



BOOK REVIEW

An unflinching claim to achieve postcapitalism: A way forward

A review of *Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy*

Tejendra Pratap Gautam ^a

^a Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai, India
Email address: tejendrapratapgautam@gmail.com

Information

Received 8 June 2022

Accepted 1 February 2023

Online 20 March 2024

Keywords

degrowth

postcapitalism

society

money

value

Nelson, A. (2022). *Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy*. Pluto Press. ISBN 9781786807816.

In the contemporary paradigm, humanity is facing severe problems, including global ecological and climatic crises. Anitra Nelson's book, *Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy*, presents a strong case against the role of money in society. She claims that the existence of money is the fundamental cause of social inequalities and by extension, a structural inhibitor to sustainability. According to her, monetary practices are pervasive and fundamentally threaten non-financial social and environmental values. Nelson also contends that social indigenous radical movements are inadequate to address the problem of the market-driven economy. Her book is a collection of eight chapters that elaborate on the functions of money in contemporary society and explain its intricacies.

Anitra Nelson is an activist scholar and an Honorary Principal Fellow at the Informal Urbanism Research Hub, University of Melbourne, Australia. She is the author of *Small is Necessary: Shared Living on a Shared Planet* (2018) and *Marx's Concept of Money: The God of Commodities* (1999), her doctoral thesis. Furthermore, she is an ardent critic of capitalism and a proponent of postcapitalism. Her writings help us to understand the undercurrents of capitalist society.

The first chapter argues that appalling societal inequities are brought about by inequitable work, living conditions, and unequal exchange of resources. This has resulted in the highly fragmented societies we see today. Furthermore, it sheds light on the two primary issues of the twenty-first century: (1) the global environmental crisis, and (2) the social and political injustices brought about by the capitalist system. According to Nelson, these problems are inexorably connected. In addition, the chapter contends that a citizen's social relationship with a capitalist state is purely economic. So, although the state is often imagined as a separate entity from the market, it is in fact subject to neoliberal capitalist pressures. The chapter further reflects that the role of the state is very limited in legal, regulatory, and political operations due to the influence of mainstream capitalist culture. Moreover, the capitalist system runs on international trade rules and treaties established among countries, which legitimises trade and helps it grow. Thus, the market controls and decides the state's role and shapes citizens' choices.

Chapter two shows how capitalist enterprises use money to increase their profits. The flow of money determines how well the market works. Since money is a means of exchange for capitalist production, it is referred to as a "sine qua non" of capitalism—indispensable and essential (Nelson, 2022, p. 1). It also serves as a unit of account¹ and a measure of value. Money is used in business interactions as legal tender and as a means of payment. It determines society and market relations. In chapters one and two, Nelson succinctly explains the basic principles of how money and other finances tend to coerce and suffocate nonmonetary social and environmental values and relationships. The author argues that embracing postcapitalism is the only possible option to save humanity from a crisis in which

¹ Money as unit of account functions as medium of exchange in transactions.

people relate to one another based on true value rather than use-value. A similar notion was raised during the early 2000s: the idea of degrowth emerged against the market-based economies (Kallis et al., 2018).

Chapter three describes a “nonmonetary postcapitalist local-global commons”, which Nelson calls “ecotat” (Nelson, 2022, p. 47). “Ecotat” is an ecologically rational community landscape. Nelson argues that a sustainable and convivial world is possible without money, where institutions use cooperative and sharing approaches. Here, a convivial world runs efficiently and democratically, as sharing and collectivity are core values. In such societies, collective sufficiency is a prerogative that concomitantly enriches individuality and social cohesion. Nelson imagines such fictional society as Yenomon—a non-monetary postcapitalist local-global commons, which is based on communing and community mode of production. However, collective sufficiency is a fluid notion under which Yenomon’s closely settled communities exchange goods in real value.

Chapter four argues that market-based solutions are inadequate for addressing climate change. Climate change is happening too fast. It is ubiquitous. Therefore, ecologists call for system change, not climate change. Furthermore, it claims that environmental pricing, water trading, carbon trading, and carbon offsets are misguided economic solutions incommensurable with the value of nature.

Chapter five criticises market-based socio-political gender dualisms from an ecofeminist perspective. In a capitalist society, the value of labour is governed and determined by money. Despite being a locus of capitalist accumulation, women’s labour has gone unrecognised throughout history. Women’s equal participation is important in creating non-binary, nonmonetary societies. It is also a goal of the radical ecofeminist school of thought. Many social and environmental activists and academics call for alternative and appropriate technologies for “living, working, and caring for people” and the environment to escape capitalism’s paradox (Nelson, 2022, p. 105).

The idea of capitalist societies as a subset of the gift economy is also advanced in chapter six, where ritualistic obligations are rationalised to form a real debt cycle, which results in

contemporary geographical disparities and social illnesses. Through technological² othering, capitalist technology, assets, and fictional capital have widened social disparities.

Chapter seven goes on to explain that a communal mode of production, based on substantive direct democracy and decision-making that emphasises actual social and ecological values, will enable the imagination and fostering of postcapitalist conjecture. Furthermore, Nelson puts forth an account of the suffering of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, drawing on a mixture of personal experiences, Eduardo Galeano's anti-market philosophy and the Zapatistas Movement. She further argues that a decentralised community mode of production, commoning, and co-governance are the most appropriate ways to achieve postcapitalism.

Chapter eight contends that human civilization is on the verge of collapse because of various global inequalities. It argues that the collective, not the individual, holds the key to the future. Moreover, it suggests that the damage created by capitalist practices can only be undone through nonviolent means.

Anitra Nelson's book envisions a way to realise a postcapitalist society by going beyond money. Moreover, like theories of degrowth, it critiques the capitalist system's fixation with money. The notion of degrowth emerged as an experiment in the quest for a more equal, equitable, and sustainable society (Paulson, 2017). The concept denotes the radical political and economic reorganisation of resources required for a social system with a radically reduced throughput (Kallis et al., 2018). Nelson makes a similar claim in this book. She opposes fetishising money-based economies when we could envisage a more inclusive system that can enhance the quality of life for people. The ideas presented in the book mirror the significant debate of post-development discourse related to economic growth and capitalism. In addition, Nelson paved the path of transition from capitalism to postcapitalism, going beyond money. Above all this book will serve as a useful reference for those interested in learning about the role of money in contemporary capitalist society.

² Technological othering means worker's alienation from their product.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

Funding

The author did not receive any funding for this research.

References

- Kallis, G., Kostakis, V., Lange, S., Muraca, B., Paulson, S. and Schmelzer, M. (2018). Research on Degrowth. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 43, 291-316. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-025941>
- Nelson, A. (2022). *Beyond Money: A Postcapitalist Strategy*. Pluto Press.
- Paulson, S. (2017). Degrowth: culture, power and change. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 24(1), 425-448. <https://doi.org/10.2458/v24i1.20882>

The author

Tejendra Pratap Gautam is a PhD candidate at Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai, India.