LESS

A Journal of Degrowth in Scotland

Issue 4 | Summer 2022

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OTHER WORLDS

IN THIS ISSUE, we wanted to explore the issues we face beyond the crisis of carbon. We wanted to look at the problems of biodiversity and habitat loss, species-collapse, extinction, pollution of seas and lochs and air and soil that stem from our economic system and our cycles of endless production and consumption. This issue of LESS looks at omnicide in Scotland, its history and trajectory, its drivers and its resistors. At the same time, we explore how processes of degrowth and decolonisation could decontaminate this process and work towards restoration and reinhabitation.

Since the first issue of LESS was published, degrowth has developed from a relatively unknown and frequently misunderstood concept into an influential part of many conversations around how we navigate from the current metacrisis to new possibilities of human flourishing.

In Scotland, degrowth has taken root in a modest but meaningful way. It's been remixed, regenerated, and made local by a network of activists, artists, researchers, and communities. This has taken place alongside a flowering of related scholarship, research, and publications internationally. What is emerging is a new synthesis between critically-engaged scholarship and applied practice in which its principles are embodied. The contributors to this issue are, as in previous issues, a mixture of practitioners and activists, scholars and thinkers.

COVER STORY

By Bec Wonders

This cover of LESS Magazine is inspired by flora, fauna and wildlife I encountered across the western Scottish isles. In anticipation of summertime renewal, I have chosen to feature movement in the form of winding kelp seaweed and meandering sprigs of heather and globeflowers. Buzzing bees, flapping garden tiger moths, twitchy longhorn beetles, a dignified cormorant and slow common toads all play their individual roles in keeping a healthy ecosystem moving and rejuvenating. The Atlantic salmon is a nod to the annual cyclical repetitions of migration and revival. I used twigs and leaves dipped in black ink to create the swirling patterns and textures. The final piece is a carefully composed symmetrical display of a delicate ecological dance which we all have the privilege of witnessing once again this springtime.

Degrowth and Ecology: a Silent Planting

As we describe elsewhere[1], creating degrowth cultures and changing the narrative about how 'wealth' is created and what a 'true prosperity' would look like is the challenge ahead. This is a major task in a society deep in climate denial and suffering the collective trauma of Covid. But is it a challenge that comes in the wake of seismic climate failure and the UK emerging as a sort of 'failed state', a kleptocracy of elite rule. 'True prosperity' may seem an elusive and difficult aim but in the context of mass immiseration and climate failure the ruinous *status quo* is indefensible.

This issue of LESS explores broadly how degrowth intersects with Scotland's ecologies: social, human, and beyond. The words *ecology* and *economy* derive from the same ancient Greek root, *oikos,* meaning the good stewardship of a family's home. The violent, dualistic rupture of this term into two concepts set in oppositional relation to each other needs to be healed and integrated. What does this mean for us in our time and place?

The answers to this constitute a plurality of possibilities that unfold in unexpected ways. We have stories to draw on that hint at a richer, more complex set of relations with the worlds beyond human supremacy, a complexity explored in Hanna Tuuliki's work. As Dougie Strang notes in his interview with the artist, with a nod to a phrase coined by philosopher and ecologist David Abram in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996): "Tuulikki's latest project, *Seals 'kin*, plays again with the notion of entanglement between the human and the more-than-human." More-than-human because animals should not be defined as simply non-human.

Iain MacKinnon uncovers mythopoetic elements in the cultural heritage of the Gàidhealtachd that can resource a return to a balanced 'truth of nature' in the face of ontological elimination. Mutually so, Col Gordon explores forms of traditional ecological knowledge and agricultural practice that can constitute distinctive lifeways in Scottish bioregions.

Bringing degrowth into conversation with *Buen Vivir*, an indigenous principle and decolonial practice of 'Good Living' from Latin America, Katherina Richter explores the need for a metaphysics adequate to address the metacrisis: "We can see that changes to our consumption, production, and working patterns alone won't be enough to sustain a profound transformation towards a just and sustainable world. To understand the deeper shifts that are required, we need to look at cultural aspects of socio-ecological transformations. So what would it mean to put a cosmological limit to growth?"

Eric Swanepoel explores similar themes with the notion of the 'real-growth' of *Biospherism* which he describes through the illustrative mnemonic letters of C-LIFE – C: Circular Economy, the Commons, Community, Co-operation, Collaboration, Competition; L: Land, Language, Littleness, Localism, Long-Termism; Interdependence (Independence, Individualism); F: Food, Food Sovereignty, Framing (and values), Fungi; Economy and Ecology.

Nowhere are the ideas of perpetual growth more embedded and more destructive than in our food economy, in which the only metric for 'success' is endless growth, export sales, and a 'productivity' without recourse to any meaningful sense of quality. The alternative to this is explored by Diana Garduño Jiménez and Abi Mordin who describe their "quiet farming revolution" starting in South West Scotland in which farmers across the region have formed a network to exchange knowledge, experience, and practice in the journey to a "regenerative farming".

In their focus on mining in Galloway, Annie Morgan and Nayab Khalid look from the particular to the global to talk of Martin Arboleda's "planetary mine". This thread is a recurring one of rooting action in place and time, but drawing back to see a wider and deeper picture. For Morgan and Khalid, Arboleda's "concept of 'global colony' with interconnected infrastructures and technologies that transverse the entire globe ... highlights the importance of understanding and challenging the extractivist model as a whole", so connecting global communities by which "resistance to mining can re-establish ways of living ... placing human concerns on an equal footing with other species."

As well as these fragments of other worlds and alternative paths we also offer our map of Scotland's top twenty worst polluters, brought to you in collaboration with *The Ferret*, Scotland's award winning investigative journalism cooperative.

Finally, Steve Rushton reviews the recently published *The Future of Degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism* by Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter, and Aaron Vansintjan, in which he argues that "Scotland needs to rectify and re-imagine its relations with the countries of the Global South, blazing a trail towards a post-colonial future."

In offering this snapshot of the Scottish bioregion and its cultures, practices, and possibilities, we do not seek to claim any kind of moral or nationalist exceptionalism. Rather, we argue for guarding against the flattening monoculture of globalised capitalism and its destructive impacts. This means being open to the world and to the possibilities of taking our place as an independent nation, to become a radical ludic space – what Pat Kane has described as a potential ark and laboratory in an age of global meltdown.[2]

However, we are conscious of the risks involved in asserting 'indigeneity' in a contemporary Scottish context. Certainly, elements of the lifeways, cultures, and patterns of colonisation and clearance of the Gàidhealtachd in particular have a strong case for such a claim – and are mutually recognised as such by some Indigenous peoples internationally. However, in the context of rising ethnonationalism and the ongoing reckoning with Scotland's active role in Empire, slavery, and colonisation, it is imperative to both stand in explicit solidarity with colonised Indigenous peoples and their ongoing resistance, and carefully differentiate the distinctions and commonalities with care. Indigenous scholars place emphasis on 'good relations' with regard to using knowledge or truth claims that are based in particular places and peoples. This can be sensitive when importing place-based knowledge from Indigenous nations without addressing specific Indigenous societies whose homelands are occupied – see e.g. Vanessa Watts' 'Indigenous place-thought'.[3] As Métis/otipemisiw scholar Zoe Todd puts it, "we cannot take Indigenous knowledge from one place and plop it into another context without doing violence to this knowing-being."[4] We commit – imperfectly – to active decolonisation and explore what this means in Scotland, while being careful not to mobilise concepts from specific areas of Indigenous thought in an extractive way.

Learning to 'live in place' will become a practical necessity as re-localisation and living within the natural carrying capacity of our bioregions becomes normal as climate breakdown intensifies. This might be the subversion we need of the storied Scottish cringe: could 'knowing your place' transmogrify from internalised shame and inadequacy – sent out into the world as colonisation and extractivism – into authentic place-based knowledge and belonging? Could 'reinhabitation' be the alter to imperialism? Could bioregionalism be the counter to colonialism?

Renewing our political and ecological imaginations in this way is going to be critical as we experience the great unravelling. We hope you agree that hope persists, including in the stories encountered in this issue. We're left with many paths forward: a generous bioregionalism in which Scotland can find its place in a mycelial network, a global organism of radically interdependent connections, transferring resources, people, knowledge, and culture in a mutually enriching way, instead of dominating, extracting, and destroying.

In Scotland, the question of independence cannot be disconnected from an understanding of Scotland as a part of the web of life. As we go to press in oppressive and unprecedented and terrifying heat across Europe, every day the world is alive with flashbang-warnings of the turmoil of the ecological breakdown. These competing spaces, Other Worlds both collapsing and emerging, are in open collision, not just of values and structures but in time. Nowtopias and Dystopias existing in parallel in a world of deep-level precarity.

It seems too late, far too late. But, in Richard Power's 2018 novel, *The Overstory*, he collects a series of tales through the lens of the lives of trees. As Douglas Pavlicek plants Douglas Fir, for a company who he realises are the same company that are cutting them down, he writes:

"The smell of the cuts overwhelms him. Damp spice drawer. Dank wool. Rusty nails. Pickled peppers. Scents that return him to childhood. Aromas that inject him with inexp;icable happiness. Smells that plunge him down to the bottom of the deepest welland hold him there for hours. Then there's the sound, like his rears are wadded up with a pillow. The snarl of saw and feller bunchers, somewhere in the distance. A great truth comes over him: Trees fall with spectacular crashes. But planting is silent and growth is invisible."[5] ■

Luke Devlin & Mike Small, LESS editors

Notes

1 *Mike Small (2022) 'True Prosperity and New Metabolisms', LESS, June 20. enough.scot/2022/06/20/true-prosperity-and-new-metabolisms/*
2 *Pat Kane (2020) 'Scotland as Ark, Scotland as Lab'. In Gerry Hassan and Simon Barrow (eds.) Scotland After the Virus. Edinburgh: Luath Press. luath.co.uk/product/scotland-after-the-virus*
3 *Vanessa Watts (2013) 'Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)', Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2(1) pp. 20-34.*
4 *Zoe Todd (2021) "14. In 'Indigenous Place-Thought', scholar Vanessa Watts..." [Twitter] 2 Feb. twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/1356680980715560966*
5 *Richard Power (2018) The Overstory. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. norton.co.uk/books/9780393635522-the-overstory*

LESS IS A JOURNAL on degrowth, radical sufficiency and decolonisation in Scotland.

LESS questions and challenges dominant narratives about what economic progress means in Scotland, and sketches out alternative visions. The focus is on collective and democratic solutions to sustaining livelihoods that meet people's needs while rising to the threats of climate change, ecocide and mass extinction, inequality, racism and the far right, and the interconnected oppressive and extractivist logic and mechanisms that feed all of those.

We invite a combination of thoroughly researched material, opinion pieces, poetry and art work. Contributions are invited from those with lived knowledge in these areas, researchers, poets, creative writers and artists.

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RE-MEMBERING THE TUATH

Forms of traditional ecological knowledge that have been enacted since antiquity in Scotland are ripe for re-imagining. Col Gordon explores ways in which a renewed application of these methods can help transition to sustainable, locally-appropriate forms of agriculture in the post fossil-fuel era. Art by Megan Chapman.

***"I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about 'achievements'; diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out."* – *Aimé Césaire,* Discourse on Colonialism[1]**

EVER SINCE HEARING it a few years ago, I've been haunted by what I take to be a very important statistic. Whilst making up just 5% of the world's population, Indigenous peoples protect and steward 80% of global biodiversity. Indigenous peoples have generally managed to co-exist in relative balance with the environments they inhabit, and which they, more often than not, see themselves as a part of. For those of us who are not among this 5%, this statistic forces us to ask if there's a need to learn, or indeed relearn, how to live with the rest of the more-than-human world in ways that resemble how Indigenous peoples do.

The question that has been preoccupying me over the past couple years is what could this mean here, in Scotland, or more specifically in the Highlands and Islands – the Gàidhealtachd? I'll situate this consideration in and amongst the hotly debated, current, and divisive issue of rewilding and how it could relate to both repeopling and cultural revival.

But to start, I'll begin with a plant: *Avena Strigosa* or Corc Beag – the small, bristle, grey oat. These oats, along with Bere Barley and Hebridean Rye, are the last remaining cereal landraces to be found in Scotland. A landrace can be defined as a "locally adapted variety of a domesticated species of plant (or animal) which over time has become well adapted to its local environmental conditions".[2] Cultivated year in, year out for hundreds if not thousands of years, they exist today only in the Northern and Western Isles, areas which conventional wisdom might define as peripheral. Grown as fodder for livestock, the 540 hectares of Corc Beag grown annually on the Uists make up the largest area of surviving landraces anywhere in Britain.[3] In many ways it's a miracle that they still exist at all.

Yet these were once the major food crops of the Gàidhealtachd. If you read the accounts from early travellers to the region, it becomes apparent quite how much grain was grown here in the past. When Martin Martin[4] visited in 1695, grains seem to have been cultivated almost everywhere, often on places where today it would be very hard to believe it possible. In giving an account of Skye for the Board of Agriculture in 1811, James MacDonald reported that of the island's total landmass of roughly 350,000 acres, 8.5% was used as arable land. MacDonald[5] claims of Corc Beag that "this grain constitutes the bread of three-fourths of the population", and, despite the population then being almost double what it is today, that the soils of Skye should be capable of being able to "supply their present population with bread."

The volume of grain being produced was only possible because this arable system worked in tandem with another agricultural practice: the Shieling system. At its most basic, the Shieling system was a form of what is called transhumance – where people and livestock would move away, beyond the boundary, from the fertile low-lying glens or in-byes, and into the out-bye land or fàsachs, and up into the hills or onto the moors where they would spend long summer months living in the àirighs or shielings, herding and milking their livestock.

This was an agricultural system that in many ways also held much of Gaelic lifeway patterns and cultural norms together. By and large, the Gaelic calendar year was split into two halves: the season of growth that began with the celebrations of Beltane in early May; and the season of decay that was marked by Samhain at the end of October and was also understood to be the beginning of the Gaelic new year. These calendar dates where the markers for when the transhumance could begin and end, and both dates involved elaborate festivities and rituals. The significance of this seasonal movement to Gaelic culture was enormous, as attested to by the volume of songs and stories in the archives about the shielings and summer milking.

As well as providing the dairy products which, along with grain, made up the bulk of the traditional Gàidhealtachd diet, there is evidence that the Shieling system was beneficial to the land. When the early travellers reported on what they found they were often describing open-park like woodland habitats, heathland, and moorland. ≫

Numerous ecologists have commented that the impacts of cattle and other livestock, if done in the appropriate way and stocked at the right density, can be beneficial to woodland ecology and biodiversity.

According to Frank Fraser Darling[6], possibly the foremost 20th century ecologist of the Highlands and Islands, "The cattle husbandry and persistence of the forests were reasonably compatible and even complementary, for the cattle received shelter from the forest and the trees benefited from light cropping of the herbage floor, from the browsing and the manuring." Writing about traditional cattle in woodland ecology in the Highlands, conservationist Roy Dennis[7] observes, "There is increasing interest in understanding the effects of mega-herbivores on forest ecosystems in Europe and a growing scepticism that the primeval forests were dark woodlands of densely growing trees. Instead, it is believed that fire and the large herbivores created mosaics on both large and small scales, and that in some places there were open 'savannah-like' wooded grasslands. … Without cattle, our forest ecosystems will not be as successful for biodiversity conservation."

Echoing this point, Knepp Estate[8] in the South of England, one of the primary working examples of the so-called rewilding movement, affirms that "the battle between these two opposing forces of nature – animal disturbance and vegetation succession – generates habitat complexity and biodiversity. Reintroducing some of these animals to the landscape – using domestic descendants as proxies for some of the extinct species – can have a hugely positive impact on nature." This was to a certain extent the type of habitat that the early travellers to the Gàidhealtachd were describing: mosaics of savannah like wood pasture at various stages of succession, achieved in ways that were still healthy and dynamic. By moving the livestock into the hills and grazing in a way that was, at least in part, beneficial to the ecology of the habitat, there was an elegant, well-balanced system which made full use of the agricultural territory.

The territories were places that people knew intimately, as evidenced by the plethora of place names found within the Gaelic heartlands. Almost every rock and little pool or stream would appear to have had a name. But, significantly, the people here also knew how to use the territory in ways that are hard to envisage today.

The naturalist Thomas Pennant[9] famously visited the Hebrides in 1772 to report to his readers on what he had seen. To accompany him, Pennant had brought along the bo tanist Rev. John Lightfoot who compiled a 1,200 page botanical survey later published in 1777[10]. Whilst this record is mostly made up of scientific descriptions of his findings, he also included many ethnobotanical notes on how these plants were used. I still need to give the book more attention, but having gone through it I've found that Lightfoot noted uses for an astonishing 274 wild plants, including 92 food and drink plants, 41 dye plants, 94 medicinal plants, and 39 for fibres, building, or tanning. To me, this shows that as recent as the late-18th century, people here understood how to dwell within their territories in ways that resemble how many Indigenous peoples today relate to theirs.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold[11] writes, "to live in the world is also to inhabit it. … Knowledge of the world is gained by moving about it, exploring it, attending to it, ever alert to the signs by which it is revealed. Learning to see, then, is a matter not of acquiring schemata for mentally constructing the environment but of acquiring the skills for direct perceptual engagement with its constituents, human and non-human, animate and inanimate."

Up until last century, a very important word in the Gaelic worldview was *Tuath*. This word meant both "territory" and "the people of the territory". The two were understood to be one and the same and inseparable. It's my understanding that from this utterly interlinked belonging to territory you get other critical ideas in the cosmology such as *dùthchas* – an idea of belonging that is described by crofter and textile artist Alice Starmore as when "you belong to the land and the land belongs to you"[12]

In *Tending the Wild: Native American knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*, M. Kat Anderson[13] documents many of the different methods that the Indigenous peoples of California have used to manipulate the "wild" plants and terrains in order to promote the growth of species that were more culturally useful. In it she demonstrates that much of what would have been considered wilderness when first encountered by Europeans was in fact vast territories of carefully tended habitat that had been shaped by thousands of years of native burning, harvesting, tilling, pruning, transplanting, sowing, and scattering. The methods described don't comfortably fit into either of the binary categories of hunter-gathering or agriculture but, rather, are better described as *tending*.

"Tend means 'to have the care of; watch over; look after.' Thus the word connotes a relationship of stewardship, involvement, and caring very different from the dualistic, exploit-it-or-leave-it-alone relationship with nature still characteristic of Western society. The role of nature's steward was (and still is) one shared by many indigenous peoples".[14]

"The foundation of native people's management of plants and animals was a collective storehouse of knowledge about the natural world, acquired over hundreds of years through direct experience and contact with the environment. The rich knowledge of how nature works and how to judiciously harvest and steward its plants and animals without destroying them was hard earned; it was the product of keen observation, patience, experimentation, and long-term relationships with plants and animals. It was a knowledge built on a history, gained through many generations of learning passed down by elders about practical as well as spiritual practices. This knowledge today is commonly called 'traditional ecological knowledge'.[15]

In Gaelic this "traditional ecological knowledge" may be able to be translated as *dualchas*. Anderson continues, "one learns that Indigenous people achieve deeper intimacy with nature by using it. The character of each tree takes on new dimensions when transformed by human hands through scraping, skinning, soaking, peeling, boiling, mashing, grinding, fire hardening, splitting and decorating. … Each time a person transforms a plant, animal or mineral into a useful item it is an acknowledgement that he or she belongs to a place. … By using nature, we begin to know our place in it".[16]

Could these ideas be encompassed in Gaelic by the word *dùthchas*? I believe it's possible that they could.

***"The most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-determination in relationship to others."* – *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o,* Decolonising the Mind[17]**

SHIFTING BASELINE SYNDROME is a term used in ecology to express how reference points (baselines) for what is perceived as 'natural' change in populations over time. Our reference points for what is natural or normal in ecosystems and biodiversity have dramatically changed over the past centuries to the point where we may now perceive highly degraded landscapes as the 'natural' state of things – even if the breadth of habitats and richness of biodiversity we know today are just a fraction of what once was. Partially because of this, it can be hard to imagine what our landscapes could be like if they were healthy, vibrant, and fully functional.

This is equally as true with cultural diversity.

What we see today as 'traditional' are the leftovers that Gaels were allowed to keep after the land-based culture here was systematically eroded and indeed dismembered.

Arable crops are now only grown on the more fertile eastern parts of the Gàidhealtachd; the Shieling system has long since collapsed and transhumance no longer happens; there is little of the biodiversity that there once was and the traditional knowledge of wild plant use is all but gone.

When the Clearances began, the Shielings were some of the first things to be removed. This was also the time when folks started to be moved away from the old, communal settlements and townships and onto small individually allotted plots of land, called crofts. In processes which starkly paralleled those imposed on many Indigenous peoples all over the world, these crofts were never designed to be able to meet all the needs of subsistence and these new, forced land arrangements pushed the Tuath – the tenantry – into the wage economy in order to survive. Until the end of the 19th century, folks would refer to themselves as the Tuath, and it was only at a later stage that they began to identify as crofters, a term of Germanic origin brought into the region in the times of 'improvement' and clearance.

When the Shieling system was beginning to decline in the 17th century, it's important to note that it was having to coexist with newer, export-oriented systems of droving and commercial forestry. And it is at this point that you start to see evidence of habitat loss due to pressures from overgrazing, and also the extinction of keystone mammals, such as beavers, wild boar, and wolves. The reintroduction of such species is of course a key bone of contention within the whole rewilding debate.

According to Iain MacKinnon[18] in a contribution to Landed, an award-winning podcast series sharing the voices behind regenerative farming, "What there has been over the course of the last 300 or 400 years, but particularly the last 150 years, is cultural devastation for Gaelic Scotland. There's comparatively little left, both in terms of social relations and cultural norms. … We're living in the debris of our traditional society. We're living in the wreckage. And we need to reconstitute something from that wreckage that doesn't exclude or fence people out but supports people to come in and be part of that reconstituting process."

In order to understand how to recover and reinvigorate some of these traditional land management practices, we need to look to what we know of the ruins from the past. According to sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos[19], these ruins are also the seeds for imagining a hopeful future. The ruins and the wreckage of the past are where we may find some seeds that we can remember, rekindle, revitalise, and reinvent for today.

Some of these ruins may be actual seeds. The Corc beag, or grey oats, that once made up three quarters of the bread foods of the Gaels are no longer cultivated anywhere for human consumption. Indeed, because they've been neglected or forgotten for so long as a food, the plant itself is no longer viable as a foodstuff for humans. If I were to mill their grains, I would end up with nothing but dust and husk. Even the few experts who still work with these seeds now doubt that they could ever have been eaten by humans, despite the early accounts. But the seed still exists. To tend them as a foodstuff would involve patient restoration work over a number of decades.

Other ruins may be things like key Gaelic cosmological ideas: Dùthchas, or a sense of belonging to the land or the territory and an interconnection with every part of life within it; Tuath, where the territory and the people of the territory are one and the same; and Dualchas, the transfer of ancestral wisdom of how to live in balance within this territory, within this place.

These are things that were actively dismembered, and then forgotten. But today we are at a point where perhaps it's time to re-member and repair them. These are keystone concepts for reconstituting the Gàidhealtachd, but they are also just ideas if they can't be supported by and in turn support real-life practices. The erosion of the ecology and habitats, traditional land practices, lifeways and foodways has gone hand in hand with the erosion of the Gaelic language and its ways of being. The language, the lifeways, and the ways of being on the land are like legs on a stool that hold up a people and a culture. If one falls, they all start to collapse.

What would a decolonised Gaelic landscape look like today? How can we work towards that now? We are living in a time where, one way or another, things are not going to stay the same. Changes in how we go about using the land are inevitable. Today, and certainly tomorrow, there are going to be more and more calls for rewilding and for crofters to change their land practices in response to the various ecological and climate crises.

Is now the time to start to recover some of these lost practices; these ruins of our past? By attempting to revive, repurpose, and reinvent some of these old lifeways, foodways, and ways of interacting with and using the land, we may be able to actively support some of these key Gaelic ideas and cultural practices and by doing so play a role in the reconstitution process Iain Mackinnon mentioned.

In *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States*, editors Elizabeth Hoover and Devon A. Mihesuah[20] write, "The concept of Indigenous food sovereignty is not focused only on right to land, food and the ability to control production systems, but also responsibilities to and culturally, ecologically, and spiritually appropriate relationships with elements of those systems. This concept entails emphasizing reciprocal relationships with aspects of the landscape and the entities on it."

Rewilding is now here and – like it or not – it's probably here to stay. Yet there is no implicit, fundamental contradiction or even tension between the actual science of rewilding and these traditional ways of being. To me, what we have is an opportunity to present a case for a return to something which could resemble an 'indigenous', pre-clearance approach to dwelling in the land.

If there's money going into purchasing large areas of land to rewild, then we need to ask: what does rewilding look like? Crofting and rewilding are often pitted against each other in a narrative that suggests they are incompatible. But rather than opposing rewilding on the grounds that it is not compatible with the practices that were imposed on the Gàidhealtachd through colonial mechanisms, we should instead start to advocate for embedding these pre-clearance practices into the rewilding agenda and demanding that they are included, considered, and acted upon by people.

It is the very same people who destroyed the Indigenous cultures and land practices who are now calling for a return to the landscape they destroyed. But "Is treasa tuath na tighearna" (The people are mightier than a lord). We need to become the Tuath once more and demand that if this happens it does so in conjunction with a return to 'indigenous' land uses, in a relevant and reinvigorated way for today. These ideas need to be invoked now and attempts at living them need to be made. Over the centuries Gaels were domesticated into the state and maybe now is the time for the Tuath to be rewilded.

If folks want to buy up the land to rewild it and that genuinely is their purpose, fine. Buy it up but then give it back to the Tuath to carry this process out. This is a moment and an opportunity to try to remember and invoke these ruin seeds. To move them towards being living seeds once again. ■

"Until last century a very important word in the Gaelic worldview was Tuath. This word meant both "territory" and "the people of the territory." The two were understood to be one and the same and inseparable."

"What we see today as 'traditional' are the leftovers Gaels were allowed to keep after the land-based culture here was systematically eroded and indeed dismembered."

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ON-THE-GROUND ACTIVISM IN GALLOWAY

As climate change, food system collapse and the crisis of the rural economy morph into a powerful cocktail, a new project explores dialogue and knowledge-sharing for regeneration. By Nayab Khalid and Annie Morgan. Illustration by Aimee Lockwood.

"So, while for the adivasis the mountain is still a living deity, the fountainhead of life and faith, the keystone of the ecological health of the region, for the corporation, it's just a cheap storage facility."

- Arundhati Roy, speaking about the adivasi communities in south India and their struggle against mining corporations[1]

THE SLOGAN 'THINK Global: Act Local' has meaning in the recent campaign against exploratory mining in Dumfries & Galloway run by the grassroots group Galloway Against Mining (GAM).

In late 2021, JDH Exploration – a subsidiary of the Australian mining company Walkabout Resources – began exploratory drilling operations in Dumfries & Galloway, after being granted exploration licences from the Crown Estate in 2018. The area of exploration covers the proposed Galloway National Park, and includes Blackcraig Wood, a UNESCO biosphere region and an area of astounding natural beauty.

Galloway Against Mining was established in early 2022 following alarm surrounding exploratory drilling activity in the Blackcraig area. Currently at around 1400 members, including local people and supporters, GAM focuses on on-the-ground activism and raising awareness.

We spoke to GAM member Kenny Campbell for this article. Kenny is a resident of Newton Stewart, and only found out about the drilling activity (similarly to other GAM members) in January this year. Kenny described the process of discovering the mining activity as "traumatic", with residents waking up one day to drilling activity "essentially in their back gardens". One of the residents, an elderly lady, "felt like she was being assaulted". Kenny has expressed frustration at the opaque nature of the mining and exploration process, stating "you're not sure where the next bore-hole location will be".

In January 2022, Walkabout Resources (WR) took full ownership of JDH Exploration, after acquiring the remaining equity in an Earn-In Agreement. The acquisition gives WR 100% ownership of more than 750 square kilometres of exploration licences in southwest Scotland, which includes what they are calling 'the Blackcraig Lead-Zinc-Silver Project' within the Crown Estate in D&G. WR are an Australian based mining company, listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. The choice of the name Walkabout is also indicative of the appropriation of the Australian Aboriginal tradition. This immediately raises the question of bringing the resource curse to Scotland: who will benefit, distant shareholders?

"I have nothing against mining, many of my ancestors were miners. What I am against is companies coming in and destroying our landscape for their own gain with little to no care or respect shown to the locals or the local wildlife. The promise of 'jobs' and 'we haven't broken the law yet' is not enough to sway me."
– Adam Walsh, Galloway Against Mining

We spoke to a local nurse involved with the campaign who wished to remain anonymous, she expressed concerns about the impact on health. Historically mining is notoriously toxic, and damages both human and ecosystem health. While JDH/WR claim that modern mining practices are 'designed to avoid the unfortunate practices of the past', it is worth noting that even modern metal mining – especially gold mining – produces toxic pollution. Toxic sodium cyanide remains the primary reagent for gold processing because it alloys for efficient extraction of low-grade gold ore.

There is also anxiety about damage to water supply in the region – Soltway Firth, North Channel, River Cree, as well as concerns about the impact on biodiversity and birdlife (starlings).

It is worth noting here that GAM are not the only group formed as a reaction to the exploratory drilling in D&G. The Galloway Mines Action Group (GMAG) were also formed ≫

in early 2022, and seek to have a more formal status as a 'regulator' instead of the on-the-ground activism of GAM. They are in the process of registering with OSCR, with acting chair Christopher Glen and acting secretary Susan Miller.

"Galloway Mines Action Group (GMAG) has been established to confront the challenges posed by Walkabout Resources mining activities across Galloway. GMAG has concerns about toxic pollution, radioactive release, ecological damage and the destruction of historically and culturally important sites and protected habitats and is seeking to protect Galloway from irresponsible mining. We are principally a research based group which will produce evidence to inform the decision making processes, in particular any formal planning applications, and provide information to enable individuals, stakeholders and mining interest groups to form their own views and respond effectively to proposals."
– Susan Miller, Galloway Mines Action Group

PUBLIC RELATIONS EXERCISES

IN ORDER TO diffuse public tensions in D&G, JDH Exploration have held a series of public meetings and consultations beginning in January 2022, organised in tandem with community councils. These meetings, dubbed by locals as 'public relations exercises' talk up the transition to 'clean energy' required to mitigate against climate change and include the promise of local employment. Globally, Walkabout Resources place themselves as key players in 'green transition' metal mining and the recent public consultations in D&G focused on this. JDH Exploration community liaison officer Nigel Bradley introduced the notion that WR have an essential role in critical metal mining for a green transition.

"Despite much research I have yet to come upon a verifiable "good news" story about the impacts of mining on local communities – so it will take a lot to convince me that mining in D&G should go ahead."
– Peter W., Galloway Against Mining

Nigel Bradley also discussed how Walkabout Resources graphite mining operations in Tanzania (operating as Lindi Jumbo Ltd) brought benefit to the community. The reality is very different – Tanzania remains one of the poorest countries per capita income in the world. The graphite mining operations in Tanzania carry the narrative of improving infrastructure and building health centres and schools. The narrative excludes the environmental impacts of their mining and the severing of people from land and traditional agricultural methods.

According to Bradley, throughout the exploration process the company has consulted with D&G Council, Forestry and Land Scotland, Cree Valley Community Council, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, private landowners, and local media outlets. However, many D&G residents claim that there has been a lack of transparency in these consultations, and environmental assessments have not been made publicly available. The public meetings beginning in January this year were the first time locals have been made privy to any details about the operation.

The 'public relations exercises' also emphasised that the company is at the 'exploration' phase, i.e., drilling is a number of years away and may not be progressed. There is no mention of the environmental costs of exploration and the often little provision for restoration. The UNESCO site classification has also not offered protection in what is being described as exploration of 'green transition' metals and minerals. The promise of local employment has also been reiterated many times in the public consultations, but if there is one thing post-industrial Scotland knows well it is that mining jobs are often a myth.

"The jobs never last."
– Kenny Campbell, Galloway Against Mining

JDH Exploration have recently completed collecting both bore-hole and top-soil samples from their exploration sites, and these have been sent to laboratories in the Republic of Ireland for analysis. Results were expected in February 2022 but have not yet been forthcoming. According to Kenny, the delay in results being made available might imply that the company is preparing their application for a mining permit.

GAM members have expressed frustration about the lack of support residents and activists have received from local politicians and council members. Kenny has pointed out that local councils have often assisted JDH Exploration by providing a venue for their public meetings. While sympathetic, South Scotland list MSP Emma Harper and councillor for Mid Galloway and Wigtown West Katie Hagmann have both indicated that action can only be taken at Scottish Government level if a full mining permit is applied for.

THE PLANETARY MINE

FOR 500 YEARS European colonialism and the mechanisms of postcolonialism – i.e., extractive colonialism – have resulted in making our entire planet a colony. Now 'green colonialism' threatens the existence of frontline indigenous communities in a similar way. We borrow concepts from Martin Arboleda's 'Planetary Mine'[2] and aim to describe antidotes to the precarious situation we have arrived at. A true and international sustainability, beyond extractivism, and a call to environmentalists to understand the importance of the structural, socio-economic, systemic changes necessary.

Arboleda's analysis goes beyond colonialism and postcolonialism, and develops the concept of 'global colony' with interconnected infrastructures and technologies that transverse the entire globe, and hence highlights the importance of understanding and challenging the extractivist model as a whole. This approach connects global communities, and Arboleda takes heart in the fact that resistance to mining can re-establish ways of living that are in balance with nature, placing human concerns on an equal footing with other species. In tracing the intersecting transfer of minerals and metals from the colonised countries of South America to the growing cities of East Asia, he explores the ongoing 'resource curse' evident in the lack of benefit in the countries of primary extraction.

We acknowledge the necessity of breaking from fossil dependence for energy but question the position of transnational companies, including fossil fuel corporations, and the infinite growth model. The urgency towards addressing the climate crisis

"A true and international sustainability, beyond extractivism, and a call to environmentalists to understand the importance of the structural, socio-economic, systemic changes necessary."

cannot be overstated, but replacing fossil extraction with the renewable narrative does not change the reality of exploitation of land and people. Use of force, environmental impacts, degradation of soil, depletion of water, tailing disasters – the list is long. It is not just mine workers whose health is destroyed but whole communities, with peri-urbanisation and urbanisation, mining and shanty towns severing people from land, family and community, and so on. Violence and conflict are integral in the imposition of mining throughout the majority world.

It is vitally important that the environmental movements recognise that changes are not just required in terms of carbon emissions reduction. Since extractivism is fundamentally rooted in injustice, solutions must go beyond the 'extractive frontier'[3] and look into reduction in demand. Reducing primary demand in countries with no processing facilities is a priority and structural transformation is required to challenge the growth model. A shift away from Gross Domestic Product and the pursuit of profit as an aspiration and indicator of wealth is necessary. Reducing demand for energy is key.

Mining is one of the main pull factors in urbanisation, the large-scale transition and centralisation of people and resources. The exponential rise of cities and megacities globally creates more demand for energy which in turn accelerates the expansion of mining – a vicious circle. Very high levels of consumption, the concentration of economic activity, sealed surfaces (roads and buildings) which absorb and retain solar irradiation, air conditioning, cars and road freight all exacerbate climate damage.

The recent drive to locate mining in the 'Global North' where it is argued that regulations and new mining technologies will alleviate harm does not hold up. Eastern Europe has the second most devastating tailing incident on record. Turkey had a tragic mining accident in 2014, the Soma mine explosion killed 301 people and President Edrogan was reported as saying that death went with the job.[4] Mount Ida in North West Turkey, a sacred mountain in ethnic and religious traditions and an area of breathtaking beauty, is currently the site of Canadian mining. The Sampi regions of North Scandinavia, home of the Sami peoples, are increasingly under threat from mining activities. In Portugal and Serbia, conflict over planned Lithium mining is current.[5]

It is also helpful to understand the process of colonialism in Scotland and Ireland here. Currently 27% of the Republic of Ireland is given to mining concessions and 25% of Northern Ireland.[6] The colonial history of the Celtic lands is pertinent within the concepts explored above: the Highland Clearances (as well as the Lowland Clearances), the forcible removal of crofters from land, the devastation of culture and historic agricultural practice – so well illustrated in John McGrath's acclaimed theatre productions 'The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil', dispossession, forced evictions, emigration, urbanisation, the Colonial famine in Ireland.

NATURAL CAPITAL

IN 2013, SIAN Sullivan[7] voiced concerns about the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) adopting the term 'natural capital' amid growing concerns around the promotion and promises of the 'Green Economy'. Quoting Einstein, "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them", Sullivan expressed concern that economic language rather than ecological language was prominent in the adoption of 'natural capital' discourse[8]. More recently, George Monboit described how the language of markets has changed how our obligations to land have become embedded in commercial relationships.

This is relevant in the Scottish context. Mairi McAllan, the Scottish Minister Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform, used the term in response to concerns that changes to the Land Reform Bill in 2023 will not go far enough in enabling communities to lead their own development. Ms McAllan told MSPs in December 2021 that the Land Reform Bill 'offers opportunities to take action to increase levels of natural capital value to harness ways to benefit communities'. She suggested further that it is important to find pathways that balance the need for private sector investment with legal commitments to a 'just transition' in land ownership and use. While a commitment to a diverse pattern of land ownership as well as public ownership of community land is the stated aim of the Land Reform Bill, her comments also included the assertion that the focus of the reform is on how land is used rather than the wider question of foreign ownership.

Currently, Scotland has one of the most unequal land ownerships in Europe, with just 500 people owning more than half of the land. Investigations by *The Ferret* in 2020 revealed that 60% of foreign-owned land in Scotland was bought by companies based in tax havens. Many Russian oligarchs also own large estates. Vladimir Lisin, who got very very rich from steel extraction and ripping off Russian workers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, received public money to the tune of £700,000 for his estate near Crieff. On the Cowal Peninsula, Vladimir Strzhalkovsky, the former CEO of Norilsk Nickel, bought the historic estate while his main residence is in the tax haven of Monaco.

Perhaps this is why Andy Wightman, land campaigner and former MSP, says that fundamental reforms to land have not yet been embraced by the Scottish administration. This is not to suggest that Land Reform legislation is not important. The Scottish Government's Land Reform Act of 2003 paved the way for community ownership in North Harris, Eigg, Gigha, Knoydart, Assynt and others. Community Land Scotland questions the so-called 'Green Lairds', millionaires with wilderness/rewilding projects in mind. These privileged elites are intending to live out their visions of conservation in an artificial creation. This could continue the process of excluding people from the land.

Returning to Galloway, the internal colonisation of land is apparent in how the Australia-based Walkabout Resources is currently exploring Crown Land. According to Kenny, the current mining issue is "really is about land reform and nothing else". The GAM campaign to prevent the exploitation of people and land by a foreign company is of timely significance. Communities leading their own vision for developing their environments is vital.

"There would be no mining if the land was not made available. Perhaps the main focus of your efforts should be channelled there. Name and shame the landowners for starters."
– Peter Horsell, Galloway Against Mining

SOLUTIONS

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words."
– Ursula K. Le Guin

Around the world communities are rising up and pushing back the frontier of extractivism and implementing solutions rooted in reducing demand and restoring ecological balance. Calls for a mass movement are frequently referred to in eco-socialist literature. The current campaign in D&G can inform what needs to happen and build solidarity networks for empowerment. Community land based solutions are key. This can mean land reform and moves towards public ownership of land, housing, transport, energy.

Beyond protest, the challenge is to build meaningful alternative economies. Quoting Colin Macleod (GalGael Trust, Pollok Free State), "That was protest, this is building." The trade union movement could be at the forefront in this, going beyond 'jobs at any cost' to climate jobs within a just transition – a transition rooted in global climate justice, recognising the importance of international organisations like Trade Unions for Energy Democracy and Yes to Life No to Mining.

Back in Galloway, our conversation with Kenny Campbell included ideas around sustainable and heritage tourism, book festivals – including the famous Wigtown Book Festival, nature walks, ecological restoration vacations – possibly alongside organisations like Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). Kenny stressed the importance of alternative affordable accommodations such as bunkhouses, independent hostels, and yurts.

"Community Land Scotland questions the so-called 'Green Lairds', millionaires with wilderness/ rewilding projects in mind. These privileged elites are intending to live out their visions of conservation in an artificial creation."

"[We need] an underlying solutions focused approach that addresses climate change and environmental destruction, so approaches that involve sustainable development such as properly connected public transport, sustainable tourism like the Book Festival and the TRAD Music Festival, heritage such as The Museum and the various activities in Whithorn and beyond, accommodation like the various bunkhouses."
– Kenny Campbell, Galloway Against Mining

This is all facilitated by integrated public transport, so the need for a better public transport system in rural D&G was stressed. The solutions around public transit connecting urban and rural towns and villages can bring a sharing of locally based initiatives around growing and making, alongside the sharing of vision and support.

"One of the biggest areas of land on these islands, D&G needs good, reliable and affordable public transport . Sadly this has not been the case, mainly since Thatcher's privatisation in the 80's – which saw prices increase 300%, and the closing of the Dumfries to Stranraer railway line back in the 60's. Campaigns like 'Haud the Bus D&G', and another to reinstate the railway line are gathering pace, giving many in the region a voice that needs to be heard. Sadly listening and making it easy for a mining company to threaten the environment of the area's stunning landscapes and ecosystem is more of a priority for some. "
– Danny Alderslowe, local activist and campaigner

GAM have connected with organisations like the London Mining Network, and are keen to forge connections with other like-minded people. They learn from and support the struggles of indigenous communities around the world.

"We are very far from alone in our struggle with Walkabout, and there are communities large and small across the globe defending their land just as we are."
– Kenny Campbell, Galloway Against Mining ■

Editor's note: Since this article was completed, exploratory drilling has finished and Walkabout is looking for next phase investors.

Notes

1 *Arundhati Roy, The heart of India is under attack (The Guardian, 2009), theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/oct/30/mining-india-maoists-green-hunt*

2 *Martin Arboleda, Planetary Mine: Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism (Verso Books, 2020)*

3 *War on Want/London Mining Network, A Just(ice) Transition is a Post-Extractive Transition (2019), waronwant.org/sites/default/files/Post-Extractivist_Transition_WEB_0.pdf*

4 *NPR, Turkish Mine Explosion: Angry Protests As Death Toll Rises (2014), npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/05/15/312694185/turkish-mine-explosion-angry-protests-as-death-toll-rises?t=1653007133702*

5 *Yes to Life No to Mining, yestolifenotomining.org/*

6 *Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland, friendsoftheearth.uk/northern-ireland*

7 *Sian Sullivan, The Natural Capital Myth (University of Bath, 2013), the-natural-capital-myth.net/*

8 *The Ferret, Revealed: Scottish property worth billions owned by tax haven firms (2020), theferret.scot/scottish-property-billions-tax-haven/*

OUT OF A CAVE OF GOLD SOMERSAULTING

Thoughts on the current and future condition of the Gàidhealtachd by Iain MacKinnon. Illustration by Pearse O Hall.

"Let me begin by stating something that might seem obvious: isolation is an important tool, and a devastating result, of colonization. …the colonized society as a whole is made to think of itself as entirely alone in the universe – completely vulnerable and unprotected. At the individual level colonised people learn to hide their real feelings and sincere beliefs because they have been taught that their feelings and beliefs are evidence of ignorance and barbarity. … This strategy of colonialism is designed to break down any resistance by persuading the colonized people that not only are they powerless to resist, but that they would also be naïve to attempt to do so."
– Erica-Irene Daes, The Experience of Colonization Around the World

IN THIS ESSAY I consider two important poetic invocations of the Gaelic Otherworld that deal with isolated figures struggling – and without human support – to understand and bring back to reality their own and their culture's sincere beliefs and feelings. One is Sorley MacLean's *Uamha 'n Òir* ['The Cave of Gold'], a poem of resolute struggle and despair which has variously haunted, plagued, and inspired me for fifteen years. The other is Myles Campbell's *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein*[1] ['And so Somersault'], published last year in a limited edition through the Skye-based arts organisations SEALL[2] and Atlas.[3] The human ecologist and land reformer Alastair McIntosh has argued that not only is Campbell's poem heart-rendingly beautiful, but that it "merits a place amongst Scotland's most distinguished mythic and religious poetry."

I have elsewhere[4] focussed on the poetry of Catriona Montgomery, a bard from Skye who has, in her own particular style and register, delineated in subtle ways that have yet to be fully recognised how cultural invasion devastates the social and self-understanding of a colonised person and people. In this instance, the poetic struggles analysed here to reclaim the 'hill' – the creative crucible of the Otherworld power of faery – from cultural invasion were both carried out by male writers.

I began by quoting Erica-Irene Daes, a United Nations special rapporteur on indigenous peoples and a key figure in the preparation of what became the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, because her words also emphasise the condition facing poets of colonised groups who are nevertheless moved, compelled to contribute to recovering and reconstituting their people's lifeworld, the ground of their being.

"...her words also emphasise the condition facing poets of colonised groups who are nevertheless moved, compelled to contribute to recovering and reconstituting their people's lifeworld, the ground of their being"

In her contribution to the collection of essays *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*[5], Daes holds that "one of the most destructive of the shared personal experiences of colonized people around the world is intellectual and spiritual loneliness."

"From this loneliness comes a lack of self-confidence, a fear of action, and a tendency to believe that the ravages and pain of colonization are somehow deserved. Thus, the victims of colonization begin, in certain cases, to blame themselves for all the pain that they have suffered."

This process of internalising blame may be one means of understanding "the tragic nature of daily life in Aboriginal communities: unemployment, self-rejection, addiction, family violence."

In the case of Scottish *Gàidheil*, personal loneliness and social brokenness have been compounded by a complicating psychological factor. According to one enduring critic at least, we have turned ourselves against spiritual, or Otherworld, forces that have power to support revitalisation of an indigenous lifeworld.
In the book of essays in which the idea of a 'Celtic Twilight' was first expressed, WB Yeats remonstrated against Scotsmen who were "too theological, too gloomy" in their dealings with "the world beyond" and who had "discovered the fairies to be pagan and wicked." "You have made the Darkness your enemy", he concluded. In short, Yeats believed that we ill-treated the Otherworld people because we had lost respectful intimacy with them. But Yeats' criticisms, while capturing an important truth in Scotland's relationship with the fairies, were misplaced in their assessment of the breadth of Scottish Otherworld tradition.

The hero of Myles Campbell's *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein* ['And so Somersault'] walks that wider, more generous fairy-path that has been well-trodden in the tradition, as can be seen by the gleanings collected by folklorists such as Alexander Carmichael, Rev. John Gregorson Campbell, and Rev. Kenneth MacLeod, among others. This is a path of often humorous, instructive, and, in the case of Campbell's poem, transformative Otherworld encounter of a kind that Yeats could not see in Scotland. Yet this path was not marginal but central to the way that traditional society conceived of the world. The importance of faery has perhaps been most succinctly captured by native scholar John MacInnes who described it as "a metaphor for the imagination": "From this shadowy realm comes the creative power of mankind."[6]

In fact, in walking this fairy path, Myles Campbell and his poem's hero instruct Yeats in the transformative possibilities of faery. After all, didn't Yeats' wandering Aengus, having once seen the fairy woman "with apple blossoms in her hair", spend the rest of his days "wandering through hollow lands and hilly lands" to find out "where she [or, perhaps, *sidhe*] has gone"?

Yeats' famous poem concludes with the bereft but still striving Aengus dreaming of kissing her

lips and holding her hand, tasting "the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun" for eternity. It's not clear what kind of a gift Aengus would ultimately gain from the Otherworld apples of the fairy woman, but the poem is clear that she's kept them from him until now. Perhaps he reminds us a little of RD Laing's injunction towards "the young man who sets off in a yacht in search of God" or of "the poet who mistakes a real woman for his muse and acts accordingly." Laing concludes: "Let us *cure* them."[7]

Except it is not us that can provide the cure for young men like Aengus; it is *them*.

And so it is with the ultimately generous, life-giving Scottish fairies that take Campbell's hero William deep into the hollow hill for a year and a day. A little the worse the wear for drink, William is on his way home over the moor from a wedding and tries to borrow a horse which takes off and finally throws him to the ground precipitating his Otherworld encounter.

The adventures he endures in the fairy hill are wild and often excruciating, true enough, although the pain is always tempered by the narrator's saving humour and an uncanny sense that, as readers, we, and William, are in safe hands. Unlike Yeats' wan, desirous, searching Aengus, the hero of Campbell's poem returns from the fairy realm, being transformed and vitally alive, and with the faery gift of wisdom that he needed; for him, acceptance – to be able to accept the fullness of reality, of flood and calm, and of people, here and there. But even after the return there is a rub. Life goes on; the sheep need fed, and William's new guide "the little green man" horrifies the folk back in the 'real' world. Yet, for William, still the stream bubbles…and so somersault, and so somersault. In this way, *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein* is an extraordinary lesson of and from the transformative power of the hill.

I also read *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein* against another story of creative descent into the Scottish Gaelic Otherworld. This is the poem of Sorley Maclean that I consider to be his most important statement, *Uamha 'n Òir* ['The Cave of Gold']. Yeats, of course, used the existence of the *Uamha 'n Òir* story in Scottish tradition – of the piper hopelessly struggling in the cave with an overwhelming Otherworld power in the form of a fairy hound – to give weight to his argument that we consider the fairies to be wicked.

In the original story and song, the piper bewails his lack of three hands, two for the pipes and one for the sword, in order that he can defend himself from the fairy hound. One of the ways that I read MacLean's symbolically and psychologically profound development of the *Uamha 'n Òir* story, is to see MacLean himself endlessly doing battle in the cave with the fairy hound of death that represents all the forces that MacLean sees invading, intruding upon and destroying the ground of Gaelic being, leading to a Gaelic Otherworld realm so contaminated with alien elements that it perversely contributes to the destruction of its own ontological basis.

MacLean set his poem in *Dùis MhicLeòid* – the land of MacLeod, which includes his home island of Raasay – and when the piper first enters the cave of gold the place that he leaves behind him, *Dùis MhicLeòid*, is the place of bread, flesh, and wine, of honey and spices on the lips, of bees sounding in the ears, and "love-making, the praise and the music, the sweet promises and the rewards, and the soft eloquent words of the drink."

"The poem's argument of cultural devastation and ontological elimination and hopelessness is compelling and horrific, and its music still casts an awful captivating spell today"

No wonder, then, that MacLean asks again and again, why would a person "leave the land and go away at all?" Exemplified by *Dùis MhicLeòid*, MacLean's traditional Gaelic ground of being is familiar, loving, and nurturing.

But as the poem unfolds it becomes clear that in the time since the piper entered the cave all that is familiar, secure, and nurturing has been subjected to a scorched earth policy, and that we have contributed to it – probably related to what MacLean once harshly called "the notorious, moral cowardice of the Highlanders". These days there is "a mean churl lord in the Dun, and the old community broken". Maclean's concluding lines in the version of *Uamha 'n Òir* that he approved for publication[8] speak to the crisis of being that he feels. In the end, and in spite of his four arms ["two for the pipes, one for shield and one for the sword"], and in spite of inspiration by music ["the sword and the shield were useless, it was the music itself that strove"] MacLean the warrior knew that he possessed "the weakness above all weakness"; he knew that the fairy hound he faced was "of the eerie dogs of death" and the situation was truly hopeless. *Sùil*, the Gaelic word for 'eye', also means 'hope', and – tellingly now written in the first person – the poem concludes bleakly:

My lack, my lack
with head and heart,
dim eye in the head
no eye in the heart.

The poem's argument of cultural devastation and ontological elimination and hopelessness is compelling and horrific, and its music still casts an awful captivating spell today, one that Yeats would surely deplore. The human consequences of this devastation are explored in Iain Crichton Smith's essay 'Real People in a Real Place'[9] and, even more directly, in Norman MacLean's unsparing autobiographical self-examination *The Leper's Bell*.[10] This most talented and most wasteful of *Gàidheil* tells how his own mother had described him as a 'changeling'. Sometimes, when the fairies steal a human child, they replace them with a changeling, a creature that appears to be the child but below the disguise is really an ancient hateful fairy which takes and takes from the parents and gives nothing in return. Norman MacLean's creative achievements were blighted by a lifetime of alcoholism and self-destructive behaviour, the result of what he called "a hairline crack in my sense of belonging."

He had been brought up, on the one hand, in the most traditional of settings in an extended family in Uist and at the head of Loch Arkaig in Lochaber permeated by a very rich oral history and literature, much of it place-specific. In *The Leper's Bell* he wrote that recollecting from old age his childhood days by Loch Arkaig time brought him into a state where his "being was no more than another stone in the eternity of the glen." On the other hand, after the family moved to late-industrial Govan he experienced what he called "culture shock", being violently attacked by other boys. Before long he had internalised and was replicating the aggression and the violence he received.

The writing of John Lorne Campbell ultimately helped him understand his plight, caught between two forms of consciousness and fully immersed in neither. Campbell wrote:

"Communities where an oral tradition predominates are so much out of the experience of the modern Western world that it is extremely difficult for anyone without first-hand knowledge to imagine how a language can be cultivated without being written to any extent, or what an oral literature is like, or how it is propagated and added to from generation to generation. The consciousness of the Gaelic mind may be described as possessing historical continuity and a religious sense; it may be said to exist in a vertical plane. The consciousness of the modern West on the other hand, may be said to exist in a horizontal plane, possessing breadth and extent, dominated by a scientific materialism and a concern with purely contemporary happenings. There is a profound difference between the two attitudes, which represent the different spirits of different ages, and are very much in conflict."[11]

Norman MacLean repeatedly renegotiated his "status between the mainstream (Scottish Lowland) culture and Gaelic culture." He added: "I did this frequently and my oscillations proved confusing." As he studied Celtic at Glasgow University he struggled to reconcile a pride in his gallus Glaswegian identity with his strong memories of and attachment to growing up traditionally in Uist and Lochaber.

"The vertical plane of old Lorne Campbell was birling like a U-boat commander's periscope. The descent into madness had begun. There I was, ostensibly drinking from the pure stream of Gaelic culture in my studies, but secretly wanting to be a townie, a boulevardier among the raffish crew who inhabited the West End of the city."

Ultimately, he reached "the conclusion that this dual consciousness laid the foundation for the cultural schizophrenia that I've suffered all my life, and still suffer to this day." As well as being a singer and piper, Norman MacLean was a stand-up comedian. His edgy humour was enormously popular in the west Highlands and Islands. His popularity may have been as much a reflection of social experience as that of his own personal experience.

Norman MacLean's was perhaps a severe case, but the prevalence of binge drinking[12] and persistently high levels of alcohol related deaths[13][14] in the islands where Gaelic language and culture is least weak but rapidly contracting suggest that his disclosures may be indicative of wider cultural trauma.

Could it be, then, that *Dùis MhicLeòid* and the *Gàidhealtachd* as a whole have become a cave of gold? And, if so, how can we escape from the endless futile struggle and suffering that is generated there?

As Peter MacKay has recently shown in an insightful analysis of Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid's responses to their understandings of the Celtic Twilight, MacLean sought in his poetry "a native symbolism" independent of "purely foreign non-Celtic development[s]".[15] Whether or not this was a futile, unnatural quest does not diminish the brilliance of his verse. But it does have ontological implications. He detested the Celtic Twilight (or what he could see of it) not only as "pretentious dishonest stupidity" but also as the insertion of foreign material. For him the Celtic Twilight represented "a romanticism of the escapist, otherworldly type, a cloudy mysticism" which never "bore any earthly relation to anything in Gaelic life or literature."[16]

This may be true of some of the material that he railed against and his reasons for doing so may have been sound – the focus of much of his ire was on the work of Marjory Kennedy Fraser and a song project which might, in sympathetic terms and given her collaboration with Rev. Kenneth Macleod, be considered an act of cultural translation. But what comes across is his writing about the twilight is a total rejection of it as a creative force. Might MacLean's concerns about cultural purity and the avoidance of "non-Celtic development" in his poetry have left him battling the already infiltrated forces of his own Otherworld in the cave of gold – a self-enclosed, radiant, and spectacular amphitheatre suffused with all the victimhood and agency of capital, empire, racial, and cultural prejudice and all that had brought *Dùis MhicLeòid* to its knees and throes – in the very manner that Yeats had warned against: captivated by the idea that the Otherworld was essentially an enemy to be defeated?

Moreover, might a rejection of "non-Celtic development" leave MacLean without recourse to the universal knowledge that Yeats returned to again and again in his struggles to see that dim twinkling light through to a new morning? One student of Yeats described that knowledge as "not empirical but imaginative knowledge" which resides "at the core of reality itself, with which the supernatural worlds of folklore, legend and myth are intimately connected."[17] The key to a poet's creativity may be not so much the way in which they are able to manipulate those worlds in their work; but the culturally derived, spiritually sourced awareness and attitudes which establish their way in the first place.

Yeats the anti-materialist said: "I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance – the revolt of the soul against the intellect – now beginning in the world." He gave, in his time, an Irish awareness and attitude to that larger revolution of the soul. As the enduring and relevant criticisms of the Twilight make clear, there are many ways in which the soul can stray and its revolution dwindle to what MacDiarmid called "the delightful taste of a pink sweet filled with snow"; yet as the Twilight's enduring and relevant appeal also appears to attest, a world that deadens the soul will always face spiritual revolt.

Sorley MacLean himself was not immune from beguilement by foreign influences. He bemoaned that he "was foolish enough" to have once preferred John Keats to William Ross. In *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein*, Myles Campbell quotes from both MacLean and Keats. This is in the sixth section of the poem in which William's transformative suffering really begins. Although later he will endure the torments of fire in the flesh in what seems like our common imaginary of Hell, in section six William first suffers a Celtic Hell, in which his flesh and his spirit become stone, cold and unfeeling. Here, in what appears to symbolise a profound and anguished psychic transformation, he quotes from Keats' *Hyperion*, which describes the sorrow of the Titans, the old gods of Greece, after their overthrow by the Olympians. Interwoven with Keats are two quotes from MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir* XVI. It may be significant that in MacLean's original work, what immediately follows *Dàin do Eimhir* XVI are verses in which MacLean denies the existence of God. Indeed it seems to be MacLean's Godless world – "cold, far off, bright, beautiful … a universe moving silently and

"This process of internalising blame may be one means of understanding "the tragic nature of daily life in Aboriginal communities: unemployment, self-rejection, addiction, family violence."

a mind alone in the environs" – from which William wishes to escape back to conversation, cèilidh, and the familiarity of home.

Campbell's juxtaposition of Keats and MacLean appears to me to be part of an imaginative reconciliation achieved in the fairy hill that allows him to transcend the isolation of "a mind alone in the environs"; an isolation that is, of course, the condition of the piper struggling in the psychological crucible of *Uamha 'n Òir*.

If this was Campbell's intent, his poem achieves this reconciliation without becoming lost in "cloudy mysticism" or diversionary confection. Campbell's hero William suffers the same "loneliness and terror" in the fairy hill that Sorley MacLean, in a poem dedicated to Alexander Carmichael, describes as being at the core of MacLean's own creative process. That is true. However, for Campbell the fairies are not a horrendous, evil extinguishing power; they are spiritual teachers, bringers of new life and understanding.

And this understanding of the fairies is no foreign importation. It has long, long provenance in Gaelic tradition. After analysing a series of medieval Irish Gaelic texts on the relationship between the fairies and Christianity, the eminent scholar John Carey concludes:

"Here, in closing, we have a still more audacious defence of the deities of the old religion, unique so far as I know in the literature. They are the guardian angels, the messengers of God. The pagan Irish, we are to understand, were not devil-ridden or deluded, 'for they were faithful to the truth of nature'."[18]

In what might be considered an act of intergenerational bardic healing, Campbell has been able to pass through the tormenting illusory gold of the cave in order to realise and recover the original restorative power that is at the heart of the Otherworld hill. In doing so he completes the journey that MacLean had begun to return to "the truth of nature".

UAMHA 'N ÒIR has worked on me for some fifteen years as the main ground of my understanding of how it is for the *Gàidhealtachd* and for *Gàidheil* in Scotland today. The brilliance of the poem's depiction of that condition – which Erica-Irene Daes describes in terms of spiritual and intellectual loneliness – has an awful sense of finality, and is not an easy place to live. *Agus Mar Sin Car a' Mhuiltein* has disturbed that sense of finality, somersaulting me towards the possibility of an acceptance of that condition that does not bring resistance to an end, and leaves hope alive too for *Gàidhealtachd* futures. For that, I already feel deep gratitude. ■

Notes

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THE DIRTY 20

Scotland's Top Climate Polluters

Design by Andy Arthur

Based on "*The 'rogues' gallery': Scotland's top 20 climate polluters*" by Rob Edwards & Paul Dobson for The Ferret (theferret.scot), 17th April 2022.

Source: Scottish Pollutant Release Inventory 2020 by SEPA, published 31st March 2022, covering 48 airborne pollutants from 1,298 sites across Scotland.

#20 O-I - **Alloa glassworks**

O-I is the worlds largest manufacturer of glass drinks containers and its glassworks at Alloa produces bottles for the distilling industry

CO2 emissions 2019 149,000t **2020 137,000t** 2019-20 change ▼8.1%

#14 Norbord - **Cowie mill**

The Cowie mill near Stirling produces wood-based panels for the construction industry and is a major UK producer of MDF.

CO2 emissions 2019 210,000t **2020 204,000t** 2019-20 change ▼2.8%

#2 PetroIneos - **Grangemouth refinery**

A 50:50 joint venture between Ineos and Chinese state PetroChina, the refinery has a processing capacity of 140,000 barrels of fuels per day.

CO2 emissions 2019 1,343,000t **2020 1,036,000t** 2019-20 change ▼23%

#4 Ineos - **Grangemouth CHP plant**

This plant produces ethylene, ethanol, polyethylene and polypropylene from ethane - either from the North Sea pipeline or imported by tanker.

CO2 emissions 2019 522,000t **2020 631,000t** 2019-20 change ▲21%

#5 Ineos - **Grangemouth CHP plant**

The gas-fired Grangemouth CHP plant provides 145MW of electricity and 257MW of steam to other parts of the petrochemicals complex.

CO2 emissions 2019 641,000t **2020 615,000t** 2019-20 change ▼4%

#6 Ineos - **Grangemouth infrastructure plant**

The Grangemouth infrastructure plant provides power to other parts of the petrochemicals complex.

CO2 emissions 2019 429,000t **2020 470,000t** 2019-20 change ▲10%

#13 Ineos - **Forties pipeline system**

The FPS at Grangemouth processes the raw crude oil from the North Sea Forties pipeline into separated liquid gases and stabilised crude oil.

CO2 emissions 2019 361,000t **2020 269,000t** 2019-20 change ▼25%

#9 E.ON - **Steven's Croft biomass plant**

The 44MW plant at Lockerbie is the UK's largest wood-fired power station, burning forest wood, agricultural residues, waste and energy crops.

CO2 emissions 2019 371,000t **2020 335,000t** 2019-20 change ▼9.7%

#11 UPM - **Caledonian papermill**

The Caledonian mill at Irvine produces coated papers for magazines and has a capacity of 250,000t per year.

CO2 emissions 2019 284,000t **2020 298,000t** 2019-20 change ▲4.9%

#19 William Grant - **Girvan grain distillery**

The whisky distillery at Girvan is one of the largest in Scotland and can produce 115 million litres of spirit per year.

CO2 emissions 2019 165,000t **2020 163,000t** 2019-20 change ▼1.2%

#15 EnQuest - **Sullom Voe oil & gas terminal**

Sullom Voe in the Shetland Islands handles oilfield produciton from the North Sea and East Shetland Basin for storage and transportation.

CO2 emissions 2019 181,000t **2020 176,000t** 2019-20 change ▼2.8%

#17 TotalEnergy - **Laggan-Tormore gas plant**

The Shetland Gas Plant (SGP) at Sullom Voe handles the output of the West of Shetland Laggan and Tormore gas fields for processing and export.

CO2 emissions 2019 208,000t **2020 164,000t** 2019-20 change ▼21%

#12 Shell - **St. Fergus gas plant**

At St. Fergus near Peterhead c. 25% of the UK's offshore gas comes ashore from the North Sea for processing before joining the National Grid.

CO2 emissions 2019 303,000t **2020 292,000t** 2019-20 change ▼3.6%

#1 SSE - **Peterhead power station**

The 2.2MW Peterhead power station burns North Sea gas. Plans to modify it to burn Hydrogen and store the carbon by CCS were cancelled in 2007.

CO2 emissions 2019 1,579,000t **2020 1,294,000t** 2019-20 change ▼18%

#8 RWE - **Markinch biomass plant**

The 55MW plant is the UK's largest, producing heat and electricity by the burning of 450,000t of wood waste and virgin pellets per year.

CO2 emissions 2019 210,000t **2020 204,000t** 2019-20 change ▼2.8%

#3 ExxonMobil - **Mosmorran ethylene plant**

The Fife Ethylene Plant converts ethane from the North Sea gas fields recieved via St. Fergus into the ethylene feedstock for the chemical industry.

CO2 emissions 2019 680,000t **2020 902,000t** 2019-20 change ▲33%

#16 Shell - **Mosmorran gas plant**

The Fife Natural Gas Liquids plant processes liquid gas outputs from St. Fergus into Propane, Butane, Pentane and natural Gasoline.

CO2 emissions 2019 250,000t **2020 166,000t** 2019-20 change ▼34%

#18 FCC - **Millerhill waste incinerator**

The "Energy Recovery Facility" at Dunbar generates 258GWh of electricity per year by the incineration of 155,000t of unrecyled waste.

CO2 emissions 2019 132,000t **2020 163,000t** 2019-20 change ▲23%

#7 Tarmac - **Dunbar cement works**

The plant at Oxwell Mains was constructed in the 1960s and is Scotland's only cement works, producing over 500,000t annually.

CO2 emissions 2019 559,000t **2020 427,000t** 2019-20 change ▼24%

#10 Viridor - **Dunbar waste incinerator**

The "Energy Recovery Facility" at Dunbar generates 258GWh of electricity per year by the incineration of 300,000t of unrecyled waste.

CO2 emissions 2019 274,000t **2020 316,000t** 2019-20 change ▲15%

Key to Sectors

- Oil, Gas & Petrochemicals
- Industrial
- Electricity Generation
- Waste Management

FARMER TO FARMER: TRANSITIONS TO REGENERATIVE FARMING IN SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

As climate change, food system collapse and the crisis of the rural economy morph into a powerful cocktail, a new project explores dialogue and knowledge-sharing for regeneration.

By Diana Garduño Jiménez and Abi Mordin. Illustration by Emily Tough.

"We're not going to change anything until we start talking and reaching those outside of our echo chambers."
– Abi Mordin, Agroecologist and Facilitator

A QUIET FARMING REVOLUTION is starting in South West Scotland. Farmers across the region have formed a group to share knowledge, experience and practice in the journey to a more sustainable, climate and nature friendly way of farming.

The project started in 2021 as part of the Fork to Farm Dialogues – a global project organised by Nourish in the run up to COP26. The dialogues aimed to bring farmers together with local authority and policy officers, to provide a space to talk about agriculture and climate change.

The dialogue in SW Scotland was organised and facilitated by Abi Mordin, Agroecologist and Facilitator working for local and sustainable food systems as part of Propagate. While most dialogue sessions were held on Zoom due to COVID-19, the group also organised two socially distanced Farm Walks in August 2021.

Abi began by writing two informational flyers inviting people to join. One for farmers and one for local authorities. To reach as many farmers as possible, Abi sent flyers to regional networks who were in touch with farmers and land managers. She also used social media, for example by posting on Facebook groups dedicated to farming materials. To reach local authorities Abi invited people in relevant departments and asked them to share the invitation with others. The flyers contained a survey link to help Abi find out more about the participants and understand their interest in the project. The group grew to over 50 participants, connected by regular email contact and the monthly zoom discussions.

Abi did not know most of the people who joined the dialogues. "If I was just going to talk to people that already agreed with me, I'd feel like I was wasting my time." As an agroecological farmer herself, the range and diversity of attendees was exciting. Abi felt it was critical to move away from a "language of blame" and to understand the broader context in order to engage with different farmers:

"Today we've got these polarised views, and there are these antagonistic camps of kind of vegans versus farmers and rewilders versus farmers, and, you know, farmers feeling like everyone's just having a go at them. We're working with people who, especially in this area, are livestock farmers...most of them feel like they've been told that they're a problem. And… you know, being told you are a problem when you're referring to many, many, many generations of somebody's culture and heritage is not helpful. So, we need to be able to use language that engages these people in a positive way…It's nobody's fault…farmers are farming the way they farm in…because of policy decisions, because of subsidy provisions."
– Abi Mordin

Abi ensured there was always at least one local authority representative in each session, although it was not always the same person. The broader context in which national policy shapes agriculture in Scotland was a reason why local authorities might not have been as engaged. "Agriculture, it's national policy, but it's also a very local issue…it's a tricky one to navigate." Nevertheless, relationships were formed. One particular local authority contacted her to collaborate on developing their communications in ways that would not alienate farmers.

The Farm Walks were critical for meaningful engagement, and proved to be very popular. The first visit was to Torr Organic Dairy Farm near Auchencairn, the second to Caldwell's Veg near Girvan.

"Could we get a lot more farmers and land managers to farm like this? While it takes time to get there, I think it looks good as an option (potentially financially as well) for whatever subsidy becomes for farmers post 2024."
– Attendee at Torr Farm Walk

At both Farm Walks, Abi facilitated a visioning session. "This did put people out of their comfort zones a wee bit!" Each session asked the group to imagine it is 2045, and at COP26 in November 2021 amazing things had happened. World leaders had come together to agree to radically decarbonise the economy, and farmers had collaborated to fast track agroecology. What do our food and farming systems now look like, smell like and taste like? What people are there and what jobs are they doing?

The discussions from the visioning were captured by an artist, who used the ideas from the group to create a hand painted image. This image has since been produced as a 28 piece jigsaw, and is used at community events to start conversations on our food and farming futures.

LOOKING FORWARD

AFTER COP26 THE group took some time to reflect and thing about where it wanted to go. Everyone agreed it had been successful and wanted to continue.

A new name was born from suggestions by the group, and it's now known as the Regenerative Farmers Network SW Scotland. They agreed not to remove the local authority representatives, as it's important that this work continues to connect with local policy.

Since January, Abi has been producing a weekly email, themed around different aspects of regenerative and nature friendly farming. The email group is open to any farmer in SW Scotland to join and participate in. So far the group has grown to 110 members, with new members joining each week.

"The aim is to get conversations going, encourage people to ask questions and share ideas. People respond most to soil – this seems to get folk really excited and curious!"

There's also a new facebook group of the same name to provide an additional way for Farmers to share and connect.

A Farm Walk has already been held, in partnership with Pasture for Life Scotland. The group visited Balsar Glen near Girvan, who practice mob grazing with their herd of Herefords and Aberdeen Angus cattle. Mob grazing means moving the livestock daily to nourish soil and animal health. Attendees really valued "Seeing the local reality and hearing the experience first hand" and "Seeing different farming techniques in practice & meeting others".

"The aim is to get conversations going, encourage people to ask questions and share ideas. People respond most to soil – this seems to get folk really excited and curious!"

More Farm Walks are planned – in May the group are visiting Trostrie Farm near Twynholm to hear about innovative approaches to using sheep in a mob grazing system. And in July there is a visit arranged to a 1acre walled garden near Laurieston, Castle Douglas, which has been producing organic fruit and veg for over 40 years.

The group are also planning to carry out a collective soil monitoring and observation project, using the Soil Mentor platform. This will collect information on soil health a biodiversity, and Farmers can use it to benchmark and compare each others interventions and management.

"I'm excited for the future" Abi says. "More Farmers are coming on board now to who this is totally new – it's gaining traction and facilitators and practitioners like me can see the change. We're not alone! Great projects like Agroecology: Facilitating Mindset Change have happened across Scotland and paving the way for a healthier, equitable and food future that's ultimately better for all of us". ■

To find out more visit:

- *dgsustainablefoodpartnership.org/regenerative-farming-network*
- *Our facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/519736749859522*
- *And our email group at groups.google.com/u/1/g/regenerative-farming-swscotland*

WHY WE NEED COSMOLOGICAL LIMITS TO GROWTH

Dr Katharina Richter on the cultural direction of socio-ecological transformations. Illustrations by Deborah Mullen.

DEGROWTH IS A big tent, peopled by ecological economists, political ecologists, activists, (eco)feminists, anthropologists, artists, researchers, students, political scientists, sociologists, and many more. Participants in a social movement, degrowthers are often both researchers and activists. They provide compelling answers to the question of how to live well and equitably within social and environmental limits. To address socially and ecologically harmful productivism and overconsumption, the initial focus lay on self-limitation, expressed in concepts such as 'voluntary simplicity' or 'frugal abundance'.[1] Sustainable degrowth aims to democratically reduce consumption and production levels.[2] These notions are being pushed by post/decolonial thinkers, feminists, anti-racist activists, and environmental justice movements from the Global South, who complement this individualised, quantified approach to degrowth with a *pluriverse* of economic practices that centre care, communal resource governance, and diverse knowledges as conditions for the reproduction of life.[3]

We can see that changes to our consumption, production, and working patterns alone won't be enough to sustain a profound transformation towards a just and sustainable world. To understand the deeper shifts that are required, we need to look at cultural aspects of socio-ecological transformations. So what would it mean to put a *cosmological* limit to growth? Namely, limits that arise from our cosmology – that is, the way we see the world, knowledge, our own destiny, the role of nature, and so on.[4] To help degrowth thought and practice grapple with this question, this article brings degrowth into conversation with *Buen Vivir*, an indigenous principle and decolonial practice of 'Good Living' from Latin America. The first part looks into perceptions that see degrowth as an anthropocentric – and thereby Eurocentric – movement. The second part introduces *Buen Vivir* and explains why a dialogue between the two helps overcome degrowth's human-centred analysis. This section also sets out the importance of 'cosmological limits to growth' for cultural elements of sustainability transformations. The last part sketches out what 'cosmological limits to growth' can mean in practice. The ideas put forward in this article are based on my PhD, for which I conducted research in Ecuador. In early 2020, I interviewed 15 social leaders, community members, and politicians, and observed public meetings and municipal, nongovernmental, and indigenous assemblies.

DEGROWTH'S COLONIAL NATURE

THE POLITICAL PROJECT, social movement, and field of study that is degrowth is a broad church. In it, you'll find a broad range of knowledges and worldviews, contingent on the different disciplines' methodologies and location within the natural and social sciences, humanities, or arts. There has been early criticism, however, of a tendency within degrowth to articulate a political critique of economic growth that is based on a narrow, anthropocentric view of the environment, and pays too little attention to colonial-era, hierarchical identity systems that continue to constrain equitable resource access.[5] This may be surprising, given degrowth's core argument is that the economy is, in fact, embedded within a planetary ecosystem. The majority of early degrowth literature adopted this argument and worldview from the discipline of ecological economics, which seeks to dispel the strict nature/culture divide prevalent in our current understanding of the world, an inheritance of neoclassical economics. This divide is argued to be the underlying cause of ecological breakdown and 'market failures' such as pollution and waste (Fig.1).[6] However, the critique of growth put forward by ecological economics is based on the concept of 'ecosystems', from which, in a simplified manner, societies "receive inputs from the earth, the atmosphere, and the waters, and [to which] they give outputs".[7]

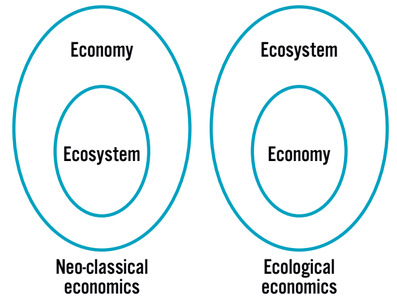

Fig. 1 Ecological Economics resituates the economy as a sub-system of ecosystems.[8]

The language of inputs and outputs, resources and materials acknowledges the embeddedness of human life within the natural environment. Yet, it also objectifies living beings, together with other abiotic elements like rocks and minerals. It detaches them from their cultural values, and the political processes that shape landscapes, societies, and histories. The nature/culture divide, for example, formed the cosmological basis of colonial plantation economies, which served as blueprints for industrial manufacturing in England and elsewhere.[9] In plantations and later in factories, slaves and sugarcane then machine parts and workers were easily interchangeable as commodities – that is, exchangeable at market rates.[10] Early capitalist developments were also accompanied by scientific advances in astronomy, mining, or metallurgy.[11] The place of humankind in the world was transformed, as were those remaining worldviews that saw nature as a living, female, nurturing being. Nature became an inanimate, controllable object.[12] This anthropocentric view sanctions resource exploitation and is arguably the cultural foundation of the economic growth paradigm.

By speaking of resources or materials, ecological economists, and some degrowthers, therefore accept and mirror the mapping of capitalist exchange values onto the intrinsic and disparate values of the living world. Degrowth scholarship influenced by ecological economics puts forward evidence for postgrowth transformations regarding work, money, or wellbeing in the form of economic models, which are based on the abstraction of 'ecosystems' into mathematical representation.[13] Though paramount for guiding policy, these models sustain a mechanistic view of nature. This is problematic – and Eurocentric – because in doing so these models risk universalising a provincial, European/North-Atlantic conceptualisation of nature – that is, nature-as-ecosystems, or even materials. This anthropocentrism in turn hampers possible alliances between degrowth and environmental justice movements from the Global South. In addition to degrowth's anthropocentrism, some of these movements have rejected degrowth as an ally because of its labour-market based perception of time, perceived to clash with indigenous and cyclical notions of time.[14]

In response, a lot of work has been done by (activist-)scholars who aren't ecological economists to show that this narrow cultural framing isn't the only way of thinking, practicing, and approaching degrowth. In relation to degrowth, analyses of social property claims to trees in Brazil, the *khat* economy in Madagascar, *Ubuntu* in Southern Africa, *Buen Vivir* in Latin America, and environmental justice movements in Chiapas demonstrate that knowledge and ways of inhabiting the world are connected to territories as biophysical and political entities that are more than either 'just' nature, or 'just' culture.[15] Thereby, they show that it is possible to challenge anthropocentric, mechanistic conceptualisations of nature and attribute agency to the living world within the parameters of degrowth. These cultural analyses have undoubtedly broadened the tent of degrowth. Indeed, they show us how to overcome tendencies to reproduce anthropocentric nature/culture binaries within degrowth. *Buen Vivir* is one such approach to cultural analyses, and in a dialogue between degrowth and *Buen Vivir* has the potential to create an ecology of knowledges.[16] Such conversation brings together different ways of knowing so ≫

that together, they may overcome their respective limitations and confront the intersecting challenges of the Anthropocene.

BUEN VIVIR AS A GRASSROOTS, DECOLONIAL PROJECT

DEGROWTH IS ONE of the most convincing and holistic responses to the Anthropocene. However, its Eurocentric focus, expressed in, amongst others, forms of human-centric knowledge production, limits its place of relevance. It thereby also challenges only parts of the civilisationary patterns that have caused the multiple crises of the Anthropocene. Latin American thinkers have argued that we aren't just living in times of ecological crisis, but in multiple crises of modernity, defined by racism, sexism, classism, anthropocentrism, etc.[17] So why would an equitable dialogue between degrowth and *Buen Vivir*, an Andean-Amazonian conceptualisation of 'Good Living', create useful frameworks for a decolonial approach to degrowth? First, the violent politics of extractivism that confront a good or in fact any life in the Andes, disclose what is at stake for people living on the extractive frontiers from which raw materials are obtained. Andean and Amazonian communities have everything to gain from degrowth in the North. Second, other ways of engaging with the natural, or living, world and with 'others' in our society show up the limitations of our own, dichotomous thinking when it comes to nature vs. culture, the insider-outsider logic of the nation state, etc. This process also requires us to recognise that scientific, peer-reviewed knowledge alone won't be able to tackle the Anthropocene's multiple crises. Third, it situates degrowth in relation to other responses to these intersecting crises. Connecting with decolonial struggles will allow us to design transformation strategies with tools and concepts that are fundamentally different than the ones that have led to these crises in the first place.

Buen Vivir is a grassroots, decolonial project of the Ecuadorian indigenous movements. *Buen Vivir*, or Good Living, is Spanish for the Kichwa terms of *sumak kawsay* or *alli kawsay*. *Sumak kawsay* is a concept that has its origins in the indigenous world. Though this is contested by some, we have textual evidence of its use as a pedagogical principle from the beginning of the 20th century.[18] It translates into 'life in excellence' or 'life in plenitude'. Today, it has become an umbrella term for a broad range of practices, imageries, and ideals of marginalised and racialised communities for working towards establishing equilibria with oneself, one's community, and nature.[19] The concept took on this broader meaning during the 1980s and 1990s, in which multiculturalism strengthened the indigenous movements. *Sumak kawsay* as a way of life configures close relations with land, within families and the spirits of ancestors, forests, water, and hills that are central to Kichwa identities, cultures, and thinking.

> *"To really change the systems destroying the world, we need to fundamentally revisit our relationship with nature, and dismantle the nature/culture divide that justifies the treatment of the Earth as a resource."*

Politically, the concept was consolidated via interaction with development organisations and left-wing intellectuals during the 1990s and early 2000s, a process that culminated in the constitutionalisation of *sumak kawsay* as *Buen Vivir*, or the right to Good Living in the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution.[20] By granting rights to nature, the constitution challenges nature's subordination to economic activity. However, this success was swiftly followed by a co-optation of the concept, which coincided with the loss of political power of the indigenous movements during the governments of Rafael Correa (2007–17). The political oppression of social, indigenous, and environmental movements took place under the guise of a discourse of *Buen Vivir* that justified extraction-led, growth-based development.[21] Nevertheless, today *sumak kawsay* continues to be a political platform for the indigenous movements of Ecuador towards territorial self-governance, equality, plurinationality, and wealth redistribution.[22]

But what does *sumak kawsay* mean in practice? The literature about this is sparse, so I went to Ecuador to find out. For the purpose of this article, I will zoom in on some of the world-making practices that I observed, in other words, patterns and behaviours that create ways of inhabiting and viewing the world in which human, natural, and spiritual wellbeing is connected. Amongst others, *sumak kawsay* can be found in the recovery of ancestral seeds, such as quinoa and amaranth, in agroecological farming practices, as well as in the rituals, traditions, and garments of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador. Some of those patterns and behaviours I observed took place while I sat talking over a fire with a community's wisewoman. We rubbed our hands with an ointment made of plants and herbs that were grown using ancestral, agroecological farming practices. This simple act reminded us of our connection with nature. Another ritual I observed was the spilling of small amounts of alcoholic drinks, such as *chicha*, the typically fermented beverage made from maize or quinoa, on the ground before the drinker had any themselves. It is an offering to *Pachamama*, or Mother Earth, and recalls her presence. An act of reciprocity, it serves to sustain caring, affectionate, and mutualistic relationships between people and nature. Though the practitioners of these rituals were from agricultural communities, there is more than a utilitarian aspect to these rituals and agroecological farming practices. In Ecuador, agroecological production is not the norm, and can be met with considerable resistance from within or outside communities. Nevertheless, for practitioners like the Sumak Mikuna ("Excellent Food") co-operative in El Tambo, located in the Southern Cañar province, the health of their children as well as topsoil fertility are dependent on the cultivation of a broad variety of high-quality organic produce.[23] Rather than neoclassical economic concerns such as profit margins, it is the underlying worldview, or cosmology, that animates these rituals, and which, vice versa, is put into practice by these rituals.

The experiences I came to know while in Ecuador made me think that the world-making practices of *sumak kawsay*, observed in various communities in Ecuador, articulate '*cosmological* limits to (development-as-) growth'. Though the communities where I've observed these practices don't struggle against the same extent of unrestrained growth and over-consumption as communities in the Global North, there is an understanding of the need to limit ecologically and socially harmful practices, such as the application of chemical fertilisers, or the construction of luxury houses by migrant returnees from the US or Spain. The practices I described above have the potential to limit socioeconomic activities before harmful social or ecological effects occur. Their respect guarantees the well-being of nature, which, in turn, produces material and spiritual wellbeing in its people.[24] In these contexts, Pachamama doesn't merely have a symbolic meaning.

Instead, she is a living presence who can act as regulatory restraint to resource extraction and/or environmental degradation. 'Cosmological limits to growth' therefore refers to limits set by worldviews – and their accompanying practices – that embed humankind within the living world, rather than considering humans as the masters of a controllable, inert nature.

The argument I make here complements recent 'limits' debates within degrowth, ecological economics, and political ecology. They critically interrogate the mainstream environmental view of 'limits' as *external* – that is, physical and absolute borders, as epitomised in the famous, albeit depoliticised, image of 'planetary boundaries'. It has been argued that, in and of itself, these limits, while having great potential to guide policy, do not contain unfettered growth. Given the lack of political progress in addressing the climate crisis, some highlight the possibility of prioritising morally constructed, *internal* limits that would restrain excess in autonomous societies.[25] Others have argued for *societal* self-limitation, where thresholds are defined collectively to contain both inequality and ecological destruction.[26] Intersectional feminist and decolonial thinkers also stress the political nature or *artificiality* of scarcity that motivates some 'limits' scholarship and which justifies uneven resource access along gender, race, and class.[27] They also draw attention to how different actors experience and understand limits and scarcity, and warn against a totalising conception of limits as ecological thresholds that erase other ways of relating to the living world – such as the practice of *sumak kawsay*. The notion of 'cosmological limits to growth' avoids the simplistic bifurcation of limits as either 'real' or 'constructed', and contains within it a possible pluriverse of worlds and knowledges without erasing one or the other. As such, 'cosmological limits to growth' are relational limits that arise out of our connection with each other and to the living world. They are normative constraints to the environmental destruction associated with economic growth. At the same time, they can create political instruments, such as Rights of Nature, that have the potential to change our view of nature as dead, inert matter, towards the environment as a living world. The conclusion will briefly elaborate on what impetus this notion can give to the cultural direction of socioecological transformations.

COSMOLOGICAL LIMITS TO GROWTH IN ACTION: ON CULTURAL (AND POLITICAL) DIRECTIONS OF SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

POLITICALLY, 'COSMOLOGICAL LIMITS to growth' can be put into practice through Rights of Nature (RoN). Environmental personhood is becoming an increasingly popular policy instrument to safeguard against environmental exploitation. In the social sciences, it can challenge the nature/culture divide prevalent in many theoretical approaches. Rights-bearers now include rivers, mountains, and national parks in India, Ecuador, Colombia, New Zealand, the US, and elsewhere. Some have criticised RoN for perpetuating categorical binaries that pit a nature that is 'out there' against society, and for problematic colonial categories of personhood.[28] RoN nevertheless open up possibilities for protecting, and even imputing onto it, ways of living that respect nature as a living being. They could transform our understanding of nature from an inert resource towards a rights-bearer with agency. As such, RoN are an interesting, *pluriverse* avenue that should be explored in degrowth policy proposals.

In terms of cultural direction, there is a wider point to make for degrowth thinkers and practitioners. Going back to my observations in Ecuador, one agroecological producer planted certain types of trees to attract certain types of birds. In general, she dotted her vegetable patches with trees throughout, so that, in her words, the birds would have to eat as well. There might be another reason too: while the birds eat the fruits, they might fertilise a vegetable or two along the way. This is, in effect, the argument that agroecologists make: integrating natural solutions improves yield in comparison to monocrop production. In that sense, the grower's relationship with nature doesn't limit growth per se, but rather, the kind of culturally and ecologically harmful growth that a monocrop culture would bring. This observation, however, illustrates how 'cosmological limits to growth' embed society into nature. They recognise that while all 'limits' are necessarily socially constructed and physically present, it is this embeddedness that constrains harmful growth. 'Cosmological limits to growth' are intrinsic to worldviews based on connectedness with nature, and also found in pre-capitalist European cosmology.[29] They are antithetical to the nature/culture divide within some degrowth scholarship, which has been criticised as anthropo- and Euro-centric.

To really change the systems destroying the world, we need to fundamentally revisit our relationship with nature, and dismantle the nature/culture divide that justifies the treatment of the Earth as a resource. We need *cosmological* limits to growth because they steer the discussion beyond socioeconomic transformations to the more active, *cultural* direction of degrowth processes. To change the way we see nature, and, eventually, act towards it, is a fundamental condition for constraining harmful growth. If we consider ourselves part of nature and practice reciprocal behaviours, then we can eventually reinscribe cosmological limits to growth. However, changing the way we *think* and *feel* ("*sentipensar*") requires a cultural transformation of a magnitude that has not yet been acknowledged by degrowth scholarship. ■

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SEALS'KIN AND THE SPACE BETWEEN

Dougie Strang interviews Hanna Tuulikki about her new project Seals'kin, and much more.

HANNA TUULIKKI SINGS "Neither one thing nor another thing," over and over, providing the vocals for a song on the album *Wayward the Fourth* by Daniel Padden's The One Ensemble, released back in 2007. The refrain might serve as a useful epigraph for the body of work that Tuulikki has created since then, work that often explores the space between the human and the non-human – or more-than-human; and just as importantly, explores the possibility of communicating across that space. In a short sound-piece from 2016, she calls out to a raven in a forest in Finland, mimicking the craak craak of the raven's voice and delighting in its reply.

Tuulikki is a singer, composer, performance-maker, and visual artist. She studied at Glasgow School of Art, graduating in 2006, and has mostly been based in the city ever since. Her work is ambitious, innovative, and lauded. It includes *Air falbh leis na h-Eòin / Away with the Birds*[1], a multi-disciplinary project investigating mimesis in traditional Gaelic song, which culminated in a live performance in a harbour on the Isle of Canna in 2014; *Cloud-cuckoo-island*[2], a film-performance created on the Isle of Eigg in 2016 that explores trauma, gender and ecology; and *Deer Dancer*[3], another cross-artform project which looks at representations of deer behaviour and hunting mythologies across different cultures, and which has generated a film and exhibition, premiered at Edinburgh Printmakers in 2019, and a live performance at Glasgow's Tramway in 2021.

Tuulikki's latest project, *Seals'kin*, plays again with the notion of entanglement between the human and the more-than-human. A film of the project was commissioned by the Sydney Biennale, and was created by Tuulikki and her team when they spent a couple of weeks filming in January on the Aberdeenshire coast, at the point where the River Ythan meets the sea, and where colonies of grey and common seals haul themselves out onto the shore.

There are countless folktales, myths, and songs about seal-people, or 'selkies' as they are widely known. Two lines in an Orkney ballad, The Great Selkie of Sule Skerry, neatly summaries their condition: 'I am a man upon the land / I am a selkie upon the sea.' Tales of these shape-shifting creatures, both male and female, continue to resonate in our cultural consciousness, featuring in contemporary films and novels. The poet, Robin Robertson, provides a powerful and dark re-telling of the myth in the poem 'At Roane Head' from his 2010 collection *The Wrecking Light*.

In *Seals'kin*, Hanna Tuulikki enacts the transformation that lies at the heart of all selkie tales. At the start of the film, we see her in traditional fisherman's gansey and sou'wester hat, standing on the shore at the river's mouth and singing to the seals who congregate on the opposite strand; but by the end of the film, she has shifted form and has entered the sea, swimming out and under to meet the seals. The film is mesmerising: gently-paced, beautifully shot, and with a vocal score for human voice that responds to, and at times merges with, the seals' own singing.

I was keen to speak to Tuulikki about her new project and about the wider question of making art in a time of ecological crisis.

Dougie Strang: The idea of being 'betwixt and between' seems to be an enduring aspect of your work.

Hanna Tuulikki: Yes, I'm really interested in meeting points, those spaces in-between, and I'm fascinated by the idea of mimesis – the imitation or embodiment of the more-than-human, whether through vocal improvisation or choreographic movement. Mimesis as a way of thinking or feeling towards, of occupying, those hybrid spaces.

DS: What's the attraction? Is it simply a desire to communicate, or is it to foster empathy?

HT: It's so many things. Partly the reason for exploring this space with the body is the inability of language to actually reach those places; so it's difficult to pinpoint the specifics, but I think empathy is a large part of it, and a feeling of 'becoming with', of kinship, of searching for ways to co-exisit with that which is so often considered the 'other'.

DS: We have a long tradition, going back into pre-history, of making art that seeks to communicate with, to 'become with' as you would say, the more-than-human. I'm thinking for example of the paintings in the caves at Chauvet in France. In the past, much of that art, whether paintings, music, or dance, would be part of a wider practice – what we might call Animism or Shamanism – with the specific purpose of mediating between humans and animals, primarily to ensure a successful hunt. But here we are, immersed in the modernity of the 21st century, yet it seems to me that your work is endowed with something of that shamanic tradition, and I wonder if that's a conscious decision, and if so, to what purpose?

HT: I'm really interested in this inheritance, and in exploring these practices in vernacular cultures across time and space. To go back to the word 'mimesis', its etymology is Ancient Greek, from Plato, who discussed mimesis in terms of the performing arts: the idea that to impersonate the qualities of a character is to make yourself vulnerable to absorbing some of those qualities. But that idea has existed outside of Western culture for aeons, and I'm interested in how we can learn from these practices in order to challenge binary Western thinking and its promotion of human/nature separation. How can we refashion that as a myriad of bodily connections? And in terms of ritual, I've been studying different vernacular traditions of mimesis, and seeing the disconnect between what's encoded in these traditions and the reality of ecological and climate breakdown. So what do such traditions mean now, and how can we work with them as part of 'the carrying stream' to create new rituals that help to make sense of the shit-storm we are living in?

DS: How did Seals'kin come about?

HT: It's one of those projects that has been hovering in my consciousness for a while, and then a few things aligned. I had the Sydney commission and I knew I wanted to work with selkie mythology, and explore what it might mean to 'become with' seal. Over the years, I've spent a lot of time watching and listening to seals, and I'm fascinated by their voices: this space between crying and singing, it's an incredible sound.

BOTH GREY AND common seals are interested in music, and I've spent a lot of time singing to them. They come up the Clyde you know, right into the city. During the Glasgow COP26, Judith Williams and I invited people to learn some seal-calling songs and then we led an improvised lamentation down by the river. I told everyone that it was unlikely we'd see seals, but we went down anyway, at high tide, and literally within twenty minutes of singing, a grey seal popped up its head in the water. It was extraordinary, one of those magical moments where it felt like these songs have something special embodied within them, and that we were tapping into that.

I was learning the songs and singing with seals, and researching selkie stories, and I found that so often the songs and tales are about loss and longing – they're bereavement allegories. Duncan Williamson, the traditional storyteller, writes about how the communities that he was learning these stories from found solace in them. If someone was lost at sea, it was a comfort to think that actually they'd gone to the kingdom of the seal-people.

There are also malevolent stories where selkies cause havoc with seal-hunters, or by stealing fishermen's fish, and they seem to be more like cautionary tales, warning us humans about the necessity of co-existence.

I began to wonder what these tales can teach us about how to live now, at a time of climate grief – there's so many different words for it: that sense of despair at what's happening. Then, last year, my best friend was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and she passed away very suddenly, and I was thrown into an extremely visceral state of grief. So the film is like a mourning ritual, as well as a mediation on loss and longing and co-existence.

DS: I'm so sorry to hear about your friend. I wonder, is the pandemic part of it too, the collective grief at the huge disruption to society and community? Or perhaps that's a bit facile to throw into the mix?

HT: No, it was in my consciousness, of course. It's been such a traumatic time for so many of us, and continues to be, we've just normalised it… we've normalised this pandemic, which I suppose is a useful teacher for how our base-line changes. Think about how we've normalised biodiversity loss, species extinction, rises in temperature, though that's all been happening more slowly, so we don't see it as clearly.

DS: In the film, that moment when you enter the water in your seal skin costume, how did that feel, knowing that there were seals swimming not far from you, that you were entering their element?

HT: Well, it was January, so it was freezing! But there was also a moment in the water that was like an invitation: seals were popping up all over the place, and I experienced a sense of shared curiosity. That also happened with the sonics: the sound of their calls throughout the filming was like an invitation for me to become more present in my body, as though I was un-numbing myself.

Grief is such a funny thing, you don't know what's going to happen the next day or the day after, and I became acutely aware of entering this liminal space, one where you're simultaneously numb to certain things, but also incredibly sensitive to others; and there was something about that, that I was exploring in relation to skin and to bodies, and to the selkie transformation. The seal skin for me was about agency, and while making the film I had a strong sense of personal transformation. It's equivocal of course, we can read into it what we want, but for me that ritual of immersion, of swimming, was about un-numbing and giving myself permission to transform; and the skin is like the site of that transformation: there's the selkie skin, but there's also my human skin, feeling through the water; this shared visceral feeling between myself and the seals.

At the end of filming, I was swimming in the water and we were running out of daylight, but at that moment there were seals everywhere, some just a meter away, and it was such a magical experience.

DS: Did you have any fear with that? Seals can be fierce!

HT: There was some concern amongst the film crew because there had been recent, local reports of dogs entering the water and being attacked by seals. But it's funny, I didn't have fear, even though I didn't, initially, realise how present the seals would be. I think as long as there's respect, as fellow-beings, there's a kind of energy. Maybe that's a romantic perspective, but it's how it felt to me.

DS: I'm curious to know if you were able to be fully present during the experience whilst, at the same time, playing a role as a performer who is making a film. I wonder if there were moments where it felt like you really slipped those boundaries?

HT: Because I was filming over a number of days, it became like a durational practice or performance, like attending a ritual space where you're just doing your thing, but filming it. So when all the seals were popping up it was a genuine connection – they were responding to the singing – and the moments in the film where you pick that up, those are the moments when I'm feeling it too. When you have an encounter with a seal, when you look into each other's eyes, that curiosity, that's a very ancient connection. It's difficult to talk about, but it's very real.

For more information on Seals'kin, and on Hanna Tuulikki's catalogue of performances and artwork, go to her website[4], where you can also subscribe to her studio newsletter and receive advance details of upcoming performances, film showings, and collaborations. Hanna wishes to acknowledge and thank those who worked with her on the *Seals'kin* project: Nic Green, Judith Williams, Peter McMaster, Minttumaari Mäntynen, Lindsay Brown, Pete Smith, Lydia Honeybone, Shireen Taylor, Liz Honeybone, and Glasgow Artists' Moving Image Studios.

In September, Hanna will be making a new work, *Echo in the Dark*, creating dance music from bat eco-location calls. She tells me it'll be performed as part of a rave she's hosting at Hospitalfield in Arbroath! Watch this space… ■

Notes

1 *hannatuulikki.org/portfolio/awbirds/*
2 *hannatuulikki.org/portfolio/cloud-cuckoo-island/*
3 *hannatuulikki.org/portfolio/deer-dancer-live-2021/*
4 *hannatuulikki.org/*

BIOSPHERISM

A 'real growth' philosophy in five letters: C-LIFE, by R. Eric Swanepoel. Illustration by Natalie Taylor.

IN *THE GLOBALISATION of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit*, addictions expert Bruce K. Alexander (2010) underlines the need for a "galvanising alternative philosophy [...] together with images, ceremonies, music and metaphysics that can give it life in human hearts and minds"[1], an alternative to what he identifies as hypercapitalism.[2]

As a project, it's important that we all take explicit collective ownership of such an alternative philosophy and its dissemination, sooner rather than later, given global crises! A philosophy reflecting regenerative *Biospheric* concerns, that will never be 'complete' but a constantly evolving, creative undertaking, not a static rulebook.

There are many ways to introduce concepts of Biospherism, and multiple approaches would ideally be developed – especially diagrammatic and artistic ones. What I present is just a taster, and have chosen simply to pin some illustrative elements to the mnemonic letters: C-LIFE.

C: Circular Economy, the Commons, Community, Co-operation, Collaboration, Competition

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

A circular economy is, to a large extent, what the biosphere embodied before the arrival of recent technologies, especially plastics. An important exception is what we call 'fossil fuels' (an anthropocentric and utilitarian term), essentially carbon that has been sequestered and removed from nature's 'circular economy', and which we should not be bringing back. Rather, we should evaluate every project/activity with regard to the extent it accords with or violates the principles of a circular economy – taking a lead from the biosphere with regard to fossil fuels not being part of this!

THE COMMONS

The concept of the commons – including the resources a community has collective access to – is a large and important topic at the heart of many local and global issues – just consider the 'clearances' and 'enclosures'. On the whole, the commons were managed extremely well by Indigenous peoples[3], for example the subtle Scottish Gaelic concept of land stewardship known as *dùthchas*.[4] This was an intrinsic component of the agrobiodiverse, sustainable, and productive agriculture practised in the Highlands, which included a large commons element and saw far greater production of arable crops than currently thought possible.[5]

If one sees the biosphere as a complex meta-creature ('Gaia', if you will), then the expropriation of elements of the local and global commons (land, air, water, forests...) for short-term private profit is recognised to be an horrifically dangerous violation of the biosphere, of which we must all realise we are a part, as Indigenous cultures generally do.

COMMUNITY, CO-OPERATION, COLLABORATION

Alexander[6] argues that there is no such thing as an overwhelmingly addictive substance or behaviour; instead, there is "psychosocial dislocation", predisposing us to harmful addictions. It is related to a lack of community and sense of meaning/purpose, such that Alexander underlines the importance of "finding a secure place in a real community" for human wellbeing.

An inherent part of Biospherism is acknowledging our species' evolutionary history. We remain essentially hunter-gatherers in our physiology and psychosocial needs, hard-wired for living in small communities, co-operating and collaborating with other members. A sense of belonging to such communities is essential for our wellbeing. However, we are not unmindful slaves to instincts, and can also recognise that in a world in which our species' impact on the rest of the biosphere is considerable, identification merely with one small community can lead to devastating conflict/competition with others. Biospherism therefore supports individuals' identification with more than one community. Ideally, this would be realised in childhood, with periods of immersion in at least one community different from one's own (e.g. through exchange schemes). If we are to collaborate on tackling global problems successfully, we must foster empathy with others, and not see them as 'other'.

Co-operatives and employee-owned businesses are inherently more egalitarian (have flatter hierarchies) than non-employee-owned concerns, and foster attitudes of trust and caring that have positive ramifications beyond the workplace. They tend to bring out the best in the people who work within them, and therefore, in many circumstances, can be more adaptive and resilient than other businesses.[7]

As we are increasingly learning, nature is as much about co-operation, including intra- or extra-specific co-operation. A truly wonderful example is the wood-wide web or mycorrhizal network[8], a metaphor/blueprint for how we might organise a decentralised, egalitarian, and co-operative world.

COMPETITION

Biospherism takes a more nuanced view of competition than the oxymoron of 'free-market competition' (dominated as it is by the biggest proponents) and acknowledges that, properly framed and managed (see the topic of framing below), in some contexts it can be constructive, playing a part in some Indigenous cultures.

A caveat: It is not about competing for the ownership of any component of the biosphere, which is inimical to it.

L: Land, Language, Littleness, Localism, Long-Termism

LAND

The right of access to land as a sense of place, to deeply bond and identify with, live on and grow food on, is central to Biospherism. This is another area where we can learn from Indigenous cultures, which generally believe that they belong to the land – not the reverse – and have a duty of stewardship within it. However ambitious abolishing land ownership is, it should be an aspiration.

The malign effects strongly related to high land and property prices are many. For example, if people's budgets are drained by paying for a roof over their heads, it variously puts pressure on the cost of food, including on the livelihoods of small, sustainable food-producers.

This is against the backdrop of agro-industrial producers not having to pay the costs of the damage they do to the biosphere ('externalities'); the manoeuvrings of supermarket chains (driving bulk production and commodification, squeezing suppliers, and dodging tax); the machinations of the producers/developers of fertilisers, pesticides, and GM crops[9]; and the ruthless land-grabbing undertaken by the agro-industrial sector in general, sometimes backed by 'development aid' (i.e. our tax payments).[10]

LANGUAGE

Growing up bi- or multi-lingual confers many advantages, and complements growing up embedded in more than one community (as outlined above). Different languages and cultures have different ways of viewing/expressing the world – unique frames, values, and embodied knowledge and wisdom. Again, the Gaelic concept of *dùthchas* is a local example.

LITTLENESS

"Small is beautiful".[11] Biospherism acclaims compositions that own and consume little, and rebuffs those that own, consume, and waste much. We need to break the power of large, hierarchical organisations, and favour smaller, more egalitarian and employee-owned ones, as but one aspect of larger transition. A recent *Food for Life Scotland and Sustainable Food Places* webinar on public procurement detailed the progress being made to support small food producers in Scotland.[12]

LOCALISM

LOCALISM MEANS FAVOURING local producers and shorter supply chains, as responsive to context. It means local, seasonal produce, and 20-minute neighbourhoods where most people's daily needs are met within a short walk or cycle.[13]

LONG-TERMISM

Capitalism (esp. the financial sector) generally seeks the highest possible short-term returns at the expense of the biosphere (future life). Whereas Biospherism considers the long-term impacts of every project/activity on the wellbeing of the biosphere (and humans as part of it).

I: Identity, Indigeneity, Interdependence (Independence, Individualism), Internationalism

IDENTITY

Apart from their roles within their immediate families, Biospherists identify principally as responsible global citizens and as belonging to the biosphere, of which they see themselves as co-custodians. After that, they identify as members of at least two place-based human communities, and may well identify with any number of other physically- or virtually-located communities.

INDIGENEITY

For the purposes of Biospherism, this is the notion of a culture with a longstanding connection to a particular piece of land, and knowledge of it ≫

– something that may, to a large extent, have been lost in the Global North. This topic can be divided into 'extant indigeneity' and 'rediscovering one's indigeneity'.

Extant Indigenous peoples are, commonly, skilled stewards of nature and at the forefront of protecting the biosphere against the depredations of big business. Indigeneity-related concepts that Biospherism embraces include highly practical things (such as Aboriginal Australians' burning practices, which prevent devastating res and foster biodiversity, and many African cultures' climate-resilient, nutritious, and low-input crop varieties and farming practices), but also overarching and less tangible (though no less important) worldviews/cosmologies/metaphysics that are, principally, highly conducive to maintaining an ideal biosphere.[14]

'Rediscovering one's indigeneity' can be subdivided into recognition of heritage/ancestral roots and through the reinvention of indigeneity. These are not mutually exclusive. The former can inform the latter, and both contribute to building empathy for extant Indigenous peoples, as well as building connections between people, centred on connections to land and nature, i.e. the community which Alexander[15] says is crucial for our wellbeing.

Perhaps the need is not for a uniform, international set of cultural dispositions but a plethora of more local, Indigenous ones? After all, it seems that the fundamental values of Indigenous cultures (at least as far as their relationships with the natural world is concerned) are overwhelmingly Biospherist ones.

INTERDEPENDENCE (INDEPENDENCE, INDIVIDUALISM)

'Independence' on an individual level is a fetish of our atomised neoliberal capitalist society. When espoused by the wealthy and powerful, this is typically hypocrisy. As Ha-Joon Chang[16] and many others have shown, such predominance was gained through state support or inherited wealth, whether they acknowledge it or not, and they continue to benefit from the services of the state and/or manipulate legislation to solidify their positions. Making people feel they should be inherently independent fosters inadequacy and exploitable guilt – just consider status competition/competitive consumption, comfort eating, and addictions in general.

Rather, we need a sense of agency, but this should not be confused with independence in the sense that capitalism pushes it. Like trees connected through a mycorrhizal network, we need to embrace our interdependence. Agency (power) comes through working together.

What of individualism, then? There is plenty of room for diversity in Biospherism. Indeed, societies thrive on it, provided only that individuality does not infringe on egalitarianism and equality. One motivation for Biospherism's stance that young people grow up familiar with at least two cultures, is that they might also grow up comfortable with cultural and individual diversity.

F: Food, Food Sovereignty, Framing (and values), Fungi

FOOD AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food systems and the ways we engage with food relate to so many aspects of Biospherism, with re-forming the agro-industrial food system being a main endeavour.[17] Earth in Common's[18] 'Restorative Climate Justice' concept embraces food sovereignty, the six pillars of which are that it: focuses on food for people (food is not simply another commodity to be traded or speculated on for profit), values food providers, localises food systems, rejects corporate control, builds knowledge and skills, and works with nature. The role of Indigenous women in sustainable food production is salient, not least in saving seeds, a practice which agro-industry is doing its best to eradicate, along with many precious crop varieties.[19]

FRAMING (AND VALUES)

Values and frames constitute a crucially important topic, and one on which, unfortunately, the 'degrowth' movement fails abjectly, including LESS, by virtue of the very words 'degrowth' and 'less'!

We should not be (implicitly) accepting the metrics of neoliberal capitalism, which boil down to GDP and correlates with the destruction of the biosphere and loss of biodiversity. There are many more appropriate criteria, corresponding to things that contribute to the wellbeing of people and the rest of the biosphere.[20] We should be campaigning for 'real growth' (in such things), *not* 'degrowth' (in GDP terms). Biospherism argues for a better world, where people have *more* of what matters: more time with their friends and family, healthier and more sustainable food, better green spaces, cleaner air and water, and more security in general (which means tackling the climate meltdown and the loss of biodiversity).

This relates to the concept of *intrinsic* values (associated with equality or social justice) versus extrinsic values (associated with viewing nature or the environment as financial assets).[21] Ironically, some wildlife charities are at the vanguard of rolling out the natural capital/ecosystems services agenda, forcing nature into the framing and extrinsic values of capitalist exploitation, and are also accused of violating the rights of Indigenous peoples.[22] Supposedly ethical banks are now going down this route too: effectively privatising the global commons.[23]

FUNGI

Fungi play a key role in nature's circular economy – mycorrhizae, of course, with lichens being a stellar example of co-operation. Fungi would feature prominently in Biospherian-focused education, offering promise in providing food, leather substitutes, and in treating a panoply of disorders,

"Biospherism argues for a better world, where people have more of what matters: more time with their friends and family, healthier and more sustainable food, better green spaces, cleaner air and water, and more security in general (which means tackling the climate meltdown and the loss of biodiversity)."

including severe depression. They have also played an important part in Indigenous cultures – such as psilocybin-containing fungi.[24]

E: Earth, Economy and Ecology, Education, Egalitarianism and Equality, Environment

EARTH

More than recognising that we all share planet earth, Biospherism is also about the vital role of healthy soil in the biosphere, and in food production. This links to knowing how to maintain a flourishing soil biota (mycorrhizae, again!), and about the value of agroforestry[25] and of Indigenous practices.[26]

ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY

These words share the same Greek root. It is tragic that the former has come to dominate the latter. Biospherism asserts the primacy of ecology (nature/the biosphere) and holds that far-reaching changes be made to the economy and financial services industry[27] – not least due to the extremes of extraction flowing from the Global South to the Global North and the imposed endebtment that is a function of this pathological system.[28]

EDUCATION

One addition to recent Less articles advancing educational practice focussed on reimagining a better future[29] is contained in the term 'Nature-Deficit Disorder'[30]; a way to talk about the human costs of alienation from nature and which emphasises the importance of outdoor education in a Biospherist society. Children benefit from growing up in meaningful contact with the earth (soil) and nature, with active knowledge of many species of fauna and flora.[31]

EGALITARIANISM AND EQUALITY

For hunter-gather societies, their most fundamental social unit is that of the 'band' of around 100-200 individuals, within which people interact sufficiently to have strong bonds based on personal knowledge.[32] These hunter-gatherer groups are characterised by equality, in various senses of the word. Suzman[33] writes:

"When in 1964 a young Canadian anthropologist, Richard Borshay Lee, conducted a series of simple economic input/output analyses of the Ju/'hoansi ['Bushmen'] as they went about their daily lives, he revealed that not only did they make a good living from hunting and gathering, but that they were also well-nourished and content. Most remarkably, his research revealed that the Ju/'hoansi managed this on the basis of little more than 15 hours' work per week. On the strength of this finding, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* (1972) renamed hunter-gatherers 'the original affluent society'.

This research also revealed that the Ju/'hoansi were able to make a good living from a sparse environment because they cared little for private property and, above all, were 'fiercely egalitarian', as Lee put it. It showed that the Ju/'hoansi had no formalized leadership institutions, no formal hierarchies; men and women enjoyed equal decision-making powers; children played largely noncompetitive games in mixed age groups; and the elderly, while treated with great affection, were not afforded any special status or privileges. This research also demonstrated how the Ju/'hoansi's 'fierce egalitarianism' underwrote their affluence. For it was their egalitarianism that ensured

that no one bothered accumulating wealth and simultaneously enabled limited resources to flow organically through communities, helping to ensure that even in times of episodic scarcity everyone got more or less enough."

Suzman strikes many other Biospherism-relevant observations concerning the unequal and hierarchical societies many of us live in today[34], that are arguably not 'natural' and certainly aren't good for us.[35] It does not have to be this way, as Erdal[36] has pointed out.

A final point on equality: climate change widens global inequality.[37]

ENVIRONMENT

This deceptively innocent word connotes the natural world as something external and therefore frames it as something separate, which can be used and traded at our whim, the existence of which is justified only by its ability to provide us with 'natural capital' or 'ecosystem services'. We are not 'environmentalists'. We are Biospherists. We belong to the natural world. It is not external to us. It has its own intrinsic value.

...And Surprise Extra Letters B and M (because the biosphere doesn't fit perfectly into any simplistic human construct!): Biodiversity and Magari

BIODIVERSITY

Maintaining/restoring biodiversity is central to Biospherism. The concept of biodiversity should be widely understood, not least because ignorance of the complexities of ecology and biodiversity – of how the biosphere works – leads to such horrors as the

"We should not be (implicitly) accepting the metrics of neoliberal capitalism, which boil down to GDP and correlates with the destruction of the biosphere and loss of biodiversity."

'natural capital' approach; of offsetting, of trading off one piece of nature against another, and of wholesale destruction of elements not deemed valuable.[38]

MAGARI

Magari, Italian for 'maybe', is a concept I propose for inclusion in Biospherism. It also has something in common with the potentialities of the French concept of *laïcisme*, for a decolonised secularism, and could be considered to be the opposite of both religious and scientific dogmatism. An element of it is an open-minded 'allowing' of various personal ways of viewing things, with the provisos that they cause no harm to others, that they may not be 'proper' in formal contexts, and that they not be taught as fact.

Magari allows space for private beliefs, allegorical myths, and the placebo effect, and worldviews/cosmologies which may differ from one's own. It can be used to denote forbearance with regard to criticising what one might perceive as someone's personal private beliefs (i.e. courtesy), or to denote those beliefs themselves.

EARTH IN COMMON: AN ORGANISATION ALIGNED WITH BIOSPHERISM?

Earth in Common[39], centred on Leith Community Croft in a densely populated part of Edinburgh and with an emphasis on *dùthchas* and agrobiodiversity-enhancing food-growing[40], has offered many ways for people to connect with nature and each other through an integrated suite of educational and experiential projects, including the popular, puntastic 'Minecroft' adventure-play/survival-skills/campfire-storytelling programme for youngsters. Triggered by its involvement in a development project in Malawi, it has also elaborated a policy/campaign which encapsulates the Biospherist attitude to Indigenous peoples: 'Restorative Climate Justice'.[41]

Earth in Common is working for urban crofts to be rolled out across Scotland. Like similar organisations, however, it is struggling for funding in an, as yet, largely non-Biospherian world – despite the fact that Greenspace Scotland's[42] sterling Social-Return-on-Investment work should make supporting such projects commonplace! Its current building project, to transform a derelict old pavilion into a multifunctional community hub, has been hit by the pandemic and Brexit, with delays and cost escalations.

To conclude: how much do we need a mycorrhizae-inspired network across Scotland and beyond, for Biospherian organisations and individuals to support each other, and save the biosphere! ■

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THE FUTURE OF DEGROWTH, AND RADICAL INDEPENDENCE

Growing our economy is destroying our society. Now an alternative can be found in a groundbreaking new book. Here Steve Rushton explores its key messages and how it relates to the case for radical independence.

A NEW SCOTLAND NEEDS to live within the limits of the world, flourishing within the nature it depends on. Its people's well-being should be cared for, with common access to resources – free from degrading, unnecessary and harmful work; not alienated in the ways they relate to each other or nature.

A new Scotland should not depend on, nor drive, capitalist accumulation or exploitation. Care should be respected, breaking down exploitation due to gender or anything else. This society's future should be determined by the people, not the forces of industrialism. Last but not least, Scotland needs to rectify and re-imagine its relations with the countries of the Global South, blazing a trail towards a post-colonial future.

With a new independence referendum nvearing on the horizon, now is a good time to imagine what could be next. The above seven threads are synthesised from Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter, and Aaron Vansintjan's new book *The Future is Degrowth: A Guide to a World Beyond Capitalism*.[1] This is not a book about independence or Scotland. Instead it offers razor sharp analysis of why everywhere needs degrowth, drawing the threads of the idea and offering multiple interweaving strategies on how to realise a future beyond a destructive growth-driven economy. This is a book laid on solid academic foundations while written fluidly and accessibly.

The book also offers political analysis useful towards realising radical independence. Degrowth too makes us ask questions of what we can and should do to realise a just and sustainable future, which is why I am bringing together these two visions in this article.

DEGROW OR DECLINE AND DIE

THE TOTAL WEIGHT of every man-made thing (buildings, roads, infrastructure, etc.) doubled every 20 years since the 20th Century began, and recently outweighed all biomass (every plant, animal, living organism: all of it).[2] This staggering statistic shows how we cannot have infinite growth on a finite planet. The book, critiquing growth, is full of more terrifying facts. For instance, humans waste 49% of food, 31% of energy, and 85% of ores.[3] All this has led to the climate crisis, mass extinctions of species, and humans extracting more than the planet can handle.

But this is just one element of growth, which the book guides the reader through. Growth is also a mental framework, an ideology that has been with us a short time in human history. Yet it falsely promises a lot to people from opposite political perspectives; something good: think the 20th Century nemeses of Soviet intensive industrialisation and US assembly line Neo-Taylorism. Whilst growth is also a social process, including how corporations are embedded playing a structural role to keep things growing, under the auspices that growth means prosperity.

Its explanation of how growth became an all-powerful canon is just one reason this book is a must-read. The book not only charts seven main critiques of growth – ecological (mentioned above), socio-economic, cultural, anti-capitalist, feminist, anti-industrial control, and a North-South critique – but it showcases the pitfalls of only focusing on one strand. For instance, a degrowth argument based solely in ecological grounds does not address structural inequalities. After mapping these diverse strands, the book draws the intersections into one overarching framework.

Degrowth, like radical independence, is both a demand to change everything and a space for these new ideas to intersect and combine.

Myth-busting is another way by which the book defines degrowth: setting out what degrowth is not. For instance, recession within a growth-based economy is not degrowth. The potential and likely global collapse of the growth-based economy in the not-distant future, due to climate meltdown or the other escalating crises, is not degrowth either. Instead, the authors articulate degrowth about "enabling global ecological justice".[4] This is a world where the richest use far less and we all share effectively – say, public transport over cars, ending waste, removing the profit motive from decision making so as to enable social justice and self-determination.

In short, a degrowth future is a complete transformation, a rupture from the past – one I am comparing with Scotland rupturing from the United Kingdom. So the next big question the book explores is how such a transformation is possible.

REALISING UTOPIAS

WHEN HUNDREDS OF people gathered in Kenmure Street, Pollockshields, in May 2021, they took direct action ending an immigration raid and resisting police intervention. They drew a line across their community against Westminster's 'Hostile Environment'.[5]

This action resonates with themes the authors draw out of degrowth. It is also an example of how bottom-up counter hegemonic power is necessary for making transformative change; one of three pillars the writers assert are needed to realise a degrowth future.

The book name-checks Ende Gelände, the anti-lignite coal movement in Germany, as one of the first explicitly degrowth-inspired environmental movements[6] – one where many participants are taking direct actions against coal mines, and which also builds on other actions worldwide that demand fossil fuels are kept it in the ground.

Much connects Kenmure Street and Ende Gelände, seen through the perspectives from the book. Both are strategic actions that make an immediate impact. Both also have a ripple effect in the longer term, delegitimising the social licence to continue those policies, and both are substantiated by further resistance.

On another level, the book makes it clear that taking action against hostile and racist border policies fits into the degrowth agenda, as we need to shift into a world where the many are not oppressed by the few (persecuted for reasons including economic growth). Global ecological justice means everyone deserves both the right to remain and the right to leave.

The authors are clear: we have the practical means to shift to a liveable planet and for everyone to have a good life. What is lacking is the political will of those with the power and wealth. They write that transformative change requires counter-hegemonic power (like Ende Gelände) in combination with two other pathways: "Nowtopias" and "non-reformist reforms".

A Nowtopia is somewhere that shows there are alternatives – whether this is a small example, a mutual aid tool library, or an example on a grander scale, such as Rojava, the democratic autonomous region in the predominantly Kurdish area of Syria.[7]

Non-reformist reforms, on the other hand, are policies that push us away from a world where capital is king. For instance, universal basic income (UBI) is considered as one gateway policy, where people can devote their time to themselves, their loved ones and their community, so they do not need to work in alienating work for corporations. But UBI is just one policy mentioned in the book, not a silver bullet, just like non-reformist reforms themselves that needs to weave with counter-power and Nowtopias.

When it comes to realising an independent Scotland (even a degrowth Scotland), it is interesting to think of how there are both non-reformist reforms and Nowtopias – and how these substantiate each other.

As a devolved nation, Scotland has already implemented what could be considered non-reformist reforms, whilst diverging from some of Westminster's most authoritarian and austeritarian policies. Could more be done? Yes. Scotland using its devolved powers is an important aspect of the independence process, as it builds political power and people's belief in this power.

Likewise, Scotland has many Nowtopias, places where people can imagine how we can live beyond the status-quo. I will highlight two, both that are relevant to degrowth and independence.

Community power is genuinely regenerating islands around Scotland's periphery, particularly in islands where locals have bought out absent landlords. This story starts in 2004, with Gigha the first "first community-owned grid-connected windfarm in Scotland".[8] Then there is the small island of Eigg, that has created a micro-grid powered by wind, water, and sun – making the island practically energy self-sufficient.[9] Or North Uist that's generating money to go back into the community[10], or Tiree[11], and so on.

One take-home from these islands is that big companies do not need to generate dirty power for massive profits. Instead, people and locally self-managed power meet their own needs. And whilst these islands are a drop in the ocean of what power is used nationally, they are Nowtopias showing how people can build autonomy and have self-determination, which in a philosophical sense sits well with the case for independence too.

Another Nowtopia example in Scotland is a work in progress. For the last few years a movement of social movements are co-creating a People's Plan for Glasgow (led by SANE[12]). The People's Plan notion is that instead of leaving politics to politicians, people can run their cities in everyone's interests, taking inspiration from municipalist struggles, where in places such as Grenoble[13], Barcelona[14], Zagreb[15], and elsewhere people are collectively running their cities on democratic means. Again, a Nowtopian idea that shatters the status-quo and shows how power can be decentralised.

Amongst both community renewables and radical municipalism, participants have different relations to the independence question. Yet these and other Nowtopias can be used in the case for independence (and degrowth), because they do what the writers suggest Nowtopias can do. Namely, they inspire a militant optimism and break the 'there is no alternative' (or that alternatives never work) narrative, whilst also creating a hub and a space to experiment with new ideas and ways of doing things.

Overall, the point the book is making is that degrowth and a massive transformation needs a diversity of tactics. Diversity is no weakness. For instance, people can go into a Nowtopia space and be inspired to collectively imagine non-reformist reforms. Or non-reformist reforms can support Nowtopias – e.g. laws that support community projects or co-operatives. And counter-hegemonic social movements are lush ground for people to think of the other two strategies.

So does the book sit neatly with radical independence? Not exactly.

REALITY CHECK

The Future is Degrowth has a lot to offer anyone interested in creating a liveable future, not least through radical independence. Yet it also suggests that degrowth is unlikely to be realised in one nation, as it would be attacked by interests of capital, even military violence.

This perspective cannot be brushed aside. Think of the many South American countries that have tried to break with the status quo, or Rojava that has been assisted not because it is a multiethnic democratic society, but only protected to the extent its interest align with the different proxy forces fighting in the region. But whilst an attack by the establishment (international, corporate, as well as British) is inevitable if Scotland moves towards radical independence, it is not insurmountable.

Arguably, there is space for cross-fertilisation between the broad global degrowth movement and the radical independence movement. Some of the pathways the authors suggest towards degrowth are well-trodden on the journey towards independence. Like degrowth, independence is an umbrella term that people can coalesce under, including to create ecological social justice. Independence puts questions onto the agenda that otherwise would not be so widely asked: What should we do next? Can we get rid of the monarchy or nuclear weapons? It also creates the chance to imagine a new framework, and a schism from patriarchy, classism, racism, and other structural oppressions Britain is built on.

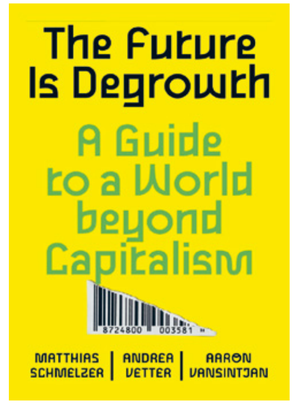
Drawing conclusions from the book's prescriptions can substantiate the idea of winning independence as a process, rather than solely focusing on winning a vote on one day. It is about showing another world is possible in the here and now, looking at Nowtopias and how these fit pre figuratively into a future independent Scotland. It is about building counter-hegemonic power to resist capital flight, or resisting Westminster using all its power to sabotage the independence process. All the while pushing forward with non-reformist reforms. In places, these strategies are already underway.

But to rupture from Britain, it is worth thinking of the strongest examples across the world: of Nowtopias, of building counter-hegemonic power, and non-reformist reforms that could assist with that. These are happening in many places; for example, in Chile social protests and movements created local assemblies, demanding and since securing a new constitution.[16] This people-led process has been completed recently.

Another example of reimagining where political power lies comes from municipalism, where people are taking back control of their local political spaces, building autonomy and new power structures. This dual power strategy is often summed up as one foot in the streets and one inside political institutions, and it takes different forms in different places, from Barcelona to Zagreb and Rojava to Jackson, US.

There are also many examples of countries that showcase the power of non-reformist reforms – many Nordic countries that Scotland has an affinity to. For example, Finland tops many social indicators of well-being and happiness.[17] Although still capitalist nation states, Nordic welfare states show the importance of social indicators about well-being. Celebrating these is an essential step towards replacing the crude marker of GDP, successors needed to guide anywhere that moves beyond growth.

One of the core messages of *The Future is Degrowth* is that to change everything, top-down approaches need to complement bottom-up ones, backed up with those that seek to build something new beyond the frame. The book also tells there will be no radical politics without degrowth. Yet reciprocally, an independent Scotland could be a Nowtopia to realise this other world. ■



Notes

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4 *Ibid p.196*
5 *Alistair Davidson (21 May 2021) Lessons from the Kenmure Street Siege, bellacaledonia.org.uk/2021/05/21/lessons-from-the-kenmure-street-siege/*
6 *Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter & Aaron Vansintjan (2022) p.267*
7 *Further reading see: Michael Knapp, Anja Flach & Ercan Ayboga, (2016) Revolution in Rojava: Democratic Autonomy and Women's Liberation in Syrian Kurdistan, London, Pluto Press*
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9 *Jennifer Green (producer and editor) (14 November 2021) Renewable energy: How Scottish Isle of Eigg relies on wind, water, solar, bbc.co.uk/news/av/science-environment-59238305*
10 *Uist Wind, uistwind.com/*
11 *10:10 Climate Action, This community love their wind turbine so much they gave her a name, 1010uk.org/articles/tilley-the-turbine-tiree/*
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13 *Xavi Ferrer, Elena Arrontes & the Collective for Global Municipalism (18 August 2020) Municipalist France! redpepper.org.uk/municipalist-france/*
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16 *Steve Rushton, (28 January 2022), GND:15, Chile's popular political revolution offers lessons far beyond its shoreline, occupy.com/article/gnd-15-chile-s-popular-political-revolution-offers-lessons-far-beyond-its-shoreline*
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The conversation on our collective survival is utterly alienating and disempowering for the vast majority of people. The climate movement's biggest task is helping all people see they have a role to play.

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The 'one big moment' narrative post-COP26, the complete and intentional dislocation of most people from the process, the sense of 'but what can I do?' belies the fact that our chances to respond to climate breakdown don't come in a cycle of big events. They come every day, every time we encounter the corrosive logic of growth at work – every planning decision, every procurement policy, every community facility condemned to closure or privatised delivery.

Capitalism can feel like a totality. It can also be seen as a systemic pattern emerging from the repetition of actions,structures and decisions underpinned by logics of accumulation, extraction and expansion. And this is where it gets hopeful – it's recognising that the tangible places to get to work are everywhere and belong to everyone. It is the power of all people reclaiming their agency over what most impacts their life and connecting these struggles to climate breakdown – it is this that has transformative potential.