




The limits of  
developmental  
ism in an era  
of climate  
change



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What is developmentalism?

The Eurocentrism of  
developmentalism

A more radical approach

Implications for understanding  
and addressing climate change



# Developmentalism

Developmentalism rose to prominence in post-WW2 era (although can be traced to 20/30s)

Contrary to mainstream views of the time, developmentalism **recognizes** that countries of the global South have **different structures** due to colonial legacies that need addressing to facilitate structural transformation/capitalist transition

Problem is **still** 'failed'/'stalled' structural transformation (Geda et al. 2018)

Implications:


- Investment to facilitate structural transformation (Rosenstein-Rodan, Gerschenkron, Hirschman)
- (Autonomous) State to play a central role in orchestrating the transformation



# Green developmental ism

Green developmentalism leads to following policy responses:

- Investments in green technology, green industry, green infrastructure, and renewables to stimulate a “green transition” (Mazzucato, 2021)
- Focus on development banks and state intervention to support the transition
- ‘Old’ developmentalism typically extractivist, green developmentalism tries to move beyond this (but often unsuccessfully)
- Variations of a “Green New Deal” and “Green Growth” (Jacobs, 2012), sometimes under umbrella of neo-structuralism or neo-developmentalism (Féliz and Melón, 2023; Leiva, 2008)



# The Eurocentrism of Developmentalism

Founded on a Eurocentric view of development (e.g. Amin, 1988)

Reduces development to a technobureaucratic project focusing on finding the 'right' kinds of policies / depoliticises capitalist development & depoliticises the state itself (Dutt et al. 2025)

Methodologically nationalist – development as endogenous & abstracted from global system

Neither considers the inherent unevenness of the capitalist system itself nor the colonial/imperialist relationship between countries... as such cannot explain the 'failed' transformation

At worst, can be a Eurocentric ideology that serves to perpetuate uneven development



# The Eurocentrism of green developmental ism

Assumptions that capitalism can be even, fair and controllable by the State remains

The environment considered something external to be 'controlled' by the State  
Solutions are limited to national policies, despite climate change being a **global** problem

Abstracted from uneven global system where countries of the Global South play a particular role supplying critical minerals, raw materials & cheap labour for the (esp. Global North's) green transition

As such, risks intensifying and deepening existing patterns of extraction, exploitation and environmental degradation, especially in the global South (also risks worsening climate change!)



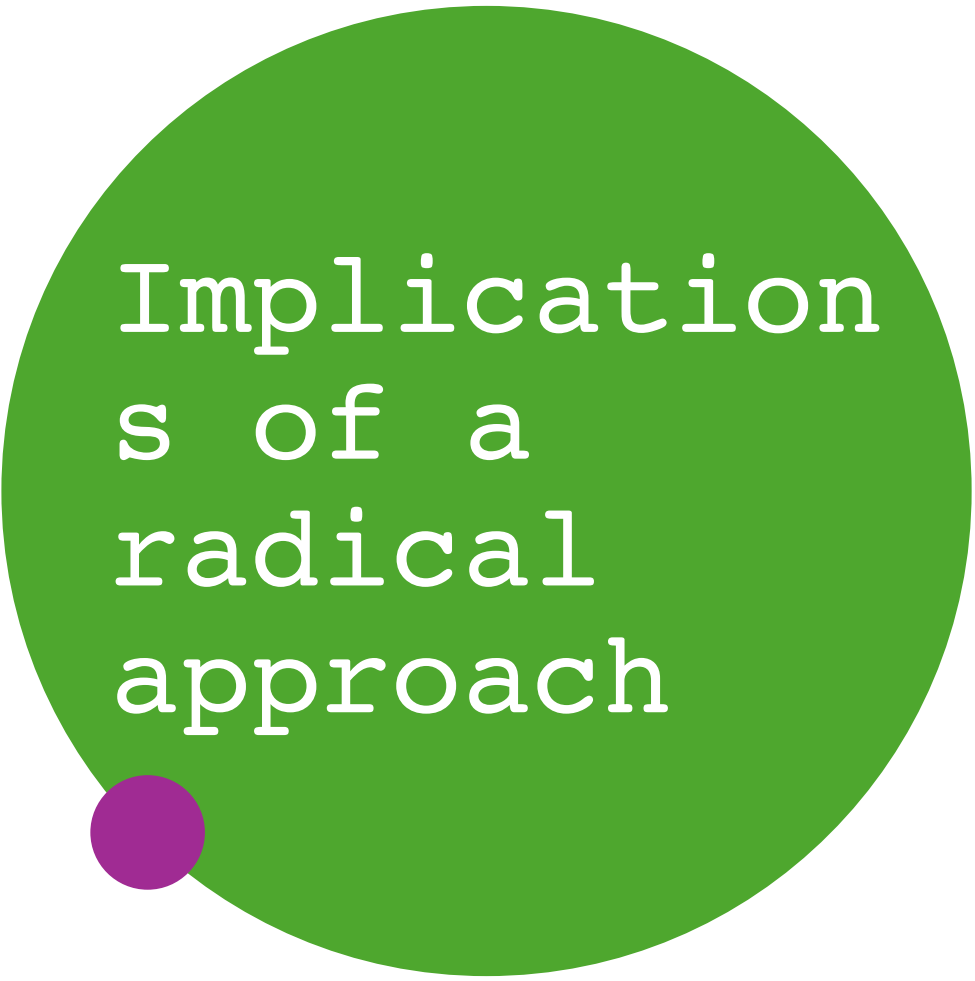
# A radical approach

The environment is part of the global economy and therefore intrinsically shaped by capitalism, racialization and imperialism, not an 'externality' (Campling & Havice, 2009; Feliz & Melon, 2023)

Colonial legacies shaped countries in the global South to be providers of minerals, raw materials and cheap labour, and laid the foundation for brutal forms of environmental destruction

Leads us to **historicize** capitalist development and understand the climate crisis as challenge to be tackled **systemically** and **globally**

A radical understanding would recognise that developmentalist approaches are likely to exacerbate inequalities through their technical treatment of a political problem



# Implications of a radical approach

Leads us to **re-politicize** development & the climate crisis, see the limits of technical fixes that leave system intact


Leads us to confront structural inequalities of the system rather than paper over them (racialisation, imperialism, exploitation, class)

Global problems require global solutions – but what kinds of solutions are on the table beyond developmentalism?

Proposals on reparations, debt relief and considering unequal burdens of responsibility/impact are more radical and just...

...even reparations etc. will not be sufficient unless the social relations of production themselves are also challenged





# Implications of a radical approach

UN system better forum than IMF/World Bank for tackling global problems, but...

- ...developmentalists were historically enthusiastic about the UN as an institution to do "good," but given the UN's liberal and colonial history, and that it is itself a reflection of unequal power dynamics, there are limits to UN's capacity to deal with global change too

A radical approach pushes us to 1) see the limits of the current system and 2) to broaden our **political imagination** beyond reform and fixes within the system (e.g. a People's Green New Deal; Ajl, 2021)



Thank  
you!





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