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Embracing Ecological Intimacy

The struggle for racial and ecological justice is one—undoing and unlearning anti-black supremacy is constitutive of practicing ecological intimacy. White supremacy intricately connects exploitation of people and the earth. W. E. B. Du Bois presciently recognized this reality when he described whiteness as "ownership of the earth forever and ever. Amen."[1] The critical point I take from Du Bois is that whiteness as ownership is a perversion of relationships between human and nonhuman kin such that social relations of reciprocity, mutuality, and common care are torn asunder.[2] This chapter elucidates some of the ways that modernity/coloniality has divided "nature" from society, and in turn, we human beings have lost a living sense of the radical intimacy, interconnection, and interpenetration of human and nonhuman ecologies within the whole web of life. The same colonial, dualistic ways of thinking and being that gave rise to the Atlantic slave trade and genocide of Indigenous Peoples throughout the Americas, as I discussed in Part I, are at the very source of the objectification and exploitation of all of creation.

If we, as the people of God, are going to live by the integral ecological praxis recommended by Pope Francis, we will need to shift away from seeing ourselves as separate from the web of life and retrieve a deeper, living sense of the radical intimacy of the whole of creation. Thomas Merton understood the interconnection between economics and ecology when he criticized White people for being "victim to the same servitudes which he has imposed on the Negro: passive subjection to the lotus-eating commercial society that he has tried to create for himself, and which is shot through with falsity and unfreedom from top to bottom."[3] If we are going to live in ways that sustain

[1]W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*, introduction by David Levering Lewis (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004 [1920]), 22.

[2]Du Bois was among the first sociologists to examine the relationship between racism and environmental degradation. See Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865–1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 50.

[3]Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1964), 86.

the regenerative capacity of the lotus flower's ecology and the entire web of life, "we need an intellectual state shift to accompany" the new epoch that has already emerged.[4] The problem, however, is that we remain wed to a disease of capitalist growth "that eats your flesh—and then profits from selling your bones for fertilizer, and then invests that profit to reap the cane harvest, and then sells that harvest to tourists who pay to visit your headstone."[5] Tragically, it seems that our civilization is in "a sort of terminal spiral of thanaticism," that is, a gleeful will for death,[6] or, as Pope Francis laments, a "spiral of self-destruction."[7]

I begin by drawing upon Pope Francis's passionate embrace of Saint Francis to frame the ecological vision and praxis of this chapter. Second, I outline a brief history of how our economic assumptions have been killing the planet and human beings for five hundred years. The problem is not only capitalism but our idolatry of capitalist growth over and against living ecosystems that sustain the global common good. We tell ourselves a happy story of how capitalism naturally developed from feudalism and universally extended the human life span. This happy story is just that—a nice-sounding fairy tale with no basis in history. The real history of the shift from feudalism to capitalism is quite different and instructs humanity on the need for shifting from growthism, the belief that "growth is the costless, win-win solution to all problems,"[8] to a new paradigm that de-commodifies public human goods like health, education, housing, and transportation and prioritizes reciprocal relations with the local and global ecological commons.

Third, I engage the deeper cultural dialogue with Indigenous perspectives invited by Pope Francis. He promotes a way of cultural dialogue that is constitutive of practicing an authentic integral ecology. Fourth, drawing upon *Laudato Si'* and ecological scholarship, I outline how the "degrowth" paradigm, perhaps ironically, nurtures ecological conversion to the overflowing giftedness of God's creation. Finally, I offer an open-ended "in/conclusion" to invite readers to learn ways of living in harmony with nature from African American ecological traditions, and dwell in Jayne Cortez's ecological poem "I got the blues-ooze."

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[4]Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 2.

[5]Ibid., 18. Patel and Moore cite M. S. Graham Dann and A. V. Seaton, "Slavery, Contested Heritage, and Thanatourism," *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration* 2, nos. 3–4 (2001): 1–29.

[6]McKenzie Wark, "The Capitalocene," *Public Seminar,* October 15, 2015, www.publicseminar.org.

[7]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), no. 163.

[8]Herman Daly, "Growthism: Its Ecological, Economic, and Ethical Limits," Local Futures: Economics of Happiness, March 21, 2019, https://www.localfutures.org.

A Franciscan Vision of Ecological Intimacy

Pope Francis provides a contemplative and critical way of framing this chapter in terms of three interrelated and fundamental crises of our time: ecological, socioeconomic, and spiritual-cultural. In the midst of a culture of climate-change denial and a fossil-fuel-based economy, it seems nearly impossible to even begin to adequately address the ecological crisis that threatens the very life of the planet. As the global, neoliberal economic way of life threatens Earth, it simultaneously spawns a socioeconomic crisis in which the wealth of society is directed to the richest, while the most vulnerable bear ever-increasing and death-dealing burdens. These ecological and economic crises are fundamentally intertwined with three spiritual-cultural divides: between persons and nature, between individuals and others, and between society and authentic ecological development—that is, the full thriving of human and planetary biodiversity. The profound disconnection between the imperative for infinite growth in current economic logic and the finite resources of the earth threaten all of life as we know it. Human and nonhuman kin who experience oppression seem only to cry out more.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home"), Pope Francis invites a shift in our entire way of living and being from an egocentric to an ecologically centered way of life. Pope Francis calls people of faith, personally and collectively, to an "integral ecology" that truly cares for and celebrates the radical intimacy of the whole of God's creation. The title of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* heralds Saint Francis's *Canticle of the Creatures*, "Praise be to you, my Lord," where "Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."[9] Like Black and Brown sisters who cry out for racial justice, our Sister Mother Earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted upon her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed us."[10] The source of this violence is

> present in our hearts, wounded by sin, [and] also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22).[11]

[9]Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 1.
[10]Ibid., no. 2.
[11]Ibid.

We need to remember with Pope Francis that we are made of the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7), and that from this ground of humility we surrender to the mystery of God's creation because "our bodies are made up of [the earth's] elements," as "we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."[12]

Laudato Si' draws deeply upon Saint Francis of Assisi because he is "the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically."[13] Saint Francis demonstrates with his joy, generosity, and openheartedness "just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."[14] *Laudato Si'* highlights the witness of Francis of Assisi to help open us to the "awe and wonder" of gazing at the sun, the moon, or the smallest of creatures.[15] Pope Francis invites us to "the heart of what it is to be human" and to be united, like Saint Francis, by "bonds of affection" with all creatures in the intimacy of God's creation.[16] If we lose the language of mutuality and beauty in all our relationships with creation, the pope warns, "our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on [our] immediate needs."[17] However, "If we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."[18] The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis's spirituality, Pope Francis writes, is "something far more radical" than "a mere veneer of asceticism"; rather, Francis of Assisi refuses to turn God's creation "into an object simply to be used and controlled."[19] In the spirit of Saint Francis, the pope invites us to "see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness."[20] Pope Francis calls us to joyful, contemplative transformation with the whole of God's creation.

I believe his focus on Saint Francis is fitting for our time. Saint Francis emulates the kind of relationship with nature that ecologists invite today, that is, a humble way of listening to, attending to, and caring for our nonhuman kin. However, we who are overprivileged seem to have lost that intimate sensibility of interrelating to the whole of creation. I recall noticing this inattentiveness when I was nine years old and dressed up as Saint Francis for Halloween. While I looked silly in a fake beard and Franciscan tunic, I remember adults making fun of how Saint Francis interrelated with creatures and nature. Even

[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid., no. 10.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid., no. 11.
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid.
[20]Ibid., no. 12.

in my divinity school and doctoral theological education, teachers tended to view Saint Francis as a bit out of touch with reality.

In the context of ecological disaster, however, radical reorientation of our entire being with the earth, plants, animals, water, and air is a necessity for all of life. Saint Francis models the kind of reciprocal relationship with local and global ecosystems that we need to sustain life for all of our human and nonhuman kin. By drawing upon the witness of Saint Francis, perhaps our first Jesuit pope invites us to notice the "intimacy, porosity, and permeability" of all human and nonhuman kin within the multidimensional relationships in "which there are no basic units, only webs within webs of relations: 'worlds within worlds.' "[21] In their study of gut microbiota in diverse vertebrates, including zebrafish, mice, and humans, Ruth E. Ley and her colleagues reveal how human gut microbiota evolved within diverse forms of microbial life over 3.25 billion years ago, interconnecting habitats "all over the biosphere" that "likely required whole microbial communities to have exchanged innovations."[22]

Dynamic webs within webs of living relations hint at a deeper level of transformation through God's creation, to which Saint Francis witnesses. I cannot prove this, and proving is not the point of the mystery of God's creation. My point here is that Saint Francis was humbly open to being transformed by Brother Sun and Sister Moon and Mother Earth and all of God's creatures. Our Western anthropocentric perspective has socialized us to assume that we humans only act upon nature and that nature does not act upon us. Western dualism's splits between mind and body and society and nature have blinded us to the ways that the entire web of life is inside of us and that we are inside of nature, and to how the interaction between body, society, and nature transforms us. Saint Francis is not alone in the way that he witnesses to a profound intimacy with and between the entire web of life. This chapter listens to voices of peoples and cultures that herald humble respect and affinity for the entire creation. Pope Francis invites all of us into this deeper level of sociality when he writes that "a true ecological approach must also be a social approach," because we need to integrate questions of human and ecological justice and "hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*"[23]

Pope Francis emphasizes how the climate is a global common good "belonging to all and meant for all" because it is a "complex system linked to

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[21]Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), 8. Moore quotes Ruth E. Ley, Catherine A. Lozupone, Micah Hamady, Rob Knight, and Jeffrey I. Gordon, "Worlds within Worlds: Evolution of the Vertebrate Gut Microbiota," *Nature Reviews Microbiology* 6, no. 10 (2008): 776–88.

[22]Ley et al., "Worlds within Worlds," 776.

[23]*Laudato Si',* no. 49.

many of the essential conditions for human life."[24] He underscores how we are "witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system." The consequences of climate change are "a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods."[25] The pope invites us to notice that when plants and animals cannot adapt to climate change, "this in turn" unleashes a whole series of consequences that impact the "livelihood of the poor, who are forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children."[26]

The Problem of Growthism

Western societies take it as an article of faith that capitalism is the best economic system ever created. In the US political system, while there are wide-ranging views on the role of government and how best to distribute goods, it is difficult to find any political party or politician who questions whether we need economic growth. In a recent essay discussing the need to reimagine capitalism, the author asserted that "Entrepreneurial capitalism remains the best system ever invented to create and distribute prosperity and if you look at the billion-plus people in China, India and elsewhere who were lifted from poverty in the past two decades, it remains easy to sing its praises."[27] Two Catholic authors reiterate the basic claim that capitalist, market economies serve the common good.[28] Yet does the happy story of capitalism inexorably serving human progress and the common good stand up to scrutiny?

Our "origin story" of capitalism claims that human beings by nature are self-interested, profit-seeking, and maximizing agents known as *Homo economicus*, as all college students learn in Economics 101.[29] The story we tell ourselves contends that humanity's competitive, self-interested, profit-maximizing nature guided us to break free from the "constraints of feudalism and the chains of serfdom" and establish capitalism as the way of prosperity for all.[30] However, this deeply ingrained cultural belief—that capitalism naturally emerged to serve human freedom and the common good—is not true. Historians tell a different story.

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[24]Ibid., no. 23.

[25]Ibid., no. 25.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Randall Lane, "Reimagining Capitalism: How the Greatest System Ever Conceived (and Its Billionaires) Need to Change," *Forbes,* March 31, 2019, www.forbes.com.

[28]See, for example, Arthur Brooks, "Confessions of a Convert to Catholicism," *America,* February 6, 2017, and Stephanie Slade, "A Libertarian Case for the Common Good," *America,* August 6, 2018.

[29]Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (London: Penguin Random House, 2020), 40.

[30]Ibid.

As is the case with much of Western culture that stresses the "humanistic river" of instrumental reason and *Homo economicus,*[31] we tend to forget that it was peasant-driven revolutions, not capitalism, that brought an end to feudalism. Organized peasant rebellions in the early 1300s, ecological anthropologist Jason Hickel explains, began the process of revolt against the feudal system all across Europe.[32] Social and political crises were accelerated by the bubonic plague that killed one-third of Europe's population in 1347. Unexpectedly, because the plague decimated the labor force while land remained abundant, commoners realized that they had gained bargaining power. They took advantage of their newfound collective power to demand lower rents and higher wages.

Revolts spread across Europe, including, for example, a peasant revolt in England in 1381, people taking over city government in Ciompi, Italy, in 1382, and Parisians establishing a "workers' democracy" in 1413.[33] Commoners across Europe wanted nothing less than revolution, with a complete overturning of the feudal system. Hickel quotes historian of European political economy Silvia Federici's summary of their goal: " 'The rebels did not content themselves with demanding some restrictions to feudal rule, nor did they bargain for better living conditions. Their aim was to put an end to the power of the lords.' "[34] Although many rebellions were crushed and rebels executed, feudalism was indeed overturned. In its place, "Free peasants began to build a clear alternative: an egalitarian, co-operative society rooted in principles of local self-sufficiency" and collective care for natural resources.[35] Notably, historians call this period from 1350 to 1500 the "golden age of the European proletariat."[36] Even more remarkably, Hickel adds, it was "a golden age for Europe's ecology, too."[37]

Feudalism devastated the ecological commons because lords pressured peasants to deforest and overgraze to the point of eroding soil fertility. Peasant rebellions after 1350, however, reversed the devastating ecological impacts of feudalism and "inaugurated a period of ecological regeneration."[38] Once they gained control of the land, peasants established a "more reciprocal relationship with nature: they managed commons and pastures collectively, through democratic assemblies, with careful rules that regulated tillage, grazing and

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[31]Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 1–2.

[32]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 41–42.

[33]Ibid., 42.

[34]Ibid., 43. Hickel quotes Silvia Federici, *Caliban the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2004), 46.

[35]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 42–43.

[36]Ibid., 44.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

forest use."[39] The key lesson is that where the ecological commons is a fundamental value, soils and forests can regenerate.

While it is often assumed that capitalism evolved from feudalism, Hickel illuminates how such a transition was impossible. Capitalism depends upon "piling up excess wealth for large-scale investment."[40] We will never know how an egalitarian, cooperative peasant society might have evolved because it was systematically destroyed by nobles, the Church, and merchant bourgeoisie through land privatization.[41] Historians describe the period from 1350 to 1500 as the "golden age of the European proletariat" because a series of peasant rebellions throughout Europe (briefly described earlier) enabled serfs to become free farmers "with free access to commons: pasture for grazing, forests for game and timber, [and] waterways for fishing and irrigation."[42] While the feudal system had been an ecological disaster because lords extracted more from the land, forests, and soil than nature was able to regenerate, the reintroduction of a collective commons that carefully managed tillage, grazing, and forest use helped forests and soil to regenerate.[43] Since they were unable to re-enserf peasants, Europe's elites violently forced people off their lands through "a continent-wide campaign of evictions."[44] The public commons of collectively managed pastures, forests, and rivers "were fenced off and privatized for elite use. They became, in a word, *property.*"[45]

This process of placing physical boundaries between privately owned land, forests, and rivers is known as "enclosure." The enclosure movement destroyed "thousands of rural communities" by ripping up and burning crops and razing villages to the ground.[46] The Reformation only added "fuel to the bonfire of dispossession" by dismantling Catholic monasteries across Europe that were confiscated by nobles. Revolts by commoners failed in the 1500s, and over the next three centuries "huge swathes of land were enclosed," thereby removing millions of people from their lands, which in turn triggered "an internal European refugee crisis."[47] In England, "poverty," a word that had rarely been used in texts of that time, became useful for describing the mass of paupers and vagabonds created by enclosure and privatization. Enclosure worked like "magic" for capitalists because it inaugurated what Adam Smith called "previous accumulation," that is, appropriating vast amounts of land and natural resources that had previously been in the public domain of the

[39]Ibid.
[40]Ibid., 45.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Ibid., 43–45. The "golden age of the European proletariat" is attributed to Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life: 1400–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 128ff.
[43]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 43.
[44]Ibid., 45.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Ibid.
[47]Ibid.

commons.[48] As Smith and economic textbooks tell the story, this accumulation came about by innocent hard work and savings. Contrary to this idyllic tale, which historians call "naïve," a more accurate term for the process of enclosure is "plunder," or what Karl Marx called "primitive accumulation," a term that defines the violent ways capitalists appropriated labor and natural resources through

> *Restructuring of the relations of reproduction—human and extra-human alike—so as to allow the renewed and expanded flow of Cheap labor, food, energy, and raw materials into the commodity system.*[49]

As capitalism commodified everything, including land and raw materials, the consequences of enclosure were devastating for peasants. Enclosure also created something else capitalism has historically depended upon: plentiful, cheap labor.[50] Peasants were thrust into an intolerable choice: starve or subsist on rock-bottom wages. Neither slaves nor serfs, they were proletarians wholly dependent upon wages, facing a predicament "utterly new in world history."[51] Far from the economists' happy story of a peaceful and inevitable transition from feudalism to capitalism, "organized violence, mass impoverishment, and the systematic destruction of self-sufficient subsistence economies" actually inaugurated the new system.[52] The devastating consequences of primitive accumulation included driving wages down 70 percent, creating conditions of famine and starvation, which in turn dramatically lowered population as "average life expectancy at birth fell from 43 years in the 1500s to the low 30s in the 1700s."[53]

We often hear and tend to assume that from its inception capitalism increased life expectancy, but the opposite is the case. Industrial capitalism erupted with disastrous public health impacts. In Manchester and Liverpool, two of the giants of industrialization, life expectancy dropped precipitously in comparison to nonindustrialized parts of England. One of the world's leading experts on the history of public health, Simon Szreter, has demonstrated that life expectancy dropped in industrialized cities to levels "not seen since the Black Death in the fourteenth century."[54] The same pattern was found in other European cities, and for its first three centuries "capitalism generated misery to a degree unknown in the pre-capitalist era."[55] Major boosts to life

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[48]Ibid.

[49]Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 98 (italics and capitalization in original).

[50]Patel and Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, 97.

[51]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 47.

[52]Ibid., 46.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid., 49.

[55]Ibid. Hickel cites Simon Szreter, "The Population Health Approach in Historical Perspective," *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 3 (2003): 421–31, and Simon Szreter and

expectancy, Szreter explains, did not occur until public investments were made in public plumbing, that is, in separate water and sewerage systems in the late 1800s.[56] Capitalists opposed public investments in water and sewerage systems.

Primitive accumulation through colonization was even more devastating than Industrialization in Europe. The same elites who achieved enclosure in Europe were colonizing "new frontiers" in Africa, the Americas, and South Asia. For example, in the same year (1525) that German nobles massacred 100,000 peasants, the "Spanish king Carlos I awarded the kingdom's highest honor to Hernan Cortés, the conquistador who slayed 100,000 Indigenous people as his army marched through Mexico and destroyed the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán."[57] In his multidisciplinary study of the Americas before the arrival of Columbus, Charles C. Mann observes that "from Bartolome de Las Casas on, Europeans have known that their arrival brought about a catastrophe for Native Americans."[58] Indeed, after Cortés, "the population of the entire region" of central Mexico collapsed from over 25 million people to 730,000 by 1625.[59]

Capitalism is not a fairy tale of human evolution. Rather, "It hinged on commodities that were produced by slaves, on lands stolen from colonized peoples, and processed in factories staffed by European peasants who had been forcibly dispossessed by enclosure."[60] Consider, for example, how European colonizers, from the 1500s to the 1800s, extracted more than 220 million pounds of silver from the Andes. Hickel invites us to a thought experiment about the scale of wealth stolen by siphoning silver: "If invested in 1800 at the historical average rate of interest, that quantity of silver would today be worth $165 trillion—more than double the world's GDP."[61] Reflect further that the calculation does not include the gold extracted from South America during the same period. That is not all. Colonization also provided raw materials like cotton, which was the most important commodity for Britain's economic rise,[62] and sugar, which was a "key source of cheap calories for Europe's industrial workers."[63]

Remember that at least 5 million Indigenous peoples were enslaved to

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Graham Mooney, "Urbanization, Mortality, and the Standard of Living Debate: New Estimates of the Expectation of Life at Birth in Nineteenth-Century British Cities," *Economic History Review* 51, no. 1 (1998): 84–112.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 50.

[58]Charles C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 146.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 51.

[61]Ibid.

[62]Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 155–56.

[63]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 52.

power the mines and plantations in South America, and 15 million "souls were shipped across the Atlantic from Africa during three centuries of state-sponsored human trafficking."[64] Consider another thought experiment: "If enslaved Africans had been paid at least the US minimum wage, with modest interest, it would add up to $97 trillion today—four times the size of the US GDP."[65]

A "subtler form of appropriation" was at work in the way the British extracted $45 trillion in taxes from India between 1765 and 1938, a process that enabled Britain to buy "strategic materials like iron, tar and timber which were essential to the country's industrialization."[66] Britain also used these taxes to fund new white-settler colonies like Canada and Australia. Hickel notes that many contemporary politicians justify colonization on the grounds that Britain helped India to develop when, in fact, "The opposite is true: India developed Britain."[67] Far from a process of natural human evolution, capitalism was achieved through violent processes of enclosure, enslavement, extraction, and colonization.

The long history of capitalism, Hickel finds, far from a story about human evolution, is that capitalist growth has always depended upon commodification and enclosure. He describes the "Lauderdale Paradox," first articulated by James Maitland in 1804, the Eighth Earl of Lauderdale (the peerage of Scotland), "which holds that an increase in 'private riches' is achieved by choking off 'public wealth.' "[68] Maitland noticed that colonizers were "burning down orchards that produced fruits and nuts, so that people who once lived off the natural abundance of the land would be forced instead to work for wages and purchase food from Europeans."[69] Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent protests against the British salt tax demonstrate perhaps the most iconic example of the Lauderdale Paradox. Salt was abundantly available to everyone along India's coasts—all people had to do was scoop it up. The British made something that was abundant scarce by enclosing the coasts and imposing a tax. Not only did the British acquire free value from the public commons, "they also created artificial scarcity" that produced revenue for the colonial government and sabotaged the commons "for growth."[70] The point is that capitalism, rather than protecting freedom, instead encloses, extracts, colonizes, and expropriates public wealth for the sake of growth and private enrichment.

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[64]Ibid.
[65]Ibid.
[66]Ibid.
[67]Ibid.
[68]Jason Hickel, "Degrowth: A Theory of Radical Abundance," *Real-World Economics*, no. 87 (2019): 54.
[69]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 60.
[70]Ibid.

The happy story we tell ourselves about capitalism perpetuates another perversity: "The proponents of capitalism believed it was necessary to *impoverish* people in order to generate growth."[71] The intellectual history of capitalism includes philosopher David Hume's claim that "'Tis always observed, in years of scarcity, if it not be extreme, that the poor labor more, and really live better.' "[72] John Locke was more straightforward, admitting "that enclosure was theft from the commons, and from commoners, but he argued that this shift was morally justifiable because it enabled a shift to intensive commercial methods that increased agricultural output."[73] Locke argued that any increase in output was for the greater good of humanity, and he applied the same argument to defend colonization. Yet, as Hickel explains, Locke is making an "alibi" for capitalism to shift from meeting human needs and the common good to using production for profit and private wealth. "Today," the very same alibi is "routinely leveraged to justify new rounds of enclosure and colonization—of lands, forests, fisheries, and of the atmosphere itself."[74] Today, the alibi is called "growth."

Before I turn to the ways that the preoccupation with capitalist growth is killing humanity and the planet, it is important to understand that the Church's role in advancing what Walter Mignolo calls the "colonial matrix of power" was not only through colonization of land and peoples. The Church also played a role in suppressing ecologically healthy ways of human living, simultaneously facilitating the rise of capitalism. Commoners had taken responsibility for caring for the earth because they saw it as a nurturing, even divine, mother. The historian Carolyn Merchant describes how, in precapitalist times, "The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. . . . As long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it."[75]

Although Pope Francis rightly celebrates the Franciscan tradition that nurtures intimate connection and co-relationship with the whole of creation, there is also a long history in Catholic Christianity of the *contemptus mundi* tradition.[76] In brief, *contemptus mundi*, literally contempt for the world, is

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[71]Ibid., 58.

[72]Ibid. Hickel's quote of Hume is derived from Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

[73]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 55.

[74]Ibid.

[75]Ibid., 66. Hickel quotes Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 3.

[76]See, for example, Lothario di Segni (Pope Innocent III), *The Misery of the Human Condition: De miseria humane conditionis*, ed. Donald R. Howard, trans. Margaret Mary Dietz (New

obsessed with the salvation of the soul beyond this world and disdains all things biological and physical, including the body. As theologian Elizabeth Johnson has shown, this contempt issued in a dualism that made women and the earth passive agents, at best.[77] *Contemptus mundi* is, perhaps, a precursor to the tradition of dualism that locates society and economics outside of nature, so that capitalism disrupts nature from the outside.

This dualistic worldview is fundamental to the violence of capitalism.[78] Pope Francis focuses his critique of dualism on the "*undifferentiated and one-dimensional*" technocratic paradigm that "exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object."[79] Francis laments the way this technocratic paradigm is a "technique of possession, mastery and transformation."[80] That technique of possession, furthermore, "has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth," which "is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit."[81] World-ecology scholars[82] express a critique similar to that of Pope Francis: Cartesian dualism is a root philosophical orientation and colonial practice that not only separates mind from body but also divides "thinking things" from "extended things."[83] Ecologists Patel and Moore explain that European ruling classes viewed most human beings, including "women, peoples of color, Indigenous peoples—as extended, not thinking beings."[84] It is upon this division of mind and body, nature and society, that Descartes argued that "we" Europeans must become "'the masters and possessors of nature.'"[85] Dualism "was recruited in order to justify not only the land of colonies, but the bodies of the colonized themselves."[86]

York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

[77]Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 51–54.

[78]Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, 5 and 30.

[79]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 106.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Giorgis Kallis, Vasilis Kostakis, Steffan Lange, Barbara Muraca, Susan Paulson, and Mattias Schmelzer, "Research on Degrowth," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 43 (May 2018): 291–316, here 294. The authors state, "The economic sphere was construed as a relatively autonomous, self-equilibrating sphere governed by different laws than nature, and distinct from the state." They cite Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), and Margaret Schabas, *The Natural Origin of Economics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), for this argument.

[83]Patel and Moore, *History of the World*, 52.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid. Patel and Moore cite René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings: Volume I*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stroothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 142–43.

[86]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 76.

Integral Ecology and Cultural Dialogue on Othering the Earth

Pope Francis prioritizes listening to Indigenous communities as a primary way of shifting from the technological paradigm to an integral ecological ethic. In this section I highlight how listening to Indigenous and Black communities facilitates deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of time and space within the web of life. *Laudato Si'* underscores the need for integrating diverse forms of knowledge into a "broader vision of reality" in the opening of chapter 4, "Integral Ecology."[87] In his openness to a broader vision of the interconnectedness of reality, Francis pays heightened attention to "cultural ecology" because he understands that "together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic, and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat."[88] Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions deserve "special care" and "should be the principal dialogue partners" because the land "is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."[89]

In contrast to the multitude of ways that capitalism seeks to control and extract value from the web of ecological relations that make up all life, many cultures deemed "primitive" by modernity/coloniality celebrate radical intimacy, interdependence, and reciprocity within the web of life. For instance, the Anishinaabeg, whose original lands were in northeastern America (now Canada), have the word "*minbimaatisiiwin*," which means "'a continuous rebirth' of reciprocal and cyclical relations between human and other life."[90] In southern African regions, "Bantu languages have *ubuntu*, human fulfillment through togetherness," and the Shona have "*ukama*, 'relatedness to the entire cosmos,' including the biophysical world."[91] The Chinese *shi-shi wu-ai* and the Maori term *mauri* express interrelatedness through the entire life force of the cosmos.[92]

Professor Lisa Brooks recovers the way her Abenaki ancestors mapped native space in the northeast, the region white settlers call New England.[93] Mapping, for the Abenaki, is itself a language of communication within the entire interdependent and interconnected landscape. A central metaphor Abenaki use to describe their mapping of the Northeast is the "Common

[87]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 138.
[88]Ibid., no. 143.
[89]Ibid., no. 146.
[90]Patel and Moore, *History of the World*, 19.
[91]Ibid.
[92]Ibid.
[93]Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

Pot" or *Wlôgan*, which "is that which feeds and nourishes. It is the wigwam that feeds the family, the village that feeds the community, the networks that sustain the village."[94] The "pot" is made from birch trees, the clay of the earth, and is the *Wlôgan* or "dish" of interconnected social and ecological interrelationships. Women play a central role in facilitating cocreative relationships in the Common Pot. "All our relations" are evoked in the Common Pot, and the closely related Abenaki word *wlidôgawôgan* proclaims "thanks to all our relations."[95] The Common Pot interrelates the whole of existence, including the divine, as the pot is "our mother" who is "Sky Woman's body, the network of relations that must nourish and reproduce" life itself.[96]

Rather than just nice words or rhetoric, these diverse ways of describing the radical interdependence of the whole web of life reflect ways of living that actually protect the world's biodiversity. Although traditional Indigenous lands have been reduced to 22 percent of the earth's land area, scientists have found that "80 percent of the world's biodiversity is found on territories stewarded by Indigenous peoples."[97] As capitalist processes appropriate land and "'modernize' indigenous ways of life," and "accelerate consumerism and urbanization," these and other factors "are driving a cultural die-off."[98] Scientists have linked linguistic diversity with the plentitude of biodiversity. As the world loses one language every two weeks, eroding the diversity of seven thousand languages, we also lose local species.[99] Cultural diversity and linguistic diversity are integral to full thriving for all human and nonhuman kin.

A central concern to Indigenous peoples is the question of how to mark time, including geological time and the current epoch. Consider, for example, how a group of scientists recently voted to designate a new epoch "the Anthropocene."[100] The Anthropocene coincides with measurable impacts of the "great acceleration" of human activities over the past century.[101] This new human-dominated geologic epoch generates unprecedented global impacts that geologists measure in layers of the earth. Geologists find no analogue for the period we now navigate.

However, if we dig a little deeper into how we mark geologic time, we find startling revelations about coloniality. Geologists Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin advance two hypotheses that date the Anthropocene to

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[94]Ibid., 4.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Ibid., 4 and 253–54.

[97]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 264. Hickel cites Hannah Rundle, "Indigenous Knowledge Can Help Solve the Biodiversity Crisis," *Scientific American,* October 12, 2019.

[98]Jessica Stites, "There's a Vanishing Resource We're Not Talking About," *In These Times,* January 31, 2019, www.inthesetimes.com.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Meera Subramanian, "Anthropocene Now: Influential Panel Votes to Recognize Earth's New Epoch," *Nature,* May 21, 2019, www.nature.com.

[101]International Geosphere-Biosphere Program, "Great Acceleration," January 2015, www.igbp.net.

1610.[102] Their first hypothesis concerns how the ecosystems of Europe and the Americas were reshaped through the exchange of plants and animals. The evidence for this change is found in the kinds of biomass accumulated in European and American continents. Lewis and Maslin's second hypothesis, far more terrifying, examines geological strata that reveal how carbon dioxide levels dropped when genocide eviscerated Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. While 54 million to 60 million people lived in the Americas in 1492, by 1650 there were only 6 million. Lewis and Maslin call this the "Orbis spike" of 1610, because the onset of globalization (*Orbis* is Latin for "world") in the form of European colonization coincides with dramatic geological changes in landmass and carbon dioxide levels. They conclude that the "Orbis spike implies that colonialism, global trade and coal brought about the Anthropocene."[103]

Indigenous scholars, however, invite decolonization of the Anthropocene. Decolonization begins with exposing how the concept of the Anthropocene makes Eurocentric assumptions about the relationship between time and space invisible, neutral, and global. Simultaneously, it erases Indigenous knowledges. In the wake of slavery, the Anthropocene extends colonialist logics that sever relations between humans and soil, plants and animals, and even "between minerals and our bones."[104] Consider Métis scholar Zoe Todd's reflection on the entanglements across time between other-than-human and human kin that heralds Black and Indigenous ways of attending to mutually complex interrelationships between rocks, fish, and human kin.[105] Todd invites contemplation of Christina Sharpe's reflection *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Sharpe invites readers to imagine the historical, hydrological wake of an Atlantic slave ship in order to recall enslaved peoples who were deliberately drowned in the Middle Passage.

People who drowned during the slave trade still endure through "residence time," the amount of time it takes for a substance to enter the ocean and then leave it. Sharpe learns what "residence time" is from a colleague who is a marine geographer. The colleague explains that human blood is salty, and that sodium has a residence time of 260 million years.[106] Sharpe then asks, "And what happens to the energy produced in the waters? It continues cycling like atoms in residence time. We, Black people, exist in the residence time of the wake, a time in which 'everything is now. It is all now.' "[107]

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[102]Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature,* March 12, 2015, 171–80, www.nature.com.

[103]Ibid., 177.

[104]Zoe Todd, "On Time," November 7, 2018, www.zoestodd.com.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 41.

[107]Ibid. Sharpe quotes Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1987), 198.

Sharpe reflects on multiple levels of the meaning of living in the wake left by slave ships, including the historical, literal, and enduring consequences of enslavement of Africans. She invites meditation on the meanings of "wake" as the track left on the water's surface by a ship, and as all the disturbances left by a wake, including mourning the dead and living in a state of wakefulness and consciousness.

She writes that "living in/the wake of slavery is living 'the afterlife of property' and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrem* (that which is brought forth follows the womb) in which the Black child inherits the non-status, the non/being of the mother."[108] The historical inheritance of non/being and non/status as human, Sharpe writes, "is everywhere apparent in the ongoing criminalization of Black women and children."[109] This inheritance also includes "the gratuitous violence of stop-and-frisk and Operation Clean Halls," mind-boggling rates of incarceration, and "the immanence of death as 'a predictable and constitutive aspect of *this* democracy.' "[110]

I wonder whether and how residence time, in the wake of Atlantic slavery, even register in white settler being? Zoe Todd and Heather Davis pragmatically deploy the Orbis spike of 1610 to thread interwoven ties between the Anthropocene and colonization.[111] Todd and Davis explain, however, that their interest goes deeper than a scientific marker—"We are interested in how rock and climate are bound to flesh."[112] Sharpe's residence time registers that relationship. If we attend to residence time, it offers the possibility of learning from Black and Indigenous ancestors whose bodies endure in landmasses and oceans as "oxygen, hydrogen, and atoms."[113] Returning to the residence time of the Middle Passage, which she must honor as an Indigenous woman in order to survive, Todd asks, "What if the rocks are working in concert with those residence times of those who were violated by the nightmares that white supremacy has summoned?"[114] Her question haunts, and nurtures wonder. Will we white settlers turn toward a new way of being? Will we cultivate a tender way of co-sensing our mutual relationality, interconnectedness, and obligations with and for Indigenous and Black kin as well as other-than-human kin?

The reality of the Orbis spike and the interconnections between human and nonhuman kin that Sharpe, Todd, and Davis help us to perceive expose how Western time is not natural, no matter how much we Westerners may think that today's date on the Gregorian calendar is so. My point is not to

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[108]Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 15.

[109]Ibid.

[110]Ibid.

[111]Zoe Todd and Heather Davis, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographers* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80.

[112]Ibid., 769.

[113]Todd, "On Time."

[114]Ibid.

dismiss the practical dimension of marking time on a daily calendar; rather, we need to notice how the Western conception of time divides us from the larger reality of beings rooted in a global ecosystem that is the source of all life as we know it. Western time orients humanity to control and domination over the earth to accelerate production and consumption without limits or regard for Sister Earth.

Consider, for example, the summary report released May 6, 2019, from the Intergovernmental Science-Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), an independent body comprising more than 130 member governments and often called the "IPCC for biodiversity." The report finds that "nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history—and the rate of species extinction is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world now likely."[115] Planetary biodiversity is "humanity's most important life-supporting safety-net," a net that "is being stretched almost to breaking point," said Professor Sandra Diaz of Argentina, who cochaired the global species assessment.[116]

The report states, "The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever."[117] Finding that more than one million plant and animal species are threatened with extinction, and at a greater pace than ever in human history, the report warns, "We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide."[118]

Degrowth: A Way of Radical Abundance

It should be clear by now that we can't pursue capitalist growth and simultaneously reverse environmental racism and breakdown of the ecological commons. We need new ways of thinking and being in relationship with Mother Earth. An alternative economic way of being, oriented toward hope and radical abundance, began to emerge at least fifty years ago with the Club of Rome's[119] study of the devastating ecological implications of unabated economic growth.[120] While the Club of Rome found that the current myopic

[115]Intergovernmental Science-Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, "Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented' " (Bonn, Germany: ISPBES, May 2019), www.ipbes.net.

[116]Ibid.

[117]Ibid.

[118]Ibid.

[119]The Club of Rome describes itself as a "network of thought leaders from a rich diversity of expertise" whose "goal is to actively advocate for paradigm and systems shifts which will enable society to emerge from our current crises, by promoting a new way of being human, with a more resilient biosphere." See "About the Club of Rome," https://www.clubofrome.org/about-us/.

[120]Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III,

focus on economic growth is unsustainable, they were joined by other thinkers who articulated paradoxical ways of living in radical abundance and harmony with the planet without economic growth.[121] These alternative perspectives have recently congealed into a multi- and interdisciplinary ecological field of "degrowth," a movement that emerged in the early 2000s and a term that was first used in a collection of essays titled *Demain la Décroissance: Entropie—écologie—économie (Tomorrow's Degrowth: Entropy—Ecology—Economy)*.[122] Degrowth may sound impractical and disruptive to American ears that can easily miss its ecological meaning. The French word "*décroissance*" and the Italian *"la decresita"* evoke an ecological imagination to French and Italian ears because these words mean "a river returning to its regular flow after a flood."[123] Degrowth, paradoxically, is not about living in Scrooge-like misery—it is about living in the radical abundance of God's creation. Jason Hickel delineates the outlines of a vision of degrowth:

> Degrowth stands for de-colonization, of both lands and peoples and even our minds. It stands for de-enclosure of the commons, the de-commodification of public goods, and the de-intensification of work and life. It stands for the de-thingification of humans and nature, the de-escalation of ecological crisis. Degrowth begins as a process of taking less. But in the end it opens up new vistas of possibility. It moves us from scarcity to abundance, from extraction to regeneration, from dominion to reciprocity, and from loneliness and separation to connection with a world that's fizzing with life.[124]

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis implicitly promotes degrowth in his recognition of the limits of capitalism. He writes that the environment "cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces."[125] He urges that we "reject a magical conception of the market" that prioritizes private and corporate gain over the fundamental value of biodiversity.[126] We need an entirely new approach that prioritizes care for the living organism Earth and

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The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

[121]See, for example, Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), and E .F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

[122]Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *Demain la Decroissance: Entropie—Écology—Économie*, preface and translation by Jacques Grinevald and Ivo Rens (Lausanne: Pierre Marcel Favre, 1979). Cited in Ksenija Hanacek, Brototi Roy, Sofia Avila, and Giorgos Kallis, "Ecological Economics and Degrowth: Proposing a Future Research Agenda from the Margins," *Ecological Economics* 169 (2020): 1–13, here 12.

[123]See "What Is degrowth?" at https://www.degrowth.info/en/what-is-degrowth/.

[124]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 287.

[125]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, no. 190.

[126]Ibid.

people who are most vulnerable to environmental destruction. It ought to be evident that growth for its own sake produces "more illth than wealth" when the ongoing pursuit of growth in high-income nations produces more inequality and instability, stress, and depression from overwork, along with "ill health from pollution, diabetes and obesity, and so on."[127] This contradiction "cannot be considered progress," writes Pope Francis, because too often "people's quality of life actually diminishes—by the deterioration of the environment, the low quality of food or the depletion of resources—in the midst of economic growth."[128] We need to find a way other than growthism. Pope Francis recommends,

> We know how unsustainable is the behavior of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.[129]

We tend not to perceive how economic growth delivers diminishing returns. There are, for example, dozens of countries that attain higher life expectancy with significantly less per capita income than the United States, including Japan, South Korea, Portugal, and even the European Union (which has 36 percent less income than the United States).[130] A similar pattern emerges in terms of education. Finland, Estonia, and Poland attain the best educational systems in the world despite per capita income levels that are respectively 25 percent, 66 percent, and 77 percent less than the United States.[131] The critical point is that it is possible to achieve high levels of human development and protect the environment with much lower levels of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

In fact, United Nations data show that nations can succeed in a wide variety of social indicators, including health, education, employment, nutrition, social support, democracy, and life satisfaction, "with as little as $10,000 per capita while staying within planetary boundaries."[132] If we use a metric that accounts for inequality and the social and environmental costs of economic activity, which GDP does not measure, it becomes clear that "past a certain point" growth "begins to have a *negative impact*."[133] While the Genuine Prog-

[127]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 175.
[128]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si',* no. 194.
[129]Ibid., no. 193.
[130]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 174.
[131]Ibid.
[132]Ibid. Hickel cites Daniel O'Neill et al., "A Good Life for All within Planetary Boundaries," *Nature Sustainability* (2018): 88–95.
[133]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 176.

ress Indicator (GPI) begins with personal consumption expenditure just like GDP, it also accounts for both benefits and costs to provide a more holistic perspective on the economy. Global GPI grew with GDP until the mid-1970s, but has declined since because the "social and environmental costs of growth have become significant enough to cancel out consumption-related gains."[134]

At the same time, although income levels have quadrupled in the United States and tripled in the United Kingdom since the 1950s, levels of happiness have declined. As economist Joseph Stiglitz demonstrates, inequality exacerbates economic inefficiencies, erodes trust and social cohesion, undermines democratic institutions and civic participation, and creates a sense of unfairness and disillusionment.[135] It ought not be surprising, then, that countries with higher levels of inequality tend to be less happy while countries with "robust welfare systems have the highest levels of human happiness, when controlling for other factors."[136] There are many countries with significantly less GDP per capita than the United States that experience higher levels of well-being.[137] Interestingly, the economically poor Nicoya region of Costa Rica has one of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. Researchers found the reason for higher life expectancy in Nicoya was not genes or diet but community—even in old age people felt valued through connections with family, friends, and neighbors.[138] Drawing upon comprehensive studies of happiness, Hickel finds that "when people live in a fair, caring society, where everyone has access to social goods, they don't have to spend their time worrying about how to cover their basic needs day to day—they can enjoy the art of living."[139] In fact, the more generous the welfare system, the "happier everyone becomes."[140]

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[134]Ibid., 177.

[135]Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012); see especially chapter 4, "Why It Matters," and chapter 5, "Democracy in Peril."

[136]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 177.

[137]Ibid., 178. Hickel's list of countries include Germany, Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, Finland, Canada, and Denmark.

[138]Ibid., 180n20. "Sixty-year-old Nicoyan men have a median lifetime of 84.3 years (a three-year advantage over Japanese men), while women have a median lifetime of 85.1." Hickel cites Luis Rosero-Bixby et al., "The Nicoya Region of Costa Rica: A High-Longevity Island for Elderly Males," *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research* 11 (2013); Jo Marchant, "Poorest Costa Ricans Live Longest," *Nature*, September 3, 2013, 10.1038/nature.2013.13663; Luis Rosbero-Bixby and William H. Dow, "Predicting Mortality with Biomarkers: A Population-Based Prospective Cohort Study for Elderly Costa Ricans," *Population Health Metrics* 10, no. 1 (2012): 11, doi: 10.1186/1478-7954-10-11.

[139]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 178.

[140]Ibid., 180. Hickel cites Adam Okulicz-Kozaryn, I. V. Holmes, and Derek R. Avery, "The Subjective Well-Being Political Paradox: Happy Welfare States and Unhappy Liberals," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 99, no. 6 (2014): 1300–1308; and Benjamin Radcliff, *The Political Economy of Human Happiness: How Voters' Choices Determine the Quality of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Degrowth, argues Jason Hickel, is an "antidote" to capitalist growth by "calling for a fairer distribution of existing resources and the expansion of public goods," and "releasing both humans and ecosystems from its grip."[141] Growth in material consumption, even so-called green growth, is undesirable because it does not keep humanity within ecological boundaries. When people live in a fair and equal society with universal health care, unemployment insurance, pensions, paid holiday and sick leave, affordable housing, daycare, and strong minimum wages, and are not stressed about covering basic needs, they "can enjoy the art of living" and "build bonds of social solidarity."[142]

We need a social, moral, and ecological compass that will guide us in living in ways that enable every human being and community to live in dignity and well-being while also protecting global ecological systems. Kate Raworth created such a compass when she was working at Oxfam in 2012. She calls her compass the "doughnut" because it "combines two concentric radar charts to depict the two boundaries—social and ecological—that together encompass human wellbeing."[143] The inner boundary, she explains, is a social foundation that establishes a floor below which are shortfalls in well-being, including water, food, health, housing, education, work, peace and justice, political voice, social equity, gender equality, networks, and energy. The minimum standards for these indicators are based upon internationally agreed-upon minimum standards established by the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all UN member-states.[144] The outer boundary of the doughnut delineates an ecological ceiling, above which is represented "overshoot of pressure on Earth's life supporting systems," including climate change, ozone layer depletion, air pollution, biodiversity loss, land conversion, freshwater withdrawals, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, chemical pollution, and ocean acidification.[145] We are now living above and beyond the ecological ceilings for climate change, biodiversity loss, land conversion, and nitrogen and phosphorus loading, according to the planetary boundaries framework.[146]

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[141]Jason Hickel, "Degrowth: A Theory of Radical Abundance," *Real-World Economics Review*, no. 87 (2019): 54.

[142]Hickel, *Less Is More*, 180.

[143]Kate Raworth, "A Doughnut for the Anthropocene: Humanity's Compass in the 21st Century," *The Lancet: Planetary Health* 1, no. 2 (May 1, 2017), www.thelancet.com.

[144]United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development Goals, https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

[145]Raworth, "A Doughnut for the Anthropocene."

[146]Ibid. Raworth cites W. Steffen, K. Richardson, and J. Rockstrom et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," *Science* 347, no. 6223 (February 2015): 1–10.

In/conclusion: Toward Racial and Ecological Intimacy

In his 2009 book *Farewell to Growth*, French economist Serge Latouche explains how a postgrowth, post-GDP world has no room for racism: "We resist, and must resist all forms of racism and discrimination (skin color, sex, religion, ethnicity). Unfortunately, they are all too common in the West today."[147] Environmental racism in the United States, sadly, compounds the injustices of anti-black racism because those who are viewed as "being threats to the larger social body are usually the ones who end up being" subjected to the most degraded geographical spaces and the many illnesses that result from living in those spaces.[148] The way ecological issues in the United States tend to be perceived as the "exclusive dominion of European-Americans," Black Americans might be legitimately skeptical about proposals for degrowth.[149] The tendency of the larger ecological movement to be led by affluent White people is exacerbated when "'environmental justice' (the movement and the issue) is populated by Black Americans, native Americans, working class European Americans and Latinos."[150] Not only are people who are poor and/or Black or Indigenous or other people of color constructed as the "environmental lepers,"[151] the larger society misses how Africans in diaspora and Indigenous peoples fostered intimate relationships with nonhuman kin.[152]

Drawing upon the ecological traditions of her African ancestors, Kimberly Ruffin demonstrates how Africans' adaptiveness and capacity to cultivate their own love of nature, biophilia, enabled their survival through enslavement.[153] Retrieving African ecological traditions is a critical piece of becoming an "ecosocial" citizen who cultivates "civic participation informed by the interconnectedness of ecological and social worlds."[154] Ruffin believes, rightly so, that we need a broader concept of citizenship and democracy that nurtures biophilic fitness for these times. By "biophilic fitness" she means

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[147]Serge Latouche, *Farewell to Growth* (New York: Polity Press, 2010), 99.

[148]Washington, *Packing Them In*, 21.

[149]Brian Gilmore, "The World Is Yours: 'Degrowth,' Racial Inequality and Sustainability," *Sustainability* 5 (2013): 1282–303, here 1287.

[150]Ibid. Gilmore quotes Kimberly N. Ruffin, "Writing African-American Ecological Ancestors," in *Proceedings of Land and Power: Sustainable Agriculture and African Americans, 2007 Environmental Thought Conference*, Jeffrey L. Jordan, Edward Pennick, Walter A. Hill, and Robert Zabawa, eds. (Washington, DC: US Department of Agriculture, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program [SARE], 2007), www.sare.org.

[151]Washington, *Packing Them In*, 30.

[152]Kimberly Ruffin, "Biophilia on Purpose: A Declaration to Become an Ecosocial Citizen," *Intervalla* 3 (2015): 44–48, here 46.

[153]Ibid., 45.

[154]Ibid.

that human beings have an innate affinity for the natural world "that must be cultivated and supported."[155] "Going forward," both for global elites and African Americans, she writes,

> human beings need both social and ecological vitality, what I will call the presence of "ecosocial security," if planet Earth is going to continue to be the stage for their biophilia. Contemporary African Americans cannot fully enjoy self-certified biophilia if their status in the social sphere remains compromised. And while their geographic and social mobility is enviable, [elite] citizens cannot shield themselves from ecological collapse through their purchased entry into human systems that confer "alternative" citizenship. Simply put, our future in our current life support system is predicated on our ability to strengthen interconnected ecosocial security.[156]

Ruffin's point is clear in our current predicament of impasse: "neither ecological nor social affiliation can be enjoyed exclusive of the other. Human beings are an intimate part of nature whose notions of rights, responsibilities, obligations, and freedoms have both a social and ecological context."[157] She demonstrates how a focus on slavery's commodity crops may miss insight into the richness of African American ecological agency. African traditions of botanical knowledges enabled them "'to ward off hunger, diversify their diet, reinstate customary food preferences, and to treat illness.'"[158] Developing an interconnected sense of racial and ecological intimacy, I believe, means recognizing and retrieving the ways "African Americans have a triumphant record of self-certified biophilia that enriched their connections to nonhuman nature and emboldened them to change human systems built to exclude them."[159]

In her book *Black on Earth: African-American Ecoliterary Traditions*, Ruffin draws upon diverse African American artists, poets, musicians, and slave narratives as ways of thinking and working through ecological crises. She celebrates the ecological blues poetry of Jayne Cortez (1934–2012) for the way Cortez viscerally articulates our physical entanglements with landscapes we have rendered surreal. For example, in her "I got the blue-ooze," Cortez laments,

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[155]Ibid.

[156]Ibid., 47.

[157]Ibid., 48.

[158]Ibid., 46. Ruffin quotes Judith Carney, "Seeds of Memory: Botanical Legacies of the African Diaspora," in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas*, ed. Robert Voeks and Johan Rashford (New York: Springer, 2013), 30.

[159]Ruffin, *Biophilia on Purpose*, 46.

I got the fishing in raw sewerage blue-ooze
I got the toxic-waste dump in my backyard blue-ooze
I got the contaminated water blue-ooze
I got the man-made famine blue-ooze
I got the dead house dead earth blue-ooze.[160]

Ruffin urges readers/listeners to sit with Cortez's images and sounds as a way of embracing the ecological emergencies of our day. She reflects on Cortez's ecological poetry:

> Disruptive, memorable and unexpected images in angry tones push the reader/listener to expand their ecological consciousness and think with an epistemological orientation that is not stunted by the alienation of modern daily living. Those who are in ecological crisis may find in Cortez's poetry artful acknowledgment and advocacy. Those sheltered from ecological crisis may find their buffer eroding from her acidic vision.[161]

My hope is that people malformed by anti-black supremacy will be disrupted enough in this moment of ecological disaster to delink from modernity/coloniality and relink with Black and Indigenous cultural traditions that draw us into ways of living an authentic integral ecology.[162] When we begin living in loving concert with our human and nonhuman kin, then we may yet nurture the shared labor of liberation and intimate belonging to which Sophia-Wisdom draws us in creating the *basileia tou theou*.

[160]Kimberly Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Eco-Literary Traditions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 145. Ruffin cites Jayne Cortez, "I got the blue—ooze," in *Jazz Fan Looks Back* (Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 2002), 60.

[161]Ruffin, *Black on Earth*, 150.

[162]Pope Francis, *Laudato Si',* no. 138 and following.