



Systemic Alternatives

*Vivir Bien, Degrowth, Commons, Ecofeminism,
Rights of Mother Earth and Deglobalisation*



*Systemic
Alternatives*

CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Vivir Bien	13
Degrowth	59
The Commons	77
Ecofeminism	101
The Rights of Mother Earth	131
Deglobalisation	161
Complementarities	185

INTRODUCTION

The premise of this publication is that we are living a systemic crisis that can only be solved through systemic alternatives. Humanity is facing a complex set of crises from environmental, economic, social to civilizational crisis. All of these crises are part of a whole. We cannot solve one of these crises without addressing the others. Each one is constantly receiving a strong feedback from the others. Strategies that focus only on one dimension of the crisis will not be able to solve the current systemic crisis and can even aggravate the current situation.

Since the first known civilization 8,000 years ago, humanity has suffered different crises that have combined several of those dimensions. However, it is the first time that we are facing a global crisis that covers every corner of the planet and is even altering the geological era of the Holocene in which different cultures emerged thanks to the stability of the climate. The magnitude of the crisis is so great that what is at stake is no longer a particular civilization but the fate of humanity and life as we know it. The systemic crisis is of such magnitude that, it is triggering the sixth extinction of life on Earth. As in the past, the planet will continue, but the environmental conditions that made possible the development of millions of life forms including human life will be totally disrupted.

This systemic crisis has been provoked by a set of factors among which stands out the incessant search of profit by the capitalist system at the expense of the planet and humanity. This system is leading to the extinction of species, significant biodiversity loss, the degradation of humanity and relentlessly pushing the limits of the planet. This is not one more cyclical crisis of capitalism in which after suffering a depression, recovers with record figures of growth and is then able to continue its expansion. This is a much deeper crisis that has spread to all aspects of life on Earth and now has its own dynamics without the possibility of reverting within the framework of the capitalist system.

Far from imploding by its internal contradictions, capitalism is being reconfigured and continues to search for new mechanisms to increase its rate of profit squeezing people and the planet until the last drop. Everything can be commodified. Everything becomes an “*opportunity*” for new business: natural disasters, financial speculation, militarism, human trafficking, the so-called “*environmental services*” of forests and water. There are no limits for capitalism. Overexploitation, overconsumption and waste are the main engines of this system that requires unlimited growth in a finite planet. Increased inequality and destruction of nature’s life cycles are its legacy.

Alternatives to the current system can only be constructed if we deepen our understanding of the process of reconfiguration of capitalism. Capitalism has shown its great flexibility to adapt, capture, reshape and create options for itself. What begins as a progressive movement or idea is captured, transformed and incorporated to maintain and reproduce the system.

However, although capitalism is a very important factor, it is not the only element that has led to this systemic crisis. Other key causes are productivism and extractivism that gave rise to capitalism and that have survived even in economies that wanted to overcome capitalism. The idea of a thriving society based on

continued economic growth has led to the breakdown of the climate balance achieved by the Earth system 11,000 years ago.

In addition to these factors we have the patriarchal structures and culture that have survived for centuries and nourished different forms of concentration of power in favor of privileged elites in both public and private spaces. Capitalism has not created patriarchy but it has accentuated it in a particular way by making invisible and devaluing the care and reproductive work that women and other human groups develop in spaces outside the market.

Finally, it is important to highlight the dominant anthropocentric vision that regards humans as a superior being that is separate and above nature. Just as patriarchy views women as an object, anthropocentrism views nature as something that can be exploited and transformed for human/man benefits. This anthropocentrism that already existed in several pre-capitalist societies has increased exponentially with the industrial revolution and the development of technology.

In this context when we talk about building systemic alternatives we refer not only to alternatives to capitalism but to strategies that are capable to confront and overcome patriarchy, productivism, extractivism and anthropocentrism.

Alternatives do not emerge in the vacuum. They emerge in the struggles of social movements, in their concrete experiences, initiatives, victories, defeats and resurgences. They emerge in a process of analysis, practice and proposals that are validated in reality.

There is not just one alternative. There are many alternatives. Some come from indigenous peoples, like the concept of “Vivir Bien”. Others, like degrowth are conceived in industrialized societies that have surpassed the limits of the planet.

Ecofeminism brings up the women dimension that is essential to overcome the current patriarchal regime that is interlinked to anthropocentrism. The rights of Mother Earth seeks to build new forms of relationship with nature. The commons emphasizes the self-management of human communities. Deglobalisation focuses on the analysis of the current process of globalisation and the development of alternatives for a world integration centered on people and nature.

These proposals are not the only ones that can contribute to the construction of Systemic Alternatives. Ecosocialism, food sovereignty, the solidarity economy, Ubuntu and other visions contribute from different perspectives to this process. All have strengths, limitations, contradictions and points in common. All are proposals under construction. They are pieces of a puzzle that have multiple answers and that is altered with the aggravation of the systemic crisis.

None of these proposals, neither *Vivir Bien*, degrowth, ecofeminism, deglobalisation, the rights of Mother Earth, nor the commons can adequately face the systemic crisis alone. All of these proposals and many others have to engage in processes of complementarity to forge systemic alternatives.

Complementarity means to complement one another to form a whole; to articulate with others to respond to the complexity of the problem we are facing; to learn from others; to see your own conclusions through the eyes of the other visions; to discover your strengths, common weaknesses and gaps; and to build deeper systemic alternatives.

The complementarity of visions does not seek to build just one single alternative but to develop multiple systemic alternatives. The diversity of realities that interact on our planet require several systemic alternatives. That is why we are speaking in plural. The

main goal of this publication is to promote a constructive and creative dialogue between these different visions.

This book is the result of the Systemic Alternatives initiative, which is coordinated by Focus on the Global South-Asia, Attac-France and Fundación Solón-Bolivia. The different chapters of the publication on the one hand reflect the opinion of its authors and on the other hand are the expressions of the processes of interactions and collective construction that have occurred throughout different events and exchanges organized by the Systemic Alternatives initiative that were made possible with the generous support of CCFD, Fastenopfer and DKA.

The coordinators of this publication hope that it will awaken and trigger new debates and increasingly deepen and articulate approaches that will help to deal with the systemic crisis that we live in.

VIVIR BIEN

By Pablo Solón

Vivir Bien or Buen Vivir is a concept that is under construction and that has passed through many different moments. There is not just one single definition of Vivir Bien and today this term is under dispute. At present, there are institutions linked to the business sector that now speak of Vivir Bien, but in an understanding that is very different from what its promoters imagined more than a decade ago in the fight against neoliberalism. Vivir Bien is a space of debate and controversy in which there is no single absolute truth. There are many truths as well as countless lies that today are canonized in the name of Vivir Bien.

The concept of Vivir Bien or Buen Vivir has gone through different phases. Three decades ago almost no one in South America was talking about this vision. What existed then was the *Aymara suma qamaña* and the *Quechua suma qawsay*, which express a set of ideas centered in the systems of knowledge, practice and organisation of the native peoples of the Andes of South America. *Suma qamaña* and *suma qawsay* were living realities of the Andean communities, the subject of studies by anthropologists and *Aymara* and *Quechua* intellectuals. During almost the entire 20th century this vision went unnoticed by broad sectors of the left and the workers' organisations, especially in urban areas.

Suma qamaña and *sumaq kawsay* had arisen some centuries earlier and still continued to exist in Andean communities, although retreating ever more under the pressure of modernity and developmentalism. Among other indigenous peoples of Latin America there also existed similar visions and terms such as *Teko Kavi* and *Ñandereko* of the *Guaraní*, *Shiir Waras* of the *Shuar* and *Küme Mongen* of the *Mapuche*.

The concept of *Vivir Bien* or *Buen Vivir* began to emerge and be theorized toward the late 20th and early 21st century. Perhaps *suma qamaña* and *sumaq kawsay* would never have given origin to *Vivir Bien* or *Buen Vivir* without the devastating impact of neoliberalism and the Washington consensus. The failure of Soviet socialism, the absence of alternative paradigms, the advance of the privatisation and the commodification of so many spheres of nature, inspired a process of relearning the indigenous practices and visions that had been devalued by capitalist modernity.

This process of revalorisation occurred in both theory and practice. The dismissal of tens of thousands of workers through the application of the neoliberal measures provoked a change in the class structures of the Andean countries of South America. In the case of Bolivia, the miners, who for almost a century, were the vanguard of all the social sectors, were relocated. In their place, the indigenous peoples and peasants came to the fore.

The indigenous struggle in defense of their territories not only generated solidarity but awakened interest in understanding this self-managing vision of their territories. Sectors of the left and progressive intellectuals that had lost their own utopias after the fall of the Berlin wall began to take a closer look at what could be learned from these indigenous cosmovisions. That is how the concept of *Vivir Bien* and *Buen Vivir* emerged. In reality, both terms are incomplete and insufficient translations of *suma qamaña* or *sumaq kawsay*, which have a more complex set of

meanings such as “*plentiful life*,” “*sweet life*,” “*harmonious life*,” “*sublime life*,” “*inclusive life*” or “*to know how to live*.”

Vivir Bien and Buen Vivir, as new concepts, had not yet matured when suddenly a new phase began with the arrival of the governments of Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006) and Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007). The terms were institutionalized by both countries in their new constitutions and transformed into referents for various normative and institutional reforms. Vivir Bien came to be a central part of the official discourse. The national development plans of both countries incorporated the terms as references.

The triumph of these concepts at a constitutional level prompted the rise of the complementarity of alternatives with other visions, such as Thomas Berry’s “*Earth Jurisprudence*,” generating the development of new proposals like the rights of Mother Earth and the rights of nature, which had not been present originally in Vivir Bien. The impact of Vivir Bien was so strong that a set of other systemic alternatives like degrowth, the commons, eco-socialism and others turned their attention at international level toward this vision.

However, this constitutional triumph of Vivir Bien was also the beginning of a new phase of controversies, and the main one came to be its concrete implementation in the reality of both countries. This new stage, which initially was accompanied by great hopes, very quickly turned into profound disputes. Is Vivir Bien really being applied? Are we moving toward this objective or have we lost our way?

The application of Vivir Bien or Buen Vivir, which both governments proclaimed nationally and internationally, led to a redefinition of the concept. What really is Vivir Bien? Is it an alternative vision to extractivism or is it a new form of development, more humane and nature-friendly?

In Bolivia and Ecuador alike there now exist different interpretations of what is meant by *Vivir Bien* or *Buen Vivir*. Simplistically, we can say that at present we have an official vision that is passable even for financial institutions like the World Bank and another one that is subversive and rebellious. As the years pass, the positions and differences have become sharper. Today, important longstanding proponents of *Vivir Bien* in both countries think that the respective governments are not practicing *Buen Vivir* and broad sectors of the population think these alternatives have remained only in the discourse. *Vivir Bien* as a paradigm in both countries is in crisis because it has lost credibility in their societies. However, its essence subsists and still nurtures processes of national and international thinking.

Is *Vivir Bien* really possible at the level of a country or a region? After a decade of governments claiming adherence to *Vivir Bien*, what are the errors committed and the lessons to be drawn? How can we advance toward a practice that is in line with the postulates of this vision?

We do not know what the future of *Vivir Bien* will be. Perhaps it will end as mere distractionist rhetoric or as a new form of conceptualisation of sustainable development. Today, the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia want the concept to adjust to their practices, and not that their policies really follow the subversive road of *Vivir Bien*. In the attempt to canonize their vision of *Vivir Bien*, they have in their favour, innumerable media and the complicity of international institutions that have seen that the best strategy for blurring this proposal is to appropriate it in their language.

In this context of controversy, relearning and an uncertain future it is fundamental to go to the essence of this proposal if we are to advance in its actual implementation.

The core elements

There is no decalogue of Vivir Bien or Buen Vivir. Any attempt to define it in absolute terms would stifle this proposal under construction. What we can do is to approximate its essence. Buen Vivir is not a set of cultural, social, environmental and economic prescriptions but a complex and dynamic mixture that starts from a philosophical conception of time and space and proceeds toward a cosmivision pertaining to the relation between human beings and nature.

In this text, we do not pretend to address all of its facets but rather to focus on those that can be central to the theoretical and practical construction of systemic alternatives. In our opinion, the strength of Vivir Bien in comparison with other alternatives like the commons, degrowth, ecofeminism, deglobalisation, ecosocialism, etc., is in the following elements: (1) its vision of the whole or the *Pacha*; (2) co-existing in multipolarity; (3) the pursuit of equilibrium; (4) the complementarity of diverse subjects; and (5) decolonisation.

The whole and the *Pacha*

The point of departure of any systemic alternative transformation is its comprehension of the whole. What is the totality in which the process of transformation we wish to undertake operates? Can we carry out a profound change in one country alone? Can we be successful if we focus only on economic, social and institutional aspects? Is the global capitalist system the whole subject matter or is it part of a larger whole?

For Vivir Bien, the whole is the *Pacha*. This Andean concept has often been translated simply as Earth. That is why we speak of *Pachamama* as Mother Earth. However, *Pacha* is a much broader concept that includes the indissoluble unity of space and time. *Pacha* is the whole in constant movement; it is the cosmos

in a permanent state of becoming. *Pacha* refers not only to the world of humans, animals and plants but also to the world above (*Hanaq Pacha*), inhabited by the sun, the moon and the stars, and the world below (*Ukhu Pacha*), where the dead and the spirits live. For Vivir Bien, all of this is interconnected and the whole makes up a unity.

In this space, the past, present and future, co-exist and interrelate dynamically. The Andean vision of time does not follow Newton's mechanics, which state that time is a coordinate independent of space and a magnitude that is identical for each observer. To the contrary, this cosmivision reminds us of Einstein's famous sentence: "*The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.*" Within the concept of the *Pacha*, the past is always present and is recreated by the future.

For Vivir Bien, time and space are not lineal but cyclical. The lineal notions of growth and progress are not compatible with that vision. Time advances in the form of a spiral. The future is connected with the past. In any advance, there is a return and any return is an advance. Hence, as the *Aymara* say, to walk forward we have to have our eyes on the past.

This spiral vision of time questions the very essence of the notion of "*development,*" of always advancing toward a higher point, of the search to always be better. This ascendant becoming is a fiction for Vivir Bien. Any advance involves turns, nothing is eternal, everything is transformed and is a re-encounter of the past, present and future.

In the *Pacha*, there is no separation between living beings and inert bodies, all have life. Life can only be explained by the relation between all the parts of the whole. There is no dichotomy between living beings and simple objects. Similarly, there is no separation between human beings and nature. All are part of nature and the *Pacha* as an entirety has life.

According to Josef Estermann (2012a), the *Pacha* “is not a machine or a giant mechanism that organizes itself and moves simply by mechanical laws, as stated by the modern European philosophers, especially Descartes and his followers. *Pacha* is rather a living organism in which all parts are related to one another, in constant interdependence and exchange. The basic principle of any ‘development’ should be, then, life (*kawsay*, *qamaña*, *jakaña*) in its totality, not only that of humans or animals and plants, but of the whole *Pacha*.”

The objective of human beings is not to control nature but to care for nature as one cares for the mother who has given you life. That is the sense of the expression “*Mother Earth*.” Society cannot be understood in relation to human beings alone; it is a community that has nature and the whole at its centre. We are the community of the *Pacha*, the community of an indissoluble whole in a permanent process of cyclical change.

Suma qamaña and *sumaq kawsay* are *Pachacentric*, not anthropocentric. The recognition and relevance to the whole is the key to *Vivir Bien*. The Andean cosmivision places the principle of “*totality*” at the core of its existence.

Vivir Bien means we have to centre ourselves on all aspects of life. Material life is only one aspect and cannot be reduced to the accumulation of things and objects. We have to learn to eat well, dance well, sleep well, drink well, to practice one’s beliefs, work for the community, take care of nature, appreciate elders, respect whatever surrounds us and learn as well how to die; because death is an integral part of the cycle of life. In the Aymara way of thinking, there is no death as understood in the West, in which the body disappears into a hell or a heaven. Here, death is just another moment of life, because one lives anew in the mountains or the depths of the lakes or rivers (Mamani, 2011).

In this sense, the whole has a spiritual dimension in which the conceptions of self, of the community and of nature are based on and linked cyclically in space and time. To live in accordance with the whole means living with emotion, concern, self-understanding and empathy toward others.

This cosmovision has a series of concrete implications. Namely, favourable policies are those that take into account the whole and not only some parts. To act only according to the interests of one part (humans, countries of the North, elites, material accumulation, etc.) will inevitably generate imbalances in the whole. Any measure must try to understand the multiple dimensions and interrelations of all the parts.

Coexisting in multipolarity

In the Vivir Bien vision, there is a duality in everything since everything has contradictory pairs. Pure good does not exist; good and bad always co-exist. Everything is and is not. The individual and the community are two poles of the same unit. An individual is a person only in as much as he or she works for the common good of his or her community. Without community there is no individual and without singular beings there is no community. A person is not strictly speaking a person without his or her partner. The election of authorities is by twos: man-woman, as a couple. This bipolarity or multipolarity of partners is present in everything. The individual-community polarity is immersed in the humanity-nature polarity. The community is a community not only of humans but also of non-humans.

Vivir Bien is learning to live together in this duality. The challenge is not “*to be*” but “*to learn to interrelate*” with the other contradictory parts of the whole. Existence is not something given but a relational concept.

In the Andean communities, individual private property coexists with communal property. There are differences and

tensions between members of a community. To manage those tensions various cultural practices are carried out in order to promote some kind of redistribution. This means, for example, that the wealthiest pay for the *fiesta* of the entire community or are responsible for other acts or services that benefit everyone.

There are also different practices of collaboration within the community. In the *Mink'a* everyone performs collective labour for the community. In the *Ayni* some members of the community support others and in return the latter repay this with support to the former during the seeding, the harvest or in some other way. In the Andean communities, the principal milestones are not limited only to the individual or his or her family, but are shared with the entire community. When a child is born, the whole community celebrates. Marriage is not only the union of two persons but the union of two families or communities.

The indigenous communities worldwide are very diverse. They vary from region to region and country to country. But notwithstanding their differences, they share the sense of responsibility and belonging to their communities. The worst punishment is to be expelled from the community; it is worse than death because it is to lose your membership, your essence, your identity. In contrast to this indigenous practice, the western societies tend to focus on the individual, on personal success, on the rights of the individual and above all on the protection of one's private property through laws and institutions.

Vivir Bien is not egalitarian; that is an illusion because inequalities and differences always exist. The key thing is not to remove them but to coexist with them, to prevent inequalities and differences from becoming more acute and polarizing until they destabilize the whole. In the framework of this vision, the fundamental point is to learn or relearn to live in community respecting the multipolarity of the whole.

Vivir Bien is a call to redefine what we mean by “well-being.” To be rich or poor is a condition, to be humane is an essential characteristic. Vivir Bien is concerned less with “well-being” (the condition of the person) and more with the “being well” (the essence of the person).

The pursuit of equilibrium

For Vivir Bien, the objective is the pursuit of equilibrium among the various elements that make up the whole — a harmony not only between human beings but also between humans and nature, between the material and the spiritual, between knowledge and wisdom, between diverse cultures and between different identities and realities.

Vivir Bien is not a version of development that is simply more democratic, non-anthropocentric, holistic or humanizing. This cosmivision has not embraced the notion of progress of the western civilisations. In opposition to permanent growth, it pursues equilibrium. This equilibrium is not eternal or permanent. Any equilibrium will give rise to new contradictions and disparities that call for new actions to rebalance things. That is the principal source of the movement, of the cyclical change in space-time. The pursuit of harmony between human beings and with Mother Earth is not the search for an idyllic state but the *raison d'être* of the whole.

This equilibrium is not similar to the stability that capitalism promises to achieve through continuous growth. Stability, just like permanent growth, is an illusion. Sooner or later any growth without limits will produce severe upheavals in the Pacha, as we are seeing now in the planet. Equilibrium is always dynamic. The objective is not to arrive at a perfect equilibrium without contradictions, as such does not exist. Everything moves in cycles, is a point of arrival and departure for the new imbalances, for new and more complex contradictions and complementarities.

Vivir Bien is not to achieve a paradise, but to pursue the well-being of everyone, the dynamic and changing equilibrium of the whole. Only by understanding the whole in its multiple components and in its becoming is it possible to contribute to the search for new equilibrium and to live in conformity with Vivir Bien.

According to Josef Estermann, in the Andean vision human beings are not owners or producers but rather “*caretakers*” (*Arariwa*), “*cultivators*” and “*facilitators*.” The only force that is strictly productive is Mother Earth, the *Pachamama*, and its various elements such as water, minerals, hydrocarbons and energy in general. Human beings do not “*produce*” or “*create*,” they cultivate or grow what *Pachamama* gives them (Estermann, 2012b). Human beings are those who help to give birth to Mother Earth (Medina, 2011). The role of humans is to be a bridge (*chakana*), a mediator that contributes to the pursuit of equilibrium, cultivating with wisdom what nature has given us. The challenge is not to be more or have more but to search continuously for equilibrium between the different parts of the community of the Earth.

This essential component of Vivir Bien has major implications because not only does it challenge the dominant paradigm of growth but also, it promotes a concrete alternative with the pursuit of equilibrium. A society is vigorous not by its growth but because it contributes to equilibrium both between human beings and with nature. It is fundamental in this process to overcome the concept of human beings as “*producers*,” “*conquerors*,” and “*transformers*” of nature, and to substitute that of “*caretakers*,” “*cultivators*,” and “*mediators*” of nature.

The complementarity of diverse subjects

Equilibrium between contraries that inhabit a whole can only be achieved through complementarity. Not by cancelling

the other but by complementing it. Complementarity means seeing the differences as part of a whole. The objective is how, between these different parts, some of which are antagonistic, we can complement and complete the totality. Differences and particularity are part of nature and life. We shall never all be the same and equal. What we must do is to respect diversity and find ways to articulate experiences, knowledges and ecosystems.

Capitalism operates under a very different dynamic. According to the logic of capital, what is fundamental is competition to increase efficiency. Whatever restricts or limits competition is negative. Competition will ensure that each industry or country specializes in something in which it can gain. In the end, each will become more efficient at something and will encourage innovation and increase productivity.

From the perspective of complementarity, competition is negative because some win and others lose, unbalancing the to-tality. Complementarity seeks optimisation through the combination of strengths. The more one works together with the other, the greater is the resilience of each and of all. Complementarity is not neutrality between opposites but recognition of the possibilities that provide the diversity to balance the whole.

In concrete terms, this means that instead of seeking efficiency through equal rules for unequal groups, industries or countries, we should promote asymmetrical rules that favour the most disadvantaged so that all can rise. *Vivir Bien* is the encounter of diversity. "*Knowing how to live*" is to practice pluriculturalism, to recognize and learn from difference without arrogance or prejudice.

Accepting diversity means that in our world there are other *Buen Vivires* in addition to the Andean version. Those *Buen Vivires* survive in the wisdom, knowledge and practices of

peoples who are pursuing their own identity. Vivir Bien is a plural concept, both in the recognition of human pluriculturalism and in the existence of diversity of ecosystems in nature (Gudynas & Acosta, 2014). Vivir Bien proposes an intercultural encounter between different cultures. There is no single alternative. There are many, which complement each other in order to make up systemic alternatives.

Vivir Bien is not a utopian regression to the past, but the recognition that in the history of humanity there have been, there are and there will be other forms of cultural, economic and social organisations that can contribute to overcoming the present systemic crisis to the extent that they complement each other.

Decolonisation

In the vision of Vivir Bien there is a continual struggle for decolonisation. The Spanish conquest 500 years ago initiated a new cycle. That colonisation did not end with the processes of independence and constitution of the republics in the 19th century, but it continues under new forms and structures of domination.

To decolonise is to dismantle those political, economic, social, cultural and mental systems that still rule. Decolonisation is a long-term process that does not happen once and forever. We can achieve independence from a foreign power and be more dependent on its economic hegemony. We can conquer a certain economic sovereignty yet continue being culturally subjugated. We can be fully acknowledged in our cultural identity by a new constitution of the State and yet continue to be prisoners of a western consumerist vision. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the decolonisation process: liberating our minds and souls, which have been captured by false and alien concepts.

To build Vivir Bien we have to decolonise our territories and our being. The decolonisation of territory means self-management

and self-determination at all levels. Decolonisation of the being is even more complex and includes overcoming many beliefs and values that impede our re-encounter with the *Pacha*.

In this context, the first step in Vivir Bien is to see with our own eyes, to think by ourselves, and to dream with our own dreams. A key point of departure is to encounter our roots, our identity, our history and our dignity. To decolonise is to reclaim our life, to recover the horizon. To decolonise is not to return to the past but to put the past in the present, to transform memory as an historical subject. As Rafael Bautista (2010) puts it,

“The linear course of time of modern physics is no longer of use to us; that is why we need a revolution in thinking, as part of the change. The past is not what is left behind and the future is not what is coming. The more we are conscious of the past, the greater the possibility of producing the future. The real subject of history is not the past as past but the present, because the present is what always needs a future and a past.”

Vivir Bien is a plea to recover the past in order to redeem the future, amplifying the overlooked voices of the communities and Mother Earth (Rivera, 2010).

Decolonisation means rejecting an unjust status quo and recovering our capacity to look deeply so as not to be trapped by colonial categories that limit our imagination. To decolonise is to respond to the injustices that are committed against other beings (human and non-human), to break down the false limits between humanity and the natural world, to say aloud what we think, to overcome the fear of being different, and to restore the dynamic and contradictory equilibrium that has been shattered by a dominant system and way of thinking.

Constitutionalisation and Implementation

Any institutionalisation and formalisation of a cosmovision always entails a dismemberment of that vision. Some aspects will be featured and others left aside. Some meanings will stand out while others are lost. In the end there remains a mutilated corpus that may reach a wider audience although it is incomplete.

That is what occurred with Vivir Bien and Buen Vivir under the governments of Evo Morales and Rafael Correa. For the first time, after centuries of exclusion, the indigenous peoples' vision was recognized and incorporated as a core element in the political agendas of both countries. *Suma qamaña* and *sumaq kawsay* were made central points of reference in the official discourse. Everything began to be done in its name.

Vivir Bien and Buen Vivir were included, in differing wording, in the new constitutions of both countries in 2008 and 2009. In Ecuador's case, the term "*sumak kawsay*" appears five times and "Buen Vivir" 23 times, even giving rise to a Chapter (Rights of Buen Vivir) and a Title (Rules of Buen Vivir) in the new constitution.

However, when we take a closer look at how this concept is developed, we find it has been incorporated as:

1. An ideal to achieve: "*A new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living, the sumak kawsay*"

2. A way of life: "*The State shall promote forms of production that assure the good way of living of the population...*"

1 In Ecuador it is written "*sumak kawsay*" and in Bolivia "*sumaq kawsay*".

3. A set of rights such as: water and food, healthy environment, information and communication, culture and science, education, habitat and housing, health, labour and social security.

4. A concept of what is entailed by development and productivity:

- *“The development structure is the organized, sustainable and dynamic group of economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental systems which underpin the achievement of the good way of living (sumak kawsay).”*
- *“Planning national development ... to enable access to the good way of living.”*
- *“To develop technologies and innovations that promote national production, raise efficiency and productivity, improve the quality of life and contribute to the achievement of the good way of living.”*

In the case of the Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, “Vivir Bien” is mentioned seven times and “*suma qamaña*” once. Unlike the Ecuadorian version of rights of Buen Vivir, the Bolivian text presents it as a set of ethical-moral principles: *“The State adopts and promotes the following as ethical, moral principles of the plural society: ama qhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa (do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief), suma qamaña (live well), ñandereko (live harmoniously), teko kavi (good life), ivi maraei (land without evil) and qhapaj ñan (noble path or life).”*

Similarly, in the new Bolivian constitution it is presented as an ideal to achieve, a way of life, and it is linked to *“productive development of the industrialisation of natural resources.”*

To summarize, the Ecuadorian version puts greater emphasis on a vision of rights while in the Bolivian version it is closer to

an ethical-moral concept. Nevertheless, in both constitutions those concepts co-exist with, are linked and instrumentalized in terms of a dominant developmentalist and productivist vision throughout the text.

Without denying the importance and the major difficulties involved in the drafting and approval of these constitutions, it is obvious that in their incorporation, *Vivir Bien*, *Buen Vivir* and *Suma Qamaña* lost much of their substance. They were transformed more into symbolic terms of recognition of the Andean indigenous peoples than in points of inflection for the capitalist developmentalist model that still exists under the so-called “plural economy.”

But beyond its formal inclusion in the constitution, the laws and development plans, it is fundamental to appreciate what has happened to this vision during the last decade. How has it been implemented? To what degree has it been given concrete expression in various aspects of life in these two countries?

To answer these questions, let us look at what has occurred at the level of the economy, nature and the strengthening of the communities and social organisations which, at the end of the day, will always be the principal protagonists of any process of change.

Populist extractivism

Both governments contend that we are following the road of *Vivir Bien* notwithstanding the difficulties and problems. The proof, they say, is in the statistics of GDP growth, the reduction of poverty, the increase in their international monetary reserves, the increase in public investment, the expansion of infrastructure in roads, health care, education, telephones and many other indicators.

The figures are real and in some cases very significant. GDP has grown by an average 4.2% per year in Ecuador and 5.0% in Bolivia: poverty has been reduced to 11% of the population in Ecuador and in Bolivia extreme poverty has fallen to 16%. This is due principally to an increase in public investment, from 4.2% to 15.6% of GDP in Ecuador and from 14.3% to 19.3% of GDP in Bolivia. This increase has made way for various social programs, bonuses or conditional cash transfers as the World Bank calls them, and in both countries inequality of income, as measured by the Gini index, has declined.

These achievements of the last decade were due to an increase in State revenues from the boom in prices of raw materials and the renegotiation, in some cases, of the contracts with the transnational corporations. In Bolivia, the nationalisation of hydrocarbons did not mean statization of foreign companies but a renegotiation of the distribution of profits. The share of total profits the gas transnationals get through earnings and recoverable costs declined from 43% in 2005 to only 22% in 2013. This meant that the Bolivian government had eight times more revenue, rising from 673 million USD in 2005 to 5.459 billion USD in 2013. This increase in State revenues has allowed a leap in public investment, the awarding of bonuses, the development of infrastructure projects, the extension of basic services, the increase in international reserves and other measures.

There is no doubt that the conditions of life have improved for various sectors of these populations, and that explains the popular support still enjoyed by both governments. However, are we really on the road to *Vivir Bien*?

Today, the prices of hydrocarbons and raw materials have dropped as a result of the deceleration in China's economy and both countries are moving dangerously toward economic crisis. Their revenues from raw materials exports have begun to fall, the international reserves are beginning to decline and external

indebtedness is rising. Factories that were previously statized -for example, Bolivia's ENATEX- are closed. President Correa is signing free trade treaties with the European Union that he previously rejected. Bolivia has put up for sale 1 billion USD in bonds on Wall Street and Evo Morales travels to New York to attract foreign investment.

Why are we in this situation? Simply because of external factors or because of an inconsistency with *Vivir Bien*?

Ecuador and Bolivia, like Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina, were captivated by the easy money from raw materials exports during the past decade. Although Bolivia and Ecuador, in their official discourse, told themselves the central objective was to reduce dependency on raw materials exports, cease being mono-export countries, diversify the economy, promote industrialisation, increase productivity and add value to what they produced, there is no denying that today these economies are more dependent on exports of raw materials than before.

The diversification of the economy has not occurred because it was more profitable in the immediate context to bet on extractivism and raw materials exports. The progressive governments wanted to show immediate results, through public infrastructure and social programs, and the quickest way to obtain resources was to continue pursuing the course so often criticized in the past. With a discourse of *Vivir Bien* that was sometimes anti-capitalist and progressive, they promoted a reinforcement of dependency on exports accompanied by some mechanisms of redistribution of income that did not alter the essence of the system of capitalist accumulation.

Notwithstanding the speeches, the transnationals and national oligarchies to a large extent, continued to enrich themselves and benefit from this extractivist-populist model. In the case of Ecuador,

“The main economic activities are concentrated in a few companies: 81% of the soft drinks market is in the hands of one company; likewise, one company controls 62% of the market in meat; five sugar mills (with just three owners) control 91% of the sugar market; two companies, 92% of the cooking oil market; two companies control 76% of the market for hygienic products, and we could go on.... The profits of the hundred largest firms increased by 12% between 2010 and 2011, and they are close to a staggering \$36 billion. It should be noted that the profits of business groups in the period 2007-2011 grew by 50% over the previous five years, which was the neoliberal period” (Acosta, 2014).

In Bolivia, the situation is similar. The profits of the banking system rose from 80 million USD in 2006 to 283 million USD in 2014. At the present time, two transnational companies, PETROBRAS and REPSOL, handle 75% of the natural gas production. The minister of Finance himself, in an “appeal to the conscience” of private enterprise to invest in Bolivia, noted that their profits increased from 900 million USD in 2005 to 4 billion USD in 2014.

In Bolivia, the interests of the great majority of pre-2006 landlords have not been affected. Land titling that largely favoured the indigenous and peasants have been promoted but no attempt has been made to dismantle the power of the big landowners. GMO-produced soy, which in 2005 represented only 21% of total exports of that product, accounted for 92% in 2012.

In practice, the slogan “*We want partners, not bosses*” has been used to re-articulate a new alliance of the Plurinational State with the old oligarchies. The government’s prevailing strategy has been to make agreements with the economic representatives of the opposition even while persecuting their political leaders. A sort of economic carrot and political stick which has meant that many

sectors of the bourgeoisie that initially were in opposition have since come over to supporting the government.

Now that the time of the fat cows has ended, the old and new rich allied with these governments are beginning to take their distance from them and to build their own political alternatives. The exports share of the revenue pie chart has shrunk and the sectors with the most weight want to preserve their profits as best they can at the expense of the State and the rest of the population. Hence, the return of post-populist neoliberalism. A return that comes not only from outside the “*progressive governments*” but also from within, now that the governments themselves are beginning to adopt criteria of efficiency and neoliberal profitability, closing factories and trimming increases in benefits instead of affecting the dominant sectors in the economy that have been enriched during the last decade.

The economic crisis is eroding the popularity of the progressive governments and the Right that was previously their ally is sabotaging them from outside as well as inside by carrying out coup-like actions, as we have seen in Brazil. We are witnessing the end of the cycle of the progressive governments and also of that populist extractivism that has been applied in the name of Vivir Bien.

Abuse of nature

One of the postulates of Vivir Bien that is most disseminated is that of harmony not only between human beings but also with nature. The governments of Bolivia and Ecuador initially won recognition for their emphasis on Mother Earth in their discourse. The Ecuadorian constitution of 2008 recognized the rights of nature. Bolivia followed suit in 2009, when it got the United Nations to back an international day of Mother Earth, and in 2010, adopted the law on the rights of Mother Earth in its legislation.

Everything seemed to point to a change in the relationship with nature, especially in light of concrete proposals such as the Yasuni ITT initiative in Ecuador. In the latter case, President Correa promised to keep an area in the Yasuni National Park, a region rich in biodiversity, free of petroleum exploitation in exchange for economic compensation from the international community. Specifically, Ecuador would leave an equivalent of 856 million barrels of oil below the ground in return for payment by developed countries of 350 million USD annually. This was the first time a country had proposed to break with extractivism in order to conserve nature and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

However, Ecuador's offer was not followed by the expected economic compensation. In 2013, Rafael Correa declared the Yasuni ITT initiative terminated and announced the beginning of petroleum exploitation in the area without even allowing a citizens' consultation on the matter to take place.

Bolivia likewise began with great promise. Art. 255 of its new constitution provided for the "*prohibition of importation, production and commercialisation of genetically modified organisms.*" However, in 2011, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly adopted Law No. 144 concerning the Communitarian Agricultural Productive Revolution, which in Art.15 replaces the prohibition with a requirement of registration and labelling of GMOs: "*Any product destined directly or indirectly for human consumption that is, contains or is derived from genetically modified organisms, shall be duly identified and indicate this condition.*" Five years after the adoption of this law there is still no labelling of GMO products and production of GMO soy for export has increased exponentially.

Similarly, the protection of national parks and protected areas has been called into question. The government has approved norms and projects for oil and gas exploration and exploitation

in such areas, and has attempted to build a highway through the middle of the TIPNIS national park, although its construction was paralyzed by the opposition of indigenous peoples in the region along with other sectors of the population.

Deforestation annually affects between 150,000 and 250,000 hectares of native forests, to the benefit above all of agro-industry, cattle raising and real estate speculators. The government has simply promised to end illegal deforestation by 2020 and has made no commitment to stop native deforestation in the current year, as recommended in Sustainable Development Goal number 15.

Many mining, hydroelectric, petroleum and infrastructure projects are being approved and implemented without real environmental impact assessments. The government has even adopted projects for nuclear energy development despite the contrary provisions in the constitution and the Rights of Mother Earth law.

Between discourse and reality, between law and practice, there is a huge chasm in both countries. It is impossible to cite any example during the last decade in Bolivia in which the rights of Mother Earth have prevailed over the interests of extraction, pollution and depredation of nature. The law has remained on paper with no implementation of such provisions as the establishment of a Mother Earth ombudsman. As Rafael Puente says:

“The bottom line seems to be: we denounce the abuse of Mother Earth by all the developed countries to the whole world, but we reserve for ourselves the need to mistreat Mother Earth until such time as we have reached a minimum level of development” (Puente, 2014).

Eduardo Gudynas maintains that the progressive governments “*feel most comfortable with such measures as campaigns to stop using plastic or to replace light bulbs but they resist environmental controls over investors or exporters.*” And he concludes that “*the caudillos feel that environmentalism is a luxury that only the wealthiest can afford, so it is not applicable in Latin America until poverty is overcome*” (Gudynas 2012).

Weakening of the community and the social organisations

The essence of Vivir Bien is in the strengthening of the community, the promotion of complementarity in contrast to competition, and the pursuit of equilibrium in opposition to boundless growth. How have we advanced in those aspects? Are the indigenous communities and social organisations stronger today? Are they more complementary to each other? Have the differences, hierarchies and privileges been reduced? Is there much greater creativity on the part of the social movements? Has there been an increase in their capacity for initiative and recreation of alternative imaginaries?

If we look at Bolivia, where the process of change has relied from the beginning on strong indigenous and social organisations, we can say that in general, the social movements and indigenous communities have been weakened, not strengthened, in the last decade.

What has happened is a sort of paradox. The indigenous communities and social organisations have received a series of material goods, infrastructures, credits, conditional cash transfers and services. But instead of contributing to their strengthening as living and self-managing organisms, they have been weakened, even fragmented.

Before the 2005 election victory, the social movements in Bolivia had the capacity not only to stop some privatizing projects around water and gas, but also to bring together a major part of the population behind the proposal of recovery of territory, nationalisation of hydrocarbons and redistribution of wealth. In other words, the indigenous peoples and social organisations were capable of building a societal alternative to neoliberalism. Today that dynamism has been lost; instead we have entered a phase of sectoral bargaining in which each and every sector has its demands and mobilizes in an effort to get from the Plurinational State the most it can in terms of public projects, credits, tax shares, etc.

The property granted by the government to leaders of indigenous communities and social organisations has generated a clientelism logic of patronage. The social movements have ceased to be the protagonists of change and have been transformed into clients seeking things and work from the government. Each seeks to improve its particular situation through exerting pressure on the State as benefactor. It is no longer a question of changing Bolivia but of getting the best cut. In reality, the idea of building a new society based on indigenous values has been lost.

The indigenous communities, which for centuries resisted the Spanish conquistadors' so-called modernity and capitalism have now become prisoners of this mirage thanks to the practices and discourse of their indigenous government, which tells them the task is to achieve a 5% increase in GDP growth per year over the next 15 years. The modernity of consumption and efficiency that in the past were resisted by the indigenous communities are now beginning to be accepted. Projects that previously were rejected by the peasant organisations, such as megadams, or were considered unthinkable, like a nuclear plant, are today accepted in the name of modernity. What the Conquest, the Republic and neoliberalism were unable to do over centuries, the present government has achieved in a decade: transforming the

vision of a majority of indigenous peoples. Perhaps that is why the last census revealed a striking fact: the number of persons who considered themselves indigenous, far from increasing, had declined from 62% in 1990 to only 41% in 2013.

An example of this expansion of capitalist modernity that erodes the communities and the indigenous vision is the high-risk Dakar off-road race endurance competition that since 2014 travels through Bolivia. For any humanist, environmentalist and anti-capitalist activist, the Dakar race is a deplorable event that has arrived to the country with the direct intervention of the president of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In 2017, the government paid 4 million dollars to the organizers of this competition in order to get half of its journey to be held in Bolivia.

The Dakar race has nothing to do with the Bolivian reality or with *Vivir Bien*. It is a competition in which one needs at least 80.000 USD to participate; the competitors promote major transnational enterprises. The Dakar race is a sort of Roman circus of the decadent era of fossil fuels. Each year some pilots and spectators are killed. The archaeological damage and environmental impacts are a real scourge for Mother Earth. The Dakar race is a colonizing spectacle in violation of nature and human conscience. It is so widely questioned and the cost is so high that Chile and Peru no longer participate in it. However, the Dakar survives in Latin America thanks to the help and support of the indigenous and Plurinational government of Bolivia.

The authorities justify and praise the Dakar race, saying it is a performance that brings us closer to modernity, that it generates “economic movement” of more than 100 million USD, and that it serves to promote Bolivia as a tourist destination. If the objective really were to publicize the country, the government could promote another class of events based on our cultural traditions, such as the *Chasqui*, for example. That is, an event in which one crosses Bolivia by foot, as the ancient *Chasqui* did, sharing

experiences, knowledge of different regions and ecological strata, seeking complementarity among distinct types of knowledge, encouraging solidarity among participants and promoting the values of Vivir Bien and respect for nature.

However, the incredible thing is that there has been no discussion about this within the government or the social organisations. Critical voices are marginal and do not in fact come from the indigenous peoples, who always used to be critical of these practices. If it had ever occurred to any of the neoliberal governments to bring the Dakar race to Bolivia, you can be sure that the social organisations would have organized road blockades in some of its stretches. However, it is the indigenous government of the process of change that promotes it, and that completely reverses the values and principles they had defended for centuries.

The social and indigenous organisations have also been eroded by corruption. Having more available resources, some leaders directly administering mechanism like the Indigenous Development Fund in Bolivia have been corrupted or have ended up being accomplices by omission.

The indigenous, social and civil organisations that have opposed policies of the central government have been marginalized, ignored, worn down and even divided. The indigenous solidarity that was once a natural practice has broken down when indigenous sectors were repressed (during TIPNIS and *Takovo Mora*) and the rest of the peasant and indigenous organisations have been rather quiet.

In short, Vivir Bien has been absent in practice and confined solely to speeches.

Vivir Bien Is Possible

If what we have experienced is the application of an extractivist-populist model in the name of Vivir Bien, what might have been a practical implementation of Vivir Bien more consistent with its principles and vision? Is Vivir Bien possible in the reality of one country? Where is the problem? In its inapplicability beyond the limits of the indigenous communities? In the lack of understanding of this vision? Is this proposal not mature enough?

It is not easy to answer these questions. A series of concrete proposals for its implementation have been advanced throughout the last decade but almost all have been partial or specific to a sector. There has been no articulated, integral and coherent proposal of measures to advance along the road of Vivir Bien in either Bolivia or Ecuador. Only some very useful approaches but of a particular character without a comprehensive complex of initiatives that would allow us to transform the reality in its many dimensions. The questioning of the poor or contradictory implementation of Vivir Bien, or of its lack of implementation, has not been accompanied by a holistic set of proposals at various levels. When it comes to applying Vivir Bien, we have forgotten one of its most important postulates: totality and completeness.

Overcoming statism

A key error was to think that Vivir Bien could be fully developed using State power, when in reality, Vivir Bien is a proposal that is built on the basis of the society. The constitutional recognition of Vivir Bien and Buen Vivir deepens this illusion and encourages the belief that advances toward Vivir Bien could be made through a national State-based “*development*” plan when the secret of this vision in fact lies in the strengthening of the community, in boosting its capacity for complementarity with other communities and in the self-management of its territory.

In the case of Bolivia, the vice-president is the principal exponent of this statist vision which, applied in its extreme, is the opposite of Vivir Bien. As Álvaro García Linera has put it:

“The State is the only actor that can unite society. It is the State that takes on the synthesis of the general will, plans the strategic framework and steers the front carriage of the economic locomotive. The second carriage is Bolivian private investment. The third is foreign investment. The fourth is small business. The fifth is the peasant economy and the sixth, the indigenous economy. This is the strategic order in which the country’s economy must be organized” (García, 2007).

This vision of an all-powerful State that oversees everything is contrary to Vivir Bien. It is society that must determine its own course if we are to counteract the perverse dynamic that any State power involves.

In the Bolivian case, we have always spoken of an internal struggle between the exponents of “developmentalism” and the “pachamamistas,” between the “modernists” and the adherents of Vivir Bien. However, it must be said that the error of the “pachamamistas” and supporters of Vivir Bien was that we too were profoundly statist. We thought that in opposition to the neoliberalism that had dismantled the State the fundamental thing was to give more power to the State, ignoring the essence of the logic of power.

The “pachamamistas” and the developmentalists have differed over the orientation that the empowerment of the State ought to take. For Bolivia’s vice-president, the fundamental objective was to enlist our forces “in the implementation of a new economic model that I have provisionally called ‘**Andean-Amazonian capitalism**’. That is, **the construction of a strong State** that regulates the expansion of the industrial economy, extracts its profits and transfers them to the community in order to strengthen forms of

self-organisation and commercial development that are specifically Andean and Amazonian” (García, 2007).

The discussion of this proposal was centered on the concept of “*Andean-Amazonian capitalism*” but not on the conception of the State that it implied. That was in the time of the “*nationalisation of hydrocarbons*” and whatever pointed to the strengthening of the State seemed correct. The differences were more over the rationale of a strong State: was it to build *Vivir Bien* or to develop a new phase in the construction of capitalism?

The role of the State in the construction of *Vivir Bien* cannot be, nor should it be, that of an organizer and planner of society as a whole. The State must be one more factor that contributes to the empowerment of the communities and social organisations through practices that are not of clientelism. That means that before providing the communities and social organisations with material goods such as vehicles, union headquarters or sports fields, it is necessary to encourage them to analyze, debate, question, construct public policies and in many cases carry them out without awaiting a green light from the State. The concepts of *suma qamaña* and *suma qawsay* survived for centuries in struggle against the Inca State, the colonial State, the republican, nationalist and neoliberal State. These were weighty communitarian visions and practices albeit without recognition by the established powers in each of those epochs. By “*statizing*” *Vivir Bien* we began to undermine its power as a force for self-management and questioning.

Normally, for the Marxist left, the objective is to take power in order to change society. This entails capturing and transforming the State in order to change society from above. However, the experience with “*progressive*” governments of the last decade would demonstrate to us that for *Vivir Bien*, the taking of power should be in order to encourage even more the process of emancipation and self-determination from below, questioning

and subverting all of the colonial structures that persist or arise even in the new State of the process of change.

Empowering the local and communitarian

Thinking in terms of the whole means that the economy must not be placed at the center in the construction of a new society. What we have seen in recent years is an obsession on the part of the misnamed governments of Vivir Bien with growth in terms of GDP that measures only the part of the economy that is commodified, that is, the production of goods and services that enter the capitalist market in a way that destroys nature and human beings.

Instead of economic growth for the capitalist market, efforts should be oriented to promoting the recovery of equilibrium at all levels — a search for equilibrium between different sectors of the economy and society that cannot be achieved without attacking the structural causes of inequality.

The present inequality, which is severe, cannot be overcome through conditional cash transfers of money to the poorer sectors. Redistribution cannot be limited to the reassignment of the fraction of revenue that is not appropriated by the economically more powerful sectors. The search for equality between human beings cannot be reduced to welfare programs while the big landlords, extractive enterprises and big bankers continue to accumulate substantial profits.

The experience of the last decade shows that the transnational enterprises and domestic oligarchies, when obliged by social pressure, may accept a redistribution of income so as not to lose all their profits. However, when the bonanza of international prices comes to an end and hits them in their pockets, they deploy all kinds of actions to remove the “*progressives*” from government and apply the most savage neoliberal policies.

It is not possible to modify substantially the redistribution of wealth without substantially altering the power of the powerful. What was done was to renegotiate contracts with transnational corporations, put some enterprises under State ownership, and try to get on well with the banks, the agribusiness, some private sectors and to attract foreign investment that can be invested “fairly.”

This model — in first place the State, in second place domestic private investment, in third place foreign investment, in fourth place micro-enterprises, in fifth place the peasant economy, and in the last place the indigenous economy — has failed. The so-called “plural economy” was a delusion because it pretended that everyone was going to be recognized and enjoy equal conditions when in reality an hierarchical and pyramidal structure survived, in which the State substantively increased public investment while the private (national and foreign) sector simply reaped its profits without reinvesting and the micro-business, peasant and indigenous sector was relegated to a role as recipients of some public welfare programs.

Where could our efforts have been directed? Toward ensuring that the new economy be centered precisely on the peasant and indigenous economy and small-scale local economies. Toward ensuring a real redistribution of the wealth concentrated in the hands of the financial, extractivist and agro-industrial sectors. To do this it is fundamental to go back and redistribute the property of the big landlords, to regulate private banking more effectively and gradually bring it under State ownership, to make more efficient use of the resources of the extractive industries in order to promote projects that would help us escape extractivism, and to promote the strengthening of the local and communitarian economies and small and medium business owners through strengthening their capacity for self-management and complementarity.

The true potential of countries like Bolivia is in agro-ecology, agro-forestry, the strengthening of food sovereignty based on the indigenous and peasant communities. In that perspective, the fundamental role of the State should not be to create communitarian enterprises from above but to empower the networks of production, exchange, credit, traditional knowledge and innovation at the local level and with the active participation of the local actors. But what predominated was not the strengthening of the communitarian social fabric but the production of dazzling and showy works that would have immediate demonstrative impact. Ecological production free of transgenics was left to the speeches while in the deeds the consumption of agro-toxins and glyphosates was increased in the country during the last decade.

The promotion of mega-infrastructure projects, mega-dams, and nuclear research centers is part of an obsolete model of capitalist development from the last century. Far from trying to proceed by way of this “*modernity*,” which is beginning to be abandoned by the countries of the North themselves, it is necessary to leap over stages and to take advantage of the most recent advances in science from a communitarian, social and not privatizing perspective. That means looking to community, family and municipal solar and wind energy to transform Bolivians from mere consumers of electrical energy into producers of electricity.

The empowerment of communities must include benefiting from ancestral practices and knowledges and combining them with the most recent technological advances provided that they help to re-establish equilibrium with nature and strengthen human communities. Renewable energies are not in themselves a solution to the systemic crisis since they can also be used to displace populations, gain control over resources and reconfigure capitalism.

The experience of the last decade clearly shows that a plural economy can only be achieved if the domination of capital

is overcome. This is not done through making anti-capitalist speeches but by taking effective measures in opposition to the financial capital that is the backbone of capitalism. If measures are not taken to dismantle big business, the other components of the plural economy will always be marginalized and ignored.

Placing local and community production in the center does not mean abandoning or setting aside State enterprises and public services which, by their very nature, can best be managed and provided at the State and national level. This applies, for example, to banking or essential public services like education, health care and telecommunications that must be universal in nature. However, such State undertakings and public services should be accompanied by effective mechanisms for citizen participation in order to avoid their bureaucratisation and corruption, and be adapted to the realities experienced in each region.

We have always criticized the expression “export or die,” which was coined by the neoliberal governments. However, the “progressive” governments have fallen for the same dynamic. The production they favour is one that produces foreign exchange, so they allow the big agribusiness corporations to export GMO-produced soy or accept a free-trade treaty with the European Union in order to promote banana exports.

In the *Vivir Bien* framework, the objective is to generate greater resilience in the local and national economies faced with ups and downs of the global economy. It is not a question of abandoning exports but of ensuring that the economy does not revolve around the export of a handful of products. The goal is to be more sovereign, strengthening the local human communities and ecosystems of the Earth.

Free-trade agreements have a distinct logic. They force countries, industries and companies that are completely unequal to compete as if they were equal. In such conditions the winners

will always be the transnational corporations, the big agribusiness interests and the most powerful sectors of finance capital. The free-trade rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the regional and bilateral free-trade treaties, undermine the possibility of building a society of Vivir Bien because they privilege the big corporations to the prejudice of the small producer.

The experience of the last decade shows us that it is not sufficient to reject or overturn the free-trade treaties; it is necessary to advance by implementing measures to control foreign trade, to achieve a important State control over foreign trade and effective control of smuggling. Without the application of these types of measures, competition from transnational production and contraband will manage to undermine local, community and national economies as has occurred under the so-called progressive governments.

In the present global economy it is not possible to achieve full import substitution in one country. The small economies will always be more dependent on imports. Accordingly, it is very important to regulate imports to ensure that foreign exchange is not oriented to excessive consumption and is instead directed to items that are essential to the strengthening of the local economies.

This objective cannot be achieved only through mechanisms to control foreign trade but requires as well the effective promotion of cultural patterns of sustainable consumption. Under the progressive governments, the income of sectors of the population has improved, but the same practices of consumption and waste of capitalist societies have continued.

To be nature

The slogan “*sow the oil*” (*sembrar el petróleo*), that is, to promote more extractivism in order to diversify the economy,

embraced by President Correa, is an illusion. Just as alcoholism cannot be overcome by ingesting more alcohol, extractivism cannot be overcome by promoting more extractivism.

In dependent capitalist countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, the struggle against extractivism becomes extremely difficult because of the articulation of the logic of capital and the logic of power. Extractivism is the quickest way to obtain dollars, and that is essential for retaining government power. Thus extractivism creates a perverse addiction that undermines the efforts at diversification of the economy and construction of *Vivir Bien*. In Bolivia today, everyone is more addicted to the rent derived from hydrocarbons: the central and departmental governments, municipalities, universities, armed forces, indigenous leaders and the general population.

To break with this addiction it is necessary to recognize, first, that it exists. If, in Bolivia's case, a fraction of the billions of dollars in public funds invested in oil and gas exploration were invested in solar energy and community wind power, we could satisfy the entire national demand.

The same can be said in relation to deforestation. Instead of drawing up plans for reforestation, which is extremely costly, takes too long to yield results, has uncertain outcomes, and will never compensate for the wealth and biodiversity of the native forests we have destroyed, what should be done is to learn from the indigenous communities that live in coexistence with the forest, and promote agroforestry initiatives. The argument that without deforestation we cannot guarantee the food security of Bolivians is a false one. According to official statistics, since 2001 more than 8.6 million hectares have been deforested, while the total area of the country that is under cultivation has increased by only 3.5 million hectares, of which 1.9 million hectares are devoted to industrial agriculture, predominantly soy for export (1.2 million hectares).

The reason why the rights of nature have remained on paper up to now is that the progressive governments have no desire to limit their extractivist projects. The rights of nature and of Mother Earth require autonomous mechanisms and regulations to reduce and punish the constant violations that are committed against ecosystems, and above all to promote the restoration and recovery of those areas that have been affected.

The nationalisation of natural resources like oil does not mean that they can then be exploited to the last drop. State ownership of polluting or consumerist industries does not convert them into clean and sustainable enterprises. The experience of the last decade teaches us that it is not enough to nationalize or statize the means of production (mines, oil and gas deposits, etc.); it is necessary to transform them and replace them with other means that allow the flourishing of more just and equitable eco-societies.

As was stated in the People's Agreement drafted and adopted in the first World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, it is productivism, and not just capitalism, that must be overcome:

“The Soviet experience has shown us that a predatory production system with devastating conditions that make life similar to that of capitalism was possible with other ownership relationships. The alternatives must lead to a profound transformation of civilisation. Without this profound transformation, it will not be possible to continue life on planet Earth. Humanity is faced with a huge dilemma: continue down the road of capitalism, patriarchy, Progress and death, or embark on the path of harmony with nature and respect for life” (Acuerdo de los Pueblos, 2010).

Full cultural diversity

One of the greatest strengths of the changes that have occurred under the progressive governments has to do with the recognition of cultural diversity. In Bolivia's case, the concept of a Plurinational State is an achievement that, if applied to the realities of other countries, can be of assistance in the coexistence of different nationalities and nations within the same territory. Other very important advances are the recognition of native languages, the requirement that civil servants speak at least two languages (Spanish and an indigenous language), recognition of the indigenous autonomies and the indigenous peasant and native justice system.

However, many of those propositions have remained only in the Constitution and some laws, and in reality have encountered major problems in their implementation. In Bolivia the recognition of indigenous municipalities and territories has been characterized as "*an obstacle race*." There has been no effective policy under the indigenous central government for encouraging the constitution of indigenous autonomies that are self-governing, exercising communitarian democracy without political parties, and with the right to be consulted concerning proposals for the exploitation of natural resources in their territories.

Indigenous law has been recognized but restricted to the communities, the regular justice system having de facto supremacy over indigenous justice. There is little recognition of the great contribution that could be made through the establishment of a more participatory justice system that is free of charge, respectful of nature and seeks resolution of disputes through participative consensus.

Dismantling patriarchy

In constitutional and legal terms there have been important advances in gender equity and the participation of women in government and the parliament. A set of norms has been adopted in relation to land, equality of opportunities, violence against women, maternal breast-feeding, women's health, job security for mothers, retirement, etc. These are an advance in legal terms. The proportion of women in the National Assembly, municipal councils, the cabinet and other governmental bodies is among the highest in the world.

However, Bolivia still has a long way to go in breaking from patriarchal customs and prejudices. And the latter are reinforced by a series of male chauvinist practices and images based on expressions, jokes and valuations that issue from the central core of the government, which is still essentially made up of men.

The patriarchal order located in the family, communal and State structures survives and is reproduced in multiple forms which sometimes go unnoticed. Chauvinist jokes and comments by senior officials are not answered by female ministers and members of the Assembly, and instead are sometimes justified. The greater presence of women in positions of political responsibility has not been translated into actions aimed at dis-establishing power relationships that reproduce the subordination and oppression of women. Discriminatory stereotypes and cultural patterns persist and are fuelled by the conduct of the most influential men.

The model of production and redistribution of wealth to the detriment of women, the role of men and women in household labour, the separation between public and private life have not been substantially affected. Women's autonomy and right to decide remains restricted; and violence against women, sometimes resulting in their death, continues to be an everyday reality.

In its original conception, Vivir Bien did not emphasize the subject of dismantling patriarchy at the level of the family, society and the State. However, it is clear that this is an essential component in advancing toward a society of equilibrium between all human beings and with nature.

Real democracy

Vivir Bien postulates respect, equilibrium and complementarity among the different parts of the whole. However, what we have seen in the progressive governments has been an attempt by the executive to monopolize and control the other powers. The defeat of the most recalcitrant expressions of the neoliberal right has not translated into a re-launching of a vigorous democracy in which the parliamentarians propose, criticize and adopt rules based on their own criteria or those of their constituents. What we have seen instead is the replacement of neoliberal democracy by a democracy of hand raisers that simply follow the instructions of the central government.

In Bolivia the executive has adopted manners and skills for controlling the major organs of justice, ensuring that proposals as novel as the election of judges in the most important positions of a judicial nature remain devalued and discredited. Likewise, the participation and social control established in the new Constitution have remained on paper.

Without a real and effective democracy it is not possible to advance in the self-management, self-determination and empowerment of the communities and social organisations that are essential to Vivir Bien. The exercise of democracy entails limiting the power of the powerful and the State itself. If the central government instrumentalizes popular participation, co-opts social organisations and controls the various powers of the State, the construction of a real democracy is crippled. This democracy is a key piece in the construction of Vivir Bien at the

level of a country or a region because any government and people are going to make mistakes in the construction of a new eco-society, and the only way to detect those mistakes, correct them and re-imagine new paths is with the involvement of everyone.

International complementarity

The experience of this decade shows us clearly that Vivir Bien is not possible in a single country in the context of a global economy that is capitalist, productivist, extractivist, patriarchal and anthropocentric. If this vision is to advance and thrive, a key element is its articulation and complementarity with other similar processes in other countries. This process cannot be limited to the promotion of agreements for integration that do not follow the rules of free trade, nor can it exist merely at the level of States or governments. Analysts have stated that probably one of the biggest shortcomings of the last decade was how some alliances of social and indigenous movements became too close to some progressive governments and hence had lost some of their ability to develop independently. Looking back, some in the global justice movement in Latin America have reflected that instead of becoming stronger, some were weakened by its inability to articulate its own independent vision of change. Some had confused its utopias with the political plans of the progressive governments and lost its capacity to criticize or to dream beyond that.

If the processes of transformation are to flourish, they need to expand beyond the national borders and into the countries that now colonize the planet in different forms. Without that dissemination to the crucial centers of global power, the processes of change will end up isolating themselves and losing vitality until they have repudiated the very principles and values that once gave birth to them.

To that extent the future of Vivir Bien largely depends on the recovery, reconstruction and empowerment of other visions that to varying degrees point toward the same objective in the different continents of the planet. Vivir Bien is possible only through complementarity with and feedback from other systemic alternatives.

Bibliography

Acosta, A. (2010). *El Buen Vivir en el camino del post-desarrollo Una lectura desde la Constitución de Montecristi*. Ecuador: FES-ILDIS.

Acosta, A. (2014). *Ecuador: La 'revolución ciudadana', el modelo extractivista y las izquierdas críticas*, interview with Blanca S. Fernández et. al.

Acuerdo de los Pueblos (2010). *Conclusiones del grupo 1 y 2 de la CMPPC y los derechos de la Madre Tierra*. Cochabamba, Bolivia: CMPPC.

Albó, X. (2011). *Suma qamaña = convivir bien. ¿Cómo medirlo?* in Vivir Bien: ¿paradigma no-capitalista? La Paz, Bolivia: CIDES-UMSA.

Banco Central del Ecuador (2014). *Estadísticas Macroeconómicas, Presentación Estructural*. Ecuador: BCE

Bautista, R. (2010). *Hacia una constitución del sentido significativo del 'vivir bien'*. La Paz, Bolivia: Rincón Ediciones.

Blaser, M. (2010). *Storytelling Globalization from the Chaco and Beyond*. Durham, England: Duke University Press.

Dávalos, P. (2008). *Reflexiones sobre el sumak kawsay (el buen vivir) y las teorías del desarrollo*. Ecuador, ALAI America Latina en Movimiento.

Escobar, A. (1992). *‘Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements’*. Social Text. No. 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992), pp. 20-56

Estermann, J. (2012a). *Crecimiento cancerígeno versus el Vivir Bien*.

Estermann, J. (2012b). *Crisis civilizatoria y Vivir Bien*. POLIS Revista Latinoamericana.

García, A. (2006). *El ‘capitalismo andino-amazónico’*. Le Monde Diplomatique.

García, A. (2007). *Fue un error no liderar el pedido autonómico*, interview in El Deber, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, January 21st quoted by Eric Toussaint in ¿Un capitalismo andino-amazónico? CADTM/Rebelión, 2009.

Gudynas, E. (2011a). *Buen Vivir: Germinando alternativas al desarrollo*. ALAI, América Latina en Movimiento, No. 462, febrero 2011.

Gudynas, E. (2011b). *‘Buen Vivir: Today’s Tomorrow’*. Development, volume 54, Issue 4, pp 441–447. December 2011.

Gudynas, E. (2011c). *Tensiones, contradicciones y oportunidades de la dimensión ambiental del Buen Vivir*, in Vivir Bien: ¿paradigma no-capitalista? La Paz, Bolivia: CIDES-UMSA.

Gudynas, E. (2012). *La izquierda marrón*. ALAI, America Latina en Movimiento, <http://www.alainet.org/es/active/53106>

Gudynas E. y Acosta A. (2014). *La Renovación de la crítica al desarrollo y el buen vivir como alternativa*. Maracaibo, Venezuela: Revista Internacional de Filosofía Iberoamericana y Teoría Social, Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana, year 16, N°53 (April-June, 2011) pp 71-83.

Ibáñez, A. (2010). *Un acercamiento al Buen vivir*. El Salvador: Gloobalhooy nº25.

Latouche, S. (2009). *Pequeño tratado del decrecimiento sereno*. Barcelona, España: Icaria.

Mamani Ramírez, P. (2011). *Qamir qamaña: dureza de 'estar estando' y dulzura de 'ser siendo'* in *Vivir Bien: ¿paradigma no-capitalista?* La Paz, Bolivia: CIDES-UMSA.

Martínez-Alier, et al. (2010). '*Sustainable De-growth: Mapping the context, criticisms and future prospects of an emergent paradigm*'. *Ecological Economics*. Volume 69, Issue 9, 15 July 2010, pp 1741-1747

Medina, J. (2011). *Acerca del Suma Qamaña* in *Vivir Bien: ¿paradigma no-capitalista?* La Paz, Bolivia: CIDES-UMSA.

Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas Públicas (2014). *Bolivia: una mirada a los logros más importantes del modelo económico*.

Naess, A. (1989). *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Petras, J. (2012). *El capitalismo extractivo y las diferencias en el bando latinoamericano progresista*. <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=149207>

Plan Nacional de Desarrollo: Bolivia Digna, Soberana, Productiva y Democrática para Vivir Bien (2007).

Prada, R. (2012). *Matricidio del Estado patriarcal. Evaluación de la ley marco de la madre tierra y desarrollo integral para vivir bien*.

Puente, R. (2011). '*Vivir Bien' y descolonización* in *Vivir Bien: ¿paradigma no-capitalista?* La Paz, Bolivia: CIDES-UMSA.

Puente, R. (2014). *La defensa de la Madre Tierra se redujo a mero discurso*. Bolivia: Pagina Siete January 22nd 2014.

Quijano, A. y Ennis, M. (2000). 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America' *Nepantla: Views from the South*. Vol. 1, No. 3, pp 519-532.

Ramírez, R. (2010). *Socialismo del sumak kawsay o biosocialismo republicano*, in *Los nuevos retos de América Latina. Socialismo y sumak kawsay*. Quito, Ecuador: SENPLADES.

Rivera, S. (1991). *Pachakuti: los Horizontes históricos del colonialismo interno*. Published by NACLA as "Aymara Past, Aymara Future". Bolume 25, Issue 3, pp 18-45.

Saunders, K. (2002). *Feminist Post-Development Thought*. London, United Kingdom: Zed Books.

Stefanoni, P. (2009). 'Indianisation' *du nationalisme ou refondation permanente de la Bolivie*. *Alternatives Sud*, Vol. 16. N°3 pp 27-44.

Villanueva, A. (2012). *¿Quo vadis socialismo comunitario para vivir bien?* <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=159941>

Walsh, C. (2010). 'Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional arrangements and (de)colonial entanglements'. *Development* Volume 53, Issue 1, pp 15-21.

Yampara, S. (2001). 'Viaje del Jaqi a la Qamaña, El hombre en el Vivir Bien' in *La comprensión indígena de la Buena Vida*, La Paz: GTZ y Federación Asociaciones Municipales Bolivia.

DEGROWTH

By Geneviève Azam

The economic growth paradigm is central to the representations of the world and the economic policies that have emerged since 1945. However, the notion of economic growth as a regular, ongoing, self-sustained process - which reached its peak during the so-called “*Glorious Thirty*”¹ years - has fallen apart. This post-World War II period, in which growth became a necessary condition for social progress and development, no longer holds up to critical analysis. This growth occurred, in fact, in “*developed*” industrialised countries, involved a minority of the world population and was built on the senseless waste and pillaging of limited natural resources, access to cheap fossil fuels, dependency on killer technologies and the manufacturing of global inequalities and imbalances that would prove to be unbearable and unsustainable.

The goal of “*development*” sustained this process by creating the illusion that “*underdeveloped*” or “*developing*” countries could “*catch up*.” Development, and the growth that underlies it, became the global norm for all models, whether they were socialist or capitalist. Growth engenders a series of disparities that make new growth necessary.

¹ “*Les Trente Glorieuses*” was the thirty-year period that went from the boom of the post-World War II period to the 1973 oil crisis.

When it became evident that geophysical limits could bring the process to a halt, the concepts of durable or sustainable development were proposed. The 1987 Brundtland Report entitled *Our Common Future* advocated for “clean” growth that guarantees ecological sustainability, development and social justice all at the same time. This proposal became the backbone of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. However, the explosion of inequalities and the fact that we have gone beyond the ecological limits of the planet have rendered hopes for sustainable development obsolete.

Imposed around the world, neoliberal policies buried earlier development policies that were heavily marked by State intervention. With economic and financial globalisation, the integration of the world markets is said to be what will achieve development, which often involves countries resorting to assuming massive debts and increasing payments to service them. These, in turn, drive forced growth to guarantee repayment. It is thus no longer about balancing the three pillars of sustainable development - growth, social justice and the sustainability of the planet - but rather entrusting the task of caring for society and the Earth to the economy and the market. The green economy and green growth replaced the sustainable development goals. The “green economy” seeks to optimise resource management and incorporate nature into the large cycle of production, manufacturing and market valuation.

Despite all of this, economic growth has not been achieved. For the old industrialised countries, growth must be stimulated by demand from emerging countries, which did, in fact, experience astronomical growth rates in the 2000s. Having adopted the same economic models as their elders, which are based on unbridled productivism and the acceleration of industrial production to unprecedented levels, they are now the ones being violently confronted by the limits of growth. The case of Brazil is emblematic: after having experienced a staggering increase in economic activity and having promoted social policies based

on growth, the process came to a sudden halt and the country was plunged into a serious social and political crisis. Once again, growth generates the need for more growth in order to ease the frustrations caused by promises that are difficult or impossible to keep.

In growth-based societies, the cessation of growth means prolonged economic recessions, an explosion in poverty, an intensification of productivist or extractivist activities and setbacks in democracy. Critical approaches to growth show that social progress, prosperity and living well are possible without economic growth and, to be effective, require a shift towards post-growth or degrowth societies.

The origins of the debate on growth

The public debate on growth began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One can mention, among others, the Meadows Report from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for the Club of Rome in 1972 (Meadows, 1972). This report led to the questioning of the foundations of industrial society in light of the biophysical limits of the Earth and exponential population growth. The report concluded by proposing zero growth. For methodological and political reasons, this report was the subject of much debate among right-wing, left-wing and Third World scholars. The latter perceived it as having been produced by rich countries with the goal of crystallising inequalities so as to maintain their access to resources or as a resurgence of Malthusian theories.

The merit of this report is having reminded all that growth reposes on the extraction of non-renewable raw materials. After updating the report in 1992 and 2004, Dennis Meadows wrote in 2012 - forty years after the first version - that it was no longer possible to slow the system to zero growth because its carrying capacity or the ecologic footprint had increased beyond sustainable levels. According to him, that is why it is now necessary to decrease growth.

During the same period, while dreams of colonising new planets were flourishing, the United Nations Conference in Stockholm in 1972 launched the “*Only One Earth*” slogan. Sicco Mansholt², the vice-president of the European Commission at the time, publicly called for an end to growth at a time when economic growth still appeared to be infinite.

Also around that time, the works of Romanian economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen showed how thermodynamics and the laws of living beings are inseparable from the economy and society (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971 and Georgescu-Roegen, 2006). Infinite material growth is unsustainable due to the irreversibility of the transformation of energy into matter. The economy is a system embedded in the biosphere: a bioeconomy. Even with recycling, no technical process will be able to totally eliminate the entropic aspects of the extraction and transformation of resources, as industrial societies absorb gigantic injections of polluting and non-renewable energy.

Georgescu-Roegen’s work remained marginal in the world of economic thought. His best-known disciple and the founder of ecological economics, Herman Daly, defended a steady-state economy. Georgescu-Roegen rejected this proposal and affirmed that the economy must contract to return to the situation that existed prior to the point where the planet’s bio-capacity is exceeded (Daly, 1997).

Georgescu-Roegen’s bioeconomics approach, which subordinates the economy to the geophysical limits of the Earth and the fair distribution of resources, involves profound changes to economic systems and their underlying values. His proposal has little to do with the “bioeconomy” international institutions such

² In an interview in the June 12-18, 1972 edition of the *Nouvel Observateur*, he declared, “Let’s be blunt: we must reduce our economic growth to replace it with the notion of another culture, happiness and well-being”, quoted in *L’Écologiste*, October 2002, p. 67.

as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission are now promoting. This bioeconomy is an avatar of sustainable development. Its new concepts of efficiency, decoupling and circular economy are part of a new fiction story on a model for clean growth that recycles all its waste and optimises the production and consumption of energy.

Another source of inspiration for degrowth was the critique of the concept of “*development aid*” theorised by Truman in 1949 and of development as a “*Western belief*” (Rist, 1997), or, in the words of Serge Latouche (2006), the “*Westernisation of the world*.” These reflections were inspired by the works of Ivan Illich and, a little later, by André Gorz and Cornelius Castoriadis. They led to the questioning of the heteronomy of industrial societies, which gave machines a central role and reject consumerism and the basis of its imagery.

The debate has been taken up again in the past decade due to the impacts of globalisation and the acceleration of the ecological disaster. The abundance, prosperity and peace promised by globalisation and growth are becoming a nightmare: persistent and growing poverty and inequality, resource depletion, climate change, loss of biodiversity, reduced sense of well-being and the occurrence of environmental disasters and industrial accidents at an accelerated rate. The ideology of growth is beginning to crack under the ever more present signs that make its promises seem more remote and threats feel more imminent. Global warming caused by the increase in greenhouse gas emissions linked to the increase in production thanks to the use of fossil fuels provides clear evidence of this failure.

The term “*degrowth*” is provocative and almost blasphemous in nature. It is a watchword that prods people’s consciences in a world dominated by the cult of growth for the sake of growth - or, in other words, the pursuit of profit for the sake of profit.

One of its limitations is that it is often narrowly understood as promoting “*negative growth*” and as a result, it may obscure the issues of civilisation at stake. This is why some critics of growth prefer to use the terms “*post-growth*,” “*a-growth*,” “*anti-growth*,” or, as Ivan Illich put it, “*breaking the addiction to growth*.”

Degrowth is not, in fact, the opposite of growth or negative growth, nor is it an economic concept, even though it refers to and originated in studies in economics. It means:

- Reducing consumption of natural resources and energy in accordance with the biophysical constraints and the renewal of the capacity of ecosystems. This involves exiting the productivist cycle of production and consumption;
- Inventing a new political and social vision opposite to the one that underlies the ideology of growth and development;
- Building a pluralistic and diverse social movement in which various currents of thought, experiences and strategies that aim to build autonomous and frugal societies converge. Degrowth is not an alternative, but a matrix for alternatives;
- Diverse ways to move beyond growth and reject immoderation;
- A movement that raises, once again, the political and democratic question, “*How can we live together and together with nature?*”, instead of “*how can we grow?*”

Degrowth and the way out of a growth economy

What economists call growth is the evolution of the quantitative measure of output expressed in terms of the gross domestic product (GDP). In other words, growth is the process of accumulating capital and wealth. In the history of capitalism, this process is ongoing, with variations depending on the period

and geographical location. Growth may be slow, as was the case during the 19th century and in the old industrial nations since the 1980s. The “*Glorious Thirty*” (which actually only lasted twenty years) in industrialized countries after World War II, has often been taken as a model for strong and balanced growth that is conducive to social progress. Far from being a model, this period is actually an exception in the history of capitalism. It was only possible due to easy access to cheap natural resources in the Global South, severe pressure on the environment and the massive de-skilling and rationalisation of labour. In return, and to deal with the Communist bloc and social protest, social and economic rights were granted to the population.

This “*Fordist compromise*” was adopted as an economic and social model and social conflicts were seemingly reduced to the issue of distributing the wealth produced. It was assimilated into a type of Keynesian compromise. However, Keynes himself, in his superb 1930 essay entitled “*Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren*” wrote that the time will come for humanity to learn to “devote our further energies to non-economic purposes” and when “*the love of money as a possession (...) will be recognised for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semicriminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease.*”

Global growth does not only draw on labour and capital; it also requires energy and natural resources. These resources are limited and cannot be replaced by technical capital, contrary to the affirmations of neoclassical economic models that reduce nature to capital that can be replaced. Therefore, the capitalist process of production-consumption feeds on the expropriation and destruction of livelihoods and forms of life that escape market valuation. Since the 1980s, economic and financial globalisation has accelerated the commodification of natural resources and living organisms, as well as the extraction of natural resources. However, the capitalist economy cannot grow indefinitely,

or more precisely, it can only grow by escalating irreversible socio-environmental destruction and concentrating the wealth produced in the hands of a minority.

This issue of the external limits of our economic models is not only related to capitalism: all systems of production and consumption are subsystems of the biosphere.

This is why degrowth is not the same as negative growth, or zero growth, or a stationary state: degrowth is not a shift towards downward economic fluctuations, nor a recession. It is a political choice that leads to a voluntary and planned reduction in the use of energy and resources, to redefining our needs and choosing “*frugal abundance*.” “*Sustainable degrowth*” anticipates the forced recession that, in a growth-based society, leads to social and political disaster.

In capitalism, it is claimed that reducing pressure on resources can be achieved at the micro-economic and micro-sectoral level through the use of new, green technologies that improve technical and economic efficiency. But at the global macroeconomic level, as long as the principles of growth and accumulation are not called into question, an increase in efficiency in a sector and on the units produced and consumed will be absorbed by an increase in the volume of production: past improvements in the energy efficiency of cars, for instance, were offset by an increase of average car power and the overall volume of production. This is called the “*rebound effect*,” which was highlighted by economist S. Jevons as early as the 19th century. This is why green growth is not a solution to coping with the limits of natural resources: it is a means of perpetuating growth and capital accumulation.

This is the illusion that gave rise to the hope of “*decoupling*” economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions. It is argued that due to energy efficiency gains made possible by growth, emissions should eventually decrease, according to economic models

based on the Kuznets curve and applied to the environment. International institutions tell us that growth is the solution. But this does not take into account the increase in the production volume obtained by gains in efficiency and productivity. Growth is the problem.

The same can be said of the so-called “immaterial” growth that is based on services and a “*knowledge economy*,” or cognitive capitalism. To expect a dematerialized growth economy to emerge is to ignore the very material basis of many services. A software may be essentially made of “*grey matter*,” but the production of hardware and computer chips uses raw materials, energy and large amounts of water.

Lastly, in industrialised countries, the strong, accelerated growth of the “*Glorious Thirty*” was only possible thanks to the extraction of cheap resources in colonized countries dominated by the North. The countries of the Global South, some of which are currently experiencing strong growth, will see this growth dry up much faster than it did in industrialised countries: they will be confronted with an explosion in the demand for natural resources and most will be forced to extract these resources in their own countries. They could always attempt to grab these resources in other countries, but there, they would have to wade into war to control these natural resources.

In the field of economics, the theme of degrowth stems from the work of Romanian mathematician and economist Georgescu-Roegen. Georgescu-Roegen re-integrated the economy into the biosphere and incorporated the law of entropy (the principle of the dissipation and disorganisation of energy and materials in the economic process) into economic analysis. Herman Daly (1997), Tim Jackson (2011), and many others³ are developing new theories on macroeconomics and prosperity without growth.

3 Jean Gadrey, 2010, *Adieu à la croissance. Bien vivre dans un monde solidaire*, Les Petits matins, Paris; Richard Heinberg, 2011, *The End of Growth : Adapting to Our New economic reality*, New Society Publishers; Rob Dietz & Dan O’Neill (préface Herman Daly), 2013, *Enough is Enough*, Routledge.

However, degrowth is also a strong critique of economism and it is inconceivable without a “*degrowth society*.”

Degrowth and the way out of a growth-based society

Growth is not related only to the economy. It is a vision of society that makes “*progress*” a historical norm for all human societies. In capitalism, this norm is economic growth measured in terms of GDP. Thus, growth has become a political goal, a compulsory civic virtue, the only way to achieve a free and just society and the road to democracy. This ideology reduces society to a people of workers and consumers that is deprived of any political dimension. Social conflicts are reduced to mere tensions around the distribution of wealth, regardless of the nature of this “wealth” and how it was obtained.

Neoliberalism has accelerated this process at the global level. The neoliberal policies of the 1980s can be understood as a reaction to the slowdown of growth in industrialised countries, which occurred in the 1970s. Free trade and the increased financialisation of corporations have been the driving forces behind a desperate search for new sources of growth.

In the social-democratic tradition (of all stripes), growth is seen as a necessary condition for social justice. It is a question of making the pie bigger so that everyone gets a bigger piece, without worrying about what recipe and ingredients are used. This stance has reduced politics to a management issue. Yet, social justice cannot be reduced to the redistribution of the results of growth: it is about recognising the equal dignity of all humans and it is inseparable from the preservation of the material conditions that are required to guarantee this dignity. It was precisely the illusion that free trade agreements and competition can restore growth that has led large numbers of social-democratic politicians to convert to neoliberal policies since the 1980s.

This is why degrowth is not an economic concept: it involves the whole of society, its representations and values. It questions the Western norm of progress and its imposition on the entire planet. Degrowth is based on the relocation of activities, the redistribution of wealth, recovering the meaning of work, convivial and soft technologies, slowing down and giving power back to grassroots communities.

Degrowth is the expression of several currents of critical thought: the critique of the market and globalisation; of technology and techno-science; of anthropocentrism and instrumental rationality; of homo economicus and utilitarianism and the critique of excess.

Degrowth is embodied by the social movements that reject acceleration, economic and financial globalisation, the massive extraction of natural resources, the blind headlong rush on energy issues, advertising and consumerism, and social and environmental injustice.

Several international conferences held since 2008 have contributed to the expansion of the degrowth movement. More than 3,000 participants attended the one held in Leipzig in 2014. The most recent conference was held in Budapest.

Degrowth and development ideology

Development has always been intrinsically linked to economic growth. It was to be both quantitative and qualitative growth - that is, “*good*” growth.

Early criticisms of the Western notion of development appeared in the 1980s, mainly in the works of Escobar (1995), Wolfgang Sachs (1992), Latouche (1986), G. Rist and also André Gorz and Majid Rahmena, who were all influenced by the theories of Ivan Illich. Sustainable development was later classified as an

oxymoron or a contradiction in terms. Post-developmental theories also served as the inspiration of various lines of thought on degrowth.

Degrowth theories clashed with developmentalist theories, mainly in the Global South. In line with Marxist tradition, “*progressive*” forces defended developmentalism, as they saw the development of productive forces as the way to build the foundations necessary for their emancipation. This is why early warnings about growth in the 1970s were strongly criticized.

However, faith in a universal kind of growth is also being shaken in societies of the Global South. Critical views on growth and progress remained limited to Western societies for a long time and began to appear well before the post-war boom and the current “*crisis*”, in the works of W. Benjamin, H. Arendt, G. Anders, J. Ellul and the Frankfurt School, among others. They are now gaining ground in the Global South, whose populations are still widely considered candidates in need of growth. This is why critics of growth, particularly those in left-wing circles, are often portrayed as denying the humanity of the peoples of the South. This amounts to saying that growth is founded in nature, a condition for moral life and constitutes the only way humans can free themselves from a sub-human condition. The dehumanization and de-civilization of Western societies expose, in part, the fallacy of such arguments.

Criticising growth in the Global South involves criticising development and building on aspirations for a “*post-development*” era. This is the objective of the work of Latin American researchers and activists such as the Ecuadorian Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas from Uruguay, Maristella Svampa from Argentina, Edgardo Lander from Venezuela and others who have joined forces in a working group called “*Beyond development*”⁴. As for the other continents, for several decades now, Vandana Shiva and Arundhati Roy in India, Emmanuel N’Dionne in Senegal and

4 http://rio20.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/mas-alla-del-desarrollo_30.pdf

many others have been developing a critique of the Westernization of the world and development.

However, the call for degrowth will only make sense and influence public policies in the Global South if the process that has been initiated in industrialised countries, is accompanied by the redistribution of wealth and outlines what a desirable future looks like. Only then will Gandhi's saying, "*Live simply so others may simply live,*" take on its full meaning.

Degrowth is a debatable option for societies of the Global South. They are not or not yet growth-based societies, their ecological footprint is low and the basic needs of the population have not yet been met. However, degrowth can be taken as a call not to enter a growth-based society, to break free from the economic and cultural domination of the Global North and to regain a sense of self-restraint and moderation that is often already present in their traditional cultures.

Degrowth and social movements

The ideology of growth was built over several centuries and its deconstruction will necessarily take a long time. It requires adopting social practices and making political choices that allow us to both deal with the pressing challenges of our time and lay the foundations for new ways to live together and inhabit the Earth.

Several social movements are part of the degrowth matrix, even though they do not necessarily claim the notion as theirs: the ones focusing on North-South relations and the pillaging of resources; farmers movements that reject productivism and promote "*peasant agriculture*"; movements fighting to cancel the debt that forces countries to export excessive amounts of raw materials at the expense of ecosystems; movements to reclaim land; the commons movement; movements for access to water;

environmental justice movements; resistance to unnecessary large-scale projects (megadams, airports, highways, high speed trains, giant shopping centres); movements to decentralise energy and in favour of transition towns, Slow Food, Slow Science, Slow Cities, low tech instead of high tech, local food, deglobalisation and the re-localisation of activities.

In general, it is a question of the concrete realization of the principle of “*counter-productivity*” developed by Ivan Illich. Beyond a certain point, productivist policies are no longer effective. Instead of feeding people, industrial agriculture begins to poison or sicken them and destroys its own future by exhausting soils. The surge in health expenditures feeds the profits of pharmaceutical companies without improving the health of most people. The increase in car traffic ends up increasing distances and the time spent in transit. “Growth” kills jobs or makes them more precarious.

These resistance struggles and experiences are already tracing the path to other possible worlds. They are initiating a kind of “*change from below*” without which no social and political transformation is even thinkable. Is that enough? Where can we find leverage for broader transformations? While it is relatively simple to understand and agree on the need to change our vision, it is difficult to imagine what the transition towards a post-growth society looks like. This raises numerous questions. Degrowth of what, where and how? What kind of diversified policies and on what scale? How do we envisage solidarity and justice without economic growth? What are the milestones? What steps should we take? How can we organize industrial reconversion?

The alternatives to growth and productivism must be complementary at all levels: individual, local, national and global.

To move forward, it will be essential to achieve breakthroughs in the Global North for several reasons:

- Capitalism and productivism were invented in countries of the Global North, as was productivist “*socialism*.”
- This model was then exported from the Global North, as it found allies in the South.
- This is where the illusion that unlimited growth of wealth is the necessary condition of happiness and justice is most deeply rooted.
- In the countries of the Global North, the deterioration of ecosystems hits the poorest (food, health, housing, leisure) and economic and financial globalisation destroys jobs, labour and nature.

In the Global South, many resistance movements and concrete experiences are seeking to redefine the relationship between societies and the environment while challenging neoliberalism and productivism. These movements are generally long-standing and they are linked to what Juan Martínez Alier calls an “*environmentalism of the poor*” (Martínez Alier, 2002). They help to silence the pseudo-compassionate discourse on the countries in the Global South and the “*woes*” of the planet and those that claim that environmental concerns are only a luxury of rich countries and of the richest of the rich.

This reflection cannot be left in the hands of an enlightened elite composed of distinguished individuals and experts. We know that such a vision would only bring new forms of totalitarianism, albeit ecological ones. Concrete social relationships and experiences must be the basis for our reflections.

The sources are numerous and one of our tasks is to revisit them. To those who have already been mentioned, we can add the works of Cornelius Castoriadis who went against the dominant trend of the 1980s to maintain his critique of the economic

imagery of development and productivism (Castoriadis, 1998). He linked his critique to that of capitalism and “*state capitalism*” and eventually propose the notion of a “*necessary frugality*.” His political thought makes a frugal society the very condition for a democratic society - a society that rediscovers that it is possible to make collective choices within limits that are also collectively defined. Castoriadis puts social relations, social movements and politics at the centre of his analysis. Frugality, as he defines it, allows us to free ourselves from the heteronomy imposed by techno-scientific domination and neoliberalism.

Conclusion

To go beyond growth-based societies, we must challenge capitalism, which is founded on the continuous and unlimited accumulation of wealth and capital. But challenging capitalism does not necessarily mean questioning growth. Productivism is a common feature of both capitalism and socialism, and the political right and left.

Degrowth questions not only capitalism, but also a civilization that conceives freedom and emancipation as something achieved by tearing oneself away from and dominating nature, and that has sacrificed individual and collective autonomy on the altar of unlimited production and consumption of material wealth. Capitalism has brought further ills such as the expropriation of livelihoods, the submission of labour to the capitalist order and the commodification of nature. This project to establish rational control over the world, humanity and nature is now collapsing.

Degrowth - or, better said, post-growth or “breaking the addiction to growth” - outlines the paths to meet the aspirations of Buen Vivir, the movements that fight for the rights of Mother Earth, reject extractivism, deglobalisation, and all broader struggles for true democracy.

Bibliography

Castoriadis, C. (1998). *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press.

Daly H. (1997). *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development*. Boston, MA, USA: Beacon Press.

Daly H. (1972). *Toward a Steady-State Economy*. San Francisco, CA, USA: Freeman.

Dietz R. & O'Neill D. (2013). (prefacio Herman Daly), *Enough is Enough*. USA: Routledge.

Escobar A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press.

Gadrey J. (2010). *Adieu à la croissance. Bien vivre dans un monde solidaire*. Paris, France: Les Petits matins.

Georgescu-Roegen N. (1971). *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*. Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.

Georgescu-Roegen N. (2006). *Demain la décroissance : entropie-écologie-économie*. Paris, France: Favre. Versión original 1979.

Heinberg R. (2011). *The End of Growth: Adapting to Our New economic reality*. Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Jackson T. (2011). *Prosperity without Growth. Economics for a Finite Planet*. London, England: Earthscan.

Latouche S. (1986). *Faut-il refuser le développement*. Paris, France: PUF.

Latouche S. (1989). *L'occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portée et les limites de l'uniformisation planétaire*, Paris, France: La Découverte.

Latouche S. (2006). *Le pari de la décroissance*. Paris, France: Fayard.

Martinez Allier J. (2002). *L'écologisme des pauvres, une étude des conflits environnementaux dans le monde*. Paris, France: Les petits matins-Institut Veblen.

Meadows D. (1972). *Limits to Growth*. New York, NY, USA: Universe books.

Rist G. (1997). *The History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*. London, England: Zed Books.

Wolfgang S. (1992). *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London, England: Zed Books.

THE COMMONS

By Christophe Aguiton¹

In academic and activist circles today, there is a lot of discussion on the “*common goods*” or the “*commons*.” What are the commons? Is it right to talk about common “*goods*” as physical or natural resources or knowledge? Or, on the contrary, are the commons a kind of social relation or a way of collectively managing the different elements and processes that are essential to the life of a human community? What defines a common: the object or the social relation that is involved?

In this chapter, we will talk more about the “*commons*” than “*common goods*” to highlight that they are essentially processes of socially managing the different elements and aspects that are necessary for a human community. These collaborative social relations evolve around some type of material, natural or digital element or knowledge, but what makes them the “*commons*” is the practice of managing them as a community, which allows community members to “*care*” for the element and, at the same time, reproduce and enrich their forms of social organisation.

¹ Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán (Bolivia) collaborated in the writing of this chapter.

The origin

The term “*commons*” dates back to Medieval England when farmers had access to their lord’s pasture lands and forests. The “*Magna Carta*” imposed on King John by English barons in 1215 defined the freedoms that were to be enjoyed by the members of the kingdom. It was modified in 1225 and incorporated a second text called the “*Charter of the Forests*” (Bollier, 2015). This document stipulated commoners’ rights to access pasture lands and forests. These British commons were questioned in the 16th and 18th centuries by landowners who wanted to put up fences for sheep-grazing in order to supply the boom in the textile industry. Even though the reality of the British commoners was specific to the forms of social and economic organisation of the Middle Ages, similar situations can be found in several pre-capitalist societies on different continents and, in very diverse and complex ways, in the management forms of indigenous peoples who had the custom of managing the “*common goods*”.

The nature of the commons

The commons are a particular kind of social relation with material and immaterial goods. Elements of nature such as water and air exist on their own and only become commons when a human community manages its relations with these elements in a collective way - for example, the distribution of water for irrigation in a community.

In 1954, economist and Nobel prize winner Paul Samuelson indicated that one of the characteristics of public goods is that they are *non-excludable* and *non-rivalrous* (Samuelson, 1954). A good is excludable when one can stop another person from using it. A rival good is one that the use by one person reduces the amount available for another person to use. For example, public lighting is neither excludable nor rival because it is impossible to deprive one person of its use and its use by one individual does

not stop nor limit another person from using it. Samuelson's description created problems, as some economists used these criteria as if they were specific to the commons, which led public goods to be confused with the commons.

This confusion became even more problematic when some highlighted that even though common goods are non-excludable, they can be rivalrous. This is, for example, the case of high seas fishery resources: while it is difficult to exclude one fisherman, the use of these resources by a group of fisherfolk can reduce the use or the enjoyment of others.

Discussions on the relationship with the goods of nature and both social and environmental sustainability began to grow in importance in the 1960s when a strong wave of activists and scientists started to reflect on the limits of the so-called "natural resources" and population growth. In 1968, Garrett Hardin published an article entitled "*The Tragedy of the Commons*" in which he affirms that "*when acting only out of personal interest and independently, yet rationally, individuals end up destroying a limited shared resource (the common) even though it is in the interest of no one - individuals or a group - that this destruction occurs*" (Hardin, 1968).

Hardin attempted to demonstrate that common goods are condemned by the fact that users, fisherfolk or farmers will eat what comes from a common good before they use their own resources. According to him, resources such as water, land, seeds, parks and nature are subjected to predatory use by a population that grows uncontrollably on the planet and uses them inefficiently. The message of the "*tragedy of the commons*" is that the community is incapable of reaching rational agreements on the use of communal property and therefore, one must prioritise private property or introduce an external agent such as the State via public property to ensure that these resources are managed efficiently.

In opposition to Hardin's theory and other approaches to the commons, Elinor Ostrom, political scientist from the United States who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009, demonstrated that common goods can be controlled efficiently when managed and maintained by a community. In her book "*Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*" published in 1990, she discusses this issue after having carried out a thorough study of experiences in the management of the commons in various parts of the world. She concludes that "*polycentric governance*" based on complex designs of complex systems for managing complex realities must underline the management of the commons (Ostrom, 2010). Ostrom affirms that communities and people can develop sustainable management systems by creating social consensus on the management of "*resources*". The notion of abundance - as opposed to scarcity - prevails in this approach and is at the basis of the paradigm of the commons.

In her work, Ostrom identified eight principles that characterise the management structures of the commons:

- Organisations with clearly defined membership: members know how and why they belong to the group.
- Coherent rules for managing the commons: on who, when and how much of the common good can be used or managed.
- Democratic systems for electing representatives collectively.
- Monitoring systems: managers must be accountable to the organisation.
- A system of sanctions for those who violate the rules.
- Conflict resolution mechanisms.

- Minimal recognition by State or municipal authorities of the right to organise autonomously.
- The activities involving the common resource are carried out by interested organisations.

Ostrom's contribution has been criticised for treating nature as “resources” that can be managed by a human community while forgetting that they are part of ecosystems and the Earth system that have their own life cycles and cannot be “managed” anthropocentrically if the goal is to ensure the ecosystems’ sustainability. This reality becomes more visible when one analyses the commons of several indigenous peoples. According to their vision, nature is their home, their mother and their basis for life, which they do not propose to “govern”, but rather to coexist with and take care of.

Common goods and public goods

The commons have drawn a certain amount of attention, as they are a response to the widespread privatisation promoted by the current neoliberal globalisation process. However, they are not the only response. Other concepts such as “*global public goods*” or the “*common good of humanity*” have emerged. These proposals highlight the responsibility of the international community to address climate change or resolve the financial crisis, and argue that these crises must not be left up to the free will of the market or financial speculation. However, the disadvantage of these approaches is that they bring the notions of common goods and public goods together in the same concept.

Riccardo Petrella proposed as “*vital goods [that are] essential for life - air, water, bioethical capital, forest, the sun, energy and knowledge - which must be recognised as a common good of humanity*” (Petrella, 1996). Similarly, in 2009, François Houtart proposed the adoption of a “*Universal Declaration on the Common*

Good of Humanity” at the United Nations, which identifies democracy, multiculturalism, the fight against climate change and services such as healthcare, education, public transportation and electricity, among others, as common goods (Houtart, 2009).

Contrary to the proposals above, we feel it is important to distinguish between public goods and common goods to highlight the differences between the visions defended by the left a century ago and the debate today. Back then, the vision of the left mainly revolved around the capitalism versus socialism debate - or in other words, private ownership of the means of production and the laws of the market, on one hand, versus the nationalisation of the means of production and economic planning, on the other. The contribution of the current vision of the commons is that it shows there are alternatives to capitalism and to a public sphere dominated by the State. This opinion is shared by many activists and intellectuals who work on the commons, including Michel Bauwens, Silke Elfrich and David Bollier, who founded the “*Commons Strategies Group*”², and other authors such as Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval. This approach to the commons is important at a time when the limits of the centralised State management of the economy come to light. Under the centralised economic planning of the Soviet Union, many public enterprises were managed in a way that is very similar to how private corporations are run; the same occurred in market economies where industries were nationalised at the end of World War II.

The public sphere is one in which society delegates the task of managing activities that are not private - such as public services at schools, hospitals, research centres and other public administration bodies (government, local authorities), etc. - to specialised State institutions. In general, the public sphere includes everything related to the State in the broadest sense. The commons, on the other hand, are the space where interested people or groups get directly involved. The kinds of involvement

² <http://commonsstrategies.org/who-we-are/>

vary significantly, from cooperative members who work for their businesses everyday to villagers who cut firewood a few days a year and readers and collaborators who contribute occasionally to Wikipedia.

The relationship between the public and the private, the market and State planning is not strictly binary. In fact, it is ternary: between the public, the private and the commons. For example, in the field of cartography, one finds: a private transnational corporation that has a virtual private monopoly with its “*Google Maps*” and “*Google Street View*”; public mapping agencies, the majority of which are military; and finally, “internet activists” that have created other options such as “*OpenStreetMap*”. The latter is a collaborative project to create a free editable map and its success is growing. In the case of France, the French National Geographic Institute (IGN) lost out in the competition because it could no longer sell the digital maps that Google makes available to the public for free. *OpenStreetMap*, on the other hand, became known when its collaborators succeeded in only a few days in putting together the map of Port-au-Prince, Haiti after the city was destroyed by an earthquake on January 12th, 2010.

There is also the opinion of those who affirm that there is, in fact, a four-way relationship among the public, the private, the commons and nature. They affirm that the latter has its own processes of self-regulation and dynamics that must be taken into account by all “*management*” processes.

A typology of the commons

Originally, the concept of “*common goods*” referred to natural goods, forests and pastures to which English peasants had access in the Middle Ages to guarantee their livelihood. By extension, the concept of the commons applied to all natural resources managed collectively in pre-capitalist societies: pastures, community irrigation systems, fishing, forestry, etc.

More recently, work to conceptualise knowledge as a common good began in response to the tightening of the rules on intellectual property. In the early 1980s, “*free software*” appeared, which was not protected due to the fact that the computer industry did not charge a separate fee for the programmes on the hardware it sold. This changed in 1981 when IBM launched a contingency plan to compete with the new businesses coming out of the Silicon Valley, such as Apple, that were selling the first microcomputers on the market. Microsoft patented its operating system in order to sell it separately from IBM’s “*personal computers*”. This change in the software industry led to the creation of the Free Software Foundation (FSF) in 1985. This organisation supports the licensing of free software, among which the most well-known one is the “*General Public License*” (GPL10)³. For Richard Stallman, founder of FSF and the free software movement, it is “*a common good of humanity*” that must be accessible to all. This movement has continued to grow to the point where the majority of software today is available for free or based on free software.

In the 2000s, two initiatives expanded the scope of knowledge commons. The first was the introduction of the *Creative Commons*⁴, which are a set of licenses that can free any intellectual work, photograph, text, music, etc. from copyrights and intellectual property rights. Gilberto Gil, one of Brazil’s most famous artists and former minister of culture, during the Lula administration, released his works under a *Creative Commons* licence. The second was developed in the academic world that suffered the onslaught of intellectual property rules that allowed large publishing houses to establish a de facto monopoly over academic publications. This situation is highly absurd, as the large majority of researchers and higher education professors earn salaries and do not receive any pay for their academic publications. In response to this situation and in support of universities in the countries of the South that often lack the means to pay the expensive subscriptions to

3 <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/licenses.fr.html>

4 <https://creativecommons.org/>

academic journals, the “*Open Access Initiative*”⁵ was launched in 2002 in Budapest. This initiative enables researchers from all over the world to publish the results of their work for free.

Growing environmental concerns and awareness of the seriousness of problems such as climate change and air and ocean pollution contributed to the idea that the commons could be the right approach. Among the various initiatives undertaken to halt the privatisation of the commons, the most successful ones have been those linked to water. The most famous examples were the water wars in Bolivia in which the people won the fight against privatisation in Cochabamba and El Alto. Another noteworthy example is the referendum in Italy where the YES to “*water as a common good*” won. These victories, however, have not resulted in an improvement in the population’s capacity to manage water as a common good. In Bolivia, public water management did not produce the desired results and the transition towards “*public-social management*” - a demand of the anti-privatisation movements - came up against the resistance of authorities, trade union bureaucracies and the technocracy of public water companies. Thus, these commons involving nature only went half-way - that is, they remained as projects that have yet to be concretised.

The major challenge of the commons linked to nature is that they now involve millions and even billions of people. In pre-capitalist societies, the commons of nature were managed by tens or hundreds of shepherds or peasants, whereas nowadays, some commons such as climate require collective management on a planetary level.

Finally, there are the commons that involve cooperatives, mutual societies, associations or social enterprises immersed in the solidarity economy. These commons are very diverse, ranging from cooperatives reactivated by its workers after social

⁵ <http://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/>

disputes to credit unions with portfolios of billions of euros. These structures can be hybrid and have different dynamics that end up distancing them from the commons. However, it is worth pointing out that the cooperatives were the first solution the labour movement and the socialist movement of the 19th century put forward as an alternative to industrial capitalism, which is based on the exploitation and alienation of workers.

In sum, one can find commons that are very different from one another. The differences and tensions are many and often make it difficult to classify and define them. Their scale, object, management forms and dynamics make the task of analysing them all the more complex. The goal of production and their relationship to the market are other elements to consider, as they affect the commons. A community producing to satisfy its own consumption needs is not the same as one producing for a local, national or global market. The commons do not develop in a vacuum, but rather constantly interact with other forms of public and private management in ecosystems that evolve over time.

There are also different types of “*commoners*”. On one hand, there are those who want access to knowledge to be universal, such as the producers of free software that are pushing for the broadest possible dissemination of all codes. On the other hand, one finds indigenous communities who only share their ancestors’ knowledge on seeds with the members of their community or “*those they trust*”.

The diversity, complexity and tensions that exist among the commons do not weaken the commons approach. On the contrary, they enrich it and force us to root ourselves in reality rather than ideas or proposals that often do not take into account the multiple dimensions of the processes of building and managing “*the common*” that are beyond the public and the private spheres.

Rights, “commoning” and taking care of the commons

Two myths can be found at the heart of Western modernity and capitalism: the one on the unlimited sovereignty of the State, as Hobbes defined it in the *Leviathan*; and the other is faith in the institution of property that allowed John Locke to link private property to general prosperity. Serge Gurtwirth and Isabelle Stengers, and later Fritjof Capra and Ugo Mattei, remind us that the balance between property rights and State power is constantly changing (Gurtwirth & Stengers, 2016) (Capra & Mattei, 2015). We are in a phase of history where the State has renounced a series of its prerogatives to defend private property because in the end, the State is also a property owner. Between State sovereignty and the sovereignty of private property, there is no room for the commons, which are governed by a set of rights and obligations based on other rationales. For Ostrom, the commons can be broken down into a set of rights that can be granted to different users that have different rights: access, management, alienation, exclusion and elimination. The rights of use - which include the right to access, elimination and exclusion - are related to the historical origin of the commons (the right to pasturelands and forests), but do not really apply to the knowledge commons for which the right to access exists, but not the right to exclusion because there is no rivalry among users.

Burns Weston and David Bollier go beyond simply describing the different kinds of rights and stress the importance of “*commoning*,” which means to “*make common*” or to act collectively to develop the commons. “*Commoning*” is the logic underlying the various types of commons. The concept allows us to describe similar practices in the management of the commons and excludes those that involve private property or are assumed by the State and its institutions. The concept of “*commoning*” is based on a culture of cooperation and reciprocity (Weston

& Bollier, 2013). Capra and Mattei developed an innovative approach that distinguishes extractive practices from the right to engage in generative practices. The current legal system is based on an extractivist mentality that fragments society based on individualism - a notion that reduces all human relations to property relations. In contrast, the right to “*commoning*” is generative because it is based on relations of cooperation, reproduction, access and inclusion. These, in turn, promote new practices that follow an imaginative logic for the development of the commons, which in Latin America is called the “*pro común*”, or “*pro commons*”.

“*Commoning*” is a generative right that provides key concepts on the functioning of all commons. One principle that unites all commons is the need to “*take care of*” them. Ostrom gave different examples to demonstrate what allowed the commons, such as how different local actors used social norms and institutional agreements to manage resources. In the different examples of commons given, one can see that regardless of their differences, it is only the direct management and “*care*” of the commons by the communities that guarantees their sustainability. If small farmers stop selecting their seeds or crossbreeding their animals, the risk of their practices and knowledge being monopolised by transnational corporations such as Monsanto or parastatal organisations such as the INRA in France increases. That said, the tendency to seize “*the common*” and knowledge is inherent to monopoly capital. If the millions of contributors to Wikipedia stopped writing and updating their texts, the largest encyclopaedia in the world will disappear or end up being absorbed by a private group or public institution. If the inhabitants of a village do not want to continue managing communal forests, they will lose control over them. What is more, one must consider that pressure from corporations and even states exists in all fields to control these goods and to integrate them into the capitalist, predatory and extractivist dynamics, as that is how the dominant model works.

Common goods and fundamental rights

In the 19th century, during the time when socialist and communist theories were on the rise, the aspiration to build workers cooperatives or productive associations to free them from wages also spread. Mutual aid or benefit societies run by workers served as a complement to the cooperatives and provided solidarity to members in face of illness or old age. These associations were based on a common, inalienable and inseparable capital that attracted the “*commons*” of feudal peasantry. This was the beginning of a separation between collective property and the ability of one person to use it to engage in productive activities.

In the late 19th century-early 20th century, an alternative vision began to emerge. Collective property was turned into public property under the control of the State or local authorities. Two important elements explain this change:

- At the end of the 19th century, an entirely new world emerged thanks to the second industrial revolution, the appearance of the “*big company*” based on the German model and the development of technical networks such as the railway, electricity and telephone lines. At the same time, the first period of globalisation was drawing to an end and the major powers affirmed their power and proceeded to divide the world up among themselves. In this context, social-democracy and the communist movements developed a vision of socialism that focused on continuing to develop the technical networks and large industries under State control and planning.
- During the same period, popular aspirations and the needs of a modern industry converged to develop free and mandatory public education services and social protection systems that were to cover risks, illnesses, work-related accidents and retirement. That is when the idea of universal rights appeared, which are not limited to the democratic rights listed in the

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the 1789 French Revolution. Instead, they include “positive rights” such as the social and economic rights (right to education, to housing, etc.) enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

In this context, the commons of the 19th century - the heirs of the feudal societies and workers’ cooperatives - went into decline for two reasons: for one, they did not meet the criteria of progress and efficiency that made large corporations and State planning possible; secondly, they did not allow for the conception of social rights as universal rights.

Nearly a century had passed before the issue of the commons returned to the centre of the debate, thanks to the anti-globalisation movement and academic circles. Several reasons explain the commons’ return: the overall negative outcomes of the experiences with State and private sector management of the economy; opposition to privatisation; the crisis of the idea of progress as it was conceived at the beginning of the 20th century (including by socialist states that developed industrialist visions); and finally, the appearance of new categories of commons such as knowledge and the new commons of nature. The latter includes the climate, oceans, the atmosphere and other components of the Earth system that are being threatened by human activities in the current period of history, which is now known as the Anthropocene.

These new categories of commons are characterised by the fact that they go hand in hand with the emergence of new universal rights: “*the right to access to information*” for the commons of the digital era, and third or fourth generation “*fundamental rights*” for the commons of nature.

After the recognition of civil, political, economic and social rights, more general rights began to be defined, such as the “*right to*

live in a healthy and ecologically-balanced environment”, which was incorporated into the French constitution in 2005. There are also even broader rights, such as “*the rights of nature*” that encompass non-human elements of the Earth system and are defended in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth that Bolivia has proposed to the United Nations⁶. The development of new fundamental rights will give new momentum to the concept of the “*commons*” and prompt a broader reflection on the relation between the commons and nature, and the commons and their relation to the private and the public spheres.

Common goods and democracy

In light of history, the primary interest in defending and expanding the scope of the commons is that they constitute one of the best approaches to taking care of the commons, which involves adopting truly collective property relations and forms of direct democracy that cannot be reduced to a moment of struggle or a revolutionary experience. Also, considering the contributions of recent reflections on the climate crisis, food or water, they are goods for which there is no ownership, but rather a vital relation of interdependencies and ecodependencies, as ecofeminists suggest.

The delegation of power to political institutions can be corrected through participatory democracy by introducing mechanisms to revoke the mandates of elected representatives or by extending the right to a referendum. However, experience has shown us a series of difficulties in implementing these measures, and even more of them in getting these political innovations to endure over time, as in the case of the participatory budgets born in 1988 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, for example. The commons require participation and involvement, and not merely changes to

⁶ <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/Projects/Indicators/motherearthbolivia.html>

the structures of political power. The commons serve, then, as a mechanism to begin to put alternatives into practice.

The commons allow us to re-establish a tradition of socialism from the 19th century - that goes from Owen to Fourier - which puts social practices related to education, cooperatives, community living, relationships between men and women, etc. in the centre of the liberation process.

The knowledge commons and the common goods of nature allow us to identify new fundamental rights and, in some cases, offer us the possibility of exercising them without having to go through the public sphere. The internet serves as an interesting example here. In the 1990s, private corporations such as AOL and public services such as *Minitel* in France made the first attempts to offer new bases of knowledge and means of communication to the general public. Today, the internet has gone beyond these early initiatives and has been established all over the entire world, which is one reason why many defend the idea that access to internet should be considered a fundamental right. Since the 1980s, thanks to a community of engineers and university students that built the network by using free software programmes, the internet developed with an identity that is collaborative and open to everyone. Certain characteristics allow the internet to be defined as a common good of humanity run by a technical community capable of self-management. As it is not run by states, conflicts and debates are constantly emerging, mainly in response to two positions: 1) one that intends to control the internet by using national mechanisms created in the name of the defence of intellectual property, the fight against terrorism and paedophilia; and 2) the proposal to establish an inter-state system responsible for managing the internet. These issues are key in the mobilisations being held around the world against the ACTA (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement). They also explain the appearance of new political groups, such as the pirate parties,

or new social movements such as “*Students for a Free Culture*”, which had a major impact in the United States between 2007 and 2010.

The radicalisation of democracy, together with practices of collective appropriation such as the commons and the emergence of fundamental rights that are not managed by the State, could constitute a key line of intervention for a left that is seeking social change in ways that would enable society to take steps towards a kind of socialism that does not get confused with the strengthening of State structures. The left could promote laws and policies that expand freedoms and rights and favour the development of different types of commons. It could also encourage the involvement of all in the different forms of collective property by promoting value systems based on sharing and caring for others. The specific forms may vary significantly and be linked to maintaining or improving the production of agricultural commons and cooperatives and generalising individual and social practices based on shared values and caring for common goods.

Hybridisation and common paths

The social relations at the centre of the commons run counter to the logic of capitalism and public-state management. However, in reality, a series of hybrid interrelations and realities exist because the commons are not immune to the influence of their surroundings.

Everything indicates that capitalism would not have been able to develop without the modern State. This interdependency means that capital and the State mutually influence one another’s management methods, organisation of labour, institution-building in various fields, research, education, innovation, social protection, market management strategies, etc.

In relation to existing commons, one of the first changes was cooperatives and mutual societies' adoption of structures that are very similar to those of large capitalist groups. Today, agricultural cooperatives and credit unions are at the forefront of this process of change. In developed countries, farming cooperatives are in the race to become giants in the sector. In the United States, this sector's annual revenues are around 140 billion dollars. In France, they represent 40% of the food sector and generate 60 billion euros in revenue. At the same time, these farm coops are increasingly adopting agro-industrial practices and management forms that are very similar to those of transnational corporations. The banking sector is going through a similar process: there are less and less differences between credit unions and private banks. These changes can be explained by three elements: i) neoliberal globalisation that pushes cooperatives to adopt management methods in order to compete internationally; ii) the fact that the involvement of cooperative members "*at the base*" in the management of their cooperatives is declining; and finally, iii) the excessive autonomy of the cooperatives' directors who encourage members to distance themselves and accelerate the integration of their cooperatives into the world market and the dynamics of transnational capital.

The second process of change to be highlighted is how the collaborative economy is beginning to be controlled by certain digital businesses. The concepts of circular economy and the collaborative economy are different from the commons. However, they are part of a general trend that favours sharing, recycling and shorter circuits between producers and consumers. A key element of the knowledge commons - the digital - has facilitated the implementation of these practices by offering devices and platforms that facilitate sharing. At the same time, however, the digital field allows large and powerful players to take advantage of the benefits created by the network and move towards forming a monopoly. This is the case of social networks such as Facebook

or Twitter, Google's work tools and collaborative platforms such as Uber, Airbnb or Blablacar.

In view of these forms of "*privatisation*", two types of reaction are emerging. The first is that of identifying those who are working with these platforms so that they have the same rights as all other workers. This is the case in the United States where initiatives have been launched to grant Uber drivers employee status so they can have access to social benefits available to salaried workers. The other reaction coming from the world of the commons and the search for "*free*" alternatives are the large consortiums of the digital economy: free programmes, truly collaborative platforms based on a culture of exchange and that are not-for-profit, etc.

Finally, in relation to the complexity of the processes surrounding the common goods and hybridisation, it is important to take into account the logic of the commons emerging and developing in the public services sector and in efforts to control institutions and large corporations. While the presence of parents in the functioning of school establishments is considered "*outdated*", the intervention of patients in health services appeared during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. These interventions are now being facilitated by digital tools that allow patients to connect with one another, have a say on their treatment and access medicines. Digital tools are also facilitating initiatives to control institutions and corporations, such as actions by citizens groups that filter or systematise information, and by offering the possibility to publish information on blogs or websites.

Debates for further discussion

An issue that merits further reflection is the one linked to the modes of managing the commons. The practice of "*caring*" that is inherent to the commons means getting involved, engaging in and, as a result, being tightly linked to the management of the commons. The forms of doing so can vary significantly. The cases

of the large commons such as Wikipedia or the internet itself are particularly interesting, as they function in ways that are similar to some more recent movements such as the “*Indignados*” or “*Occupy*,” which are based on three principles: whoever wants to participate can; decisions are adopted by consensus; and they are socialised at the broadest local level possible. There are, however, certain problems with this way of functioning, as it tends to put the political debate aside and it is not transparent about decision-making processes that take place outside of the large assemblies. This raises key questions on the increasingly broad commons: what do we really mean by “*real democracy*”? What are the elements that constitute it? How do we strengthen real democracy so that it does not end up being co-opted or distorted by political parties or State actors?

It is not only a matter of building democracy within the commons but also in relation to the State. What stance should the commons adopt vis-à-vis the State? From the commons’ perspective, what type of changes must be made to the State? Is it possible to “*commonise*” the State? Or, on the contrary, is the greatest contribution the commons can make to generate counterpower to the State by always preserving a certain level of autonomy from State power? How can one combine strategies to radically change the State and ones that aim to increase the commons’ counterpower vis-à-vis the State? In fact, the situation in many countries, especially those in the South, reveal dynamics where the State tends to regulate and impose legal and fiscal control over all activities, especially those related to territorial management, despite the numerous instruments that have been created in local and multilateral legal systems, which affects the structures of the existing commons.

Therefore, it is fundamental to reflect on what the commons’ vision on prosperity, modernity or future is. Currently, all forms of private, State and community management respond to certain dynamics that involve a present and a future. Where and how

far do we want to go with the commons? Within the commons movement, does a shared critical vision exist on development, progress, productivism and modernity? Is this issue not essential for the strengthening of the commons of the 21st century?

Finally, it is fundamental that we reflect on the relation of the commons with nature. In other words, how do we build and encourage the promotion and need for non-anthropocentric commons in the 21st century? The oldest commons practiced by indigenous peoples were not anthropocentric. In the midst of a planetary crisis, eco-social relations are more necessary now than ever, but they have to be established at an unprecedented scale. What are the most appropriate ways of managing the commons of the climate, oceans and glaciers? Until now, inter-state initiatives have been tested but have not been very effective. How do we construct forms of management for these commons that are planetary in nature? How do we generate global consciousness so that we truly assume the challenge of our time, which is to “take care” of the Earth?

Bibliography

Azam, G. (2010). *Le temps du monde fini*. Paris, France: Les liens qui libèrent.

Bollier, D. & Helfrich, S. (2012). *Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*. Amherst, Massachusetts, USA: Levellers Press.

Bollier, D. (2014). *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society.

Bollier, D. & Helfrich S. (2015). *Patterns of Commoning*. Amityville, NY, USA: Commons Strategy Group.

Bollier, D. (2015) *Who May Use the King's Forest? The Meaning of Magna Carta, Commons and Law in Our Time*. <http://bollier.org/blog/who-may-use-kings-forest-meaning-magna-carta-commons-and-law-our-time>

Bowers, C. (2006). *Revitalizing the Commons: Cultural and Educational Sites of Resistance and Affirmation*. Lanham, MD, USA: Lexington Books.

Bowers, C. (2012). *The Way Forward: Educational Reforms that Focus on the Cultural Commons and the Linguistic Roots of the Ecological Crisis*. USA: Eco-Justice Press, LLC.

Capra, Fr. & Mattei, U. (2015). *The Ecology of Law. Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community*, San Francisco, CA, USA: BerrettKohler Publishers.

Coriat, B. *et al.* (2015). *Le retour des communs, la crise de l'idéologie propriétaire*. France: Les Liens qui Libèrent Editions.

Dardot, P. & Laval, C. (2014). *Commun, essai sur la révolution du 21ème siècle*. Paris, France: La Découverte.

Fourier, C. (1996). *The Theory of the Four Movements*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

Gurtwirth, S. & Stengers, I. (2016). *Le droit à l'épreuve de la résurgence des communs*, *Revue juridique de l'environnement*, 2016/2, p. 306 – 343.

Houtart, Fr. (2009) *Pour une déclaration universelle du bien commun de l'humanité*. <http://journal.alternatives.ca/spip.php?article4898>.

Le Crosnier, H. *et al.* (2015). *En Commun, introduction aux communs de la connaissance*. France: C&F Éditions.

Linebaugh, P. (2014) *Stop, Thief!: The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*. Oakland, CA, USA: PM Press.

Hardin, G. (1968). *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Science Dec Vol. 162, Issue 3859, pp. 1243-1248

Menzies, H. (2014). *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society.

Ostrom, et al. (2012). *The Future of the Commons: Beyond Market Failure and Government Regulations*. London, England: Institute of Economic Affairs.

Ostrom, E. (2015). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

Ostrom, E. (2010). *La Gouvernance des biens communs, Pour une nouvelle approche des ressources naturelles*, Bruxelles, Belgique: De Boeck. Versión original 1990.

Petrella, R. (1996). *Le bien commun: Éloge de la solidarité*. France: Éditions Labor

Samuelson, P. (1954). *The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure*, The Review of Economics and Statistics, Vol 36, N°4.

Weston, B. & Bollier, D. (2013). *Green Governance, Ecological Survival, Human Rights and the Law of the Commons*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

ECOFEMINISM

By Elizabeth Peredo Beltrán

Ecofeminism is a critical theory, a philosophy and an interpretation of the world that seeks to transform it. It brings together two emerging currents of political theory and practice into one approach that aims to explain and transform the current system of domination and violence by focussing on the critique of patriarchy and the overexploitation of nature and their impacts on society, bodies and nature, all as part of the same phenomenon.

In relation to alternatives to the system, ecofeminism's enormous value lies in the fact that it is a precursor of a dialogue between the proposals coming from the different social struggles and political theory of the past century. It allows for the interaction between two currents of thought and activism that have conceived an alternative society by questioning the main economic and cultural pillars of oppression and the crisis of the modern world: human domination of nature and the violent domination of women by patriarchy.

Ecofeminism also develops a proposal for social change that promotes comprehensive social changes based on the recognition of interdependencies between human beings and between humans and nature. It sees humans as interdependent and eco-

dependent beings that all need care and attention to survive. What is more, we are all beings that need quality care to live “*a life worth living*”, just as nature needs us to take care of it and respect its limits and vital cycles (Herrero 2013, Eisler 2014). The change proposed by ecofeminism basically involves highlighting the material bases of care and sustainability of life and denouncing the anchors of the capitalist system of domination. These anchors are: invisibility, devaluation, disregard, exploitation, plundering and the appropriation of wisdom, knowledge, work and all activities - the majority of which are carried out by women - without which human survival and the production and reproduction of culture and society would be impossible (Shiva 1995, Herrero 2013).

Ecofeminism proposes a critical analysis of the capitalist economy and patriarchy and the singular way of thinking that organises the world into pairs of opposites and assigns them hierarchical values, such as “*man-nature*”, “*good-bad*”, “*rational-savage*.” This was developed by the patriarchal West as an ideological and philosophical complement to the power and domination over nature and is at the service of capitalism. This dichotomous and reductionist way of thinking extends to other dimensions of life and culture and to value systems: the good and the bad; culture and nature; science and traditional knowledge; man and woman; men’s work and women’s work.

“These dyads are associated to one another in what Celia Amorós calls ‘overlaps’: One particularly transcendent overlap is the one formed by the pairs ‘culture-nature’ and ‘masculine-feminine’. Understanding culture as freeing oneself from nature ideologically justifies its domination and exploitation. Belief in the primacy of the masculine (associated to reason, independence or the mind) legitimises the domination of the physical world by men and reducing women to the body, the unstable world of emotions and nature” (Herrero and Pascual, 2010).

In spite of their differences, the different currents of ecofeminism agree on the basic idea that the oppression of women

- and of men - and the overexploitation of nature are part of the same phenomenon. They denounce a cultural and symbolic order - patriarchy - and an economic order - capitalism - which render invisible, devalue, violate and appropriate the work of caring for human life by overexploiting bodies and women who, due to the sexual division of labour socially imposed by patriarchy, are the majority of care providers. Patriarchy and capitalism also overexploit nature, pushing it to the brink of collapse, even though it constitutes the fundamental basis for the well-being and sustainability of life on the planet.

Ecofeminism is both a theoretical and political proposal and a social movement. This is why we can rightly speak of “*ecofeminisms*” - that is, of a diversity of movements, positions and currents that come together in dialogue, practices and debate.

This is also why ecofeminism is constantly evolving. It is fuelled by dynamic and forward-looking movements that are prefiguring a political proposal for social change based on the struggles, experiences and theoretical contributions of feminist, social and women movements, activists, and scholars and philosophers from different currents: essentialist, spiritual, constructivist, ecofeminisms from the Global North, ecofeminisms from the Global South... Women and men activists from various currents and social movements have adhered to ecofeminism, as they see in it an alternative path for the transformation of society.

Some background information

The ecologist movement emerged in the 20th century in response to the impact of industrial society on the planet. An important part of ecologist thought and work on the limits of the planet has been done by women since the 1950s and 1960s. Prior to this, women were the first to protest against the destruction of the balance of life, the impacts of the industrial era, nuclear energy and the violence of war.

One of the most important references of the ecologist movement was US biologist and oceanographer Rachel Carson. She denounced the use of pesticides by soldiers in World War II, as it led to the expansion of its use in agriculture and the contamination of ecosystems and the health of humans and other species. Her work played a key role in giving origin to ecological thought. Her book *Silent Spring* (1958-1964) constitutes one of the most visionary contributions to the critique of the notion of progress and agribusiness, as it contains the first elements of an ecologist philosophy that is critical of the relations of domination of nature:

“We still talk in terms of conquest. We still haven’t become mature enough to think of ourselves as only a tiny part of a vast and incredible universe. Man’s attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself” (Carson, 1962).

As for the Meadows Report on *The Limits to Growth*, which was prepared for the Club of Rome and contributed to the Earth Summit and arguments on the economy, ecology and development, substantial contributions were made by another woman scientist and journalist, Donella Meadows. Donella directed the production of this report, along with other scientists, which addresses the unsustainability of development by questioning the principle of unlimited economic growth. It had a major impact on ecologist and anti-systemic narratives, which has lasted even until today. This report presented an in-depth analysis on the consumption of resources, economic distribution, demographic growth and pollution and estimates for the new century. It is considered a notable attempt to steer humanity towards a different path to industrialism. While many activists quote Einstein to say the same thing, Donella Meadows

was truly a precursor of complex thought and the questioning of traditional and reductionist systems of scientific thought:

“...If we want to bring about the thoroughgoing restructuring of systems that we know is necessary to solve the world’s gravest problems - poverty, pollution and war - the first step is thinking differently” (Meadows, 1991).

With regards to the other school of thought in ecofeminism, feminism emerged as one of the most important social rebellions of the last century. It was initiated by the Suffragist movement and with the reflections of women thinkers who analysed the social processes of the Russian revolution and the German and European political processes. The thought of Simone de Beauvoir would later contribute substantially to its development. De Beauvoir revived feminism from the suffragist era with her work in the area of philosophy and her critique of patriarchy, namely the social construction of gender and the naturalisation of the traditional roles of women:

“One is not born a woman, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (Beauvoir, 1949).

Alicia Puleo analyses the elements in de Beauvoir’s works that contribute to the reflection on the relation woman-nature, which are few, as her works concentrate more on the “construction” of the female being. Even so, her reflections on nature incorporate substantive elements for the evolution of feminist thought and proposals:

“Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his peer. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits it, but it crushes him. He is born of it and dies in it...”

Both ally and enemy, it appears as the dark chaos from which life springs forth, as life itself, and as the beyond it reaches for... woman sums up Nature as Mother, Wife and Idea.... Since the coming of the patriarchy, Life has worn in his eyes a double aspect: it is consciousness, will, transcendence, it is the spirit; and it is matter, passivity, immanence, it is the flesh" [...] Man's case is radically different. He does not provide for the group in the way worker bees do, by a simple vital process, but rather by acts that transcend his animal condition... Through such actions he tests his own power; he posits ends and projects paths to them: he realizes himself as existent..." (Beauvoir, quoted in Puleo, 2009).

But it was French feminist activist and de Beauvoir's contemporary Françoise d'Eaubonne who was the first to address the relation between ecology and feminism, to coin the term in 1974 in her book *Feminism or Death* and to lead a movement in that decade. She proposed the term "*ecology-feminism*" as a response to the fact that humanity was facing the dilemma between "*feminism or death*" due to the devastation of natural goods. She argued that only feminism was capable of defending life on the planet against the phenomenon of unsustainable growth and defends women's control over their own bodies to ensure sustainability, control population growth and rebel against the dictates of patriarchy.

"...if masculine society continues, tomorrow, humanity will no longer exist (...) Until now, feminist struggles have been limited to demonstrating the harm done to over half of humanity. The time has come to demonstrate that with feminism, it is humankind that will change (...) By liberating women, feminism liberates all of humanity. It is what is closest to universalism. It is at the basis of the most immediate values of life and that is why the feminist struggle and the ecologist struggle coincide" (d'Eaubonne, 1974).

She also affirmed that “*The capitalist system is the engine that gives patriarchy devastating power*” and that “*socialism is not free from it*”.

Her reflections were motivated by the destruction of the planet and the totally unsustainable system of domination that has its origins in patriarchy and in the organisation of social relations that subjugate nature, women and the feminine. She argued that “*women and nature must unite*” and inserted the issue of how to address the relation between nature and women without reproducing the naturalisation of gender identities into the feminist debate. She was one of the first to speak of the expropriation of women’s time and power to decide over their own bodies in relation to procreation.

Even though they were contemporaries, d’Eaubonne disagreed with Simone de Beauvoir who argued that women should be considered culture, and not nature. Françoise d’Eaubonne defended women’s closeness to nature and sought to valorise their practices by considering them as being vital and of universal value to humanity. She defended this position as part of her criticisms of modernity, which exploits nature and women by subjugating them to the imperatives of reproduction and growth. She proposed the creation of a global pacifist movement in favour of birth control in order to increase women’s ability to make decisions about their own body and life itself.

In the late 20th century, many thinkers contributed to the development of the basic ideas of the first wave of ecofeminism, which questioned the hierarchies established by Western patriarchal thought: culture-nature, mind-body and man-woman, among others. They did so by redefining the value of the terms of the dichotomy that until then had been treated as second-rate - woman and nature - and by confronting militarism, war, nuclear energy and environmental degradation, which, according to them, are manifestations of a sexist culture that had devalued nature.

Critical of masculinity, this line of ecofeminism developed the first generation of ecologist systemic critiques and inspired thousands of women and similar movements, especially in North America.

Essentialism and constructivism

According to Yayo Herrero (*Ecologistas en Acción*, Spain), the evolution of ecofeminism over time gave rise to two major tendencies. First, there is essentialist ecofeminism, which associates being a woman to nature and thus concludes that the defence of nature is inherent to women's gender identity. She takes as an example the feminism of Petra Kelly who argues that women have the innate capacity to challenge the system thanks to their capacity to give birth. Secondly, there is constructivist ecofeminism, which insists that the close relation between "*women and nature is sustained by a social construct that involves the assignment of roles that give origin to the sexual division of labour and the distribution of power and property in patriarchal societies*" (Herrero, 2013). This is what awakens the ecofeminist consciousness in women.

She proposes that throughout ecofeminism's evolution, one can identify:

1. essentialist ecofeminisms that criticise the subordination of women and nature and propose defending being a woman as an alternative to save the planet;
2. ecofeminisms from the South that criticise patriarchy and "maldevelopment" and consider women bearers of respect for life;
3. constructivist ecofeminisms that see women's relation with nature as part of a social construct linked to the sexual division of labour that sustains capitalist patriarchal societies.

What is certain is that the different approaches and distinct views contribute to ecofeminisms' development as they mutually enrich one another and all contribute to the construction of a diverse and constantly evolving current of thought and political action. All lines of ecofeminist thought share a systemic vision of the interdependent relation between humans and with nature.

Although the profound reflections mentioned above are from one of the earliest versions of ecofeminism that we can call “*essentialist*,” they served as the basis that enabled women students and thinkers from the 1970s and 1980s to advance the theory on the construction of patriarchy and its relation with nature and analyse in more depth how the feminine is treated as second-rate. This is the case of anthropologist Sherry Ortner who affirms that the feminine collective has been treated as second-rate for carrying out tasks such as childrearing and cooking meals, functions that had been given little value for a long time: nature (Ortner quoted by Puleo, 2009). There is also the work of Riane Eisler, Austrian-American thinker who, in 1987, through her analysis of anthropology and history, described how patriarchy tore women's power away from them and culturally established an epistemological double standard so that women and nature would be valued less and considered inferior in a hierarchical and predatory society (Eisler, 1989).

Ecofeminism from the South and the critique of “maldevelopment”

Ecofeminism is also said to be a very ancient practice that is revived and rebuilt through social struggles and the defence of nature. In the 1970s, other ecofeminist movements in the South emerged, with different characteristics, which took up women's ancestral struggle for the defence of life once again. The *Chipko* movement from the Himalayas is one of the most emblematic cases. It emerged in India in the 1970s in response to forestry policies that would have resulted in thousands of trees being cut

down. Using a tradition from their own history, women from the hills of the Himalayas resisted these policies by hugging trees, just as their ancestors had centuries earlier.

The Chipko movement represents the resurgence of a resistance struggle from over 300 years earlier. In 1730, Amrita Devi, a woman from a Bishnoi community, which is a religion that prohibits hunting animals and cutting down trees, lost her life while resisting tree cutting with her daughters and over 350 villagers who did the same to stop the trees from being killed. They continued to resist until they succeeded in having logging banned in that region.

This ancient resistance tactic reappeared in 1974 when another Hindu woman, Gaura Devi, organised the women in her village to protect 2,500 trees along the Alaknanda River that authorities wanted to cut down. This action stopped the tree-cutting and forced the government of Uttar Pradesh to prohibit similar acts in the region by imposing a ten-year moratorium. This way of taking care of the forests of the Himalayas - tree-hugging - became a **peaceful form of resistance** to deforestation and a symbol that won international recognition. This movement received the alternative Nobel prize (the Right Livelihood Award) and its message of care, traditional knowledge and non-violence spread around the world. It inspired one of the most well-known ecofeminists from the South, Vandana Shiva:

“The violence against nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with violence against women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families and their societies” (Shiva, 1995).

Born from the experiences of anti-systemic resistance in the Global South, this line of ecofeminist thought highlights the connection between women and nature. It also criticises the dichotomous and androcentric logic of development and science,

and defends women's involvement in the struggle for respect for life. It incorporates an analysis of colonialism as a fundamental element for comprehending the destruction of natural goods and the development of capitalism. This feminism calls the Western economic model imposed in Third World countries "**maldevelopment**" - a model that intensifies the pillaging and destruction of nature for the benefit of a minority of elite in the Global North.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Vandana Shiva (India) and Maria Mies (Germany) developed ecofeminism's most elaborate theories and postulates by furthering the understanding of how the dichotomous logic of the dominant capitalist system is based on a patriarchal vision:

"...The rise of a patriarchal science of nature took place in Europe during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as the scientific revolution", Shiva affirms. "The scientific revolution in Europe transformed nature from terra mater into a machine and a source of raw material; with this transformation it removed all ethical and cognitive constraints against its violation and exploitation. The industrial revolution converted economics... into a process of commodity production for profit maximisation" (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

They see women as bearers of respect for life and accuse Western "maldevelopment" of being the main cause of the grabbing of knowledge, nature and wealth of women and indigenous peoples.

"Maldevelopment is maldevelopment in thought and action. In practice, this fragmented, reductionist, dualist perspective violates the integrity and harmony of man in nature, and the harmony between men and women. It ruptures the co-operative unity of masculine and feminine, and places man, shorn of the feminine principle, above nature and women, and separated from both. The violence to nature as symptomatised by the

ecological crisis, and the violence to women, as symptomatised by their subjugation and exploitation arise from this subjugation of the feminine principle” (Shiva, 1995).

Furthermore, they are very critical of the reductionist dichotomy in industrial society that produces a violent and exclusionary way of knowing and thinking according to which nature is categorised as productive or non-productive and, therefore, one can intervene in it. It even conceives the possibility of transforming and making nature “grow”. They centre their analysis on how modern science - that of “maldevelopment” - was born to control nature, convert it into an object in which one can interfere and dominate. As a result, modern science, which emerged with Francis Bacon in the sixteenth century who “*promised to create ‘a blessed race of heroes and supermen’ who would dominate both nature and society*”, is said to be a “patriarchal project” in which “*there was a dichotomising between male and female, mind and matter, objective and subjective, rational and emotional... testing of hypotheses through controlled manipulations of nature (predominated)...formulated in clearly sexist metaphors...*” (Shiva, 1995).

Shiva and Mies argue that patriarchal reductionism is violent:

1. *against women*: women, tribals and peasants due to the expert/ non-expert divide that pillages their knowledge.
2. *against nature*: when modern science destroys its integrity in the process of both perception and manipulation.
3. *against the beneficiaries of knowledge*: as violence against nature affects the people the most.
4. *against knowledge*: as reductionist science suppresses and falsifies facts and declares traditional knowledge to be irrational (Shiva, 1995).

They also question the traditional indicators of growth that govern modern society. In practice - using the analysis of the anti-globalisation movement - these indicators measure destruction rather than growth (Shiva, 2004). This is one idea that links ecofeminism to the different groups of activists, academics and social mobilisations that contested the globalisation of capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s.

This so-called “*essentialist*” feminism concludes that sustainability and care for life are guaranteed by women’s qualities and their relation with nature, as women produce life. According to Maria Mies, women “*make things grow*”:

- “a) Their interaction with nature, with their own nature as well as the external environment, was a reciprocal process. They conceived of their own bodies as being productive in the same way as they conceived of external nature being so.*
- b) Although they appropriate nature, their appropriation does not constitute a relationship of dominance or a property relation. Women are not owners of their own bodies or of the earth, but they co-operate with their bodies and with the earth in order ‘to let grow and to make grow’.*
- c) As producers of new life they also became the first subsistence producers and the inventors of the first productive economy, implying from the beginning social production and the creation of social relations, i.e. of society and history” (Shiva, 1995).*

Ecumenical ecofeminism and spirituality

Another important current of thought is Latin American ecofeminism. Part of this current’s origins lies in the reflections of progressive women of religion who work with indigenous communities and poor communities in marginalised neighbourhoods in situations of territorial dispossession engaged

in resistance struggles to defend their territories, rivers, forests or to fight against poverty and marginalisation. It is in context of these spaces - where women confront violence and poverty in concrete terms - that this line of ecofeminism emerged.

Ivone Gebara (Brazil) is one of its most well-known representatives. Theologian linked to the liberation theology, Gebara began to question this approach due to its lack of sensitivity to issues related to the body, sexuality, abortion and domestic work, among others, including the analysis of the use of guilt as a mechanism to dominate women to keep them in submission and poverty. Thus, a proposal was developed that looked at all of the tremendous injustices done to women and their bodies, which were the object of “*forgiveness*” for the Church hierarchy, but not really contemplated by liberation theology.

“...for me, feminism has been an encounter, a consciousness, a meeting with women from popular classes, a malaise, a learning process...and suddenly, I began to speak and I don't know how I became a feminist theologian. I can't say it was one specific woman who made me change, but rather a movement, an awareness created by newspapers, books, articles and daily life in a neighbourhood, seeing how people live” (Gebara, 2000).

This line of ecofeminism maintains the feminine principle for care and the reproduction of life, and questions how the dominant ideology and the traditional theological scheme, in particular, reinforce the oppression and the androcentric vision of spirituality based on “*the structure of God, the creator, his only Son who suffered for us.*” This scheme forces women to adopt the idea that sacrifice is valid because it can be justified as a way to contribute to society based on guilt.

Feminist icons of the Latin American social struggle such as Domitila Chungara, the land and housing movements and the Marian movements all share this vision that defends the

engagement of women in the struggle for social change. They question the bases of oppression of religions and large land ownership, which naturalise the roles of women and poverty.

“There is a notion of nature that has to be changed. It is not women’s priesthood that is essential, but rather their right to think, act, be leaders, say things that are different from what men say and to be recognised for this. New relations must be created in society. This means that we must also rethink theological works because there are things that can no longer be upheld - things that were validated in a theocentric, medieval world, where everything was organised based on an image of God as “the father almighty, creator of heaven and earth” (Gebara, 2000).

The current of ecofeminism linked to spirituality and theology generated much debate in the Church and provoked a reaction from the ecclesiastic hierarchy dedicated to criticising the rebellion of women theologians and nuns committed to feminism by evoking the most conservative elements of Catholic doctrine.

Ecofeminism and extractivism: My body, my territory

A broader current is being forged in Latin America and other parts of the world in contexts marked by environmental conflicts in regions whose natural resources are being overexploited by mining, oil and forestry operations. Women participating in this current are fundamentally reacting to defend their territory and denounce the environmental violence of its impacts on their lives as women.

“...in the context of the current struggles against extractivism, the language that gives greater value to women in the framework of the care culture tends to express a potentially radical pro-commons ethos that conceives social relations according to

a different logic and rationale and questions capitalism by recognising ecodependency and giving greater value to the work of social reproduction” (Svampa, 2015).

Representatives of this current include Berta Cáceres, Honduran leader and winner of the Goldman Prize assassinated by hired gunmen defending the interests of the transnational corporation behind megadam projects, and Máxima Acuña, a leader of the fight to defend the lakes in the Andean region in Peru from mining projects who also receives threats for her activism. These women embody the broad struggle of the communities, which has influenced Latin American feminist thought.

This current of ecofeminism proposes paths that bring the division between essentialism and constructivism into question. They explain that environmental devastation and extractivism affect women in their daily lives and exacerbate their vulnerability not only by increasing their work burden and intensifying their exploitation in domestic chores, such as collecting water, feeding their family and taking care of their own health and that of their loved ones. They do so also by forcing them to move to places where they are more vulnerable to sexist violence, trafficking, prostitution and femicide.

Though it is essentialist, this current of thought goes beyond essentialism and challenges the system on the economic and political level by seeking to build a different relation to nature:

“In light of the ethical-political imperative to make this transition from the rentier and extractivist model towards the “Buen Vivir” and the defence of the rights of the Earth, we, organised groups of women, ecofeminists resisting and struggling against the oppressive world system of predatory capitalism, analyse and put forth here our strongest arguments to warn about the consequences that the development of the Mining Engine and large-scale extractivist mining projects the Venezuelan

government is proposing as part of the so-called “Mining Arch of Orinoco” will bring. (...)indigenous and mestiza women have not been mere victims. As a result of their own experience, women possess a greater awareness and the vision that the destruction of nature and its resources will lead to the destruction of life. Many have bravely overcome the constant sexist coercion and have become the protagonists of the struggle to build a different type of social connection and another model for relating to nature and living beings, at the risk of their own lives, as demonstrated by the figures of Berta Cáceres and Máxima Acuña” (Comunicado Ecofeminista contra el extractivismo minero de la Orinoquía, Peru, 2014).

The number of women’s networks and collectives that reflect on and propose radical activism for the defence of their territories have multiplied in various parts of the world. They coordinate their actions and connect with one another. They engage in mutual solidarity and take action in a complex scenario that links them to political processes and involves facing repression and even death. This is particularly true in Latin America where the feminist premise “*my body, my territory*” originated. This premise is political in nature and challenges violent sexist power and the dynamics of pillaging established in recent decades in the region through the development of predatory capitalism with the complicity of several governments, even the so-called “*progressive*” ones.

Intersectionality, the importance of social class and ethnicity

Other approaches have sought to go beyond essentialism. Thinkers and writers such as Bina Agarwal from India or Val Plumwood from Australia believe that it is key for ecofeminist analysis to consider the construction of social relations and interaction with nature as the origin of the special ecological awareness that women have. Agarwal does not share the

essentialist position of Vandana Shiva and other representatives who put the emphasis on an essentialist identity basis for ecofeminism. On the contrary, she argues that ecofeminism is built from the concrete experience of women in their relation to work, territory and production.

Other feminists, thinkers and activists with a long history in social struggles, such as Angela Davis, insist that the identities and potential for emancipation cannot be generalised or conceived on the basis of an essentialist conception of the feminine nature. Instead, it is necessary to cross this analysis with the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity, as well as territorialities and specific age groups. The constructivist approach to which Yayo Herrero refers argues that the sexual division of labour and distribution of power and property is what has subjugated women. Proponents of this approach agree with all ecofeminists that this is one component of the predatory domination of nature governing the world today.

Marta Pascual says:

“It is not a matter of exalting what has been interiorised as feminine or confining women once again to a reproductive space by denying them access to culture; nor is about holding them responsible for the enormous task of fighting against capital and rescuing life on the planet, as if they had nothing else to do. It is about making their subjugation visible, denouncing the immoral logic of the system, identifying responsibilities, reversing the order of priorities of our economic system and making men and women share the responsibility for all work necessary for survival” (Pascual, 2010).

Australian philosopher Val Plumwood insists that ecofeminism is a philosophical, theoretical and practical construct. She criticises androcentric rationality and proposes a dualist interpretation of reality and social relations. Like other ecofeminists who opt for

a constructivist vision, she proposes that we must overcome the hierarchical dualisms to which we referred in the first section of this chapter by deconstructing the patriarchal logic and, while rooted in rationality and ethics, by reclaiming affection, bodies, interdependency and our relation with the planet as a proposal for the evolution of civilisation.

The contributions of feminist economics to the sustainability of life

In recent decades, ecofeminism has interacted with feminist economics to incorporate reflections and elements based on the analysis of work and the sustainability of life.

Since the end of the 20th century, and especially on the basis of the analysis of domestic work and the issue of domestic workers and their relation to the economy, feminist economics has developed a variety of inputs and analyses that have contributed enormously to advances in ecofeminism in the new century.

The analyses of unpaid domestic work and paid domestic work in stratified societies draw attention to the invisibility of this sphere of work, which is so vital to the economy and life in societies. The category of work and value were incorporated into ecofeminist thought as a point of departure for understanding the profound lack of sustainability of the current system, which gives no value to and disrespects the work needed to ensure the reproduction of life and society, despite the fact that it is absolutely fundamental to human survival.

Silvia Federici, Riane Eisler, Lourdes Benería, Elsa Chaney and Cristina Carrasco, among others, are renowned representatives of these contributions. They take up women's struggle for the right to work on equal terms - a demand of first-wave feminism that defended the inclusion of women in the workforce and public space. This inclusion has not necessarily brought improvements

to women's status in society. In the majority of cases, it has turned domestic work into an additional and invisible burden in relation to the use of their time and energy.

Cristina Carrasco says that this is, in fact, the result of a conflict between two contradictory objectives: *“on one hand, to make profit and, on the other, to care for life.”* She also affirms that *“this tension grows due to the dependency of the capitalist system on the processes of reproduction and sustainability of human life that take place beyond its sphere of relations and its direct control”* (Carrasco, 1999).

This approach questions how the androcentric economy and capitalist system have no concern for the reproduction of life and have concentrated instead on giving visibility only to those spheres that have an exchange value.

“By focusing explicitly on how each society resolves the problem of the sustainability of human life undoubtedly offers a new approach to social organisation and allows us to give visibility to everything that tends to be implicit and is normally not mentioned” (Carrasco, 1999).

Riane Eisler, for her part, develops a proposal for changing gender relations, elaborates gender indicators and proposes a care economy based on the collaboration of both genders working together in solidarity and in a complementary way.

The main contribution of these reflections and feminist economic theory is the questioning of society's unsustainability due to the failure to recognise or give visibility to reproduction work. There are, however, nuances and differences among authors on how to approach the construction of a system of care. Such nuances and differences focus on society's restorative and transitional processes while considering degrowth as a means to stop the crisis of the limits of nature generated by capitalist

civilisation. Other approaches are more concentrated on developing public policies and a system of indicators that give visibility to care work and the use of time.

Cristina Carrasco affirms that the care crisis goes beyond gender equality and leads to the questioning of the system and neoclassical economics.

The key contribution of the analysis of feminist economic theory is the questioning of the unsustainability of society due to its failure to recognise reproduction work and the importance of organising care in society. This questioning seeks to dismantle the power of financial capital that only values human activities linked to money and the pillaging of nature. Some initiatives, such as the one led by Yayo Herrero in Spain, are focused on restorative and transitional processes in society and reflecting on energy and social transitions towards degrowth to confront the crisis of the limits of nature generated by capitalist civilisation. Other currents of the feminist economics of care are more concentrated on developing public policies and a system of indicators that give visibility to care work and the use of time.

Cristina Carrasco notes that the elaboration of indicators, which are based on surveys of women on the use of their time, has not made progress in relation to men's use of their time and their involvement in providing care. For her, resolving the care crisis requires going beyond gender equity and leads to the questioning of the system and neoclassical economics to open paths to dismantle the essence of the capitalist system.

Some pending challenges for ecofeminism

Through its development, ecofeminism raises some important debates and reflections that are still to be addressed, as it is both a kind of activism for social change and a current of thought that puts forth alternative, dynamic and constantly evolving proposals.

One of them is the one that emerges at the nexus between equality feminism and difference feminism and their convergence with ecofeminism. This raises questions on what alliances or linkages ecofeminism can develop with these other currents of feminism.

The social change on ecofeminism's horizon is systemic. It is not only focused on achieving gender equity or getting certain public policies passed, but rather taking the contradiction to the limit by addressing the structural economic and philosophical bases that underlie human relations of gender oppression. Ecofeminism can contribute to these other currents of feminism by taking the analysis on the relation between gender equity processes, the exercise of rights and the fight against violence further, towards the debate on systemic change, structural change and changes in civilisation. This could allow the issues of discrimination, inequality and violence that women experience to be connected to political proposals with a greater scope for change.

Another pending dialogue is the one between essentialist ecofeminism and constructivist ecofeminism. In theory, they are actually two opposing trends or different stages of one single process. Constructivist ecofeminism insists that the relation *“women-nature is sustained by a social construct that involves the assignment of roles that give origin to the sexual division of labour and the distribution of power and property in patriarchal societies”*. This is a historical construct linked to the development of the sexual division of labour and the power relations incorporated into the economic and productive systems of society.

The essentialist current, however, proposes an interpretation linked to being female, maternity and the paragon who has the innate ability to take care of nature. This feminism is based on the idea, which is essentially naturalist, that women have the quality of being the “keepers” of the relation between humanity and nature.

What is clear is all currents of ecofeminisms are reflecting, evolving and building theory, philosophy, vision and proposals for change based on their own practices and contexts, which all point in the same direction: the one to destroy patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism.

In fact, the ecofeminism of Vandana Shiva, considered essentialist, is one of the currents that has contributed the most to the comprehension of the systemic coordination between the financial system, the pillaging of nature and patriarchy. Ecofeminisms from the South and Latin America, for their part, are also contributing to this with the concept “*body-territory*,” which is based on the fight against extractivism and the gender violence shaking the region; these are symptoms of the dystopia capitalism is generating in its alliance with patriarchy and colonialism. These lines of ecofeminism are questioning the system deeply and dismantling its structural bases. As for constructivist ecofeminisms, they contribute enormously with theories and concrete experiences in the organisation of care, proposals for transitions and energy democracy - experiences that must come together and converge with the resistance struggles underway in various contexts.

Even though some currents may strengthen an essentialist vision and avoid, in a way, entering into the systematic deconstruction of patriarchy and capitalism, they do point towards a systemic reflection. As Svampa states, “*ecofeminism provides a view on social needs - not based on scarcity or a focus on misery - but rather based on reviving the culture of care as the main inspiration for conceiving an ecologically and socially sustainable society founded on values such as reciprocity, cooperation and complementarity*” (Svampa, 2015). This systemic reflection must include an analysis of the processes of the left and of socialism of the 21st century, which provide numerous elements for taking the leap from essentialism to a critical and profound ecofeminism.

Another area of debate, reflection and dialogue is the relation of ecofeminism to the eco-social transitions, el Buen Vivir, the movements of the commons and degrowth. Degrowth proposals have been around for years. They originated in the questioning of capitalist industrialism and “*socialism that really exists*” - that is, socialist and unsustainable industrialism, which accelerated after World War II. They began to be developed further in the 1960s and 1970s. Among their precursors, one finds not only the critiques of development of the Club of Rome, but also those coming from the ranks of socialism and communism. These currents of thought criticised the direction that the political and economic processes in the socialist countries were taking - towards an arid and arbitrary type of industrialism - as they returned to unbridled capitalism with predatory relations towards nature and human beings. These pioneering critiques were masterfully elaborated by Ivan Illich, André Gorz, Cornelius Castoriadis, among other, and taken up again by Serge Latouche at the end of the last century.

Based on constructivist questioning and the critiques of political ecology and feminist economics, we, ecofeminists, argue that degrowth is unavoidable in the future of humanity. Yayo Herrero insists that if we do not organise societies to adapt gradually - to make the energy transition and to a rational and sustainable use of resources - this will be imposed eventually, but in an authoritarian and even fascist way. She is not wrong: society is currently on the path to collective suicide, as it fails to coherently address the climate crisis produced basically by societies addicted to overconsumption, fossil fuels and the pillaging of the environment.

The concrete experiences of ecofeminists are contributing enormously to the building of alternative currents for a new civilization. Based on feminist economics and the transitions approach, they require an entirely different view on social organisation: one that points out the unsustainability of current

society; and one that does not accept neoliberal dogma, but rather recognises care work in harmony with nature and solidarity. In other words, they strive to build societies that care for life and a life that “*is worth living.*”

On the other hand, the establishment of a relation between the movement of the commons - that is, of solidarity-based collective management of natural or symbolic goods or knowledge, which has been catapulted by the valuable theories of Elinor Ostrom and the Common Strategic Group (Silke Heilfrich, David Bollier and Michael Bauwens) - and ecofeminist debates and movements represents an important challenge. It raises questions on how to incorporate the reflections on care and solidarity as fundamental components of the management of the common goods. These cannot continue to be dealt with as if they were “*resources*” back in medieval times or only by trying to resolve the tensions between the State and the private. They are only viable and vital if we transcend the notion of “*property*” and “*resources,*” incorporate - as many are already doing - the reflection on the ecologic crisis of anthropogenic origin and the crisis of humanity caused by capitalism and patriarchy, and propose systemic change.

For ecofeminism, it is a major challenge to propose paths based on these experiences, which until now are isolated and small in scale, that contribute to processes of social, energetic, economic and cultural transition towards the dismantlement of the capitalist State that restricts society’s capacity to reproduce life.

It will also be a challenge to find strategies that apply to different political and economic contexts. It is one thing to apply ecofeminism in a welfare society where public goods have been dismantled to a lesser extent, but quite another in poor societies strongly marked by the scars of colonialism or “*developing countries,*” where social anomy, lack of services, poverty,

unbridled extractivism and authoritarian regimes can affect the implementation of these approaches. It will be a major challenge to build proposals in different social contexts and propose ecofeminism, buen vivir and degrowth so as to address the crisis of the limits of nature and its impacts, which are already being felt in the majority of the regions of the world. This requires going beyond merely influencing public policies to propose, instead, systems and paths that restore nature and strengthen social ties rooted in solidarity.

By way of an epilogue: embracing life

The dialogue between feminism and ecology is producing a new synergy that is intended to act on the harsh reality of capitalism. Capitalism only strengthens and exacerbates very old systems of oppression: patriarchy, colonialism and the destruction of nature, which are entirely at its service. The violence and destruction of our times - the fruit of an economic system that is totally unscrupulous and vile towards nature and humanity - alert us to the danger of it leading to barbarism, which can be the fate of a civilisation trapped in unprecedented levels of pillaging.

When we look back at the first questions raised on the sustainability of infinite economic growth, we see that intuition on the unfeasibility of the myth of development that had subjugated humanity was right. However, the tricks of the imaginary of civilisational developmentalism, infinite accumulation, androcentrism expressed as blind faith in technology and the political power and money to resolve all problems worked well to culturally sustain the system's renewal. "*Sustainable development*" ended up being the deceitful catch phrase that paved the way to: even more preying on territories, communities and ecosystems; continue subjugating women, their bodies and their time; subdue the peoples for one's own benefit; and seize the richest corners of the planet and convert them into simple objects and commodities.

Part of the trick of the myth of “*sustainable development*” was that the formula never incorporated “*us*,” the interdependencies or the human ties to nature, nor did it worry about questioning the oppression of women as the structural basis of depredation. Therefore, nature and humans continued to remain separate, as if isolated from one another, and plundering was imposed as the dominant model. Change is only possible, then, if we include the body itself while creating a new epistemology and ethic of nature that allows us to regain a profound sense of belonging, empathy and the humanising sense of time that is required to create and recreate life, wealth, relations, humankind, knowledge and culture.

Restore and repair should be the new paradigm of human coexistence today, the new model of civilisation that puts degrowth on its horizon. We must end the myth of “*sustainable development*,” a path where memory and forgetfulness combine, in order to revive the feminine energy for healing, care and profound rebellion.

Thousands of women in the world are speaking out and taking the lead in pointing the way to this new path for the defence and care of life. Some of them have fallen along the way, attacked by capital’s violent henchmen, such as Berta Cáceres or the Mirabal sisters. Yet, their strength lives on and the ideal of nature being restored, protected from pillaging, capable of sheltering all human beings as equals and as loving and empathetic carers and healers of the planet is increasingly transcendent.

Bibliography

Agarwal, B. (1988). “*El debate sobre género y medio ambiente: lecciones de la India*”, in Vázquez García & Velázquez Gutiérrez, pp. 239–285. Scielo, México.

Beauvoir, S. (1949). *Le Deuxième Sexe*. N.p.: Gallimard.

Carson, R. (1962). *The silent Spring*. USA: Houghton Mifflin.

Carrasco, C. Borderías, C. y Torns, T. (2011). *El trabajo de cuidados. Historia, teoría y políticas*. Madrid, Spain: Los Libros de la Catarata.

Carrasco, C. (1999). *Mujeres y Economía: nuevas perspectivas para viejos y nuevos problemas*. Barcelona, España: Icaria.

Comunicado ecofeminista vs. el extractivismo minero en la Orinoquia (2014). Peru, november 2014.

D’Eaubonne, F. (1974). *Le féminisme ou la mort*. France: Horay.

Ecologistas en Acción (2008). *Tejer la vida en verde y violeta. Vínculos entre ecologismo y feminism*. Cuadernos de Ecologistas en Acción, nº 13.

Eisler, R. (2003). *El cáliz y la espada*. España: Cuatro Vientos. Original Version 1989.

Eisler, R. (2014). *La verdadera riqueza de las Naciones: creando una economía del cuidado*. La Paz, Bolivia: Fundación Solón, Trenzando Ilusiones. Original Version 2007.

Gebara, I. (2000). *Ecofeminismo: algunos desafíos teológicos*. Alternativas 16/17, p.: 173-185.

Herrero, Y. (2013). *Miradas Ecofeministas para transitar a un mundo justo y sostenible*. Revista de Economía Crítica, nº16, pp 278-307.

Herrero, Y. & Pascual, M. (2010). *Ecofeminismo, una propuesta para repensar el presente y transitar al futuro*. CIP-Ecosocial. Boletín ECOS nº 10, enero-marzo 2010.

Meadows, D. (1991). *The Global Citizen*. Washington: Island. Original Version 1972.

Mies, M. & Shiva, V. (1993) *Ecofeminism*. India: Kali for women.

Otero, T. (2013). *Incompatibilidad del sistema hegemónico con la vida*. Bilbao, Alternativas feministas a la Crisis pp. 7-20.

Ostrom, E. (1990). *The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Pascual, M. (2010). *Apuntes sobre ecofeminismo: las mujeres y la tierra, en Decrecimiento*. World Watch Nº 30 Hacia el cuaderno de ACSUR.

Peredo, E. (1993). *La equidad empieza por casa, hablemos del trabajo del hogar*. La Paz, Bolivia: Tahipamu.

Peredo, E. (2009). *Reflexiones sobre la agenda social en América Latina: Crisis climática, un desafío para la condición humana y para una ética de la naturaleza*. La Paz, Bolivia: Fundación Solón

Puleo, A. (2011). *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible*. <http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/article8728.html>

Puleo, A. (2009). *Naturaleza y libertad en el pensamiento de Simone de Beauvoir*. *Revista de Investigaciones Feministas*. Cátedra de Estudios de Género, Universidad de Valladolid.

Shiva, V. (1995). *Abrazar la vida, Mujer, ecología y desarrollo*, *Cuadernos Inacabados*. Madrid, España: Horas y Horas.

Svampa, M. (2015). *Feminismos del Sur y Ecofeminismo*, *Revista Nueva Sociedad* No 256, marzo-abril de 2015.

THE RIGHTS OF MOTHER EARTH

By Pablo Solón

The rights of Mother Earth are a call to abandon the existing dominant anthropocentric paradigm and to imagine a new Earth society. For anthropocentrism, human beings are at the center of everything and are superior to all other beings and elements that are part of the Earth. Humans are the only ones who possess consciousness, values and morals. Humanity and nature are two separate categories. In this anthropocentric paradigm, nature exists mainly for the survival and development of human societies.

Capitalism, productivism and extractivism are deeply rooted in this dominant vision of our times. For these visions, everything can be extracted, transformed, commodified, controlled and “*repaired*” through the advancement of technology.

The rights of Mother Earth challenges this vision and argues that in order to build alternative societies, we need to overcome anthropocentrism and change our relationship with nature. The use of the term “*rights*” gives the impression that this would be essentially a normative or legal proposal. However, as we will see

later, the rights of Mother Earth go far beyond the need for a new legal framework that takes nature into account.

The incorporation of the rights of Mother Earth or nature in the legal order of a municipality, country or international institution is a very important step, but only one of the first steps necessary to begin to overcome anthropocentrism. The final aim of the rights of Mother Earth proposal is to build an Earth community: a society that has humans and nature as a whole.

The recognition of the rights of nature and Mother Earth in Ecuador and Bolivia back in 2008 and 2010 gave the impression that this proposal comes only from the Andean region of South America. However, the reality is much more complex and in truth, the rights of Mother Earth are the result of the confluence of different currents that have developed in different regions of the world.

In a schematic way we can group the different contributions to the rights of Mother Earth in four streams: indigenous, scientific, ethical and legal. Each one represents a particular perspective that interacts with the others, forming an alternative vision that is still under development.

Within the rights of Mother Earth there are debates and discussions that fuel the construction of the proposal. For example, the rights of Mother Earth and the rights of nature are not exactly the same. Mother Earth is the whole, while nature is a part of the whole. The rights of nature seek the recognition of rights for the non-human components of the Earth system. Whereas the rights of Mother Earth aspires to create a new regime of rights for all and everything, where there are obviously differences according to the characteristics of each of the components of the Earth system, but where we begin to overcome the separation between humans and nature so we can leave anthropocentrism.

Throughout this chapter we will look at the different aspects that converge in the construction of the proposal of the rights of Mother Earth, we will analyze their evolution, how they have been institutionalized in Ecuador and Bolivia, and finally we will explore some of the problems and challenges ahead.

The streams

The Indigenous Stream

The rights of Mother Earth reflect the vision of indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, and in particular, of the Andean region of South America. This indigenous vision entails a deep respect of nature. In this vision, everything on Earth and in the cosmos have life. Humans are not superior beings who are above plants, animals, or mountains. Humans "*inter-be*" with other non-human beings forming an Earth community. The division between living beings and non-living beings does not exist. In the Andean indigenous vision, everything has life including the hills, rivers, air, rocks, glaciers and oceans. All are part of a larger living organism that is Pachamama or Mother Earth. In the Andes of South America you cannot explain life if you do not take into account the "*whole*." Humans are just one of the components of the Earth community. They do not own the Earth or other beings, nor are they their masters. Human existence depends on harmony with nature; a balance that is not static, but dynamic, that changes and moves in cycles, and brings misfortune when broken.

The rights of Mother Earth are based on the indigenous premise that questions: If we are all part of Mother Earth, why do some have to be more than others? Why do some beings enjoy protection and privileges, while others are relegated to the status of things?

In this vision, in order for the Earth community to flourish, we must give equal treatment and respect for all who are part of it: from glaciers to forests, animals to humans, plants to the wind and all beings.

Though the indigenous stream does not speak of “rights” directly, as the concept of “rights” in the Western philosophical sense, the essence of the indigenous vision underpins the whole approach of the rights of Mother Earth. The concept of “rights” is a construction that comes from outside the indigenous context and therefore the “rights” of Mother Earth or “rights” of nature are expressed through socio-cultural practices rather than legal terms.

The Scientific Current

Different communities of Earth scientists acknowledge that the Earth behaves as a single, self-regulating system with physical, chemical, biological, and human components. The Earth system consists of the land, oceans, atmosphere and poles, and includes the planet’s natural cycles of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, phosphorus, sulphur and others. As noted in the 2001 Amsterdam Declaration on Earth System Science, “*The interactions and feedback between the different components of the Earth sciences are complex and exhibit multi-scale temporal and spatial variability*”. According to NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) of the United States, human life is an integral part of the Earth system and affects the carbon, nitrogen, water, oxygen and other cycles and processes.

Human society would not only be a component of the Earth system but in the last centuries would alter the functioning of the system as a whole, causing global change.

“Human activities are significantly influencing Earth’s environment in many ways in addition to greenhouse gas

emissions and climate change. Anthropogenic changes to Earth's land surface, oceans, coasts and atmosphere and to biological diversity, the water cycle and biogeochemical cycles are clearly identifiable beyond natural variability. They are equal to some of the great forces of nature in their extent and impact. Many are accelerating. Global change is real and is happening now" (Steffen, et al., 2004).

This global change cannot be understood in terms of a simple relation of cause and effect. Human driven changes cause multiple effects that cascade through the Earth System in complex ways. These effects interact with each other and with local and regional scale changes in multidimensional patterns that are a challenge to understand and even more difficult to predict.

Presently, human activities have the potential to transform how the Earth System operates in ways that may prove irreversible and that may make this planet less hospitable to humans and other life. The probability of a human driven abrupt change in the Earth's environment has yet to be quantified, but it is significant.

Throughout its existence, the planet Earth has undergone several sudden and radical changes. Yet this is the first time that these changes of planetary scale would be produced by human activity creating less hospitable conditions for humans and other forms of life.

For the scientific community, the Earth System has moved well outside the range of the natural variability exhibited over the last half million years at least. The nature of changes now occurring simultaneously in the Earth System, their magnitudes and rates of change are unprecedented. The Earth is currently operating in a non-analogue state (IBGP, 2001).

Some members of the scientific stream have even gone further and advocated for a kind of ethical framework to address

the systemic crisis that we are facing. In 2001, scientists from the IHDP (International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change), the IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme), the WCRP (World Climate Research Programme), and DIVERSITAS issued the Amsterdam Declaration on Earth System Science affirming:

“An ethical framework for global stewardship and strategies for Earth System management are urgently needed. The accelerating human transformation of the Earth’s environment is not sustainable. Therefore, the business-as-usual way of dealing with the Earth System is not an option. It has to be replaced - as soon as possible - by deliberate strategies of good management that sustain the Earth’s environment while meeting social and economic development objectives” (IBGP, 2001).

Between 2001 and 2005, 1,360 experts from 95 countries participated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which was carried out at the request of the United Nations. One of their key conclusions was that species and ecosystems have “*intrinsic value*”; that “*is the value of something in and for itself, irrespective of its utility for someone else*” (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005).

The Earth sciences provide a set of data and analysis that place the challenge of thinking and building a new system of management of the planet to restore the balance of the Earth System. This is why the scientific stream is fundamental for the rights of Mother Earth that aims to preserve and strengthen the Earth community.

The Ethical Stream

The ethical stream that contributes to the emergence of the rights of Mother Earth is very broad and diverse, and comprises a series of voices that advocate for an improvement or change in

the relationship with nature, based on philosophical, religious or moral considerations.

For example, the thoughts of St. Francis of Assisi are part of this ethical current since they advocate for the equality of all creatures rather than the domination of man over creation. St. Francis of Assisi referred to the sun, the Earth, the water, and the wind as his brothers and sisters. Today, Pope Francis develops this thought and affirms: *“This is our sin, exploiting the Earth and not allowing her to give us what she has within her.”*

In Buddhism, we also find similar perspectives. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama condemns environmental destruction and commands humanity to realize its obligations to the planet:

“We are part of nature. (...) Among the thousands of species of mammals on earth, we humans have the greatest capacity to alter nature. As such, we have a two-fold responsibility. Morally, as beings of higher intelligence, we must care for this world. The other inhabitants of the planet - insects and so on - do not have the means to save or protect this world. Our other responsibility is to undo the serious environmental degradation that is the result of incorrect human behavior. We have recklessly polluted the world with chemicals and nuclear waste, selfishly consuming many of its resources. Humanity must take the initiative to repair and protect the world” (Dalai Lama et al., 2001).

Also part of this ethical stream is the thinking of the North American conservationist, Aldo Leopold (1887–1948) who proposed a *“land ethic”*; a body of self-imposed limitations on freedom, which derives from the recognition that *“the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts.”* In his words:

“The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. A land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from

conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow members, and also respect for the community as such" (Leopold, 1949).

In this same line of ethical thought was the Earth Charter launched in 2000. This document states that *"the protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust,"* the charter calls for *"universal responsibility"* to protect the *"unique community of life"* that includes all the living and non-living beings on this planet (Boff, 2000). It contains a broad range of principles, from ensuring sustainable life in all its rich diversity, to the adoption of alternative systems of production that *"safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities"* (Boff, 2000).

Many other thinkers and philosophers have contributed to forge this ethical current that contributes to the vision of the rights of Mother Earth.

The Juridical Stream

The juridical stream takes into account all the elements mentioned above, and seeks to place them in a legal framework, with the perspective that the scientific, ethical, and indigenous principles that prescribe radical transformation in the relationship between humans and the Earth require tools for the enforcement of that change. This stream recognizes that law and governance are social constructions, which evolve over time and change with new realities. They are important mechanisms for regulating human behavior, but need to remain flexible to account for a shift away from an anthropocentric order. Every process of economic and social transformation leads to changes in the juridical framework of the society. The challenge that we now face is to do a profound revolution in this legal framework to overcome anthropocentrism and prevent a catastrophe befalling the Earth.

As Leopold says, a legal framework implicitly considers human beings as the center and the end of the universe, and claiming that the universe exists to satisfy human needs and desires, is absolutely anthropocentric (Leopold, 1949).

In this context, the juridical stream that feeds the rights of Mother Earth intends to develop jurisprudence that is centered in the Earth instead of being centered in the human being. A new legal and institutional framework that includes the postulates of scientific, ethical and indigenous currents to accelerate the change we need.

According to Australian law professor Peter Burdon (2010):

“Law is a social creation and a legal conclusion and as legal philosopher Philip Allot notes, ‘law cannot be better than society’s idea of itself’. As a consequence, it should not be surprising that many aspects of our law reflect an anthropocentric view of the earth. (...) Law is a significant description of the way a society perceives itself and projects its image to the world. (...) As an evolving social institution, law needs to adapt to reflect this understanding.”

The juridical stream is currently asking how to rethink the legal and institutional order to allow the welfare of the Earth and all of its components? How can our legal and normative frameworks reflect the fact that nature has intrinsic value? How to build a governance that helps prevent catastrophic imbalances on planet Earth?

In search of a new Earth jurisprudence, the catholic priest and “eco-theologian” Thomas Berry (1914-2009) emphasized that “*all rights have been bestowed on human beings*” and that the other modes of non-human existence have no rights (Berry, 1999). Consequently, all other non-human components have no value and are only taken into account as they serve the human being.

In this context, what is not human becomes something totally vulnerable to exploitation by the human.

So to advance to an Earth jurisprudence it is necessary to overcome that conception of the non-human world like “a collection of objects” (Berry, 1999) and begin to think in terms of a “communion of subjects”, alive, non-alive, human and non-human (Boff, 2000).

In this way, it is necessary to question the legitimacy of any law that exceeds the ecological limits of the environment in order to satisfy the needs of the human species (Leopold, 1949).

The dualism between subject and object is a key aspect of Western civilization. We have assigned values to subjects and everything that are like “us” and we deprive rights from all other aspects of the world that we tend to consider “objects”. Subjects are able to think and create while the rest are only resources, instruments or environment.

To move away from this position, the juridical stream of the rights of Mother Earth propose a revolution in how we conceive of the law. As Berry puts it:

“To the industrial-commercial world the natural world has no inherent rights to existence, habitat, or freedom to fulfill its role in the vast community of existence. Yet there can be no sustainable future, even for the modern industrial world, unless these inherent rights of the natural world are recognized as having legal status. The entire question of possession and use of the Earth, either by individuals or by establishments, needs to be considered in a more profound manner than Western society has ever done previously” (Berry, 1999).

The Path

The proposal for the “rights” of nature was initially developed in North America and Europe in the mid-20th century, and was built on a platform of ideas, including those of Aldo Leopold and proponents of animal rights, such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan and Jeremy Bentham.

The defense of animal rights contributed to the development of the rights of Mother Earth by questioning the concept of rights as being exclusive to human beings. In 1789, Bentham wrote, “*The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny... The question is not, can they (animals) reason? Nor can they talk? But can they suffer?*” (Bentham, 1789).

The rights of animals have been resisted and until now transit different paths in the legislation of countries. In the case of Germany, the Section 90a of the Civil Code states: “*Animals are not things. They are protected by special statutes. They are governed by the provisions that apply to things, with the necessary modifications, except insofar as otherwise provided.*”

Nonetheless, the vision of the rights of nature as a whole only began to develop in the middle of the twentieth century. In the 1970s, two key sources of the juridical stream developed in Europe and North America. One is “*deep ecology*” promoted by Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and the other one is “*Earth jurisprudence*” or “*wild law*”, initially developed by Thomas Berry an American catholic priest and eco-theologian.

Deep Ecology

Arne Næss (1912 – 2009) envisioned two different forms of environmentalism: “*deep ecology*”, which interrogates, on the most fundamental level, the root causes to Earth’s imbalance, and

“*shallow ecology*,” which tends to focus on short-term, surface-level changes, often promoting technological fixes (e.g. recycling, increased automotive efficiency, export-driven mono-cultural organic agriculture) that are rooted in the same consumption-oriented values and practices of today’s industrial economy. The Deep Ecology approach involves redesigning our whole system to align with values and methods that truly preserve the ecological and cultural diversity of natural systems¹.

For Michael E. Zimmerman: “*Deep Ecology is founded on two basic principles: one is a scientific insight into the interrelatedness of all systems of life on Earth, together with the idea that anthropocentrism – human-centeredness – is a misguided way of seeing things. Deep ecologists say that an eco-centric attitude is more consistent with the truth about the nature of life on Earth. The second component of deep ecology is what Arnie Næss calls the need for human self-realization (“re-earthing”). Instead of identifying with our egos or our immediate families, we would learn to identify with trees and animals and plants, indeed the whole ecosphere. This would involve a pretty radical change of consciousness, but it would make our behavior more consistent with what science tells us is necessary for the well-being of life on Earth. We just wouldn’t do certain things that damage the planet, just as you wouldn’t cut off your own finger*” (Zimmerman, 1989).

Næss rejected the idea that beings can be ranked according to their relative value. For example, judgments on whether an animal has an eternal soul, whether it uses reason or whether it has consciousness have all been used to justify the ranking of the human animal as superior to other animals. Næss states that from an ecological point of view “*the right of all forms [of life] to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species*” (Næss, 1973).

¹ <http://www.deepecology.org/deepecology.htm>

A primary critique of deep ecology focuses on the proposal of some of its advocates like Bill Devall and George Sessions who wrote that, *“the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.”* The main argument of the critique is that to promote birth reduction as a key solution especially targets poor countries and leads to racist attitudes. Other Deep Ecology theorists like Warwick Fox in Australia respond to this notion by arguing for the distinction between being misanthropic (hating humanity) and being anti-anthropocentric.

In addition, many social ecologists and eco-feminists agree that deep ecology does not conduct sufficient analysis of the social forces at work in the destruction of the biosphere. Finally, others have critiqued deep ecologists who sometimes attribute human characteristics to non-human organisms, falling into anthropomorphism.

Earth Jurisprudence or Wild Law

Thomas Berry (1914-2009) inspired the movement for Earth Jurisprudence or Wild Law. Interestingly, Berry’s main point of reference was not nature or the Earth, but the universe.

“The universe is the only text without context. Everything else has to be seen in the context of the universe. The story of the universe is the story of each individual being in the universe’, and so the journey of the universe – forever evolving, continually emerging – ‘is the journey of each individual being in the universe’. We can read the story of the universe in the trees. Everything tells the story of the universe. The winds tell the story, literally, not just imaginatively. The story has its imprint everywhere, and that is why it is so important to know the story. If you do not know the story, in a sense you do not know yourself; you do not know anything” (Berry, 1999).

The term “*Earth Jurisprudence*” was coined to highlight the need to overcome the anthropocentric framework of contemporary jurisprudence. Wild Law reflected the view among the movement’s advocates that their work was about bringing together and balancing two different parts of the whole: civilization and nature. Cormac Cullinan explains the concept in these terms:

“I know that “wild law” sounds like nonsense -a contradiction in terms. Law, after all, is intended to bind, constrain, regularize and civilize. Law’s rules, backed up by force, are designed to clip, prune and train the wilderness of human behavior into the manicured lawns and shrubbery of the civilized garden. “Wild”, on the other hand, is synonymous with unkempt, barbarous, unrefined, uncivilized, unrestrained, wayward, disorderly, irregular, out of control, unconventional, undisciplined, passionate, violent, uncultivated, and riotous. A wild law is a law to regulate human behavior in order to protect the integrity of the earth and all species on it. It requires a change in the human relationship with the natural world from one of exploitation to one of democracy with other beings. If we are members of the earth’s community, then our rights must be balanced against those of plants, animals, rivers and ecosystems. In a world governed by wild law, the destructive, human-centered exploitation of the natural world would be unlawful. Humans would be prohibited from deliberately destroying functioning ecosystems or driving other species to extinction” (Cullinan, 2011).

Why "rights"?

What kind of rights does nature have? Are they similar to human rights?

The first and most comprehensive responses to these questions are in the Ten Principles of Earth Jurisprudence written by Thomas Berry.

Ten Principles of Earth Jurisprudence

Thomas Berry

1) *Rights originate where existence originates. That which determines existence determines rights.*

2) *Since it has no further context of existence in the phenomenal order, the universe is self-referent in its being and self-normative in its activities. It is also the primary referent in the being and the activities of all derivative modes of being.*

3) *The universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not objects to be used. As a subject, each component of the universe is capable of having rights.*

4) *The natural world on the planet Earth gets its rights from the same source that humans get their rights: from the universe that brought them into being.*

5) *Every component of the Earth community has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth community.*

6) *All rights are role-specific or species-specific, and limited. Rivers have river rights. Birds have bird rights. Insects have insect rights. Humans have human rights. Difference in rights is qualitative, not quantitative. The rights of an insect would be of no value to a tree or a fish.*

7) *Human rights do not cancel out the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state. Human property rights are not absolute. Property rights are simply a special relationship between a particular human 'owner' and a particular piece of 'property,' so that both might fulfill their roles in the great community of existence.*

8) *Since species exist only in the form of individuals, rights refer to individuals, not simply in a general way to species.*

9) *These rights as presented here are based on the intrinsic relations that the various components of Earth have to each other. The planet Earth is a single community bound together with interdependent relationships. No living being nourishes itself. Each component of the Earth community is immediately or mediately dependent on every other member of the community for the nourishment and assistance it needs for its own survival. This mutual nourishment, which includes the predator-prey relationship, is integral with the role that each component of the Earth has within the comprehensive community of existence.*

10) *In a special manner, humans have not only a need for but also a right of access to the natural world to provide for the physical needs of humans and the wonder needed by human intelligence, the beauty needed by human imagination, and the intimacy needed by human emotions for personal fulfillment.*

According to Berry, rights originate where existence originates. Beings have rights not because they have consciousness or moral status, but merely because they exist and because their existence can only be explained as interaction between the different elements of the whole. Everything is interrelated, nothing exists in isolation, and all share the same source of existence: the universe.

For Berry, every component of the Earth community has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth community.

These three rights are role-specific or species-specific, and limited. Rivers have river rights. Birds have bird rights. Insects have insect rights. Humans have human rights. Difference in rights is qualitative, not quantitative. The rights of an insect would be of no value to a tree or a fish.

Thus, the rights of nature are not an extension of human rights to nature. According to Christopher D. Stone “*to say that the environment should have rights is not to say that it should have every right we can imagine, or even the same body of rights as human beings have. Nor is it to say that everything in the environment should have the same rights as every other thing in the environment*” (Stone, 2010).

Moreover, human rights do not supersede the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state. These rights are based on the intrinsic relations that the various components of Earth have to each other. No living being nourishes itself. Each component of the Earth community depends on every other member of the community for its own survival.

The concept applies only in the context of human interaction with nature and would place duties only on human beings. The rights of nature motivate to action people in a position to help promote or safeguard a given right (Burdon, 2011).

Legal texts

In the 21st century, the proposals of Earth Jurisprudence began to be incorporated into legal texts. In 2006, with the help of the Community Environment Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), the town of Barnstead in the State of New Hampshire in the United States passed an ordinance that states: “*Natural communities and ecosystems possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within the Town of Barnstead. Ecosystems shall include, but not be limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems.*”

Similar resolutions have been adopted in other towns in the United States. These municipal ordinances are focused on specific areas of nature, and are not of general application; they empower local communities to assume the role of guardian for

nature. Authorities measure damages in terms of the actual harm caused to the ecosystem rather than to a human property owner.

“Under existing environmental laws, a person needs to prove ‘standing’ in order to go to court to protect Nature. This means demonstrating personal harm from logging, the pollution of a river, or the extraction of water. Damages are then awarded to that person, not to the ecosystem that’s been destroyed. In the wake of the BP oil spill, the only damage deemed compensable by the legal system is the financial damage caused to those who cannot use the Gulf ecosystem anymore. Under a rights-based system of law, a river has the right to flow, fish and other species in a river have the right to regenerate and evolve, and the flora and fauna that depend on a river have the right to thrive. It is the natural ecological balance of that habitat that is protected. Just as the lion hunts the antelope as part of the natural cycle of life, recognizing Rights of Nature does not put an end to fishing or other human activities. Rather, it places them in the context of a healthy relationship where our actions do not threaten the balance of the system upon which we depend” (Margil & Biggs, 2010).

The Constitution of Ecuador

The most important achievement in legal text is without a doubt, the Constitution of Ecuador in 2008. The Constitution devotes Chapter Seven to the Rights of Nature and says:

Article 71. Nature, or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and occurs, has the right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes. All persons, communities, peoples and nations can call upon public authorities to enforce the rights of nature.

Article 72. Nature has the right to be restored. This restoration shall be apart from the obligation of the State and natural persons or legal entities to compensate individuals and communities that depend on affected natural systems.

Article 73. The State shall apply preventive and restrictive measures on activities that might lead to the extinction of species, the destruction of ecosystems and the permanent alteration of natural cycles. The introduction of organisms and organic and inorganic material that might definitively alter the nation's genetic assets is forbidden.

The text is clearly the result of the combination of the indigenous stream with the juridical stream. It speaks about nature as synonym of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), which for some is not accurate because Mother Earth comprises nature and humans. The specific rights for nature that are recognized in the Ecuadorian constitution are the right to exist, to its integrity, to regenerate, to its vital cycles and to be restored.

The Constitution of Ecuador doesn't include mechanisms of enforcement of these rights and gives the State the flexibility to interpret these regulations for national interests. Therefore, much of the enforcement of the rights of nature depends on the will of the government and an active society.

The case of Bolivia

The constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia adopted in 2009 doesn't include the concept of the rights of nature and is more in the line of "*environmental rights*" for the benefit of present and future generations of humans (Art. 33). The most advanced development of this legal text is that "*any person, in his own right or on behalf of a collective, is authorized to take legal actions in defense of environmental rights*" (Art. 34), something that we can also find in the Ecuadorian Constitution.

The rights of Mother Earth was developed in the case of Bolivia after the adoption of the Constitution and is directly linked to an international response to the global crisis of climate change. In 2010, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, at the “*World’s Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*” with the participation of 35,000 participants, and more than one thousand delegates from around one hundred countries drafted the “*Proposal for a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth.*”

This Declaration says “*that we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny*” and that “*in an interdependent living community, it is not possible to recognize the rights of only human beings without causing an imbalance within Mother Earth*” and “*that to guarantee human rights it is necessary to recognize and defend the rights of Mother Earth and all beings in her.*”

This approach to Mother Earth rights sees that humans and nature are part of the Earth community and therefore we must see these rights as the rights of the whole and all its beings and not only of the non-human (nature) part.

For this declaration “*the inherent rights of Mother Earth are inalienable in that they arise from the same source as existence*” and that all “*organic and inorganic beings*” have rights “*that are specific to their species or kind and appropriate for their role and function within the communities within which they exist*”.

The specific rights that are recognized to Mother Earth as a whole and to “*all beings of which she is composed*” are the rights to life and to exist; to be respected; to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions; to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being; to water; to clean air; to integral health; to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic

or radioactive waste; to not have its genetic structure manipulated and to full and prompt restoration.

This Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth was presented to the United Nations and the Climate Change process of negotiations, and at the end of 2010 its text was incorporated and adopted as Law 71 of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

The most important advancement of the Bolivian Law of the Rights of Mother Earth is the inclusion of an Ombudsman of Mother Earth (*Defensoría de la Madre Tierra*) whose mission would be to look after the compliance and enforcement of those rights. However, this Ombudsman of Mother Earth has not yet been put in place in Bolivia.

The Challenges

The rights of nature initiatives are spreading in different parts of the world. In the case of the United States, the struggle continues for ordinances at municipal level that recognize the rights of nature; in Europe there is an initiative to have the European Parliament and Council recognize that nature has rights; in New Zealand the Crown has signed an agreement with the *iwi* (the local *Māori* people) stating that the *Whanganui* River will be recognized as a person when it comes to the law; in the Philippines and other countries there has been juridical awards that speak about the “*health of the people and the environment which are equally protected under our fundamental law*”; in the United Nations every year there is dialogue on “*Harmony with Nature*” where the proposal for a Universal Declaration of the rights of Mother Earth is discussed; also at the UN and in the International Criminal Court of Justice there is an initiative from civil society groups to recognize the crime of ecocide; at the global level, since 2014, there is a Rights of Nature Ethics Tribunal that is promoted by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

The proposal of rights of Mother Earth has gained momentum after the experiences in Ecuador and Bolivia but is now facing a very difficult moment as there is a lack of implementation and several provisions are being violated by the governments that originally supported them.

In this process, the rights of Mother Earth approach has to address some key concerns in relation to the issue of compliance and implementation; articulate a clear rejection to threats like the payment for ecosystem services and the green economy; deepen the discussion around property rights that clearly obstruct the implementation of rights of Mother Earth; and go beyond legal texts to address key issues such as what kind of democracy do we need for an Earth democracy.

Compliance and implementation

Without any doubt one big challenge that the rights of nature and the rights of Mother Earth face is the implementation and compliance of these rights where they have already been recognized. In Ecuador and Bolivia, there is not one single case that can be used as a positive emblematic example. On the contrary, there have been several backlashes, where government projects and decisions have been made in clear violation of these rights.

In 2011, the government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia tried to build a road that was going to cut the “*Isiboro Ségure Indigenous Territory and National Park*”, TIPNIS in Spanish. TIPNIS covers 12,363 km² of Amazonian and Andean territory. It is among the richest reserves of biodiversity in Latin America. It shelters thousands of species of flora, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes. It is the land of the *Mojeño*, the *Chimán* and the *Yuracaré*.

Thanks to the resistance of these indigenous peoples and the mobilizations of many sectors of the society, the government has put on hold the project to build the road. Unfortunately though, this decision to put the project on hold was taken only after the police had committed acts of repression and violence against the indigenous peoples that were then marching to the city of La Paz. In no moment during the conflict and until today, there has not yet been an official process by the authorities to take into account the rights of Mother Earth that are going to be affected and violated if the road is constructed.

In the case of the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, the government of Ecuador was going to refrain from exploiting the oil reserves of the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) oil field within the Yasuni National Park. It was presented as a real positive step in preserving the rights of nature in such a biodiversity-rich region. But in 2013, the government of Correa announced that they will exploit the oil in that area because they had not received enough economic support from the international community and all the initiatives to have a national referendum on this issue have been blocked by the authorities in Ecuador.

The case of Yasuni-ITT made it clear that it is not possible to condition the respect of the rights of nature to the existence of an economic or monetary compensation or some form of payment for environmental services. Just as human rights must be guaranteed in all circumstances, irrelevant to monetary or economic gain, so must the rights of nature.

Besides these very infamous cases in Bolivia and Ecuador, in many other projects of mining, oil extraction, deforestation, nuclear energy, GMOs, fracking and others with evident negative impacts to the rights of nature, there has been no official process to see how the rights of nature are or will be affected and what measures should be taken to protect these rights. There is an evident contradiction between the discourse and the practice of

these governments, between the legal rights that are recognized and the rights that are respected and guaranteed in reality.

Nonetheless, the fact that these rights are legally recognized and are now very well-known in the society, has allowed different indigenous groups, social and environmental organisations to develop different actions demanding the implementation of these rights.

The threat of Payment for Environmental Services.

Another issue is that of the threat of the concept of the Payment for Environmental Services. One thing is that of the environmental services of cleaning the streets and parks of a city, quite another, is to use the term to refer to the functions of nature, to measure them, and to put a price on them to market them under the name of “*environmental services*”. This has been introduced through the “*Green Economy*” that starts from the good premise that “nature has an intrinsic value” but then uses this premise to push in favor of the commodification of ecosystem services and the development of new kinds of “*biodiversity offsets*”. The idea is that if a company destroys nature anywhere in the world it can “*compensate*” for its destruction by buying “*credits*” from another project that in a different part of the world promotes biodiversity conservation. An example of this is the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) initiative, which suggests that air transport, instead of effectively reducing their greenhouse gas emissions, can buy “*carbon credits*” from conservation projects of forests.

The idea of offsets at the level of carbon emissions or offsets of biodiversity represents a very speculative process of the financialization of nature that will further deepen the imbalances of the Earth system. The preservation of one species can never compensate for the destruction of another species. The rights of nature can never be guaranteed through a market logic in which

polluting companies buy “permits” to continue with their harmful activities on the environment.

As Maude Barlow says:

“Payment for Ecological Services (PES) puts a price tag on ecological goods – clean air, water, soil etc, - and services such as water purification, crop pollination and carbon sequestration that sustain them. A market model of PES is an agreement between the “holder” and the “consumer” of an ecosystem service, turning that service into an environmental property right. Clearly this system privatizes nature, be it a wetland, lake, forest plot or mountain, and sets the stage for private accumulation of nature by those wealthy enough to be able to buy, hoard, sell and trade it. Already, northern governments and private corporations are studying public-private partnerships to set up lucrative PES projects in the global South” (Barlow 2010).

Private property

Another issue that needs to be addressed in the implementation of the rights of Mother Earth is that of private property. One of the main manifestations of anthropocentrism in law is the notion of property. Long before the concept of human rights was adopted, the legal concept of property rights was established and enforced: property rights over land, houses, animals, machines, tools and even other humans such as slaves and women. Property can be sold, borrowed, gifted, split, inherited, etc. In order to have property, the object of possession has to be identified as a thing that has no rights or has less rights than that of the owner of that possession. Property between citizens that have equal rights was not acceptable even in Ancient Greece. In order to become an object of property, the other human had to be dispossessed of his or her rights through war and conquest or was born a slave.

The dominant legal relation between humans and nature until today is through property. Laws are established to guarantee the property rights over land, mineral resources, oil, animals, water, etc. Property can be private, State-owned or public, but it is always the property of certain humans over certain “*things*” of nature. Not every thing is property in nature because in order to become property it has to be delimited, isolated, scarce and subject to be brought to the market. Property fragments nature into “*things*” that in reality are never dissociated: the forest from the soil, the underground water from biodiversity, the land from the minerals.

In reality, the main contradiction has never been between human rights and the rights of Mother Earth, but between the rights of nature and property rights that are concentrated mainly in a small fraction of humanity.

As Peter Burdon says:

“In western society, property law provides some of the most foundational ideas about the land and about our place in the environment. Many of these ideas are so ingrained that we rarely give them second thought. The common ‘idea’ of private property is individual or absolute entitlement over a thing (what Blackstone called ‘sole and despotic dominion’), which is protected by the will of the State. Our home is our castle, our zone of personal influence ‘where we make the rules’. Our legal conception of property also tells us that the land can be divided into discrete and distinct bundles of legal relations, which individuals hold in relation to each other” (Burdon, 2010).

In order to have a new legal framework that is not anthropocentric, it is necessary to overcome, redefine and limit the concept of property. Earth Jurisprudence can only flourish if property rights are constrained and if we have a new eco-society that is not ruled by capital. In the case of Ecuador and Bolivia,

there were important changes with the addition of new rights related to nature but there was no significant change in relation to property rights.

Beyond Rights

Why, if the rights of Mother Earth and nature were born criticizing anthropocentrism, have they used the concept of “rights” that is very anthropocentric? If humans developed “rights” to govern themselves, why attribute rights to nature instead of building another kind of legal framework to prevent the destruction of the environment?

Thomas Berry was never entirely happy with the language of “rights”, “*but it was the best we had to be going on with.*” The idea was to try to use a central concept of the current legal system (rights) to restore a certain balance in the Earth system by recognizing rights to the other part of the system that had none. How to reduce property rights, especially those of large companies, if at the same time it is not recognized that nature also has rights? Talking about responsibility and obligation of humans and companies could be another way, but this would not question anthropocentrism and in the current context would always leave nature in a situation of inferiority.

The main objective of the Jurisprudence of the Earth or of the rights of Mother Earth was never to stay in the dead letter of legal texts. The goal is to advance towards an Earth society, and therefore the rights of Mother Earth should not be restricted to the discussion of legal frameworks.

The challenge for the Mother Earth rights movement is to advance in the construction of a system of governance of the Earth at all levels. The recognition and effective application of the rights of nature at the level of a city or a country is a very important but not a sufficient step. The recovery of the balance

of our planet requires international mechanisms and regulations. The challenge is how to develop forms of Earth Democracy at the national, regional and global levels that take into account the whole and not just the human part of the whole.

Thomas Berry used to say: “*The loss of imagination and the loss of nature are the same thing. If you lose one you lose the other.*” Cormac Cullinan continues along the same lines and stresses that the aim of the Mother Earth rights movement is “*to foster creative diversity rather than impose uniformity*” and “*open spaces so that different non-conventional approaches can emerge, flourish, follow its course and die*” (Cullinan, 2011).

Bibliography

Barlow, M. (2010). *Building the Case for the Universal Declaration of The Rights of Mother Earth*. Canada: Council of Canadians, Fundación Pachamama, y Global Exchange.

Bentham, J. (1789). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. USA: Prometheus Books.

Berry, T. (1999). *The Great Work*. New York, USA: Three Rivers Press.

Boff, L. et al. (2000). *Carta de la Tierra*.

Burdon, P. (2010). *Exploring Wild Law, The philosophy of Earth Jurisprudence*. Kent Town, S. Australia: Wakefield Press.

Burdon, P (2011). *Earth Rights: The Theory*. IUCN Academy of environmental law, e-journal issue 2011.

Cullinan, C. (2011). *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*. Totnes: Green.

Dalai Lama, Quaki F, Benson A. (2001). *Imagine All the People: A Conversation with the Dalai Lama on Money, Politics, and Life As It Could Be*. Boston, USA: Wisdom Publisher.

Drengson, A. *Some Thought on the Deep Ecology Movement, Foundation for Deep Ecology*. <http://www.deepecology.org/deepecology.htm>

IBGP (2001). *Amsterdam Declaration on Earth System Science*.

Leopold, A. (1949). *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Margil, M. & Biggs, S. (2010). *A New Paradigm for Nature - Turning our Values into Law*. Canada: Council of Canadians, Fundación Pachamama, y Global Exchange.

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005). *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Næss, A. (1973). *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement*. *Inquiry, an interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 16, Issue 1-4, pp 95-100.

Price, B. *What are Rights, and how can Nature “have” Rights?*

Steffen, W. et al. (2004). *Global Change and the Earth System: A Planet Under Pressure, Executive Summary*. Sweden: IGBP Secretariat, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

Stone, C.(2010). *Should Trees have Standing? Third Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zimmerman, M. (1989). *Introduction To Deep Ecology*. Recovered from <http://www.context.org/iclib/ic22/>

DEGLOBALISATION

By Pablo Solón

Deglobalisation does not promote isolation or autarchy, but rather a different kind of global integration that is not dominated by capital. Deglobalisation is about thinking and building alternative integration models with people and nature at the centre.

Globalisation is not a process in which growing interdependence and integration have been made possible thanks to advances in communications and the internet. In this sense, globalisation is not a simple synonym of world integration. Globalisation here is defined as the accelerated process of integrating capital, production and markets and extending them to all areas of life with the goal of increasing the profit rates.

According to Walden Bello and Focus on the Global South, who coined the term “deglobalisation”, the objective is not to withdraw from the global economy, but rather to trigger a process of restructuring the world economic and political system so as to strengthen local and national economies instead of weakening them (Bello, 2005). Deglobalisation questions the integration process dominated by the logic of capital and the supposed rationality of the economy that erodes the decision-making

capacity of the people and States. Deglobalising means starting to think and build an integration process based on the needs of peoples, nations, communities and ecosystems.

Just as degrowth invites us to imagine a society of prosperity without growth that degrades nature, deglobalisation calls on us to think of a kind of globalisation that is for the people, and not for banks and transnational corporations.

The deglobalisation proposal includes three intimately linked processes. The first is to **understand** the future of globalisation and its different phases; the second is to **deconstruct**, confront, resist, slow and obstruct the expansion of globalisation; and the third, to build **alternatives** to the process of capital capture in the world (Bello, 2005).

Understanding the globalisation process

In Walden Bello's view, there have been two major phases of globalisation. The first went from the early 19th century to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and the second phase began in the 1980s and continues to this day. The period between these two phases (1914-1980) was marked by the dominance of national capitalist economies with a significant degree of State intervention and an international economy with strong constraints on trade and capital flows (Bello, 2013).

The current phase of globalisation began in the late 1970s-early 1980s with the rise of neoliberalism and the "Washington Consensus". Neoliberal ideology affirms that the key lies in the market and competition that reward efficient and profitable ventures while punishing obsolete companies and businesses. In order for the market and competition to fulfil their role, it is necessary, on one hand, to remove the barriers and obstacles that prevent goods, services and capital from flowing freely and, on the other, to limit the State's role in society, production, trade, finance

and the environment. For neoliberalism, anything that inhibits competition is contrary to the individuals' freedom to consume, innovate and invest in what gives them the most benefits and satisfaction. The inequality that results from competition and the market rewards those who are the most efficient and in the long run, generates growth, which benefits society as a whole. The benefits, however, are always distributed unevenly.

For neoliberalism, there are no citizens, but rather consumers who feel fulfilled when they expand their capacity to consume. Progress and modernity are associated to consumption and increases in productivity, and not to caring for humans or nature. This ideology of modernity based on unlimited consumption and productivism is so strong that it is able to penetrate even indigenous communities who were guided by the goal of living in balance amongst themselves and with nature.

Neoliberal policies include measures that aim to:

- a) Downsize the State, privatise public enterprises, reduce public spending, lower taxes on profits, cut social benefits - in sum, dismantle the State so that markets can show their full potential.
- b) Reduce regulations on capital flows and financial activities.
- c) Promote supranational mechanisms and agreements that put foreign investments before State sovereignty.
- d) Promote free trade agreements that cover goods, services, investments, government procurement, competition policies, intellectual property rights, as well as a set of clauses that put the rights of capital before labour and environmental rights.
- e) Cut and weaken labour and social protections to increase capital's profit margins.

f) Promote the financialisation of nature and life by creating new speculative markets for capital expansion.

Since neoliberalism first appeared, no two countries have ever applied it the same way. The implementation of neoliberalism in the United Kingdom, the United States or Chile was marked by national particularities and specificities, as can be seen, for example, in the enormous US defence budget and the maintenance of a military presence in the copper industry in Chile. In fact, 'pure' neoliberalism adopted the same way by all countries does not exist. Each country has its own powerful national sectors or social resistance struggles that have influenced the way neoliberalism was implemented in their country. Neoliberalism has always been quite flexible and has been able to transform into very agile forms of adaptation that allowed it to survive and expand even during processes of nationalising companies or renegotiating trade agreements.

Neoliberalism is not entirely consistent with its own tenets. For instance, with regard to intellectual property rights, it promotes a protectionist regime for patents, the majority of which are controlled by large corporations. In relation to investments, it establishes a protection regime that favours foreign investors over national ones. It also establishes measures to guarantee the free circulation of only goods and capital, leaving the people and the workforce, who are constrained by a series of migratory regulations, to their own fate. The fact that the free movement of individuals has been left out is the strongest evidence of the fact that neoliberal globalisation does not pursue integration for the benefit of human beings.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the advance of neoliberalism appeared to be unstoppable. Some even predicted the establishment of a new world order run by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade

Organisation (WTO) and transnational corporations. However, at the end of the century, the devastating effects of neoliberalism began to surface and triggered a process of growing resistance to globalisation. The world went from an initial phase of neoliberal optimism to the Mexican crisis in 1994, the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the deep recession in Argentina from 1998 to 2002 and then, the 2007 crisis in the United States. Yet to be resolved, the latter has spread to Europe and the emerging economies and is currently gnawing away at China's economy.

Neoliberal globalisation replaced the cyclical crises of capitalism with a chronic crisis that has lasted for over a decade. Far from causing capitalism to implode, this chronic crisis has led to an even greater concentration of wealth. Neoliberal capitalism causes and feeds off the crisis. The chronic crisis has become an opportunity for capital - especially the financial sector and capital linked to speculation - to multiply its earnings.

Trade liberalisation helped capital migrate to places where labour and environmental standards were the weakest, thus resulting in the loss of millions of jobs in the countries left behind by capital. The structural adjustments promoted by the IMF and the WB intensified the destructive one size fit all export-oriented policies in many countries and generated unsustainable levels of foreign debt. The loss of jobs, homes and social gains impacted broad sectors of the population.

The relentless application of neoliberalism generates resistance. Major strikes and mobilisations were held to try to stop it from advancing. Many were defeated. Others won partial victories, such as the mobilisation against the WTO in Seattle in 1999 and the campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), which succeeded in defeating this treaty in 2005.

The discontent was so great that in many Latin American countries, progressive governments with anti-neoliberal

discourses or that affirmed a certain level of sovereignty vis-à-vis transnational capital came to office. In their first few years in power, some of these governments adopted measures to regulate financial capital, renegotiated or put certain free trade agreements (FTAs) on hold, denounced bilateral investment treaties (BITs), nationalised certain companies and developed several social and welfare programmes that improved the socio-economic conditions of millions of people. These progressive governments even promoted integration processes such as UNASUR, CELAC and ALBA, which afforded them a certain amount of political autonomy, mainly from the United States.

However, the strategy used to support these measures was to strengthen extractivist sectors that were benefitting from the high prices of raw materials and commodities on the international markets. When the chronic crisis of the world economy spread to the emerging economies and the price boom was over, the economies of these countries ran into serious problems and popular discontent started to be channeled into the rebirth of neoliberal forces.

Resistance processes arose in other parts of the world, such as Occupy Wall Street in the United States, the Arab Spring, *Syriza* in Greece, the “*Indignados*” and “*Podemos*” in Spain and many other movements. This resistance to neoliberal globalisation continues and takes on different forms, such as Bernie Sanders’ candidacy or the dozens and even hundreds of thousands of people who are taking to the street to protest Donald Trump’s measures against migrants, Muslims, women, the environment, the freedom of information, health and the rule of law in this northern country.

Although these social and political mobilisation processes succeeded in establishing governments with strong popular support, they were not capable of building structural alternatives to neoliberalism. The most progressive measures implemented by these governments in Latin America did not break with the image

of progress and modernity of neoliberal consumerism. Moreover, they strengthened extractivism that - even under State control in many cases - contributes to the advance of transnational globalisation. Social movement leaders in governments became caught up in the logic of power and opted for a more pragmatic approach, which meant leaving radical proposals such as “Vivir Bien” or the rights of Mother Earth on paper while they pursued alliances with powerful sectors of the society in order remain in government. Over the years of parasitizing from the State, new sectors of power emerged through corruption, aggravating the crises in the governments even more.

After over a decade of progressive governments in several Latin American countries, we are now witnessing the return of neoliberal governments managed directly by the haute bourgeoisie. The “progressive” governments that have survived are doing so by intensifying extractivism, imposing mega-projects and adopting restrictive and, in many cases, authoritarian measures that maintain the status quo, which only increase popular discontent.

A new phase of the globalisation process?

The neoliberal globalisation process has probably entered a new phase that is characterised by the following elements:

a) *The crisis of capitalism has become chronic.* We have entered a period of continuing crisis that affects both the countries of the North and the South and that is starting to slowly erode the division that used to exist between “developed” and “developing” countries. Now, the new ‘normal’ is a permanent crisis that generates large pockets of poverty alongside bubbles of highly concentrated wealth in all countries. Capitalism lives and feeds off this unending crisis that allows certain sectors of capital to make tremendous amounts of profit. We have before us the beginning of a capitalism of chaos that not only takes advantage of environmental, social and economic crises and war,

but also constantly causes them in order to set off processes of even greater capital accumulation.

b) Capitalism is altering the Earth system. The environment is no longer affected only at the local or national level; instead, the impacts are affecting how the planet functions, as the series of equilibriums that made the development of agriculture possible for over 11,000 years are being disrupted. Capitalism does not regulate itself. The logic of capital does not recognise any limits. Capitalism is undergoing an unprecedented process of reconfiguration on a finite planet that is beginning to enter a State of ecological imbalance.

c) A new technological revolution with great dangers and opportunities. Some call it the fourth industrial revolution and distinguish it from the previous ones (steam, electricity and electronic-information), since it is marked by biotechnology and the expansion of automation. This technological disruption will allow electricity to be stored and will drive the generation of solar and wind energy and the production of electric vehicles as never seen before. However, at the same time, it will exacerbate social and economic inequalities, increase unemployment due to automation and will benefit mainly sectors and countries that have the capacity to innovate and adapt to new technologies. One of the most serious dangers is the attempt to use these technologies, namely geoengineering, to try to control climate change or to promote synthetic biology to create new life forms that can be patented to generate new profits.

d) The deepening of trade and economic disputes and conflicts. The emergence of right-wing nationalist governments in countries such as the United States, Russia, India, the Philippines, Turkey and others will not slow down the process of neoliberal globalisation, but rather intensify its contradictions and conflicts. Trump will not break with the essence of neoliberalism. While he criticises US corporations that migrate to other countries,

he himself does business outside the United States and takes advantage of trade liberalisation to increase his profits. What Trump is seeking to do is to readjust and renegotiate some trade liberalisation policies to reposition the US economy, namely in relation to the Chinese economy, and to lower the large trade deficit with Mexico. The adoption of protectionist trade barriers will set off unprecedented trade wars and tensions in what has become a multipolar world. Simply classifying Trump and other reactionary governments as right-wing populist nationalism hides their true essence and their neoliberal project. What we have before us now are different kinds of nationalist neoliberal governments. They combine two conflicting trends (nationalism and neoliberalism) that will only make this new phase of globalisation all the more explosive. Neoliberalism will continue to advance by blending in outlandish nationalist proposals such as that of building walls between countries.

e) *The increase in interventionism and armed conflict.* The United States is no longer the dominant economic power, but it continues to be the top military power on the planet. Its role is decisive in this respect and will be marked by alliances, disputes and interventions designed to undermine governments that are not fully under its sphere of influence, while it tests alliances that until recently has appeared unlikely. The geopolitical map of recent decades is likely to change and we will face unexpected situations brought on by the juxtaposition of economic and geopolitical disputes.

f) *The undermining of democracy and the expansion of authoritarianism, xenophobia, misogyny and racism.* Neoliberal nationalisms tend to divert popular discontent generated by the impacts of neoliberalism towards migrants, women, LGBT communities, people of colour, indigenous peoples, people living with drug addictions and all those that can be labelled as a threat. Attacks on civil, political, human, economic, social and cultural rights are underway in different parts of the planet.

Liberal democracy is being undermined to impose a kind of authoritarianism that comes from the vote, but does not respect the established legal order.

g) *The rise of broad and diverse forms of social resistance.* The expansion of neoliberal authoritarianism is bringing on important, highly intense and widespread processes of spontaneous resistance. The convergence of various movements and individuals that are taking to the streets by the thousands is generating new processes of articulation and solidarity that transcend borders. Trump's offensive on multiple fronts is provoking reactions never seen before, as well as processes to build new movements, networks, alliances, organisations and political instruments. The future of this new phase of the globalisation process depends primarily on the configuration that these social resistance processes assume, the victories they obtain, the development of real political and economic alternatives to neoliberalism and how a real democracy can be developed - one that does not peter out when the street mobilisations subside.

Many of the elements mentioned above have been present at other moments in the evolution of capitalism. However, their level of intensity and explosive convergence with other more recent elements open up a new, highly complex and belligerent phase of globalisation marked by the emergence of grave dangers and big opportunities for social change.

Deconstructing globalisation

According to Walden Bello, globalisation must be deconstructed so we can reconstruct integration so that it is at the service of humanity and life as we know it, in general. To achieve effective social change, we must weaken the dominance of the old systems, undermine their hegemony and rollback several of their rules and institutions.

In order for alternatives to flourish, we must delegitimise, stop, exploit the contradictions and deconstruct both the ideology and the institutions of globalisation embodied by the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO and free trade and investment agreements.

This deconstruction process won important victories against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the WTO, as mobilisations succeeded in stalling free trade negotiations in this institution until the Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia in 2013. However, the lesson learned from all these years is that these organisations are highly capable of adapting and reinventing themselves by capturing elements of criticism and using them to relaunch their offensive.

This is the case of the World Bank. After several defeats in the processes of privatising public water utilities, it repackaged the old as a more clever and dangerous proposal called “public-private partnerships”. Another example is its attempt to take advantage of the climate and environmental crisis to launch a new offensive to financialise nature using the concept of the “green economy”.

The same is true of trade liberalisation. After the defeat of the FTAA and the stalemate of negotiations at the WTO, trade liberalisation continued to advance through a series of bilateral and subregional free trade and investment agreements. Resistance to trade liberalisation has become more complex due to the emergence of nationalist neoliberal governments such as the Trump administration, which is withdrawing from free trade agreements such as the TPP (the Trans-Pacific Partnership signed by 12 governments after a decade of negotiations) and proposing that United States, Mexico and Canada renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has been in effect since 1994.

The crisis and reconfiguration of capitalism processes are affecting the forms of resistance of social movements all around

the world. The strategies to deconstruct globalisation that were effective in the past no longer have the same impact. Spaces such as the World Social Forum and several anti-globalisation networks have lost their leadership role. However, a broad range of initiatives, actions, struggles, debates and local, community and regional alternatives continue to emerge. This shows that the seeds of the other world we are fighting for are starting to germinate.

Over the past decade, we have gone from a moment where the international struggles against the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO shared centre stage, to a phase in which national and local struggles are more predominant. Social movements with new characteristics have appeared in different countries. Some have formed parties and political instruments that have even managed to win elections. Understanding the future of these experiences in recent years raises the need for a broader reflection on power and social movements, on neoliberalism and extractivism and on other lessons that need to be extracted in order to confront neoliberal globalisation in a more effective way.

The rise of progressive governments in Latin America helped promote various initiatives to deconstruct globalisation. However, the fact that the social organisations that gave birth to them lost their autonomy vis-à-vis these governments ended up weakening the movements.

Furthermore, the appearance of new movements such as Occupy, Indignados and the Arab Spring was very important, but their outcomes varied: in some cases, the results were temporary; in others, such as Spain and Greece, they gave rise to political instruments, while others, such as Egypt, they produced highly contradictory results.

Furthermore, strategies of giving general support to “*developing*” countries or the South versus “*developed*” countries

or the North must be revisited. Behind the actions of the countries of the South, one essentially finds new elite and corporations that are benefitting and profiting from these countries' "*right to development*". Likewise, many State enterprises from countries of the South behave like private corporations in relation to natural resources and labour rights.

The fight against the WTO and free trade agreements has always been marked by the strategy of exploiting the contradictions among capitalist countries and among different sectors of the bourgeoisie to stall negotiations. The appearance of nationalist neoliberal governments that put their own country before the rest of the world will give rise to new contradictions that can and must be exploited. However, it is fundamental that we never lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with disputes between different sectors of capital that want to reshape globalisation to suit their own particular interests.

The current process of deconstructing neoliberal globalisation has become more complex and must be taken as a whole, and not only its trade-related elements. While a trade agreement can be stopped, the pillaging of natural resources, the elimination of social gains and the degradation of fundamental rights are intensifying. Reducing the struggle against globalisation to only one of the components of neoliberalism would be a serious mistake. On the contrary, the most important thing is to promote new processes of convergence that go beyond isolated or fragmented campaigns focused on specific issues and that confront the set of constitutive elements of this new phase of globalisation as a whole, while articulating the global, regional, national, local and individual dimensions much more effectively.

Alternatives to globalisation

At the heart of the deglobalisation approach is the promotion of new forms of international and regional integration that

preserve and allow the multiple dimensions of life to flourish. Deglobalisation alternatives have evolved and have been enriched over the years. At first, the proposals centred more on what national states should do to preserve their sovereignty and decision-making capacity in light of globalisation. Today, it is clear that deglobalisation cannot be limited to the actions of states, which have generally helped further capital's globalisation process.

In this new phase of globalisation, one of the most important deglobalisation proposals is the elimination of borders to allow for the free circulation of individuals regardless of their nationality, religious beliefs, culture, economic status, gender or race. One of deglobalisation's main demands is an end to the walls and restrictions on the free movement of people. A deglobalised world is one where solidarity exists amongst all, from victims of violence, to unemployment, to displacement of homes and sources of livelihood to frontliners of the impacts of natural disasters. If fraternity among various human beings does not exist, world integration cannot be built. The promotion of tolerance, acceptance and unity in diversity at all levels is essential to the deglobalisation process.

Therefore, deglobalisation requires introducing profound changes to our relationship with the system of planet Earth. Deglobalisation involves recognising and respecting the limits and vital cycles of nature. It means assuming that the Earth is our home and that no economic, geopolitical or technological activity must be allowed to aggravate the ecological imbalance we are already suffering from further. To deglobalise, one must assume that the Earth system is above states and national interests. Thus, deglobalisation is only possible if we decarbonise the economy, stop deforestation and the destruction of biodiversity, take care of the water and preserve the different ecosystems.

Contrary to capitalism that promotes neoliberal globalisation to better exploit natural and human resources, deglobalisation gives priority to both humans and nature in all integration processes.

Deglobalisation does not oppose trade nor the exchange of products or services, but proposes that trade is not done at the expense of the communities, the local and national economies and the diversity of its products whether agricultural or industrial. The one size fit all policy of structural adjustment programs pushing countries to only remain producers of particular cash crops or goods, destroys that country's ability to satisfy people's needs, diversify and more importantly, be self-reliant in its ability to feed its people. Deglobalisation embraces the principle of subsidiarity that affirms that all political or economic decisions must be adopted by the level of government that is closest to the problem. The ones who know the most about the local situation and will be the first to suffer the consequences of a decision must be the first to give their opinion and state their position. A political or economic decision that affects a local area must fundamentally be made at this level and only when it is truly necessary should this decision-making power be transferred to the national, regional or global level. Deglobalisation is also not possible without real democracy. Strategic political, economic and environmental decisions must be made with the broadest and most democratic participation possible and must not be left up to the market and State technocrats and bureaucrats to make.

A community, region or country's production must be fundamentally geared towards meeting the needs of its population, and not for exports. The economy cannot be based on extractivism that causes the Earth's ecosystem to deteriorate further.

Currently, trade rules cannot be the same for all countries. One cannot ask sardines to compete against sharks. In this

context, trade and investment rules must be asymmetrical so as to favour the smallest economies and countries whose economies and agricultural sector were weakened by transnational capital, colonialism and the interventionism of the superpowers. Trade policies - such as quotas, tariffs and subsidies - must be used to protect local economies from imported goods subsidised by large corporations that set prices at artificially low rates.

Food production, which is essential for human life, must not be subjected to market rules. The alternatives of deglobalisation are in line with the principles of food sovereignty that is defended by La Vía Campesina, which unites 200 million members around the world. According to the Declaration of Nyéléni, approved in the First International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users. Food sovereignty prioritises local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal - fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just incomes to all peoples as well as the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food.”

Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations” (Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007).

Deglobalisation is based on experiences being developed in agriculture, production, communications, information around the world and other areas that are emerging from different types of communities. For deglobalisation, the alternatives to globalisation are not something yet to come, but rather initiatives that are already present to different extents in society. However, as Walden Bello says, *“many of these alternatives have faced great difficulties either in sustaining themselves or in living up to their original objectives because the market system is dominated by large transnational corporations”* (Bello, 2013).

Therefore, in addition to the defence and generalisation of these local experiences, deglobalisation requires that new mechanisms and forms of organisation and collaboration that enable us to take on the forces of capital be developed.

At the State level, certain initiatives inspired in the tenets of deglobalisation have emerged, such as:

- The withdrawal of Bolivia, Venezuela and Ecuador from the World Bank’s ICSID (International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes).
- The provisions of the new Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia that establish the basis for denouncing all of Bolivia’s bilateral investment treaties.
- The processes of revising, denouncing or not renovating bilateral investment treaties and the questioning and rejection of state-investor dispute settlement clauses in trade agreements.

- The renegotiation and replacement of the FTA between Bolivia and Mexico in 2009 by a trade agreement only on goods and services in which the chapters on intellectual property, investments, government procurement and others were eliminated.

However, the experience of the past three decades show that these partial or specific alternatives cannot coexist with globalisation in the long run. They often end up being isolated, cornered, distorted or co-opted by globalisation if they are not expanded or complemented by other deeper, broader and diverse alternatives that break with the logic of capital.

Therefore, deglobalisation is essentially anti-capitalist because integration that respects all life is not possible in the framework of capitalism. Deglobalisation pursues a broad process for the just redistribution of the sources of life, which are highly concentrated in the hands of a few. The redistribution process involves adopting tax measures and capital controls, expropriations, nationalisations, sweeping land and urban reforms, eliminating financial derivatives and tax havens, and processes to increase control over and socialise capital.

Society must possess and democratically control the financial system and implement an international monetary system based on a new system of reserves, including the creation of regional reserve currencies, in order to end the current supremacy of the dollar. It must also cancel the debt of countries that oppress the peoples and that was imposed to favour private and corporate interests. Just, sovereign and transparent credit systems must also be established (Economy for Life, 2013).

Deglobalisation cannot flourish if social forces do not seize and transform State power. The transition process combines reforms and revolutions at different levels. The main indicator of progress is the empowerment and effective participation of the people in

their present and future. Democratising the management of the State property of public enterprises, strengthening the communes that exist and developing others to turn consumers into producers, reinforcing self-organisation and self-management of society, and punishing corruption and nepotism are essential to ensure that the transition process does not come to a halt or regress.

Local and national changes converge towards new and broader integration processes that are sovereign in nature and based on complementarity and not on the free market. The only way a country can advance in the construction of an alternative model is by allying with other countries that are on the same path.

In an increasingly multipolar world, several processes of integration or alliances that accentuate the contradictions of the globalisation process, but that do not question the essence of neoliberal globalisation exist. They are integration processes promoted by national bourgeoisies that are fighting over a fraction of the market and the planet's resources. This is the case, for example, of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which do not constitute a real alternative to the process of neoliberal globalisation, even if some of their measures can momentarily be considered progressive, as they challenge the hegemony of the United States or Europe. However, in the current phase of globalisation, we cannot fall into the trap of thinking that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. There is no single dominant economic power in the world today. In an open dispute with capital from the United States and Europe, one can find China, Russia, India and other regional sub-imperial powers such as Brazil and South Africa.

The ALBA project of integration between Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua was an attempt to build a distinct process based on complementarity and not market competition. However, it did not succeed as desired because for one, it was based on extractivism and secondly, it fostered a rent-seeking

rationale that undermined social movements' capacity for self-determination. Building alternative integration processes requires implementing national projects that strengthen, above all, various social sectors' experiences in self-organisation and self-management so they can fulfil their fundamental needs and overcome consumerist tendencies and the image of modernity that are the most powerful and invisible forces of neoliberalism.

An integration model that serves as an alternative to neoliberal globalisation cannot succeed within a capitalist system. It is impossible to imagine mixed economies that exclude transnational corporations (TNCs). TNCs and financial capital are the frontline of capitalism. Mixed or plural economies can only prosper in a global economy that is not dominated by the logic of capital. Thus, while the deglobalisation alternatives may seem reformist at first, they must gradually take on a more anti-capitalist nature in order to consolidate and go further.

The international institutions that dominate globalisation today cannot be reformed. They must be dismantled and replaced by new ones created according to a different rationale - one that serves the interests of all of humanity and guarantees balanced ecosystems. The ability to replace the old institutional framework centred on the IMF, the WB and the WTO will depend significantly on the development of alternative mechanisms at the regional and international level. These new international mechanisms must expand the exercise of true democracy not only at the level of states, but of global society as a whole. Without this shift of decision-making powers into the hands of the people, it is difficult to imagine a thriving alternative kind of integration to globalisation.

The alternatives to globalisation cannot be envisioned only at the economic level, much less in relation to trade alone. Deglobalisation has multiple political, socio-cultural, gender and environmental dimensions. In this framework, one of the

biggest challenges of deglobalisation is to forge truly binding international agreements and mechanisms that allow climate change to be addressed based on scientific criteria.

Deglobalisation does not seek to replace the homogenising model of globalisation with another model that can be universally applied to all countries and communities. Deglobalising means embracing diversity. It promotes a form of integration that respects and promotes multiple visions and forms of self-determination.

Deglobalisation is far from being a proposal that has been finalised and that has all the answers. On the contrary, inputs from different perspectives are required in order to foster integration of the people and nature.

Bibliography

Al-Rodhan N. (2006). *Definitions of Globalization: A Comprehensive Overview and a Proposed Definition*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

Altmann J. (2011). *América Latina y el Caribe: ALBA: ¿Una nueva forma de Integración Regional?* Buenos Aires, Argentina: Teseo

Bello W. (2005). *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*.

Bello W. (2013). *Capitalism's Last Stand?* London: Zed books.

Bond P. (2003). "Deglobalization"? Sure but... <https://systemicalternatives.org/2014/02/13/deglobalization-sure-but/>

Chomsky N. (2013). *Occupy: Reflections on Class War, Rebellion and Solidarity*. New Jersey: Zuccotti Park Press.

Climate Space (2013). *Statement: To confront the climate*

emergency we need to dismantle the WTO and the free trade regime.

Declaration of Nyéléni (2007). <https://nyeleni.org/spip.php?article291>

Derber C. (2003). *People Before Profit: The New Globalization in an Age of Terror, Big Money, and Economic Crisis*. New York: Picador

Economy for Life in our Earth community (2013). <https://systemicalternatives.org/2014/04/23/economy-for-life-in-our-earth-community/>

Focus on the Global South (2003). *The Paradigm: Deglobalization*. Focus on the Global South. <http://focusweb.org/content/paradigm-deglobalisation>

Focus on the Global South (2013). *Derailers' Guide to the WTO and Free Trade Regime 2.0*. Focus on the Global South. <http://focusweb.org/content/derailers-guide-wto-and-free-trade-regime-20>

Haas L. & Lesch D. (2016). *The Arab Spring: The Hope and Reality of the Uprisings*, 2nd Edition. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Harnecker M. (2015). *A World to Build: New Paths toward Twenty-first Century Socialism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Harvey D. (2007). *Breve historia del neoliberalismo*. Madrid: Akal Ediciones.

Schwab K. (2016). *La Cuarta Revolución Industrial*. Barcelona: Debate.

Solón P. (2016). *Algunas reflexiones, autocríticas y propuestas sobre el proceso de cambio en Bolivia*. La Paz Bolivia: Fundación Solón.

Wallach L. & Woodall P. (2004). *Whose Trade Organization?: The Comprehensive Guide to the WTO*. New York: New Press

Wallerstein I. (2004). *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. N.p.: Duke University Press.

COMPLEMENTARITIES

By Pablo Solón

Complementarity means to complete each other; it is to seek a whole that is diverse; it is a dialogue among those who are different; is to learn from the other and contribute to another; it is to recognize your own strengths and weaknesses in order to transform yourself in the interactions with others. Complementarity is to combine forces to optimize the potential of each one and complete the whole in its multiple dimensions.

The search for complementarity between *Vivir Bien*, degrowth, the commons, ecofeminism, the rights of Mother Earth, deglobalisation and other proposals seeks to enrich each of these approaches by generating increasingly complex interactions that help the process of construction of systemic alternatives. The goal is not to build just one single alternative, but to develop multiple holistic alternatives that are intertwined and articulated, in order to give answers to the changing diversity of the whole.

How to deal with the systemic crisis?

We are living a systemic crisis that cannot be addressed fully except through the combination of multiple approaches and the construction of others. The response to the systemic crisis requires

alternatives to capitalism, to productivism, to extractivism, to plutocracy, to patriarchy and to anthropocentrism. These elements are very closely linked and nourish each other by deepening the crisis of the Earth community. To think in the resolution of one of these factors without dealing with the others is one of the biggest mistakes we have made.

We cannot overcome capitalism if we do not address productivism that is deeply rooted in the extractivism of nature and in the reproduction of the plutocratic and patriarchal structures of power. Equally, it is impossible to think in recovering the balance of the Earth system without getting out of the logic of capital that turns everything into a commodity and uses the crisis as an opportunity for new business. The transformation of the economy is closely linked to the transformation of the cultural and symbolic values that are reproduced in public and private spaces.

The logics of capital, of productivism-extractivism, of concentration of power, of patriarchy and anthropocentrism are dominant and operate at all levels: from politics to personal relationships, from institutions to ethics, from historic memory to visions of the future. In order to build systemic alternatives, we must not only change our perspective but adopt multiple perspectives from which to analyze and confront the problem. This is one of the main contributions of the complementarity among approaches, visions and philosophies that have different perspectives but share a common concern for life.

The “whole” on which complementarity must act is the community of the Earth, the *Pacha* as the Indians of the Andes call it, or the system of planet Earth as scientists designate. The economy is a subsystem embedded in the biosphere, it is a bio-economy, in the words of the precursors of the degrowth movement. There is no economic activity outside of nature. The planet is a self-regulated system of physical, chemical, biological

and human components. Human society is only one of the most recent components of this complex system that is constantly evolving and changing.

The systemic crisis we are experiencing does not endanger the existence of the planet Earth, but of the multiple ecosystems that have made possible various forms of life, including human life. What is at stake is the climatic stability that has allowed agriculture and the existence of various civilizations. Many forms of life will disappear if the balance of the atmosphere, oceans, soil and solar radiation continues to change. In short, the challenge is to build systemic alternatives that will slow down and stop the sixth extinction of life that is underway on planet Earth.

Capitalocene and Plutocene

This imbalance started with the industrial revolution that gave birth to the capitalist system and began to be more visible and evident in the last decades. Some say that this imbalance is the fault of human activity. But that is a smokescreen when we find that only 8 people (8 men specifically) have the same wealth as 3.6 billion people, the poorest half of humanity (OXFAM, 2017). That is why it is not correct to call it Anthropocene, as if all humans have the same degree of responsibility in this planetary catastrophe. It is mainly a fraction of humanity, the richest and the most powerful that are driving our existence into the abyss.

It would be more appropriate to use the term Capitalocene or Plutocene or another denomination that highlights the destructive power of the logic of capital and the concentration of power in the hands of a very small minority of rich people. It is not human activity in general that is causing the end of the Holocene, but a particular type of system (capitalist, productivist, extractivist, plutocratic, patriarchal and anthropocentric) that has invaded all spheres of human life and transformed non-human life into simple commodities or resources.

How do we restore the balance of the Earth and meet the fundamental needs of all the population? Is it through some kind of growth that is dissociated from the destruction of nature as suggested by the green economy? Degrowth clearly states that this is a mirage. There is no growth that is disassociated from its material base. The development of technology and efficiency do not lead to the reduction of consumption but to the opposite. So, what is the path forward? *Vivir Bien* delivers a key alternative to growth: the search for a dynamic equilibrium. To aim to have harmony between humans and with nature as a new horizon for civilization that is different from economic progress. The challenge is not to have development with the aim of constantly trying to be and have more – but rather to seek complementarity with other human beings and nature in order to rebalance our system. A balance that brings new contradictions and requires new processes of balance. A new type of modernity that makes obsolete the modernity of capitalism based on growth. A new paradigm that establishes that life should not lead to the dispossession of others and nature, but to achieve an adequate articulation of all parts of the whole.

The dynamic equilibrium and the commoners

The search for this equilibrium requires degrowth in some sectors and regions and a certain type of growth in other levels and places, but above all it requires to get out of the logic of growth per se and instead, pursue a dynamic equilibrium. We need to grow in renewable energies and decrease in fossil fuels; to decrease over-consumption in the rich bubbles of the north and the south, and to increase the levels of nutrition and essential services for the majority of the world's population.

Equilibrium is not possible without the redistribution of wealth and power. The welfare of all is only possible when the absolute concentration of resources in very few hands is disrupted. Without processes of expropriation and socialization, it is not

possible to achieve social justice and restore a equilibrium that does not plunder nature.

The task is not to move from a capitalism of large private owners to a State capitalism under the name of “socialism.” After a century of experiences, it is clear that the alternative to the free market is not the control of all spheres of life by the State. Redistribution, to be effective, has to have in the center other actors aside from the market and the State. This is the great contribution of the commons. Without self-organized and self-managed commoners, there is no real and lasting redistribution. It is not only a question of better distribution, but also one of managing the sources of life in a different and adequate way. As Vivir Bien points out, the role of humans is to be a bridge, a mediator that contributes to the search of equilibrium by carefully cultivating with wisdom, what nature gives us.

From this perspective, it is not enough to socialize the means of production (private banks, transnational corporations of industries and services, agribusiness, chemical companies, military complexes and others), but transform them completely so that they respect the vital cycles of nature and don't continue with extractivism, productivism, the privatisation of knowledge, the commodification of biodiversity and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

In Marx's view: *“At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution”* (Marx, 2010). Consequently, the task is to change the relations of production, in particular its legal expression that are the relations of property, so that they don't continue to block the development of the productive forces.

Marx emphasizes the transformation of the relations of production but doesn't highlight the transformation of the productive forces. This vision written in 1859, has inspired, for more than a century, many left parties. However, today, we are on the verge of a planetary catastrophe. At present, it is not enough to transform the relations of production and property. We must also transform and restrain several productive forces that are contributing to the destruction of humanity and nature.

Unlimited growth of productive forces on a finite planet is impossible. Consequently, the legacy of capitalism can't be just managed in a social and environmentally friendly way. Extractivism can never be sustainable. There is no future for humanity if we do not stop the plundering of nature. In every process of taking from nature there must be awareness of the need of preserving its balance and repairing the damages.

Vivir Bien introduces a very acute reflection that questions many of the dominant concepts: The only strictly productive force is Mother Earth, nature. She is the creator and humans are only cultivators, facilitators, caretakers of that process. Humans do not create water, oil, or oxygen. Humans can use these elements but always with deep respect.

This view is questioned by the evolution of technology that creates the false illusion that everything is possible, even a new genesis, as some proponents of synthetic biology claim to create never before known, novel life forms. The project Genesis – the science for artificial life – asks what is the point of placing lights in the streets if we can create trees that shine? Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to permanently protect ourselves from viruses and diseases by writing the appropriate genetic code onto our chromosomes? At another level we have geo-engineering that claims that it is possible to manipulate climate on a planetary scale to counteract global warming, through the construction of large chimneys that would fill the atmosphere with sulfur compounds,

interfering with the sun's rays and cooling the surface of the earth, mimicking what happens when there is a volcanic eruption.

At present, and despite a moratorium on geo-engineering, experiments have already been made and if spread out, could cause unpredictable consequences for life and the Earth system. Why embrace these dangerous technologies instead of taking care of our Mother Earth? Why fight the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere with the pollution of sulfur dioxide? Is it not much more advisable to respect the cycles of nature than to try to change them?

These reflections that arose from the visions of Vivir Bien, the rights of Mother Earth, ecofeminism and degrowth are valid but unacceptable to the logic of capital.

The logic of capital and growth

Capital is not a thing, it is not money, machinery or property. Capital only exists when it is invested to generate profits and increase capital. Capital is a process. Capital that does not grow and does not achieves profits is capital that is taken out of the market. Capital cannot be constrained to accept a limit that implies its disappearance. Capital is in permanent search for new and greater profits to continue to expand and exist as capital.

According to Marx: *"The simple circulation of commodities - selling in order to buy - is a means of carrying out a purpose unconnected with circulation, namely, the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of wants. **The circulation of money as capital is, on the contrary, an end in itself, for the expansion of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The circulation of capital has therefore no limits**"* (Marx, 2007).

The search for permanent growth is a sine qua non for capitalism. Without growth the process of realization of capital is not possible.

In order to exist, capital appeals to an increasing exploitation of human beings, to unrestrained extractivism and productivism, to generate and exacerbate consumerism, to provoke irrational waste, to colonialism of entire nations, to conflicts and wars, to financial speculation, to the commodification of all material and immaterial processes and goods, to the financialisation of nature and the supremacy of technology over life and the Earth system.

All these mechanisms for a certain period of time allow capital to recover and increase its profits, until growth moderates, declines and the crisis explodes. Capital never gives up and is constantly exploring new markets and mechanisms. The problem for capital is that we live on a finite planet and no matter how speculative the process of accumulation is, it always has a material basis that when exhausted, triggers a crisis. Previously those crises were cyclical. There were even glorious periods of capitalism as the “glorious thirty” in Europe after the Second World War, that were possible thanks to the extraction of cheap resources from the countries of the South. Today, the crisis has become permanent, the economies of the former industrial countries are barely growing or stagnant. Capital begins to touch several boundaries simultaneously at the level of markets, demand, extraction of resources, the possibility of colonizing new countries and territories, etc.

Capital in its insatiable pursuit of profits seeks to do business with the crisis that it creates. Thus arises a capitalism of chaos that lives off of the chronic crisis. If ever some had the illusion that there could be a human capitalism responsible with nature today it is clear that the only possible capitalism in the twenty-first century is a savage capitalism. There is no regulation that capital will respect at the end, it always finds a back door to escape and expand. That is the logic of capital and that is why to talk of balance, respect for the vital cycles of nature, degrowth is a real affront to his own existence.

The logic of capital does not act alone. It nurtures from anthropocentrism, from patriarchal structures and culture, from the concentration of wealth in very few hands, from plutocracy covered by democratic forms, from the development of a vision of consumerist modernity and a new imagination of values based on competition and individualism. The expropriation and socialization of capital by the State does not in itself alter the productivist and extractivist essence of capital. It can even be reinforced and aggravated. That is why social transformation should not only operate at the level of the economy or property rights. These are essential but not determinant elements since the logic of capital can continue to act even when the State has nationalized most of the large private property.

A new vision for the future

Overcoming capitalism requires a new vision of modernity. Hence the importance of the proposal of a frugal society that aims the vision of degrowth. A simple and moderate society that is thrifty, prosperous, prudent and economical in the use of consumable resources. Or as Vivir Bien says, a society that promotes harmony between human beings and not the competition and exploitation of the other. The vision of the future is key in the process of social transformation. If the objective is that all human beings live like the bourgeoisie or upper middle class sectors of high consumption we will never get out of the logic of capital and unlimited growth.

In order to satisfy the basic needs of the population without increasing consumerism, a self-organized and self-managed society is essential. Pretending that the State regulates from above how society should live and that those below simply obey leads to a growing authoritarianism that only aggravates tensions. The State can and should regulate certain aspects, but above all, it should be society that in a conscious and organized way increasingly manages the sources of life in a frugal way. The key

to social transformation lies in the commoners, in their capacity to build a different modernity that has at its center: balance, moderation and simplicity.

The contemporary State and capital love property and growth. At the level of property, there are obvious contradictions and tensions between private and State property, but ultimately they are ascribed to the concept of property and not to the concept of commons, not to collective and self-managed management of key sectors for life and nature. In relation to growth, between capital and the State, far from existing frictions, there is almost a honeymoon. Both want more consumption and production and therefore more extractivism. The higher the growth, the higher the profits and the higher the taxes. Each sees in growth the source of its empowerment. That is why the central answer to the problem of endless growth will not come from the State or from capital, but from the commons, from a conscious and organized self-management, starting from the local, and that will increasingly move towards a national and global perspective.

Global and personal transformation

Deglobalisation emphasizes that to achieve a deep transformation it is necessary to expand this process beyond national borders. It is not possible to think in the full and effective realization of *Vivir Bien* and the commons without deconstructing global capitalism. The proliferation of borders and barriers between peoples contributes to the dominance of world capitalism. In this sense, local transformation, in order to flourish, needs to be involved in processes of transformation at national and global levels. Old industrialized countries and new emerging economies play a key role in overcoming global capitalism since a process of transformation in these centers of economic and political power will have a great impact on the rest of the world. As degrowth very well points out, it is impossible to think of the expansion of this paradigm if it does not occur in the

countries that invented and disseminated the cancerous concepts of limitless growth and productivism.

The construction of worldwide alternatives is permanently evolving. World capitalism is not a static system; it is constantly in the process of adaptation and reconfiguration. Hence the great contribution of the deglobalisation proposal is that it emphasizes the necessity of the analysis of the different stages and moments of the globalisation process. The commons, the *Vivir Bien* or the rights of Mother Earth can only thrive in their implementation, starting from an adequate analysis of how the current process of neoliberal globalisation advances at each moment.

However, it is not possible to generate a true global change, if there is not also a change at the personal, family and community levels. One of the contributions of ecofeminism is precisely the need for complementarity between change in the public and private spheres. There is no sustainable transformation if at the same time human relations are not revolutionized in the most intimate nuclei of people's lives. The coherence between public policy and private action is fundamental.

It is not possible to overcome patriarchy only through the promotion and implementation of gender equity laws if at the same time we do not promote a change in the cultural and symbolic order created by the patriarchal system that impacts on women, nature and men. The adoption of norms that ensure the right of women to decide over their bodies or to penalize femicide and domestic violence are absolutely undermined when the leaders, authorities and rulers promote misogynist and sexist practices in their daily lives.

Dismantling patriarchal structures is extremely difficult precisely because their reproduction is insidiously made invisible by the dominant patriarchal structures of power that exist at all levels: from the family to the union, from the community to the political party, from the school to the government.

Capitalism has exacerbated this dynamic that was already present in the absolute majority of pre-capitalist societies. To that extent, the overcoming of capitalism does not necessarily lead to overcoming patriarchy. Experiences of State capitalism under the rubric of “socialism” show that even patriarchal systems of values can be reinforced after the nationalisation or expropriation of large private capitalist property.

The questioning of patriarchy is not something inherent in the commons. Many very successful commons experiences in the world reproduce patriarchal practices. This is the case, for example, of the commons that are linked to water and land management in several indigenous communities, or the uneven and unequal participation of men and women in assemblies of commoners.

Visions such as *Vivir Bien* and the commons can only fully flourish if they effectively make visible and internalize the struggle against patriarchal structures and culture. The dynamic balance between humans and with nature is only possible if it also involves the innermost core of family and personal life.

Production and reproduction

Productivism renders invisible the reproductive work and care that are essential to the life of every society. To take care of the home and the family, the food, the cleaning, the emotional support, the maintenance of community spaces and others are reproductive work, mainly carried out by women, whom are not taken into account by productivism. Productivism is only interested in the goods or services that can be commodified.

For productivism the essential thing is to transform nature into products and increase the productivity of that process by producing more in less time. This process leads to a relentless

process of servitude for the producer and the poisoning of the consumer. As Ivan Illich pointed out in 1978:

“I believe that this crisis is rooted in a major two-fold experiment which has failed, and I claim that the resolution of the crisis begins with a recognition of the failure. For a hundred years we have tried to make machines work for men and to school men for life in their service. Now it turns out that machines do not “work” and that people cannot be schooled for a life at the service of machines. The hypothesis on which the experiment was built must now be discarded. The hypothesis was that machines can replace slaves. The evidence shows that, used for this purpose, machines enslave men” (Illich, 1985).

Productivism ends up not only rendering reproductive work invisible but also alienating the worker and generating an increasingly large army of unemployed. If we continue on the path of productivism, there will be fewer and fewer sources of employment for the new generations because the development of automation reduces the need for wage labor.

In order to tackle the structural causes of unemployment, one must move away from the logic of productivism and make visible, recognize and expand the reproductive work to new areas especially linked to the restoration of the equilibrium with nature. Today, in order to have a healthy society and economy, it is essential to repair the imbalances that have been provoked in nature. Doing so requires restoring and caring for forests, rivers, mangroves, coasts, the atmosphere, groundwater and many other components of the Earth system. Far from having less need for the generation of jobs there is more need for them, but for different type of jobs that are not based on production but on the reproduction and care of life. Hundreds of millions of jobs are needed to deal with the planetary emergency we are experiencing.

Reproductive jobs do not generate commodities and therefore are not recognized, valued, or remunerated in the current world capitalist system. However, it is not that there are no resources to pay for the reproductive jobs we urgently require. Tens of millions of jobs could be financed with a drastic reduction of military and defense expenditures that exceed 1.5 trillion USD a year. The redistribution of wealth that is concentrated in very few hands today would create sources of subsistence while addressing the deep imbalances of the planet. The problem is that this involves embracing a totally different logic than that of capital that despises the reproductive work and is only interested in activities that produce commodities.

In this context, we must not only recognize and reward the reproductive work that women do at home and in the community, but also promote reproductive and care work on a scale never seen before in an attempt to repair the imbalances caused in the planet's ecosystems.

Transformation of power and counter-power

The question of power and the transformation of State power structures have been analyzed in different way by the visions, philosophies and proposals mentioned. *Vivir Bien* addresses the issue of power from the perspective of colonisation and decolonisation, and through practices of rotation of authorities at the level of indigenous communities. The commons emphasize that the real dilemma is not more State or more market, but more power to the commoners. That is to say, to promote the self-organisation, self-management and self-determination of the society. The rights of Mother Earth incorporate the dimension of nature into the equation, raising the need for a normative legal framework that regulates the State and society in order to preserve the vital cycles, the capacity of regeneration, and the identity and integrity of nature. Ecofeminism highlights the interrelationship between State power structures and patriarchal power structures.

Degrowth points out that everything has limits and that the logic of power does not escape this principle. Deglobalisation emphasizes the capture of national and supranational power structures by transnational corporations. All these visions provide insights on the subject of the transformation of State power structures but do not exhaust the discussion on the subject.

What to do with current State power structures? There are several answers to this question and they can be classified into four large blocks.

First is a vision and a very common practice that is mainly defended by “progressive” and left governments is to *take over all institutions of the State*. The leaders of these governments normally argue that, given the danger of reactionary counter-revolution, the political party must capture and control, as much as possible, all State institutions: executive, legislative, judicial, electoral, and any other entity of State control at economic or human rights level. If the left in the government does not extend its control to all possible structures of the State then imperialism or the right wing forces will use those spaces to sabotage and overthrow the government. In this context, the government can make transformations that democratize or improve the institutionality of the State but only if they do not undermine the power of the “revolutionaries” in government.

A second proposal emphasizes *the radical democratization of the State* through a series of mechanisms such as the revoking of the mandate, referendums, Constitutional Assemblies, inter-institutional control from independent institutions of the State, participatory budgets and other mechanisms that allow greater citizen participation and control in order to limit privileges and corruption within the bureaucratic spheres. This position considers that, through these reforms, it is possible to transform the State into an instrument that can serve society.

Thirdly, there is the proposal of self-management and anarchist currents that *reject the State and promote its abolition* in order to encourage the blossoming of experiences of self-determination of different social movements. These currents consider that the process of change is going to come from the proliferation and association of a series of communitarian and self-managed experiences that are constructed from the ground, questioning and undermining the authoritarianism that entails all forms of State power.

A fourth approach combines *real democratization of the State and construction of social counter-power*. According to this view, any power structure has its own logic and dynamics that leads to the accumulation of increasing power when there is no force outside that power structure capable of counterbalancing it (Solon, 2016). In other words, it is not enough to implement the radical democratization proposals of the State.

Individuals, “*caudillos*,” leaders and progressive or leftist political forces, when they enter the government, are captured by the logic of power and take pragmatic decisions to preserve their permanence in power. For this reason, it is necessary to complement the proposals of radical democratization of the State with the promotion and empowerment of social forms of power that are independent from the State. A kind of social counter-power that is not part of the State structures. A counter-power that can acquire different forms like councils, assemblies, “*coordinadoras*,” communes, etc. that not only control, oversees and puts pressure to redirect the State policies, but above all, promotes the development of forms of self-organisation and self-management at different levels without having to depend or to go through the structures of the State. An independent counter-power that feeds the emancipatory commoning of society, while at the same time encourages a series of radical measures to democratize the State.

Any political movement that enters the power structures to transform them must be fully aware that it is entering shifting sands. There will always be negative impacts and side effects such as the development of internal privileges, the temptation of corruption, pragmatic alliances, and the mirage that their permanence in power is the key for social “revolution.” The only way to avoid being captured by the logic of power is to encourage the empowerment of autonomous counter-powers, not under a client logic of support to the “*caudillo*,” but rather to be truly self-managed and capable of counterbalancing the conservative and reactionary forces that will inevitably develop within the new structures of power, and above all, to encourage commoning in all the society.

The road to complementarity

The processes of complementarity between *Vivir Bien*, commons, degrowth, the rights of Mother Earth, ecofeminism, deglobalisation and other proposals are multiple and diverse. In the preceding pages we have barely explored some of the possible contributions of these complementarities to encourage the reader to continue along this path. Far from contributing with a list of conclusions, we want to motivate us to look at reality, problems and alternatives from different perspectives, approaches and visions. We are convinced that complementarity can help to strengthen each of these visions, to find their weaknesses, to overcome their failures, to work together to explore answers to issues that have not been widely discussed, and to advance in the construction of systemic alternatives.

Bibliography

Church, G. and Regis, E. (2014). *Regenesis: How Synthetic Biology Will Reinvent Nature and Ourselves*. N.p.: Basic Books.

ETC (2010). *Synthetic Biology: Creating Artificial life forms*. http://www.etcgroup.org/files/publication/pdf_file/ETC_COP10SynbioBriefing081010.pdf

Illich, I. (1985). *La convivencialidad*. Mexico: Joaquin Mortilz. Original version 1978

Harvey, D. (2011). *The Enigma of Capital: and the Crises of Capitalism*. London: Profile Books.

Marx, C. (2007). *El Capital Tomo I*. Madrid: Akal Madrid. Original version 1867.

Marx, C. (2010). *Contribución a la crítica de la economía política*. N.p.: Biblioteca nueva. Original version 1859.

Morton, O. (2015). *The Planet Remade: How Geoengineering Could Change the World*. Princeton : Princeton press.

OXFAM (2017). *Una economía para el 99%*. Oxfam GB para Oxfam Internacional.

Solón P. (2016). *Algunas reflexiones, autocríticas y propuestas sobre el proceso de cambio en Bolivia*. La Paz Bolivia: Fundación Solón.

Systemic Alternatives

First Edition

www.systemicalternatives.org

2017

Publishers

Fundación Solón / Attac France / Focus on the Global South

Compilation: Pablo Solón

Translation: Karen Lang, José Carlos Solón, Mary Louise Malig

Cover image: Walter Solón Romero Gonzales, “*Mujer Mundo*”

Print: Grafica Leal, La Paz, Bolivia

This publication was possible thanks to the support of
CCFD, DKA and Fastenopfer

Printed in La Paz, Bolivia, February 2017

Focus on the Global South

4th Floor Wisit Prachuabmoh Building
Chulalongkorn University, Phayathai Road
Bangkok 10330, Thailand
Tel: (+66) 2 218 7363
info@focusweb.org
www.focusweb.org

Attac France

Villa du Moulin Dagobert
Paris 75011 – France
Tél.: (+33) 01 56 06 43 60
attacfr@attac.org
www.france.attac.org

Fundación Solón

Av. Ecuador 2517
La Paz – Bolivia
Tel.: (+591) 2-2417057
info@fundacionsolon.org
www.fundacionsolon.org



CC BY-NC-ND

This license allows people to share for non commercial use, and build upon this publication.



We are experiencing a systemic crisis. The environmental, economic, social and political crises are part of an interrelated and interdependent whole. It is impossible to solve one of these crises without addressing the others. To address them satisfactorily we require alternatives to capitalism, to productivism, to extractivism, to patriarchy and to anthropocentrism.

Complementarities between Vivir Bien, degrowth, commons, ecofeminism, the rights of the Mother Earth, deglobalisation and other proposals are fundamental to advance in the process of the construction of systemic alternatives.