



# (Un)making in sustainability transformation beyond capitalism

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## ABSTRACT

Theorizations of sustainability transformation have foregrounded the construction (making) of novel socio-ecological relations; however, they generally have obscured processes of deliberate deconstruction (unmaking) of existing, unsustainable ones. Amidst ever more compelling evidence of the simultaneous unsustainability and continued reproduction of capitalist modernity, it is misguided to assume that transformation can happen by the mere construction of supposed 'solutions', be they technological, social or cultural. We rather need to better understand whether and how existing institutions, forms of knowledge, practices, imaginaries, power structures, and human-non-human relations can be deconstructed at the service of sustainability transformation. This paper demonstrates the usefulness of a lens that attends to processes of making and unmaking in sustainability transformations through an analysis of an ongoing sustainability transformation, the *territorios campesinos agroalimentarios* (TCA) endogenous territorial figure and peasant movement in Colombia. TCA is transforming territory beyond capitalism on the basis of relational ontologies and principles of autonomy, dignity and sufficiency. This paper identifies processes of unmaking of capitalism in the TCA and demonstrates how they are concretely entangled in the construction of post-capitalist realities. This paper sketches a research agenda on sustainability transformation that is sensitive to and theoretically equipped for the analysis of transformation as a multifaceted, multilevel process that entails the deconstruction of capitalist modernity and the construction of post-capitalist realities. Central to this agenda is a plural engagement with theories of social change from across the social sciences and humanities, which have not previously been mobilized for this endeavour.

## 1. Introduction

During the last decade, the notion of transformation has taken centre stage in sustainability debates. Inputs from the social sciences and humanities are increasingly recognized as being essential to understand and engender transformative responses deemed necessary in light of the magnitude and scope of global environmental change (Pelling, 2010; O'Brien, 2011; 2012; Hackmann and Lera St. Clair, 2012; Feola, 2015; Patterson et al., 2017; Fazey et al., 2018).

While the unsustainability of models of development rooted in capitalist modernity was not a central feature of initial theorizations of sustainability transformation (Feola, 2015; for a notable exception, see Pelling et al., 2012), sustainability transformation scholarship has more recently come to terms with the root causes of the climate crisis. Societies that maintain 'business as usual' and hence pursue compound expansion—a central tenet of capitalism—are set to overshoot the target of limiting global warming to 1.5–2.0 degrees (IPCC, 2018). Meanwhile,

the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in a broadening of the debate on the contradictions of capitalism and the conditions for post-growth and post-capitalist economies (e.g. Harvey, 2014; Streek, 2014; Brand and Wissen, 2013; New Roots Collective, 2020; Büscher et al., 2021). Evidence on the unfeasibility of strategies such as green growth and the circular economy, which aim to decouple capitalist development from its intrinsically destructive impacts on the natural environment, has mounted (e.g. Haberl et al., 2020; Hickel and Kallis, 2020; Jackson and Victor, 2019; Parrique et al., 2019). Close examination of sectors such as agriculture (e.g. IPES-Food., 2016) as well as broader analyses of affluence and overconsumption (e.g. Wiedmann et al., 2020) further question the possibility of meeting global sustainability targets without challenging and transforming modern capitalist institutions and their cultural, social and political architecture.

Sustainability transformation is increasingly seen across a broad range of fields as a multifaceted, multilevel process that necessarily entails questioning the fundamental principles on which our societies

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are based: the ‘physical deep structures of civilization’, as well as ‘established patterns of life and work and [...] benefits and burdens’ (Jasanoff and Kim, 2013: 189). Critical, autonomous and post-development scholarship in geography (e.g. Escobar, 2015; Chatterton, 2016; Demaria et al., 2019; Schmid, 2019; Schmid and Smith, 2020) and political ecology (e.g. Brand, 2016) as well as some sustainability transition approaches focussing on long-term development cycles (e.g. Kemp et al., 2018; Kanger and Schot, 2019; also see Feola, 2020) and earth system governance debates (e.g. Albert, 2020; Lövbrand et al., 2020) have enriched the conceptualization of sustainability transformation, particularly by bringing together critiques and conceptions of global environmental change, capitalism, industrial modernity, and sustainability transformation. For example, leading human geographer Leslie Head has contended, ‘It is widely recognized that we need to shift some very big cultural frames—the importance of economic growth, the dominance of fossil fuel capitalism, the hope of modernity as unending progress—to deal adequately with the climate change challenge’ (Head, 2019: ix). Similarly, environment and development scholar Harold Wilhite has argued that ‘deep reductions in energy use and carbon emissions will not be possible within political economies that are driven by the capitalist imperatives of growth, commodification and individualization’ (2016). This position has been echoed by researchers in the field of sustainability transitions; according to Kemp and colleagues, the sustainability literature indicates ‘the need for systemic change, not only in socio-technical systems, but also in the system of capitalism and the process of marketisation, which has been the dominant force of transformation in the last two centuries, together with emancipation and democratization’ (Kemp et al., 2018:71).

In this paper, we maintain that connecting the above mentioned theorizations of sustainability transformation and debates on contradictions of capitalism and the conditions for post-growth and post-capitalist economies provides a fruitful and as yet not fully explored ground to conceptualize sustainability transformation. An especially relevant perspective has been advanced by scholars who argue that sustainability transformation entails the deconstruction of and liberation from capitalist imaginaries of endless economic growth (e.g. Latouche, 2010) or the ‘breaking’ of capitalist habits (Wilhite, 2016). This research suggests that sustainability transformation might not come about through the mere addition of supposed ‘solutions’, values or social imperatives (e.g. Leff, 2010), but rather by *subtracting* problematic existing institutions, forms of knowledge, practices, imaginaries, power structures, and human-non-human relations in the first place.

A recent approach proposed by Feola (2019) similarly rejects the assumptions of ‘automatic’ displacement of extant socio-economic regimes as a *consequence* of the addition of socially, technically, or culturally innovative ‘solutions’. Rather, this framework proposes that actually existing prefigurative and propositional initiatives entail an element of ‘unmaking’ modern capitalist configurations in order to ‘make space’ for alternative, post-capitalist realities. Unmaking is referred to as ‘a diverse range of interconnected and multilevel (individual, social, socioecological) processes that are deliberately activated in order to ‘make space’ (temporally, spatially, materially, and/or symbolically) for radical alternatives that are incompatible with dominant modern capitalist configurations’ (Feola 2019: 979).

Building on the above framework, in this paper, we call for a research agenda on sustainability transformation that is sensitive to and theoretically equipped for the analysis of transformation as a multifaceted, multilevel process that entails the deconstruction of capitalist modernity or elements thereof, as well as the construction of post-capitalist realities. We demonstrate the usefulness of a lens that attends to processes of making and unmaking in sustainability transformations by applying it to the analysis of an ongoing sustainability transformation. We are guided by the following research question: How are processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity and making of post-capitalist realities entangled in sustainability transformation?

To answer this research question, we examine the case of el

Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del Norte de Nariño y Sur del Cauca, one of a growing number of *territorios campesinos agroalimentarios* (TCA; agro-food farming territories) that have emerged as a Colombian peasant movement that is seeking to realize societal transformation beyond capitalism at territorial level. We introduce an inventory of theories and concepts of deconstruction, rupture and disarticulation drawn from across the social sciences and apply it to identify processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity within a *territorio campesino agroalimentario*. We describe their diversity in a manner that extends beyond siloed paradigms or disciplines and show how they concretely interplay with the construction (making) of post-capitalist realities. We disentangle processes of deconstruction (unmaking) and construction (making) as two sets of complementary and reinforcing but nonetheless distinct processes. In doing so, we show how processes of unmaking are generative in that they interrupt the routines, structures and relations that impede the constitution of post-capitalist realities.

## 2. Theoretical context: Unmaking and making in sustainability transformation

### 2.1. Knowledge gaps and theoretical shortcomings

Theories of sustainability transformation have generally suffered from an ‘innovation bias’ in the sense that they have overly emphasized the emergence of novelty and undertheorized the deconstruction and disarticulation of existing socioecological configurations. Research on prefigurative social movements has tended to emphasize the ‘construction of the future in the present’, the ‘viral’ diffusion of grassroots prefiguration, and the disruptive effect of such prefiguration on the status quo (e.g. Maeckelbergh, 2011; Monticelli, 2018).

Similarly, socio-technical and sustainability transition studies have long assumed that the disruption of the dominant socio-technical regime is an automatic effect of innovation and have therefore largely undertheorized the former aspect of socio-technical change (Shove and Walker, 2007). Shove (2012) lamented that although the emergence of innovations often implies the disappearance of older socio-technical arrangements, the details of such declines and supersessions rarely receive adequate attention. Along similar lines, Davidson more recently noted the persistence of innovation bias, which in her view can be explained because innovation ‘is far more politically palatable after all, because it does not threaten any vested interests in the current regime. Innovations are also new and exciting; the stuff that wins awards, launches careers and stimulates stock markets’ (Davidson, 2019:255).

Theorizations of sustainability transformation in the field of social-ecological systems (SES) studies have suffered from a similar limitation. Bringing forward complexity and systems dynamism, frameworks for understanding social-ecological transformations have dedicated considerable attention to social innovations and the emergence of new ways of thinking, doing and organizing (Park et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2014; Olsson et al., 2014; Haxeltine et al., 2017). Considerations of disruption have been limited to a pre-transformation phase, whereby disruption is usually regarded as an effect of external events such as an ecological crisis rather than a result of deliberate action.

Researchers in both of the above-mentioned fields have more recently studied processes of destabilization and disruption. In the field of sustainability transitions, the notion of destabilization—i.e. ‘the process of weakening reproduction of core [socio-technical] regime elements’ such as routines, technical capabilities, strategic orientations, and mindsets (Turnheim and Geels, 2012, p. 35)—challenges the assumption that this process is an inevitable by-product of the emergence of innovation. Rather, the notion of destabilization conceptualizes the ‘unlocking’ of existing socio-technical regimes as a condition for innovation (Turnheim and Geels, 2012, 2013). Another emerging notion of disruption in this field is that of exnovation: ‘a conscious decision to phase out technology or practice, to decommission it, and to withdraw the corresponding resources and use them for other purposes’

(Kimberly, 1981:91). Exnovation includes the deliberate termination of existing (infra)structures and products to pursue ideological, economic, ecological or other objectives which are perceived as desirable (Heyen et al., 2017). The notion of exnovation, which has so far mostly been applied to specific technologies in the energy sector, rests on the assumption that innovations alone often prove insufficient for replacing established unsustainable infrastructures (David, 2018; Davidson, 2019). Similarly, a recently proposed framework of socio-ecological transformations in SES studies acknowledges the importance of challenging incumbent paradigms on the micro, meso and macro social levels in order to contribute to a parallel process of change facilitation. Within this framework, Sievers-Glotzbach and Tschersich (2019:6) explicitly identified the need to challenge crucial capitalist modern paradigms such as ‘materialistic culture and growth’, the ‘control and autonomy of humans over nature’ and ‘expert knowledge and specialization’ in order to pursue socio-ecological transformation.

However, although these theories of destabilization, exnovation and disruption are useful in unpacking some aspects of the entanglement of unmaking and making in sustainability transformations, they hardly offer conceptual tools to examine sustainability transformation in terms of transformation of and *beyond* capitalist modernity. Indeed, capitalism has by and large been taken for granted in dominant theories of sustainability transitions (Feola, 2020; Newell, 2020), which has limited the scope for imagining alternative futures, policy options and strategies for transformative change. Furthermore, theorizations of sustainability transformation have often given scarce consideration to normative and ontological pluralism, which has contributed to the rigidity of depoliticized techno-centric responses to global environmental change and undermined the transformative co-production of political economies, cultures, societies, and biophysical relations (Nightingale et al., 2019; Pelling et al., 2012; Stirling, 2011; Turnhout et al., 2020). The contributions of subaltern and indigenous scholars on alternative knowledge systems, resistance to capitalism and social transformations (e.g., Nelson, 2008) have rarely been acknowledged in these debates (Latulippe and Klenk, 2020; Turnhout et al., 2020).

In turn, social, political or economic actors with vested interests in the status quo have often co-opted and consequently depleted the term ‘transformation’ of its progressive meaning, as can be observed in instances of ‘greenwashing’ operated by some actors in the business sector (Blythe et al., 2018; Pelling et al., 2012). In this respect, one significant limitation has been a lack of attention to power relations and the politics of sustainability transformations: as transformation becomes an ubiquitous policy imperative—albeit only nominally, such scant consideration of power and politics has reduced the space for other political strategies to face global environmental change, including the potential of resistance and conflict to initiate the early stages of a transformative process (Eriksen et al., 2015; Manuel-Navarrete and Pelling, 2015; Patterson et al., 2017; Blythe et al., 2018; Nightingale et al., 2019; Pelling et al., 2012).

In contrast to sustainability transition and SES studies, autonomous and anarchist geographies, degrowth, and community economies studies have deeply engaged with post-capitalist futures (e.g. Graeber, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Holloway, 2010; Chatterton, 2016; White and Williams, 2012; Demaria et al., 2019; Schmid, 2019; Schmid and Smith, 2020). Autonomous spaces ‘where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organization’ (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006:730) exist against (in opposition to) and beyond (as a prefiguration of alternative futures to) modern capitalist socioecological relations (Holloway, 2010; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010; Chatterton, 2016). Given the

pervasiveness of capitalism, ways of living otherwise also necessarily exist within the dominant (albeit not monolithic) system that they seek to overcome (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Wright, 2013). Thus, the emergence and consolidation of autonomous spaces entails both destruction and construction, resistance and experimentation, refusal and proposition. This tension between the making of post-capitalist realities and the unmaking of capitalist ones underscores the critical function of the latter in the non-binary, nuanced in-against-and-beyond character of existing attempts to realize and prefigure sustainability transformation.

However, by and large, this literature has combined thick descriptions of single case studies and weak theory (Gibson-Graham, 2014), which has been pivotal for producing a performative rethinking of the economy but also has hindered more structured theoretical generalizations of transformation processes, specifically with regard to the entanglement between unmaking and making of concern in this paper. Sustainability transformation scholars have repeatedly called for a more in-depth engagement with theories of social change (e.g. Feola, 2015; Fazey et al., 2018) and lamented the inability of existing research and research frameworks to integrate different ontologies about the nature of social and socioecological change (e.g. Sunderlin, 1995; Geels, 2010). Despite attempts to combine, for example, the personal, political and practical dimensions of transformation (O’Brien, 2018), research on transformation has too often struggled to capture and comprehend the widely diverse forms and arenas of struggle for transformation and their productive interconnections. Thus, sustainability transformation scholars have also critiqued the lack of frameworks that can support a multi-level analysis of sustainability transformation. For example, the frameworks used in sustainability transition and SES research do not lend themselves to supporting the analysis of micro and individual level processes, whereas those used in research on post-capitalism and autonomous spaces place individual, micro- and meso levels in focus but are less sharp on macro-level processes. Sievers-Glotzbach and Tschersich’s (2019) framework might be a possible exception to this norm; however, the applicability and added value of this framework remains to be proven in empirical research.

In summary, the scholarship on sustainability transformation is rich and diverse; however, theorizations of processes of sustainability transformation—how such transformations come about, how they unfold, and how they achieve desired outcomes or fail to do so—suffer from important gaps and theoretical shortcomings that have narrowing and siloing effects on our perspective on the entanglement of processes of construction (making) and deconstruction (unmaking) in sustainability transformation.

## 2.2. A perspective on the unmaking of capitalist modernity in sustainability transformation

In response to the above shortcomings, the following perspective expands on Feola (2019) by introducing an inventory of theories and concepts of deconstruction, rupture and disarticulation drawn from across the social sciences (Table 1). This perspective contrasts with theories of sustainability transformation that foreground ‘windows of opportunity’ or the capacity for innovative ‘solutions’ to outcompete or disrupt established socioecological configurations (Feola, 2019). Consistently with Feola’s proposal, which draws attention to the deliberate unmaking of socioecological configurations, these theoretical tools conceptualize processes of deconstruction, rupture and disarticulation as *conditions for* rather than *consequences of* social and transformation, and they can be used to inform thinking about the role of unmaking of modern capitalist relations in sustainability transformation beyond capitalism.

**Table 1**

Theories and concepts and their significance for the disentanglement of processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity and the making of post-capitalist realities (elaboration based on [Feola, 2019](#), and [Feola and Vincent, unpublished document](#)).

Theory/concept (field)	Selected references	Core idea	Level at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist modernity*	Significance for the making of post-capitalist realities*
Destabilization (Sustainability transitions)	<a href="#">Turnheim and Geels (2013)</a>	The 'process of weakening reproduction of core [socio-technical] regime elements' such as routines, technical capabilities, strategic orientation, and mindsets ( <a href="#">Turnheim and Geels, 2012, p. 35</a> )	Macro (societal)	Weakens the reproduction of core elements of capitalist socio-technical regimes (e.g. technical capabilities for the increasing exploitation of human and non-human life, strategic orientation towards efficiency).	Allows cultural, technical and strategic diversification and experimentation (e.g. as related to modes of exchange outside of the market, responsible technologies or strategic orientation towards sufficiency).
Exnovation(Sustainability transitions)	<a href="#">Davidson (2019)</a>	A 'conscious decision to phase out technology or practice, to decommission it, and to withdraw the corresponding resources and use them for other purposes' ( <a href="#">Kimberly 1981, p. 91</a> )	Macro (societal)	Abandons, purposively terminates, de-funds, de-routinizes and/or de-institutionalizes socially and environmentally destructive/exploitative technologies, and the production and consumption practices with which they are bound.	Allows political and financial capital to be invested in alternative technologies (e.g. low-tech, frugal technologies) and related practices, value systems (e.g. oriented towards care), and more horizontal power structures.
Unlearning(Organization studies)	<a href="#">Fiol and O'Connor (2017a, 2017b)</a>	Consciously not thinking or acting in 'old' ways ( <a href="#">Stenvall et al., 2018</a> )	Micro (individual), meso (collectives)	Abandons, rejects, discards from use, gives up, abstains from retrieving, questions taken-for-granted values, norms, beliefs (e.g. the idea of progress as endless accumulation and expansion), and operations and behaviour (e.g. over-production and -consumption).	Enables learning new cultural significations and routines (e.g. voluntary simplicity) and emotional re-attachment (e.g. with nature).
Sacrifice(Political ecology)	<a href="#">Maniates and Meyer (2010)</a>	Giving up something (now) for something of higher value (to be obtained now or in the future).	Micro (individual), meso (collectives)	Entails voluntary reduction of consumption (voluntary simplicity).	Enables time and space for developing new cultural significations and practices, e.g. as related to non-utilitarian, non-market-based engagements with the self, others, and the biophysical environment.
Crack capitalism(Social movement studies and atonomous geographies)	<a href="#">Holloway (2010)</a>	A refusal to perpetuate capitalist practices and organizational structures through its commitment to value, money, profit.	Micro (individual), meso (collectives)	Entails the refusal to reproduce capitalist relations (e.g. labour, value).Rejects rigid classifications and totalizing abstractions (value, labour) as expressions of modern rationalism and capitalist form of domination.	Enables autonomy to enact forms of doing and organizing based on non-monetary values, self-determination, horizontal relations, and principles of cooperation and recognition.
Everyday resistance (Peasant and development studies)	<a href="#">Scott (1986)</a>	Everyday resistance refers to quiet, dispersed, disguised, or otherwise seemingly invisible acts of opposition, struggle or refusal to cooperate with abusive powers.	Micro (individual), meso (collectives)	Questions, opposes and objects to abusive or oppressive power relations. Refuses to cooperate with or submit to oppressive behaviour and control (e.g. as it relates to the appropriation and exploitation of cheap nature and labour).	Enables autonomy and sense of dignity.
Resistance(Social movement and political studies)	<a href="#">Hollander and Einwohner (2004)</a>	Resistance refers to varying forms of overt (visible) intentional actions of opposition, which are recognized by the targets of such opposition.	Meso (collectives), macro (societal)	Questions, opposes and objects to abusive or oppressive power relations. Actively dismantles material and symbolic infrastructures of capitalist exploitation of human or non-human life; contests and prevents the physical or symbolic presence of organizations imposing capitalist institutions and relations.	Defends spaces of diversity and autonomy.Reinforces alternative subjectivities through collective action.
Refusal(Decolonial/ indigenous and cultural studies)	<a href="#">McGranahan (2016)</a> <a href="#">Simpson (2016)</a>	Refusal is the rejection or negation of an imposed and taken-for-granted definition of a situation, subjectivity and/or social relation.	Micro (individual), meso (collectives)	Abstains from, stops, and/or breaks exploitative and/or alienating relations (e.g. labour relations).Rejects (taken for granted) consent to, e.g. definitions of progress as endless accumulation or consumption as only political space.	Affirms freedom to redefine subjectivities, problem definitions, histories; thereby provides alternative basis for social recognition, empowerment and reconfiguration of social relations on the ground of, e.g., principles of care, democracy, autonomy.
Delinking(Decolonial and cultural studies)	<a href="#">Mignolo (2007)</a> <a href="#">Wanzer-Serrano (2015)</a>	De-linking from the colonial rhetoric of modernity, which must be conceived as simultaneously capitalist, and denouncing the pretended universality of a Western and European episteme in which capital accumulated as a consequence of colonialism.	Meso (collectives), macro (societal)	Uncovers hidden assumptions, rejects/resists claims to epistemic privilege and universality of Western thought.Disengages from the logic and rhetoric of modernity and capitalism.	Allows claiming and relinking with diverse (e.g. relational) logics and types of knowledge (e.g. non-scientific) and a redefinition of subjectivities, citizenship, democracy, human rights, human and non-human nature, economic relations.

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Table 1 (continued)

Theory/concept (field)	Selected references	Core idea	Level at which it occurs	Significance for the unmaking of capitalist modernity*	Significance for the making of post-capitalist realities*
Decolonization of the imaginary (Degrowth)	Latouche (2010)	A radical and profound cultural change of the foundational imaginary significations of modern capitalist societies.	Micro (individual), meso (collectives), macro (societal)	Refuses complicity and collaboration with the ideology of development, e.g. as in the abstention from the use of environmentally destructive technologies, or the limitation of space allotted for advertisement. Cognitively subverts and critiques economicism and the imperative of endless economic growth.	Enables the autonomous determination of new imaginaries (e.g. alternatives to development).
Defamiliarization (Decolonial and cultural studies)	Shklovsky (1925) Vaught (2012)	The 'removal of an object from the sphere of automatized perception' (Shklovsky, 1925, p.6).	Micro (individual)	Ruptures, de-automatizes, dis-habituates automatized perception, e.g. as related to cultural constructions of value and worth. Emotional detachment and critical reflection. Disrupts common sense, e.g. as related to taken-for-granted production-consumption routines and utilitarian value systems.	Allows critical awareness, emotional re-attachment, and establishment of new cultural meanings.

\* We provide here an interpretation (stretching) of the theories and concepts to illustrate their applicability to and significance for the study of the unmaking of capitalist modernity and the making of post-capitalist realities. The examples are illustrative and not comprehensive.

This inventory is consistent with an understanding of unmaking as a combination of situated processes, whereby acts of unmaking are not end points but rather means inscribed in the performance of historically and spatially situated individual, social and socioecological transformation (Feola, 2019). Processes of unmaking involve both symbolic and material deconstruction and often entail contradictory personal experiences, which open up spaces for different ways of being that are enabled by the rejection of modern capitalist rationalist and utilitarian subjectivities but which might involve compromises, negotiations, setbacks, and dilemmas (Feola, 2019). Unmaking can occur through public actions (e.g. civil disobedience, protests) and disruptive public discourse but are more often private or even covert, and hence less prone to co-optation by states and markets (Feola, 2019). Unmaking is also generative; it interrupts the reproduction of capitalism, thereby opening possibilities otherwise out of reach, and it entails the withdrawing of support from a dominant system in favour of alternative ethical allegiances (Feola, 2019).

The utility of these concepts is illustrated using the case study of a *territorio campesino agroalimentario*. We adopt an interdisciplinary approach to explore the potential of our framework to inform the analysis of processes of unmaking as conditional components of sustainability transformation beyond capitalism. In doing so, we stretch these theories beyond their conventional application, which has not necessarily been to questions of sustainability or post-capitalist transformation. We show their applicability to and significance for the study of the unmaking of capitalist modernity and the making of post-capitalist realities. In concrete cases of sustainability transformation such as that studied in this paper, none of these existing theoretical perspectives in isolation can explain the unmaking of capitalist modernity because different forms of unmaking may be at play and interact with others at multiple levels (from the individual to the socioecological) in distinct cases of sustainability transformation. Thus, the interdisciplinary application of these theories and concepts shatters the paradigmatic and disciplinary silos that have reproduced the fragmentation of this scholarship. Furthermore, the inventory does not aim to offer an integrated theory of unmaking, but rather is designed to direct attention in research on sustainability transformations to important processes that may otherwise be overlooked within present frameworks. This framework may be subject to further refinement and extension on the basis of future research.

### 3. Materials and methods

To demonstrate the usefulness of a lens that attends to processes of making and unmaking in sustainability transformations, we draw on the case study of the *Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del Macizo del Norte de Nariño y Sur del Cauca* (henceforth, TCA Nariño and Cauca). Data on this case study was collected through both desk research and during fieldwork conducted between February and April 2019. We adopted a mixed methods approach consisting of the analysis of written and visual documents (see [electronic supplementary material](#)) produced by peasant organizations and six semi-structured interviews conducted by one of the authors (Moore) with peasant leaders and experts on peasant movements in Colombia. Interviewees' identities are kept anonymous in this paper. In addition, in April 2019 Moore attended the *Foro Sobre Derechos Campesinos*, a four-day long meeting where representatives from around the country gathered to discuss peasant rights and the future of the Colombian agrarian movement in light of the publication of the United Nations' Peasant Rights Declaration (2018). The *Foro Sobre Derechos Campesinos* was supported by multiple research, peasant and non-governmental organizations and hosted by the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá. Notes were taken throughout the conference and several speeches and discussions were recorded and transcribed, as were all visual documents used in this study. Our approach to data collection assumed that TCA Nariño and Cauca can only be understood through the forms of seeing and

naming the world of those who construct it: that it is only through the worldview of the peasants themselves that one can understand the strategies and visions they are using to push forward their own form of development (Iguarán, 2018).

Our data analysis approach involved an initial phase of characterization of the sustainability transformation beyond capitalism in which TCA Nariño and Cauca is engaged, which includes the construction of autonomous institutions (Fig. 1). We then reconstructed the history of TCA Nariño and Cauca, which we interrogated through the above-discussed making/unmaking lens (Table 1). Throughout this process, the empirical material was analysed through thematic and discourse analysis (Hajer, 1995), which was informed by de Souza Santos's (2014) approach to counterhegemonic grammars and Fals Borda (2010) perspective on popular knowledge.

#### 4. Case study: Territorio campesino Agroalimentario del Macizo del norte de Nariño y sur del Cauca

##### 4.1. Background: Peasant struggles and the emergence of re-constitutive processes

*Territorios campesinos agroalimentarios* (TCA) have emerged as territorialized associations of peasants seeking to create alternative forms of agricultural production, non-alienated labour and relations to nature. This form of association has taken shape within recent peasant, indigenous and afro-descendant joint mobilizations that struggle against marginalization, lack of access to land, and the degradation of vital ecosystems caused by the expansion of agro-industrial, extractive industries and infrastructural megaprojects. Peasant, indigenous and afro-descendant organizations alike see these processes as stemming from a capitalist neoliberal development model which is based on the pillars of extractivism and displacement, as reflected in the Colombian Government's quadrennial *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo* (National Development Plan) (Yie Garzón, 2017; Daza, 2019). These mobilizations have not only contested social exclusion and revendicated political rights and the redistribution of resources but also activated 're-constitutive processes' (Jiménez Martín et al., 2017; also see Cruz, 2014), i.e. processes of political creativity and social bottom-up prefiguration that

lead to the construction of a societal project that builds on popular democracy, recognizes the multiplicity of territorial governance forms, constructs a social, solidary and diverse economic model, [and] permits to overcome the capital-nature contradiction, among other elements that express a new worldview (Jiménez Martín et al., 2017:316, authors' translation).

Launched in 2013, the *Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Etnica y Popular* (Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic and Popular Summit) is one of many interconnected and nested social movement platforms such as the *Coordinador Nacional Agrario* (CNA, founded in 1995) and the *Congreso de los Pueblos* (founded in 2010), which bring together social movements at the national level in participatory processes, marches, assemblies and deliberative moments.

As one of the outcomes of these mobilizations, the idea of forming TCAs emerged after the fourth CNA Assembly in 2013 and informed initial attempts to establish them nation-wide. Eager to learn about the experiences of TCA construction, CNA met again for a fifth assembly in February of 2016. The regions of Cauca and Nariño appeared to be more successful than others, and soon became a blueprint for other territories to follow. Encouraged by the positive feedback from the assembly, the peasants of Nariño and Cauca continued their work; local communities from 15 municipalities, encompassing three community meetings in each municipality, various local mayors, and more than 3,000 peasants from the region actively participated in the collective discussion and elaboration of the declaration of TCA (Iguarán, 2018). The first TCA, Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del Macizo del norte de Nariño y

sur del Cauca was officially declared on 25 November 2016.

##### 4.2. Local circumstances

The construction of TCA Nariño and Cauca was facilitated by a number of place- and time-specific circumstances. First, a pre-existing strong social fabric among peasant communities and organizations, including the *Comité de integración del macizo colombiano*, had been reinforced by collaboration during the national agrarian strike in 2013 (see Salcedo et al., 2013; Cruz, 2014; interview, 18.03.19). Furthermore, peasants in Nariño and Cauca could rely on the traditional collective organization of the *minga*<sup>1</sup>. In December of 2015, the first *Minga por la Soberanía y Armonización* was held in Nariño with approximately 600 participants. Four more *mingas* followed, including one in January with more than 1,200 participants. It was at one such *minga* that mayors promised to reject extractive megaprojects and to support the formation of TCA Nariño and Cauca. The aims of other *mingas* were to establish the foundational ideas of the *Plan de Vida Digna, Agua y Dignidad* (more on this below) and construct autonomous governance institutions (Yie Garzón, 2017).

Second, local peasant communities and organizations also shared a history of struggle against environmental injustices caused by the capitalist development model. When in 2011 the Canadian company Gran Colombia Gold launched the so-called *Mazamoras* project, which included plans for exploration and extraction of gold over an area of nearly six thousand hectares, peasant communities mobilized to collectively oppose what they considered an intrusion in their territory. Feeling threatened in the absence of the right of prior consultation, many felt they were being denied a say in the exploitation of the local ecosystem on which their livelihoods depended. At the time of the events, the Colombian state granted the right of prior consultation (*consulta previa*) to indigenous and afro-Colombian but not peasant communities. The mobilization was met by death threats to peasant leaders and an escalation of social mobilization, which culminated in the occupation of two of Gran Colombia Gold's encampments. The local authorities did not initially take a position on the issue; however, the local mayors eventually issued an open letter that asserted their opposition to mining operations in their municipalities based on the grounds that the lands have traditionally been used for agriculture. The strong opposition of local communities and administrations forced Gran Colombia Gold to cease exploration in October 2011 (Muñoz, 2017).

Third, local peasant communities share a deep-rooted cultural identity defined in relation to territory (interview, 18.03.19). Due to this strong connection between land and identity, the idea of a *territorio campesino* (peasant territory), although as yet unformalized, was an old aspiration of local peasants (interview, 24.03.19; Muñoz, 2017). The threat of mining in the region made those cultural connections explicit in collective discussions.

Finally, fourth, the construction of TCA Nariño and Cauca was facilitated by the history of direct action at community level to respond to the national government's neglect in this region. While the state has historically been unable to consistently provide adequate basic social, health and educational services, personal security and rule of law, infrastructure, and technical support to the local communities, peasants have long adopted what Muñoz (2017) has called *de facto* actions: local peasant communities autonomously solving concrete issues through the 'sovereign decision of the *campesinos* and *campesinas*' (Grupo Kavilando, 2017), as endowed with 'the legitimacy that is entitled by being the

<sup>1</sup> A *minga* is a gathering that offers a space over a period of several days for people to consciously discuss and share ideas to work towards solutions to collective problems. Indigenous people first applied this idea to social mobilization, but *mingas* have spread beyond the indigenous community. Today they are used as a collective mode of social organizing with its power coming from the ability to express political action in alliance with others (Mantilla, 2018).

people who have historically lived in this territory' (interview, 24.03.19). Nevertheless, *de facto* political action is not merely a 'fall-back' option when *de jure* pathways are absent but rather a conscientious parallel strategy. Official TCA documents insist that 'TCAs will be constructed *de facto* by the communities that inhabit them and their foundation will be found in the legitimacy and strength of its organizational expressions' (Coordinador Nacional Agrario (CNA), 2015: 17). The grassroots approach and idea of 'working with the impossible' are critical characteristics of *de facto* political action. For TCA leaders, thinking about and discussing 'the impossible' constructively expands the limits of the possible, thereby motivating them to conceive of solutions beyond the limits of current legislation (Muñoz, personal communication, 15.03.19). Decisions on *de facto* actions were legitimized through hundreds of regular community meetings leading up to the declaration of the TCA Nariño and Cauca.

#### 4.3. Sustainability transformation beyond capitalism in Territorio campesino Agroalimentario

TCAs are simultaneously a collective vision for an alternative future, a physical geographic area, and a political tool for institutionalization. They are distinguished from other territorial figures such as *zonas de reserva campesina* (peasant reserve areas) by the participation of *campesinos* (peasants) as autonomous agents capable of determining in their own terms how the territory and community will develop (Muñoz, 2017).

A TCA is also a discursive space where the peasantry can put forward their visions for a just and dignified future and assert a proud identity that stands against alienation:

The construction of territories connects us directly to the culture of those who inhabit them and this implies that we are dealing with history, socially constructed social relations, with a transformed landscape, with struggles that have already started. To recognize ourselves as peasant men and women is fundamental for the appropriation [of our identity], for our [cultural] differentiation, for making our words express what we are and what we feel (Coordinador Nacional Agrario (CNA), 2017, authors' translation).

The physical area of a TCA is demarcated by common agreement of the *campesino* communities that inhabit it and have decided to unite and self-organize. A ground rule for this demarcation is that the majority population must be *campesino* and it cannot overlap with land already established under a different territorial arrangement, such as *resguardos* (reservations, in indigenous communities) or *consejos comunitarios* (community councils, in afro-descendant communities). Furthermore, the TCA's role as a political tool is fulfilled by translating the collective norms, values and visions of the peasantry into concrete institutions to give it legitimacy and power and prefigure an alternative development pathway.

Based on four fundamental principles, namely autonomy, coexistence, participation and profound respect for life and nature (see [electronic supplementary material](#)), the construction of peasant territoriality (*territorialidad campesina*) encapsulates the essence of the sustainability transformation pursued by TCAs. Through the construction of territory, a TCA constitutes novel, inclusive and dignifying social and political relations as well as a deeply felt human-nature connection:

We are the water from the mountains, the water from the mountains is in our bodies, because we, our grandparents, great-grandparents, we all have this water and the minerals it contains in our body. We are the land because we eat the products and minerals that the land gives; they are in our bodies [...] The relationship that exists between us as *campesinos*, it is not relationship of use, of utilization of land to produce, instead it is a much stronger connection and it is that which we are defending and have to continue defending (Daza, 2017, authors' translation).

One of the fundamental motivations behind TCAs is the defence of peasant identity, culture and ways of life, of peasant men and women's bodies, and of ecosystems and the commons from capitalist appropriation and exploitation. Nevertheless, TCAs cannot be reduced to a mere resistance movement or a backward-looking defence of a putatively primordial peasant culture. TCAs entail the construction of peasant territoriality in forms that have never before existed: a forward-looking constitution of human-human and human-nature relations in ways that grow from the roots of traditional culture but significantly move beyond them as well as beyond capitalist modernity to the extent to which elements of both traditional culture and capitalist modernity are incompatible with the desired vision of a sustainable future.

The construction of territory in TCA entails an ecological and social re-embedding of economic practices in ways that improve the wellbeing of the local population and ensure ecological sustainability. The notion of *economía propia* is a pivotal axis of the TCA sustainability transformation<sup>2</sup>; it is an economic alternative to capitalist development that responds to the 'potentials, necessities, and values of the *campesinado* and to the life that surrounds it' (TCA, 2016a). The *Plan de Vida Digna* (discussed below) lays the foundations of *economía propia* as a set of situated economic relations that function on the principle of sufficiency, which entails a guarantee of forms of production and exchange that are just, pursue food sovereignty, and the protection of the environment and human relations (TCA, 2016a; Yie Garzón, 2017). Strategies of *economía propia* include crop diversification to increase community resilience and self-sufficiency, prioritization of subsistence production with any surpluses going first to the local market before entering national or international markets, and public ownership of common goods such as water (La Direkta, 2014). This model opposes capitalist development; it challenges, among others, the understanding of efficiency (productivity), self-interest, violence domination and homogeneity as an organizing principle of agricultural production and human and non-human life (Coordinador Nacional Agrario (CNA), 2017; Cardona-López, 2020).

#### 4.4. Disentangling processes of unmaking and making in Territorio campesino Agroalimentario Nariño and Cauca

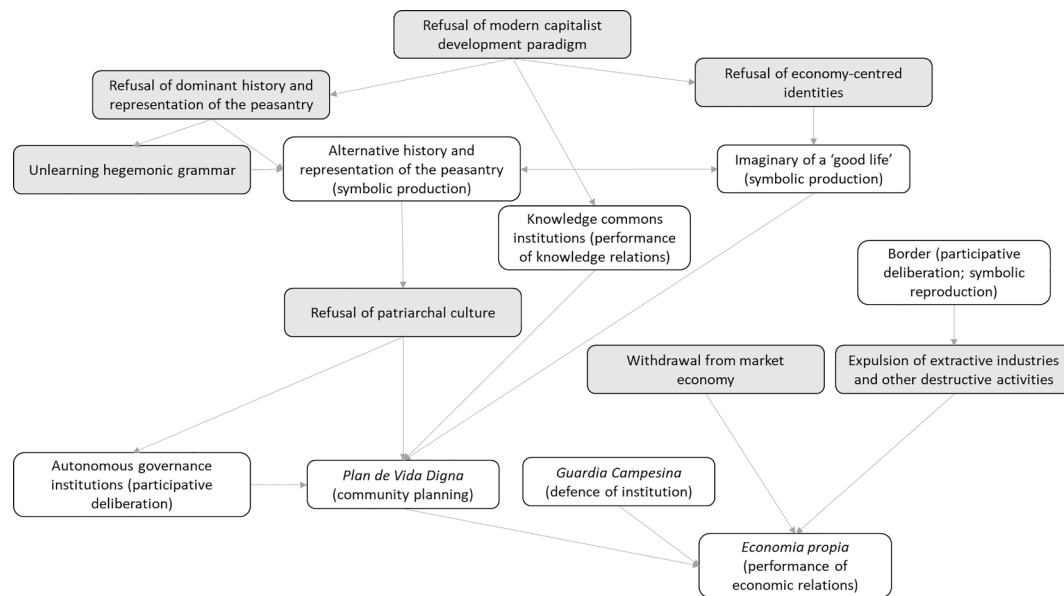
##### 4.4.1. Processes of unmaking and making: Territorial institutions

We understand the sustainability transformation pursued by TCA Nariño and Cauca as consisting of interconnected and interdependent processes of deconstruction and disarticulation (unmaking) of existing realities and of construction (making) of alternative ones. Fig. 1 visualizes the entanglement of these two sets of processes.

The construction of peasant territoriality, including an *economía propia*, has proceeded through the creation (making) of new institutions, namely autonomous governance institutions, the *Guardia Campesina* (peasant guard), knowledge commons institutions, and the *Plan de Vida Digna* (Fig. 1). We discuss them in turn.

**Autonomous governance institutions.** The political system within TCA Nariño and Cauca, referred to as the *gobierno campesino* (peasant government), is decentralized and constructed from the bottom-up with the idea 'that the communities start from the local to create processes of resistance, of organization, of self-governance, towards a conformation of a popular resistance in all of the nation that can counteract the power of the imperial regime.' (TCA, 2016b). The *gobierno campesino* is meant to be inclusive and representative, with authority and legitimacy stemming from the territory. The *gobierno campesino* does not aim to replace but rather to work in parallel and in collaboration with state government.

<sup>2</sup> The term *propia* here simultaneously denotes emphasis on (i) appropriateness, i.e. of socioecological and cultural embeddedness, specificity, and fit; (ii) ownership, sovereignty and control; and (iii) endogeneity. This term is used with reference to both the economy (*economía propia*) and education (*educación propia*).



**Fig. 1.** Entanglement of processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity and making of post-capitalist realities in *Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del Macizo del norte de Nariño y sur del Cauca*. White-shaded text boxes denote peasant institutions that constitute the sustainability transition as peasant territoriality and, in brackets, the actions of ‘making’. Grey-shaded textboxes denote processes of unmaking. Arrows denote causal relations as reconstructed through the data analysis.

**Table 2**

Overview of the unmaking of capitalist modernity in *Territorio Campesino Agroalimentario del Macizo del norte de Nariño y sur del Cauca*.

Processes of unmaking	Theoretical reference	What is unmade
Rejecting and negating imposed and taken-for-granted identities and imaginary significations	Refusal (e.g., McGranahan, 2016; Simpson, 2016)	Imaginary and imperative of development as defined by Eurocentric modernity; imposed identities of peasant, consumer entrepreneur and hired labourer; patriarchal culture.
Abstaining from using un-dignifying but routinized and interiorized language	Decolonization of the imaginary (e.g., Latouche, 2010)	Hegemonic discourse, patriarchal culture.
Withdrawal from the market economy	Unlearning (e.g., Fiol and O'Connor, 2017a, 2017b)	Market economy relations.
Expulsion of destructive enterprises from the territory	Crack capitalism (e.g., Holloway, 2010)	Capitalist presence and its socioecological impacts on the territory.
	Resistance (e.g., Hollander and Einwohner, 2004)	

The role of elected members of the *gobierno campesino* is *mandatar*, to mandate, which means to reach collective agreements and transform them into norms while guaranteeing that they express the values, interests, and needs of the people living in the territory. The mandate is the primary tool used to legitimize collective action and serves a mechanism to ensure that ‘all of the activities that we are doing have to be talked about and converted into an instrument that will guide our declaration of rights, our proposals, our projects’ (Daza, 2019).

The *Junta de Gobierno Campesino* is the political body of the *gobierno campesino* and is entrusted with leading the process of constructing and managing the territory into the future (TCA, 2016b) (see [electronic supplementary material](#)). The *Junta*’s representatives are elected in municipal meetings to ensure representation from all regions. Each municipality must elect three people, ideally a woman, a man, and a member of the youth in order to guarantee inclusiveness and diversity (TCA, 2016a).

**Guardia Campesina.** The *Guardia Campesina* (peasant guard), is an unarmed group of people who are elected in the number of three per municipality and is subordinate to the *Junta de Gobierno* (TCA, 2016c). Its members are required to participate in a special training and establish a communication system to spread alerts quickly throughout the territory (TCA, 2016b). In case of a threat (e.g. intrusion of mining companies), the *Guardia Campesina* informs everybody in the territory to facilitate and lead a mass mobilization:

We, the *campesinos*, through our way of living and farming, have historically carried out the role of ‘guardians of life’. Today the territories which we inhabit are subjected to multiple threats, among

which is mining. Because of this, it is necessary to form a *Guardia Campesina* which can ensure the protection of both the territory and its people. (TCA, 2016c).

**Institutions of knowledge commons.** Peasants participate in distributed knowledge production and circulation, such as the *campesino-a-campesino* (peasant-to-peasant) model, which is centred around the idea of a distributed network of municipal agrarian committees united through a common agrarian agenda (Daza, 2017). Relevant knowledge is spread through personal communication, schools, conferences, and community meetings. This method has empowered peasant communities to construct their own land ordinances and has made it possible to activate collective participatory processes around the *Plan de Vida Digna* (Forero, 2018).

**Plan de Vida Digna.** Emerging from the experiences of some indigenous, afro-descendant and peasant communities from the 1980 s, the *Plan de Vida Digna* (also *Plan de Vida Comunitario* or *Plan de Vida Digna, Agua y Dignidad*) is a form of participatory community-led planning that aims at conducting collective processes of constructing visions of possible futures and empowering communities to inhabit, govern, make decisions, and legislate over their territory, ways of living, economy, and culture (Coordinador Nacional Agrario (CNA), 2015). *Plan de Vida Digna* is informed by principles of solidarity, justice, dignity, a holistic view of human and non-human life, collective participation, autonomy, and sovereignty (Coordinador Nacional Agrario (CNA), 2015).

The *Plan de Vida Digna* stands in contrast to capitalist development because we want life, we want agriculture, we want *alimentación*, we want vital goods like water. Neoliberalism does not desire these



things, it only wants profits, to extract minerals for export, while we, on the contrary, defend life. Our Plan de Vida Digna is a form of countering the neoliberal model (Iguarán, 2018).

Furthermore, in contrast with the National Development Plans of the national government, which assume a four-year timeframe, the *Plan de Vida Digna* assumes a long timeframe ranging from twenty to thirty years. This temporal dimension of the *Plan de Vida Digna* is a key form of opposition to the ‘short term mentality of capitalist accumulation as a criterion for development’ (Iguarán, 2018).

Like other institutions for autonomous governance in TCA Nariño and Cauca, the *Plan de Vida Digna* responds to calls for advancing ‘a territoriality free of patriarchy’ (interview, 24.03.19). This is in contrast to the machoistic and patriarchal culture remains widespread in rural Colombia. The fact that women still have to demand basic rights—‘rights to be, to know, to learn, to speak, to decide’ (interview, 24.03.19)—is understood as a serious problem in TCA Nariño and Cauca and is therefore as much an object of transformation as capitalist development.

In summary, autonomous governance institutions, the *Guardia Campesina*, knowledge commons institutions and the *Plan de Vida Digna* are foundational institutions that prefigure and to an extent already realize the construction of an autonomous society, including an *economía propia*. TCA Nariño and Cauca is set against-and-beyond even while still a part of and therefore inevitably within a capitalist society. However, this construction is made possible by the unmaking of the socially and ecologically destructive presence of capitalism as embodied in the extractive industries and agribusiness (Fig. 1; Table 2). TCA Nariño and Cauca’s vision and practice of autonomous society is founded on agro-ecological agriculture that is ‘kind to the ecosystem, that produces produce free of chemicals, that takes care of people, that takes care of the water and the environment’, which is supplemented by plans to reforest and collectively manage water resources (interview, 24.03.19).

This form of sustainable agriculture would be critically undermined by ecological destruction (e.g. soil contamination, disruption of water cycles, biodiversity loss) caused by the extraction of natural resources. Furthermore, TCA Nariño and Cauca depends on the inclusion and participation of healthy people and ecosystems and on their dedication to building a dignified economy. This approach is incompatible with agrobusinesses as well as extractive industries, which have a long history of negative health impacts on hired labourers and local communities, and often require the ‘extraction’ of labourers from their community (e.g. Göbel et al., 2014; Göbel and Ulloa, 2014; Feola, 2017; also see the Environmental Justice Atlas: <https://ejatlas.org/>).

Peasants in TCA Nariño and Cauca have achieved the unmaking of ecological and social destruction in two ways (Fig. 1, Table 2). Firstly, peasants deliberately—albeit often partially—withdraw from the market economy, i.e. from food supply chains and exploitative labour markets in the effort to localize the economy, by establishing locally embedded social relations as well as material (e.g. water) flows. Secondly, peasants engage in the expulsion of destructive economic, in particular extractive enterprises from their territory. Illustrated by the case of Gran Colombia Gold described above, the expulsion of extractive industries was in turn made possible by the creation of a territorial border (see map in [electronic supplementary material](#)), in itself another fundamental institution, which became consolidated in collective deliberations and led to the declaration of TCA Nariño and Cauca in 2016, as described above. TCA Nariño and Cauca’s border is actively monitored by the *Guardia Campesina*. Furthermore, it is reproduced through symbolic as well as material actions, such as *caravanas* (caravans) attended by hundreds of people, which aim to harmonize the territory and cultural identity (Yie Garzón, 2017). The peasants put up flags indicating their permanence in this territory as a symbolic gesture intended to assert to companies that ‘this land is our land, it is our children’s land, the water is for humanity not for profit’ (interview, 24.03.2019). *Caravanas* are events of ‘brotherhood with mother earth, it is a spiritual event were the participants

talk to the mountains, talk to the lakes, and communicate that they are there to defend them’ (interview, 24.03.2019; also see Yie Garzón, 2017). According to one peasant leader, the *caravana* ‘seeks to alert the whole territory of the threat of mining transnationals’ and remind people to care for the earth and ‘the generosity she has had with humanity.’

#### 4.4.2. Processes of unmaking and making: Development and subjectivities

The construction of new institutions rests on processes of deliberate refusal and unlearning of development imaginaries and imperatives and their related subjectivities of peasant and human beings (Fig. 1, Table 2). In turn, these processes of unmaking enable the elaboration and projection of alternative subjectivities that inform the new institutions as well as the relational ontologies and holistic principles on which the TCA is founded. Peasants explicitly refuse the dominant development paradigm based on material accumulation by dispossession, violence, the imperative of endless economic growth and profit-seeking, and the reduction of people and nature to commodities. This paradigm is incompatible with a dignified life founded on TCA’s principles of autonomy, coexistence, participation, and deep respect for life and nature ([electronic supplementary material](#)) (Cardona-López, 2020).

The refusal of development has two facets, both of which are formalized in the official TCA written and audio-visual documents used to present this institution to other peasant communities and the wider public. Firstly, peasants refuse the subjectivities of consumer, hired labourer, and entrepreneur (food producer) imposed by the dominant capitalist development narrative; peasants refuse ‘what the system wants us to want’ (interview, 24.03.19). A peasant leader laments the hegemonic nature of the globalized neoliberal capitalist system that ‘insists that the population have only one type of imaginary, only one type of culture’, an imaginary ‘of being a consumer. Not human beings but consumers.’ (interview, 24.03.19). To peasants, life is the central organizing principle rather than profit: ‘what unites us is life’ (Yie Garzón, 2018; also see: Cardona-López, 2020). Peasants see agriculture as more than a form of employment and perceive themselves as more than agricultural workers. From a *campesino* perspective, agriculture has ‘never been catalogued as a business’; being an entrepreneur is not part of the *campesino* mentality. People in the territory do agriculture for agriculture’s sake, because of tradition; it is their duty and lifestyle (interview, 24.03.19).

The second facet of the refusal of development relates to the way in which the state’s development discourse in Colombia depicts peasants and their cultures and rural ecosystems as dispensable and as barriers to development and progress towards modernity. *Campesinos* engage in deliberate unlearning of this discourse by abstaining from using the routinized, interiorized language and imaginaries of peasants as ‘lacking basic needs, being years behind in terms of development, backward and inefficient in agricultural techniques’ (Daza, 2019). In parallel, peasants develop and learn to use an alternative discourse in which the grammar of rights is very prominent; peasants request the right to life and the right to territory. Similarly, peasants abstain from reproducing interiorized notions of ‘natural resources’ and rather learn to think and speak of nature in terms of ‘vital goods’ or ‘ancestral heritage’. The new discourse makes peasants’ lived connection with nature explicit and reveals their intergenerational, long-term temporal perspective whereby present natural conditions are the result of ancestors’ actions. Such counterhegemonic grammar becomes part of the larger effort to construct an alternative history of the peasantry—one that reaffirms their dignity, autonomy and cultural relevance. To recover historic memory and construct a non-hegemonic history of the peasantry also enables *campesinos* to critically examine some aspects of peasant culture. In particular, the persistence of a machoistic and patriarchal culture is explicitly acknowledged as being incompatible with the vision of a dignified future for the community, and thus it is deliberately refused, thereby enabling the design of new institutions that practice inclusion, as described above.

For TCAs, it is important to make a conscientious effort to learn about one's own history and the traditions and rituals of everyday life that make their culture. The construction of an alternative peasant history is very closely connected to the new discourse on the good life (*buen vivir*). The two discourses reinforce each other and result in symbolic practices and proposals that solidify new ideas. One such proposal is that of *educación propia*: an education based on ideas of autonomy, dignity, and cultural relevance that revendicates being *campesino* (Mantilla, 2018). *Educación propia* aims at strengthening communities such that peasants can become leaders who know their rights and can defend their territory (Mantilla, 2018). The proposal of *educación propia* includes a requirement that rural school principals must be *campesinos*, people that grew up in the countryside rather than the cities, and that there is at least some discussion of what it means to be *campesino* (interview 24.03.19).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

### 5.1. Contribution to theorizations of unmaking capitalist modernity in sustainability transformation

In this paper, we have sought to advance the theorization of sustainability transformation by expanding the notion of unmaking capitalist modernity. We have contended that rather than conceptualizing sustainability transformation as a process of addition of sustainability values, social imperatives, or socio-technical solutions, which are assumed to displace extant values, social imperatives or socio-technical regimes, we should see the role of *unmaking* as a possible condition of sustainability transformation.

We have offered empirical evidence of how unmaking and making operate in a concrete case of sustainability transformation. In undertaking this analysis, we find that the unmaking of capitalist modernity cannot be adequately explained from any single existing theoretical perspective. In seeking to develop this field, we have brought together theories from as diverse fields as sustainability transitions, degrowth, political ecology, decolonial and indigenous, resistance, anarchist, and cultural studies scholarship in order to provide the basis for a new analysis that takes into account the deconstruction of unsustainable capitalist socioecological relations alongside the construction of sustainable post-capitalist realities in sustainability transformation. Thus, this paper has covered some ground towards an integrative framework of the role of the disruption of capitalism in sustainability transformation by reconstructing the interplay of different but interrelated processes of unmaking from an empirical perspective.

In advancing the theorization of unmaking of capitalist modernity in sustainability transformation, this paper also makes at least three more specific contributions. First, it expands the theoretical basis for studying processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity and provides empirical evidence of these processes and their operation in the case study of TCA Nariño and Cauca. Many of these processes of unmaking are underappreciated in sustainability transformation research, or they have been studied in isolation, if at all, in relation to sustainability transformation. Although only a subset of the processes presented in Table 1 were actually observed in this case study, other processes may be at play in concrete cases of sustainability transformation elsewhere. Second, this paper shows how processes of unmaking and making are concretely entangled; unmaking creates conditions for the construction of alternative institutions; however, unmaking and making occur in chains whereby the construction of some institutions and the deconstruction of undesirable subjectivities, imaginaries, physical and social structures can enable each other in turn (Fig. 1). This finding provides nuance to the relationship between processes of unmaking and making. Third, the analysis of TCA Nariño and Cauca illustrates that the unmaking of capitalist modernity for the pursuit of sustainability transformation can be combined with the deconstruction of other cultural elements—in this case, traditional patriarchal relations—that coexist with the former and are equally incompatible with the realization of peasant territoriality. In

this respect, too, this case study provides evidence against overly simplistic conceptions of sustainability transformation as instances of mere anti-capitalism.

In sum, our analysis supports the understanding of generative processes of unmaking of capitalist modernity in sustainability transformation. As postulated by Feola (2019), processes of unmaking interrupt the routines, structures and relations that impede post-capitalist realities from emerging and becoming consolidated. Political acts of unmaking are sometimes covert and hidden, which makes them no less meaningful to those who enact them and their collectives, whereas other times, they are vocal and visible; they can take conventional (e.g. protests) or unconventional political forms (*de facto* actions, *caravanas*). Importantly, disruptions of the status-quo have an emergent and processual character; they are performed and reproduced in everyday lives of individuals and collectives (Feola, 2019), as in the case of counterhegemonic grammars and the enforcement (both symbolic and material) of the territorial border in TCA Nariño and Cauca. Unmaking and making are lived in the contradictory everyday experiences of individuals and collectives who exist in-against-and-beyond capitalist modernity: peasant communities living simultaneously in two different territorial constructions, which also correspond to contrasting value systems, types of economic relations, governance and knowledge systems, historical narrations, and subjectivities.

### 5.2. Future research

We call for a research agenda on sustainability transformation that is sensitive to and analytically equipped for the analysis of transformation as a multifaceted, multilevel process that entails the deconstruction of capitalist modernity or elements thereof as well as the construction of post-capitalist realities. We suggest that three research directions can fruitfully inform this research agenda.

First, we envision further comparative analysis of existing transformational initiatives worldwide to critique and refine the approach proposed in this paper. Doing so will help to overcome the limitations of single case study analysis and generate further evidence of the roles played by different forms of unmaking to engender the construction of sustainable alternatives to modern capitalist development. In inviting applications of this perspective to existing transformational initiatives in other contexts, we are particularly aware of the specificity of the case study discussed in this paper: an initiative that is situated in the 'periphery' of capitalist modernity, where there might be more social and symbolic structures, including non-Western ontologies, that have not yet been appropriated by capitalism, and where a relatively weak state fails to protect communities from the negative impacts of capitalist development. In 'peripheral' contexts such as these ones, which are in fact 'core' in the resistance to capitalist appropriation of cheap nature and labour, transformative initiatives may be more vulnerable to capitalism, but also share a history of resistance, and thus find crucial resources to inform transformative initiatives that are alternative to capitalist modernity. In effect, these were important local circumstances for TCA Nariño and Cauca. In 'core' areas of the Global North, where capitalist modernity is more entrenched, also thanks to stronger state power, and where there might be more difficult access to ways of knowing, being and doing that have not been appropriated by capitalist modernity, transformative initiatives may experience different dynamics than those observed in TCA Nariño and Cauca. The analytical approach proposed in this paper, with its openness to diverse forms of unmaking in transformation to sustainability, can help identify processes specific to either the 'core' and 'periphery' of capitalist modernity.

Secondly, although this was not accomplished in the present study due to limitations in the available data, we envision and call for longitudinal studies of sustainability transformation that can disentangle processes of unmaking and making over time. To do so, also recognizing the processual character of sustainability transformation, we suggest that process research methods based on narrative-based explanation,

such as event-sequence analysis (e.g. Griffin, 1993) are promising to unpack such entanglement and thereby re-construct sustainability transformation pathways. This proposal also responds to calls for infusing a more marked historical and temporal perspective in investigations of sustainability transformation, as advocated by Hackmann and Lera St. Clair (2012) and Fazey et al. (2018), among others.

Finally, as this paper illustrates the usefulness of investigating sustainability transformation and specifically the entanglement of unmaking and making in such processes of fundamental change, we suggest that scholars pursue a more daring plural engagement with theories of social change from across the social sciences and humanities. Doing so requires escaping the safe ground of established theories and paradigms and mobilizing concepts that remain as yet unapplied to sustainability transformation, which may help gain insight into particular change processes, as well as critically exploring their respective blind spots and potential for theoretical integration. We consider this study a first step towards such a plural theoretical engagement.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102290>.

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