REVISTA DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS

A WORLD IN BROKEN DROPPER: (RE)THINKING FUTURES THAT ARE BOTH USELESS AND LIVEABLE

UM MUNDO EM CONTA-GOTAS QUEBRADO: (RE)PENSAR FUTUROS INÚTEIS E VIVÍVEIS

UN MUNDO EN CUENTAGOTAS ROTO: (RE)PENSAR FUTUROS INÚTILES Y VIVIBLES

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How to reference this paper:

BARROS, Matheus Guimarães de. A world in broken dropper: (re)thinking futures that are both useless and liveable. **Rev. Cadernos de Campo**, Araraquara, v. 25, n. esp. 2, e025016, 2025. e-ISSN: 2359-2419. DOI: 10.47284/cdc.v25iesp2.20011

| **Submitted**: 14/02/2025
| **Revisions required**: 30/04/2025
| **Approved**: 31/10/2025
| **Published**: 28/12/2025

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ABSTRACT: This article seeks to demonstrate that the modes of production and destruction of modern-colonial capitalism have placed the Earth before 'unthinkable' climatic and environmental catastrophes, especially since the global hegemony of neoliberalism. These extreme phenomena highlight the alarming reality of an accelerated and uncontrolled deterioration of the world, but whose impacts vary according to pre-existing socio-economic and geopolitical inequalities. In Brazil, the structural power of racism means that such catastrophes disproportionately affect black and indigenous people, something that is very noticeable in the latest cases of mining dam collapses. In addition to reflection on the so-called 'unthinkable' of the present, it aims to indicate theoretical paths towards a possible and liveable future, taking into account ancestral epistemologies and cosmovisions that confront the dominant capitalist and colonialist imaginary that guides the exploitation and voracious devouring of all the planet's constituent elements, human and non-human.

KEYWORDS: Modern-colonial capitalism. Ecological catastrophes. Possible futures.

***RESUMO**: Este artigo procura demonstrar que os modos de produção e destruição do capitalismo moderno-colonial têm colocado a Terra diante de catástrofes climáticas e ambientais "impensáveis", especialmente a partir da hegemonia global do neoliberalismo. Esses fenômenos extremos evidenciam a realidade alarmante de uma deterioração acelerada e descontrolada do mundo, mas cujos impactos variam consoante desigualdades socioeconômicas e geopolíticas preexistentes. No Brasil, o poder estrutural do racismo faz com que tais catástrofes atinjam desproporcionalmente as pessoas negras e indígenas, algo bastante perceptível nos últimos casos de rompimento de barragens da atividade mineradora. Além de refletir sobre o dito "impensável" do presente, pretende-se indicar caminhos teóricos para um futuro possível e vivível, levando em conta epistemologias e cosmovisões ancestrais que confrontam o imaginário capitalista e colonialista dominante que orienta a exploração e a devoração voraz de todos os elementos constitutivos do planeta, humanos e não humanos.*

***PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: Capitalismo moderno-colonial. Catástrofes ecológicas. Futuros possíveis.*

***RESUMEN**: Este artículo pretende demostrar que los modos de producción y destrucción del capitalismo moderno-colonial han colocado a la Tierra ante catástrofes climáticas y medioambientales 'impensables', especialmente desde la hegemonía global del neoliberalismo. Estos fenómenos extremos ponen de manifiesto la alarmante realidad de un deterioro acelerado e incontrolado del mundo, pero cuyos impactos varían en función de las desigualdades socioeconómicas y geopolíticas preexistentes. En Brasil, el poder estructural del racismo hace que tales catástrofes afecten de forma desproporcionada a la población negra e indígena, algo muy perceptible en los últimos casos de derrumbes de presas mineras. Además de reflexionar sobre los llamados 'impensables' del presente, se pretende indicar caminos teóricos hacia un futuro posible y vivible, teniendo en cuenta epistemologias y cosmovisiones ancestrales que se enfrenten al imaginario capitalista y colonialista dominante que guía la explotación y la voraz devoración de todos los elementos constitutivos del planeta, humanos y no humanos.*

***PALABRAS CLAVE**: Capitalismo colonial moderno. Catástrofes ecológicas. Futuros posibles.*

Introduction

They have bullied the planet,
And I see the planet as a dog:
When it can no longer endure the fleas,
It shakes them off.
(Seixas, R., *As aventuras de Raul Seixas na cidade de Thor*, 1974, our tranlation).

Amitav Ghosh (2022), one of the foremost contemporary figures in Indian literature, argues that we live in an age of great derangement. For him, the predominance of the "unthinkable" and the "absurd" defines our time. Instead of the regularity of bourgeois life—a long-worn fiction—there now prevails, more than ever, the vehement force of the unforeseen and the unprecedented. The (false) capitalist narrative of social control over nature, of unrestricted and unshakable human power, shatters in the face of ever-worsening ecological catastrophes that repeatedly threaten, if not to break the planet apart, at least to shake it violently so as to rid itself of unwanted fleas—that is, to rid itself of us..

If, as a result of our modern practices of predation and environmental destruction, the world had already been surviving "by a drip," today that drip has broken, and the bleeding finds virtually nothing to contain it. The fluids flowing from the Earth—due to enormous, deep, and open artificial wounds that are difficult to heal—run unprotected and swiftly, leaving little hope that such a battered, sick, and injured body can recover. In a context where extremes have become normalized, under a permanent state of exception, as the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2004) aptly diagnosed, an unprecedented accumulation of disasters, unnamed natural forces of unpredictable magnitude, and exceedingly rare phenomena has become alarmingly real (Ghosh, 2022).

This is indeed a time that refutes the political thesis of Western modernity and of the hegemonic capitalist and colonial order, grounded in the logic of calculation and probability, and in the supposed human mastery over nature, understood as something relatively stable. This line of thought, consolidated especially during the European Enlightenment, implies a kind of deification of the human (Ghosh, 2022). It has been called into question by current climate events that affect and constrain us in a particularly direct and relentless manner. The recent situation in Rio Grande do Sul—where more than 80% of the territory was overtaken by torrential rains, floods, and inundations, impacting millions of lives, resulting in hundreds of deaths, more than 800 injuries, and dozens of missing persons—offers undeniable evidence. It confirms that, in terms of environmental and climate catastrophes, the words impossible and distant have lost their meaning.

Anything can happen, anywhere—although vulnerabilities are certainly not distributed under a regime of absolute equality. Abrupt transformations in natural environmental cycles and in the climate, the "death spiral of carbon emissions," in Ghosh's words (2022, p. 137, our translation), driving global warming, culminate in events "too powerful, too grotesque, too dangerous, and too accusatory," umbilically linked to human activity, since "they are the mysterious work of our own hands returning to haunt us in unthinkable forms and manifestations" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 41, our translation). In truth, as the Indian writer explains, we have never been free from "nonhuman constraints," insofar as "we have always been judged and observed by other eyes" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 133, our translation).

However, the Western conviction that agency, will, and consciousness exist only in humans—combined with the devaluation and attempted suppression of any worldview or ontology that claims otherwise, promptly relegated to the dustbin of "backwardness," "obsolescence," or "non-modernity"—produces a condition of generalized blindness and deafness. This condition restrains the genuine capacity of our senses and atrophies our imagination, creating multiple obstacles to perception. According to Ghosh (2022), we have generally been indifferent to the murmurs of the Earth and its many warning signs. Perhaps that is why, even while excessively provoking it, we remain astonished and even incredulous at its increasingly violent retaliations (Angus, 2023).

> It appears that we are now in an era that will be defined precisely by events that, according to our current standards of normality, seem highly improbable: sudden floods, historic storms, persistent droughts, unprecedented heatwaves, abrupt landslides, furious torrents pouring from ruptured glacial lakes, and, indeed, unusual tornadoes (Ghosh, 2022, p. 32, our translation).

This is not catastrophism, nor an extraordinary and paralyzing theory of the apocalypse or the imminent end of the world. It is reality as it presents itself and the trajectories it signals. Its numerous brutal symptoms, as demonstrated by Canadian ecosocialist Ian Angus (2023), include food insecurity, chronic hunger, child malnutrition, water scarcity and thirst, extreme temperature fluctuations accompanied by deaths from heat stress, the proliferation of diseases and ecological threats of all kinds, forced displacement, waves of refugees, the breakdown of livelihoods, and so forth. Evidently—and Angus himself acknowledges this—we are not all in this together. The impacts of changes in the Earth system, although universal, are shaped by preexisting socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities and injustices, which they intensify. Certain regions, countries, and social groups face greater exposure and risk. Moreover, despite

the absurd and apparent contradiction, "it is possible, at least for some, to live better in a deteriorating world" (Charbonnier, 2021, p. 15, our translation).

This article seeks to critically reflect on this unthinkable present, to lay it bare, and to indicate pathways toward a thinkable and feasible future. Positioned as giant amoebas of the world, as described by the thinker and Indigenous leader Ailton Krenak (2020, p. 09), or as fleas of the planet, as sung by the Brazilian artist Raul Seixas (1974), humanity, through its modes of production and destruction, has established a utilitarian relationship with its surroundings, capturing and devouring them; thus consuming life itself to satisfy the infinite hunger of capital.

The article begins by discussing the foundational role of modern-colonial capitalism in promoting ecological catastrophes. It then examines the current period of global neoliberal hegemony and its violent (neo)extractivist mechanisms, before focusing on the case of Brazilian environmental racism, whose most recent paradigmatic expression can be observed in the impacts of large-scale mining activities by major corporations. Finally, it highlights important—though not new—elements, grounded in ancestral, Indigenous, and quilombola teachings, aimed at reforesting the dominant imagination (Núñez, 2021), transforming minds into cultivated fields and sowing countercolonial seeds (Santos, 2023) capable of germinating other worlds, as envisioned by the late philosopher and quilombola master Nêgo Bispo.

Capitalism, Coloniality, and Ecological Catastrophe

Capitalism lies at the center of the climate and environmental crisis and of the dramatic qualitative transformations in the most basic natural aspects of the Earth system. Among its many contradictions is its inability to create without destroying. As a structure of simultaneously expanded production and destruction, capitalism operates in the realm of the unrestrained, as Pierre Clastres (2004, p. 62, our translation) argued: an "endless space because it is the constant retreat of the limit, the infinite space of perpetual flight forward." Nothing seems impossible for capital, the French anthropologist continues, except not being its own ultimate end. Consequently, in pursuit of its desired continuity, "races, societies, individuals; space, nature, seas, forests, subsoil: everything is useful, everything must be used, everything must be productive; productivity driven to its maximum intensity" (Clastres, 2004, p. 62, our translation).

Capital has always been obsessed with appropriation and accumulation; these obsessions run in its DNA. Nature is valued only as a means to fulfill this supreme objective, which in turn demands waste, pollution, even sacrifice, exhaustion, and extinction—global tragedies. Ultimately, what matters is placing products on the market and securing financial returns: the most profitable and rapid return on invested value.

> It does not matter whether the products sold are harmful to human beings and to nature, nor that many commodities cannot be produced without spreading disease, devastating forests that generate the oxygen we breathe, destroying ecosystems, and treating our water, air, and soil as sewers for industrial waste. All of this contributes to capital growth—and that is what matters […]. If nothing restrains it, capital will attempt to expand infinitely—but the Earth is not infinite. The atmosphere, the oceans, and the forests are vast, yet ultimately they are finite and limited resources—and capitalism is pushing against those limits(Angus, 2023, p. 128-129, our translation).

The metabolism of capital requires not only growth, but accelerated and ever faster growth. Capitalism operates on short time horizons, Angus (2023) argues, at a speed incompatible with the tempo of natural life, its processes, and its normal cycles. There is a striking mismatch between the artificial predation of the planet and its organic capacity for regeneration. Beginning with the two World Wars of the twentieth century, when we witnessed the capitalist multiplication of scientific techniques and advanced technologies of production and destruction—alongside synthetic, chemical, petrochemical, nuclear substances and harmful gases with intense impacts on climate and the environment—a period of particularly damaging "antiecological growth" emerged, further deepening this mismatch. It was also during this period that an abrupt concentration of power and wealth took shape within the networks of ecologically destructive private industrial and financial monopolies and oligopolies.

Whether one calls our geological era the Anthropocene, the Capitalocene, or any other name, the fact remains that since then the world's drip has shattered, placing the Earth—or at least humanity as a whole—on the edge of a precipice under constant risk of collapse. It would seem neither appropriate nor intellectually honest to address capitalism and its undeniable responsibility for ecological catastrophes without linking it to its historical genesis in the enslavement of African peoples and modern colonialism, as well as to the coloniality of power (Quijano; Wallerstein, 2019), which continues to organize the capitalist economy through social classifications and ethno-racial divisions and hierarchies, despite the formal exhaustion of colonization and slavery on a global scale.

According to the Cameroonian historian and political philosopher Achille Mbembe (2020), there are intimate connections between Western capitalist modernity, the transatlantic slave trade, the enslavement of Africans, and European colonialism in the Americas—and between all of this and the environmental question and ecological disturbances. For Mbembe (2020), the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries marked the beginning of a colonial process of extraction and consumption of a biostock that was both human—the colonized and enslaved peoples—and vegetal—nature itself. This process has never fully disappeared, although it has undergone a series of mutations over time.

> […] The plantations of the New World could hardly have functioned without the massive use of the "ambulatory" suns that were African slaves. Even after the Industrial Revolution, these veritable human fossils continued to serve as coal for the production of energy and the dynamism necessary for the transformation of the Earth System(Mbembe, 2020, p. 178, our translation).

The persistent human and environmental costs resulting from the geographic, economic, and political legacies of racial enslavement and capitalist coloniality have not been borne equally by all. The bourgeois standards of living and development universally promised, Ghosh (2022) reminds us, are accessed by only a few but paid for by the majority who remain excluded—or included under conditions of exclusion. The unequal distribution of power and wealth, both among countries and within each of them, shapes the intensity of impacts and levels of insecurity, as well as the capacity to avoid, externalize, or mitigate disasters. As Angus (2023, p. 199, our translation) notes, "climate change and extreme weather events are not devastating human beings around the world at random."

> The pattern repeats itself at every scale. Globally, the South suffers far more than the North. Within the South, the poorest countries—especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa—are the most severely affected. Within each country, the poorest people—women, children, and the elderly—are more likely to lose their homes and livelihoods as a result of climate change and are more likely to die (Angus, 2023, p. 200, our translation).

The United States benefited the most, politically and financially, from the rubble and catastrophes of the Second World War, consolidating its position as a hegemonic capitalist power. This had direct repercussions on the planet's "climate malaise" for several reasons. Among them, Angus (2023) highlights the imperialist drive that extends U.S. influence into regions of the Global South in search of resources—such as low-cost oil—to satisfy its infinite domestic demands and its ecocidal paradigm of prosperity. A few years later, with the

astronomical advance of neoliberalism, a savage capitalist logic expanded "across the entirety of life" (Mbembe, 2021, p. 74, our translation), like a cancer in metastasis (Krenak, 2020), rapid and uncontrollable, imposing upon the world the civilizational religion of Western white bourgeois society. Grounded in the sacralization of private property and a heavy-footed trampling upon the Earth, this religion has further complicated the urgent task of imagining livable futures.

Contemporary (Neo)extractivist Brutalization and the Devouring of Life

It is necessary now—and once again—to return to Mbembe. For this African thinker, the contemporary neoliberal era has set in motion a form of power without contours or limits, one that brutalizes the world and the totality of living organisms. The planet and its natural bodies, according to Mbembe (2021), have become targets of a series of vertical and metamorphic processes—twisting, demolition, fragmentation, poisoning, crushing, and plunder—countless destructive creations. Alongside the mass production of waste, debris, and a range of toxic, chemical, and radioactive gases and residues that affect nature, the constant suspension of rights, guarantees, and regulations delivers the environment to the voracity of the capitalist regime. Thus, as Krenak (2022, p. 52, our translation) states, "so-called progress commands us, and we proceed on autopilot, furiously devouring the planet."

The blurring of the boundaries between sovereignty, politics, and terror, characteristic of neoliberal societies of enmity (Mbembe, 2020)—a discussion central to Mbembe's theory since his formulation of necropolitics—can readily be extended to encompass recent environmental and climate catastrophes, as well as those that will inevitably occur sooner or later. Alongside attacks on the already battered substance of democracy—now on the verge of collapse—neoliberalism also appears committed to transforming the Earth into a "universal tomb, its mausoleum" (Mbembe, 2021, p. 254, our translation). This scenario is particularly visible today in Latin America, a region that has frequently faced extreme neoextractivist cycles, often politically disguised under the fallacy of "social welfare."

Argentine sociologist Maristella Svampa (2019) demonstrates that, in this century, across different Latin American countries—including under governments identified as left-wing—unsustainable development dynamics have been activated, radicalizing practices of dispossession and the superexploitation of increasingly scarce and nonrenewable natural resources. These dynamics have expanded the frontiers of exploitation, primarily to meet the demands of international trade. The phenomenon of neoextractivism, Svampa (2019) argues, is

characterized, among other features, by intensive land use and land grabbing, monoculture or single-commodity production—particularly of primary goods destined for export—and the gigantism of enterprises that mobilize vast amounts of capital, such as agribusiness.

To make matters worse, Svampa contends that neoextractivism has assumed increasingly violent forms in the region. Evidence includes record numbers of murders of community leaders, Indigenous representatives, and environmental activists; the proliferation of criminal organizations that control territories and settlements, often in direct or indirect collusion with the state; and the expansion of extreme energy projects of various kinds, in which extraction—difficult to carry out—entails heightened risks of contamination and socioenvironmental disasters, such as tar sands, described as "the dirtiest fossil fuel of all extreme energies" (Svampa, 2019, p. 199, our translation), or the Brazilian pre-salt oil fields, among others.

Although more explicit in Latin America and other peripheral or dependent capitalist regions of the Global South, this is a global phenomenon driven by neoliberal hegemony, which demands ever more energy sources and raw materials. The cunning of the bourgeois rationality that permeates us repeatedly constructs, through various arguments, "justifications for acting upon the world as if it were plastic matter: we can make it square, flat, stretch it, pull it" (Krenak, 2020, p. 100, our translation). Social welfare, developmentalism, modernization, economic growth, civilizational progress, humanism—all are instrumentalized to subordinate existence to the calculus of utility, conceiving the planet as yet another commodity to be expropriated and exploited by capital.

Within critical feminist and Marxist thought, philosopher Nancy Fraser, in theorizing the hidden supports of capitalist (re)production and the vital foundations of value accumulation—especially under today's voracious neoliberal conditions—amid countless converging calamities and corporate feasting, proposes the powerful metaphor of cannibal capitalism. She highlights the force with which this bourgeois order transforms society, entire habitats, and ecosystems—fauna and flora alike—into "a grand institutionalized banquet, where we ourselves are the main course" (Fraser, 2024, p. 14, our translation). Capitalism is understood as the perpetrator of a heinous crime driven by the sin of gluttony: it does not replenish what it consumes, nor does it repair all that it damages, and it continues devouring the bases of our shared existence. This is the hypercaloric and unsustainable diet of capital.

> More than a relation to labor, capital is also a relation to nature—an extractive and cannibalistic relation that consumes ever greater biophysical wealth in

> order to accumulate ever more "value," while denying ecological "externalities." What also accumulates, not by accident, is the ever-growing volume of ecological destruction: an atmosphere flooded with carbon emissions; rising temperatures; the disintegration of polar ice shelves; rising sea levels clogged with islands of plastic; mass extinctions; biodiversity decline; climate-driven migrations of organisms and pathogens; increased zoonotic spillover of lethal viruses; superstorms, megadroughts, locust swarms, colossal wildfires, titanic floods; dead zones, poisoned lands, unbreathable air. Systematically structured to exploit a nature that cannot replenish itself indefinitely, the capitalist economy is perpetually on the brink of destabilizing its own ecological conditions of possibility (Fraser, 2024, p. 131, our translation).

Another perversity of neoliberalism, as Ghosh (2022) observes, lies in its political tendency to sanctify subjectivities, to merge with morality, and to virtually expel respect for the nonhuman from its orbit. Ghosh legitimately warns against reducing the environmental question to a matter of individual conscience, in line with the individualizing ideology of neoliberal capitalism. In reality, its scope is collective, as it concerns common and universal goods and the survival of all. Isolated or personal behavioral changes are insufficient. The current ecological emergency demands an abrupt shift in the very structure of the economic, political, cultural, and social trajectory in which we have been entangled since colonial modernity.

It is therefore unsurprising that so-called global warming has accompanied the rise and consolidation of neoliberalism, becoming particularly pronounced since the 1980s. The gravity of this phenomenon, however, must be clearly understood, as it involves far more than average thermometer readings, as Ian Angus explains:

> In short, the climate is not only becoming warmer on average; it is shifting toward heat extremes. This is of utmost importance, because adaptation to the new normal—if that is even possible—will require responding to extremes, not merely to averages. For human well-being and survival, the question is not only how much average sea levels will rise, but how high the largest storm surges will be; not only what the average daily rainfall will be, but how long droughts will last; not only how much hotter heatwaves will become, but how long they will persist and how deadly they will be (Angus, 2023, p. 107-108, our translation).

Neoliberalism is deeply intertwined with systematic environmental aggression. Once again, the planet's responses to these assaults weigh disproportionately on specific target communities, given the segregations and injustices—such as those based on race and income—that structure social life. In Brazil, the notion of "environmental racism" has justifiably gained increasing prominence, as it captures this disproportionality, particularly in the neoliberal

context. Moreover, the country's colonial and slaveholding legacies have fostered the consolidation of a strong "narcissistic pact of whiteness" (Bento, 2022, p. 18, our translation), an unwritten and unspoken contract to preserve white privilege and power. It is also a pact of death directed at the "other," as it repeatedly disregards the suffering of Black and Indigenous populations and actively seeks to crush their historical struggles and resistance.

Structural Racism, Socioenvironmental Disasters, and Neoextractivism in Brazilian Mining

Since the colonial period inaugurated in the fifteenth century, Brazil's history can be summarized by the binomial genocide–resistance. This does not imply a historical or sociological reading that ignores the complexity and diversity of social arrangements and of life—human and nonhuman—that existed prior to European penetration. On the contrary, European colonialism, through various brutal mechanisms, incessantly sought to destroy the richness and exuberance of this original multiplicity, often under the guise of civilizational progress and development, and under the false narrative of a great encounter that romanticizes the arrival of Portuguese ships on our shores.

> If progress is not shared by everyone, if development has neither enriched nor provided access to quality of life and well-being for everyone, then what kind of progress is this? It seems that we had far more progress and development when we could drink from all the rivers here, breathe all the air here, and, as Caetano says, someone standing on the beach could stretch out a hand and pick a cashew (Krenak, 1999, p. 30, our translation).

The massacre of native Indigenous peoples—comprising countless ethnicities, languages, and social forms—involved not only physical annihilation through violence, mass killings, exposure to unfamiliar viruses and bacteria, widespread rape, forced labor, and so forth, but also symbolic liquidation through cultural corruption and, above all, through the crushing of their traditional ways of life, their relationships among themselves and with nature, and their modes of thought. Anthropologist Pierre Clastres (2004) termed this impious practice ethnocide, often justified by Euro-Christian salvation and/or by integration into the ethical standard of Western bourgeois humanity, which seeks to kill not the body but the spirit of the other. For the philosopher and master Nêgo Bispo, colonization, in its most distinctive feature, begins precisely with the movement to "deterritorialize the attacked being, breaking its identity, removing it from its cosmology, distancing it from its sacred elements, imposing new ways of life, and assigning it another name" (Santos, 2023, p. 12, our translation). Indians, savages,

Blacks of the land or Blacks from outside—among many other racist and ethnocentric terms used by Europeans to name the colonized and enslaved. This was the project of dismantling the multiple and imposing the one.

Colonialism in Brazil, according to historian Ynaê Lopes dos Santos (2022), introduced a mosaic of violence and discriminatory dynamics that became naturalized and were even deemed necessary for the infamous civilizational "progress." This mosaic encompassed the extreme exploitation and subjugation of diverse social groups, both those who already inhabited the territory and those who were forcibly brought here. The profitable transatlantic trafficking of African people and their enslavement in this land consolidated the entire colonial period and extended far beyond it. Africans and their descendants, in fact, built the country by fertilizing "Brazilian soil with their tears, their blood, their sweat, and their martyrdom in slavery," as playwright, intellectual, and prominent Black movement activist Abdias Nascimento (2016, p. 58, our translation) emphasized—whether in the sugarcane plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or later laboring in gold and diamond mines, in cotton production, and in coffee cultivation, which sustained a significant portion of the national economy in the nineteenth century.

Despite the significant processes of national independence, the legal-formalist abolition of slavery, and the subsequent Proclamation of the Republic, the weight of racism continued to organize the unequal society (Theodoro, 2022) that was taking shape. The history of this country is intertwined with the history of racism, Santos (2022) argues, since the racialization of non-white populations and its harmful consequences structure it, producing, on one side, a myriad of disadvantages and risks and, on the other, a whitened wall of power and privilege. This (im)balance persists to this day, accompanying the transformations that are part of racism's own dynamic capacity—adapting to circumstances and skillfully deploying the various political, economic, cultural, and other tools at its disposal.

The term environmental racism first appeared in the United States in the late 1980s to underscore how socio-environmental problems disproportionately affect individuals belonging to specific ethno-racial groups (Orsi *et al.*, 2023), who are commonly marginalized and rendered precarious. In Brazil, it constitutes yet another facet of the system of racial oppression and violence that structures the country as an authoritarian and unequal society. The notion that natural disasters and climate calamities are "democratic" because they spread across all social strata is as fallacious as the old "myth of racial democracy." Like that myth, it distorts reality in order to obscure the depth of racism's entrenchment and of socioeconomic inequalities in Brazilian society.

Does it not seem paradoxical that "those who have contributed least to generating the impacts are those who have suffered most from their consequences" (Orsi *et al*., 2023, p. 183, our translation)? Black and Brown populations, as well as Indigenous peoples, are the most vulnerable to landslides and burial, floods and inundations, prolonged droughts, the deadly outcomes of unregulated mining and capitalist agribusiness, the deserts of monoculture, the deleterious effects of exposure to waste and toxic products and gases, the lack of water, food, and basic sanitation—in short, to the misfortune that an unthinkable event simply materializes. For these socially dehumanized or subhumanized groups, Brazilian environmental racism projects "spaces of death, permanent morbidity, and, not infrequently, hopelessness" (Orsi *et al*., 2023, p. 179, our translation), effectively realizing socio-environmental tragedies and catastrophes long foretold.

Paradigmatic examples include the recent dam failures linked to neo-extractivist mining activities carried out by major corporations in Brazil. The collapse of the Fundão Dam, located in Mariana, Minas Gerais, owned by Samarco and controlled by the multinationals Vale S.A. and BHP Billiton, in November 2015, released approximately 45 million cubic meters of iron mining tailings into the environment, affecting the lives of thousands of individuals and families in the short, medium, and long term. At the time, it was considered the largest "environmental disaster" in the country's history. Quilombola communities, riverside dwellers, Indigenous peoples, and the poor were among those who died or were displaced, those who saw their traditional ways of life collapse, or who were forced to purchase uncontaminated water and food at exorbitant prices set by commercial networks that, like vultures, fed on others' pain and misfortune[2].

The Krenak villages were particularly devastated by the mining sludge and by this "blender called humanity" (Krenak, 2019, p. 14, our translation)—a humanity detached from the earth that exhausts nature and denies the plurality of life forms, depersonalizing other bodies to legitimize their commodification. According to Krenak (2019, p. 42, our translation), this crime—because it was not a mere "accident"—placed his people in the "real condition of a world that has ended." The Doce River, named Watu, is for this people a person—a deeply cherished and beloved being, their grandfather—not a resource subject to appropriation and degradation as a result of the white man's filthy capitalist enterprises.

[2] The price of mineral water in the city of Governador Valadares, for example, rose by as much as 150%(Lima; Parreiras, 2019).

> Watu, the river that sustained our lives along the banks of the Doce River, between Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, across six hundred kilometers, is now entirely covered by toxic material that descended from a tailings dam, leaving us orphaned and watching the river in a coma(Krenak, 2019, p. 42, our translation).

Just over three years later, in January 2019, Dam I at the Córrego do Feijão Mine, owned by Vale S.A. in the city of Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, also collapsed, releasing 12 million cubic meters of mining tailings into the Paraopeba River basin, which traveled approximately 300 kilometers downstream. The disaster affected at least 18 municipalities and nearly one million people—predominantly Black and Brown—killing 272 individuals, as documented by Orsi *et al*. (2023). Moreover, as these researchers emphasize,

> Beyond the direct deaths caused by the mudslide following the dam's collapse, the sludge—containing minerals and toxic substances—also spreads over a vast area and generates impacts on a broader spatial and temporal scale, since physical destruction and chemical contamination persist in the environment for a long time. This second phase, as severe as the first, reinforces the identification of environmental racism when one observes a certain neglect toward the affected population, whether through the absence of adequate reparations or through responses and actions that are slow and insufficient relative to actual needs (Orsi *et al.*, 2023, p. 177-178, our translation).

The collapse of Dam I subsequently triggered the failure of dams B-IV and B-IV-A, affecting vegetation, wildlife, and other rivers along the hundreds of kilometers traversed by the toxic mining sludge. Among the hundreds of immediate deaths were two babies and two pregnant women. Several bodies were never recovered by rescue teams. Homes and other means of subsistence were summarily destroyed. Here is yet another so-called rare phenomenon that indeed occurred, adding new layers of devastation to the ledger of a cannibalistic capitalism that has shattered the world's drip mechanism and made the unthinkable and the absurd the stark truth of our time. In light of these cases, the suspicion raised by Cameroonian historian and philosopher Mbembe appears more pertinent than ever: "is toxicity—that is, the multiplication of chemical substances and hazardous waste—not ultimately a structural dimension of the present?" (Mbembe, 2021, p. 14, our translation).

Final Considerations: Toward a Thinkable, Ancestral, and Counter-Colonial Future

Some people spend their entire lives
Waging a futile struggle against the "branches"
Without realizing that it is in the trunk
That the joker in the deck resides .
(Seixas, R., *As aventuras de Raul Seixas na cidade de Thor*, 1974, our translation).

According to Indian writer Ghosh (2022), the current climate crisis is also a crisis of culture and imagination. Indeed, much is said about sustainable development, green capitalism, and other such fallacies, when the problem lies precisely in this very model of development—namely, capitalism itself. After all, "sustainable development for what? What exactly must be sustained?" (Krenak, 2019, p. 22, our translation). These expressions foster a misguided understanding of reality, as they presuppose that ecological catastrophes can be addressed through minor adjustments or reforms without confronting the structure, without challenging the core of the issue. Fighting the branches preserves the joker in the deck; the trunk remains intact. Raul was right. In this regard, it is worth recalling the Marxist philosopher Fraser (2024, p. 18, our translation), who argues that "only with grand thinking will we have a chance to fight and defeat the relentless drive of cannibal capitalism to devour us entirely."

We must learn from the radicalism of other epistemologies and worldviews, and there is no need to search in distant places. Brazilian soil remains replete with genuinely revolutionary alternatives. Drawing on her Guarani Indigenous and anti-colonial cosmogony, for example, Núñez (2021) unveils our colonial system of thought, which entails a predatory agenda of action upon the planet—a system grounded in "monocultures," whether of faith (Christian monotheism), of affections (monogamy), of sexuality (monosexism), or of the land itself, among others. This system imposes the white, bourgeois rationality of the One, which contradicts the principle of the forest, necessarily multiple, as Núñez (2021) argues. By instituting its divisions—male and female, human and animal, civilized and savage, among others—these monocultures are further based on a presupposition of non-concomitance, that is, on the logic of a univocal existence that makes it impossible to be one and the other at the same time. Thus, Núñez (2021) explains, one cannot be civilized and savage simultaneously, because the civilized negates the savage, just as the human negates the animal or blue negates the color pink. To reforest the imaginary, life itself, and its multiplicity, the author contends, all these monocultures must be confronted.

The disruptive experiences and knowledges of another Indigenous people, voiced by Krenak, likewise point to a complete transformation of our bonds with the Earth and all its living organisms. If we continue along the path of capitalist progress—terribly colonial from the outset—which has left behind an ever-growing number of lives deemed unimportant, useless, or disposable, the outcome will be the downfall of humanity itself—and, with it, perhaps much of natural life. This is why "if there is a future to be envisioned, that future is

ancestral" (Krenak, 2022, p. 11, our translation). The exclusive club of humans, the increasingly restricted caste of humanoids, Krenak (2022) maintains, must be abolished in favor of a different, ancestral "we" that unsettles human centrality and opens itself to distinct cosmovisions, recognizing and valuing alterities and pluriverses, moving away from that "euphoria of monoculture" (Krenak, 2022, p. 40, our translation).

We-river, we-mountain, we-earth. For Krenak (2022), we have corroded this potent—both magical and concrete, in any case non-anthropocentric—way of existing and living in communion with other bodies of the Earth, within a vast constellation of beings, human and non-human, all equally respected. The idea of life as fruition—a beautiful cosmic dance—suffers in the face of our immense ambition to "reduce it to a ridiculous and utilitarian choreography" (Krenak, 2022, p. 108, our translation).

> What we are doing by polluting waters that have existed for two billion years is bringing about our own extinction. They will continue to exist here in the biosphere and will slowly regenerate, for rivers possess this gift. We, however, have such an ephemeral duration that we will dry up, enemies of water, even though we have learned that 70% of our body is composed of water. If I were to dehydrate completely, half a kilogram of bone would remain here; that is why I say: respect the water and learn its language. Let us listen to the voice of the rivers, for they speak. Let us be water, in matter and in spirit, in our movement and our capacity to change course, or we will be lost (Krenak, 2022, p. 26, our translation).

This is not an individualistic plea of the kind celebrated by neoliberal capitalism, but one directed to the collective. Transformation must be radically structural; hence the rejection of the development and progress fostered by colonizing capital. The quilombola counter-colonialism of Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2023), known as Nêgo Bispo, demonstrates that such development is, in reality, a variant of cosmophobia that disconnects us. Its companion, humanism—which sees the human being as creator rather than creature, and as owner rather than part of all other forms of life—is averse to involvement, a truly admirable term because it conveys connection with trees, forests, other animals, seas, rivers, and the land. The dangers of this proprietary, capitalist, and colonial humanity led Nêgo Bispo to formulate the notion of the diversais: cosmological, organic beings, products and fragments of nature, beings of confluence, sharing, and circularity, markedly distinct from the tendency toward unity that rejects the primordial diversity of living beings—all of whom are necessary, not merely "important" and much less "useful."

> This terror of the cosmos, of nature, of the Earth stems from an interpretation of reality as founded upon a single, static, punitive, deterritorializing, disenchanting principle. This interpretation gave rise to what Bispo called the Euro-Christian-monotheistic matrix. More than a critique of religion emerging from colonial worlds, it constitutes an assessment of a way of living and intervening in reality that impoverishes the potentials of existence around a project of domination, permeated by an obsession with accumulation. To accumulate from the land, the land itself, impoverishes it and impoverishes us as well, paradoxically. In contrast, there is the idea of sharing in/of the world, without being driven by the fear of lack (Nascimento; Rufino, 2023, p. 326, our translation).

Far removed from the capitalist specter of lack or scarcity, sharing, according to the quilombola master Nêgo Bispo, "is something that yields" (Santos, 2023, p. 36, our translation). The construction of another future is indeed possible. It is not a mere utopia, understood as something remote and devoid of material grounding, detached from the earth. Diverse, real, and alternative ways of organizing community life and of relating socially to the Earth are lived out around us, sometimes very close at hand, within sight. The haunting narrative of the end of the world, occasionally proclaimed, must not lead us to abandon our finest dreams, as the lucidity of Ailton Krenak teaches. The catastrophic experience of the present, therefore, should compel us to "dive deeply into the earth in order to recreate possible worlds" (Krenak, 2022, p. 37, our translation), in a skillful movement akin to that of waterways, which evade and resist the violence of white, bourgeois, and colonial civilization.

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CRediT Author Statement

- **Acknowledgements**: I am grateful for the fruitful discussions and the many classroom conversations with José María Gómez, an exemplary professor and intellectual.
- **Funding**: Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES).
- **Conflicts of interest**: Not applicable.
- **Ethical approval**: Not applicable.
- **Data and material availability**: All data and materials used in this study are available in books and journal articles accessible online.
- **Authors' contributions**: The author is solely responsible for the entire content of the manuscript.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation