

## Global Energy Partnerships: Green Colonialism and an Ecological New International Economic Order

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### Abstract

This chapter examines the contemporary relevance of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the Brandt Commission's suggestions in the climate and energy context, focusing on African nations. It analyzes recent global political and economic shifts, highlighting NIEO and Brandt Commission deficiencies in energy and climate policies. It explores persistent North–South dependency patterns, labelling them as energy imperialism and green colonialism with financial access as an example. Furthermore, the text considers the potential of a renewed 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO2) for promoting global partnerships for socio-ecological transformation. It draws on Global Ecological Political Economy, linking dependency, imperialism, and colonialism theories with ecological aspects.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Global Energy Partnerships: Green Colonialism and an Ecological New International Economic Order

*Simone Claar*

## INTRODUCTION

“Affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” is what the United Nations’ (UN) Sustainable Development Goal number 7 aims to achieve by the year 2030. The international community is still far from reaching the goal of ensuring that all people have access to energy,

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however, and the energy supply is still fraught with extreme social inequalities. Even after 2015, when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were set down, many people still have no access to energy: in Africa alone, there are over 600 million people who have no electricity (AFDB, 2022a).

The Sustainable Development Agenda is meant to enable economic development that considers the needs of the environment. This means that the SDGs address economic, ecological, and social dimensions simultaneously. Goal 7 views renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydroelectric power as effective solutions to meet global energy needs (UN, n.d.). With the increasing threats brought about by climate change, it is not only the UN that sees mobilizing funds for renewable energy as an important catalyst for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal. However, public and private financial resources and investments are not sufficient, according to an SDG progress report (IEA et al., 2022, p. 18). The multiple political, health, environmental, and economic crises of recent decades have exacerbated persistent energy shortages, particularly in the Global South.<sup>1</sup>

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has once again changed the debate about energy supply since 2022, as Europe in particular faces a massive increase in the cost of energy as well as difficulties in accessing energy. To solve the immediate problem of finding substitutes for natural gas and oil from Russia, the European Union and its member states are looking for new suppliers of these raw materials—mostly in the Arab or African region, such as in Senegal (Rinke & Marsch, 2022). There has also been a massive increase in the export of South African coal to Europe (Banya, 2022). If fossil fuels continue to be relied upon, that is because the focus is on Europe's energy security not on the impending climate catastrophe or developing a global energy partnership.

The European strategy, which was set down in the European Green Deal in 2019 (see, for example, Claar, 2022), includes the production of what is referred to as green hydrogen. To this end, possibilities for producing hydrogen using other energy sources are being sought outside Europe, for example in Morocco. However, there are several unanswered questions when it comes to this option. First, it is unclear whether Morocco will be able to produce enough carbon-neutral energy

<sup>1</sup> While acknowledging the problematic nature of the term 'Global South' for its oversimplification and homogenization of diverse regions, I employ it due to the lack of alternatives (e.g. Prys-Hansen, 2023).

to generate green hydrogen. Second, there is a risk that energy poverty in Morocco itself will be exacerbated if the energy supply of the local population must be weighed against lucrative hydrocarbon exports. Third, the production of hydrogen requires drinking water—an already scarce resource in Morocco that will almost certainly become even scarcer because of global warming (Baumann, 2021). It is therefore possible that the energy transition in Europe will lead to a new period of the Global South being dependent on raw material exports although it would need a global strategy for energy access.

The inequality of distribution and undersupply of energy, the dependence on fossil fuels in general, and the dependence of the Global South on fossil fuels in particular have not fundamentally changed since the established New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s (see UN, 1974). The climate crisis is making all this worse. Alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power have become much more common in recent years, but they are far from being enough to make countries in the Global South independent of oil and gas resources and especially are not enough to provide “clean and affordable energy for all” as described in the SDG (UN, n.d.).

The Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues, chaired by the Ex-West German Chancellor Willy Brandt, dealt extensively with the problems related to global energy as part of the NIEO debates in 1977 (Brandt, 1980). The group, referred to as the Brandt Commission, determined even then that new technologies and energy sources were needed and discussed various ways to develop them. Despite the insights on this from the Commission’s report, little has changed regarding the dependence of fossil fuels by countries in the Global South since then, which points to the persistence and growth of global inequalities. At the same time, it shows the continuing economic and political dependence of the Global South on the industrialized nations, a dependence which is largely due to external factors. Energy is only one aspect in which this continued dependence of African and other countries of the Global South manifests itself.

This chapter addresses the timeliness of the NIEO and the Brandt Commission’s climate and energy proposals. To do this, I look at global political and economic changes in recent decades, predominantly in relation to African countries. I begin by pointing out gaps in the NIEO and the Brandt Report on energy and climate policy. I then postulate a perpetuation of dependency relations in the North–South relationship

and argue that these can be described as energy imperialism and green colonialism. The chapter illustrates this by looking at access to funding, including funds to combat climate change. Building on this, I discuss the extent to which a revised ecological New International Economic Order (NIEO<sup>2</sup>) could be a means of implementing a global energy partnership.

In terms of theory, this contribution is oriented on the Global Ecological Political Economy, which links theoretical approaches to dependency, imperialism, and colonialism with issues of ecology. The original dependency theory (see, among others, Frank, 1968; Amin, 1976) assumes that the underdevelopment of countries in the Global South is due to domination and exploitation by countries in the Global North. According to this theory, the Global North exploits the Global South by controlling natural resources, international trade, and technology and knowledge (Frank, 1966). Marxist theories of imperialism are closely related to this. Lenin (1917), for example, argued that imperialism leads to a concentration of capital and power in the hands of a few rich nations. These nations profit from the exploitation of raw materials and labor in underdeveloped countries. According to Lenin, imperialist states pursue the strategy of maximizing their profits by expanding into other countries, opening new markets, and gaining access to raw materials and cheap labor.

Both the dependency theory and the previously developed Marxist theories of imperialism assume that the rich countries of the Global North can exploit and oppress the poor countries of the Global South through their economic and political dominance. In the colonial era, this was done through direct control; in the postcolonial era, it is done through indirect control based on continuing economic dependencies. This shift provided the backdrop for the NIEO suggestions in 1974, which focused on naming these dependencies and inequalities. Despite the diverging interests in the Global South by fossil fuel dependent countries and non-fossil fuel dependent countries. In the meantime, global conditions, and relations between different states in the North, the South and between each other have become increasingly complex and the dichotomy that the North exploits the South does not remain so simple. Nevertheless, it remains as a symbol of exploitation, and it is used to simplify matters.

Global Ecological Political Economy (GEPE) is an expansion of International Political Economy to include the analytical categories of political ecology, that is, the aspects of energy (renewable and non-renewable), sustainability, and climate (van de Graff et al., 2016; Kuzemko et al., 2018; Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018) as well as their application to

the current potential ecological collapse. In practice, the article emphasize that ecological as analytical category must be considered, here in the political economy of energy/climate finance. The GEPE approach assumes that policy fields such as finance, trade, or production must be framed as ecological phenomena (Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018, p. 34). Representatives of this line of research illustrate how ecological aspects are interwoven with imperialism in global capitalism (Katz-Rosene & Paterson, 2018, p. 71). Therefore, GEPE has also been filled with analytical categories of political ecology, as their raise similar questions regarding power asymmetry or capital accumulation.

### LOOKING AT THE PAST AND THE PRESENT: THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT

From 1977 to 1980, the Brandt Commission analyzed the economic and political relations between the Global South and the Global North (Wionczek, 1981). It found clear evidence of an “inequality of economic strength” (Brandt, 1980, p. 32) for all economic sectors. The “economic power,” including the “rules and regulations and [...the international economic system’s] international institutions of trade, money and finance” (Brandt, 1980, p. 32) was found to be in the hands of the northern countries. This can also be seen in the fact that “international mining companies [...] provided capital, technical knowledge and marketing facilities” (Brandt, 1980, p. 155) and thus controlled the extraction of raw materials. These power relations described by the Commission have been perpetuated in recent decades—despite the rise of emerging economies such as China.

In the UN program of action for an NIEO (UN, 1974), the issue of energy was addressed only indirectly through the question of sovereignty over natural resources. In contrast, it played a major role in the Brandt Commission’s report. The chapter on energy in the Commission’s report (Brandt, 1980, pp. 160–171) focuses especially on the need to move away from oil and on the development of alternative energy sources. Written just a short time after the oil crisis of the 1970s, the report dealt with the oil dependence of importing countries without their own oil reserves (especially developing countries). It expressed concern that there would be long-term high costs as well as insufficient scope for the development of alternative energy sources. From today’s perspective, the Commission

was ahead of its time. However, it failed to link the energy issue to sustainability, the environment, and climate impacts.

In its recommendations, the Brandt Commission aimed to secure and expand access to energy—just as SDG 7 does today. Although it was critical of the role of oil (and gas), it also assessed the raw material as difficult to avoid, since oil was not only abundant, but also had the advantage over other energy sources of being usable for many forms of energy production (Brandt, 1980, p. 166). Among other things, the Commission proposed that global oil reserves be measured so that “equitable and stable contracts” (Brandt, 1980, p. 157) could then be concluded with companies for marketing these reserves. However, such far-reaching international agreements never materialized, especially since in the meantime new explorations and the development of deeper drilling techniques continued to increase the amount of available oil. Equitable partnerships in these terms would have been a changing moment. However, recent history shows that new oil deposits are almost always exploited if states or oil companies can make a profit from them.

Even though the Brandt Commission took up the energy issue, its report lacked a link between price development, marketing, and regulation on the one hand and the exploitation of nature and the climate issue on the other. Climate and environmental policy did not play the same role at that time as they do today, although they were indirectly addressed in discussions about the NIEO. In his introduction to the report, Willy Brandt made fundamental references to these issues clear, for example by pointing to “a new awareness of the environmental and ecological dangers to our planet” (Brandt, 1980, p. 19) which are at the same time a major challenge in South-North relations (Brandt, 1980, p. 7). From my point of view, the exploitation of nature is not just a matter of awareness, but a core problem for the entire planet and needs immediately awareness.

So, from today’s perspective, both the NIEO and the Brandt Commission’s report have serious blind spots in the field of energy and climate policy. These are particularly evident in the summary of the Commission’s report, which names coal as a possible alternative energy source (Brandt, 1980, p. 279). Today we know that one fossil fuel cannot be an alternative to another. It does not make sense to speak of “clean coal” as, for example, the South African state-owned power company Eskom did until recently (Centre for Environmental Rights, 2018) or, in Germany, of natural gas as a “clean bridging technology” (LobbyControl, 2023,

p. 6)<sup>2</sup> because coal and gas—despite new technologies—are still one of the main air polluters and contribute to the global warming.

The Brandt Commission saw hydropower as another possibility for generating energy independently of oil. However, again, it did not address the environmental, social, and societal consequences of, for example, the construction of dams. After all, large hydropower plants required (and still require) resettlement and deprive people of access to water elsewhere. Today, such large-scale plants are often discussed critically due to their consequences for nature and local populations. Still, these kinds of new plants continue to be built, for example in Ghana (Hausermann, 2018) or Ethiopia (Kaledzi, 2023). Their construction cannot defy climate change, however, as the increase in droughts in recent years has shown. For example, at the Kariba Dam in Zambia in 2015/2016, hardly any electricity could be generated because the water level was too low due to drought (Claar, 2018). The problem still exists, as because Zambia obtains more than 86 percent of its energy from hydropower (Ncube, 2023), and does not have enough energy diversification. The high dependence on rain and water for energy makes Zambia's energy production highly vulnerable in times of droughts.

At the time of the Brandt Commission, solar energy was not yet sufficiently developed technologically, but even then, it had the potential to become a key alternative energy source (see Brandt, 1980, p. 167). To this end, the Commission took up an important, though often little considered, point of the original NIEO ideas: the transfer of technology from North to South (UN, 1974, p. 8). In its report, the Commission wrote:

“We believe there is a strong case, in view of the mutual interest in assured world energy supplies, for the fruits of research on solar energy in the North to be made available on specially favourable terms to the poorer countries of the South” (Brandt, 1980, p. 176).

The Commission also called for technology transfer from industrialized to developing countries beyond solar energy. This was intended to promote sustainable development and reduce environmental damage. The Commission believed this was crucial to enabling developing countries to leave polluting technologies behind and adopt cleaner and more sustainable forms of development (Brandt, 1980, p. 200).

<sup>2</sup> All quotes originally in German have been translated into English by the author.

Overall, the Brandt Commission's proposals attempted to establish a weak consensus compared to the NIEO proposals, which were highly controversial in the global community. However, even these two proposals, if implemented, would presumably have led to little fundamental structural change in the access to the global market and in particular energy for countries in the Global South. The Brandt report also lacked concrete strategies for engaging capital interests. In the context of the current climate catastrophe, their importance has become even more apparent. Capital has no interest in being restricted. Therefore, in the existing economic system, many well-intentioned proposals may have little or no effect. Fossil capital is highly interconnected around the world. Neither the power of the Global South nor that of its supporters in the Global North (such as Willy Brandt) was sufficient for fundamental, radical reforms. This problem of unequal power relations continues to be evident in energy policy and partnerships at present and limits the possibilities to develop a global energy partnership.

## ENERGY IMPERIALISM AND GREEN COLONIALISM

In recent decades, however, the issues of environment and climate have certainly played a role in international politics. There have been many different initiatives in this area, including some under the auspices of the UN, such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997, or the Paris Climate Agreement and SDGs of 2015. But these initiatives fall short of preventing climate catastrophe because they are not far-reaching enough. They do not prevent new forms of unilateral dependence and exploitation.

Energy and climate policy is primarily about securing access to energy sources. The export of fossil fuels has been an expression of imperialist behavior and power relations that has led to the persistence of energy poverty in states of the Global South. Industrialized nations are using their position of power in the existing world economic order to secure their own energy needs first. In the past, they relied almost exclusively on fossil fuels such as gas or coal—importing from countries that had not secured their own energy production. This pattern continues with renewables and green hydrogen. These political, economic, and military strategies of industrialized countries are also described as *energy imperialism*. In principle energy imperialism means that, industrialized countries seek to control their access to oil, gas, coal, or other energy

resources in countries with less power and has its roots in the demand of coal for industrial revolution. Ciccantell (2020) defines energy imperialism from an historical perspective that “the use of military, diplomatic, economic, and other forms of social power to take control of energy resources outside a state’s domestic boundaries, was essential to the state’s economic growth and geopolitical competitiveness” (p. 2). The consequences must be borne above all by the weakest links in the global power hierarchy, namely the local populations in the Global South, as in the example of oil production in Nigeria with its large-scale destruction of nature (Kappel, 2010).

Current climate policy runs the risk of reproducing such patterns. In 2019, the European Union (EU) adopted the European Green Deal (European Commission, 2019), which aims to enable sustainable and ecological conditions in the EU economic area. At the same time, it is to define core instruments for combating the climate crisis. This includes a strategy for green hydrogen (European Commission, 2019), the production of which is planned in Morocco, among other places, as mentioned above (see also Claar, 2022). However, the discussion does not focus on the energy transition in Morocco or in other potentially hydrogen-producing countries in the Global South. Instead, the core issue is the export of green hydrogen to Europe. In this context, one can therefore speak not only of energy imperialism, but moreover of *green colonialism* (Claar, 2021, 2022). Hamouchene (2023, p. 30) defines green colonialism as following:

Green colonialism, or “renewable energy colonialism” can be defined as the extension of the colonial relations of plunder and dispossession (as well as the dehumanization of the other) to the green era of renewable energies, with the accompanying displacement of socio-environmental costs onto peripheral countries and communities, prioritizing the energy needs of one region of the world over another.

In practice, the current EU strategy prioritizes energy needs and consumption in the Global North over needs in the Global South while externalizing environmental impacts to the Global South.

### *Access to Financing*

Structural power inequalities between the Global South and the Global North are reflected in access to finances. As early as the beginning of the 1980s, the Brandt Commission noted that there was a lack of financial resources in development finance in particular, including in the energy sector (Brandt, 1980, p. 227). It called for a “massive” transfer from North to South, as well as changes in the form of development financing, such as a continuous increase in development aid to 1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) or an improvement in lending practices (Brandt, 1980, pp. 241–243).

Even today, countries and companies in the Global South do not have the same access to the financial market as comparable actors in the Global North. The problem is intensifying in view of the steadily increasing importance of the financial market for other areas of society as well, which is described by the term ‘financialization.’ Referring to imperialist relations, Jeff Powell (2013, p. 144) argues in this context: “peripheral economies will experience the tendencies of financialization, but in a distinctive form which has been shaped by imperial relations in the current world market conjuncture.” The term *subordinate financialization* has since become established in academic discourse (see Bonizzi, 2013; Kvangraven et al., 2020).

African states, state-owned enterprises, and private companies in the energy sector are dependent on the global market as well as on exchange rates and foreign direct investment. They need loans for their investments, and they receive these loans in US dollars or euros. Fluctuations in exchange rates to the respective national currencies are classified as an investment risk by rating agencies such as Moody’s. As a result, international lenders demand a risk premium in the form of higher interest rates for loans (Chirikure et al., 2022; Mutize & Nkhalamba, 2021). Sustainable and socioecological transformation projects (such as for renewable energy) are also seen as a greater investment risk, as their implementation requires a lot of capital (Schwerhoff & Sy, 2017, pp. 397–398). In addition, national companies in the Global South, in particular middle- and low-income countries, are often at a competitive disadvantage: they must pay higher interest rates on loans than their competitors from the Global North. As a result, they have higher costs and do not win international tenders—for example, for renewable energy infrastructure projects. Elsner et al. (2021) describe such a case in Zambia, where the World Bank

tendered a photovoltaic project that then went to international companies from the Global North.

The increase in market-based financing perpetuates dependencies and limits African states' possibilities for acting (Banse, 2019, p. 87). This is illustrated, for example, by the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) between South Africa and various countries in the Global North, including the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. At its core are loans worth 8.5 billion US dollars for the conversion of South Africa's energy supply to renewable energies. The cooperation partners see the JETP as an innovation leading to a *just* transition to renewable energies. However, the credit model also makes South Africa dependent on lenders in new ways. The country's debt can increase abruptly due to exchange rate fluctuations. The JETP is therefore characterized by green colonialism (Global Energy Justice Workshop Collective, 2023) as the South African state pays the costs. Nevertheless, the countries of the Global North are negotiating similar cooperation models, for example with Vietnam. The new debt crisis in the Global South, which is characterized, for example, by insolvency vis-à-vis international creditors as in Zambia in 2020 or Ghana in 2022 (Banse, 2023), will probably be exacerbated by this. The term *just transition* comes from the trade union movement. It describes a phase-out of fossil fuels that creates new climate- and environmentally friendly jobs. The concept has been introduced into the international political debate on climate change mitigation (Achouche & Mokoena, 2021) and is receiving attention in many academic discourses (including in the field of energy, see Jenkins, 2019; Müller & Claar, 2021; Müller et al., 2020).

Developing countries are demanding more room for maneuver, including their right to their own development and economic growth, to be able to fight poverty and inequality. There is also a need for them to make their own decisions and set their own priorities in climate and energy policy. However, there are conflicting goals. In terms of the national economy and financing, this often means choosing between the economic development of the country on the one hand and combating climate change and designing a *just transition* on the other (interview with a civil service employee, Accra, May 23, 2022). Choosing economic development is contrasted with the need to combat the consequences of climate change (see also Neumann & Claar, 2022). The "African Economic Outlook" is published once a year and looks at the economic development of African states. In 2022 it had the focus "Supporting

Climate Resilience and a Just Energy Transition in Africa” (AFDB, 2022b), and in the debate surrounding the publication the conflict of goals is clearly evident: many countries in the Global South do not even have sufficient material resources to implement core tasks such as eradicating poverty. The demand for the same right as countries of the Global North to push forward their own development, as well as the question of why the Global South should primarily finance climate impacts, are constantly present in the global debate on climate impact mitigation.

The consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, are among the greatest challenges facing countries in the Global South. From a global perspective, the trade-off can be mitigated by implementing climate issues into the development strategies and plans of countries in the Global South. This included, for example, the promotion of investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, in renewable energies, or in environmentally friendly technologies. To this end, as the Brandt Commission already noted (Brandt, 1980, pp. 193–200), it is necessary to promote technological exchange and cooperation between the countries of the Global South and North and to expand financial support for developing and newly industrializing countries in coping with the consequences of climate change. This would also mean developing a joint global energy partnership for technology and knowledge.

In sum, energy imperialism and green colonialism are continuations of the current power relations. Overcoming the strong structural disadvantage of countries in the Global South in terms of access to finance would be one strategy to change these power relations. In practice, this means that an NIEO<sup>2</sup>, for example, will have to deal more intensively with the energy-climate-environment nexus in North–South relations. In the Brandt Commission’s analysis at the time (Brandt, 1980), climate and environmental policy played only a limited role, even though this nexus had already been discussed in the debate on the NIEO.

## ECOLOGICAL NIEO<sup>2</sup>–GLOBAL ENERGY PARTNERSHIP AS AN ELEMENT OF SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION?

The previous sections have made clear how strongly the climate and energy issues are interwoven with fundamental questions of economic and political structure. Ryan Katz-Rosene and Matthew Paterson (2018) also emphasize this point, and any NIEO<sup>2</sup> must address this issue. Based on the assumption that no fundamental systemic change will take place for the time being, strategies are needed on how an ecological NIEO<sup>2</sup> can level the path to a socioecological transformation and which role a global energy partnership could have. Socio-ecological transformation can be seen as a response to multiple crises (Brand & Wissen, 2017). The focus here is above all on creating climate-conscious social structures. What is meant is the vision of a sociopolitical project of fundamental change in society and the economy in which social and ecological issues are not played off against each other. Such a socioecological transformation must keep in mind issues of social justice, historical interdependencies, and power structures while also questioning neoliberal capitalism.

The task of an NIEO<sup>2</sup> would be to accompany the process of such a transformation and to set thematic priorities in climate and energy policy. In doing so, it would have to include proposals to promote sustainable development, global energy partnerships as well as to address the challenges of climate change.

Some concrete measures in this regard could follow on from the proposals made by the NIEO at the time—for example, greater technology transfer to support the implementation of low-carbon technologies that should be part of an energy partnership. According to Brand et al. (2013), a socioecological transformation requires not only technological innovation but also social innovation. This means that institutions and actors need to change social, political, and economic processes and practices. One of these practices is the funding of climate adaptation measures as well as climate change mitigation, and how energy production and consumption is distributed on the global scale. In other words, financial and capital markets should not be the only form of financing available. At the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, asked the legitimate question: “How do companies make 200 billion dollars in profits in the last three months and not expect to contribute at least 10 cents on every dollar

to a loss and damage fund?” (UN News, November 7, 2022). Mottley pointed out that corporations use nature as a free resource to maximize profits. What she suggests would be a more significant contribution by these companies to climate impact costs (see also Foster, 2000; Harris, 2013).

Changing global practices would include talking about the North–South relationship and breaking colonial continuities—such as in the form of green colonialism (Claar, 2022; Hamouchene, 2023)—and working together to create a *just* transition to a socioecological society.

Among other requirements, an ecological NIEO<sup>2</sup> would mean that the transition to a low-carbon economy would need to be shaped equitably and with an eye to social factors. Not all countries have social security systems that can absorb the fears of job loss—a lack that can be seen in the example of coal workers in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Therefore, such a transformation is always accompanied by conflicting goals such as securing jobs versus climate adaptation (Kalt, 2023). As part of a socioecological transformation within the existing global economic system, the following aspects would be part of a radical reform and, at the same time, of a transnational regulatory program, for example, within the framework of the climate and energy policy of an NIEO<sup>2</sup> including clear steps for designing a global energy partnership. This includes:

1. A comprehensive elaboration and transformation of economic and development models is required that promotes sustainable, social, climate-resilient, and low-emission development. In doing so, conditions must be placed on the principle of growth: economic growth must always consider the subsequent costs for nature and people—in the Global North and South. One possible avenue would include concepts such as post-growth or *degrowth*, around which a new scholarly field has emerged in recent years (Engler et al., 2024). These concepts criticize the focus on economic growth and seek visions for a different society that prioritizes ecological and social well-being instead of overproduction and consumption. This also means recognizing the importance of conserving resources, including during energy production. It is about an economy that focuses on human well-being, reducing inequality, and preserving the ecological foundations for life (Rahti, 2020). As GDP growth is no longer the focus, this can also have the effect of reducing growth (Hickel, 2021, p. 2). What is unique about this is that the

debate is not only an academic debate, but also a social debate that is being conducted in conjunction with social movements and political practice at major scientific *degrowth conferences* (Schmelzer & Vetter, 2019, p. 12). The theoretical debate on post-growth has so far mainly taken place in the Global North. To be more effective, it needs to engage more with postcolonial perspectives (Bendix, 2017).

2. There needs to be a change in mindset and policymaking, particularly with regard to the use of scarce resources and the implementation of measures to adapt to climate change. To this end, it must be questioned whether climate change mitigation must be profitable. At the same time, there is a need for more binding donor responsibility, such as the payment of development aid amounting to 1 percent of GDP by countries of the Global North (Franczak, 2023). Close cooperation between the government, the private sector, civil society, the population, and international organizations is essential for this. Regarding the international organizations, Ernesto Samper Pizano (2023) calls for a “solidarity-based development model” that better represents the countries of the Global South, particularly in the United Nations. In addition, the question of material reparations must be raised, as JETP makes it clear that the fight against climate change continues to drive the debt spiral. Social movements such as ‘Debt for Climate’ pursue the payment of climate debt. Climate and energy financing need to be separated from market and banking logic so that nature and the planet can be protected independently of profit targets.
3. Energy production is needed that focuses on preserving the planet. The old demand of the Brandt Commission for “[a]n orderly transition [...] from high dependence on increasingly scarce non-renewable energy sources” (Brandt, 1980, p. 171) must be implemented. This means no more energy from fossil fuels and instead more solar and wind energy based on today’s technological possibilities. Green hydrogen can also be seen as an alternative energy source if it is not exported—like fossil fuels—from developing countries whose own energy supply is not secure (Claar, 2022).
4. Energy justice must be ensured, locally and globally. Simply changing the energy mix does not guarantee that everyone will have access to affordable and sustainable energy. It is not only about low-threshold access to energy, but also about the fact that many

people feel the negative effects of fossil fuels on their livelihoods, even if they do not have access to energy (see Müller & Claar, 2021; Müller et al., 2020). Energy democracy is a pillar of energy justice. This means not only involving people in decisions about new forms of energy, but also ensuring their participation as consumers and owners (Jenkins, 2019, p. 84–85). There is also a need for further decentralization of energy generation and infrastructure. Monopoly positions of individual energy companies (including those that are state-owned) must be ended. The aim must be to feed decentrally generated energy into the electricity grids at low cost. Energy justice and Energy Democracy would be key principles for a global energy partnership, and elements how this can look like the South African Climate Justice Charter demonstrates this (COPAC/SAFSC, 2020).

Without a fundamental change to the current economic model—which is based on the idea of economic growth and the exploitation of nature and people to create financial added value for a small economic and political elite—, the changes described in the context of NIEO<sup>2</sup> reforms will not transform the existing conditions. This includes the fossil form of energy generation. What is therefore needed is a radical socioecological transformation that will question the economic system and overcome the colonial dependencies of the Global South.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the Brandt Commission's forward-looking analysis of renewable energies and its support for a transformation of the global economic system, to this day two core elements for achieving the equal participation of countries of the Global South have yet to be implemented: a change of North–South relations and the assumption of responsibility for imperialism and colonialism and avoid new forms such as energy imperialism and green colonialism by countries of the Global North. This includes switching to environmentally and climate-friendly production as well as the use of energy. That can be achieved through the expansion of renewable energies, technology transfer to developing countries, and the provision of funding for climate change adaptation and decarbonization, and for developing steps for a global energy partnership.

This chapter has shown that the global and political power and inequality in North–South relations have been perpetuated since the times

of the NIEO and the Brandt Commission. This is illustrated above all by energy imperialism, green colonialism, and the impediments to the Global South's access to funding to combat climate change. There are still gaps in the areas of sustainability, environmental protection, and climate impact. Despite some forward thinking regarding the energy issue, these aspects were neglected. An NIEO<sup>2</sup> must therefore address these gaps and find strategies for socioecological transformation. The gaps could be filled by changing economic and development models, ways of thinking about development, sustainable energy production, and greater energy justice and democracy.

In the long term, solutions for the energy-climate-environment nexus must be developed that are in line with the needs and priorities of affected countries and their populations. This ensures that these solutions are effective and support the sustainability goals. Involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes can support to ensure that all relevant parties find the solutions acceptable and that these solutions can be implemented. In addition, this includes also to foster elements and rules for an energy partnership on the global level. Overall, however, the question remains open as to whether radical reforms within the framework of an NIEO<sup>2</sup> are even possible within capitalist structures or whether an alternative economic model is required in the long term to face climate and energy policy challenges.

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