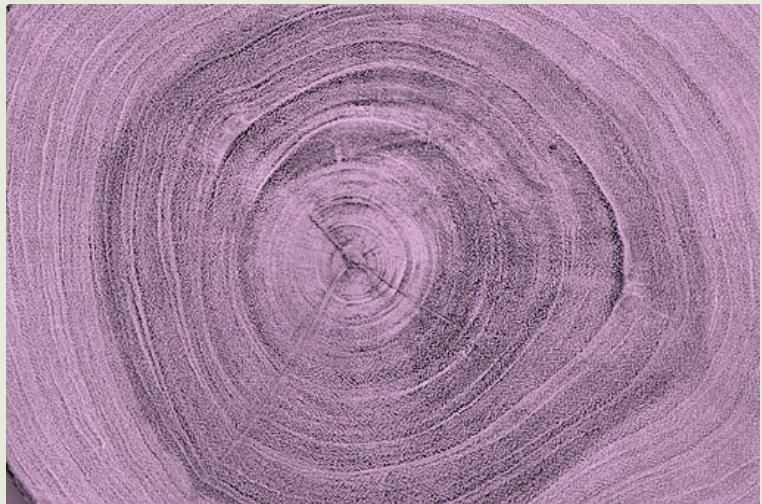


Confronting violence: Towards an insurgent, internationalist degrowth

Franca Marquardt

Abstract

Capitalism relies on various forms of violence that create and uphold injustice and alienation. Anarchist practices—such as disobedience and occupations—challenge this status quo by resisting oppression and imagining alternatives beyond the State. While degrowth scholarship has effectively analysed global inequalities, it must further engage with these movement experiences and explore the affective dimensions of collective struggle. In this context, this article discusses how acts of solidarity during moments of State oppression serve not only as resistance but as survival strategies against systemic violence. By referring to internationalist protests in solidarity with Palestine, the article argues for an emphasis on political emotions to understand and confront global capitalist violence. In order to move beyond ideological constraints to envision a world of radical interdependence and justice, degrowth needs to become part of a global movement for liberation, based on revolutionary bonds and collective self-defence.



Introduction

In the summer of 2024, the Palestine solidarity bloc at Berlin's Dyke March and the Internationalist Queer Pride were violently attacked by the police, part of an intensifying crackdown on pro-Palestine activism in Germany. While such protests have long faced criminalisation, repression has escalated dramatically since the genocide conducted by the Israeli State in Gaza starting in October 2023. This shift is closely tied to the construction of memory culture in German society and its alignment with Zionism, which has contributed to increasing violence against dissenting voices

(Anonymous 2020, Marquardt 2024). Images circulating on social media show protesters lying on the ground, held down by police officers. Protesters and police stand face to face, tension evident in their stances. A group of people link

The article unfolds in three parts: the systemic and normalised nature of violence; how recent internationalist protests are redefining the paradigms and legitimacy of violence; and a renewed attention to political emotions and bonds in fighting the indifference of capitalism.

their arms tightly, forming a human barricade as a way to protect themselves from the approaching police. In another photo, men create a platform with their bodies, allowing one of them to stand on their shoulders and hold a Palestinian flag high. Nearby, a young woman wearing a Kufiyah is pushed against a wall by police. An older woman sitting close to the scene notices her, then approaches and gently kisses her arm—

a quiet moment of care and solidarity amid the unrest.¹ These instances of solidarity during police violence highlight not only how solidarity can exist amidst violence but also how affective bonds become survival strategies against systemic conditions that oppress anyone who disagrees with the status quo and has the courage to resist.

The article unfolds in three parts. Firstly, I will outline the systemic and normalised nature of violence and its manifestations in imperial-capitalist society, pointing towards the need for an anarchist politics to confront this condition. I argue that civil disobedience occupations are prefigurative acts that build more just futures by centring horizontal relations. Then, the article discusses how recent internationalist protests are redefining the paradigms and legitimacy of violence, as their intensified repression represents the State's fear of losing control. I argue that these mobilisations are helping to unmask the complicity of the State and its reliance on violence and inequalities. In this context, the article asks what the role of degrowth should be in the international struggle for liberation and against capitalism. The last part suggests a renewed attention to political emotions and bonds in fighting the indifference of capitalism. As such, solidarity practices are prefigurative acts that guide movements towards liberatory futures. While many degrowthers highlight the imperative to 'get serious about strategy,' the article urges for an emphasis on emotions not just as strategic tools but as integral parts of the transformation. Ultimately, to counter the normalisation of violence everywhere, we need to mobilise collective affects and engage in solidarity practices across movements.

Violence everywhere

Capitalism perpetuates subjugation and dominance that affect people in different ways but implicate us all. It is built on 'common senses' that make us believe that inequality between people and communities, which entails terrorising and abusing people, for others' benefit is 'natural.' This dominant narrative is constructed in a way that portrays poverty and precarity as inevitable phenomena rather than political impositions. When in fact, capitalism carries the right to endless accumulation and a structural need for other people's suffering. As Nelson Mandela said at a protest in London in 2005, 'like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings (in: Jeffery 2005).' Realising the normalised aspect of violence under capitalism leads us to question what is rendered as violence in the first place. Beyond physical violence, there is the more complicated but not less pervasive influence of structural or psychological violence. The visible becomes normalised but leads to similar outcomes: bodies, minds, earth and water are exploited, whilst only a few get to enjoy the benefits. Today, capitalism organises systemic violence as it sits on genocide and ecocide, and we have come to largely accept this reality.

The normalisation of violence under capitalism can be understood through the lens of structural violence, which Galtung (1969) defines as an avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs embedded within societal structures,

¹ The video of the scene: https://www.instagram.com/aljarmaq_news/reel/C-A4q0kM7tk/

institutions, and ideologies. This form of violence is not necessarily the result of direct or intentional harm but is deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life and the political-economic systems that govern societies. Capitalism, particularly in its neoliberal form, perpetuates this condition by prioritising profit and economic growth over human well-being, leading to systemic inequalities and the exploitation of populations through marginalisation. The safety and affluence enjoyed by the imperial core are built on the back of historical and ongoing exploitation, including enslavement, economic extraction, and environmental degradation. As Younes (2024, 123) describes, 'once you understand that colonial capitalism is always violent, and that it's just a matter of degree, you understand that not being attacked is already a privilege.' This reveals how the violence of capitalism is not just an isolated phenomenon but is global, structural, and deeply entrenched in the historical and contemporary colonial practices that continue to shape the world.

The politics of austerity, often implemented within a single nation-state, only reveals a fraction of the violence occurring on a global scale. Austerity, as a policy, exemplifies structural violence by imposing economic hardship on the most vulnerable populations while maintaining the status quo of a (neo)colonial global order that prioritises political control, racism, and extractivism (Cooper and Whyte 2017). The State, as a continuation of colonial power, plays a crucial role in legitimising and perpetuating this violence (Gelderloos 2017, Ince and Barrera de la Torre 2024). Through mechanisms like historical revisionism, national security rhetoric, and the suppression of dissenting voices, the State not only normalises structural violence but also justifies the use of direct, physical force when it sees necessary. The monopoly on violence, as evidenced by the extensive budgets allocated to prisons, police, military, and secret services, underscores the State's reliance on it to maintain control and enforce its vision of a 'good society' (Nagengast 1994). At the same time, the increasing repression of dissident voices and the intensification of police repression are contemporary examples of how State-sanctioned violence is used to uphold capitalist structures, further normalising violence as an inherent aspect of life under capitalism.

The relentless pressures of capitalist societies, characterised by competition, insecurity, and the commodification of every aspect of life, create environments where psychological distress is normalised and people are divided. The psychological dimension of violence under capitalism is a critical yet often overlooked aspect of structural violence. Alienation, a concept extensively explored by Marx, is a form of psychological violence where individuals become estranged from their labour, from each other, and from their own humanity (Marx 2007 [1844]). This concept holds renewed significance today as it is a direct consequence of living in a system where economic relations dictate human interactions. While depression and anxiety, among other mental illnesses, have become a new pandemic, the normative narrative still categorises them as individual problems (Proctor 2024). As a result, mental health crises are often treated as personal failures rather than as symptoms of a violent system that perpetuates alienation and dehumanisation. As the feminist degrowth perspective highlights, capitalism and the growth paradigm do not allow for practices of care, which sustain life and are elemental for people's wellbeing (FADA 2023). Therefore, the psychological impacts of structural violence need to be addressed as part of a broader critique of capitalism. Solidarity practices become anti-capitalist projects, as they oppose violence and alienation by putting mutual care and support at the centre of political projects.

Anarchist movements are exposing the normalisation of violence by radically questioning State and global capitalism and building counter-narratives of social organisation. Radical forms of resistance and civil disobedience in light of the destruction of life become part of a larger negation of what strategies and responses are 'desirable' and 'proportional' (Dunlap 2022). As Berglund (2020, 863) argues, civil disobedience 'builds a common affective revolutionary subjectivity by counteracting the isolation that results from dispossession.' Historically, anarchism has been associated with prefigurative politics as it seeks to build the foundations of a more just society through practices that directly reflect its ideals, rejecting hierarchical and authoritarian methods even in the struggle for change. As occupations or direct actions

show, protesters use their bodies to take ownership over collective futures within the ruins of the capitalist present. As such, Berglund (2023, 5) writes, 'prefiguration is the indispensable part of anarchist direct action' as a future without the State is being put into experimental practice. The anarchist experience helps break through the normalised visions of violence by prefiguring horizontal interactions. However, to build collective power and fight against this violence, we need to tap into the emotions that are part of the transformation, including rethinking solidarity.

Rethinking internationalism

Recognising the omnipresence of violence in its various forms, intensities, and patterns leads to a reflection on how we engage with it within movements and struggles. While the aspiration for peaceful lives, safety for all, and freedom from conflict remains an essential pillar of degrowth, the pursuit of this ideal mandates a commitment to liberation. However, the current trajectory of imperialist dynamics and socioecological crises compels us to adopt a serious approach to political struggle and our corresponding actions, which includes addressing the issue of violence. Internationalist mobilisations show that oppression is always interconnected, and therefore, there are no isolated struggles. As such, radicalising tactics without simultaneously engaging in internationalism and class struggle risks making movements the scapegoats for emerging fascist regimes. The global movement in solidarity with Palestine has been exemplary in embodying a struggle politics that fights imperialist capitalist violence, by calling out the complicity of Western States in the Zionist enterprise. Beyond that, it has shown the importance of creating strong networks of solidarity across movements to expose the normalisation of violence and physical attacks by the Police.

Germany's response to the genocide in Gaza and its unwavering support for the State of Israel highlights how violence is a red thread of imperialist capitalist politics (Anonymous 2020). Not only does Germany send weapons to Israel, which leads to the killing of uncountable civilians, but the police also use violence against protesters in solidarity with Palestine in its own territories. This violence is being enshrined through more intricate parts of oppression, such as the criminalisation of protest or the framing of scholars and activists as 'terrorists' or 'antisemites.' To counteract this normalised narrative of the German State that excludes or obscures the suffering of Palestinians and their claims for liberation, internationalist groups are continuously mobilising for actions and protests. However, tensions and hate continue to rise, as authorities are policing any solidarity protests, z national cohesion, particularly in the face of the growing and enabling neo-fascist tendencies within the country (Thompson and Tuzcu 2024). The State is not only implicated in perpetuating violence but also creates conditions in which such violence can thrive. Said differently, the capitalist State needs violence to sustain and legitimise itself. Anti-imperialist groups, such as the Alliance of Internationalist Feminists (2024), resist these authoritarian shifts, not through liberal means, which might inadvertently reinforce the State's power. Instead, they use radical resistance based on an intersectionality of struggles, which challenges the very foundations of the carceral system (Davis 2016). As such, these groups draw connections between the legacies of dispossession, structural violence, and genocide, emphasising that 'memory politics' in Germany should not be detached from current struggles (Thompson and Tuzcu 2024). This internationalist subjectivity is key to constructing a vision for liberation from capitalism and needs to be part of any movement, including environmental mobilisations.

Large parts of the degrowth community have been silent on the genocide in Palestine, which undermines its legitimacy in truly struggling for liberation from imperialism and capitalism. Silence functions as a form of what Spivak (1988) called 'epistemic violence' - the distortion or erasure of the lived experiences of oppressed communities through knowledge production. This can also be seen in how Western academia deliberately erases Palestinian narratives, legitimising colonial structures, and causing both symbolic and material harm (Shoman et al. 2025). At the degrowth conference in Pontevedra in June 2024, some space was made for Palestinian voices and connecting degrowth to the

ongoing genocide. This was most apparent during Samer Abdelnour's speech² on the interconnections of capitalist 'innovation' and the military industry complex in the context of Palestine (Abdelnour 2023). As he stressed, we need to 'make degrowth matter for children in all contexts of violence and domination.' However, this discussion has not translated into a broader degrowth struggle against the genocide, which might relate to the dispersiveness of the community and its reluctance to engage in meaningful actions on the streets.

The degrowth community has repeatedly referred to movements like the often-cited Zapatistas or the Rojava liberation struggle as inspiration for constructing different ideas of social organisation. So far academically anchored, degrowth has focused on analysing and using these movements as external examples rather than joining in alliances or protests. This has been a cop-out for degrowth to not position itself fully, retreating to the safer frames of (European) academia. However, speaking only from the frame of the academy can be problematic when its colonial foundations are not recognised and questioned, as 'radical' ideas become institutionalised (Arribas Lozano 2018). At the same time, Western scholarship mostly operates from institutional positions that are deeply entangled with imperialism, colonialism, and Zionism as universities have financial investments and research partnerships that directly support settler-colonial structures. Therefore, degrowth needs to be aware and actively fight against these violent underpinnings of Western academia, while relating it to liberation struggles on the ground. The challenge remains to transform academic discussions into grassroots organising and in local and international contexts, to oppose violence beyond discursive academic realms.

The practice of solidarity requires exploring relationships with social movements at home and afar, which in turn calls to explore our own relationships with violence. As Stevenson, Lehner, and Khan (2024) write in a degrowth.info post, 'the Palestinian liberation struggle needs to be seen as integral to degrowth and not as a distraction to achieve a just future for all.' The encampments for Palestine at many universities all over the world highlight the urgency to engage in internationalism and hold States accountable for imperialist violence.

They are also fruitful places to discuss emergent strategies of resistance, as they combine anarchist tools of occupations and civil disobedience with prefigurative and internationalist visions. According to Çubukçu (2024), the Palestine solidarity movement demonstrates that when 'law and order' enables the smooth operation of the imperialist capitalist machine, disobedience becomes 'not only a right but a moving duty.' The encampments and continuous protests highlight people's conviction that another way of living is possible. Therefore, a movement that seeks to overcome capitalism needs to confront these binary conceptions of violence and fight all instances of colonialism and apartheid that are ongoing.

A crucial part of internationalist solidarity means understanding that for many people living under war and oppressive regimes, non-violence is not an option. As the Kurdish activist Ayla Akat Ata explains in the case of the Rojava revolution, 'the Kurdish movement is anti-militarist but in the context of life and death, non-violence is a privilege' (in: Daudén 2016). For the women in Rojava, self-defence is legitimate as it recognises the agency of each person. There is an ideological reality behind this decision, and it is not just a question of a physical force opposing an oppressive force. It is the result of decades of struggle and passion that Kurdish women have chosen to organise themselves. Collective organising in Rojava suggests that even in the context of a violent conflict, structural peacebuilding that aims to counteract the impacts of both direct and structural violence can be implemented. This view of violence as agency and self-defence, and not only as a destructive force, challenges the taken-for-granted boundaries between peace and

² <https://eese-degrowth2024.uvigo.gal/en/the-conference/program/plenary-dialogues/dialogue-1-sts/>

violence. While most people engaging with degrowth are privileged enough to live in peaceful contexts, it is imperative to think about insurgent strategies that go beyond analysis and resistance, which means truly practising internationalism. As Gelderloos (2017) stresses, the conditions of violence in our everyday lives, as well as how our lives are built on the violence for others, need to be exposed in a more radical way than we are doing right now.

Love and anger

International solidarity is an important pillar in exposing global capitalism and imperialism. However, to fight against systemic violence and to embody a different organisation based on the fulfilment of collective needs, protest has to centre social relations based on care and revolutionary love. According to Lin et al. (2016), livable futures are constructed within the fabric of everyday materiality and relationships rather than as an external ideal removed from present realities of oppression and violence. There is a distinction between strategic politics, which are instrumental, and prefigurative politics, which are inherently relational, built on the identifications and aspirations formed within groups. Thus, liberatory organising involves not only 'taking power' through mass mobilisation to challenge State and market forces but also 'making power' by creating internal structures within movements that embody the desired future world (Smith 2005, 187). Lin et al. (2016, 305) describe prefiguration as engrained in the everyday, as it 'is not something we create to call in a future without (or nostalgically before) oppression and violence but rather in spite of it.' This speaks to the coexistence of multiple realities under oppressive systems and the possibilities to build alternatives in the present.

Organising collective subjects for social change allows people to see each other, recognising and countering neoliberalism's isolating effects. As Hennessy (2017, 231) argues, revolutionary love is a way to resist the 'systemic production of unmet needs' under capitalism. Internationalist movements highlight that our grievances are intertwined as they are embedded in the material conditions of today's class struggle. To sustain collective action and build up capacities against violence and alienation, a sense of belonging and aspiration within a community is crucial, fostering a collective identity that transcends individual experiences of subjugation. These 'deep coalitions', according to Lugones (1992), emerge from a deeply intertwined sense of self and a larger desire for collective liberation. This relationship is embodied by the Kurdish concept of 'hevaltî', which centres the friendship between comrades in a movement as a liberatory condition (Dirik 2022). It means that through our comrades we understand ourselves and the world we want to create. As long-term activists and revolutionaries show us, this relation is not an idealised idea but a survival strategy to confront psychological and physical violence.

As a response to the attacks by the police on the Internationalist Queer Pride in Berlin in 2024, the collective Juedische Stimme (Jewish Voice) wrote:

Individuals and groups that are bringing the internationalist anti-genocidal protest to the Pride movement are being attacked, because they understand what collective liberation truly means. The instrumentalisation of rainbow flags to justify the bombing in Palestine only works as long as Pride is being alienated from its intersectional abolitionist roots. Therefore, we must always emphasise how our liberation is interconnected.

This statement underscores the agency of internationalists, who understand that true liberation depends on recognising the interconnectedness of various struggles and each other. Police repression is driven by the State's awareness of the expanding Palestinian solidarity movement, which is actively challenging the deeply ingrained assumptions upon which the Imperial core relies. Bell hooks (2006) famously noted, 'because we no longer are playing by the safe rules of the status quo, rules that if we obey guarantee us a specific outcome, love moves us to a new ground of being. This movement is what most people fear.' As such, bonds between protesters present a threat to the logic of the capitalist

State that seeks to divide and weaken the agency of people. Ultimately, revolutionary love and solidarity are some of the most powerful tools we have against the normalisation of violence, creating the ground for prefigurative aspirations and visions of livable futures.

The collective trauma experienced under imperial-capitalist violence fosters an awareness and connection among those with shared wounds and hopes, producing new affective knowledge. While fear often leads to affective closure, relating to each other through mutual care and revolutionary love leads to an openness to the world. As Hilal and Varatharajah (2024, 267) write, 'revolution has to come from a genuine sense of belonging to the web of life, not from fear and powerlessness.' Rebuilding this connection to each other, our struggles and our ecosystems requires ongoing work to hold ourselves and each other accountable and reflect on the deeply engrained anthropocentric and patriarchal conceptions of being and struggling together. The shared recognition of each other's wellbeing creates a community where hope is a mutual understanding and a creative response to suffering, embodied by Columbian feminists in the slogan 'nuestra venganza es ser felices' ('our revenge is to be happy') (Pérez Rodríguez 2024). As such, internationalist movements illustrate that through the interplay of anger and joy, utopian horizons emerge, challenging capitalist violence and envisioning a future rooted in collective care and shared hope.

Conclusion: committing to liberation

The persistence of internationalist organising exposes the absurdity of the perceptions of violence and criminality in capitalist societies and shows that another way of relating is possible. As Cubukçu (2022) writes, 'there lies a possibility to declare an act of dissent criminal.' As more and more dissident people become affected by violence and decide to resist, we should say 'we are all criminal, we are all illegal.' This challenges how the system hierarchises and oppresses according to made-up conceptions of violence, ultimately exposing that there is no justice under capitalism. Criminality, or resistance to adopting dominant frames of legality, becomes the ground for solidarity. Therefore, focusing on prescribing either violent or non-violent actions can distract from the necessity of engaging in active resistance across the full spectrum, which might include militant defence. Instead, a deeper understanding of the links between war, imperialism, and capital, including the military-industrial complex and the normalisation of violence in daily life, is crucial for envisioning a socially and ecologically just world. The anarchist perspective of collective disobedience against the State, combined with an ethics of love for each other and the world, are powerful ways to fight against indifference and build new affective registers of belonging needed for liberation.

The scene of the woman kissing the arm of the young activist who is being detained during a Palestine Solidarity protest reminds us that violence cannot stand a chance against our love for collective liberation. Affective relations between our comrades and the world we want to create give us the strength to continue fighting for it. Following the slogan 'no one is free until all of us are free,' internationalist movements demonstrate how our liberation is always in relation to each other, across movements, struggles, species and ecosystems. Recognising the increasing systemic violence that affects us all, we need to build relationships beyond ideological lines and organise affectively through collective self-defence and radical hope. This means providing mutual support at protests, engaging in care work, and listening to each other's needs at all points of organising. It also means creating a new vision of society based on these relations, that moves from division and alienation to a radical interdependency of life. This re-rooting is evident in social movements striving to create a better world, emphasising a commitment to transformation despite uncertain outcomes, a practice guided by a profound sense of responsibility towards a liberated future. Degrowth has to decide if it wants to be part of this or remain within the reformist shadows of Western academia.

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