global consciousness of the ecological crisis, the latter’s root-causes are not tackled. Instead, we are experiencing alternatives

that aim at an ecological modernisation of capitalism in the global North by accelerating and deepening the exploitation of the global South. We will come back to this point at the end of the article.

Spatiality is a dimension of social structures (see *Belina and Michel 2019* for an overview). Gender and class relations, wage labour, production, reproduction and consumption, the appropriation of nature etc., all have spatial dimensions, just as they have temporal ones. This is not about a science of space in its own right, but about knowledge and awareness of spatiality, i.e. the focus is not on space as such, but on the social practices and relations that inscribe themselves in space and on spatial structures that, in turn, enable and empower certain practices and actors at the expense of others: the production and distribution of commodities, the creation and maintenance of material and social infrastructures, wage labour and other forms of work as part of the social and international division of labour, particular policies at different spatial scales, the aspiration to and realization of a good life etc.

The “imperial mode of living” itself can be understood as a spatial category: it creates asymmetric interdependencies between various places and territories in the global North and the global South, it structures the relationship between different parts of the globe in a way in which the mechanisms of reproduction in one part pose severe restrictions for the practices of a majority of people in other parts. The dominant economic and political forces, in particular, but also larger or smaller portions of the subaltern classes are interested in maintaining this status, i.e., want to institutionalise social practices and their framework conditions that help them secure their social positions. This happens as a result of social disputes and compromises, but is also a search process in a dynamic imperial mode of living that is more complex than that produced by the strategies of ruling actors and compromises. These strategies, in turn, depend on the strategies of subaltern actors and their capacity to articulate their needs. In other words, the hegemony of the imperial mode of living is secured through complex spatial strategies that reproduce highly uneven social structures at various scales. This should be considered a dynamic process, as we try to clarify below.

The concept thus is inspired by geographical approaches that focus on the complex relationships between different spatial practices and their institutional and

infrastructural manifestations, namely territorial, network-related, place-based and scalar practices and structures (*Jessop et al. 2008*). In particular, it draws on *David Harvey's* concept of a “spatial fix” as a means for processing crises of overaccumulation: declining rates of profit, which are due to “a surplus of capital relative to opportunities to employ that capital” (*Harvey 1999: 192*), require the relocation of capital to places where there are better conditions for accumulation. A constant tendency towards territorialisation and de-territorialisation thus essentially shapes capitalism’s mode of operation, making uneven development one of its structural features (see also *Harvey 1985, Massey 1994, Smith 1984*). This tendency has an ecological dimension: the capitalist mode of production is inherently contradictory not just for economic reasons. Rather, its contradictions also rest on the fact that it produces socio-ecological costs which must be externalized in order to safeguard the reproduction of advanced capitalist societies. Thus, as capitalism requires an economically driven spatial fix, it also depends on an “environmental fix” (*Castree 2008*). The imperial mode of living must be seen in this context. The resource- and emission-intensive patterns of production and consumption that constitute the imperial mode of living produce the need for fixing capitalism in ecological terms. The externalization of costs in space and time, which is at the core of the imperial mode of living, is how capitalism is “fixed.” It goes without saying that this form of processing contradictions aggravates the ecological crisis in the long run.

2. Dimensions of the “imperial mode of living”

We combine such a socio-spatial perspective with our proposition that the reproduction of the imperial mode of production and living as well as its unfolding dynamic and crisis should be considered along four dimensions: capitalist valorisation (*Inwertsetzung*), accumulation and reproduction; hegemony and subjectivation; hierarchisation; and externalisation. All four dimensions have socio-spatial implications.¹

Valorisation, accumulation and reproduction

The valorisation and accumulation of capital and hence highly uneven societal reproduction at a global scale has as one precondition: the world system must be constituted politically as fragmented and competing spaces. Companies seek to obtain the best possible conditions for exploitation. These are secured

and regulated by states that attempt to attract capital and contribute to its valorisation and accumulation, as well as by international political agreements. Economic expansion and growth are the main rationales and justifications for many political and economic activities.

The commodification of labour power and nature is an essential moment in the expansion of capitalism. From the very beginning, commodification had a trans-regional and even global dimension. *Marx* (1981: 339) had already pointed out that cheap materials were essential for capitalist development, particularly due to, on the one hand, the accompanying transfer of value to the capitalist centres and, on the other, the importance of the falling price of raw materials as a “counteracting tendency” to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (see also *Moore and Patel* 2018). These market-mediated forms of wealth transfer are accompanied by forms of dispossession that are achieved politically, legally or by force, as in the privatisation of the commons or public property. These dispossessions crucially result from pressure applied by (private as well as public) companies from the global North but also, and increasingly so, from the global South. Often, they go hand in hand with displacement, impoverishment and destruction of nature.

We want to highlight that North-South relations are not just about the production and transfer of value, but also about biophysical issues that are not necessarily mirrored in monetary terms. As *Alf Hornborg* (2010) put it, a crucial element of global domination is the ecologically unequal exchange that tends to privilege societies in the global North in the appropriation of ecological time and space. This is related not only to economic values and surplus labour, but also to violence, dispossession, racism and ecological devastation. Higher economic “productivity” and surplus value in the North must be understood against this background.

Valorisation also indicates the moment in the development of the capitalist mode of production that can be observed in the relationship between capitalism and areas beyond it, or non-capitalist milieus. The latter means not only regions and countries but also areas of society, such as social and physical infrastructure and human needs and activities. The moment of accumulation that is bound up with that of valorisation implies the creation of surplus value in the production process, the realization of surplus value in the sphere

of circulation and the increase of invested capital. This process takes place within capitalism but is nevertheless made possible only by capital’s expansive tendency (*Luxemburg* 1913, *Dörre* 2018).

Hegemony and subjectivation

As argued at the beginning of this article, of major importance for the “imperial mode of living” is the concept of hegemony in the tradition of *Antonio Gramsci*, which connects the everyday life of people with social and international structures and thus reveals the prerequisites of capitalist patterns of production and consumption. Our point here is that the relative attractiveness of the imperial mode of living – mainly in the global North but also increasingly in the global South – secures existing relations of power and domination.

We distinguish between a more strategic and a more structural dimension of hegemony. The first one implies that certain social forces in the process of becoming and being hegemonic tend to be able “to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society – bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a “universal” plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a powerful social group over a series of subordinate groups (*Gramsci* 1971: 181-182). In other words, despite all the political-ideological disputes and conflicts within a society about many different issues, there is usually a broadly shared “unity” and widely shared “goals” such as “progress”, “growth”, “development”, “competitiveness” or the idea that nature consists mostly of resources that should be exploited.

The strategic making of the imperial mode of living is complemented by its structural dimension. Here, hegemony is understood as an active or at least passive consent to certain relations and practices, but also as a comprehensive material practice, “namely the daily initiatives of many individuals and social groups in which they reveal consent to domination in the form of active self-submission to the commonly shared habits of large collectives” (*Demirović* 1997: 257). Hegemony therefore implies not only the specific forms of organisation of the rulers and of rule, but also of the ruled. “Organisation” here does not primarily mean political organisation but the organisation of everyday lives. In other words, consent as a basis for he-

gemony is not necessarily politically explicit but is in fact lived in practice – and alternatives to the imperial mode of living are difficult to imagine and to realise.

When domination does not use naked force, discipline and oppression to maintain itself, but instead draws on the wishes and desires of the people, it becomes a part of individual identity, shapes it and thereby becomes all the more effective. Domination then is no longer merely external to individual subjects. Instead, it employs the very mechanisms with which the individuals discipline themselves, and thus displays its effectiveness precisely in the fact that it is not felt as domination.

Another aspect of the dimension “hegemony and subjectivation” is the fact that the structural constraints linked to the imperial mode of living, which often cause suffering and destruction elsewhere, are nonetheless not necessarily experienced as such, and are more often viewed as expanding the possible scope of action (*Graefe* 2016: 43). For many people, the imperial mode of living means the opportunity to have a more or less subjectively fulfilled or, at least, “normal” life: the unequal appropriation of labour power and nature creates the conditions for income-generating production, just as the acquisition of products (home appliances, industrialised food, cars, smartphones) makes everyday life easier and helps to make it livable.

Hierarchisation

We argue that the imperial mode of living is based on and reproduces highly hierarchical social relations along the lines of class, gender, and *race* within societies and internationally. It manifests itself in the highly varying income or assets available to people but also in the scope and quality of societal infrastructures, such as the education, health or social security systems.

Exploitation of nature and labour power is not only a structural feature of the relationship between the global North and the global South. Instead, it takes place in the class, patriarchal and racialised societies of the global North itself, where significant social and spatial inequalities exist and have grown in recent decades. We want to emphasise, however, that the exploitation of labour power in advanced capitalist countries is inherently linked to, and mediated by, exploitative structures and practices elsewhere. Thus,

hegemonic societal relations are reproduced socio-spatially.

The structural heterogeneity of the North differs from that of the South in that it is cushioned to a far greater extent by the welfare state and social infrastructure (cf. *Lessenich* 2019: 54 et seq.). It is thus embedded in (quite fragile and recently eroding) social compromises that are just as much the result of past class struggles as they are of the dominant position of the early industrialised countries in geopolitical and economic competition, i.e., imperialism. Conversely, it is (also) the subaltern position of the countries of the South in precisely this imperialist world order that blocks a welfare state and somewhat civil handling of the contradictions of structural heterogeneity.

However, global North and global South are not only international categories, but also internal social manifestations: the North-South divide shapes and hierarchises the social and spatial structures of almost all societies, which is related to colonial legacies, capitalist competition, dependency, and a highly asymmetric global division of labour. *Anna Landherr* and *Jakob Graf* (2019), referring to Chile, proposed the concept of a “peripheral imperial mode of living” to show that such a mode of living is highly interlinked with class structures within a society that are in themselves highly internationalised. A certain stability is also ensured in societies of the global South through the aspirations of the working class – which is highly divided in itself – to live (the promise of) the imperial mode of living.

Externalisation

Dynamic externalisation structures and processes are at the core of the spatially uneven appropriation of labour power and natural resources. As we have argued above, relatively cheaper inputs into production processes of the global North make the corporations there more productive, and commodities for final consumption tend to be cheaper. Furthermore, care chains are part of externalisation processes: mainly female workers migrate from poorer countries to the capitalist centres to care for people there. In doing so, they leave a care gap in their home countries.

As *Stephan Lessenich* (2019: 51) put it: “We externalize because we *can*, because social structures enable us to do so, because social mechanisms allow us to do so, because general practice confirms our doing so. To a

certain extent, however, we also externalize because we *cannot do otherwise*, because social structures force us to do so, because social mechanisms drive us to do so, because the general practice in our social environment causes us to do so.” From feminist contributions, we borrow the idea that “externalisation is a principle” of capitalist societies. Externalisation separates forms of work that do not create (monetary) value, such as care work, but nevertheless constitute an essential precondition for, e.g., well-paid and prestigious industrial work (*Biesecker and Hofmeister 2010*).

The brutal forms of externalisation, in the sense that the imperial mode of living devastates the living conditions of many people “elsewhere”, result in the fact that people might be forced to migrate to other regions. Most migrations take place within countries and regions, but many people try to migrate to countries of the global North looking legitimately for a better life there. Most governments’ answer to this, backed by greater or lesser consent within their societies, is to hinder such migrations (with exceptions, for instance, to allow migration from poorer regions within the EU to wealthier ones due to a shortage of labour power in the wealthy countries). From the perspective of the imperial mode of living, one could argue that many migrants aspire to live this mode of living, whose exclusive character is defended by Northern governments.

Moreover, we argue that the former colonies or regions that constituted the periphery of global capitalism have a tendency – albeit in very contradictory ways – to no longer willingly accept this position. Because they are dynamically developing a peripheral imperial mode of living, they also need access to cheap labour power and nature elsewhere for the production of commodities for the world market, as well as for internal use. This creates what we call “eco-imperial tensions” that are likely to increase in the future.

3. The socio-spatial implications of the current eco-capitalist modernisation of the imperial mode of living in the global North

The imperial mode of living is highly dynamic. Political and economic elites react to crises and their politicization, e.g., through social movements or scientific evidence, and try to secure capitalist dynamics in order to maintain societal order as well as their power

and privileges – in other words: to maintain the imperial mode of production and living. Under certain circumstances, politics become authoritarian and repressive. Among other things, they try to reformulate a societal project that promises to solve the most pressing problems and they try to offer a prospect for good living, which makes their dominance and leadership attractive and plausible. The climate crisis – and other dimensions of the ecological crisis – constitutes such a major challenge. Some governments more or less deny the problem, such as those under Donald Trump or Jair Bolsonaro. But many governments, and increasingly also economic elites, understand the problem and try to react with measures that have strong and highly uneven socio-spatial implications.

For several decades now, political initiatives and even evolving political institutions have been formed to deal with the ecological crisis. One could start with the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 or with the Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, with the latter giving birth to two important international framework conventions: the one on climate change and the other on biological diversity. However, we argue that more comprehensive projects to transform economies and societies did not gain strength until about ten years ago. It all started with various Green Economy approaches (most prominently *UNEP 2011*; see *Brand and Wissen 2021*, chapters 2 and 7, for an overview). More recently, and most prominently, a European Green Deal was proposed (*European Commission 2019*). These approaches are based on the paradigm of an ecological modernisation. As such, they have already been discussed during the economic crisis since 2007. But competitive pressures, profit opportunities and the availability and maturity of technologies (see, e.g., electro-automobility) as well as the rise of a strong climate justice movement, which politicized the ever more dramatic, and at the same time ever more precise, findings of climate science, were needed to equip the Green Economy concepts with the necessary power to influence business and the state apparatus.

The question remains whether the Green Economy/Green Deal paradigm serves as an imaginary that can provide direction and unite liberal progressive forces in economy and politics, can provide for a sufficient degree of economic coherence and can create new terrains of conflict that institutionalise social struggles in a way that allows for operating a green-capitalist regime of accumulation. Given the current situation

of deeply unsettled economic and political elites, this seems to be at least a viable option. The failure of the socio-environmentally destructive neoliberal and imperialist order is quite visible: in the inability of neoliberal health systems to effectively manage the Corona crisis, in the helplessness of state policies in the face of floods, fires and other symptoms of an aggravating climate crisis, in the vulnerability of a globalised and digitalised economy vis-à-vis hacker attacks and the interruption of supply chains, and not least in the recent NATO disaster in Afghanistan and the war against Ukraine. It has underlined the pressing need for new concepts that help to safeguard the capitalist order and their protagonists and beneficiaries in the early industrialised countries through an in-depth transformation.

A Green Deal/Green Economy project promises to process the socio-ecological contradictions of advanced capitalism in some parts of the world. It could thus become an essential component of a new environmental fix. It will not, however, contribute to overcoming the socio-ecological contradictions. Capitalism, even in a green form, does not cease to be driven by competition and economic growth. It continues to rely on the large-scale exploitation of labour power and natural resources (likely metals and biomass rather than fossil fuels), as well as on the destruction of ecosystems. The imperial mode of living thus is perpetuated through its selective modernisation. The regressive strategy of redistribution from the bottom to the top is also not clearly cut off. As can be seen especially in the European Union's policies on migration and raw materials, an ecological modernisation under capitalist conditions requires legal, economic and physical force to secure its own preconditions and to externalise its costs.

The other side of the coin is the fact that the raw materials for the greening of Northern economies – and those in some countries of the global South as well, particularly China – are largely provided by the resource-exporting countries in the South. Lithium, copper and other materials are key to the production of batteries and other products, and they come from countries such as Chile. The traditional resource extractivism (*Svampa* 2019) is complemented by forms of a “green extractivism” (*Isla* 2021, *EEB/FoEE* 2021). The imperial mode of living in the capitalist core countries is modernised by creating new material externalities, its socio-spatial patterns of asymmetric interdependency are perpetuated through their ecological modernisation.

4. Conclusion and outlook

This paper has aimed to present the core arguments of the concept of the imperial mode of living with particular reference to the latter's socio-spatial dimensions. The imperial mode of living implies the integration of places and territories into the capitalist world order and the commodification of their labour power and natural resources. This process is highly uneven in socio-spatial terms. It is shaped by asymmetric interdependencies among different parts of the world, with the early industrialised countries of the global North and new powers such as China playing the dominant role. An unequal “production of space” (*Lefebvre* 1991) and of nature (*Smith* 1984) thus is a precondition and outcome of the imperial mode of living, i.e., of the opportunity for some to live at the expense of others.

The current attempts to ecologically modernise the imperial mode of living do not fundamentally change this condition. The basic socio-spatial hierarchies – both within and between unequally developed capitalist societies – remain intact. They may even be strengthened by that ecological modernisation, since such modernisation offers new opportunities for capitalist valorisation and accumulation strategies. In the terminology of *David Harvey* (1999) and *Noel Castree* (2008), a green capitalism may provide for a new spatial and environmental fix in the form of investment options for otherwise over-accumulated capital and in the form of a shift in the materiality of externalised socio-ecological costs (visible, e.g., in the increasing demand for metals). This is due to the fact that a green capitalism, far from decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental impact or from “dematerialising” the economy, is highly dependent on critical raw materials, e.g., metals for electro-automobility or for renewable energy infrastructures. The expansion of the corresponding extractive capacities requires certain amounts of capital and new environmental “sacrifice areas”.

However, a green capitalism remains contradictory. It will be shaped by eco-imperial tensions among early industrialised countries and between them and the economic newcomers. Both require access to nature and labour power on a global scale, and their ecological modernisation will strengthen the need for metals and non-metallic minerals, in particular. Another contradiction could become, and is already becoming, obvious to the extent that more and more people

are no longer willing to bear the external effects of a mode of living whose benefits concentrate elsewhere. Combined with a world-wide youth movement, which has politicised the *future* externalities of the imperial mode of living, a social force might emerge that successfully strives for more equal socio-spatial and society-nature relations.

From our point of view, the strength of a concept such as the “imperial mode of living” does not lie in a clear-cut definition and an easy application to whatever case or context. On the contrary, the force is in its heuristic character. Therefore, it needs to be further elaborated against the background of differing research interests and topics (*I.L.A. Kollektiv* 2019) and should be translated into, rather than applied to, other historical and societal contexts (see for Latin America, *Massuh et al.* 2021).

The publication of the German version of our book in 2017 provoked critique and a debate (see for an extensive reply *Brand and Wissen* 2021, xi-xxv, on the relationship of the imperial mode of living and class issues, *Wissen and Brand* 2021). Concerning socio-spatial dimensions, a repeated criticism of our approach was that we homogenise the global North and the global South and not pay enough attention to the complex societal structures within societies. Moreover, critics contended that we equate the production of wealth in the global North with the exploitation of the countries of the global South, denying the dynamics of wealth production *within* capitalist societies (see e.g. *Hürtgen* 2020, 2021).

Actually, we wanted to stress the role of global interdependencies and hierarchies which are, at the same time, highly hegemonic. Furthermore, we pointed to the fact that societal compromises between dominant and subaltern classes are established at the cost of ecological destruction. And many of these destructions are externalised, taking place “elsewhere”. Finally, we consider it important to look not only at value transfers within transnational capitalism but also at biophysical issues, i.e., the global transfer of material quantities and qualities, and the physical infrastructures that constantly secure economic dynamics and create crises.

In sum, the concept of an imperial mode of living intends to better understand *a global constellation of power and domination* that is reproduced – through innumerable strategies, practices and unintended consequences – at

all spatial scales: from people’s bodies, minds and everyday actions through regions and nationally organized societies to the largely invisible and consciously concealed structures that enable global interactions.

Note

¹In the following, we draw on chapter 3 of *Brand and Wissen* 2021.

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