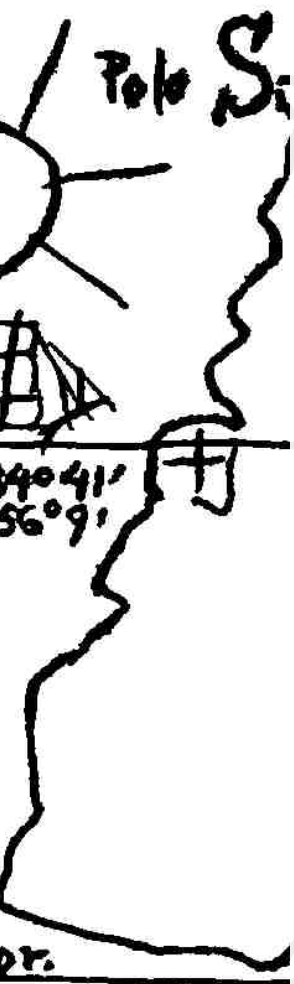


# Alternautas

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter



## Alternautas - Vol.6 - Issue 1 - July 2019

Necropolitics revisited: how mainstream media coverage of Marielle's shooting in Brazil depoliticises her struggle and reinforces neoliberal logics - *Gabriela Loureiro*

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**Alternautas** is a peer reviewed academic blog that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development thinking.

It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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## Preface

Welcome to the sixth volume of *Alternautas*!

We are already halfway through 2019, and the year has been marked by strong disjunctures and continuities with 2018. Despite widespread discontent and protests, Ortega remains in power in Nicaragua; although recent international pressure has secured the release of a large number of political prisoners. Similarly, despite dramatic scenes in the news, Guaido and his opposition groups failed to oust Maduro, and the Venezuela president firmly remains in power. After what was, for many, a shock election in 2018 in Brazil, Bolsonaro has proven to be just as controversial a figure in power as he was during his campaign. Diverse opposition groups have united against the right-wing figure, but the Brazilian president has continued to display his authoritarian tendencies.

Yet not all disjunctures are positive nor all continuities negative. The passing of Héctor Alimonda in 2017 was a tragedy, but his legacy continues in the tradition of Latin American political ecology. Similarly, the assassination of Marielle Franco was a terrible shock, but her life provided an inspiration to many to fight for the rights of the poor, dispossessed and marginalised. While generally seeing ourselves as a vehicle for change, here at *Alternautas* we also wish to emphasise a continuity and solidarity with struggles past and ongoing. This issue in particular expresses our passion for these issues of political ecology and issues of positionality, respectively.

We are an academic blog focused on discussing development through critical lenses with a particular Latin-American perspective. During the last six years, we have published original and translated articles from young and prominent scholars from Latin America and other parts of the world, contributing not only to academic

discussions, but also to creating a fertile environment where non-mainstream ideas and perspectives on development can flourish.

Our sixth issue presents contributions that continue the Alternautas tradition of offering new insights into the situation of the continent, providing space for alternatives to mainstream ideas, and helping spread the work of Latin American scholars to speakers of other languages. Two big themes come out of this issue: positionality and the environment. From an analysis of the death of political activist Marielle Franco, to a conversation about decolonising the global north, our authors examine how race, gender and sexuality are performed and experienced, often in ways that are detrimental to the disenfranchised. In response to the passing of Héctor Alimonda, the environment has also arisen as an important theme, whether it be in the context of conceiving development differently or the intertwined nature of the exploitation of both peoples and the environment.

Gabriela Loureiro starts this issue with a piece on the mainstream media coverage of Marielle Franco—a city councillor for Rio de Janeiro. Marielle was known for her work in the *favelas* of Rio, often seen as giving voice to these communities. In particular, she worked to represent poor black women. She championed causes related to gender-based violence and reproductive rights, and as an elected official with a female partner, Marielle worked to make queer communities visible and stood up for their rights. Nevertheless, despite widespread outrage, mainstream media coverage has largely depoliticised her struggle, rendering it safe and palatable for neoliberal logics.

It is commonly acknowledged that traditional measures of development are overly focused on economic indicators. Nevertheless, both the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals still fall into this paradigm. In contrast, Hans-Jürgen Burchardt discusses the need to not just develop a different concept of ‘development’ but do away with it all together. Instead, he proposes using the concept of ‘wellbeing’, particularly with reference to ideas of *Buen Vivir* developed in Ecuador. By merging this with the concept of ‘time’ as an independent

variable, this leads to the formation of the *Índice de vida saludable y bien vivida*—the index of a well-lived healthy life.

The next article returns us to the topic of positionality, gender, race and sexuality. Rather than a traditional article, however; its four authors (Katucha Bento, Andrea Sempértegui, Heriberto Ruiz Ponce, Louis di Paolo) lead the reader through a wide-ranging conversation from the creation of an “Amefricaladina” space of resistance, to a struggle against extractive projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon, to even a discussion of the commercialisation of LGBTQ+ tourism in Uruguay. A common theme across all of these discussions is decolonisation, broadly conceived—what it might look like and the struggles of those attempting to achieve it.

Facundo Martín, Gabriela Merlinsky and Catalina Toro Pérez begin our mini-dossier on Héctor Alimonda, a seminal thinker in regard to Latin American Political Ecology. The three authors offer a brief overview of his life and make a powerful case for the man’s importance with regard to analyses of the overlapping realms of ecology and politics, particularly in Latin America.

Our first work from Alimonda is a translation of *In the Key of South: Latin American Political Ecology and Critical Thinking*, an introduction to his latest book—*Ecología Política Latinoamericana – Volumen 1*. In this piece, Alimonda explores critical thinking in a Latin American context, arguing that it is a unique production of the history of the continent. Although borrowing from the English- and French-speaking traditions of political ecology, Latin American political ecology, particularly understood as critical thinking, is fundamentally linked to the experience of colonisation—the trauma of conquest and the experience of being incorporated into a subordinate in the world system.

Finally, despite being an earlier piece, *The Coloniality of Nature: An Approach to Latin American Political Ecology* expands on this discussion of Latin American political ecology being a recognisable and unique product of the continent’s history of colonisation. In particular, Alimonda explores how the current wealth of the Global North and ecological crises of the Global South are not simply dichotomies, but

closely intertwined—the wealth of the North could not have existed if it were not for the systematic exploitation and degradation of the natural environments of the South.

Alternautas began 2018 with an excellent series of articles, particularly focused on food sovereignty, urbanisation and alternative conceptions of development. Also, for the first time we were able to publish a Spanish-language version of our special issue on agrobusiness and neoextractivism—reaffirming our commitment to alternative venues for intellectual discussion, not just the traditional English-language spaces. In the second half of the year, we published a special series of articles on not-so-natural disaster. This special issue explored how although hurricanes such as María are natural, the poverty, destruction and death that result are far from it—they are the legacy of exploitative histories.

Along with publishing original content, Alternautas also engages in research and diffusion activities to the scientific community. Following this objective, the editorial team has organised and contributed to panels in relevant academic conferences, such as the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) congress, the Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) conference at the University of Glasgow, and the Nordic Latin American Research Network (NOLAN) at the University of Gothenburg.

Alternautas has seen its audience increasing over the years: since its creation in 2014, the blog has received over 50,000 visits and almost 80,000 pages views, and our social media accounts have over 1,000 followers. The blog has a global impact but has garnered attention in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Spain, Switzerland, and more. It is mainly read by English, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking audiences, but also by German and French-speaking people among others. Alternautas is now aiming to undertake a process of transformation, following the success and visibility gained since its creation. The current Editorial Board is therefore seeking to transform Alternautas into an indexed Open Access Journal, which will offer an improved capacity to share and make visible critical research on development on and from Latin America.

At Alternautas we are always looking for new ideas and perspectives. We encourage readers to engage in the community and join in the discussion around these

important topics. To this end, we have recently opened a call for editors. We are looking for more to join our editorial board, an excellent experience and a great way to help foster discussion around alternative ideas of development that otherwise tend to be overlooked. Details are on the website, Facebook page and Twitter, but if you are interested, please email us a brief statement and a CV by the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 2019 to [info@alternautas.net](mailto:info@alternautas.net). We are always keen see new faces and work with passionate individuals.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this issue!



GABRIELA LOUREIRO<sup>1</sup>

## **Necropolitics revisited: how mainstream media coverage of Marielle's shooting in Brazil depoliticises her struggle and reinforces neoliberal logics'<sup>2</sup>**

Until her assassination on the 14th of March 2018, activist Marielle Franco was a voice of her *comunidade*, the favela of Maré in Rio de Janeiro, and repeatedly denounced police brutality and the genocide of Black people, a topic that is not often covered by mainstream media in Brazil. When Marielle was murdered, pressure by national and international press prompted the ex-president Michel Temer to affirm that the case would be investigated and solved in 48 hours. Many months later, the crime has not yet been solved, although Rio police have identified a group of suspects who are part of a very dangerous militia in the state of Rio de Janeiro, with at least one tie to Jair Bolsonaro's family. The following turbulent months of 2018 made journalists follow other news: the imprisonment of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the continuation of Lava Jato's corruption investigation, and the violence and polarization associated with Brazil's presidential elections. The stories about Marielle quickly faded away. When the crime happened, however, there was a considerate amount of coverage by mainstream media. That is the subject of this article.

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<sup>1</sup> GABRIELA LOUREIRO is a PhD student at the University of West London.

<sup>2</sup> This article was originally published <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/necropolitics-revisited> on February 9th, 2019.

I will focus on six main problems I identified in Brazilian mainstream press outlets' coverage of the case and a seventh problem related to the media, although not perpetrated by journalists. Firstly, I will examine how there was a delay before appropriate attention was paid to Marielle's shooting. Then, I will speak about how her criticism of the military intervention in Rio de Janeiro was rendered invisible. This is connected to my third point—the focus on how her death affects the military intervention and not the genocide of Black people by police militias, the main subject of her activism. I will then problematise how her personal life was twisted, by firstly not disclosing her queerness and then by telling her life story with a sensationalist bent and depoliticising her cause. The final points are connected to the wider problem of fake news: some media vehicles interviewed a judge who was spreading fake news about Marielle without explicitly saying that the information was false, and the production of thousands of fake news items about Marielle.

Before the enormous public demonstrations and international coverage, Brazil's biggest news outlets were slow to understand the scale of the crime committed, perhaps because her death was not seen as 'newsworthy' as other topics, such as the Lava Jato operation or the diplomatic clash between Russia and the UK. Except for Rio de Janeiro's newspapers, it was only after the 15th of March (she was killed on the night of the 14th) that mainstream media such as *Folha de S. Paulo* gave the deserved attention to the case, with cover features, coverage of demonstrations and pressure for an investigation. Perhaps her death was not automatically perceived as "relevant" since she was not known in the media before she was killed. Her work had never been on mainstream media before and she only became a symbol when she passed away, yet another example of how important Black figures so often fail to receive the credit they deserve while alive.

Marielle's main focus was not considered newsworthy. She was not widely known by journalists, and therefore did not appear sufficiently important for news channels. She was also a daughter of Maré, born and raised in that *comunidade*. Such communities are mainly invisible to the media, except for celebrations of the "rare examples of victory"—people from the favelas doing the remarkable, such as winning international prizes or becoming very successful, which can be used as an example of

meritocracy. Marielle was not in the spotlight before her death. But she was a member of the Rio city council, gaining the fifth-highest votes in the recent elections. Furthermore, she not only denounced police violence but also played a key role on a council committee overseeing the military intervention in Rio. In the days preceding her assassination, Franco publicly criticized violent actions committed by the military police operating in the Acari favela in Rio's north, including the murder of two young men. She was later shot four times in the head after leaving an event about Black women.

When Marielle's murder finally started to receive mainstream coverage, there was another problem: her criticism regarding Rio's military intervention was largely ignored or poorly mentioned in news pieces about her death, especially in coverage by Globo, the biggest media group in Brazil and very influential in Brazilian politics and public opinion. The military intervention, which is said to curb rising street crime and drug-related gang violence, was introduced on February 16th, after Michel Temer signed a decree placing the army in charge of Rio's security forces. This move has produced considerable controversy. Critics say it harkens back to Brazil's authoritarian past, echoes the increasing nostalgia for the military government on the far right, and ignores the failures and violence produced by the militarization of Rio's favelas ahead of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympics. According to the daily Extra, homicides and carjacking actually increased during the first month of the military intervention. There were 6,731 violent deaths in Rio de Janeiro State in 2017, a 7.5 percent increase from the previous year. Only in January last year, 154 people were killed "in opposition to police intervention" and 6 police officers were killed.

Marielle was a vocal critic of the military intervention in Rio, saying that it threatened increase bloodshed without addressing the root causes of violence. In one of her last interviews, she said: "due to a recent period of decreased popularity of the illegitimate president Michel Temer and the press that favoured and enhanced what we understand as a feeling of insecurity in Rio especially during carnival, this process of federal intervention, which is called military intervention because it uses the armed forces, is legitimised. With an allusion of the pouring rain today, the city of Rio cries

because of this intervention”.<sup>3</sup> But this criticism does not seem to interest Globo or even Folha de S. Paulo, who only mentioned this very briefly in a couple of pieces. Instead, the coverage was focused on the public outcry for her death and the future of the military intervention—if the army was in the streets for security reasons, how was it that a member of the city council was murdered in the heart of Rio? But then the exact opposite of her political message was strengthened: politicians including Michel Temer affirmed that this was proof that Rio is completely out of control and in need of more extreme security measures. Her assassination therefore ‘proved’ the relevance of the military intervention. Most reporters did not question such arguments, instead showing data that reinforced how violence had indeed increased in Rio in recent months. Then part of the press’s rhetoric completely distorted Marielle’s position, spreading the message “enough violence, we need peace” — generalising peace, without disclosing which violence is being discussed. The violence against middle-class people who are robbed in privileged neighbourhoods in Rio? Police brutality in the favelas? Or the violence of Rio’s militias, criminal organizations composed by police officers, security guards and politicians that sell protection, terrorize local communities, and extort local tradesmen? The most important TV news programme in Brazil, Jornal Nacional, even broadcasted a video about Marielle’s cause made by activists, saying “this video is being shown to Brazil as a tribute and also an alert. Everything starts with respect. To life”. Life, death, peace and violence were emptied of meaning in discourses that depoliticise the cause of Marielle’s assassination. They appropriate political mobilisations, saying “Marielle presente”, while emptying and alienating her cause. The coverage finishes as a big cry for help and the answer of politicians is clear: more military intervention, meaning more terror and repression of favelas, killing more of the same people (Black, young and poor).

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<sup>3</sup> Different experts have argued that the military intervention was a “populist” measure or a “electoral marketing” strategy to simulate that the government was doing something about the problem of public security when in fact the majority of the population did not believe that a military intervention could curb the rise of violence in Rio.

And once again the genocide of Black people in Brazil is completely ignored. This was the main focus of Marielle's activism and the coverage of her death was the moment to discuss why she became a politician in the first place, which didn't happen. Instead, the focus was on her personality and life trajectory, repeating a neoliberal focus on the individual rather than the collective. Besides, her story can be suitably used by the white middle class to say that all Brazilians have the same opportunity in life. She completed the "hero's journey". Ironically, that is exactly why she was assassinated, for being a powerful and fearless Black woman who dared to denounce Brazilian state's necropolitics. Many men also did it, but a Black woman from the favela determined to fight for her community could not. It's not enough to be the successful Black woman in Brazil, where Black bodies are in the front line and will be executed first. Her execution, therefore, can be understood as part of the necropolitics she denounced — the destruction of human bodies and populations characterized as 'disposable' (Mbembe, 2003). Bodies that are not seen as 'profitable' by advanced capitalist logic are therefore not welcomed to work for the production of the market and are instead expelled from it and dumped in the informal and precarious market in the peripheral areas of the city. As a practice by the state, necropolitics dictates who is reducible to the 'unhuman', bodies without political status, who is "killable" and who is not—a series of extermination policies against the Black youth in the periphery of cities in Brazil and worldwide. Marielle can be seen as a "walking threat" to necropolitics: she not only survived it herself but was a symbol of resistance, a voice to her *comunidade* and unstoppable at her work in politics. In the eyes of those to whom she was a threat, she did not belong to the sphere of politics, she was a body outside the norms, which therefore had to be removed.

My next point is about queer invisibility. Anderson, the driver who was also shot dead in the same incident, was described in the media as "family man", a good husband that left wife and kids. Marielle also left a wife and a daughter. But a queer family is not considered 'family' in traditional parameters. In fact, her queerness was ignored in a huge piece aired on *Jornal Nacional*. Despite focusing on Marielle's personal story during six segments and several minutes, there was no mention of her queerness. Even when they translated a piece from *The Guardian* about Marielle,

they erased the word gay in the title and translated ‘Franco was a gay Black woman who defied the odds of Rio politics to win the fifth-highest vote count among council members when she was elected in 2016’ to ‘Franco was a Black woman who defied the odds of Rio...’ A couple of days later, however, with other outlets interviewing her widow, they changed the narrative and explored the drama involved in the loss of a partner, showing Monica (her partner) crying.

This leads to another important issue: sensationalism. Marielle’s death was explored as an individual tragedy, not as a political assassination to silence Black communities who demand change. Her family and close friends appear crying in numerous close-up shots. The human tragedy, the loss of a loved one, the story of a remarkable woman that is portrayed as a character in a movie. Then meritocracy comes into play: she was born in the favela, she was pregnant at 19, she faced many difficult challenges but managed to go to higher education. With a master’s degree in sociology and a place in parliament, she became a politician who defended the rights of her community. Look at her charisma, look at this beautiful smile! What an inspiration! Underlying this story there is a message of meritocracy, she exemplifies that with enough effort and dedication, others can choose education and success and not crime. Yes, she was a fantastic woman, but how did she ‘make it’? Are we talking about the help she received from other activists and all that she had to go through? Furthermore, and most importantly, what made her pursue her political career? Are we talking about police abuse and inequality or are we just exploring an engrossing story for audience consumption? And after the sensationalism, the answer. During Globo’s famous Sunday TV show *Fantástico*, there was a long and emotional story in which Marielle’s charisma was again explored as well as the suffering of her loved ones. The next piece was about Michel Temer’s renewed investment of hundreds of millions into the military intervention in Rio. Case settled.

This sensationalism is compounded by the undue attention given by the media to a judge quoted saying that Marielle was involved with criminals. The majority of readers pay attention only to the title of a story without reading it through. This is important when a handful of newspapers published the judge’s opinion, with titles varying between ‘Marielle was engaged with Comando Vermelho’ (a famous

criminal group) and “Marielle was engaged with criminals and is an ordinary corpse”. Combined with a judge’s authority, the headlines offer a condemning view of Marielle; however, the judge was reproducing a message she had received on WhatsApp without checking the facts. The title should be “Judge reproduces fake news about a non-existent connection between Marielle and criminal groups”. This was later questioned and the judge retracted her statement, without apology. However, the damage was done and there was no way to remove the narrative from the public domain.

These problems went far beyond traditional media coverage, however, not only threatening traditional journalism, but society as a whole: the unbelievable production and spread of fake news about Marielle. Many far-right YouTube channels spread fake news with the intent to destroy her image. The Free Brazil Movement, a neoliberal youth group who had an important role in the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff that put Michel Temer in power, engaged in enormous efforts to link Marielle to organized crime, trying to link the murderers to drug dealers or militias. This idea reinforced ignorant and distressingly common discourse that ‘Marielle was killed by those who she defended, criminals’. While we still have no concrete information about who is truly behind the crime, many followers of the page will believe that narrative. In a few days, there were 15 thousand denunciations of slander, defamation and false accusation registered against Marielle. After this, many media vehicles published stories refuting such fake news. It is interesting to note here that mainstream media put itself in the crossfire of fake news sources while propagating news of dubious origin such as the declaration of the judge mentioned earlier.

In this article, I have pointed out how Marielle was inscribed in a continuum of subjugation of life to the power of death. I have also highlighted how her struggle and her death have been appropriated and depoliticised by the media. To conclude, I would like to highlight the connection between the ‘cleansing’ of Franco’s life and necropolitics, not in the sense of the execution itself but the necropower that subjects populations to conditions of life. In its own way, different media outlets have constructed notions of how Marielle should have lived and how she should have died.

And the fading of her radicalness in mainstream media accounts is analogous to the their take on her struggles: the military intervention and the genocide of Black people. While the cleansing of her radical politics can be attributed to the condition of the media and journalism in cultures where neoliberal logics are internalised as necessary and neutral rather than ideological, the picture of Marielle described by the media radically clashes with what Marielle truly stood for. It is another example of how mainstream media internalises neoliberal logics hostile to politics.

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HANS-JÜRGEN BURCHARDT<sup>1</sup>

*Translation: Adrián Beling and Ana Estefanía Carballo*

## **Well-being: a Latin American response to the socio-ecological crisis<sup>2</sup>**

Latin America currently confronts different types of crises. The *social* and the *ecological* question appear as two central problems, which will be determining not only of the region's future, but that of the whole of humanity as well. The difficulty to address these problems lies in the fact that, up until today, almost all responses directed to address social issues – such as poverty, informal employment or inequality – are oriented to economic growth. These includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with which the United Nations promotes a global scheme to confront the biggest challenges of the 21st century. However, at the same time, there is no doubt that the prevalent development framework's drive towards economic growth is pushing towards the ecological collapse of the planet. In light of this dilemma, it becomes evident that wellbeing based on material growth tends to create more poverty for many, rather than a good life for all. Instead of proposing new “sustainable” or green-washed development frameworks, it seems necessary to propose new alternatives to the concept of development itself.

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<sup>2</sup> This article was originally published in Spanish in *Nueva Sociedad*, in January 2018. It has been translated with authorisation from the Author and the Editors at Nueva Sociedad, to whom Alternautas is very grateful. The original article can be accessed here: <http://nuso.org/articulo/bienestar-del-tiempo-respuesta-latinoamericana-frente-la-crisis-socioecologica/>

This entails, on the one hand, to essentially rethink the notions of wellbeing and quality of life, and, on the other hand, to reflect on the possibilities to translate alternative development ideas into concrete policies. There is an interesting approach along these lines, that seeks to measure wellbeing as a prerequisite to determining the levels of social development of any given country. Such approaches not only attempt to obtain concrete information about the quality of life of people, but also rely on the highly indicative value that these statistical indicators have both for politics and for individuals. These indicators are normally conceived as scientifically proven, neutral, rational and, as such, adequate to shape the patterns of life in the future, departing from current reference points.

For the purpose of establishing new and alternative definitions of wellbeing, new proposals have been adopted -especially those proposed by the Stiglitz Commission<sup>3</sup> - that bring interesting suggestions, without abandoning the mantra of economic growth. Precisely this is the goal of the index '*Índice de vida saludable y bien vivida*' (IVSBV) developed by Ecuador.<sup>4</sup> This index merges the concepts of Aristotelian philosophy with the notion of *Buen vivir* - which is based on indigenous cosmovisions and has become widely popular in many Latin American countries and even a *raison d'Etat* and a constitutional right - and introduces 'time' as a central unit of measurement to determine quality of life. In this manner, Latin America continues to offer new and essential insights for development theory and research on wellbeing. The following sections present a historical account of the evolution of the concept of wellbeing, as well as the meaning of its measurement. A discussion follows on the introduction of the category of time as unit to measure wellbeing, and an examination of the methodological criteria underpinning the IVSBV-index, as well as its implications for addressing contemporary crises.

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen y Jean-Paul Fitoussi: Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> René Ramírez Gallegos: La vida (buena) como riqueza de los pueblos. Hacia una socioecología política del tiempo, El Viejo Topo, Barcelona, 2012. - Translator's note: This index's name could easily be translated as 'Healthy and Good life Index'. However, as the notion of "Buen Vivir", from which it originates, the exact translation is a contested issue, as it references an indigenous notion that has been, in turn, translated into Spanish.

## **Towards an alternative to development, with the power of numbers**

The idea of a national accounting system whose focus shifted from income to production emerged in the United States towards the end of the Second World War. While originally intended to facilitate efficient planning to sustain the war effort, the conceptualisation of this indicator fixated, at the same time, the basis of the current growth paradigm: with the establishment of the GDP as an indicator, economic growth became a valid parameter to measure development and wellbeing all over the world without an in-depth discussion.

Since then, wellbeing has fundamentally become associated to the production of goods and services. This has given the discipline of economics the power to define what is to be understood as development and wellbeing. The formula used is simple: through an allocation of resources considered as optimal, the market generates a large output of goods that increases material wealth. Individuals satisfy their consumption needs thanks to this varied supply, hence a higher production of goods means increased wellbeing for the individual. Economic growth thus expands the level of individual freedom, the subjective notion of happiness and everyone's objective wellbeing.<sup>5</sup>

A central indicator is money, or else its purchasing power in real terms. In this way, the parameters used to provide an empirical measurement of wellbeing are usually income level, domestic product, or propensity to consumption. Thanks to its highly operational character, this approach has been welcomed by statisticians. The opposite

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<sup>5</sup> This notion of wellbeing was made popular at the beginning of the European Enlightenment by the utilitarian ethics of Jeremy Bentham. With his greatest-happiness-principle (which postulates that the only goal of a rational behaviour is to achieve the maximum level of happiness to the maximum number of people), Bentham justified an almost mechanical conception of individual happiness, measured entirely in quantitative terms oriented towards material goods, without a space for qualitative considerations. See Martha C. Nussbaum: «Who is the Happy Warrior? Philosophy, Happiness Research, and Public Policy» en *International Review of Economics* vol. 59 No 4, 2012.

to wellbeing is thus poverty, that is, the scarcity of material resources, which reduces the level of freedom and, in extreme cases, precludes the satisfaction of basic needs (such as eating).

Needless to say, there have always been criticisms to this approach. Soon, it became possible to demonstrate empirically that this supposedly transparent relationship between income and wellbeing was weaker than had been presumed, and that, above a certain income level, material growth was no longer associated to an analogous increase in wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Until today, an important alternative to measure development continues to be the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), based in the Capability Approach.<sup>7</sup> This approach seeks to probe the social capabilities existing in each individual to achieve the highest possible degree of active freedom. The freedoms that can be measured and promote improved capabilities are democracy, institutions that compensate market effects, equality of social opportunities, transparency guarantees and social protection. In this approach, both objective and subjective aspects of wellbeing are taken into consideration, with a clear responsibility for development being assigned both to the contextual conditions (economics, politics, and the state) and to the individual (who must take advantage of the opportunities offered). This approach has significantly influenced many other efforts directed to determine alternative concepts and forms for the measurement of development up to the present day, including the important and already mentioned Stiglitz Commission.

Despite these initiatives, the level of development and wellbeing of the different countries in the world continues to be primarily classified in terms of their GDP. The influence of the '*world's most powerful number*'<sup>8</sup> and the underlying growth paradigm

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Easterlin: «Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence» en Paul A. David y Melvin W. Reder (eds.): *Nation and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in Honor of Moses Abramowitz*, Academic Press, Nueva York, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> A. Sen: *Resources, Values and Development*, Harvard University Press, Oxford, 1984; M.C. Nussbaum: *Woman and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Lorenzo Fioramonti: *Gross Domestic Problem: The Politics Behind the World's Most Powerful Number*, Zótero, Londres-Nueva York, 2013.

are still intact, ratifying also the normative power of statistical indicators over politics and society.

The social inefficiency of the alternative approaches mentioned is also found in the fact that – beyond the multiple initiatives otherwise – they continue to adopt Eurocentric notions of development. On the one hand, they cling onto the liberal conception of the individual, centred primarily on the idea of a rational subject and her individual freedom. The influence of the liberal theory of justice can be seen here, in its call for the expansion of equal opportunities for all under the motto of ‘equality through freedom’. In other words, each individual continues to be seen as blacksmith forging their own destiny, but they have the right to be provided with a hammer and an anvil. Interpersonal relationships, collectives, social or ethnic groups are not taken into account, nor are matters of identity. Furthermore, these approaches continue to blithely prioritise material growth and an inherent promotion of capitalism as a central goal of development, while other dimensions (such as the environment or international inequalities) are relegated to a secondary consideration. In order to create an alternative to the mainstream notions of development and wellbeing that are also measurable and take the global socio-ecological crisis into consideration without compromising in efficacy, a more context-sensitive approach is required. It must rid itself of the liberal conception of the individual and of economicism, without renouncing to the ability for precise operationalisation. This is precisely what the IVSBV is aimed at.

From a theoretical point of view, this index is based on the Aristotelian approach to the good life as successful action, *eudaimonia*. According to Aristotle, individuals can achieve a good life once they have achieved their material basic needs, enjoy good health and can devote their free time to leisure, reflection and introspection, interpersonal relationships, love, erotism, and to participation in public life. Instead of pursuing an ever *better life* (that is, to have more), what is sought is a *good life* in itself. *Eudaimonia* is thus not achieved through concrete goods or goals, but is rather a form of social praxis. In addition, the IVSBV also takes root in the indigenous cosmivision of *buen vivir*, which gives a great deal of importance to the relationship between the individual and the collective, and further advocates for a more balanced

connection between human beings and nature. In this way, it seeks to satisfy all material, social and spiritual needs of the different members of a community without hampering other people or depleting natural resources.<sup>9</sup>

With this synthesis, the IVSBV takes clear distance from that which constitutes the basis of the mainstream notion of development and wellbeing: the liberal conception of individual and utilitarianism is challenged through a redefined notion of the subject as a social being embedded in an eco- environmental context. Wellbeing, personal relationships, and a healthy environment are thus inextricably linked together. Only a person who lives well – and within a community- can be happy and enjoy wellbeing. Precisely because of this, the constant increase of material goods also ceases to be regarded as a main factor to measure wellbeing, which implies a rejection of the growth paradigm. Therefore, the variables used by the IVSBV to measure wellbeing do not define individual happiness through static criteria (for example, material or other kind of quantitative measures). They seek instead to reflect the character of their sources: it is a matter of exploring the areas where wellbeing is generated, not one of measuring an accomplished goal. In that sense, the IVSBV dares to distinguish itself from Eurocentric approaches and avoids establishing universal goals for development or to propose fixed paths towards personal wellbeing, as these are defined (or should be defined) through individuals in each society.

Even while the importance of external living conditions is expressly highlighted, from this perspective, efforts to achieve material and health security come in tandem with other areas which have been found to generate wellbeing: *time* devoted to a) self-determined work, b) leisure and education, c) interpersonal relationships (love, friendship), and d) participation in public life. For the IVSBV, the (re)production of these areas represents an autonomous good, in each case. Contrary to what happens with market allocation, these goods are based on mutual recognition and social support. They are vital for human beings, but they can only be enjoyed collectively. They rely on recognition and intrinsic motivation, so that identity, communication,

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Antonio Luis Hidalgo Capitán, Alejandro Guillén García y Nancy Rosario Déleg Guazha (eds.): *Sumak kawsay yuyai. Antología del pensamiento indigenista ecuatoriano sobre sumak kawsay, fiucuhu / cim / pydlos*, Huelva-Cuenca, 2014.

feelings, and empathy become important components. Hence, it is mainly about genuine personal relations, such as friendship and cooperation, erotism, family, civic commitment, or public participation. Since these goods are inherently reciprocal, they are denominated *relational goods*.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the IVSBV demarcates precise areas in which wellbeing is generated and within which it becomes measurable. The notion of the Good Life becomes thus operational.<sup>11</sup> In place of money, *time* appears now as a central indicator of wellbeing. The question is no longer how we want to live, but rather how we want to spend our time.

### **It's time to develop a new measurement based on time**

An approximation to the category of *time* begets the analysis of a complex phenomenon, that has been hitherto underestimated by the social sciences. In the first place, it seems important to recognise that time is not a physical or naturalised magnitude, as many in the natural sciences or philosophy still argue. In his essay on the topic, Norbert Elias insisted that our conception on these issues is based on a false dichotomy between nature and culture, which prevents us from acknowledging the social nature of time.<sup>12</sup> From a decolonial perspective, Walter Mignolo arrives to the same conclusion, and points out that since the eighteenth century, two main

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<sup>10</sup> The definition of these four 'relational goods' reflects a wide contemporary consensus of which are the dimensions considered important for a good life. The notion of 'relational goods' was developed and presented almost at the same time in 1986 by the philosopher Martha Nussbaum and the sociologist Pierpaolo Donati and used in 1987 and 1989 by the economists Benedetto Gui and Carole Uhlaner, respectively. See, Luigino Bruni: *Reciprocity, Altruism and the Civil Society: In Praise of Heterogeneity*, Routledge, Londres-Nueva York, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> This is not an attempt to advocate for empiricism, but to take advantage of the normative strength of empirical results to give quantitative measurements a bridging function, useful to transform concepts of development. This is a position adopted deliberately, considering that the development of categories and the selection of indicators are as structured in this index as they are in an economicist measurement of wellbeing, and that the indicators used by the IVSBV (such as years of schooling, the Gini coefficient, etc.) can only represent the existing reality in a limited or even distorted manner.

<sup>12</sup> N. Elias: *Sobre el tiempo*, FCE, Ciudad de México, 2010.

distinctions of Western modernity have been established as a duality: on the one hand, that of tradition and modernity; and, on the other, that of nature and culture.<sup>13</sup> Rather, time is a social institution created over a period of four millennia by humankind. Our current time regimes have emerged historically alongside processes of state formation in different societies. The introduction of new methods to measure time helped to coordinate and optimise political and economic action, while simultaneously rationalising and disciplining human coexistence. There is no doubt that the newest and more precise measurement of time was also an important contribution to the birth of capitalism: in the work sphere, it promoted the generalisation of waged labour, separated the working time from private life, and contributed to the differentiation of societies.

However, time has now such a deceptive effect that we are used to perceive it as something external. Conceived in the past as an instrument to harmonize coexistence, it now seems to have become for many (for example, as a result of its apparent shortage or acceleration) the autonomous baton of personal development. The category of *time* and the pressure-exerting effect of its social institutionalization have become a pattern of self-coercion that encompasses life in its entirety.<sup>14</sup>

In reality, however, time is a category created by human beings and, as such, remains a malleable one. If we consider that its availability has an evident influence on the personal and social state of being, measurable time appears as an ideal factor to redefine wellbeing and development. At the same time, given its relevance for any daily practice, proposals directed to modify the time regime have an orienting effect, both on the individual and in politics.

The idea to incorporate time as a component of economic theories and wellbeing measurement is nothing new. In general, Benjamin Franklin's life motto 'time is money' occupies a central position. Time is thought of as a factor of opportunity

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<sup>13</sup> W.D. Mignolo: *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Duke University Press, Durham-Londres, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Hartmut Rosa: *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*, NSU Press, Malmö-Aarhus, 2010.



cost, in a context in which the individual decides to use it either to earn money or to engage in non-productive activities, in which case they resign the opportunity of material growth. In this sense, free time continues to be a dependent variable in the economic sphere. It is only possible to 'buy time' if productivity increases or if we renounce to the material dimension. It is worth mentioning here Robert Goodin, who tries to integrate this magnitude into the calculation of wellbeing by using the concept of *discretionary time*.<sup>15</sup> However, this approach is also based on a liberal notion of the subject, and primarily rests on other economic indicators for its operationalisation. The same can be said of other recent and innovative approaches, emerging from Latin America.<sup>16</sup>

In the IVSBV, in turn, time is introduced as an independent variable. Through relational goods, the index defines precise areas for measuring wellbeing. It is the amount of time required to ensure the satisfaction of basic and material needs (rest, work, health), as well as the collective generation and enjoyment of the already mentioned categories: self-determined work, leisure and education, social relations, and participation in public life. This way, the point of departure for the IVSBV consists in incorporating these goods as variables, and to assign to social relations an important role in the measurement of wellbeing. Money stops being the main indicator of wellbeing and the main axis for its assessment, adopting instead the question of time available for social (and ecological) matters as a unit of valuation and analysis.

Despite the impossibility of offering a detailed methodological description of the IVSBV here, such description is easily accessible. In general lines, however, it's worth highlighting that the characteristics of the IVSBV-logarithm, provide mathematical representation of the capacity of individuals and groups to generate relational goods through the measurement of the time therefore required.

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<sup>15</sup> R.E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo y Lina Eriksson: *Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Benven, Elizabeth Rivera y Varinia Tromben: «Propuesta de un indicador de bienestar multidimensional de uso del tiempo y condiciones de vida a Colombia, el Ecuador, México y el Uruguay» en *Revista de la Cepal*, 2016.

In addition, the IVSBV is noteworthy for several other innovations. Given that work is no longer measured solely as a function of its capacity to ensure subsistence, but also for its quality as a source of autonomous wellbeing, new options emerge for regulating labor and for designing new strategies aimed at a more just organization of employment opportunities amongst people. The possibility emerges for assessing jobs and its associated social positioning through the capacity for self-determination of working time (rather than exclusively on the basis of income), as well as for a social revalorizing of activities characterized by high autonomy in terms of time.

On the other hand, with the IVSBV, re-productive activities (generally non-remunerated and performed by women) acquire empirical visibility. This includes, for example, domestic and care work, which are usually relegated in analyses despite the fact that they are crucial for sustaining or rising wellbeing. The IVSBV explicitly acknowledges that gender relations constitutively underpin productive relations. In order to revalorize hitherto undervalued reproductive services, the best approach would probably be keeping a systematic record of the time-slots allocated to caring and preserving human life, in par with other relational goods.<sup>17</sup>

With available national data as well as self-made household surveys, this measurement of welfare was put to a practical test in Ecuador, and compared to conventional methods. Polls confirmed the viability of the new procedure and yielded interesting results. The comparison of measurements operating on the basis of time versus those basing on income show substantial differences. Income no longer has a determinant impact on personal wellbeing: within the Ecuadorean population, the average income of the time-wealthiest 10% is three times lower than the top 10% earners. What happens is that higher income often correlates with longer working hours spent on a job characterized by a lack of autonomy, which constrains the ability to generate relational goods.

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<sup>17</sup> For years now, a National Survey on the Use of Time has been implemented in 11 Latin-American countries, which provides a statistical measure of the total workload, accounting for both paid and unpaid work. According to the results obtained, women devote much more time than men to work, despite the fact that they more often appear as “inactive in the labor market” in records. V. Cepalstat: Encuesta Nacional sobre Uso del Tiempo 2009-2013; Cepal: *Panorama social de América Latina 2014*, Cepal, Santiago de Chile, 2014.

It goes without saying that this is not aimed at ratifying the slogan “poor but happy” and creating a dissociation between wellbeing and material status. On the contrary, the evaluation repeatedly emphasizes that an adequate material basis (income) is a prerequisite for achieving wellbeing; where such a basis does not exist, the level of wellbeing drastically drops by the lack of possibilities to ensure subsistence. The findings do however weaken the strength of the usually assumed correlation between income and wellbeing. On top of this, they reveal reasons for concern in the wealthy strata of the Ecuadorean socioeconomic hierarchy: out of the top 20% earners, only one sixth belongs to the group that has achieved maximum wellbeing in terms of time.

On average, according to the IVSBV, the country’s population only enjoys 11 years of wellbeing, which represents about a 14% of their total lifetime. There are great disparities here: the time-wealthiest 10% enjoys 16 times more weekly time for the good life than the bottom 10%. The greatest gap pertains participation in public life: the former decile’s participation is 35 times that of the latter’s, which constitutes a noteworthy finding not only for the theory of democracy.

Two factors substantially limit the rise in wellbeing: First, *precarious working conditions*. A sizeable portion of the economically active population – especially in the informal economy – perform low-skilled, high workload tasks, which can hardly even guarantee subsistence, let alone generating relational goods. A second factor - and tightly linked to the first- are the diverse forms of exclusion and discrimination (also on immaterial grounds, linked to geographic, ethnic, gender markers, among others) which exacerbate existing social inequalities and hinder the generation of relational goods. Among the Ecuadorean population, the time-poorest decile has only 4% of total lifetime available for the generation of relational goods.

This surely also explains why the IVSBV is largely unknown in Latin-America: where life and working conditions are precarious or even threaten the subsistence of large portions of the population, it would seem misplaced to advocate for more leisure time. In addition, and despite the fact that internationally the vision of *buen vivir* underpinning the IVSBV generates empathic reactions, ample adhesion and becomes

a reference point for alternative political proposals, in its region of origin it has come under strong pressure. Even in Ecuador, the concept of *buen vivir* has long been politically instrumentalized, and was turned largely on its head, so that nowadays it tends to serve the legitimization of an idea of development that puts economic growth before the environment and justifies the extreme exploitation of natural resources.<sup>18</sup>

This conceptual emptying, however, and the derived concrete contradictions certainly do not invalidate the IVSBV as such, but rather confirm its key argument, namely: the way of measuring wellbeing implicit in the index presupposes a material basis capable of satisfying basic needs. If one takes into account, in addition, that the active population belonging to the middle strata has almost tripled worldwide between 1991 and 2015,<sup>19</sup> the resonance for proposals aimed at a good life should be considerable, both within and outside Latin-America. Time can become a “second currency”, internationally recognized as an apt dimension for measuring wellbeing.

### **For whom the bell tolls: outlining a new politics of time**

The IVSB has concrete programmatic implications: an “active politics of time”. It’s about a politics that, in a public and participatory fashion, seeks to have greater incidence in the time structures of people; and which clearly needs to affirm the concept of time as a social construction. It is essential that such politics does not rely solely on institutional and discursive structures, but focuses on real-world practices and sees that instruments are deployed towards a new time regime with positive resonance in the cultural sphere and in daily practices, which are adopted by individuals who take real ownership of them, and are oriented towards action. The politics of time needs to be implemented simultaneously in two imbricated fields. On the one hand, through institutional frameworks (such as state programs); on the other, through the social opening of new spaces oriented towards the real world,

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<sup>18</sup> H.-J. Burchardt, Rafael Domínguez, Carlos Larrea y Stefan Peters (eds.): *Nothing lasts forever. Neo-extractivism after the boom of raw materials*, UASB / ICDD, Quito, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> ILO. *The transition from the informal economy to the formal economy. International Labor Conference. 104th Session, 2015, ILO, Ginebra, 2015.*

centred on self-determination in terms of time, and on the relationship between humans and nature. A politics of time shaped with these characteristics can create the cultural values without which it appears impossible to establish a new development paradigm that goes beyond economic growth.

On the basis of the Ecuadorian case, which reveals how informal employment and social inequality impose important constraints in terms of time prosperity, it becomes essential to promote dignified working conditions. In Latin-America this amounts, above all, to reducing the high level of informality, which not only hinders personal wellbeing, but remains the main obstacle to increasing productivity, and thus blocks any possibility of a type of economic development which goes beyond the polluting exploitation of raw materials.<sup>20</sup> A central goal of the politics of time thus consists in halving the regional rate of informal employment within the next 10 years.

In order to achieve this, a revalorization of care activities is unavoidable. If care services continue to be provided privately by individuals, many people will continue to resort to the family sphere and to cheap housekeeping work. The politics of time requires expanding public infrastructure (improving infant care, as well as that for people of age) and providing sociopolitical backing to reproductive activities (strengthening the moral and material recognition of care provision). In the same way in which the IVSBV shows that greater material prosperity often correlates to lesser availability of time due to increased working hours, high income earners living in Latin America with high levels of social protection should know that a reduction

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<sup>20</sup> "Labor productivity, as measured by the GDP/working hour ratio, has been dropping during the past decade in Latin America, in relation to other more developed economies. On average, in 2016 Latin America represented one third of the labor productivity of the United States, a proportion that is lower as compared to that registered 60 years ago. This situation contrasts strikingly with the performance of high-growth Asian countries, such as Korea and more recently China, or even against commodity exporters such as Australia, where relative productivity has remained stable." OECD, ECLAC and CAF: Economic Perspectives of Latin America 2017. Youth, Competencies and Entrepreneurship, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2016.

in working time can lead to a greater quality of life and to an economy which is more sparing of natural resources.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the two policy measures mentioned, the IVSBV identifies numerous areas for the application of an active politics of time. Even though it is not possible to provide a detailed account here, suffice it to say that they would be directed, for example, towards fomenting social relationality (with gender, family, and youth policies), promoting a high-quality education (through educational and cultural policies), and strengthening engagement in public life through diverse forms of participation.

It seems only logical that this new conception of wellbeing hasn't had wider impact yet. The prevailing time-related regimes are linked to extremely complex structures, whose change can destabilize powerful institutions. However, more people than ever understand that it is not about struggling to improve one's own life and that of one's beloved ones, but, above anything else, to ensure the survival of humanity (and, with it, the future of their own children). Environmental issues have ceased to be the expression of an enlightened goodwill to become *realpolitik*. The IVSBV is thus a "timely" indicator. It orients development ideals toward non-material goals (therefore inherently sparing natural resources) without ignoring the importance of satisfying economic needs to achieve wellbeing. This model does not undermine the right of the dispossessed of this world to improve their material living conditions, but offers instead those well-off the opportunity of improving their own quality of life without an excess consumption of resources which hinders the possibilities of other people to improve their own (and in the last instance affecting also their own possibilities). This way, instead of adopting a moralising position promises increased wellbeing for all,

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<sup>21</sup> The positive correlation existing between longer working hours and the more intensive use of resources /energy has been known for years. Tim Jackson and Peter Victor calculated a low / zero growth model, in which the working time could be reduced by 15% by 2035, without this implying a significant material loss. See: V. Anders Hayden and John M. Shandra: "Hours of Work and the Ecological Footprint of Nations: An Exploratory Analysis" in *Local Environment*, vol. 14 No. 6, 2009; T. Jackson and P. Victor: "Productivity and Work in the 'Green Economy': Some Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Tests" in *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, vol. 1 No. 1, 2011.

facilitating its insertion and application in the field of politics and in the real world. For most of us, the idea of devoting more time to family, children, friends, leisure, public participation and outdoor activities in nature has hitherto had a very private character, which is not relevant to political claims. It is necessary for us to change this worldview so that the bells can toll for a good life.

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KATUCHA BENTO, ANDREA SEMPÉRTEGUI, HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE,  
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## **Dialogues of Indigenous Afro-Latinxs (re)existence: Possible decolonialities<sup>2</sup>**

### **Introduction**

This article, in its dialogue format, is the result of a meeting among academics who delivered papers in the symposium "Decolonising the Global North: Afro-Latin America, the Caribbean and Abya Yala in diaspora". It took place at the 56th

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<sup>2</sup> *We are deliberately using the letter "x" and the term "Latinxs" without the use of "o/a" or "@", as a political decision of disidentification with the constructions of gender binaries that make restrictive references to multiple possibilities around the fluidity and performativity of identification of gender/sex/sexuality. This positionality makes reference to contributions in Queer and/or Latinx literature such as Elondust Patrick Johnson, Gloria Anzaldúa, Juliana Huxtable, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Roderick Ferguson, Sara Ahmed, Simone Browne, among others who are inspiring to the process of challenging debates on gender/sex/sexuality and its intersections.*

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International Congress of Americanists (ICA), on the 20th July 2018.<sup>3</sup> This collective work summarises the presented papers and displays them, critically, in the form of a dialogue, providing at the same time the impressions and perceptions of each one of the participants of the symposium about said papers. It is an exchange of knowledge about topics that, although initially seeming to be diverse, are connected in a dialogical way to reflect on the colonial heritage and the oppression experienced by Indigenous and Afro-Latinx groups.

This set of oppressions to which we refer also have touched our bodies and our feelings, as each of the authors self-identifies as non-white with a Latinx American identity, some of us with lower class origins, and half of us with queer identities. This article seeks to centralise the experiences of the participants of our research front, with the aim of portraying realities that are systematically marginalised by the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). In this way, our purpose is to identify possibilities to decolonise practices and discourses that oppress our siblings in Abya Yala.

We warn readers that this is not a traditional academic article, although our ideas also stem from dialogues with decolonial thinkers, Black feminists, indigenous and anti-racist activists. We believe that this shared authorship is not only a manifest of style but an empowering tool of epistemic disobedience, which demands our space of re-existence through our collective work. The structure of the text below will follow the order of the papers as they took place during the symposium. Starting with the voice of Katucha Bento, we present a Black feminist methodological framework that approaches the experiences of Black women who survive the oppressions of whiteness. Andrea Sempértegui comments on this presentation, placing emphasis on the issues that Katucha draws our attention to. One example of this is the validation of "*sentirpensar*" (feel-think) by Black women inspired by Audre Lorde's notion of

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<sup>3</sup> For more information regarding this Symposium 8/11 "Descolonizando el Norte Global: Afro-Latinoamérica, el Caribe y Abya Yala en diáspora" and its participants, access the full 56th ICA programme on page 273: <http://ica2018.es/mysite/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PROGRAMA-FINAL.pdf>.

the “erotic”. Another example is the creation of an “Amefricaladina” place location of resistance, proposed by the Brazilian Black feminist author Lélia Gonzalez.

The dialogue between Andrea and Katucha continues with Andrea’s analysis of practices of resistance and re-existence. Specifically, Andrea focuses on the territorial struggle of indigenous women against the expansion of extractive projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Heriberto Ruiz Ponce comments on this presentation with a careful analysis of how neo-extractive projects are part of a project of modernity that reveals the way that the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) is historically manifested in Abya Yala.

The analysis presented by Heriberto on the struggles for the validation of Afro and Black identities is understood from his exposition on the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) in the Mexican context. This contribution is inspired by the creation of the *Consejo Afromexicano* (Afromexican Council) in the Villa de Tututepec de Melchor Ocampo, Oaxaca, presenting us with an organisational practice of resistance against the invisibility reproduced by the Mexican State. It is important to highlight that this research was done in conjunction with the researcher Selma Jazmín Vázquez from the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLASCO). The comments on this presentation are from Louis Di Paolo – our special guest at the symposium – who focuses on the oppressive role of the Mexican State as an instrument of domination, which at the same time has created possibilities for new racial identification processes of African descent stemming from the constitutional reform.

The fourth topic is summarised by Louis, who presents his critical reflections on LGBTQ+ tourism in Uruguay. The author questions the legitimacy of the alternative spaces for LGBTQ+ groups, which although marginalised within patriarchal society, create and reproduce other types of invisibility within themselves. Katucha’s comments on this paper are from a Black feminist reading and Critical Race Studies on Queer spaces. Katucha poses questions about who they are and what the place is of validation and ‘queer’ identification. The commentator then concludes with a provocation on the need to rethink intersectionality as a fundamental tool of our decolonial studies.

This dialogue finishes by briefly mentioning some points of convergence between the themes presented in the papers that can promote decolonial practices. With this, the intention is not to provide a conclusion but to encourage the continuation of debate and dialogue about projects of re-existence that can strengthen peoples who have been marginalised and racialised, such as non-whites, by the coloniality of power (Qujano, 2000).

### **Creating an AMEFRICALADINA standpoint: AfroBrazilians Healing and Surviving Whiteness in the European Setting**

KATUCHA BENTO: My work is concerned with the broad topic of intersectional oppressions (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1996) in the experiences of Black Brazilian women in diaspora, negotiating politics of identification in their everyday lives in the United Kingdom (UK). I understand such oppressions to be intrinsically related to the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), which imposes racial roles and stereotypes that, for this discussion, are interwoven with gender, nationality and (dis)ability. My interest is in presenting how Black Brazilian Women are negotiating racial and national identities in the UK, where there are different ways to identify as the “Other” (Hall, 1996), non-white/non-European/non-English speaking. This context of a “coloniality of power” *affects* social interactions, migration experiences and, above all, the ways of surviving intersectional oppressions. Therefore, the processes of “Othering” (Hall, 1996) are negotiated in the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Muñoz, 2006; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010; Tate, 2015). Here, I am making reference to the relationship between coloniality of power and how it affects notions of Blackness, woven through the dialogue that is forming the tapestry of diasporic experiences of Black Brazilian women who live in the UK. Affect circulates, involving orientations towards others (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 4). This makes the identifications relational, negotiated to the point of considering the potential translations of relationality within a larger social sphere (Muñoz, 1999, p. 677). Within the migratory trajectory, notions, perceptions, and translations of Brazilian Blackness are present, which are negotiated in the British setting, where the intersectionality of race, gender and nationality suggest a new dynamic of oppression, struggle and

agency. Intersectionality is a relational interaction that “makes visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006, p. 187).

To talk about this affect economy that is present in the lives of Black Brazilian women in the UK, I use the concepts of “*Amefricanaladina*” by Lélia Gonzalez (1988) and “the use of the erotic” by Audre Lorde (1984). These concepts work as methodological tools of re-existence that allow me to navigate complex realities and envision strategies of how to negotiate Blackness, gender and nationality. They are methodological tools for re-existence because, on the one hand, *Amefricanaladina* means weaving together Black and Indigenous groups (racialised categories) with geographic and national origins (Caribbean, Latin American and African), claiming a decolonial positionality of constant “negation” (*negação*) of the place that racism reserves for people racialised as non-white (Gonzalez and Hasenbalg, 1982; Gonzalez, 1988). On the other hand, the use of the erotic is what functions to validate and understand Black women’s experiences by reclaiming our/their space of articulation and its power of liberation from oppressive chains. Therefore, the erotic is present as the ability to connect to share experiences and differences, creating an *Amefricanaladina* space. From this space, we – Black women – re-exist the oppressions through our own situated standpoint (Collins, 1990).

With this premise of validating the knowledge of the Black Brazilian women living in the UK, I recount Ceci’s *Herstory*.<sup>4</sup> It is about a Black Brazilian woman who arrived in Brazil after a few frustrating attempts at developing her professional career in Brazil. She faced a few perils, risks and difficulties in finding a job and learning how to speak English. She then met her husband, but later asked for a divorce due to constant domestic violence and lack of action by police when Ceci sought

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<sup>4</sup> *Herstory* is a concept used by Black feminists, remarkably well expressed by Hazel V. Carby (1982) in her paper “White Woman Listen!: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood”. *Herstories* is a way to denounce the preconceived and universalising ideas perpetuated by white hegemonic feminism, validating the intersections of identities, oppressions and needs of Black women. *Herstory* is a political way of validating the enunciation utterance of knowledge, pain and liberation of women racialised as non-white through their systematically invisible *Herstories*.

institutional support. During this relationship, there was an episode of violence when the police were called, but the officers dismissed her claims and did not record the event as domestic abuse. The judge responsible for the divorce process did not recognise her call to the police, nor the proof presented to demonstrate the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband as valid evidence.

Because of this, her migratory status in England was at risk of being made illegal (without a justification for filing divorce, she would not be able to continue her application for a resident permit through marriage). Due to a car accident, Ceci acquired a physical disability, which aggravated her emotional, psychological, financial and legal situation in the country. Ceci defined this moment in *Herstory* as when she understood what sadness meant. However, this moment was also when she ‘made use of her erotic’, finding the strength to seek resources and help to understand her new condition as a person with disability, creating a support community and starting to look for work.

Far from romanticising the stories of Black women overcoming their exclusion or suggesting from a meritocratic perspective that the experience of Ceci is the fruit of an individualised struggle, this *Herstory* shows the possibility of creating an *Amefricanaladina* standpoint. This is the opportunity of weaving together groups of resistance to achieve two things. Firstly, it stands up to the socially normalised aggression of whiteness and its mortal consequences. Secondly, because the Black feminist standpoint in Ceci’s experience teaches us the use of the erotic (Lorde, 1984) – the potential of self-love – is real and revolutionises the practices of re-existence and liberation.

Today, Ceci has learned how to live with depression, with the emotional lows, and knows her vulnerabilities. She has also found love with another partner and works in an area that allows her to adapt to her reality as a person with disability and visit her mother from time to time, in Brazil. In my reading, Ceci’s use of the erotic (Lorde, 1984) is evident in the way she has found the space to be herself within the British ‘hostile environment’ (Arif and Wangari-Jones, 2018). In conclusion, my contribution does not seek to place Black women in spaces of victimisation, but to

recognise that, despite intersectional oppression, there is the possibility of creating actions in which our Herstories also (re)exist and are woven together. This weaving is a proof of our existence, systematically invisible to the eyes of the colonality of power framed by/through whiteness, of our re-existence to overcome whiteness, and of our *Amefricaladina* (Gonzalez, 1988) possibilities of *erotically* (Lorde, 1984) flourishing beyond whiteness.

Now I invite Andrea, a fellow symposium participant, with whom I coexisted during my experience as Research Fellow in the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC), at the Justus-Liebig Gießen, Germany. Andrea, what are your reflections and interpretations of my presentation?

ANDREA SEMPERTEGUI: Before starting with my reflection on your paper, I think it is important to note the standpoint you are talking from. Then, I will continue by mentioning what caught my attention during your presentation.

Katucha Bento is an Afro-Brazilian activist, samba dancer, teaching fellow and PhD researcher in Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK. Katucha, who is also the organiser of this symposium, shared with us a fragment of her research and reflections, which connect migration, racism, gender and affect from a decolonial and Black feminist perspective.

First, she introduced us to the imaginary of Leila Gonzalez, an Afro-Brazilian thinker, anthropologist and politician, through the term of "Amefricaladino". While this word is an example of how Leila Gonzalez creates a language that weaves together Black and indigenous resistance against racism, the term also produces places of enunciation and re-existence to continue the struggle and legacy of people like the "Amefricaladina" Marielle Franco. This activist and politician was assassinated in March 2018 in the context of her activism and political work against police violence in the favelas in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro.

Thus, starting with the statement that "Marielle is present", Bento presented the political and everyday dimensions of her doctoral research. This research project

focuses on how Afro-Brazilian migrant women create "Amefricaladina" places to resist racism and the normative impositions of whiteness in the UK. Using the notion of the "erotic" from the African-American poet and feminist Audre Lorde, which refers to a process of feeling "oneself" and of recreating places from which we can speak and be, Bento introduced us to the *herstory* of "Ceci".

Learning about Ceci's life through the voice of Bento was a crucial experience to "feel-think" about how the process of the "erotic" goes beyond creating a rationalised and reflected-upon place for resistance. Ceci's *herstory* also revealed to us the possibilities of finding spaces for empowerment that arise from life experiences marked by denial and suffering in the diaspora. The process of feeling through these experiences creates spaces for self-love and communal solidarity even though they seem impossible in a world marked by racism and patriarchy.

Departing from the need to connect and create solidarity and re-existence, I continue this dialogue by introducing my presentation, which weaves together extractivism and indigenous women's resistance in the Amazon from a decolonial perspective.

### **Kawsak Sacha: Re-existence beyond Resistance**

ANDREA SEMPETEGUI: This paper is connected to the symposium's theme by reversing its objective. Named "Decolonizing the Global North", the symposium sought to trace the influence of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and indigenous populations in socio-cultural and political formations in the Global North. My presentation, however, showed how the territorial struggles currently taking place in *Abya Yala* are connected to the historical-structural forms that have determined which populations and territories should be sacrificed in the name of hegemonic and capitalist ways of living in the Global North. Inspired by Cedric Robinson's thinking, I focused on how the expansion of extractive projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon is part of what he called "racial capitalism" (Robinson 1983). This term illuminates how previous phases of racialised expropriation continue to have repercussions today and have even intensified by deploying new techniques of racialised and gendered exclusion and occupation (Bhattacharyya 2018). This



historical contextualization was critical to reflect on what forms of power permeate the territorial struggles taking place in Ecuador, without reducing them to mere resistance movements against the capitalist occupation.

I began my presentation by connecting and differentiating myself from academic debates on "neo-extractivism". This debate was born from a dialogue between various academics (Alberto Acosta 2012, Eduardo Gudynas 2010, Maristella Svampa 2011, among others), who have reflected on the question of why progressive governments in Latin America have continued and even intensified extractive projects. In the case of Ecuador, despite the government of *Alianza País* having promoted an environmental agenda since 2006, oil and mining extraction have expanded throughout the country and were even justified by governmental discourse as a necessary measure to eradicate poverty. While I agree with many of the reflections generated in the context of this debate, especially in relation to how the neo-extractive developmental model facilitated new strategies of territorial occupation, my presentation sought to reveal the profoundly colonial, racist and patriarchal roots underlining current processes of territorial occupation for the production of raw materials for the Global North.

I mentioned three current examples that reveal which territories, bodies and ways of life are to be sacrificed for the expansion of the 11th Petroleum Oil Round and mega-mining projects in Ecuador. First, the colonial construction and subordination of the Ecuadorian Amazon as a "periphery" has been crucial for its place in the governmental discourse that seeks to "refund" and "emancipate" the region from poverty with the program "Nueva Amazonía" [New Amazon] (Vallejo and García-Torres 2017). This program consists in expanding the extractive frontiers through social investment projects in indigenous, peasant and protected areas, such as the Yasuní National Park (Vallejo and García-Torres 2017).

A second example of "sacrifice" in the name of extractive development is how the bodies most affected by extractive projects have been racialised, in this case the indigenous bodies, such as the Shuar people. While the Shuar people have historically opposed territorial colonialization and currently resist mega-mining projects in their

territory, several of their leaders (Bosco Wisum, Freddy Taish and José Tendetza) have been assassinated. These murders are part of the current strategy of persecution and assassination of social leaders who resist extractive activities throughout *Abya Yala*.

A third example of sacrifice is to be found in development projects such as the "Millennium Cities" in the Ecuadoran Amazon, which sought to eliminate ways of life outside capitalist production relations, as they are considered to be "poverty generators". In the case of Amazonian indigenous women, they have been forced to sacrifice their affective relationships with the forest and their role as self-sustaining suppliers for their families if they want to move to these cities (Cielo et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, indigenous women are not passive victims of extractive occupation. My presentation concluded by showing how the organisation of Amazonian women in the southeastern Amazon is an example of "re-existence" to the extractive occupation. These women organised the "March for Life" in October 2013, with the aim of handing over the *Kawsak Sacha* (Living Forest) proposal to former president Rafael Correa. The main objective of this proposal was to declare the Amazon as a "living forest" and shows how this group of Amazonian women do more than resist the extractive policies promoted by the government. Instead, they are trying to make visible other forms of relationship and coexistence in Amazonian territories that have historically been denied and go beyond modernist and conservationist imaginaries about the rainforest.

Now I would like to pass the dialogue to Heriberto Ruiz Ponce, who will comment from his perspective about some key aspects of my paper that should be discussed and expressed in our dialogue.

HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE: My comments regarding your presentation create a walk-through of the colonial history of occupation and territorial exploitation.

Andrea Sempertegui's presentation showed us with very concrete examples how the imaginary of modernity has built horizons and territories *without* people; they are

always presented as empty spaces at the convenience of capital, in so far as it justifies the spatial occupation for its exploitation.

The general course of the presented analysis gave an account of the historical process (from the time of the European colonial invasion to the new transnational neo-extractivist projects) in which the region that is known today as the Ecuadorian Amazon has been the object of this construction of usable emptiness. However, it is clear that in the review of various geographies and histories located in *Abya Yala*, the process can be verified as a systematic form of plunder, with its own "continuities as well as colonial and neoliberal ruptures in the strategies of the occupation of lives and territories". In the face of this, the affected villages have sustained diverse forms of resistance, both visible and invisible, against the constant attempts to render them invisible and deny them the option to take control of their lives, territories and sacred places.

In the case at hand, the logic of territorial occupation and the lives affected by extractive projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon arises cyclically, with a similar appearance and discourse, in which, for the execution of public policies, it is necessary to make certain sacrifices in exchange for the general benefit. Characteristic of this balance, it is the indigenous and peasant women that live in proximity to extractivist projects who tacitly receive the classification of "expendable" in the name of progress. According to the presentation, in the centre of the old kingdom of Spain, the *Achuar*, *Shuar*, *Zapara*, *Kichwa*, *Shiwiar*, *Andoa* and *Waorani* peoples took shape and made their presence known accordingly. Moreover, those of us who listened to Sempertegui's explanation know what the Kawsak Sacha (living forest) is—a movement of creative articulation, driven by women, that occurred in response to the new attacks from the Ecuadorian state to exploit the Amazon.

For an external observer, such as the one writing this commentary, the tensions between the various national and development projects given to the interior of the same country are notorious. Considering the specific case of Ecuador presented to us in the panel and the geographical distances between our countries, it is obviously possible to verify that neither the geographical distance between our countries nor

their genealogical histories are so different or alien, particularly when it comes time to understand the operation of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000), of knowledge, and of existing within our diverse worlds of life.

It is within this field of analysis that I continue in the next dialogue section, presenting the research I carried out with Selma Jazmín Vásquez Bracamontes. In this presentation, I talk about how the coloniality of power operates within the context of Mexico, with emphasis on Afro-Mexican resistance-group fighting for the autonomy of racial self-classification, validating African and Black identities throughout the country.

### **The Afro-Mexican Council: Crossroads of Identities and Political Opportunities**

HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE: The "Afro-Descendant Movement" in Mexico has a relatively new outlook that has not yet been sufficiently explored in terms of the construction of political identities. Its specific presence in Oaxaca is generally known in terms of historical information and is preserved in popular culture and collective memory; however, there are not enough updated studies that identify the political dynamics that have recently arisen concerning the State and other cultural groups that struggle to position their agendas on the public stage.

The case of the state of Oaxaca opened a repertoire of legal options that has stimulated the emergence of movements of people of African descent from the configuration of a structure of political opportunity. Here, we specifically refer to the reform of articles 16 and 25 of the *Political Constitution of the Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca* in 2013, in which the category of Afro-Mexicans was introduced. This change to the rules of the political game does not mean that previously there were no such organisations and people – for example, *Mexico Negro A.C.*, *Africa A.C.* and *Purpura A.C.* – committed for years to promoting the recognition of rights of Afro-Mexicans. On the contrary, it was precisely the accumulation of their actions and the pressures exercised toward the central powers of the state government, at least during the decade leading up to the change, from which the aforementioned constitutional

reform was derived. That being said, this reform has given a broader opening to new dimensions in the local political environment, which encourage the collective action of other subjects and groups toward advancing the progression of rights and public policies focused on people of African descent.

Recent experience shows how Afro-descendant communities have sought, through various means, the recognition of their struggles by other international political bodies. Solidarity networks, for example, are one of the main tools that social movements in general have used in recent years, taking advantage of advances in communication technologies. The Afro-movements and their contemporary discourse, in this sense, are having an impact in various areas thanks to these new political environments, their communication potential, and their progress in being recognised as subjects of law. The invisibility of subaltern peoples gradually fades away, and some sectors are adjusting to these new structuring dimensions.

The game and struggle for the constitutional recognition of social actors is often unnecessary, but enough to provide sufficient conditions to generate political opportunities. In the case of the movements of Afro-descendants in Oaxaca, the normative change has been crucial for the activation of organisational processes around the construction of identity. Here the focus is on the *Consejo Afromexicano* (Afromexican Council), constituted in 2014 in the *Villa de Tututepec de Melchor Ocampo* (Oaxaca). It is one of the active organisations that, at different levels, has promoted a path of identity construction that deserves to be recognised and the dimensions of its pioneering activities noted. Within its agenda of activities is a coexistence called "Get-together, Talent and Culture," which aims to illuminate Afro-Mexican culture and identify with it. Like the monthly meeting, this activity is carried out alternately and varies in some of the communities that make up the Council, mainly in those whose presence and activities have been scarce.

In our opinion, the ever-greater increase in participation of organised groups in the region that pose a programmatic public agenda on rights and public policies focused on people of African descent responds to a concrete structure of political opportunity. Fundamental to the process we are observing is the reform of the *Political Constitution*

*of the Free and Sovereign State of Oaxaca*, in its articles 16 and 25, where the Afro-Mexican juridical subject is introduced for the first time. It is a formal, congruent dimension of the political context of the entity, and although it does not necessarily produce a direct transformation in the daily life of Black populations, it does open political opportunities to advance in routes of advocacy with specific objectives.

The constitutional reform has not been the origin of the Afro-movement in Oaxaca. On the contrary, the reform is the result of the accumulation of actions of people and groups that have pushed toward its establishment. In turn, this change in the definition of the rules of the game opens up possibilities for new challenges, both for the State and for the Afro-descendant organisations themselves. For its members, the formation and development of the Council have given them the opportunity to participate in the political sphere, thus contributing to the struggle for the recognition of their rights, and beyond this, motivating them to be included in the movement that has marked the beginning of their self-identification as Afro-Mexicans.

The current collective challenge of the *Afro-Mexican Council* involves the investment of much energy into different dimensions and at different times. Their survival or decline in the national socio-political arena will depend on the adjustment of their common objectives, the solidarity and interaction maintained between them and other organisations, and the dialogue with the members of each.

Here, I invite Louis to tell us about his perceptions regarding this presentation about social movements of resistance in Mexico.

LOUIS DI PAOLO: In my reflection on your paper I will focus on the importance of the constitutional recognition of Afro-descendants in Oaxaca in 2013, as well as the creation of new possibilities for political action among Afro-descendant groups through a legal identity, centring on the Afro-Mexican Council, created in 2014. Professor Heriberto Ruiz Ponce presented this research, jointly conducted with Selma Jazmín Vásquez Bracamontes, on Afro-descendant political identities in the state of Oaxaca. Their analysis was framed with a decolonial perspective, based on Aníbal Quijano's discussion on the "coloniality of power", which states that the classification

of ethnicities and races in the Global South is a fundamental instrument sustaining the domination of global capitalism. This discussion is closely linked to the historical ideas in Western philosophy in which Africa belongs to an imaginary of underdevelopment, legitimising this system of codification.

Ruiz Ponce and Vásquez Bracamontes demonstrate that there has been an increase in the number of individuals who self-identify as Afro-descendants in the State. They examine the relationships that exist between this increase in Afro-descendant self-identification and the processes of political discussion. The constitutional reform, which was catalysed by Afro-descendant activist groups, has generated new political spaces to broaden the Afro-Mexican struggle in the state of Oaxaca, through the creation of this legal identity.

This research into this legal identity opens new discussions about the crossroads between social change and the negotiation of racial and ethnic identities within governmental structures. It has been a subject little studied in this region. Although these racialised subjectivities comply with liberal state ideals about identity, their permanent invisibility in the political discourse of Oaxaca before the reform prohibited such a legal instrument for these marginalised groups to claim their rights. Ruiz Ponce and Vásquez Bracamontes carefully consider the complexities of claiming rights in the political sphere by stabilising fluid subjectivities within legal and political contexts. The authors found that the constitutional reform has created new dialogues between Afro-descendant groups to establish further agendas and collective objectives.

This topic has connections with my research, as it is important to critically analyse inclusive political agendas that utilise legal and/or political identities within liberal government structures. Next, I present my paper on LGBTQ tourism in Uruguay.

### **Decolonising 'Gay Friendly' in Uruguay**

LOUIS DI PAOLO: In 2016 Uruguay was awarded the title of being the most 'gay-friendly' country in Latin America by the international gay tourism guide, Spartacus.

This was due to the new rights agenda established in the country, with the most important achievements being marriage equality and the passing of child adoption laws for same-sex couples. This international (albeit frivolous) classification of social progress has been used by the Ministry of Tourism to promote Uruguay as 'gay-friendly' and an attractive destination for the affluent gay traveller, commodifying the achievements of civil society activism.

This appropriation of struggles by the State for market purposes demonstrates the culmination of the dangers of what María Galindo (2015) calls the 'NGOisation' of social movements of groups historically discriminated against in Latin America in their struggle for equality within the neoliberal system, taking place through egalitarian and consumerist discourses. María Galindo (2015) argues that this is a new form of clientelism, where the financing of groups reproduces the same commercial interests as in the state. In tourism studies and some sectors of international relations there is a belief that LGBT tourism has a positive impact on the promotion of social rights of these groups worldwide, which is also supported by the United Nations tourism organisation (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). This is reflected in the foreign policy of the United States, through USAID. In 2016, this agency donated one million dollars to the Dominican Republic to promote LGBT rights, for the development of LGBT tourism in the country (Taveres, 2016), which is also a foreign relations policy within the Southern Cone through activities promoted by embassies of the Global North. This shows the importance of analysing these clientelist and colonial processes closely because, as Puar (2002) argues in their critique of transnational LGBT tourism in the Caribbean, this economic access for some invisibilizes and further marginalises more dissenting gender variant subjectivities and their more pressing needs.

When critically analysing the strategies of the promotion of LGBT tourism in Uruguay, in this paper, I wanted to emphasise the importance of a self-critical-analysis as a way to decolonise the academia of the Global North. Through this, my reasons for studying LGBT tourism in Uruguay were self-reflexively revealed to me as an extension of homonormative discourses and practices (Duggan, 2003), due to



my privileged hope in the discourses of liberal equality espoused by rainbow capitalism. It is necessary to be critical of the spaces and practices that we intend to research, but if one does not question and criticise one's own positioning within colonial structures as researcher and subject, we would merely reproduce colonial researcher relationships with the field, replicating neoliberal logics within Queer theory of the North.

I now invite Katucha Bento to reflect upon my presentation, which relates to her presentation about the importance of an intersectional view between oppression and identity processes.

KATUCHA BENTO: It has been a pleasure to organise this symposium and have you present, Louis, in our dialogue. I see your contribution as necessary to promote reflexivity in the research process (for reflexivity as an epistemic concept see: Tate, 2005; Gill, 1998). The key point that caught my attention is that you and I both self-identify with the topic of our research. It certainly doesn't talk about the only form of our identity, but it is crucial for the role that we have/complete in the world. Because of this, I start with a reflection about how the Global North uses a type of "intersectional" to makes calls for LGBTQ+ tourism in Uruguay.

It is clear that this is the classic colonisation of knowledge by hegemonic groups (white, Eurocentric, upper-middle class) that make use of the terminology of resistance, in this case, black feminism. The notion of intersectionality proceeds to have an exchange value, commercialised through an imaginary alternative, which, at the same time as it celebrates alternative sexualities, renders oppressed groups invisible from their partaking in such activities. This is a problematic contradiction that requires deeper reflections within these collectives about the promotion of self-critique and inclusive spaces.

Shirley Tate (2015) takes into account a Foucauldian, decolonial and black feminist approach in her analysis of the (in)visible spaces of black British women's bodies. This is a sophisticated reflection, which seems simple but in which it is difficult to strike a balance, on the danger of the normalisation, disciplining and observation of

the body. Shirley speaks of how our ability to resist power withdraws when we become agents of our own normalisation, creating categories of classification, discursive norms and measures of difference (Tate, 2015, p. 4). Louis and Shirley inspire me to call attention to reflexivity in our roles as researchers, seeking to understand our positions of power before our participants, and as activists that make us part of the groups of resistance. Turning ourselves into agents of our own normalisation can permit new modes of exclusion, which is what Louis lays out in his presentation. By not being in constant change and negotiation, with respect to the discursive norms of resistance, the “gay friendly” that Louis presents becomes an exclusive mode of differentiation and marginalisation marked by capitalist logics.

The oppressive process that we feel, (don’t always) survive, and (don’t always) recover from demands a constant questioning of the consequences of the alliances and breakages we make with capitalism. Such negotiations are affected by colonialities of power that keeps us, the queer population, among marginalised groups, independent of the economic ascension that allows us to exclude “Other” subjects from our collectives.

Louis’s presentation has awoken greater interest in me to accompany his investigation, as I believe that reading about queer spaces, subjectivities and identities will provide us with much fruit for decolonial thinking.

### **Final Considerations**

The dialogue presented in this article discusses the failure of the State in recognising the identities of marginalised groups with the oppressions suffered by such groups. In the different papers presented at our panel, it was asserted that the State is, in fact, an active force in oppressing non-white bodies and lives on the basis of what Charles Mills (1997) called the “Racial Contract,” which has historically allowed formal and informal practices of domination on non-white bodies and lives to benefit white-Wo/Man-Eurocentric/Western hegemonic power. We understand that the practices

of racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism and de-territorialization presented in this article, despite taking place in private settings, are authorised practices by State institutions created to serve the purpose of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000).

As Katucha Bento's presentation showed, the lack of recognition of Ceci as a victim of domestic violence already implied a set of multiple oppressions of patriarchy. In other words, this lack of recognition is a form of naturalising moral, physical and psychological harassment against women in public and private spheres. At the institutional level, Ceci's case is also an example of how the State trivialises structural violence against women since it does not promote policies that address this violence, nor which protect its victims, and is equally uninterested in designing educational projects for aggressors.

In Andrea Sempertegui's presentation, the State appears once again as the leading promoter of oppressive practices against marginalised groups, failing to recognise the negative impacts produced by the extractive occupation of land in the Amazon. Extractive occupation also implies the oppression of people and nature, the imprisonment of activists, the production of gender inequalities, and the death of political activists. Nevertheless, racialised groups – as non-whites – in Latin America, have historically brought attention to these implications, as the case of the group of indigenous women who initiated the "March for Life" demonstrates. Their struggle against the extractive policies promoted by the government is thus not only an act of resistance but of their capability of "re-existing" extractivism despite territorial colonisation.

The coloniality of power represented by the State is also present in the lack of recognition of racialised identity groups. Heriberto Ruiz Ponce pointed out in his presentation the importance of recognising black peoples as subjects in the Mexican political context as a necessary step to advance social equality programs. Afromexican identities thus matter for just social organisation, and they need to be validated and understood at the national level not as conflictive identities but as possibilities for producing positive transformations. This is the case of the Afromexican Council's

proposal that has worked for the recognition of rights of Afromexican peoples, an invisible group for Mexican society.

Louis Di Paolo also offered us his critical vision of State clientelistic practices that perpetuate colonial processes within the LGBTQ community, through commercialised identity recognition. The State does this by approving laws that, while meeting the demands of some, reproduce hegemonic, white and normative patterns that render as invisible the identities and needs of the most vulnerable subjects within the LGBTQ community. The effect of this process is that LGBTQ discourses and practices become homonormative and that State recognition of LGBTQ identities is commodified through tourism development discourses and practices, serving the economic interests of the state, creating an illusion of inclusion, at the expense of dissident and vulnerable subjectivities.

All the presentations showed that resisting the coloniality of power is necessarily an intersectional practice. In fact, resisting as politicised subjects is a revolutionary practice of reclaiming our own space of existence in a continent that suffers the consequences of colonisation, a product of the enslavement of our ancestors, the expropriation of indigenous lands and the dismissal of our ways of producing knowledge. This knowledge has been presented in this dialogue as situated forms of knowledge coming from our racialised, gendered, sexual and national realities. To recognise and make visible the situatedness of our experience is an important step to enable possibilities for decolonising the practices that exclude us.

Furthermore, having done this collective work as a way of connecting our different ways of knowing, it is already an emancipatory practice that has the potential to break with colonial shackles and to promote diverse forms of re-existence. In other words, this work in eight hands is an invitation to create collaborative practices and to decolonise beyond the oppressive state. This is thus a proposal for constructive dialogues and practices that shed light on our potential as subjects of transformation. To recognise marginalised spaces and subjects is also a necessary and collective academic task that can open spaces for serious dialogue amongst groups, taking into account our privileged places of enunciation.

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KATUCHA BENTO, ANDREA SEMPÉRTEGUI, HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE,  
LOUIS DI PAOLO<sup>1</sup>

## **Diálogos de (re)existencia Indígena Afro-Latinxs: Descolonialidades posibles<sup>2</sup>**

### **Introducción**

Este artículo, en formato diálogo, es fruto del encuentro de lxs investigadorxs que participaron en el simposio titulado “Descolonizando el Norte Global: Afro-Latinoamérica, el Caribe y Abya Yala en diáspora” que tuvo lugar durante el 56º

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<sup>2</sup> Estamos utilizando deliberadamente la letra “x” y el término “Latinxs” sin el uso de “o / a” o “@”, como una decisión política de desidentificación con las construcciones de binarios de género que hacen referencias restrictivas a múltiples posibilidades en torno a la fluidez y performatividad de identificación de género/ sexo/sexualidad. Esta posicionalidad hace referencia a las contribuciones en la literatura Queer y/o Latinx, como Elondust Patrick Johnson, Gloria Anzaldúa, Juliana Huxtable, Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, Roderick Ferguson, Sara Ahmed, Simone Browne, entre otros autores que inspiran el proceso de cuestionar debates sobre género/sexo/sexualidad y sus interseccionalidades.

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Congreso Internacional de Americanistas (ICA), el 20 de julio de 2018.<sup>3</sup> Este trabajo colectivo resume las ponencias presentadas y las expone, de manera crítica, en forma de diálogo proporcionando a su vez las impresiones y percepciones de cada unx de lxs participantes del simposio acerca de dichas ponencias. Se trata entonces de un intercambio de saberes, en el cual temas que, inicialmente parecieran ser diversos, se conectan de forma dialógica para reflexionar sobre la herencia colonial y las opresiones vivenciadas por grupos indígenas y afro-latinx.

Este conjunto de opresiones a las que nos referimos también han tocado nuestros cuerpos y nuestros sentires, ya que cada persona de este grupo de autorxs se auto-define como no-blanco, con identidad latinamericana y algunxs de origen de clase pobre, y la mitad de nosotrxs nos identificamos con identidades queer. Este artículo busca centralizar las experiencias de lxs participantes de nuestras investigaciones con el fin de retratar realidades marginalizadas por la colonialidad de poder (Quijano, 2000). Asimismo, con el propósito de identificar posibilidades de descolonizar prácticas y discursos que violentan a nuestrxs hermanxs en Abya Yala.

Advertimos a lxs lectorxs que este no es un artículo tradicionalmente académico, aunque nuestras ideas parten también de diálogos con pensadorxs descolonialxs, feministas negras, indígenas y activistas antirracistas. Creemos que esta autoría compartida no solo es un manifiesto de estilo, sino una herramienta poderosa de desobediencia epistémica, que demanda nuestro espacio de (re)existencia a través de nuestro trabajo colectivo. La estructura del texto a continuación seguirá el orden de las ponencias como tuvo lugar durante el simposio. Empezando con la voz de Katucha Bento, presentamos un marco metodológico feminista negro que se aproxima a las realidades de mujeres negras que sobreviven las opresiones desde la blanquitud. Andrea Sempértegui es quien comenta esta presentación, dando énfasis a las cuestiones sobre las cuales Katucha llama la atención. Ejemplos de esto son la validación del “sentirpensar” de mujeres negras inspiradas en el uso del erótico de

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<sup>3</sup> Para más informaciones sobre el Simposio 8/11 “Descolonizando el Norte Global: Afro-Latinoamérica, el Caribe y Abya Yala en diáspora” y sus participantes consultar la programación del 56º ICA 2018, pg. 273: <http://ica2018.es/mysite/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/PROGRAMA-FINAL.pdf>.

Audre Lorde y la creación de un espacio “Amefricaladino” de resistencia, propuesto por la autora feminista negra brasileña, Lélia Gonzalez.

Este diálogo continúa hablando de prácticas de resistencia y re-existencia a través de la voz de Andrea, quien nos cuenta sobre las luchas de mujeres indígenas por sus territorios en contra de la expansión de proyectos extractivos en la Amazonía Ecuatoriana. Heriberto Ruiz Ponce comenta esta presentación con un análisis cuidadoso sobre cómo los proyectos neo-extractivos son parte de un proyecto de modernidad que hacen evidente la forma en que la colonialidad de poder (Quijano, 2000) se manifiesta históricamente en Abya Yala.

El análisis que presenta Heriberto sobre las luchas por la validación de identidades afro y negras se entiende a partir de su explanación sobre la colonialidad de poder (Quijano, 2000) en el contexto mexicano. Esta contribución se inspira en la creación del Consejo Afromexicano en la Villa de Tututepec de Melchor Ocampo (Oaxaca) y nos la presenta como una práctica organizativa de resistencia en contra de la invisibilidad por parte del Estado Mexicano. Es importante resaltar que esta investigación fue hecha en conjunto con la investigadora Selma Jazmín Vázquez de la Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLASCO). El comentarista de esta presentación es Louis Di Pablo – nuestro invitado especial del simposio – quien se enfoca en el papel opresor del Estado Mexicano como un instrumento de dominación, que al mismo tiempo ha creado posibilidades para nuevos procesos de identificación racial afrodescendientes a partir de la reforma constitucional.

El cuarto tema es resumido por Louis, quien nos presenta sus reflexiones críticas sobre el turismo LGBTQ+ en Uruguay. El autor cuestiona la legitimidad de los espacios alternativos de grupos LGBTQ+, que aunque marginalizados dentro de la sociedad patriarcal, crean y reproducen otros tipos de invisibilidad dentro de si mismos. Katucha comenta esta ponencia a partir de una lectura feminista negra y de estudios críticos de raza (Critical Race Studies) sobre espacios Queer. Sugiriendo preguntas sobre quiénes son y qué es el lugar de validación e identificación ‘Queer’, la comentarista finaliza con una provocación sobre la necesidad de replantear la

interseccionalidad como herramienta fundamental de nuestros estudios descoloniales.

Este diálogo concluye, de manera breve, mencionando algunos puntos de convergencias entre las temáticas presentadas en las ponencias, que pueden promover prácticas descoloniales. Con eso, la intención no es de proporcionar una conclusión, sino estimular que se continúe el debate y la discusión sobre proyectos de re-existencia que puedan fortalecer pueblos marginalizados y racializados como no-blancos por la colonialidad de poder (Quijano, 2000).

### **Creando una perspectiva AMEFRICALADINA: Afrobrasileñas Curando y Sobreviviendo a la Blanquitud en el Escenario Europeo**

KATUCHA BENTO: Mi trabajo se relaciona con el amplio aspecto de las opresiones interseccionales (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1996) en las vivencias de mujeres negras brasileñas en diáspora, negociando políticas de identificación en sus cotidianos en Reino Unido. Entiendo tales opresiones cementadas en la "colonialidad de poder" (Quijano, 2000), que impone roles raciales cristalizados y estereotipados que, para esta discusión, se entrecruzan con el género, la nacionalidad y (dis)capacidad. Mi interés es dar a conocer cómo estas mujeres están negociando sus identidades raciales y nacionales en el Reino Unido, donde hay formas diferentes de identificar a la "Otra" (Hall, 1996) no blanca/no europea/no hablante de inglés. Este escenario de "colonialidad de poder" (Quijano, 2000) *afecta* interacciones sociales, experiencias migratorias, y, sobre todo, las maneras de sobrevivir a las opresiones interseccionales. Luego, el proceso de identificar la "Otra" (Hall, 1996) se negocia en la economía afectiva (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b; Muñoz, 2006; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010; Tate, 2015) que está en relación con la colonialidad del poder y las nociones de negritud (Blackness), tejidas dentro del diálogo que forma el tapiz de las experiencias migratorias de estas mujeres negras brasileñas que viven en el Reino Unido.

El afecto circula, involucrando orientaciones hacia otros (Ahmed, 2004a, p.4). Esto hace que el proceso de identificaciones sea relacional, negociadas a punto de considerar las posibles traducciones de la relación dentro de una esfera social más

amplia (Muñoz, 1999: 677). Dentro de la trayectoria migratoria, están presentes las nociones, percepciones y traducciones de la negritud brasileña, que se negocian en el contexto británico, donde la interseccionalidad de raza, género y nacionalidad sugieren una nueva dinámica de opresión, luchas y agencia. La interseccionalidad es una interacción relacional que "hace visible el posicionamiento múltiple que constituye la vida cotidiana y las relaciones de poder que son fundamentales para ella" (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006, p. 187).

Para hablar de esta economía de afecto presentes en la vida de estas mujeres negras brasileñas, utilizo los conceptos de "*Amefricaladina*" de Lélia Gonzalez (1988) y el "uso del erótico" de Audre Lorde (1984) como herramientas metodológicas y de re-existencia que me permiten navegar por realidades complejas y vislumbrar estrategias de cómo negociar negritud, género y nacionalidad. Son herramientas metodológicas y de re-existencia porque, por el un lado, la *Amefricaladina* significa tejer lazos entre grupos negros e indígenas (tomando en cuenta que estas son categorías racializadas), y de diversos orígenes geográficos y de nacionalidad (caribeña, latinoamericana y africana), reclamando una posicionalidad decolonial de constante "negación" (*negação*) del lugar que el racismo reserva a los pueblos racializados (Gonzalez and Hasenbalg, 1982; Gonzalez, 1988). Lo erótico tiene la función de validar y comprender las experiencias de mujeres negras, apostando por su espacio de enunciación y por su poder de liberación de las cadenas opresoras. Por lo tanto, lo erótico está presente como una capacidad de conexión para compartir experiencias y diferencias, creando así una perspectiva Amefricaladina desde donde nosotras, las mujeres negras, re-existimos a las opresiones a través del conocimiento propio y situado (*standpoint*, in: Collins, 1990).

Con esta premisa de validación del conocimiento de la mujer negra brasileña viviendo en Reino Unido, cuento la historia de Ceci: *Herstory*.<sup>4</sup> Se trata de una mujer negra

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<sup>4</sup> *Herstory* es un concepto utilizado por feministas Negras, muy bien expuesto por Hazel V. Carby (1982) en su artículo "White Woman Listen!: Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood". *Herstories* es una manera de denunciar las ideas preconcebidas y universalizantes del feminismo

brasileña que llegó a Inglaterra después de varios intentos frustrados de desarrollarse profesionalmente en Brasil. En Inglaterra vivió algunas aflicciones, riesgos y dificultades para encontrar trabajo y aprender inglés. Conoció a su marido, pero le pidió divorcio debido la constante violencia doméstica y a la falta de acción de la policía cuando Ceci buscaba apoyo institucional. Durante esta relación, hubo un episodio de violencia cuando la policía fue llamada por Ceci, pero los oficiales desestimaron sus reclamos y no registraron como ocurrencia policial. El juez a cargo de su proceso de divorcio no reconoce como pruebas válidas sus llamadas a la policía, ni las pruebas presentadas para justificar los abusos que ella sufría por parte de su marido.

Por este motivo, su situación migratoria en Inglaterra corría el riesgo de tornarse ilegalizada (sin una justificación para presentar el divorcio, ella no podría continuar su solicitud de un permiso de residencia a través del matrimonio). Debido a un accidente de coche, Ceci queda con una discapacidad física adquirida permanente, lo que agrava su situación emocional, psicológica, financiera y legal en el país. En su *herstory*, Ceci cuenta que fue en este momento cuando ella conoció lo que significaba la tristeza. Sin embargo, este también fue el momento en el cual ella, utilizando el erótico, encontró fuerzas para buscar recursos y ayuda para entender su nueva condición de persona con deficiencia, crear una comunidad de apoyo y buscar trabajo.

Lejos de una romantización de historias de superación de mujeres negras que sufren exclusión, o de sugerir desde una perspectiva meritocrática que la experiencia de Ceci es fruto de una lucha individualizada, esta *herstory* muestra la posibilidad de Amefricanidad. Es decir, la posibilidad de tejer grupos de resistencia que, primeramente, resisten a las agresiones normalizadas socialmente por la blanquitud y sus consecuencias mortales. Segundo, porque el espacio feminista negro nos enseña

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hegemónico blanco, validando las interseccionalidades de identidades, opresiones y necesidades de las mujeres negras. *Herstory* es una forma política de validar la enunciación de conocimiento, dolor y liberación de mujeres racializadas a través de sus historias sistemáticamente invisibilizadas.

que el uso de lo erótico (Lorde, 1984) – del potencial del amor propio – es verdadero y revoluciona las prácticas de liberación.

Hoy Ceci aprendió a convivir con la depresión, con bajones emocionales, y conociendo sus vulnerabilidades. Al mismo tiempo ha encontrado otro amor y trabaja en un área que le permite adaptar su realidad como persona con discapacidad y tener posibilidades para visitar a su mamá de vez en cuando en Brasil. En mi lectura, pienso que el uso de lo erótico (Lorde, 1984) por parte de Ceci, es evidente en la forma como ella ha encontrado el espacio para poder *ser* ella misma dentro de la atmósfera hostil (*hostile environment*) británica (Arif and Wangari-Jones, 2018). En conclusión, mi contribución no busca situar a las mujeres negras en espacios de victimización, sino reconocer que muy a pesar de las opresiones interseccionales, existe la posibilidad de crear redes en las que nuestras *herstories* existan también y se *tejan* en conjunto. Este tejer es una prueba de nuestra existencia sistemáticamente invisible para los ojos de la colonialidad de poder, de nuestra (re)existencia para superar la blanquitud, y de nuestras posibilidades *Amefricaladinas* (Gonzalez, 1988) de *eróticamente* (Lorde, 1984) florecer más allá de la blanquitud.

Invito aquí a Andrea, compañera del simposio, con quien conviví durante mi experiencia como investigadora visitante en el Centro de Estudio Culturales de Posgrado Internacional (GCSC), en la Universidad Justus-Liebig en Giessen, Alemania. Andrea, ¿cuáles son tus reflexiones e interpretaciones sobre mi ponencia?

ANDREA SEMPETEGUI: Antes de hablar de mi reflexión sobre tu ponencia, creo que es importante presentar desde dónde estás hablando. Luego, presentaré lo que me ha llamado la atención durante tu exposición.

Katucha Bento es activista brasileña, bailarina de samba y socióloga cursando su doctorado en la Universidad de Leeds, Reino Unido. Katucha Bento, quien también fue la organizadora del simposio, nos compartió un fragmento de su investigación y sus reflexiones que conectan los temas de migración, racismo, género y afecto desde una perspectiva decolonial y feminista negra.

En primer lugar, nos introdujo al imaginario de Leila Gonzalez, pensadora, antropóloga y política brasileña, a través del término “Amefricaladino”. Mientras esta

palabra es un ejemplo de cómo Leila Gonzalez ingenia un lenguaje que teje la resistencia negra e indígena en contra del racismo, también nos sirve para crear lugares de enunciación y de re-existencia para continuar la lucha y el legado de personas como la política y activista “amefrialadina” Marielle Franco. Esta activista y política fue asesinada en marzo de este año en el contexto de su activismo y su trabajo político en la municipalidad de Río de Janeiro por hacer denuncia pública de la violencia policial en las favelas.

Es así, que enunciado que “Marielle está presente”, K. Bento nos presentó dimensiones políticas y cotidianas de su investigación de doctorado en las cuales se puede ver cómo mujeres migrantes afrobrasileñas crean lugares “amefrialadinos” en Inglaterra para re-existir el racismo y las imposiciones normativas de la blanquitud. Utilizando lo “erótico” de la poeta y feminista negra afroamericana Audre Lorde, que se refiere a un proceso de sentirse “una misma” y que recrea lugares desde los cuales podemos hablar y ser, K. Bento nos presentó la historia de “Ceci”.

Escuchar el relato de la vida de Ceci a través de la voz de K. Bento fue una experiencia crucial para “sentirpensar” sobre como el proceso de lo erótico va más allá de crear un lugar intelectualizado y reflexionado para la resistencia. La historia de Ceci (herstory) nos mostró las posibilidades de encontrar espacios para el empoderamiento que surgen de experiencias de vida cruzadas por la negación y el sufrimiento en la diáspora. El sentir de estas experiencias es lo que crea espacios que parecieran imposibles en un mundo marcado por el racismo y el patriarcado, pero que sin embargo se tejen y se habitan desde el amor propio y la solidaridad en comunidad.

Desde la necesidad de hablar y crear solidaridad y re-existencia, sigo este dialogo con mi presentación, que teje conexiones entre temas de extractivismo en la Amazonia y las comunidades indígenas, a partir del pensamiento descolonial.

### **Kawsak Sacha: Re-existencia más allá de la Resistencia**

ANDREA SEMPERTEGUI: Esta ponencia se conectó con la temática del simposio, invirtiendo su objetivo. Mientras el diálogo de “Decolonizando el Norte Global”

buscaba indagar sobre las influencias de poblaciones afro-latinoamericanas, afro-caribeñas e indígenas en formaciones socio-culturales y políticas en el Norte Global; mi presentación quiso más bien mostrar cómo las luchas que se están dando en estos momentos en territorios Abya Yala están conectadas con las formas histórico-estructurales que han determinado qué poblaciones y territorios son sacrificables para la hegemonía de formas de vida consumistas en el Norte Global. Partiendo del pensamiento de Cedric Robinson, me enfoqué en cómo la expansión de proyectos extractivos en la Amazonía Ecuatoriana es parte del “capitalismo racial” (Robinson 1983), donde rastros de fases anteriores de expropiación racializada continúan teniendo repercusiones y se intensifican con nuevas técnicas de exclusión y ocupación racializadas y de género (Bhattacharyya 2018). Esta contextualización histórica es importante para reflexionar qué formas de poder permean las luchas que se están dando en el Ecuador, sin reducirlas a meras resistencias a las lógicas capitalistas de ocupación territorial.

Empecé mi presentación conectándome y diferenciándome de debates académicos sobre el “neoextractivismo”. Este debate nace cuando varixs académicxs (Alberto Acosta 2012, Eduardo Gudynas 2010, Maristella Svampa 2011, entre otros) tratan de indagar sobre el por qué gobiernos progresistas en Latinoamérica continúan e incluso intensifican proyectos extractivos. En el caso de Ecuador, a pesar de que el gobierno de Alianza País impulsó una agenda ambientalista desde el 2006, la extracción de petróleo se expande en todo el país y se justifica como necesaria para erradicar la pobreza. Mientras concuerdo con muchas de las reflexiones generadas en el contexto de este debate, especialmente en relación a las nuevas estrategias de ocupación territorial facilitadas por el neoextractivismo como un modelo de desarrollo, mi presentación buscó vislumbrar las raíces profundamente coloniales, racistas y patriarcales que facilitan actualmente procesos de ocupación extractiva para la producción de materias primas para el Norte Global.

Mencioné tres ejemplos actuales que revelan qué territorios, cuerpos y formas de vidas son sacrificables para la expansión de la XI Ronda Petrolera y de proyectos megamineros en el Ecuador. En primer lugar, la construcción colonial y subordinación de la Amazonía ecuatoriana como “periferia” ha sido crucial para su



lugar estratégico en el discurso gubernamental que busca “refundarla” y “emanciparla” de la pobreza con el programa “Nueva Amazonía” (Vallejo y García-Torres 2017). Este programa consiste en expandir las fronteras extractivas a través de proyectos de inversión social, afectando así territorios indígenas, campesinos y áreas protegidas como el Parque Nacional Yasuní. Segundo, los cuerpos mayormente afectados por proyectos extractivos han sido comunidades indígenas, sobre todo comunidades Shuar, quienes se han opuesto históricamente a la colonialización territorial y actualmente están resistiendo a los proyectos mega-mineros. Un ejemplo de esto es el asesinato de varios líderes (Bosco Wisum, Freddy Taish y José Tendetza), hecho que se enmarca dentro del patrón de persecución y asesinato de líderes sociales que ponen resistencia a las actividades extractivas en toda Abya Yala. Tercero, la ocupación extractiva a través de proyectos desarrollistas como las “Ciudades del Milenio” afectan formas de vida fuera de las relaciones de producción capitalista, ya que son consideradas como “generadoras de pobreza”. Este es el caso de mujeres indígenas amazónicas, quienes se ven obligadas a sacrificar sus relaciones afectivas en la selva y su trabajo como cultivadoras y proveedoras autosustentables cuando se pasan a vivir a estas ciudades (Cielo et al. 2016).

Sin embargo, las mujeres no son víctimas pasivas de la ocupación extractiva. Mi ponencia concluyó mostrando como la organización de mujeres amazónicas del centro-sur es un ejemplo de re-existencia que va más allá de la resistencia hacia las políticas extractivas promovidas por el gobierno. Estas mujeres iniciaron la “Marcha por la Vida” en octubre de 2013, con el objetivo de entregarle al expresidente Rafael Correa la propuesta Kawsak Sacha (Selva Viviente). Esta propuesta tiene como objetivo principal declarar a la Amazonía como “selva viva”. Es en ella que se visibilizan otras formas de relación y convivencia en los territorios amazónicos que han sido históricamente negadas y que van más allá de imaginarios modernistas y conservacionistas sobre la selva.

Ahora paso la palabra a Heriberto Ruiz Ponce para que comente desde su perspectiva cuáles fueron los puntos clave en mi ponencia que deben ser discutidos y expuestos en nuestro diálogo.

HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE: Mis comentarios sobre tu ponencia hacen un recorrido sobre la historia colonial de ocupación y explotación territorial.

La ponencia de Andrea Sempertegui nos mostró con ejemplos muy concretos cómo el imaginario de la modernidad ha construido horizontes y territorios *sin* personas, presentados siempre como *espacios vacíos* bajo conveniencia del capital, en tanto que así justifica la ocupación espacial para su explotación.

El recorrido general del análisis presentado, dio cuenta del proceso histórico (desde la época de la invasión colonial europea hasta los nuevos proyectos neoextractivistas transnacionales) en el que la región hoy conocida como Amazonía ecuatoriana ha sido objeto de esta construcción del vacío aprovechable. Ahora bien, queda claro que en la revisión de diversas geografías e historias situadas en Abya Yala el proceso puede ser verificado como una sistemática forma de expoliación, con sus propias “continuidades y rupturas coloniales y neoliberales en las estrategias de ocupación de vidas y territorios”. Frente a ellas, los pueblos han sostenido formas de resistencia diversas, visibles e invisibles, frente a las intenciones constantes por invisibilizarles y negarles la opción por asumir el control de sus vidas, sus territorios y lugares sagrados.

En el caso revisado, las lógicas de ocupación de territorios y de vidas ejecutados por los proyectos extractivos en la Amazonia ecuatoriana cíclicamente surge, con un cariz y discurso similar, en el que para la ejecución de las políticas públicas es necesario realizar ciertos *sacrificios* a cambio del beneficio general. En su saldo característico, son las mujeres indígenas y campesinas que viven en proximidades a zonas de proyectos extractivos las que reciben tácitamente la clasificación de “sacrificables” en nombre del progreso. Al escuchar la ponencia aquí, en el centro del viejo reino de España, tomaron cuerpo y se hicieron presentes los pueblos Achuar, Shuar, Zapara, Kichwa, Shiwiar, Andoa y Waorani. Más aún, quienes escuchamos la explicación de Sempertegui conocimos lo que es la *Kawsak Sacha* (Selva Viviente), un movimiento de articulación creativo – impulsado por mujeres – que se dio como respuesta a los nuevos embates del estado ecuatoriano para explotar la Amazonía.

Para un observador externo, como quien esto escribe, son notorias las tensiones existentes entre diversos proyectos de nación y desarrollo dadas al interior de un

mismo país. Sin embargo, con el caso concreto del Ecuador que se nos presentó en el panel, claramente es posible constatar que las distancias geográficas entre nuestros países y sus genealogías históricas no resultan tan distantes ni ajenas a la hora de comprender los modos en que opera la colonialidad del poder (Quijano, 2000), del saber y del ser sobre nuestros diversos mundos de vida.

Es con este campo de análisis que sigo en la próxima sección de diálogo, presentando la investigación que llevé a cabo con Selma Jazmín Vásquez Bracamontes. En la presentación, hablo cómo se opera la colonialidad de poder en el contexto Mexicano, con énfasis en el grupo Afromexicano de resistencia por la autonomía de auto clasificación racial, validando identidades afro y negras en el país.

### **El Consejo Afromexicano: Encrucijada de Identidades y Oportunidades Políticas**

HERIBERTO RUIZ PONCE: El llamado movimiento afrodescendiente en México tiene un horizonte reciente que no ha sido lo suficientemente explorado en términos de construcción de identidades políticas. Su presencia específica en Oaxaca es conocida generalmente en términos de la información histórica, y la preservada en la cultura y la memoria popular. Sin embargo, no existen suficientes estudios actualizados que identifiquen las dinámicas políticas a las que han entrado recientemente en relación al Estado y a otros grupos culturales que pugnan por posicionar sus agendas en el escenario público.

El caso del estado de Oaxaca, se abrió un repertorio de opciones legales que ha estimulado la emergencia de movimientos de personas afrodescendientes a partir de la configuración de una estructura de oportunidad política: concretamente nos referimos a la reforma al artículo 16 y 25 de la Constitución Política del Estado Libre y Soberano de Oaxaca, en el año 2013, en la que se introduce la categoría de *afromexicanos*. Este cambio a las reglas del juego político no significa que previamente no hubiera organizaciones y personas –tales como México Negro A.C, África A.C. y Purpura A.C– comprometidas con impulsar el reconocimiento de derechos de los afromexicanos desde años atrás. Al contrario, fue justamente la acumulación de sus

acciones y presiones ejercidas hacia los poderes centrales del gobierno del estado, por lo menos durante una década anterior, que se derivó la reforma constitucional referida. Sin embargo, ésta reforma ha dado una apertura más amplia a nuevas dimensiones en el entorno político local, que incentivan la acción colectiva de otros sujetos y grupos hacia el avance de la progresividad de derechos y políticas públicas enfocadas en las personas afrodescendientes.

La experiencia reciente constata cómo los pueblos afrodescendientes han buscado, a través de diversas vías, el reconocimiento de sus luchas por otras instancias políticas internacionales. Las redes de solidaridad, por ejemplo, son una de las herramientas principales a las que los movimientos sociales en general han recurrido en los últimos años, aprovechando los avances en las tecnologías de comunicación. Los movimientos afro y su discurso contemporáneo, en este sentido, están teniendo repercusión en diversos ámbitos gracias a los nuevos entornos políticos, a su capacidad de comunicación y al avance en su reconocimiento como sujetos de derecho. La invisibilidad de los pueblos subalternos se desvanece paulatinamente, y algunos sectores se están acomodando a estas nuevas dimensiones de estructuración.

El juego y pugna por el reconocimiento constitucional de actores sociales es, muchas veces, una condición no necesaria pero suficiente para generar las oportunidades políticas. En el caso de los movimientos de afrodescendientes en Oaxaca, el cambio normativo ha resultado clave para la activación de procesos organizativos en torno a la construcción identitaria. Aquí se centra la observación en el Consejo Afromexicano, constituido en 2014 en la Villa de Tututepec de Melchor Ocampo (Oaxaca). Es una de las organizaciones activas que ha promovido, en distintos niveles, una ruta de construcción identitaria que amerita ser registrada y dimensionada en sus actividades pioneras. Dentro de su agenda de actividades se encuentra una convivencia llamada “Kermes, talento y cultura” que tiene como fin dar a conocer públicamente la cultura afromexicana e identificarse con ella. Al igual que la junta mensual, esta actividad se realiza, se alterna y varía en alguna de las comunidades que integran el Consejo, principalmente en aquellas cuya presencia y actividades ha sido escasa.

A nuestro parecer, el incremento en la participación cada vez mayor de grupos organizados en la región que plantean una agenda pública programática sobre derechos y políticas públicas enfocadas en las personas afrodescendientes responde a una estructura de oportunidad política concreta y fundamental para este proceso que estamos observando: la reforma de la Constitución Política del Estado Libre y Soberano de Oaxaca, en sus artículos 16 y 25, donde se introduce por primera vez, al sujeto jurídico *afromexicano*. Se trata de una dimensión congruente, formal, del contexto político de la entidad que, aunque no necesariamente produce las transformaciones directas en la cotidianidad de las poblaciones negras, sí abre oportunidades políticas para avanzar en rutas de incidencia, con objetivos concretos.

La reforma constitucional no ha sido el origen del movimiento afro en Oaxaca, al contrario, la reforma es el resultado de la acumulación de acciones acumuladas de personas y agrupaciones que han empujado hacia ella. A su vez, este cambio en la definición de las reglas del juego, abre posibilidades para nuevos desafíos, tanto para el Estado, como para las propias organizaciones afrodescendientes. Para sus integrantes, la conformación y desarrollo del Consejo les ha brindado la oportunidad de participar en el ámbito político, aportando así a la lucha por el reconocimiento de sus derechos y, más allá de esto, los motivó a incluirse dentro del movimiento, ya que a partir de entonces ellos han comenzado a identificarse como *afromexicanos*.

El desafío colectivo actual del Consejo Afromexicano implica grandes inversiones de energía en distintas dimensiones, y en diferentes tiempos. Su supervivencia o declive en el escenario sociopolítico nacional dependerá del ajuste de sus objetivos comunes, de la solidaridad e interacción mantenida con otras organizaciones y del diálogo con los integrantes de cada una de ellas.

Aquí invito a Louis para que nos cuente sobre sus percepciones sobre esta ponencia sobre movimientos sociales de resistencia en México.

LOUIS DI PAOLO: Mi reflexión sobre tu ponencia se enfocará en la importancia del reconocimiento constitucional de Afrodescendientes en Oaxaca en 2013, así como la creación de nuevas posibilidades de acción política entre grupos Afrodescendientes mediante una identidad legal, enfocándose en el Consejo

Afromexicano, creado en 2014. El profesor Heriberto Ruiz Ponce, nos presentó esta investigación realizada junto con Selma Jazmín Vásquez Bracamontes sobre identidades políticas Afrodescendientes en el estado de Oaxaca, enmarcando la perspectiva descolonial, a partir de la discusión de Aníbal Quijano (2000) sobre la “Colonialidad de Poder”, en la que se plantea que la clasificación de etnicidades y razas en el Sur Global funciona como un instrumento de dominación fundamental del capitalismo mundial. Esta discusión está estrechamente ligada a las ideas históricas en la filosofía occidental en las que África pertenece a un imaginario de subdesarrollo para legitimar este sistema de codificación.

Ruiz Ponce y Vásquez Bracamontes demuestran que hay un crecimiento del número de individuos quienes se autoidentifican como afrodescendientes en el Estado. Ellxs examinan las relaciones que existen entre ese creciente aumento de la identidad afrodescendiente y el proceso de la discusión política. La reforma constitucional, que en sí misma fue catalizada por grupos activistas Afrodescendientes, ha generado nuevos espacios políticos para ampliar la lucha Afromexicano en el estado de Oaxaca, con la creación de esta identidad legal.

Este estudio sobre la identidad legal abre nuevas discusiones en torno de las encrucijadas entre el cambio social y la negociación de identidades raciales y étnicas dentro de estructuras gubernamentales. Ha sido un tema poco estudiado en esta región. Aunque estas subjetividades racializadas cumplen con ideas estatales liberales sobre identidad, su permanente invisibilización en el discurso político de Oaxaca antes de la reforma, les imposibilitaba a estos grupos un instrumento legal para reclamar sus derechos. Ponce y Bracamontes consideran las complejidades que acarrea reclamar derechos en un ámbito político con subjetividades fluidas a quienes las establecen en contextos legales y políticos. Lxs autores encuentran que la reforma constitucional ha creado nuevos diálogos entre grupos Afrodescendientes para establecer agendas y objetivos colectivos. Este tema tiene conexiones con mi investigación, ya que es importante analizar críticamente las agendas políticas inclusivas que utilizan identidades legales y/o políticas dentro de las estructuras gubernamentales liberales. A continuación, presento mi ponencia sobre turismo LGBTQ en Uruguay.

### Descolonizando 'Gay Friendly' en Uruguay

LOUIS DI PAOLO: En 2016, Uruguay fue galardonado como el país más 'gay friendly' en América Latina por la guía gay internacional de turismo, Spartacus. Esto se debe a la nueva agenda de derechos en el país, en la que se destaca el matrimonio igualitario y la adopción para parejas del mismo sexo. Esta clasificación internacional (aunque frívola) de progreso social ha sido utilizada por el ministerio de turismo para promocionar a Uruguay como un destino atractivo para el viajero gay afluente, mercantilizando los logros de la sociedad civil.

Esta apropiación de luchas por el Estado para fines de mercado demuestra la culminación de los peligros de lo que María Galindo (2015) llama la 'oenigización' de movimientos de grupos históricamente discriminados en América Latina, en la lucha por la igualdad dentro del sistema neoliberal, mediante discursos igualitarios y consumistas. María Galindo (2015) argumenta que se trata de una nueva forma de clientelismo, donde el financiamiento de grupos reproduce la misma lógica productivista del Estado. En los estudios de turismo y en algunos sectores de las relaciones internacionales existe la creencia que el turismo LGBT tiene una relación concreta con la promoción de derechos sociales de estos grupos al nivel mundial y que es también apoyado por la organización de turismo de las Naciones Unidas (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). Esto se ve reflejado en la política de relaciones exteriores de los Estados Unidos, a través de la agencia del USAID. en el año de 2016, esta agencia donó un millón de dólares a la Republica Dominicana para promover derechos LGBT, para un desarrollo del turismo LGBT en el país (Taveres, 2016), lo que también es una política en otros países del Cono Sur y por medio de las embajadas occidentales. Esto demuestra lo importante que es seguir de cerca estos procesos clientelistas y coloniales, porque como argumenta Puar (2002) en su crítica de turismo LGBT transnacional en el Caribe, este acceso económico para algunos invisibiliza subjetividades más disidentes y asimismo sus mayores necesidades.

Al analizar críticamente la política de la promoción del turismo LGBT en Uruguay, en esta ponencia, quería enfatizar la importancia de autocriticarse uno mismo, como

manera de descolonizar la academia del Norte. Mediante este trabajo, mis motivos de estudiar el turismo LGBT en Uruguay se revelaron como una extensión de discursos y prácticas homonormativos (Duggan, 2003), debido a mi esperanza privilegiada en los discursos de igualdad liberal propugnados por el capitalismo arco iris. Es necesario ser crítico respecto a los espacios que abordamos en los análisis, pero si uno no cuestiona y critica su posicionamiento dentro de estructuras coloniales como investigador, y asimismo también como sujeto, sería otra extensión colonial dentro de la relación de investigador y el campo de estudio, reproduciendo lógicas neoliberales dentro de la teoría queer del Norte.

Ahora invito a Katucha Bento para hablar sobre mi ponencia, que está conectada con su presentación sobre la importancia de una mirada interseccional entre opresiones y procesos identitarios.

KATUCHA BENTO: Ha sido un placer organizar este simposio y contar con tu presencia, Louis, en nuestro diálogo. Veo que tu contribución es necesaria para promover la reflexividad en el proceso de investigación (sobre reflexividad como concepto epistémico: Tate, 2005; Gill, 1998). El punto clave que me llama atención es que tú y yo nos auto-identificamos con los temas que investigamos, seguramente no se trata de la única forma de nuestra identidad, pero es crucial por el rol que tenemos/cumplimos en este mundo. Por este motivo, empiezo con una reflexión sobre cómo el Norte Global utiliza una manera “interseccional” de hacer llamadas para el turismo LGBTQ+ en Uruguay.

Esta claro que esta es la clásica colonización del saber por parte de grupos hegemónicos (blancos, eurocéntricos, de clase media) que hace uso de terminologías de resistencia, en este caso, del feminismo negro. La noción de interseccionalidad pasa a tener valor de cambio, mercantilizado a través de un imaginario alternativo, que al mismo tiempo que celebra sexualidades alternativas, inviabiliza grupos oprimidos de tomar parte de tales actividades. Se trata de una contradicción problemática que requiere reflexiones más profundas dentro de estos colectivos, sobre promoción de autocrítica y espacios de inclusión.



Shirley Tate (2015) lleva en cuenta una aproximación foucaultiana, descolonial y feminista negra para hacer su análisis con sobre los espacios (in)visibles del cuerpo de mujeres negras británicas, hace una reflexión sofisticada – que parece simple, pero en la cual es muy difícil de encontrar equilibrio – sobre el peligro de la normalización, disciplina y observación del cuerpo. Shirley habla de que nuestra posibilidad de resistir al poder, se pasa cuando nos tornamos agentes de nuestra propia normalización, creando categorías de clasificación, normas discursivas y medidas de diferencia (Tate, 2015, p. 4). Louis y Shirley me inspiran para llamar la atención a reflexividad en cuanto investigadorxs, buscando entender nuestras posiciones de poder ante lxs participantes; y en cuanto activistas que hacemos parte del grupo de resistencia. Tornarse agentes de nuestra propia normalización puede autorizar nuevos métodos de exclusión que es lo que Louis se remete en su presentación. Al no estar en constante cambio y negociación a respecto de las normas discursivas de la resistencia, los espacios “gay friendly” que Louis presenta entran con medidas excluyentes de diferencia y marginalización marcadas por lógicas capitalistas.

El proceso opresivo que sentimos, (ni siempre) sobrevivimos y (ni siempre) nos curamos demanda concebir cuestionamientos constantes sobre las consecuencias de alianzas y rompimientos que hacemos con el capitalismo. Tales negociaciones son afectadas por la colonialidad de poder, que mantiene a nosotros, población queer, entre grupos marginalizados, idependiente de la ascensión económica que nos permite excluir “Otrxs” sujetxs de nuestros colectivos.

La presentación de Louis me ha despertado más el interés por acompañar su investigación, porque creo que la lectura sobre espacios, subjetividades e identidades queer nos darán frutos muy positivos para el pensamiento descolonial.

### **Consideraciones Finales**

Este diálogo nos sirvió para relacionar la falla del Estado en reconocer las identidades de grupos marginalizados con las opresiones sufridas por tales grupos. En las ponencias se manifestó que el Estado participa activamente en reproducir estas opresiones a partir del “Contrato Racial” propuesto por Charles Mills (1997). Se trata

de un conjunto de practicas formales e informales de dominación que ha permitido históricamente la opresión de cuerpos y vidas no-blancas para mantener el poder hegemónico blanco|Eurocéntrico|Occidental. Entendemos que las prácticas de racismo, homofobia, sexismo, discapacidismo, y desterritorialización presentadas en este artículo, aunque vividas en ámbitos privados, son síntomas autorizados por instituciones estatales creadas para servir el propósito de la colonialidad del poder (Quijano, 2000).

En el caso de Ceci no haber sido reconocida como víctima de violencia doméstica ya implica múltiples opresiones del patriarcado desde la forma de naturalizar acoso moral, físico y psicológico en contra de mujeres en el ámbito público y privado. Esto en mayor medida en cuanto a la banalización institucional, pues no se promueven políticas de prevención de violencia, ni acogida y protección de las victimas como tampoco se diseñan proyectos educativos a personas agresoras.

En la presentación de Andrea Sempertegui, el Estado aparece una vez más como principal propulsor de prácticas opresoras en contra de los grupos marginalizados, fallando en reconocer los impactos negativos producidos por la expoliación de la tierra en Amazonía. Se trata de una consecuencia que incluye la muerte de personas y de la naturaleza, encarcelamiento de activistas y desigualdades de género – ante lo cual grupos racializados como no-blancos en América Latina, históricamente, llaman la atención, como es el caso de las mujeres que mujeres iniciaron la “Marcha por la Vida”. Estar en contra las políticas extractivas promovidas por el gobierno no es apenas un acto de resistencia sino la confirmación de que se sigue existiendo ante las posturas de colonización territorial.

La colonialidad de poder representada por el Estado se hace presente en la falta de reconocimiento de grupos identitarios racializados. Heriberto Ruiz Ponce apuntó en su ponencia la importancia de entender estos sujetos de las poblaciones negras en el contexto político como oportunidad de avanzar en programas de igualdad social. Las identidades Afromexicanas importan en la organización social, necesitan ser validadas en el ámbito nacional y ser comprendidas no como identidades conflictivas, sino como posibilidades de producir transformaciones positivas con el fin de reconocerlos

derechos de los grupos invisibilizados, como es la propuesta del Consejo Afromexicano.

Louis Di Paolo también nos ofrece su visión crítica de las prácticas clientelistas estatales que perpetúan los procesos coloniales dentro de la comunidad LGTBQ, a través de un reconocimiento de una identidad comercializada. El Estado revela esto al aprobar leyes que, al tiempo que satisfacen las demandas de algunos, reproducen modelos hegemónicos, blancos y normativos que hacen invisibles las identidades y necesidades de los sujetos más vulnerables dentro de la comunidad LGBTQ. El efecto de este proceso es que los discursos y prácticas LGBTQ se vuelven homonormativos y que el reconocimiento estatal de las identidades LGBTQ se mercantiliza a través de los discursos y prácticas de desarrollo turístico, que sirven a los intereses económicos del estado, creando una ilusión de inclusión, en detrimento de las subjetividades más vulnerables.

En todas las presentaciones se puede ver que resistir la colonialidad de poder es una práctica necesariamente interseccional. Resistir en cuanto sujetos politizados es la prueba revolucionaria de reclamar el espacio de existencia en un continente que sufre las consecuencias de lo que significó la colonización a través de la esclavitud de nuestros ancestros, la explotación y expropiación de la tierra indígena y la desvalidación de nuestros saberes marginalizados en el proceso. Estos saberes se han presentado en este diálogo a partir de lugares raciales, de género, de sexualidad y nacionalidad que contextualizan necesidades y posibilidades de descolonizar las prácticas que nos excluyen.

Haber hecho este trabajo colectivo de construcción de saberes es parte de una práctica de inclusión emancipadora que nos permite atrevernos a romper con los grilletes coloniales y promover formas diversas de re-existencia. Es decir, este trabajo a ocho manos es una invitación a crear experiencias colaborativas en el intento de descolonizar más allá del Estado opresor. Empecemos por diálogos constructivos, prácticas diarias de concienciación sobre los impactos y consecuencias de nuestras acciones en cuanto sujetos de transformación. Reconocer lugares y sujetxs

marginalizadx es también una responsabilidad académica, que para inserirse en colectivos descoloniales, necesita considerar los espacios de privilegio que ocupamos.

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FACUNDO MARTÍN, GABRIELA MERLINSKY AND CATALINA TORO PÉREZ

## Héctor Alimonda, the American task of political ecology<sup>1</sup>

*This text is an introduction of Alternautas' mini-dossier in tribute to the work of Hector Alimonda (1947-2017). Here, Facundo Martín, Gabriela Merlinsky and Catalina Toro Pérez present Alimonda's unique contribution to the field of political ecology in Latin America. It is followed by the newly translated "In the key of south: Latin American political ecology and critical thinking", the introduction of Alimonda's latest book, Ecología Política Latinoamericana - Volumen 1 (2017), co-edited by Facundo Martín and Catalina Toro Pérez. In the next weeks, we will also publish a translation of "The coloniality of nature", an article that appeared originally in La naturaleza colonizada (2011).*

Héctor Alimonda was born in Bahía Blanca, a coastal city in Argentine Patagonia. When he was young, he moved to Buenos Aires to study Sociology at the University of Buenos Aires. However, he never lost his ties to his birth place, an aspect that awakened his early passion for environmental history. His works on the so-called Desert Campaign, a military expedition in the late 19th century that constituted one of the largest indigenous genocides of the Southern Cone, are memorable. Those who know him have often heard him critiquing economic history in that, by privileging the history of successes, it hides spatial segregations leaving aside the processes of resource expropriation and the dispossession of territories and cultures.

Already having graduated as a sociologist, he travelled to Chile to pursue a master's degree in the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO). However, he

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally published at: <http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2019/5/14/hctor-alimonda-the-american-task-of-political-ecology> on May 14th 2019.

could not carry out the project, which was interrupted by the 1973 military coup, a circumstance that forced him to return to Argentina. Several years later, following the fateful destiny of so many Latin-American intellectuals, he had to migrate to Brazil, expelled this time by the military coup that took place in Argentina in 1976.

In Brazil, he joined the University of Sao Paulo, USP, and obtained a PhD in Human Sciences with a mention in Political Science. In his thesis, he led a comparative analysis of the political economy of the Argentinian and Brazilian oligarchic State from the late 19th century to the end of the 1930s. All these training experiences in the heat of the political vicissitudes of the time made him a prominent Latin Americanist and a great promotor of ideas and debates in the different countries he visited.

During all these years, he was deepening his research on Marxism, not from a canonical position but seeking to process the legacies of Latin American social critical thinking. His entrance into the context of socialist ideas in the Southern Cone countries was enriched by Gramscian thinking led by a new crop of intellectuals who were working toward renewing Marxist interpretations of recent Latin American history. They aimed to oppose and recover the multiple and protean forms of national and popular resistances to the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. It was at this time when he published a short biography of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, an intellectual emblem of a new way of understanding Marxism, closer to our reality (considering alternative rationalities such as Latin American Indigenism) and seeking the socialization of both productive resources and political power.

In later decades, Héctor was forging his own fruitful thinking that linked the most original contributions from Latin American social sciences with thinking on the environment, history and geography. This was in order to position it in the debate of ideas around the Modernity/Coloniality project. This project is a reflection on a specific world that distances itself from the modern model of science, which is not defined as a matter of technological control, but is located in the analysis of the power relations at play in the social appropriation processes of nature. At the beginning of



the present millennium, this thinking was nourished by the ideas of Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, Germán Palacio y Enrique Leff, among others, crystalizing in an original formulation, founding the field of Latin American political ecology. This experience was institutionalized and remains in the CLACSO Political Ecology Working Group. Since then, Héctor visited several countries, academic centers and established fruitful dialogues with organizations and social movements. Those experiences are reflected in his writings on Ecuador, Guatemala, Colombia and Panama, among others.

Many of us initially approached Héctor through his publications for the CLACSO Working Group. Among them, the now classic “Nature, Society and Utopia”, published in 2002, was seminal, as the first CLACSO publication on the topic, with an impressive diversity and quality of contributions. Then, in 2006 “The torments of the topic: contributions to a Latin American political ecology” was published, in which his text “A legacy in Comala” stands out for his remarkable effort to settle accounts with the Marxist tradition. In the context of the indigenous uprising of Bagua in Peru in 2011, he published a compilation of articles called “The colonized nature: political ecology and mining in Latin America”, a set of texts of cardinal value for the work of many students and activists who have continued to recreate and construct multiple ways of approaching this problem. During the presentation of this book, Héctor made reference to the devastating processes in the Andean region, where living societies and natures received the “alluvium” of the European conquest. There, coloniality was recomposed in various ways through the logics of capital accumulation and the emergence of a new form of exploitation unprecedented in history by its scale and its cruelty: mega mining.

The analysis aims to structure the framework of Latin American Political Ecology, taking as a starting point the history of unequal development and the rupture of the society-nature metabolism on a global scale. Nonetheless, it is not an approach reduced to ecological economics since there is an analysis of the historical forces that shaped the different Latin American environments. This way, the Latin American Indigenism of Mariátegui and thinking of Martí contribute to resignifying the critique of the narratives about nature. Developed since the 18th and 19th centuries,

the dominant vision of these narratives configures a dual world between the civilized and the wild, in which nature stands as a threatening element that has to be defeated and dominated. In critiquing them, popular culture is rescued and opened up toward a dialogue of complex relationships between nature and culture.

This great operation involves moving the origins of modernity from its cradle in Northern Europe, linked to the Protestant Reformation, the origins of capitalist accumulation, and the French Revolution, and drawing attention to the “first modernity” enacted by the expanding Iberian kingdoms and their struggles. In this way, Héctor contributed to showing (following the program of modernity/decoloniality) that America has been the first periphery of the European colonial system, the hidden side of modernity. All this implies looking critically at a) the rationality of State forms and their forms of internal colonialism; b) primitive accumulation; c) the emergence of the evangelizing mission and European superiority as articulators of the Eurocentric colonial imaginary, in itself a hegemonic sense that drives and justifies the colonial project; d) human trafficking and the related imposition of subordinating forms of the working class around mining extraction and plantation economy; e) the appropriation of the bio-agro-geo-diversity; and, f) the appropriation of ancestral knowledge by the European “knowledge society”.

Hence, the critique of these narratives, which build the epistemological geopolitics of the modern world, addresses the colonial fact as a founding element of the experience of modernity. With it emerges the linear paradigm of historical evolution including notions of “progress” and “development” that have been the unique experience and heritage of the European peoples who used to evaluate the progress and evolution of the “other’s” world, the tropical worlds. This mentality is called “eurocentrism” and was installed as an imagined geography over five centuries.

As Héctor taught us, Latin American Political Ecology walks and travels from universities, popular struggles, big city neighborhoods, peasant worlds and environmental assemblies. It is also an emerging community and peoples inspiring themselves and articulating the resistance against the expropriating mechanisms of large companies stubborn in the chimerical “colonial mission”.

Today we honor the lucid teacher, companion and friend. To a great human being who managed to accompany, interpret and articulate this rebellious Latin America that struggles and will keep struggling to defend life and territory. Héctor Alimonda remains present among us as the creator of a fervent field of ideas that constitutes an indispensable tool to face the ecological, political and destiny crisis of our time.

HÉCTOR ALIMONDA<sup>1</sup>

## **In the key of south: Latin American political ecology and critical thinking<sup>2</sup>**

Here I attempt to think about the insertion of a recent theoretical-political field and diverse and branching development—that of Latin American Political Ecology—into a plural framework with very specific characteristics—the tradition of Latin American critical thinking. A first version of this obsession was recently published (Alimonda, 2015).

Perhaps it would be redundant to clarify that I do not intend to sketch an itinerary in the open field of formal history of ideas in Latin America, among what has been thought and written in this corner of the world. Instead, I attempt to identify Latin American ideas as a critical, perhaps one could say ontological, reflection about its own existence. We will be delimiting diffuse pathways in a very steep and foggy territory, full of spectres, among which the new passengers will choose their ancestors or kill the dead, as Derrida said (1994: 119).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Emilie Dupuits and Alexander D'aloia.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the original: Alimonda Héctor, “En Clave de Sur: la Ecología Política Latinoamericana y el Pensamiento Crítico”, En Alimonda Héctor, Toro Pérez Catalina y Martin Facundo, *Ecología Política Latinoamericana*, 2017, CLACSO.

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<sup>3</sup> We are talking about inheritance, legacies and, following Derrida, it is worth remembering that, according to him, “An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in *injunction to reaffirm by choosing*. “One must” means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by its cause—natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret—which says “read me, will you ever be able to do so?” (33).

### Latin American Critical Thinking in The Key of South

On several occasions I had the chance to hear Professor Anibal Quijano opening his classes and conferences by resorting to a performative provocation, the question regarding our continent's name, no doubt as a resource to deconstruct the listeners' certainties. Indeed, whatever the usual names (Latin America, imposed by the French colonial project in Mexico, 'Indoamerica' of Haya de la Torre, Hispano or Iberoamerica), all those denominations leave aside some constituent elements of our identity. Obviously, the problem is not the names but that identity. It may be better erasing them and starting again, as it is happening with the recovery of the Kuna name 'Abya Yala'. For convenience and communicability, we will use the terms Latin America, *Latinoamérica*, and Latin American, but accepting the perplexity of its precise definition that refers to, from the beginning, a fundamental and problematic origin.

From his Marxism in the key of Latin America, José Arico reflected that "when we talk about Latin America, we evoke a pre-constituted reality that is not so, that is in fact a 'black hole', an open problem, an unachieved construction or, as Mariategui was pointing out for his nation but which can be extended to the continent: a project to be realised" (1988: 42).

It is a nominalist problem then, whose foundation lies in the complexity of the continent's historical heritage. However, by recognizing this relevance, where the difficulty of the words refers to the vicissitudes of a conflictive structure, as Freud would appreciate, the whole unfolds into new directions and meanings. We are in the presence of nations that have existed as such for two hundred years in the international order (they can't, therefore, be assimilated into the colonial world constituted at the end of the 19th century).<sup>4</sup> But at the same time, they continue in the protean formation process.<sup>5</sup> On this subject, Arico also reflected that "Latin

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<sup>4</sup> Which, incidentally, excludes us from the post-colonial discussion in terms of that which is located within the ex-British Empire (Coronil, 2008; Pratt, 2008; among others).

<sup>5</sup> Obviously, it is also relevant to ask to what extent the "central countries", as they used to be called, are not also in the process of formation, in which case the South is showing the future to the North, as Comaroff and Comaroff suggest (2013).

American societies are, essentially, national-popular, meaning that they still vigorously experience the problem of their national destiny, of whether or not they are nations [...] They question their identity, what they are [...] *still going through a stage of Sturm und Drang*—as keenly noted by Gramsci referring to our America-, [...] of a romantic access to nationality [1986]” (cited in Cortés, 2015).

Thus, the condition of the enunciation of Latin American critical thinking starts with an agonizing search for identity that leads to a continuous investigation into the origins and to an anxious interrogation of the nation building processes. Given the different interpretations of the authors who have dealt with the subject, we will consider Latin American critical thinking from a perspective that relates it to (without deriving it from, naturally) the critical theory tradition. In a suggestive work, Martin Cortes (2011) has pointed out the existing similitudes between this place of enunciation of Latin American thinking and the working program of the Frankfurt school of Critical Theory.

For Andrew Biro, “at a very general level, ‘critical theory’ can be defined as a knowledge aiming to reduce domination. In contrast to social science, whose model is the free, ‘objective’ vision of values, critical thinking starts with the normative assumption that oppression must be reduced or eradicated, and organises knowledge toward that end” (2011: 3).

Boaventura de Sousa Santos also refers to the possibility of a critical theory linked to the Frankfurt school, specifically to the work of Max Horkheimer. “I understand critical theory as not reducing reality to what exists. [...] Critical analysis of what exists relies on the assumption that facts of reality do not exhaust the possibilities of existence and that, therefore, there are also alternatives able to overcome what can be critiqued in that which exists. Discomfort, indignation and non-conformity towards what exists serve as sources of inspiration to theorize about how to overcome such a state of things” (2006: 18).

The foundation of critical thinking, then, relies upon the disconformity between the existing reality and the search for alternatives, from the characterization of the present situation, whose causes can, obviously, be found in the past. This framework is at the

core of the Latin American thinking, responding to the challenge of “thinking the nation”, the creation of a knowledge that advances diagnostics and solutions, without claiming the objectivity of “normal” social sciences. Moreover, in general, these perspectives also imply a critical epistemology, that is to say a questioning of the categories and procedures of dominant scientific discourses. In the case of Latin American, there is an emphasis on denouncing the exogenous and Eurocentric nature of theoretical-methodological resources that configure established knowledge systems.

Some authors, most of all those belonging to the generation of the contemporary classics of the Latin American social sciences, explicitly consider that Latin American critical thinking is linked to their support during the height of Marxism (see Quijano, 2014; Fals Borda, 2012; Echeverria, 2011). At one extreme, the Guatemalan Edelberto Torres Rivas (2011) argues that Latin American critical thinking extends from the Cuban revolution to the fall of the Sandinista government, and now would have ceased to exist. This does not seem so to us, first of all because Marxism never covered the whole Latin American reflection, and much less covered the set of popular resistances in the region.

But, on the other hand, we should, in either case, examine that to which Marxism pertains. Our hypothesis is, precisely, that Latin American thinking always worked in an *anthropophagic* relationship (as advocated by the modernist Brazilian Oswald de Andrade) regarding the intellectual and aesthetic developments of the metropolitan centres. Even a highly coherent theoretical matrix, to the point of being punctilious, such as the Marxism of the period of the Third International, had to be reformulated at a grand scale in order to put down roots in Latin American lands and minds (was the Cuban revolution ever a proletarian revolution?). We will return to this point.

What we find more productive, in any case, is a perspective that, as other authors claim, traces the origins of that persistent dissatisfaction with the present situation, which gave rise to Latin American critical thinking, to the process of independence (Martins, 2006: 925). To take an example: a text such as the *Carta de Jamaica*, of

1815, in which Simon Bolivar analyses with an acute critical sense the political perspectives that, in his opinion, would lie ahead for the future independent republics, quite rightly deserves to be part of the references (even of the protohistory) of Latin American critical thinking.

How to characterize, except as a critical thinking based on the terrible recognition of a problematic identity, the following reflection of Simon Bolivar: “we are not Europeans, we are not Indians, our species stands halfway between the aboriginals and the Spanish. Americans by birth and Europeans by law, we find ourselves in the conflict of disputing the titles of possession against the natives, and to remain in the country that saw us born against the invaders’ opposition: in that way, our case is the most extraordinary and complicated” (Roig, 2004).

And how not to recognize the repeated and still current urgency in this call from the Argentinian generation of 1837: “Let’s try as Descartes—said Esteban Echeverria—to forget everything learnt in order to enter with all the energy of our strength in researching the truth. Not of the abstract truth but of the truth resulting from the facts of our history, and the full recognition of the customs and spirit of the nation” (Roig, 2004).

The situation of subordination in the international context, the structural heterogeneity of our societies, with its cultural implications, the anguish of having to choose between different heritages and paths, the distress of a modern destiny that seems unreachable, the urgency to organize nationality through authoritative means, the hostile difficulty of the natural environment to be incorporated as an effective territory of the nation, all these elements were present from the same moment of independence, and formed an irreplaceable referent in the history of the ideas of the continent. And, since then, they were the raw material from which would flourish critical thinking.



## Two Examples of Anthropophagy and Resignification in Critical Thinking

We believe that one of the characteristics of Latin American critical thinking is the reiterated character of the “rooted avant-garde” of its protagonists, as the Brazilian professor Alfredo Bosi (1992) labelled the Peruvian socialist group of José Carlos Mariategui. Avant-garde in the sense of stemming from the incorporation of perspectives that have already advanced beyond contemporaneous political and social thinking, upon which was made a significant *translation* process allowing its operationalization in the analysis of national realities.

We want to come back to this point in relation to Latin American political ecology. But what we are interested in, at this moment, is to refer to two cases of the resignifying incorporation of notable traditions of Western society by Latin American critical thinking, that of Marxism and the social doctrine of the Church.

Regarding Marxism, the odd figure of José Carlos Mariategui started a reconstruction of the tenets of this tradition, in the conditions of the 1920s, from its inclusion in a perspective of interpretation and political articulation consistent with Peruvian society during the time period. The recognition of the national issue and its incomplete nature; the indigenous problem as a central question of that Peruvian nationality, especially focused on the issue of land access and enabling the constitution of the indigenous peasantry as a revolutionary subject; the affirmation of the unequal and combined character of economic evolution, based on the convergence between the traditional forces of backwardness and modernity, which made him doubt about the viability of modernity and development, in the very early stages of the 20th century; the strategic importance of politico-cultural tasks—all of these elements appear in his Marxist interpretation of Peruvian society, to a large extent divergent with the central lines of the contemporaneous canonical Marxism of the Third International.

This Latin American Marxism that Mariategui put into action continued to inspire Latin American thinking for decades and is undoubtedly present in a large part of the critical production subsequent to the period.

Another resignifying incorporation of the greatest importance relates to the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, and by extension to Christian social thinking, through the Liberation Theology (Boff, 1992) and the Philosophy of Liberation (Dussel, 2008). Realizing a true inversion of its evangelizing processes, a significant part of the Latin American Church embraced its commitment to the popular sectors as the core of its pastoral activity. At the same time, theologians and philosophers proposed profound reconversions of the doctrinal orientations in new translations and elaborations now having as a basis the Church's roots alongside the poor and in Latin American soil.

In 2015, the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, by Pope Francisco, recovering the inspiration of fraternity with nature of San Francisco de Asis, and incorporating at the same time the Latin American reflection on Political Ecology, formed a particularly transcendental document linked to the long and effective tradition of Latin American critical thinking (Francisco, 2015).

In that regard, Antonio Elizalde says that “the detailed reading of the analysed documents allows me to state that: a) in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francisco, a large part, if not all, of the reflections made in Latin America on sustainability and social justice issues are included; b) its argument is a call toward a profound change in the civilizing processes; c) its apparently catastrophic tone nonetheless expresses a profound hope in the possibility to turn the tide and outline the main ways to do so; d) it recovers the figure of Francisco de Asis and uses it to mark the path that the main institution on the planet—the Catholic Church—should follow; e) with an unambiguous language critiques the real powers (economic and political) that today govern the world, and the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes of those who exercise them; f) it proposes an ecological conversion towards sobriety, humility, fraternity, a new universal solidarity and a culture of care; and g) it calls for the spread of a new paradigm regarding human beings, society and relations with nature” (Antonio Elizalde, 2015: 145-146).

## The Latin American Political Ecology

Over the past two decades, the so-called *political ecology* has spread through the international intellectual field, especially in Latin America. Essentially originating from academic developments from the Anglo-Saxon (such as the human ecology studies, the geography of Carl Sauer and the urban cultural studies of Lewis Mumford) and French (a solid geographic and anthropologic production, combined with a tradition of regional economy) traditions, it does not, however, register major reference works that establish new paradigms or points of departure. *Political ecology* was established in a molecular way from the emergence of new theoretical and practical questions and challenges for which there were no answers at hand. On the one hand, an *eco-political turn* emerged in different disciplinary areas, opening a two-fold working program: the rereading of the disciplinary tradition itself, from new angles, and the establishment of new interdisciplinary dialogues. At the same time, a long-term perspective can verify that this *eco-political turn* was also a response (or, at least, an intellectual transformation aiming to formulate answers, without giving this circumstance a necessary determination) to the presence of new socio-political subjects who, in such advanced societies, assumed critical and active positions in relation to crucial issues such as pacifism in times of the Cold War, critiques of consumerism, nuclear energy policies and the protection of natural environments, often linked to the emergence of “green” parties. There were theorists external to academia, such as André Gorz, who tried to reformulate the anti-capitalist critical tradition in order to highlight the new challenges.<sup>6</sup> In the last decades of the 20th century, it also became evident that a new dimension in the capital/nature relationship was emerging, consolidating mechanisms of appropriation and exploitation of planetary resources of unknown dimensions and effects until then.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> André Gorz explicitly used the term *political ecology*. For Gorz, defending the planet's ecology could be captured by the oppressive logic of capitalism, with an eco-fascist physiognomy. This is why ecology should be political, implying the inclusion of a critique of the forms of appropriation and exploitation of nature and human beings by industrialism, which not only controls production and work, but also imposes consumption models and the formation of subjectivities.

<sup>7</sup> An excellent review of the intellectual origins of political ecology is available in Leff (2015).

It was from this time that the term ‘political ecology’ started to circulate throughout Latin America. At the present time, various authors who have assessed this intellectual field agree in characterizing Latin American Political Ecology as a specific political-intellectual tradition, with a dynamic structure of development that has no equivalent in other political-intellectual areas of elaboration (Martinez-Alier, 2014; Martin and Larsimont, 2014; Delgado Ramos, 2013; Bryant et al., 2012).

When he received the title of doctor *honoris causa* at the National University of Cordoba, Joan Martinez-Alier (2014) said that “Political ecology analyses socio-environmental conflicts. At the same time, the term designates a broad social and political movement for environmental justice that is stronger in Latin America than in other continents. This movement fights against environmental injustices at the local, national, regional and global scales [...] In Latin America, political ecology is not so much a university specialization within human geography or social anthropology departments (in the style of Michael Watts, Raymond Bryant, Paul Robbins), as its own field of thought of international relevance with authors very attached to environmental activism in their own countries or on the whole continent”.

Another example is the presentation by Martin and Larsimont. After identifying the existence of three trends in the international field of *political ecology*, and referring to the first two as Anglo-Saxon *political ecology* and French *political ecology*, they deal with the third one, Latin American Political Ecology: “Although one could identify in the Latin American Political Ecology influences and elements of a more or less disciplinary and academic origin, without a doubt its defining characteristics relate to an encounter between the Latin American tradition of critical thinking and the vast peoples’ experiences and strategies of resistance in the face of pillaging and the “economy of robbery”. We will mention the distinguished early contributions of José Carlos Mariategui, Josué de Castro, Eduardo Galeano, among many others. However, since the end of the 90s, a differentiated perspective for dealing with society-nature relationships in the region has emerged. The difference of this perspective is probably its aspiration to do so from a Latin American “place of enunciation”. This implies recognizing the theoretical and territorial spheres existing

outside the great consolidated traditions of Western geopolitical thinking. Additionally, this place, according to the ones who converge in the Modernity/Coloniality (M/C) Research Program,<sup>8</sup> stands in an ethical, political and epistemological position crossed by the modern/colonial experience but, at the same time, aims to create conditions for decolonization. The central argument is that the Latin American ‘mark of origin’ is founded on the catastrophic trauma of the conquest and integration in a subordinate and colonial position in the international system. This means, therefore, that Latin American Political Ecology gives a relevant place to the historical experience that European colonization implicated as a rupture with the origin of the particular heterogeneity and ambiguity of Latin American societies (Alimonda, 2005). This, in turn, supposes the construction of an environmental history of the region or, in other words, a “Siamese twin” of *political ecology* (Alimonda, 2005).<sup>9</sup> Thus, Latin American Political Ecology is a collective construction in which, not without tensions and debates, diverse Latin American authors have converged, placing emphasis on the study of power relations, which are historically shaped, as mediators of society/nature relations” (Martin and Larsimont, 2014).

### Political Ecology and Critical Thinking

This section includes elements we want to present here, by examining more attentively the proposal to consider Latin American Political Ecology as forming part of the critical thinking tradition of the region. We will do it in the form of a very general and necessarily limited exposition, scarcely an attempt to mark the epistemological-territorial milestones of these traditions, in the form of a glimpse of

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<sup>8</sup> The M/C Program is a contemporary space of collective dialogue in and on Latin America where various well-known intellectuals participate such as Arturo Escobar, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo and Ramon Gosfogual, among others.

<sup>9</sup> Guillermo Castro Herrera has particularly contributed to the consolidation of the environmental history of Latin American and putting it in dialogue with political ecology. It is clearly relevant to question of what consists ‘Latin’ in Latin American Political Ecology, as German Palacio (2012) does in relation to environmental history, above all when the importance of indigenous inheritances is valued. But we accept for now the established conventions.

a cognitive cartography (Jameson, 2002), and having as a methodological premise the “geopolitics of knowledge”, as indicated by the title of an article by Arturo Escobar (2005), “Culture inhabits places”.

It is true that our era (end of the 20th century, first years of the 21st century) presents unique characteristics, especially regarding the relevance acquired by the violent appropriations of nature by more concentrated capital, the emergence of the global climate crisis, the regression this process implies in terms of development policies and human rights, etc. It is also obvious that the more conventional traditions of international social sciences were not prepared for the analytical response to these new challenges, which suppose a radicalization of the destructive trends of modernity, from which this social thinking is, by different ways, tributary.

For this reason, it is common to find the opinion that *political ecology* (and also, consequently, environmental history) would appear to be a new analytical construction, brought about by characteristics of the new global crisis and the silences of social theory and conventional politics. It is perfectly legitimate to agree with this position.

However, I would like to invert in some way the terms of the debate, not to oppose to this position, healthily iconoclastic, but at least to ensure more density in the current critical position. Throughout time, the different intellectual and political generations that emerge as critical positions reasonably argue that their time is unique and challenging, and that they face substantial problems that differentiate them from previous generations. But I think these positions are reinforced when, in the perspective of the geopolitics of knowledge, they recognize that they are rooted (reworked from new readings, of course) in strong traditions of the historical-territorial scope itself.

From a personal point of view, then, but which refers in part to the path travelled and to my present intellectual references, I believe that the plural and collective “place of enunciation” that emerged (and is emerging) from the Latin American Political Ecology precisely relates to the characterization made by the distinguished Brazilian

intellectual Alfredo Bosi (1992) in relation to José Carlos Mariategui and his colleagues in his intellectual and political generation: “the rooted avant-garde”.<sup>10</sup>

In that sense, I would like to think about that political ecology as an avant-garde political-intellectual development, anxiously trying to respond to the tremendous challenges that this period presents for the people of our continent, recognizing the inevitable need to criticize the civilizing assumptions of conventional modernity and development. To do so, it is necessary to use all possible resources, most of all going through the paradigmatic task of updating its repertoires of action and thought, at the same time as it must try to recover the plurality of popular and critical heritages that preceded it.

Avant-garde, but rooted in the determinations of its time and the geopolitical particularities (we could say) of its points of view. A rooted avant-garde as were the generation of the University Reform and José Carlos Mariategui, or the best of the Brazilian modernists. As Latin American critical thinking was in its best moments.

I ask the permission to make reference to my personal experience. When I assumed the coordination of the CLACSO Political Ecology Working Group, in 2000, it seemed to me that a part of the task ahead was to try and establish an interweaving, in the worst case connecting intellectuals from different countries of the region who did not know each other and in the best case to trying to build a community of enunciation. But there was also another task, which in turn had two necessary and complementary aspects in the same strategic perspective: the strengthening of our proposal for the creation of a possible space of dialogue with past traditions of political and social thought.

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<sup>10</sup> Of course we agree with Ramon Grosfoguel when, taking the Zapatista movement as a reference, he defends the intellectual work thought of as a “rearguard movement”, the *Andar preguntando* (2007: 76-77). The same idea was expressed latter on by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010: 40-41).

On the one hand, as a critical social science project, it was necessary to settle accounts with the past of those disciplines. The main target, in that case, seemed to be Marxism, as the most established and institutionalized critical tradition in social sciences, but always keeping in mind that this “international” Marxism (which came from an intense process of refounding/updating from the 70s) did not exhaust the plurality of anticapitalistic critics nor even was, in the Latin American conditions, always anticapitalistic.<sup>11</sup> It was therefore necessary to subject it to a profound critical reading, which allowed for the recovery of dimensions able to nourish our reflection (not necessarily from central or consolidated places in the tradition) and get rid of the rest, the “idols”, that in the best of hypotheses only served to strengthen our indolent reason, not just to give us old answers but to discourage the actual possibility of formulating new questions.

At the same time, the example of the eco-political interpretation of José Martí developed by Guillermo Castro Herrera and the discovery of a Brazilian eco-political thinking tradition from the 18th century, presented by José Augusto Padua, showed me that we also had a decisive task in relation to the origins and identities of Latin American thinking. Our critique would come to be more powerful precisely if it could be rooted in a tradition and if we could recognize ourselves (as in the blood group or the physiognomy of our ancestors) in the genealogy of Latin American critical thinking. Hence, I propose to think about the constitution of the place of enunciation of Latin American Political Ecology in continuity with this thinking.

In a first place, *Latin American critical thinking* and *political ecology* share the same starting point of doubt about our identity and the anxious search for the keys of the same. In that case, we only have certainties that we are not equals to the tutelary exemplifying countries of modernity and development. Neither are we equals, incidentally, to societies of other continents, where the destruction of traditional

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<sup>11</sup> As Pancho Arico said, with the sacralization of the “progressive” aspect of the development of productive forces, *El Capital* in Latin America was more the book of the bourgeoisie than of the proletariat. “Por isso, uma obra que era concebida por Marx como o maior golpe teórico contra a burguesia, converteu-se, nos países atrasados, no livro dos burgueses, isto é, no mais sólido fundamento para a aceitação da necessidade e progressividade do capitalismo tal como se configurou concretamente na Europa ocidental” (Aricó, 1982: 62).



cultures by modernizing eurocentrism did not reach the same extremes of America. In Asia and Africa, there are societies that can return to the legacies of their past, but it is more difficult in America. This distrust, of course, extends to the theoretical, conceptual and methodological instruments with which to think, as tributary tools of Eurocentric modernity.

Second, this search for identity can only find answers by resorting to an examination of our past. Hence, the use of a historical perspective of interpretation is present in the whole Latin American essay tradition, and also in *political ecology*, in its connection with environmental history. In doing so, the role played by the process of the Iberian conquest is evident in the definition of that identity, destroying native civilizations and incorporating us into modernity/coloniality in subordinated positions. From there, and in continuity with colonialism and the project that modernity had for us, emerged our particular structural heterogeneity, which manifest itself in economy, society, culture, memory, identities, the systematic subordination of populations excluded from citizenship, the difficulties in building a republican political regime that functioned effectively, and a Nation State capable of acting legitimately, the persistent colonial attitude also in regard to nature, our economies' orientation in direction of the world market, in cyclic cadences of euphoria and destruction, and many more other evils.

Third, by enunciating its more general points of view, both *critical thinking* and *Latin American Political Ecology* do it in reference to a common geo-historical reality, in which they mutually recognise each other, even when they deal with a particular national society. As an example, when José Carlos Mariátegui wrote the *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana*, it is clear that his critical discursivity was accompanying Peruvian evolution in the different issues of its repertoire, but also that crouching behind there is a text where his analysis questions the region's identity and history. Indeed, he explicitly uses the comparison with Argentina as an interpretative resource (even if at this point it is too optimistic). In the same way, when any Latin American reads Josué de Castro's works on hunger in Brazil, it is interpellated, at the same time, by the reality of hunger and social deprivation in its own country. The generalization of the offensive for environmental plunder and "accumulation by

dispossession” throughout the region is such that the various books collecting case studies of environmental conflict, especially in relation to large-scale mining, present situations that appear to reproduce the same general characteristics in all countries (indeed, they often involve the same companies).

Fourth, between critical thinking and the political ecology made in Latin America, there is a shared distrust of the theoretical and methodological instruments of the conventional social sciences. Some doubts were and are exhibited regarding their relevance and applicability to the particularities of our realities; their links with the finalist historical perspectives that from the beginning placed us as “deviant cases” in the march for progress; and their difficulty, being elaborated from the repertoires of modernity, in questioning our populations from positions of respect and autonomy. For this reason, the methodological tools of critical thinking and political ecology often present a prominent anti-positivist bias, and the sources are often unconventional but are expected to be able to substantiate with better relevance critical arguments against the established order. Frequently, interlocutions and discursive articulations exist with subaltern popular political traditions. Political ecology has links to socioenvironmental activism at different scales.

Fifth, and finally, both *Latin American critical thinking* and the *political ecology* elaborated in the region are located on the frontier, in relation to the established knowledge systems. Despite being a co-participant to the University Reform spirit, Mariategui could be defined as “non-university and even anti-university”, although he would have directed the Popular Universities Gonzalez Prada. In Brazil, inside or outside the university, the coexistence of Caio Prado Jr. or Darcy Ribeiro with academic institutionalism never was easy. In the same way, despite the remarkable momentum it has had in the region, political ecology was growing on the margins of the university structures, where, despite the appeals to interdisciplinarity, disciplinary cutbacks still resist as the basis of established structures of institutionalized power.

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HÉCTOR ALIMONDA<sup>1</sup>

## **The Coloniality of Nature: An Approach to Latin American Political Ecology<sup>2</sup>**

Here, I propose to focus on the topic of political ecology in Latin America. It seems to me the best way to do this is to ask what it is that specifically constitutes that which, for better or worse, has come to be called “Latin America”. I want to do this by recovering the analytical perspective that has been called the Modernity/Coloniality Research Program—a contemporary space of collective dialogue both in and about Latin America. The conclusion that I have drawn from this is that the catastrophic trauma of conquest and integration into a subordinate, colonial position in the international system, as the hidden and necessary other side to modernity, is the mark of origin of Latin America. Note that I am not saying that this mark of origin fatally determines absolutely all our history.

In saying this, I make clear that I consider that History has a relevant role in the interpretation of societies. Therefore, it should not be surprising that, in my opinion, Latin American political ecology must form a relationship of dialogue and feedback with another area of reflection that has recently been developing in the region—environmental history.<sup>3</sup> After presenting these points, I will attempt to end this

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Alexander D’Aloia

<sup>2</sup> This entry is a translation of the essay ‘La colonialidad de la naturaleza: una aproximación a la ecología política latinoamericana’, from the collection of essays organised by Alimonda ‘La naturaleza colonizada: ecología política y minería en América Latina’

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from participating in the foundation of the Latin American and Caribbean Society of Environmental History in 2004, CLACSO’s Work Group of Political Ecology always included an aspect of environmental history in its meetings and publications.

reflection with references to the different proposals of political ecology in Latin America.

To begin, I wish to highlight the persistent coloniality that affects the Latin American nature (as in 'environment'). It appears, as much a bio-physical reality (its flora, fauna, human inhabitants, the biodiversity of its ecosystem) as its territorial configuration (the sociocultural dynamics that significantly articulates these ecosystems and landscapes), before global hegemonic thought and before dominant elites of the region as a subaltern space, which can be exploited, levelled, and reconfigured according to the necessities of the prevailing regimes of accumulation. Over the course of five centuries entire ecosystems were levelled by the introduction of monocultures for export. Fauna, flora and humans were all victims of biological invasions of European competitors or diseases. Today it is the turn of hyper-open-cut mining, of soy monocultures and agrofuels with chemical inputs that raze entire environments (including humans), of great hydroelectric projects, or of new communication channels in the Amazon, such as the infrastructure of new export cycles. Even the "ecologically correct" political orientations of the imperial centres entail environmentally catastrophic options for our region: the transfer of polluting industries, projected nuclear waste dumps, mega-monoculture of agrofuels, etc. A long history of unequal, combined development and a global rupture of the society-nature metabolism increasingly penalises the Latin American nature and the people that make their lives in it (O'Connor, 2001).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Modernity/Coloniality Perspective**

The Modernity/Coloniality (M/C) Research Program, so called by the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2005b), consists of a recent perspective from Latin

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Toledo (2008), presenting a typology of human appropriation of nature, offers a definition of 'colonised nature': "appropriated ecosystems have lost such abilities" (of self-management and self-reproduction) "and require *a fortiori* external energy (human, animal, or fossil) to maintain itself. In the absence of human action, these 'artificial ecosystems' either regenerate and recover through mechanisms of ecological restoration, or deviate in bizarre forms, atypical and unpredictable" (p. 10).

American thinking about Latin America itself. It lays the foundations for a prominent, multi-disciplinary dialogue and the constitution of a non-institutional intellectual collective of work. Composed of academic researchers residing in Latin America and the United States, it has a rising presence in Colombia, judging by recently published books from its perspective (Castro Gómez, 2005; Castro Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007) and by the vitality of the journal *Tabula Rasa*, that also incorporates these points of view.

In active dialogue with contemporary intellectual tendencies such as postcolonialism, subaltern studies and world-systems theory (developed by Immanuel Wallerstein), M/C differentiates itself from them by implicitly assuming (since sometimes this is not too explicit) a position of continuity with the traditions of Latin American critical thinking. Essentially, M/C organises itself from a critique of the historical-cultural and epistemological foundations of modernity, questioning its grand interpretivist narratives over the course of five centuries.

This great operation supposes, as a previous step, to “displace” the origins of modernity from its cradle in northern Europe, linked to the Protestant Reformation, the origins of the accumulation of capital, the Enlightenment or the French revolution, and draw attention to the “first modernity” in which a leading role was played by the Iberian kingdoms together with their expansion and overseas conquests. The movement results in a greater geo-epistemological importance as it allows for the visualisation of America as the first periphery of the European colonial system, the original hidden side of modernity. This perspective also entails verifying: a) the rationality of the forms of the State and Iberian colonial enterprises; b) the original accumulation of capital to those who authored these conquests; c) the appropriation of the natural biodiversity of the tropics as the foundation for modernity (Coronil, 2000); d) the emergence of the principles of the evangelising mission and European superiority as central articulations of the Eurocentric colonial imaginary, as a hegemonic common-sense that drives and justifies colonial enterprise, but also a “drive for identity”, present in each individual subject of this project.



For this critique, the narratives in question, which gave rise to all the epistemological geopolitics of the modern world (and, consequently, the genetic womb of the human and social sciences), ignore the significance of the colonial episode as a *founding* phenomenon of all the historic experience of modernity. Modernity would thus constitute a linear paradigm of historic evolution, instituting notions of “civilizing processes”, “progress”, or “development”, which have been a unique experience, the heritage of a few European peoples (the northern European narrative, for example, is accustomed to excluding the Mediterranean in general, and the Iberians in particular, from this experience). For different reasons, which frequently include the bio-physical inability of the non-European races to overcome natural conditioning, the rest of humanity was not capable of reaching this level of civilization, and its destiny was guided and driven by civilized peoples. This is what the theorists of the M/C Program call “eurocentrism”—an interpretation of history that attributes certain European peoples with an autonomous capacity for evolution and the construction of a history of the whole of humanity. Thus, it establishes a vast epistemology of geopolitical roots, a true “geographical imaginary”<sup>5</sup> that established, in reality, hidden relationships that continued for over five centuries. Paradoxically, this continuity (the geostrategic predominance of certain areas of the planet over the rest of the peripheral regions) is further highlighted when the analysis attempts to interpret historically determined periods or processes. Classic colonialism is, in general, excluded as an explanatory factor in these narratives. What attention was dedicated by the founding fathers of sociology, such as the French Durkheim or German Weber, to the colonial empires their countries had formed at the time in Africa? It is history that usually speaks of colonialism, but treats it as its own particular epoch, that ended with the political independence of the ex-colonies.

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<sup>5</sup> Arturo Escobar (1996) uses this term, take from the *Orientalism* of Edward Said, to refer to the vision of the global world implicit in the conceptions of “developed/under-developed” that expand as the common sense of the epoch from the second half of the forties, in the post-WWII period, when the breakup of the colonial empires was imminent.

Another case is the debate about globalisation. In the 1990s, during the golden years of neoliberalism, it was customary to characterise globalisation as an empire without a core, where national decisions and inequalities had ceased to exist, giving birth to a “global-centric” world (Coronil, 2000). “Global-centrism”, for example, is the habitual place of enunciation of the Catholic Church, from the crusades through to the present. In March 2009, during a visit to African countries, the Pope invited the audience to abandon their tribal superstitions and witchcraft and adhere to the universal message of the Church. Partha Chatterjee, founder of the subaltern Indian studies group, proposes the necessary reverse of the “global-centric” discourse, what he calls “the rule of colonial difference that, following from the universal discourse, excludes the colonised as its beneficiaries. Chaterjee says:

*This occurs when a normative proposition of supposedly universal validity (and many such propositions would be asserted in the centuries separating us from the early Portuguese expeditions) is held not to apply to the colony on account of some inherent moral deficiency in the latter. Thus, even as the rights of man could be declared in the revolutionary assemblies of Paris in 1789, the revolt in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) would be put down on the ground that those rights could not apply to black slaves. John Stuart Mill would set forth with great eloquence and precision his arguments establishing representative government as the best possible government, but would immediately add that this did not hold for India. The exception would not detract from the universality of the proposition; on the contrary, by specifying the norm by which universal humaneness was to be recognised, it would strengthen its moral force. In the case of the Portuguese expedition, the norm was given by religion. Later, it would be supplied by biological theories of racial character or historical theories of civilizational achievement or socio-economic theories of institutional development. In each case, the colony would be made the frontier of the moral universe of normal humanity; beyond it, universal norms could be held in abeyance (Spanish: Chatterjee, 2008: 30-31; English: Chatterjee, 1998: 1331)*

The global-centric perspective recovers the discursive devices of colonialism and proclaims universal modernity as a fatal destiny, prophesied, for example, by Anthony Giddens.

*From his perspective, it is no longer an issue of the West, as modernity is everywhere. The triumph of modernity lies precisely in having become universal. This could be called the ‘Giddens Effect’: from now on, modernity is the only way, everywhere, until the end of time. Not only is radical alterity expelled forever, expelled from the realm of possibilities,*

*but all cultures and societies in the world are reduced to the manifestation of European history and culture (Escobar, 2005b: 68).*

According to the theorists of the M/C Program, these would form the broad, hegemonic outline of an interpretation of the history and evolution of global societies, produced from a Eurocentric perspective, that attributes Europe with having instituted modernity and erects it as an explanatory-interpretive referential model for all valid historical and social logic. This perspective includes the social sciences, whose fundamental paradigms, established in the 19th century, comfortably excluded the consideration of those phenomena linked with colonialism, plainly still in force in this era (other symptomatic silences were, for example, the topics of gender and nature). And this criticism continues to be valid and applied, according to M/C authors (including the most critical views, developed from European experience, such as Classical Marxism,<sup>6</sup> Western Marxism and poststructuralism).

The M/C program is not defined in opposition to modernity, nor does it deny the emancipatory potential that it could possess. Its perspective is, in any case, “transmodern” (Dussel, 2000), assuming a critical distance in relation to those consecrated and consecrating narratives. Finding its locus of enunciation and epistemological foundation “in the margins”, M/C presents itself as “border thinking”, which questions North-Atlantic modernity and asks about alternative paths and logics.

The interpretive apparatus of the M/C Program lies in a series of calculations that are derived from their characterisation of coloniality as a necessary, opposed and systematically hidden complement to modernity. The abominable (in a word) character of colonialism thus lies separated from modernity, which proceeds to assume an almost angelic character (somewhat like the “God without intestines” of which Kundera speaks). Therefore, the challenging part of the M/C program is located in a point of rupture with the equivalent chapter XXIV of *Capital* when Marx,

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<sup>6</sup> See the following note about the heterodox reading of Marx by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

attacking the sweet fables of the Political Economy about the natural origins of the categories of the mercantile economy, introduces into his narrative, as an eruption, an analysis of a historical perspective of original accumulation, where capital was born and was constituted by violent methods: “dirty with blood and mud.”<sup>7</sup>

In assuming this point of view, that is to say, processing the so-called “decolonial turn”, an epistemic diversity emerges that allows us to discover a plurality of places of development, past and present, in critical relation or resistance to colonial modernity. This is why we speak of “border epistemologies” (Mignolo, 2007) from which one can construct diverse challenges to (or, eventually, partial recuperations of) modernity and coloniality. This entails a rewriting of the narratives of modernity from another space, revaluing dominated cultures and peoples and their stories of resistance. In the same way, it would be possible to once again tell a history of the continent, from the perspective of society/nature relations.

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth remembering a surprising text by Claud Lévi-Strauss, that not only offers an unusual reading of this chapter of Marx's *Capital*, as he advances (in 1961) a perspective that sits in dialogue with the M/C Program. “Thus, colonization historically and logically precedes capitalism, and the capitalist regime consists in treating Western people as Western people had previously treated native populations. For Marx, the relationship between capitalist and proletarian is thus only another particular case of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. From this point of view, one could almost maintain that, in Marxist thought, economics and sociology first appear as offshoots of ethnography. It is in *Das Kapital* that the thesis is put forward with perfect clarity. The origins of the capitalist regime go back to the discovery of gold and silver regions in America; then on to the enslaving of the natives; then to the conquest and looting of the East Indies; finally to the transformation of Africa into ‘a sort of commercial preserve for the hunting of black skins. Such are the idyllic means of primitive accumulation which announce the dawn on the capitalist era.’ Immediately afterward the mercantile war is declared. ‘The mute slavery of the New World was needed as a cornerstone on which the covert slavery of Europe's wage earners was built.’”

Lévi-Strauss continues: “In the first place, those societies which today we call “underdeveloped” are not such through their own doing, and one would be wrong to conceive of them as exterior to Western development or indifferent to it. In truth, they are the very societies whose direct or indirect destruction between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries have made possible the development of the Western world. Between them there is a complementary relationship. That same development and its greedy requirements have made these societies such as they are today” (Spanish: Lévi-Strauss, 1976a: 319-20; English: Lévi-Strauss, 1976b: 315).

Perhaps it would be opportune to outline here, within the theoretical Marxist tradition, that the emergence of the themes of the coloniality of peripheral peoples and nature is present within the rupture made by Rosa Luxemburg. In the notes for her course Introduction to Political Economics, which she dictated in the cadre school of the German Democratic Socialist Party and her book *The Accumulation of Capital*, written in 1913, she incorporates an ample lesson, unusual in her time and place, about what would later be called the Third World. Not only that (and what makes this a valid predecessor of the contemporary M/C perspective), this incorporation was expressed as “border epistemology” (and it is tempting to speculate over the possibility of “another point of reading” residing in the condition of her gender, which made her especially sensitive to alternate readings of the white, civilised, masculine hegemonic logics). Coloniality, says Rosa, is a constituent part of the accumulation of capital, its necessary and foundational obverse. Based on this insight, Rosa questions the analytic model of the capitalist mode of production developed by Marx in *Capital*, which does not incorporate the colonial subordination of people and nature as a necessary condition for the ample reproduction of this productive regime. We can see it in her words, in the last page of Chapter 31 in *The Accumulation of Capital*:

*Thus capitalist accumulation as a whole, as an actual historical process, has two different aspects. One concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced—the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light, accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and wage labourer. In both its phases, however, it is confined to the exchange of equivalents and remains within the limits of commodity exchange. Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail, and the keen dialectics of scientific analysis were required to reveal how the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people’s property, how commodity exchange turns into exploitation and equality becomes class-rule.*

*The other aspect of the accumulation of capital concerns the relations between capitalism and the non-capitalist modes of production which start making their appearance on the international stage. Its predominant methods are colonial policy, an international loan system—a policy of spheres of interest—and war. Force, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment [...] The conditions for the reproduction of capital provide the organic link between these two aspects of the*

*accumulation of capital. The historical career of capitalism can only be appreciated by taking them together (Spanish: Luxemburgo, 1967: 351; English: Luxemburg, 2015: 432-433).*<sup>8</sup>

For some, such as one of the pioneers of environmental history, Professor Donald Worster from the University of Kansas, this history is an answer to the environmental worry that has been growing in public opinion during recent decades. Others, such as the economist James O'Connor, from the University of California, are much more radical: in the face of an offensive by global capital to appropriate and commodify all the world's natural resources, environmental history becomes the history of our age, and all past history can and now much be told as environmental history.<sup>9</sup>

The field of environmental history is growing in Latin America, with the Latin American and Caribbean Society for Environmental History (Sociedad Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Historia Ambiental—SOLCHA) already having held five meetings. It is a space for intellectual reflection that offers particularly stimulating multidisciplinary encounters between researchers from the entire region.

This Latin American reflection, at the same time, has interesting international repercussions. In particular, there are many exchanges of perspective with the production of the United States. In effect, the territory that came to be known as

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<sup>8</sup> Over the course of previous chapters, Rosa Luxemburg develops a history-based analysis of the destruction/recomposition of the social forms of colonial peoples, but what is especially interesting is its relevant treatment of the transformation of nature into commodities, which also constitutes a precedent to political ecology and environmental history. A contemporary recuperation of Rosa Luxemburg's perspective can be found in Harvey (2004).

<sup>9</sup> O'Connor says: "environmental history may be regarded as the culmination of all previously existing histories—assuming we include environmental dimensions of contemporary political, economic, and cultural history, as well as environmental history strictly defined" [...] "Environmental history is, in short, the history of the planet and its people and other species' life and inorganic matter insofar as these have been modified by, and have enabled and constrained, the material and mental productions of human beings [...] Since these relationships are indecipherable without an investigation of the social relations between human beings ('society,' 'economy'), on the one hand, and nature's own (modified, stunted, enhanced) biological, chemical and physical relations, on the other, the scope of environmental history is, for all practical purposes, limitless [...] In principle, environmental history is a totalizing history, the only true 'general' or universal history" (Spanish: 2001: 74 and 78; English: 1998: 51 and 54). It is pertinent to clarify that this extreme position of O'Connor is substantiated over the course of the article.

“America” was the stage of what was perhaps the greatest succession of environmental catastrophes in human history: invasions of humans, animals, vegetable species, and diseases that devastated and subdued the original populations. It was a North American historian, Alfred Crosby (1993) who wrote one of the available stories about this assassination. It seems to us that residing in this original trauma is the key question to think about the problem of coloniality of the environment and the underdevelopment of Latin American societies.

Another important work, also produced in the United States, is the book *Late Victorian Holocauasts* by Mike Davis (2000), which is defined specifically as a book about political ecology, analysing the great droughts that affected the tropical regions of the world in the last quarter of the 19th century, sparking great famines and death tolls. In the first part, Davis analyses the oscillations of the Pacific Ocean currents (the phenomena of El Niño and La Niña) and its effects on the pattern of winds and rains in the inter-tropical region. Later, he demonstrates that the effects of these climactic changes were heightened in the tropical region that, at the time, was experiencing the processes of imperial penetration that had disarticulated traditional peasant economies and established the separation of subsistence agricultural production and the orientation toward external markets. A fundamentalist free-market ideology prevailed among colonial authorities, which postulated the need to allow “natural” forces to re-establish equilibrium.

As a result, proposes Davis, more than the millions of lives sacrificed, the affected regions were left prostrate, and imperial order was easily imposed on them. Here would be the origin of the current “Third World”.

The prestigious historian Donald Worster proposes a classical definition of environmental history: “environmental history occupies the role and place of nature in human lives. It studies all interactions that societies of the past have had with the

non-human world, the world that we have not created in any primary sense” (2003:25).<sup>10</sup>

I must say that this definition always makes me feel slightly uncomfortable. In the first place, it seems to separate nature and culture too radically, rendering invisible certain important questions, which Worster does not deny. Human action transforming the natural environment creates more environments, a “second nature” (or “third” or “nth”) that is a human creation, but that evidently behaves as if it were composed of natural ecosystems (cities, agriculture, etc.). From this point of view, human action also creates new relations *within* nature.

Secondly, those elements of human ecology also depend on the combined actions between social and natural relations. The spatial distribution of specimens of a species is part of the ecology of that species. “Why are there black and white people in the Americas?” an extra-terrestrial visitor could ask. Obviously because there had been conquest and slavery. Therefore, the current population of the Americas is not understood, from a biological perspective, without reference to non-natural historical processes. That is to say, the distribution of specimens of the human species throughout the continent (an object of human ecology) refers to a complex interaction, historically given, between power relations and social domination.

The demographic significance of humans of extra-American descent is only explained by the radical process of depopulation of original inhabitants, in which a principal role was played by pathogenic agents of disease, brought over by the Europeans. This depopulation reached 90% in the first century of conquest and created the need for black slavery. Thus, natural elements, unintentionally driven by humans during an undertaking of conquest and subjugation, acted on aboriginal societies, bringing about their destruction almost to the point of annihilation. Therefore, this does not

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<sup>10</sup> A disciple of Worster and one of the Latin American precursors of environmental history, the Panamanian Guillermo Castro Herrera gives a highly suggestive definition: “environmental history could define itself as the investigation of the consequences in the Latin American territory, derived from processes of transformation of the natural biospherical environment, associated with successive development styles in the region” (1996: 31).



merely deal with a society/nature interaction, but complex relations between humans, which include violence and power, mediated by natural elements.

To offer another example: the Australian historian Elinor Melville (1999) studied the case of the destruction of a prosperous Indigenous agricultural region in Mexico, el Valle del Mezquital, by the flocks of sheep brought over by the Spanish. The narrative of environmental history presented by Melville recounts the destructive interaction between natural elements, which were provoked by established unequal power relations between humans. This natural catastrophe, in turn, either redresses the unequal relations between humans or establishes new ones. "Sheep are devouring men," said Thomas Moore of the enclosures in England. Indeed, but there are also people behind the sheep...

The case of the conquest of the Americas (and Oceania, some centuries later) is an evident example of a mega environmental catastrophe from human intervention, given they were territories that were isolated from the great Euro-Asian-African block. Nevertheless, it is still relevant to think of the whole of human history as a co-evolving relationship with natural systems. Another North American historian, Stephen Pyne (1997) puts forward the hypothesis that the great plains of the western United States were the product of centuries of human action, that destroyed the original forests. Similarly, based on the work of the great Brazilian geographer Azis Ab'Saber, from the University of São Paulo, and the North American anthropologist Darrel Posey, one tends to think of the joint development of the Amazon Jungle and human societies. In summary, without entering into a specialised discussion, it seems unarguable to me that human action on the environment was producing a humanised nature long before any historic records began.

I wish to propose, therefore, another definition of environmental history: it is the study of the interaction between human societies and the natural environment over the course of time, and its consequences derived from both, including natural interactions mediated by humans and human interactions mediated by nature.

I believe that there are various dimensions contained within the intellectual proposal of environmental history that have important meaning for ecological debates and

conflicts that are currently underway in Latin America. I will attempt to briefly recount them.

Despite its emphasis on the materiality of history, in its search for antecedents, environmental history separates itself from Marxism, at least the classical, “canonical” versions.<sup>11</sup> The mainstream Marxist tradition always attributed a positive sense to the development of productive forces, generally interpreted as a markedly mechanical form, without taking into account all of its dimensions. Marxism shared with all 19th century science (and a large part of current scientific thought) the optimistic idea that science and technology would domesticate nature, and that it would always be possible to find technical solutions to problems, an idea that environmental thinking rightly puts in doubt. In this way, the confluence of Marxist politics and developmentalism was quite common in Latin America. Environmental history, to incorporate problematic dimensions that developmentalist perspectives left out of their analyses, called attention to the hidden costs of processes that at times have been glorified by economic history. Many economic successes of Latin American history can now be read as disasters (and Amazonian history, in particular, has many examples to show for itself).

For example, an environmental perspective, oriented to evaluating the balances of energy in nature, arrives at the conclusion that the agricultural model of the “green revolution” has failed, and now consumes more energy than it produces, especially that which is sourced from non-renewable fossil-fuels. Many more have failed if we include in this evaluation an account of resources that includes the cost of erosion, biodiversity loss, or land fertility contaminated by agricultural chemicals, etc. All of this is without considering the social and human costs of establishing industrial agriculture, in the form of the dispossession of *campesino* land, loss of employment

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, the topic of the environmental concerns of Karl Marx himself is a topic for discussion. Without a doubt, in the margins of the Marxist tradition one finds important reflections for an environmental perspective on history. For example, the work of Nikolai Danielson, who, in Russia at the end of the 19th century, perceived that the destructive dimensions of capitalism could be greater than its constructive ones and finally block the dynamics of its own progress (Alimonda, 2006).

and market for agricultural families, effects on the health of the rural population, rural exodus, the growth of cities, etc.

From the 19th century, in the Argentine pampas or the prairies of the US and Canada, grain was produced in fantastic quantities, capable of feeding many generations of human beings and generating enormous wealth in those countries. At the same time, the natural fertility was lost, and animal and plant species became extinct; there were, and still are, enormous problems of erosion and desertification. But this irreparable environmental damage was never counted in the cost of this production. All of this is repeating itself, amplified, with the case of genetically modified soy that currently accounts for 70% of tilled land in Argentina (*La Nación*, 28 August 2010).<sup>12</sup>

Following the Argentine case, there is another interesting example of how economic history, in privileging histories of success, proceeds to create spatial segregations, leaving histories of failure out of sight, which are themselves recovered by environmental history. From 1860, the humid pampas of Argentina experienced an intense process of development oriented toward exportation, with an enormous accumulation of capital, transatlantic migration, construction of railways and public works, urbanisation, etc. But behind that process, a vast region of dry subtropical forest, the Chaco of Santiago and Santa Fe, were destroyed. Its mountains contained quebracho, a tree whose wood is hard and resistant to the elements and was primarily used for railway sleepers and telegraph poles. However, the economic history of Argentina dedicates thousands of pages to the success of grain and meat (in whichever form, without taking into account its environmental impact on the humid pampas themselves) and has nothing to say on the destruction of the forests of Santiago del Estero, which was transformed into an arid region, with chronic environmental and social problems.

Here, territorial hegemonies and subaltern regions appear particularly important. Coloniality did not end with what the historiography of our countries calls “the

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<sup>12</sup> At this point, there is ample critical literature. One could consult Domínguez and Sabatino (2006), Pengue (2008), and the work of the tenacious campaign of the Rural Reflection Group.

colonial period”. In every Latin American country there are regions that, for a variety of reasons (be they geomorphological, climactic, etc), presented difficulties when being incorporated into territories for the effective exercise of power for the colonial administrations, whether for disinterest, costs not matching benefits, or characteristics making difficult the establishment of a metropolitan population as a nucleus.<sup>13</sup>

This is what Germán Palacio (no date) highlights, with reference to the Amazon but which is valid for these regions: their *eccentricity*. It is the case of the Amazon and all the countries it spans, the Pampa of Patagonia, the Chaco in Argentina, the Araucanía in Chile, the North and Yucatan in Mexico, the Petén in Guatemala, the Darién in Panamá, and the ‘lowlands’ in general in Colombia. These regions are incorporated into territories of independent States, often unexplored and unknown, from which derived the conflicts over the demarcation of borders during the course of the 20th century. Indigenous peoples subsist or find refuge within them. Against these peoples, national armies, when political and technological conditions permit (railways, repeating firearms, telegraph, etc.), develop programs of conquest and subjugation. In Argentina, the “Conquest of the Desert” was justified by Estanislao Zeballos as necessary to complete works left unfinished by the Spanish. He was going to repeat, in relation to the indigenous peoples of the Pampa and Patagonia, a war of conquest. The great advance of the Argentine army to the Río Negro was conducted in 1879, and the fight continued for several more years in the mountain ranges of Neuquén. In 1883-84 the campaign of the Chaco was fought. At the same time, the Chilean army completed the so called “Pacification of the Araucanía” against the Mapuche. The fight against the indigenous of Mexico occupied the entire second half of the 19th century. Operations against warrior peoples of the north, such as the Apaches and Yaquis lasted until the end of the 19th century, and the so called “Mayan Wars” only finished in 1904, with the surrender of the rebel city Xan Santa Cruz.

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<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, the important work of Serje (2005) on Colombia, supports elements that can be applied to all countries in the region. It seems perfectly justified to include this reflection on the natural environment and the formation and exercise of political power in the bibliography of Latin American political ecology.

But the Mexican army also confronted local, autonomous *campesinos*, the most famous of which was the Tomóchic rebellion in the state of Chihuahua, from 1891-1892 (Alimonda, 2002a). Brazilian equivalents were the Canudos conflict in the interior of Bahía (1893-1897) and the Contestado War in Santa Catarina (1913-1915), where the national army conducted ruthless campaigns against autonomous *campesinos*, which had not submitted to the territorial authority of the republican government.

Incorporated into the national order through conquering military operations, these regions generally lacked the autonomy enjoyed by political units where territorial hegemony was exercised by dominant local classes. They depended directly upon the powers of the national executive, in a regime that could be described as “internal colonialism”, that presupposed occupation and management by administrative and military organs of the central government, such as surveys of natural resources and their “implementation value” according to the logics and needs of the hegemonic regions.

In Argentina, for example, a formally federal country, according to the constitution of 1853, the areas conquered from the indigenous groups after independence (that is, more than half of the land-area of the country) remained until roughly 1950 as “national territories”,<sup>14</sup> dependencies of the central power and deprived of the federal attributes of the “14 provinces” that protect their autonomy, as negotiated by the local oligarchs with the central authority.

Hence the second characteristic, derived from coloniality, that Germán Palacio attributes to these regions—*asynchrony*. Their history does not follow, not even slightly, the stages of the national societies into which they have been incorporated. As lucidly expressed at the time, by Argentine Estanislao Zeballos, the independent nation state was finishing, during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, the conquest and territorial occupation the Iberian colonisers had left incomplete. In

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<sup>14</sup> These include the current provinces of La Pampa, Río Negro, Neuquén, Chubut, Santa Cruz, Tierra del Fuego, Chaco, Formosa and Misiones, created during the first government of General Perón (1946-1952).

order to continue the history of these regions, therefore, it is necessary to add tension to these established narratives.

Let us note that here we have an important point of contact between the environmental history perspective and the Modernity/Coloniality Research Program. The “decolonial turn” is complemented by a “natural-colonial turn”. It attempts to read and narrate the epic of modernity through its obverse, from its silenced dimensions. If the perspective of the M/C Program entails the recuperation of silenced discourses, environmental history also seeks out its hidden voices, consequences that are neither assumed nor confessed, environmental and social destruction that the exemplary processes of development occlude, which are frequently revealed to be unsustainable.

Returning to the topic of antecedents, if environmental history diverges from the Marxist tradition, it instead vindicates a precursor that was formed in this tradition—Karl Polanyi (1886-1964), a Hungarian linked to the Austrian Social Democratic Party. With the ascension of Nazism and incorporation of Austria into the Third Reich, Polanyi was exiled to England and later travelled to the United States and Canada, where he developed his academic career. It is interesting to note that, despite large affinities with both his academic career and personal views, Polanyi always took care to differentiate his work from Marxism or, in any case, hide these affinities (an effect, perhaps, of his need to circulate in the Anglo-Saxon academic sphere during the Cold War).<sup>15</sup> He wrote an important work that was recovered during the 90s by critics of the neoliberal boom.

His best-known book, *The Great Transformation*, was published in 1944. There, Polanyi asks after the origins of the terrible crisis and war humanity was navigating. His conclusion was that this catastrophe was the result of the uncontrolled expansion of market liberalism since the middle of the 19th century (globalisation, we would say today). At the same time as it had multiplied wealth and technology to levels previously unseen, this expansion introduced the entire planet into a market system

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<sup>15</sup> It seems improbable, with his political trajectory and intellectual development, that Polanyi did not know of the works by Rosa Luxembour.

based on a central fallacy: to consider as commodities, to produce as commodities, two central elements of the real world—nature and the work force (which he called *fictitious commodities*). Market fundamentalism, built atop this double fiction, provoked the disaggregation of all established societies, the multiplication of social and political crises, the need for repressive internal systems, and the international arms race. The final results were the lack of solutions, authoritarian recompositions, and war.

Chapter fifteen of *The Great Transformation* is called *Market and Nature*. Polanyi demonstrate that what today we call “land” was always inextricably linked with all the complex dimensions that constituted human societies. In reality, he says, to suppose that nature was just “land”, that it could be subject to purchase and sale in the market in exchange for money, was once a utopia with no connection to reality. But it is better to offer his words:

*Traditionally, land and labor are not separated; labor forms part of life, land remains part of nature, life and nature form an articulate whole. Land is thus tied up with the organizations of kinship, neighborhood, craft, and creed—with tribe and temple, village, guild, and church. One Big Market, on the other hand, is an arrangement of economic life which includes markets for the factors of production. Since these factors happen to be indistinguishable from the elements of human institutions, man and nature, it can be readily seen that market economy involves a society the institutions of which are subordinated to the requirements of the market mechanism. The proposition is as utopian in respect to land as in respect to labor. The economic function is but one of many vital functions of land. It invests man's life with stability; it is the site of his habitation; it is a condition of his physical safety; it is the landscape and the seasons. We might as well imagine his being born without hands and feet as carrying on his life without land. And yet to separate land from man and to organize society in such a way as to satisfy the requirements of a real-estate market was a vital part of the utopian concept of a market (Spanish: Polanyi, 187; English: Polanyi, 2001: 187).*

Nature, linked in every way to the life of society, was transformed into mere “land”. And with this movement social equilibriums that had been constituted over centuries and were the basis for social imaginaries were disarticulated. This process, that occurred all over the world, has affected and continues to affect Latin American indigenous populations and be present in *campesino* resistance in defence of their lands, including movements in all countries along the Andes that oppose large-scale

mining. The defence for and respect of *Pachamama*, the central proposition of the Andean concept of “buen vivir”, present in the recent constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, is directly linked to the effort to protect nature and exclude it from the market.

For Donald Worster, this process of commodifying nature was as revolutionary and devastating as the Neolithic revolution. Here there exists, according to his perspective, a privileged topic for environmental history:

*I submit that the single most important task for scholars in the history of modern agroecology is to trace what Karl Polanyi has called “the great transformation,” both in general planetary terms and in all its permutations from place to place [...]*

*What actually happened to the world of nature, once it had been reduced to the abstraction “land,” is one of the most interesting historical problems presented by the capitalist transformation and will require a great deal more research by environmental historians. There are many possible lines for that research to take, but among the most promising is an inquiry into the restructuring of agroecosystems that capitalism promoted. First in England and then in every part of the planet, agroecosystems were rationally and systematically reshaped in order to intensify, not merely the production of food and fiber, but the accumulation of personal wealth. (Spanish: Worster, 2003:33-35; English: Worster, 1990: 1097-1101).*

Worster gives central importance in his formulations to Polanyi’s idea that the transformation of nature into land constituted a milestone in human history. From his perspective, it is not strictly the sale of production in the market, which can also occur in subsistence agriculture, but the process of a comprehensive reorganisation of agriculture for that purpose. A specialised agriculture that produces surpluses of certain types of products supposes a radical simplification of agricultural ecosystems, with the consequent loss of biodiversity and a greater vulnerability of the entire agricultural complex, as much from an ecological standpoint as economic-financial and energetic.

There is a different nuance here that constitutes another discrepancy between environmental history and interpretations of Marxist inspiration. The process of reorganising production by orienting it toward distant markets has more explanatory importance than the question of relations of production, central to the Marxist



tradition. If the so-called “Atlantic Forest” of Brazil was destroyed to plant sugar or coffee, from an environmental standpoint it matters little whether the workforce used were enslaved or salaried.

*What had once been a biological community of plants and animals so complex that scientists can hardly comprehend it, what had been changed by traditional agriculturalists into a still highly diversified system for growing local foodstuffs and other materials, now increasingly became a rigidly contrived apparatus competing in widespread markets for economic success. In today's parlance we call this new kind of agroecosystem a monoculture, meaning a part of nature that has been reconstituted to the point that it yields a single species, which is growing on the land only because somewhere there is strong market demand for it (Spanish: Worster, 2003:35; English: Worster, 1990: 1101).*

Worster does not fail to highlight that, along with the disappearance of biodiverse agriculture, there is also a loss, a closure of the peasant knowledge associated with it. Humans that interact with monocultures are imprisoned, in some ways, by a unique, highly specialised knowledge, and have lost the detailed abilities and knowledge of nature that allow for multicultural agroecological practices.

Another strategic dimension is how environmental history comes to fuel contemporary debates that Catalan economist Joan Martínez Alier (2004) call “environmentalism of the poor” and we prefer to call “popular environmentalism”. It attempts to identify how, as there are environmental movements for “the rich”, which originate in informed environmental concerns, there are also popular movements that mobilise for environmental reasons, even if they do not carry the same name. Fortunately, this is a subject that is readily evident in Latin America, and it does not need to be reaffirmed. However, merely a few decades ago it was common to hear the dismissal of environmentalism by conservative voices, for being “imported”, “chic”, etc.

The perspective of environmental history, therefore, also allows another reading of these movements and, by extension, of all Latin American History. In the 20th century, the environmental movement appeared and identified demands, conflicts, and specific movements. But these demands, conflicts and movements had always

existed throughout history, although their environmental components had not always been explicit in the conscience and discourse of the actors involved.

At this point, we re-encounter Rosa Luxembourgh and Karl Polanyi. If the decisive factor in the origins of the market economy is the transformation of human beings and nature into “fictitious commodities”, then the resistance against these commodifying processes takes on a new significance. It is not merely resistance in the name of halting progress, as asserted by the hegemony of liberal enlightenment and traditional Marxism. It is possible to now read them as forms of resistance based in the defence of traditional systems of social organisation for the use and communal availability of human and natural resources, in the face of attacks by commercialisation.

An entire tradition of good English historiography has been applied to reconstruct popular resistance during the time of the Industrial Revolution, in the form of a defence of the “moral economy”, in which a collective ethic presided and regulated social and environmental relations in the name of preserving basic values of cohabitation. The same logic is being applied for the interpretation of the historic formation of Latin American countries. This allows us to trace genealogies and continuities between the fights of indigenous peoples during five-hundred years of their history and current conflicts and challenges. It does not attempt to rewrite all history and environmental conflict, but recognises the presence of these dimensions, although they were not explicit, in different moments and processes of our past. If the decisive theme of environmental history, as proposed by Worster, is the process of commodification of nature and forms of popular resistance, we find a bridge between the past and present. The current global resistance movement, with all of its difficulties and contradictions, or contemporary indigenous or environmental movements, acquire concrete roots and profound legitimacy in our past and in our identities.

## Political Ecology

But in addressing these political dimensions of environmental history, we are approaching another intellectual field of contemporary relevance in the social sciences: political ecology.

In fact, people began to speak of political ecology in the 1970s, in reference to a series of pessimistic predictions of a markedly conservative and neo-Malthusian character, which visualised limits for the industrial development model and received quite an orthodox critique by Hans Magnus Enzenberger in his book *Para una crítica de la ecología política* (Toward a critique of political ecology) (1974).

Subsequently, political ecology was configured, in its academic perspective, as a field of confluence and mutual feedback between different social sciences. In the English anthropological tradition, it had been, on the one hand, a politicisation of a traditional problem area—human ecology—that came to incorporate political dimensions into its analysis. On the other hand, a series of works produced by geographers, who studies ecological topics (such as soil erosion, deforestation, use of water, etc.), were arriving at the conclusion that it was not possible to understand these problems if you did not include political dimensions. It affirmed the conviction, encapsulated by David Harvey, that “all ecological projects (and arguments) are simultaneously political-economic projects (and arguments) and vice versa” (cited in Bryant & Bailey, 1997: 28).

Let us indicate here the fundamental difference in relation to the field of environmental history, despite how closely aligned its problematic concerns are with political ecology. Epistemologically and methodologically, environmental history is located within the disciplinary boundaries of history, and it is there that it is fighting for recognition. Political ecology, in contrast, critiques in its practice the exacerbated compartmentalisation of technical and *technologized* knowledge, and highlights, on the contrary, the necessary integration of perspectives to account for its objects of study. Pragmatically, in a recent book a British geographer has said:

Political ecology can be understood as a kind of umbrella, under which coexist various traditions and lines of political and ecological research that share certain ethical-

political and intellectual concerns [...] the field of political ecology emerged and was constructed under the notion that it is not a theory, but a common space of reflection and analysis, largely defined by its own history and by those who practice it, who share a vision more or less similar of ideas and practices which sustain it (Bebbington, 2007:26).

Against this, an “expanded” and ambitious version of political ecology is presented by the noted French intellectual and politician Alain Lipietz, deputy for *Les Verts* in the European Parliament. Firstly, for Lipietz, political ecology is, at the same time, a totalising perspective of scientific knowledge and a reformist political practice. It is clearly understood here as homologous with Marxism, and Lipietz makes this explicit. Facing the crisis of Marxism, political ecology would reassume some central legacies (materialism, the dialectic, the notion of crisis), while leaving behind unsustainable hypotheses (the belief in the virtues of developing productive forces, the glorification of technology, the working class as the revolutionary subject).

For Lipietz, the basic characteristics of the human genre of ecology is its political character. Humanity produces and reproduces its subsistence collectively, which necessarily implies that its relationship with the natural environment is always mediated by social relationships of domination and consent. What to produce, how to organise labour processes, how to distribute surpluses, and the ends to which they are destined are all necessary decisions that refer to situations of domination and consent. At the same time, human communities are organised in territories, which presupposes disputes or cooperation between territorial communities. In sum, if the ecology of the human race is political, the logical development of Lipietz’s argument leads to the configuration of scientific political ecology as a totalising point of view, which interpolates and integrates all of the sciences, whether they be oriented toward the study of nature or directed toward the study of human societies (1999, 2002, 2003).

Curiously, those of us who have tried to approach a conception of political ecology in the Spanish tradition have coincided in seeking a different approach from the Lipiezian totalisation or, at the same time, the pragmatic English umbrella. The one

who introduced the notion of political ecology into our language was Joan Martínez Alier, author of a solid and informed work and founder and editor for fifteen years of the journal *Ecología Política*, published in Barcelona, and which constituted an obligatory reference for these topics.

Martínez Alier came to realise a critical lesson from the intellectual tradition of political economy, highlighting its systematic and symptomatic silences in relation to the question of nature and recovering authors who, in isolation, were constituting a reflection on ecological economics. In relation to the continuation of this critical work and the recognition of the antecedents of political ecology in English anthropology and geography (limited, in any case, by a functionalist method that, in reality, was not intrinsic and reduced its reach to the local level), he proposed as its object of study *distributive ecological conflicts*.

“Ecological distributions,” proposes Martínez Alier, “are understood to be social, spatial and temporal patterns of access to obtainable benefits of natural resources and services provided by the environment as a system that supports life [...] In part, political ecology overlaps with political economy, in that the classical tradition is the study of conflicts of economic distribution” (2004: 104-105). Despite almost entirely incorporating political ecology within economics, Martínez Alier’s point of view is not economic, given its permanent reference to the dimensions of conflict and negotiation implied in the processes of ecological distribution and the different “languages of valorisation”, sometimes untranslatable and incommensurate, of those who are the messenger of the different actors involved in these conflicts.

Another perspective was developed by the Colombian Arturo Escobar, stemming from the “interwoven character of the discursive, material, social and cultural dimensions of the social relations between human beings and nature”. Thus, he prefers to avoid the society/nature dichotomy, seeking a definition of political ecology that “displaces nature and society from their privileged position in Western analysis.” He therefore proposes that “political ecology can be defined as the study of the multiple articulations of history and biology, and the inevitable cultural mediations through which such articulations are established” (2005a: 24). “Political ecology has

as a field of study the multiple practices through which the biophysical has been incorporated into history or, more precisely, those practices in which the biophysical and historical are mutually implicated” (2005a: 25).

However, some years before,<sup>16</sup> Escobar had approached Marínez Alier’s perspective and had explicitly opted to deepen it. Thus, in his introduction to the book *Más allá del Tercer Mundo: globalización y diferencia* (Beyond the Third World: Globalisation and Difference), he says: “Chapter 5 begins the prospective work of thinking about place, difference and globalisation from a broadly political ecology perspective. This chapter proposes a vision of political ecology that systematically incorporates the economic, the ecological and the cultural, defining this field as the study of economic, ecological and cultural conflicts of distribution. With this definition I extend the notion of political ecology proposed by Joan Martínez Alier to the cultural field” (2005b: 17).<sup>17</sup>

The recognition of plural knowledges and the need to deconstruct alternative rationalities is a key point in the perspective of the Mexican intellectual Enrique Leff. The exercise of power in the logic of accumulation and the market, at the same time as it fragments knowledge of a scientific and technological base and orients it unequivocally to its needs, has split it off from the vast field of popular knowledge of

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<sup>16</sup> The previously cited article by Escobar was published in English in 1999.

<sup>17</sup> However, in the cited article, Escobar does not integrate these analytical dimensions into a structured political ecology. To the surprise of the reader, in the text of the article, political ecology only occupies one of the dimensions of distribution: “If economic distribution underlies the political dimension of the economy, giving rise to the political economy, and if ecological distribution identifies dominant economic strategies as sources of poverty and environmental destruction thus giving origin to the field of political ecology, cultural distribution therefore displaces the study of cultural difference from its strict relation to diversity toward the distributive effects of cultural predominance and, in turn, its surrounding struggles. This last aspect of our tripartite conception of distributive conflicts generates a political anthropology centred on the relationship between political power and contrasting cultural practices. Power inhabits meaning, and meaning is the source of power” (2005b: 130). With political ecology being limited to the analysis of economic strategies, and the specificity of the political field, it is diluted into a vacuum. It is true that power inhabits meaning, but power does not lie solely within meaning.

nature. Indigenous knowledge, based in centuries of coexistence, observation and empirical experimentation in the framework of local ecosystems, was discarded at the time of conquest and during the colonisation that has continued until the present day.

For this reason, Leff insists that political ecology supposes a political epistemology.

*Political epistemology overflows into an interdisciplinary project in its desire for integration and complementarity of knowledges, recognising strategies of power that play a role in the field of knowledge and reducing the environmental conflict to an encounter and dialogue of knowledges [...] Political ecology in Latin America is fuelled by perspectives originating from philosophy, epistemology, ethics, economics, sociology, law, anthropology and geography,<sup>18</sup> by authors and social movements that, beyond the proposition of ecologising thought and action, are coming together in the political arena and in the study of power relations that crosscut knowledge, wisdom, being and doing. Proof of this is, between others, the environmentalisation of indigenous and campesino struggles and the emergence of Latin American environmental thought that supports proper reflection on these topics and processes (Leff, 2006: 32, 37 & 38).*

Finally, I want to note here that other authors have attempted to offer an account of a conception of political ecology that would be feasible from a practical point of view for research and knowledge generation and appropriate, at the same time for developing critical perspectives and establishing dialogues and negotiations, as much in the interdisciplinary academic sphere as in relation to actors in environmental conflicts. Recognising the relevance of contributions by authors such as Martínez Alier, Escobar or Leff, our reflections lead us to attempt to ground political ecology in a space of enunciation that, in any case, finds its place in the analytical body of political science.

In effect, before appearing as problems of distribution, it seems that the ecological questions of human societies constitute questions of appropriation, such as the establishment of power relations that allow for access to resources by certain actors, for decision making about their utilisation, for the exclusion of other actors from their availability. It is a matrix of social power relations that have prevailed in Latin America since the colonial period and were predicated on access to and control of

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<sup>18</sup> It is curious that in this list, Leff does not mention history.

land and other resources. This historical perspective, informed by environmental history, but also the economic, social and political histories of the region, deepens, it seems to us, the perspective of a political ecology constructed only from the present, privileging the reading of current environmental conflicts.

To turn to an example, it seems to us an overly short-term vision to analyse the emergence of “environmentalised” indigenous movements that cover the breadth of the Americas merely as a problem of “distribution”, when in reality these conflicts have been configured over the course of complex processes of exploitation and exclusion for more than five centuries. In this case, behind the current “conflicts of distribution” lie long histories of coloniality, which entailed physical and cultural genocide, mechanisms of expropriation, and exclusion from natural resources, such as the destruction or racist subordination of identities.

Another important point to highlight is that the perspective of these authors tends to minimise the analysis of the role of the State and its policies in relation to the environment.<sup>19</sup> It is true that it touches on a theoretical necessity, which has the healthy effect of highlighting the dynamics of local movements and, at the same time, serves to call attention to the presence and effect of both macro-powers acting in local public fields and implicit political common-sense often hidden in cultural distinctions, for example.

The State, however, through its multiple mechanisms (the Law, to start with), its institutions, its visible and invisible policies, its routines, is the Great Primary Distributor that underlies current conflicts of distribution. It is also the one who establishes general *macro-political* lines of environmental management in subordinated territories. In that sense, taking up the classical perspective of the work of Henri Lefebvre, a line of investigation of contemporary English geography, tends to think of the State as the great (re)organiser of territorial spaces, and baptise it as the “*Ecological Leviathan*” (Whitehead, Jones and Jones, 2006).

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<sup>19</sup> Arturo Escobar appropriately uses the Foucauldian notion of “governmentality” in his analysis, and particularly claims the importance of the State, although never dedicating particular attention to it (2005b: 134).



These examples seem pertinent to us in order to reformulate a vision of Latin American political ecology that bestows a central place to “the political”, at the same time as it can account for its porousness and contradictory character. Thus, just as Martínez Alier proposes a political ecology that overlaps, in part, with political economy, from our point of view, we wish to propose a political economy that superimposes itself on the problematic field of political science (understood not as “the science of the State”, in its classical conception, but as the study of the formation of hegemonic power and deviant counter-powers, a political science that puts authors such as Gramsci or Mariátegui in dialogue with the environmental issues of our age).

Without any sort of previous agreement, my friend Germán Palacio and I have arrived at these points of view. Thus, each one of us has, at the same time and of his own accord, attempted to write alternative definitions of political ecology that privilege the political space. I present here an attempt at a definition of political ecology: it is the study of the complex and contradictory articulations between multiple practices and representations (including different systems of knowledge and topological devices), through which diverse political actors, acting at similar or different scales (local, regional, national, global) are made present, with relevant effects and with differing grades of legitimacy, collaboration and/or conflict, in the constitution of territories and in the management of their endowments of natural resources.<sup>20</sup>

Germán Palacio, for his part, after reviewing several antecedents, including James O’Connor, Martínez Alier, and the English-language bibliography, concludes that:

*[...] all of these proposals are founded in approaches that do not give primacy to politics, as such, but the sources of political power, that is to say, to the economy, or society and its classes and forms of organisation. This conceptual relegation of politics occurs in other studies that are recognised as political ecology. Therefore, I propose that Ecopol is an inter- and trans-disciplinary field of discussion that reflects upon and discusses power relations in relation to nature, in terms of its social fabrication, appropriation and control by different socio-political agents [...]. Similarly, political ecology discusses the*

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<sup>20</sup> This definition clearly includes, in the Gramscian tradition: a) culture, as an inseparable part of the political (Álvarez, Dagnino & Escobar, 2000); b) the political not supposing automatic consensus, but constitutive antagonisms (Mouffe, 2000).

*aspects of social fabrication, construction or systematisation of nature, not only in terms of material issues, but its imaginary or symbolic construction. Thus it includes the ways in which society, on the one hand, and science, on the other, imagine or invent notions of nature and what are considered environmental problems [...]. Such an Ecopol recognises the support of political economy in the way it analyses processes of appropriating nature, by which it reviews its circulation, distribution and consumption. From there, modalities and disputes are derived around the appropriation, usufruct and control of nature. Consequently, the disputes, struggles and negotiation of these agents are also analysed, from which the political-economic problems of environmental justice are derived (Palacio, 2006: 11).*

## The Coloniality of Nature

With our comments supporting environmental history, political ecology and the research program of modernity/coloniality, it now becomes possible to approach a consideration of the coloniality of Latin American nature.

- a) To begin, a suggestive observation is presented by Fernando Coronil from the perspective of the M/C Program. It refers to the anthropocentrism of narratives of the origins of modernity, parallel to eurocentrism, and highlights the fundamental role of nature in colonial spaces (basically, mineral resources or tropical lands) in the genesis of modernity. In highlighting the presence of this coloniality of tropical nature, Coronil displaces European self-sufficiency in producing modernity and capitalism, and locates “its birth and evolution not in Europe, to which the dominant historiography has restricted it, but in the already globalised interactions between Europe and its other colonies [...] Instead of seeding a self-generated European phenomenon that spread to the rest of the world, capitalist modernity appears as the result of its transcontinental transactions, whose truly global character only began with the conquest and colonisation of the Americas” (2000: 92-93).

The incorporation of American nature (in the sense of environment) into a condition of inferiority, as a resource to be exploited, accompanied the logic that Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “imperial discoveries” (2006, chapter 4). Imperial discovery always supposes the production of mechanisms that interiorise and subordinate the discovered in order to colonise and exploit it,

whether it is the Orient, the savages, or the tropical environment. In the case of the Americas, a “New World”, these mechanisms were implanted and acted with much more efficiency and impunity than in Asia and Africa, ancient interlocutors of the European world.

It is important to highlight that in the American case, nature was undervalued to the point where the colonisers destroyed its valuable biodiversity to plant monocultures of exotic species for exportation. The northeast of Brazil and the Caribbean, the first areas to be colonised through this regime of production, had their original vegetation cleared for the production of sugar cane. That is to say, they were conceived merely as a platform of tropical lands incorporated into the European hegemonic space, appropriated for a production of great benefit.<sup>21</sup> This is an example of what Polanyi referred to as the utopia of the transformation of Nature into land. This original event already defined the characteristics of the coloniality of nature in the Americas, which continues to repeat itself in the 21st-century, with the expansion of soy and agrofuel monocultures.<sup>22</sup>

- b) Just how radical this process of colonising nature is can also be explained by how radical the process of colonising humans is, which until then Europeans had not had occasion to apply with such efficacy. It is sufficient to note that there have been studies that estimate that during the course of the first century of conquest, the original population of the Americas was reduced to 10% of that at the time of discovery. This sad record is not only limited to the direct, violent actions of the colonisers, but other natural factors played a role as well: epidemics of diseases

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<sup>21</sup> “Quickly discovering that the lands of the northeast lent themselves marvellously to the cultivation of sugar cane, the colonisers sacrificed all other possibilities in order to exclusively plant cane. For the interests of this untimely monoculture, nearly all life in the region, both animal and vegetable, was destroyed, completely subverting the ecological equilibrium of the landscape and blocking all other attempts at the cultivation of foodstuffs in the region. Thus, the food resources of the region were degraded in the extreme.” (Josué de Castro, no date: 107).

<sup>22</sup> In the Argentinian province of Salta, between the 1988 and 2002 censuses, the area covered by soy increased by 50%. In the same period, “the area with forests and natural mountains went from 3.7 million hectares to 2.2 million, a loss of 1.5 million. It is calculated that since 2002, 800,000 more hectares have been cleared, of which half a million correspond to 2007 alone. [...] The average number of hectares per agricultural unit in Salta went from 93.7 in 1998 to 132.7 in 2002. Lands dedicated to soy in 2002, meanwhile, averaged 590 hectares. Furthermore, in 2000, 95,000 hectares were in the hands of 19 producers, and just one of them had 25,000” (“Soya y bosques nativos” 2009: pg 12, Cash Supplement, Buenos Aires, 29 of March).

that arrived with the invasion, for which indigenous populations did not possess antibodies, and the disruption and/or destruction of native productive ecosystems.

- c) Continuing the argument of the previous point, which associates monoculture/destruction of native/colonial ecosystems, one can prove that currently the greatest reserves of biodiversity left on the continent are located in indigenous territories, forming the so-called “biocultural diversity”. We can recount the Mesoamerican example: “In Mexico, half of all public lands and indigenous communities (close to 15,000) are located in only those ten states considered to be the richest in biological terms.” A team from CONABIO listed 155 areas as priorities for biological conservation in the territory of the republic, and 39% of them overlaid indigenous territories. This proportion rose to 70% in the centre/south of the country. “Five of the six Biosphere Reserves located in Central America are found to be inhabited by different indigenous communities (Toledo et al, 2001: 23-24).<sup>23</sup>
- d) The modernity/coloniality complex, in its epistemological implications, produces points of view that organised humans by the purity of their blood and denigrated the biodiversity of the tropics, perceived as not appropriate for civilised society.<sup>24</sup> For one of the original theorists of the modernity/coloniality perspective, Aníbal Quijano, the social classification based on racial criteria appeared alongside the Iberian colonisation of the Americas, and ended up being the constituting category of world power:

*Coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the global pattern of capitalist power. It is founded on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as a cornerstone of said pattern of power, and operates on each of the planes, areas and*

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<sup>23</sup> This does not mean, of course, failure to record the possible environmental crises that could have occurred in Mesoamerica, thoroughly proven in the case of the Mayan cities (Gill, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> A long retelling of the European narratives and discourses about the inferiority of the American environment between the 18th century and 1900, always linked to the inferiority of its original populations, was developed in the classic book by Antonello Gerbi (1996). Probably the work of greatest complexity available on the appearance of this point of view in the American natural sciences was the erudite *La Hybris del punto cero*, by Santiago Castro Gómez (2005). Another important Colombian for this discussion is *Remedios para el Imperio*, by Mauricio Nieto Olarte (2006).

*dimensions, both material and subjective, of daily existence and the social ladder (Quijano, 2007: 93).*

But it is clear that the genocide and subordination of the original population meant the loss of their knowledge and traditional ways of interacting with nature. At the same time, there was a selective reorganisation of knowledges, stemming from new power relations. There was an appropriation of American plant species and the technologies associated with them, which saved Europe from the threat of starvation. There was a rearrangement of cognitive structures, of what could and could not be known, and even planted.<sup>25</sup> It was crucial that the Spanish maintained indigenous knowledge that referred to the management of nature and its necessary uses in order to provide sustenance and, if possible, production for the market.<sup>26</sup> In the Brazilian case, Sergio Buarque de Hollanda (1977) studied the incorporation of different indigenous technologies by expeditionaries confined to an unknown territory.

- e) Jean Brunhes (1869-1930) was a notable French geographer, known amongst other things for directing, from 1909, a massive project of visual documentation of the planet (*Archives de la planète*), which produced 72,000 photos and 183,000 meters of photographic film across 50 countries. His work inspired the historiographic perspective of Marc Bloch and of the school of the *Annales*. But it is also a precursor to the ecological critique of colonial devastation.

In 1910, in his book *La Géographie Humaine*, he refers to a peculiar modality of “destructive occupation” of space by the human species, “which tend to first strip mineral, vegetable, and animal materials without any idea or method of restitution”. In extreme cases, adds Brunhes, the destructive occupation presents “an unmoderated intensity, that merits the terms ‘economic pillage’ or, more

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<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to verify that the culture of the conquest also established interdictions over American plants. Such was the case of amaranth (*huautli*), which served as material for small idols in Mesoamerican religious rituals. “These idols were broken into small pieces, shared between those present, and thus consumed. This type of ceremony appeared similar to the Christian Eucharist in the eyes of the *conquistadores*, for which both its cultivation and consumption were prohibited” (Hernández Bermejo and León, 1992: 91). An excellent example of the relation between biology and history, mediated by power and culture that Arturo Escobar could use!

<sup>26</sup> Equivalent practices are now reproduced in relation to indigenous knowledges around biodiversity, pharmacology, vegetable cosmetics, etc.

simply, if you prefer, ‘devastation’. Devastation accompanies civilisation, while savages only know it in attenuated forms.” Its victims are not only the elements of nature, but also indigenous peoples.

Among the principle processes of destructive occupation indicated by Brunhes are two that are fundamental for Latin America. The first is mineral exploitation, which “under the name of devastating exploitation, includes the abusive exploitation that, for want of immediate benefits, becomes over-extended”, and he cites the case of guano deposits in Peru. The other is that of monocultures, that attack the soil “avidly robbing it of its fundamental nutrients, wanting to produce with minimal costs and without compensation. In Western Europe, with its dense population and its extremely intensive cultivation, there is hardly devastation; necessity has taught the use of fertilisers. The same did not occur in colonised countries” (Brunhes, cited in Castro Herrera, 1996: 35-37).

- f) Halfway between the two epochs, the important, pioneering book of Enrique Leff, *Ecología y Capital*, presented a complete formulation of the coloniality of Latin American nature and its effects, although still being a part of the discussion on “under-development”. For Leff, the situation of colonial or neo-colonial dependence and unequal exchange provoked:

*[...] the destruction of the resource system and the degradation of the productive potential of the ecosystems that constituted the foundations of the sustainability of these countries’ productive social forces [...] Its most enduring effect was produced by the destruction of the productive potential of Third World countries, by the introduction of inappropriate technological patterns, by the induction of extractive rhythms, and by the spread of social models of consumption that generated a process of ecosystem degradation, soil erosion, and resource depletion [...] Under-development is the effect of the loss of the productive potential of a nation, due to a process of exploitation and spoilage that destroys the ecological and cultural mechanisms upon which depend the sustainable production of productive forces and regeneration of natural resources [...] One of the most important transformations consisted in eliminating traditional agricultural practices, founded in the diversity of cultivars and adapted to the ecological structures of the tropics, in order to induce monocultural practices intended to satisfy the demands of the external market (Leff, 1986: 155-159).*

Here, clearly demonstrated by Enrique Leff, is the principal mechanism of accumulation and reproduction of the coloniality of Latin American nature, in

terms that could perfectly resemble those of Brunhes or the contemporary perspective of Mike Davis, a devastation that destroys or disorganises ecosystems and autochthonous productive systems and negate the autonomous potentials of these societies.

Another author that furthered the quandary of the coloniality of nature's persistence in our region was Guillermo Castro Herrera, in a book dedicated to outlining a possible Latin American environmental history.

*It could be said that over the course of the last five-hundred years, the environmental history of Latin America has been marked by two great characteristics, which developed from the 16th century. The first, of an economic nature despite enormous demographic, social, political and cultural implications, refers to the redistribution and revaluation of the natural resources of the region in function of the demands generated by successive metropolises, which explains the specialised and discontinuous, though always predatory, nature of the exploitation of the same. The second, of a technological nature, is related to the incapacity of the region to establish for itself the financing, means, methods, sources of energy, procedures for waste disposal, and, above all, the associated propositions for this natural resource exploitation (Castro Herrera, 1996: 65-66).*

- g) From a point of view that attempts to reunite the M/C Program with the contributions of environmental history and political ecology, we argue that contemporary globalisation carries at its core the aspiration of imposing a singular model of modernity. Paradoxically, globalisation also comes to highlight questions of difference, in the form of emerging cultural, ethnic, and particularistic conflicts, which can be schematically referred to as “politics of difference”. They cannot be classified as “anti-modern”, and it seems more interesting to reflect on them from the criterion of “trans-modernity”, an anthropographic acceptance of the potentially liberating elements contained in the unfinished project of modernity, “which does not have modern solutions for the conflicts and crises it provokes”, in the words of Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

The modernist project always implies the use of biopower over nature, understood as power over physical-geographical spaces—soils and subsoils, natural resources, flora and fauna—taking advantage of climactic conditions, but also power over subaltern

human bodies through domination. Biopolitics of modern/colonial discourses do not only produce subjectivities and territorialities, they also produce “natures”. That is to say, they reveal the colonialities of “natures”.

It deals with the hegemonic validity of a perspective of “observation” that was characterised in the works of Michel Foucault. Observation, secularised and pragmatized for the ends of territorial control (“governmentality”) and the production of marketable goods, supposes the construction of a timeless, impersonal and universalising point of view, a true “point zero”. This is the point form which modern scientific discourse and the social practices founded upon it make their pronouncements (Castro Gómez, 2005).

The emergence of conflicts provoked by globalisation deconstructs this perspective and struggles to legitimate other points of view, incorporating a true “heterarchy” of conflicts (Castro Gómez; Grosfoguel, 2007). It is not just an environmental crisis, but one of fragmentary issues, localised and timely but, at the same time, generalised and conclusive, which pierces definitions of the environmental as a specific arena of conflict and discourse, and which encompasses, as an entirety, the whole modernist project (or the current development model).

Returning to the definition proposed by Arturo Escobar of political ecology as the study of different articulations between biology and history, let us now say that for this author “[...] each articulation has its history and specifications, and it is related to modes of perception and experience, determined by social, political, economic and knowledge-based relations and characterised by modes of spatial use, ecological conditions, and more. The work of political ecology is to delimit and characterise these processes of articulation”, to those he calls “*regimes of nature*” (Escobar, 2005a: 25).

In Latin America, since the Iberian conquest, a diversity of regimes of nature have coexisted, with the hegemonic and colonising predominance of those oriented toward securing governmentality and the production of exchange value. In varying degrees of subordination or relative isolation, other regimes of nature have constituted



strategies of survival or resistance, such as small-holding, indigenous groups, *palenques*, etc. Just as this coexistence has endured over time, the overwhelming impetus for destructive occupation is renewed over regions that had remained relatively marginal in this dynamic, such is the case of the Amazon.

In a work prepared for the Fourth Brazilian Congress of Agroecology, realised in Porto Alegre from the 18th to 21st of November 2004, we worked with the notion of the hybrid character of Latin American cultures (García Canclini, 2003), applied to the sphere of landscapes, natures, and, more specifically, agricultural knowledges, in an attempt to include in this dimension a viable approach to a possible Latin American heritage and identity (Alimonda, 2004). The imperial projects of modernity were never entirely completed. They couldn't be, because they don't know their limits, because they are based in a colonialism that provokes destruction in its wake, which ends up rendering the modernist project unfeasible, and, furthermore, because it has always faced resistance. As a result, Latin American cultures and natures, through different heritages, have been constituted as hybrid entities. It is the current task to recover the plural character of this heritage, letting it "hybridise" in response to emergencies that are often contradictory and utopic. In this way, a path of reconciliation will be laid out, not only political, social and environmental, but also epistemological, between society and nature, between knowledge and respect for an "economy of nature" and the ethical imperatives of social organisation, in the form of a "moral economy" (to use 18th century terms). In this moment, in which the crisis of the dominant models appears unquestionable, it becomes ever more important to advance the construction of alternatives. Mobilising all our identities and putting in action all our heritages and capacities, in whichever place within Latin America.

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