

**Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative Modernizations,  
Postliberalism, or Postdevelopment?**

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*Al maestro Orlando Fals Borda, luchador incansable, In Memoriam, por su honestidad  
intelectual y su compromiso político con América Latina, con la vida y con el mundo.*

## **Introduction: The ‘turn to the left’ and the current conjuncture<sup>1</sup>**

Latin America is the only region in the world where some counter-hegemonic processes of importance might be taking place at the level of the State at present. Some argue that these processes might lead to a re-invention of socialism; for others, what is at stake is the dismantling of the neo-liberal policies of the past three decades –the end the “the long neo-liberal night,” as the period is known in progressive circles in the region— or the formation of a South American (and largely anti-American) bloc. Others point at the potential for *un nuevo comienzo* (a new beginning) which might bring about a reinvention of democracy and development or, more radically still, the end of the predominance of liberal society of the past two hundred years, particularly one founded on private property and representative democracy. *Socialismo del siglo XXI*, plurinationality, interculturality, direct and substantive democracy, *revolucion ciudadana*, endogenous development centered on the *buen vivir* of the people, territorial and cultural autonomy, and decolonial projects towards post-liberal societies are some of the most well-known concepts that seek to name the ongoing transformations. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano perhaps put it best when grasping the historical specificity and

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potential of the moment: “It is a time of *luchas* (struggles) and of options. Latin America was the original space of the emergence of modern/colonial capitalism; it marked its founding moment. Today it is, at last, the very center of world resistance against this pattern of power and of the production of alternatives to it” (2008: 3).

Despite the contradictory and diverse forms it has taken in the present decade, the so-called “turn to the Left” in Latin America suggests that the urge for a re-orientation of the course followed by most countries over the past three to four decades is strongly felt by many governments. This is most clear in the cases of Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador at present; to a greater or lesser extent, Argentina, Paraguay, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador; and in the cases of Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, which make up what some observers have called the “pragmatic reformers” or “neoliberal Left.” Why is this happening in Latin America more clearly than in any other world region at present is a question I cannot tackle fully here, but it is related to the fact that Latin America was the region that most earnestly embraced neo-liberal reforms, where the model was applied most thoroughly, and where the results are most ambiguous, in the best of cases. It is well known that it was on the basis of the early Latin American experiences that the Washington Consensus was crafted. Thus the fact that many of the reforms carried out in the most recent years are referred to as “anti-neoliberal” seems particularly apposite. Whether these countries are entering a post-neoliberal –let alone, post-liberal—social order remains a matter of debate.

There is an acute sense, of course, that this potential will not necessarily be realized, and that the projects under way, especially in their State form, are not panaceas of any sort; on the contrary, they are seen as fragile and full of tensions and contradictions. But the sense of an active stirring up of things in many of the continent’s regions, from Southern Mexico to the Patagonia, and especially in large parts of South America, is strong. *How one thinks about these processes is itself an object of struggle and debate*, and it is at this juncture that this paper is situated. Is it possible to suggest ways of thinking about the ongoing transformations that neither shortcut their potential by interpreting them through worn out categories, nor that aggrandize their scope by imputing to them utopias that might be far from the desires and actions of the main actors involved? What perspectives might be most fruitful to think through, and about, the transformations? Is it enough to think from the space of the modern social sciences, or must one incorporate other forms of knowledge, such as those of the activist-intellectuals that inhabit the worlds of many of today’s social movements? In other words, the questions of *where one thinks from, with whom, and for what purpose* become themselves important elements of the investigation; this also means that the investigation, more than ever, is simultaneously theoretical and political.

This specificity also has to do with the multiplicity of histories and trajectories that underlie the diverse cultural and political projects at play. As I will suggest in the first part of the paper, the transformations are most fruitfully seen in terms of the crisis of both neo-liberalism and modernity. Seen in this way, it can plausibly be argued that the region could be moving at the very least beyond the idea of a single, universal modernity and towards a more plural set of modernities. Whether it is also moving beyond the

dominance of one set of modernities (Euro-modernities), or not, remains to be seen. The answer to this question will depend on the degree to which national, sub-national, and regional projects might be able to go beyond modernization projects and into post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist formations. Although moving to a post-liberal society does not seem to be the project of the progressive governments, some social movements could be seen as pointing in this direction. This also means that the relation between the socio-economic and political transformations going on at the level of the State, on the one hand, and the actions and cultural-political demands of social movements, on the other, need to be kept in mind. A third layer to which attention needs to be paid is, of course, the reactions by, and projects from, the right. State, social movements, and the right thus appear as three inter-related but distinct spheres of cultural-political intervention.

Said differently, this paper seeks to understand the current conjuncture, in the sense of “a description of a social formation as fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” (Grossberg 2006: 4). Latin America can be fruitfully seen as a crossroads: a regional formation where critical theories arising from many trajectories (from Marxist political economy to poststructuralisms and their many combinations); a multiplicity of histories and futures; and very diverse cultural and political projects all find a convergence space. As we shall see, the current conjuncture can be said to be defined by two processes: the crisis of the neoliberal model of the past three decades; and the crisis of the project of bringing about modernity in the continent since the Conquest.

Part I of the paper summarizes the context and some features of the current socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations in some South American countries. Part II presents the thrust of the argument: do they constitute alternative forms of modernization, or could they be said to move in the direction of de-colonial projects, that is, in terms of more radical societal transformations towards post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist options –what could be called “alternatives to modernity”? Part III-V move on to provide a general discussion of selective changes introduced at the level of the states in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia, respectively, and their relation to social movements; each part attempts to ascertain the character of the changes according to the two options outlined above. For the Venezuelan case, I highlight certain innovation at the level of development and the economy which, nevertheless, continue to be patently modernizing; the direction that future changes might take is seen as largely depending on the tension at the heart of Chavez’ Bolivarian Revolution between popular organizations and the State. The Ecuadorian case allows us to examine the tension between neo-developmentalism and post-development; while the overall orientation of Correa’s project can be said to be neo-developmental, certain tendencies in the environmental and cultural arena, particularly promoted by social movements, are seen as providing openings towards post-development.

The section that follows is the more substantial of the paper; it focuses on an emergent approach that sees the contemporary Bolivian process as a struggle among

cultural-political projects, particularly between those based on liberal and communal logics, and between state and non-state forms of power and politics; this tension is reflected in the contrasting projects advanced by social movements and by the State; while the former can be seen as pursuing post-liberalism, the State is embarked on an alternative modernization project under the direction of the established Left and Morales' government. The discussion between liberal and post-liberal forms is continued in Part VI on a different register, that of ontology, or basic assumptions about the kinds of entities that are thought to exist in the world. At stake in many cultural-political mobilizations in Latin America at present, it is argued, is the political activation of relational ontologies, such as those of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants. These relational ontologies can be differentiated from the dualist ontologies of liberal modernity, particularly in that they are not built on the division between nature and culture, us and them, individual and community; the cultural, political, and ecological consequences of taking relationality seriously are very significant; in other words, relationality refers to *a different way of imagining life* (socio-natural worlds). The Conclusion, finally, raises some questions facing both State and social movements from the perspective of the sustainability, or not, of the transformations under way. As we shall see, a key question for the states is whether they can maintain their redistributive and anti-neoliberal policies while opening up more decidedly to the autonomous views and demands of social movements; for the latter, a key question will be the extent to which their politics of difference can develop institutional infrastructures that might confer upon them a reasonable chance to vie for the re-design of social life along postliberal and postcapitalist criteria, while retaining their autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Context and some features of the current transformations**

### *a) Some statements about the transformations*

Let us begin with some statements about the transformations under way that convey the sense of what might be new about them. For Luis Macas, former CONAIE leader, *nuestra lucha es epistémica y política*, meaning by this that it is not only about economic transformations and social inclusion but about the character of knowledge itself—whose knowledge counts—and, more generally, about culture. Aymara sociologist Félix Patzi Paco put it succinctly by saying that the social movements in Bolivia are about “the total transformation of liberal society” (Chapel Hill, November 17, 2005). What he meant, as we shall see in detail, is the end of the hegemony of liberal modernity, based on the notions of private property and representative democracy, and the rise of a communal forms of social and economic organization based on indigenous practices. Anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena echo these contentions; for Blaser, the Left governments constitute “attempts to recompose or reorient the project of modernity through a modernizing model that to a greater or lesser extent presents an alternative to the neo-liberal model”; he also asks, “is this approach sufficient to assess cultural-political projects that seem to overflow modernist criteria?” (2007: 11). Similarly, de la Cadena speaks about “an ontological-political de-centering of modern

politics” (2008). Finally, cultural studies scholar Jesús Martín Barbero says that what is at stake in the transformations is “*el sentido de lo latinoamericano* and, moreover, the meaning of collective life, of what we share at ethnic groups, regions, or nations.”<sup>2</sup>

There is also a sense that the transformations under way entail a rupture with the immediate or even long-term past. This sense was eloquently expressed by President Correa in his inaugural speech by contrasting and ‘epoch of changes’ with a ‘change of epoch’:

“Latin America and Ecuador are not going through an epoch of changes, but through a genuine change of epoch .... [We can] initiate the struggle for a *revolución ciudadana* that is consistent with the profound, radical, and expeditious change of the current political, economic, and social system –a perverse system which has destroyed our democracy, our economy, and our society” (Rafael Correa, Inaugural Speech as President of Ecuador, January 15m 2007)

Bolivian vice-president Alvaro García Linera (2007a) similarly explained the depth of the changes in his country by emphasizing its historical and cultural complexity thus:

“The Constituent Assembly is conceived of and was convoked to create an institutional order that corresponds to the reality of who we are. Up to now, each of our 17 or 18 constitutions has just tried to copy the latest institutional fashion – French, US, European. And it was clear that it didn’t fit us, because these institutions correspond to other societies. We are indigenous and non-indigenous, *we are liberal and communitarians*, we are a profoundly diverse society regionally and a hybrid in terms of social classes. So we have to have institutions that allow us to recognize that pluralism.”

On the scholarly side, although without assuming the radical cultural rupture seen by indigenous intellectuals like Macas and Patzi, we find similar expressions by some of the most experienced observers of the reality of the continent, such as Fernando Calderón, who sees in the present moment “a political inflection in the process of socio-cultural change” and the rise of *un nuevo ciclo histórico*, potentially leading to a renewal of democracy and development and the redefinition of what counts as institutional order (2008).

As a first approximation, the novelty and tensions of the transformations could thus be seen as a series of contrasts: between neoliberal development models and anti-neoliberal policies; between a single nation-state and pluri-national and pluri-cultural states; between a national (mestizo/white) culture and a multiplicity of cultures and interculturality; between “América” and Abya Yala, *pueblos indígenas and pueblos originarios*; between demands for land and conceptions of territoriality; between capitalism and development and 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism and alternative modernizations; liberal society and modernity versus communal systems and alternative modernities or non-modernity; and between economic and social liberation (the ‘old Left’) and epistemic/cultural decolonization and decoloniality (the ‘decolonial option’). The

actuality, of course, is far from been so neatly divided; as it is often the case with transitions, in the enthusiastic accounts the novelty of the new is exaggerated and the continuities with the old downplayed.

A frequently broached question in journalistic and scholarly treatments alike is whether the progressive regimes can all be described in terms of “the Left.” In seeking to specify the political left, Arditti (2008) identifies two features: regimes which aim to change the status quo and which construe themselves as torchbearers of equality and solidarity in ways that go beyond classic liberalism; and a set of policies which refer to particular adversaries (e.g., US imperialism, the oligarchy) and that enact anti-neoliberal policies, including the role of the State in the regulation of markets and the pursuit of redistributive policies. That the new left is not so enthralled by orthodox Marxist script and that it is less hostile towards private property does not invalidate it as “Left,” in Arditti’s view. What it suggests is that the continent is moving towards other, ‘post-liberal formats’ of political participation. However, part of this paper’s argument is that the contemporary transformations call for moving beyond Left-Right formulations, given that some of the tendencies cannot be accommodated within the terms defined by this spectrum; to anticipate, a more apt formulation for political forms –suggested by Walter Mignolo-- would be that of “the left, the right, and the decolonial,” thus opening up the political spectrum beyond Eurocentric frameworks. The transformations, in short, need to be seen not so much, or solely, as a turn to the left, but as a decolonial turn (Mignolo 2006; Patzi Paco 2007: 328).

#### *b) Some features in common*

Perhaps the most grounded observation that can be made so far is thus that in the post-Washington consensus climate Left ideas have moved from a defensive to a proactive stance in such a way that alternatives to pro-market reforms have brought about “the constitution of a new discursive center of reference for politics ... the left is now the center” (Arditti 2008: 71).<sup>3</sup> If one thinks about the three most clearly associated cases with the ‘turn to the Left’ –Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, one can identify some features in common. Chief among them is the fact that all three regimes offer radical proposals to transform State and society, including a) deepening of democracy, towards substantive, integral, participatory democracy; b) an anti-neoliberal political and economic project; c) pluri-cultural and pluri-national states in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador; d) to a lesser extent, development models that involve an ecological dimension. A main vehicle for the refounding of the State and society in the three countries have been the Constituent Assemblies. Also in common are: significant popular mobilization (unprecedented in the case of Venezuela), the heightening of social conflicts, Constitutional reforms, the strengthening and transformation of the State, new citizens’ protagonism, and the abandonment of traditional political parties (*partidocracia*), often including old Left parties. Last but not least, an anti-US and anti-imperialist stance and a decided will to play a progressive role in the international scene, both within South America (through the creation of a set of new regional blocs and institutions, from UNASUR, the Banco del Sur, and ALBA<sup>4</sup> to a proposed common currency) and globally, as in the case of the Israeli attacks on Palestinian territories of January 2008. We will

leave pending for now the relation between the regimes and social movements, which is an important factor in three cases.

*c) The current conjuncture*

Mario Blaser (2008) has suggested that the present moment in the continent should be seen in terms of a double crisis: the crisis of the hegemony of the neoliberal modernizing model of the past three decades; and the *long durée* of the more than five hundred years of hegemony of the modern project since the Conquest, that is, the crisis of the project of bringing about modernity in the continent. It is in the space of thought and action opened up by this conjuncture of a two-faced crisis that what is happening in the continent can be most productively seen. It is important to address, however briefly, both dimensions of the conjuncture.

The crisis of the neoliberal model

Neo-liberalism in Latin America started in the early to mid 1970s with the brutal military regimes in Chile and Argentina; by the early 1990s it had encompassed practically all of the countries of the region; it had become hegemonic. There was a global dimension to this hegemony. With the inauguration of Thatcherism in England in 1979, followed by the Regan-Bush years, neo-liberalism expanded to most corners of the world. The first decades of this period represented the apogee of financial capitalism, flexible accumulation, free-market ideology, the fall of the Berlin wall, the rise of the network society, and the so-called new world order. While this picture was complicated in the 1990s, neo-liberal globalization still held sway. Landmarks such as NAFTA, the creation of the World Trade Organization, Davos, Plan Puebla and Plan Colombia were indications of the changing but persistent implantation of this model of capitalist globalization. Signs of resistance appeared almost from the start. Indigenous politics, for instance –so crucial in the Latin America progressive scene today—took off in the 1980s; in 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro) was an attempt to introduce an alternative imaginary to the rampant mercantilism then prevalent. From the food riots in various Latin American capitals of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the anti-GATT demonstrations in India of the early 1990s, and the Zapatista uprising since 1994 to the large-scale demonstrations in Geneva, Seattle, Prague, Barcelona, Québec, Genoa and the like, this idea of a single, inevitable global order under the aegis of a capitalist modernity has been variously challenged. Beginning with the first Gulf War but particularly after September 11, 2002 and the invasion of Iraq of March, 2003, there was a renewed attempt on the part of the US elite to defend its military and economic hegemony. This has affected various world regions in particular ways, and it is part of the context of the current “anti-American bloc” in South America.

Known as “market reforms” in the region, neo-liberalism entailed a series of structural reforms intended to reduce the role of the state in the economy, assign a larger role to markets, and create macroeconomic stability; among the most important measures were liberalization of trade and capital flows, privatization of state assets, deregulation



and free markets, and labor reforms; some analysts believe that they have brought about a measure of success (e.g., greater dynamism of some export sectors, increased direct foreign investment, gains in competitiveness and productivity in some sectors, control of inflation, and the introduction of social policies such as those of decentralization, gender equality and multiculturalism). Yet even the same analysts recognize the high costs of these alleged gains in terms of the growth of unemployment and informality, the weakening of the links between international trade and national production, greater structural unevenness among sectors of the economy (structural dualism), tremendous ecological impact (including the expansion of monocrops such as soy, oil palm, eucalyptus and sugar cane as agro-fuels, often at the expense of peasant and ethnic group territories), and particularly the fact that the market reforms brought with them a sharp increase in inequality in most countries and even an increase in poverty levels in many of them. In fact, by the middle of the current decade one of the most knowledgeable Latin American economists could say, “there is possibly not a single country in the region where the levels of inequality were lower [then] than those of three decades ago; on the contrary, there are many countries in which inequality has increased” (Ocampo 2004: 74). This was particularly the case for South America. The social costs of the reform, in this way, are considered to have been extremely high. Infamous SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programs) and shock therapies brought with them a level of callousness and brutality by the ruling regimes that reached staggering proportions, again particularly in Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

The crisis of the neo-liberal project constitutes the first dimension of the transformations and processes in vogue at present. This crisis would have to be qualified in ways that are beyond the scope of the paper. For instance, whether this means that the neoliberal reforms of the 1970s-2000 have been dismantled is less clear. The opposite is more likely the case. According to Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas, many of the neo-liberal reforms are still place; in this way, rather than “the beginning of a new dream,” the transformations brought about by progressive governments might be described more properly as “the dream of a new beginning”—that is, more rhetoric than reality.<sup>6</sup> In other words, a more significant rupture with the economic policies of the past is yet to come. Yet some important cherished dictums of the neo-liberal mantra have been reversed, such as the reduction of the role of the State and the privatization of publicly-owned enterprises. The State is certainly back as a main actor in the management of society and the economy, particularly through redistributive policies; and some of the previously privatized public companies have been re-nationalized, most notably in the field of energy resources. This is why the new wave of reforms is termed anti-neoliberal. Besides the policy level, it would be important to investigate the extent to which the processes under way have changed those imaginaries, representations, and desires of the population that became more deeply ingrained than ever during the neoliberal decades –e.g., ideologies of individualism, consumerism, the ‘marketization’ of citizenship, and so forth. The impact of the reforms at the social and cultural levels, in other words, needs to be ascertained.

The crisis of the modern project<sup>7</sup>

One of the most salient processes of the past few decades in Latin America is the forceful emergence of indigenous peoples in the political scene of many countries, and in the continent as a whole; this is a process that involves other world regions (see, e.g., Starn and de la Cadena, eds. 2008 for the new indigenities in various parts of the world), but I will only refer here to the Latin American case. The Zapatista uprising and the election of Evo Morales as President of Bolivia in January 2006 did much to put this fact in international circles, but the phenomenon goes well beyond these markers. Even in countries like Colombia, with a very small percentage of indigenous peoples, they have occupied a prominent role in resistance movements, particularly against the proposal for a TLC (free trade agreement) with the US. Over the past two decades, indigenous mobilizations have been paralleled by the appearance of sizeable movements of afro-descendants in countries like Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador. Together, although not commonly appreciated, this emergence is finally making visible the profoundly eurocentric and ethnocentric project of nation building under the allegedly universal paradigms of modernity and modernization. To this extent, the indigenous and black resurgence point well beyond economic exploitation and social and cultural exclusion: they bring into light, more clearly than ever before, the arbitrary (historical) character of modernity, that is, the fact that ‘modernity’ is one cultural model among many (to this extent, it should be called ‘dominant Euro-modernity,’ since there are various modern projects even within Europe/USA today). More importantly perhaps, critical conversations about modernity have ceased to be the province of white or mestizo intellectuals, to become a matter of debate among indigenous and black intellectuals and movements in a number of countries. Equally, important, the debate has seeped into the public sphere in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Guatemala, and (southern) Mexico. These are unprecedented social, cultural, and political facts.

The increasing use of “Abya Yala” as a self-designation after the II *Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala* celebrated in Quito in 2004; the insistence on the right to self-determination; the rich conceptualizations of autonomy; and the self-redefinition as *pueblos originarios*, as opposed to the Eurocentric category of *pueblos indígenas* are among the most telling elements in the constitution of a diverse set of indigenous peoples as a novel cultural-political subject (Porto-Gonçalves 2008). Hence, “the diverse indigenous peoples and movements have been able to consolidate a heterogeneous and multiform pole of resistance and of social and political confrontation that places the *indigenous movement* as a central subject regarding the possibility of social transformation” (Gutiérrez and Escárzaga 2006: 16). This assertion has been amply validated in the last few years, most notably in the creation of the *caracoles* or *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (juntas of good governance) in Chiapas, the events around the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Rainforest, the autonomous movements in Oaxaca (Esteva 2006), the repeated uprisings in Ecuador and Bolivia, the activation of smaller but noticeable movements in Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Colombia, and the many summits and meetings of representatives of *pueblos originarios* where this “political offensive” and “new civilizational project” (Mamani Ramírez 2006a) is widely debated. The key elements of this offensive have to do with, first, territory –the defense of the territory as site of production and the place of culture; second, autonomy, that is, the right over a measure of autonomy and self-determination over the decisions that

affect them, for instance, around the control and use of natural resources and “development”; political representation, towards more pluralistic and participatory forms; and the relation to the state and the nation, most cogently articulated in the notion of pluri-nationality by indigenous organizations in Ecuador, and around the construction of autonomous forms of power and *contra-poderes* at the local and regional levels.

None of this is of course free of risks and contradictions. As it has been argued, the label *pueblos originarios*, for instance, might situate these societies outside time and history; the same can be said of the territorial focus, which tends to constrain indigenous groups in geo-cultural spaces (Rivera Cusicanqui 2008). Bolivian vice president Alvaro García Linera (2007b) warns about romantic and essentialist readings of indigenous worlds, which he sees instead as hybrid of modern and non-modern practices rather than as bearers of significant non-modernities or as separate from the modern world. We shall return to these questions when we discuss the rise of communal logics in Bolivia and the activation of relational ontologies. But the force of indigenous and afro-Latin American mobilizations and their significant cultural and political implications seems undeniable.

## **II. Argument: Alternative modernizations or de-colonial projects?**

The following is the argument I want to make in this paper: The current social, economic, political and cultural transformations suggest the existence of two potentially complementary but also competing projects: a) *alternative modernizations*, based on an anti-neoliberal development model, in the direction of a post-capitalist economy and an alternative form of modernity (*una modernidad satisfactoria*, in García Linera’s phrase). This project stems from the end of the hegemony of the neo-liberal project but does not engage significantly with the second aspect of the conjuncture, namely, the hegemony of Euro-modernity; b) *decolonial projects*, based on a different set of practices (e.g., communal, indigenous, hybrid, and above all, pluriversal and intercultural), leading to a post-liberal society (*an alternative to euro-modernity*). This second project stems from the second aspect of the conjuncture and seeks to transform neoliberalism and development from this perspective. Let me add two qualifications.

First, both options, I argue, are taking place in some fashion at the level of both states and social movements; while at the level of the State the alternative modernization orientation predominates, the second option is not completely absent (that is, it can be seen at play in some aspects of the State, as we will see with the analysis of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions and development plans). Conversely, while the second option can clearly be seen as enacted by some movements, many forms of Left thinking and mobilization continue to be thoroughly modernizing. Hence the importance of looking at these options *at the level of a) the State; b) social movements; c) the nexus of their interactions*. Theoretically speaking, my question is thus: is it possible to think, and move, beyond capital (as the dominant form of economy), Euro-modernity (as dominant cultural construction of socio-natural life), and the State (as central form of institutionalization of the social)? If this hypothesis has any validity, we could speak of

*three scenarios*: post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist. This would require a radical transformation of the monopoly of the economy, power and knowledge that has characterized modern/colonial societies until recently. As we shall see, a basic criterion to answer these questions and to ascertain the character of the changes is *the extent to which the basic premises of the development model are being challenged*.

Second, the *post* before capitalist, liberal, and statist should be understood in a very specific manner. It is somewhat similar to the meaning given to it by Arditto and Lineras already mentioned. For these authors, post-liberalism means a state of affairs characterized by hybrid practices, as a result of a partial displacement of the most dominant forms of Western liberalism and the acknowledgment of other social and political forms, such as the “communal logics” of peasant and indigenous groups. I mean something similar but a bit more. My understanding of the *post* is poststructuralist. It has been said of the notion of postdevelopment (Escobar 1995) that it pointed at a pristine future where development would no longer exist. Nothing of the sort was intended with the notion, which intuited the possibility of *visualizing an era where development ceased to be the central organizing principle of social life* –even more, visualizing such a displacement as already happening in the present. The same with post-liberalism, as a space/time when social life is no longer seen as so thoroughly determined by the constructs of economy, individual, instrumental rationality, order, and so forth that are characteristic of Eurocentered modernity. It is not a state to be arrived at in the future but something that is always under construction. ‘Post-capitalist’ similarly means a way of looking at the economy as diverse, that is, as made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist practices; it signals a state of affairs when capitalism is not seen as the only, or even hegemonic, form of economy (as in the capitalocentric frameworks of most political economy), where the domain of ‘the economy’ is not fully and “naturally” occupied by capitalism but by a vast array of other economies –solidarity, cooperative, social, communal, even criminal economies that cannot be reduced to capitalism (J.K Gibson Graham 2006). In other words, the ‘post’ signals the notion that *the economy is not essentially or naturally capitalist, societies are not naturally liberal, and the state is not the only way of instituting social power as we have imagined it to be*.

The post, succinctly, means a decentering of capitalism in the definition of the economy, of liberalism in the definition of society and the polity, and of state forms of power as the defining matrix of social organization. This does not mean that capitalism, liberalism, and state forms cease to exist; *it means their discursive and social centrality have been displaced somewhat*, so that the range of existing social experiences that are considered valid, and credible alternatives to what exist, is significantly enlarged (Santos 2007a). Taken together, post-liberalism, post-capitalism, and post-statist forms point at alternatives to the dominant forms of eurocentered modernity. Alternatives to modernity, or transmodernity (Dussel 2000) is also the expression of a political desire, a desire of the critical utopian imagination. Operating in the cracks of modernity/coloniality, it gives content to the World Social Forum slogan, *another world(s) is (are) possible* (Escobar 2004). That this notion is not solely a conceit of researchers but that it can be gleaned at

least from the discourses and practices of some social movements and intellectuals close to those movements will be shown in the rest of this paper.

However, I should make it clear that the argument about the possibility of post-liberal, post-capitalist, and post-statist social orders is at this stage perhaps more an argument about potentiality (about the field of the virtual) than about ‘how things really are’. In this sense, it will remain a working hypothesis to be further refined and a statement of possibility, and it is offered as such in this paper in the spirit of discussion. But I should also emphasize that this does not make the trends I will describe less “real.” It has been said of today’s social movements that one of their defining features is their appeal to the virtual; movements do not exist only as empirical objects “out there” carrying out “protests” but in their enunciations and knowledges, as a potentiality of how politics and the world could be, and as a sphere of action in which people can dream of a better world and contribute to enact it. The contemporary wave of movements in Latin America open up again the field of the virtual to other thoughts and other theoretical and political projects; by positing not simply different but radically other codes of existence, they point at unactualized tendencies and capacities, giving expression to an undetermined potential for change. It is in these spaces that new imaginaries and ideas about how to re/assemble the social –and, as we shall see, the socio-natural-- are not only hatched but experimented with, critiqued, elaborated upon, and so forth.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. Venezuela: Elements of a post-capitalist politics**

With its strong anti-neoliberal stances, the Venezuelan case of the Chávez era would seem to exemplify the move to an ‘alternative capitalist’ and perhaps post-capitalist economy and politics. Many of the changes introduced by President Chávez through the Bolivarian Revolution and the *Socialismo del Siglo XXI* surely have an anti-capitalist orientation, broadly speaking; this applies as much to the main anti-neoliberal reforms (chiefly, the nationalization of a number of sectors of the economy, most notably the control of oil production) as to the strategies for the support of local economies under an ‘endogenous development’ model. Whether these changes can be legitimately characterized as anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal, post-neoliberal, alternative capitalist, or post-capitalist is a matter of debate in Venezuela and beyond; the answer to this question depends in great part on the framework used to analyze development and the economy. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to discuss the extent to which the changes could be seen as furthering the principle of a (more) diverse economy as defined above. As we shall see, while some of the changes could be seen as leading in this direction, the main point is that they exemplify the tensions between the goals and strategies of autonomy by social movements, on the one hand, and State-led projects of re-founding society and the economy within a developmentalist and modernist framework –albeit more diverse at the level of the economy-- on the other.<sup>9</sup>

To ascertain the character of the transformations seen in Venezuela since 1999 is not easy. Several of the most knowledgeable observers of the Venezuelan process have noted the Manichean mind-set that pervades most analyses and assessments (e.g., Coronil

2009: 3); this is perhaps an extension of what has been termed a “partisan historiography” that has simplified and distorted 20<sup>th</sup> century history (Ellner 2008: 10), but certainly a reflection of the “profound polarization” of Venezuelan society in recent years, particularly after the popular uprising against IMF-imposed reforms known as *El Caracazo* of 1989 (e.g., López Maya and Lander 2008). It is commonly agreed, however, that the decline of traditional party system and the exhaustion of the oil-based oligarchic development model of the past decades were two of the most important aspects leading to the rise to power of Hugo Chávez, elected as President of Venezuela in December, 1998.

Some of the landmarks in the Bolivarian process under way since include: the new Constitution of 1999 to support the Bolivarian revolution; the coup attempt of 2002 and the oil strike of 2002-2003; the unsuccessful referendum against the president of August 2004; Chávez’s reelection of December 2006 with 62.9% of the votes; the announcement, during the campaign for reelection, of the *Socialismo del Siglo XXI* and, after the electoral triumph, of the formation of a single, unified party out of all the forces supporting his government, the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (PSUV), and of a set of special “Enabling Laws” giving power to the executive to introduce measures to carry the country towards socialism; the defeat of the referendum on the reform of the Constitution proposed by the President and the National Assembly on December 2, 2007 (50.7% against, 49.3% in favor, 44% abstention); this referendum included, among other items of reform, the unlimited reelection of public officials, including the president. On February 15, 2009 a new referendum ultimately made possible the unlimited re-election of all popularly elected government positions, again including the presidency (54% of the vote in favor).

The 1999 Constitution shaped the first period of Chávez’s presidency; it introduced the key principle of *democracia participativa y protagónica* (participative and protagonist democracy); along with the Plan for Economic and Social Development 2001-2007, it reasserted the role of the State in regulating the economy and other important aspects of social life; it also mandated State ownership of natural resources, particularly oil. It introduced a host of mechanisms for popular participation, especially citizen’s assemblies, which brought about intense political mobilization, to this date. The Plan stated a principle of self-development and self-management by popular sectors within a framework of ‘endogenous development’ and of a ‘popular economy,’ largely based on cooperative models.<sup>10</sup> To this end, it created local councils of public planning as well as organizations concerning land and local economies (nuclei of endogenous development, communal banks, cooperative and solidarity economies, etc.), with massive State funding. The Plan also included the notion of mixed property regimes. To this extent, then, there have been important changes at the level of development and the economy.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the changes in economic policy have not been completely consistent, except perhaps for a steady tendency towards their radicalization. There exists an uneasy mixture of private and State capitalisms which seems increasingly untenable in terms of either securing support from industrialists or deepening the reforms,

a path favored by the more radical sectors within the government (Lander 2009, 2007b). A wave of nationalizations took place since 2006, including of the cement, electricity, telephone and steel industries. And although the government shows preference for local and national capital over foreign one, the role of big capitalist groups in a socializing economy remains undefined (Ellner 2007, 2009). Progressively, however and despite contradictory strategies, the government is moving towards an alternative to neoliberalism with strong social economy and social policy sectors. The increase in social expenditure has been sharp, particularly with funds from the State oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA)*, whose annual expenditures in social programs went from 48 million in the period 1999-2003 to 1.7 billion in 2004 and 2.4 billion for 2005 (see Parker 2007b: 66).<sup>12</sup> This is a prime example of the utilization of the economic surplus for redistributive purposes, a feature of most of the progressive governments of the continent. (The extent to which such surplus is efficiently used in policy terms remains a matter of debate, as will be discussed in the next section.)<sup>13</sup>

During the first presidency period, new channels of political participation were created by the government following the principle of direct democracy. Many of these forms of direct democracy were geared towards popular input in the design and management of public policies. The most effective mechanism in this regard were the “technical committees” (*mesas técnicas*) in areas such as water, gas, and energy; these committees brought together community organizations and state agencies to come up with solutions to the serious problems of social services in poor urban neighborhoods in particular. There were also community organizations around urban and rural lands and property issues. Another very well-known instrument of social policy has been the various *misiones sociales* which have fostered a high degree of organization in areas such as health, education, employment, and food distribution; these enabled popular sectors to have access to social services and are considered by many as conveying real gains by the poor at and as contributing to a decrease of poverty and unemployment (see e.g., Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008a; Weisbrot 2009; Fernandes 2009). To this extent, it can be said that the protagonist democracy has worked against the long-standing patterns of social and economic exclusion.<sup>14</sup>

A landmark in the process of building up popular organizations was the promulgation in 2006 of the *Ley de Consejos Comunales*, which sought to deepen the process of building “popular power” which became more and more important during Chávez’s second term. This has been perhaps the most important element in the strategy by which the government has sought to create a self-sustaining popular process for the exercise of direct democracy. Indeed, the communal councils are seen as the pillar of the fifth “driving engine” of the *Socialismo del Siglo XXI*, namely, “a revolutionary explosion of communal power.” Between 20 and 26,000 CC have been created, covering about two-thirds of the population, their main goal being the improvement of living conditions through the self-management of social services and government-funded projects; in principle, however, their functions go well beyond this aim, following President Chávez’s call in 2007 for a radical restructuring of the spatial-political organization of the country under the rubric of “a new geometry of power.”<sup>15</sup> This is doubtless a very important development, yet one that is fraught with problems. Generally

speaking, the opening of new spaces of participation is seen as generating “an important organizational dynamic among the popular sectors, that has enabled collective civic action geared towards managing and solving diverse problems facing the communities; this process has doubtlessly created conditions for the empowerment of people; however, it has faced serious limitations” (López Maya and Lander 2008: 12; López Maya 2007, 2008). Among those cited are: the fact that often times popular organizations are too local, lacking middle-level structures that could aggregate their efforts and actions; their inability to maintain autonomy vis à vis the state; and tension between newer and older organizations. Taken together, however, it can be said that the policies of the Chávez government have fostered a tremendous amount of popular organizing in the sense that there have emerged many avenues to foster popular organizations and to incorporate popular power into the State.<sup>16</sup>

The unevenness, tensions, and ambiguities in the process of building communal power raise many questions to which there are not good answers yet. As a recent analysis of the CC asks, “Are the CC spaces for the real exercise of popular sovereignty, as President Chávez says, or are they, on the contrary, spaces of political clientilism and tutelage? Democratizing spaces, or populist spaces? Autonomous or para-statal spaces?” (García-Guadilla 2008: 130; see also Lander 2007b: 79-81). Two tendencies are identified: “technical-clientilistic” (those CC who see themselves largely as in charge of managing government resources) and the “empowerment vision” (represented by those CC which see themselves as instruments of popular power, and which are often linked to more autonomous popular movements). Those following the first approach have been unable to limit the influence of political parties (especially the PSUV) and the government, and so can be seen as “co-opted”; those more inclined towards autonomous popular power and to becoming a social movement run the risk of conflict with the government. In this author’s view, the first tendency predominates; this means that the CC are not operating effectively as spaces for the construction of new subjectivities or alternative societal models (p. 23).

This brings to the fore the second key question to be addressed in this section: the tension between the autonomy of social movements and popular organizations and the State. Despite the fact that Venezuela has little history of collective action when compared with other countries of the Andes, various forms of mobilization, particularly belligerent ones, have steadily increased since 1989.<sup>17</sup> During the 1989-1999 period, these forms of protest were advanced chiefly by diverse social actors who had in common poverty and exclusion. The intense popular mobilization that resulted constituted what has been called “the agenda of the poor,” which enabled organizations to open up spaces of participation especially at the municipal level in order to press for social and public services (López Maya and Lander 2008). From 1999-2006 (Chávez’s first period), and within the framework of the *democracia participativa y protagónica*, various forms of collective action continued to be practiced, this time by a broad array of social actors with contrasting political motivations and allegiances. Popular sectors who support the hegemonic project of change continued with both civic and belligerent forms of action in defense of the Bolivarian process. Middle and upper class sectors privileged belligerent actions against the government; this increased both the social and the political



polarization of society. The confrontation among pro-government forces and those against it was particularly fierce from 1999-2004, including the coup attempt of 2002 and the oil strike of 2002-2003.

The closing of space at the political level came clearly into view with the process leading to the referendum for the reform of the constitution of 2007 (see Lander and Maya 2008 for a lengthy discussion of the referendum and its aftermath). For some, this process entailed a return of “the left subculture of the bureaucratic apparatus” and authoritarian socialism –in short, “directed (not direct) democracy” (Biardeau 2007a, 2007b). The top-down process followed by the creation of the PSUV was seen as a step back in the construction of a socialist democracy (Lander 2008, 2007a). Once again, the Venezuelan State was seen “like a magician that makes appear from his hat the illusions and miracles of modernity” (2007b: 1). This well-known metaphor refers to the inextricable fusion of State and society based on oil money (Coronil 1997). The situation after the referendum was well summarized by one of the most astute observers of the process: “While the social dynamics of the revolution are characterized by their vital and open nature, in the sphere of politics, then, there appears to be a sort of regressive evolution, towards a closing of the space for participation and democratic decision-making. Venezuela, in this sense, appears to be moving in the direction of a politically less democratic society” (López Maya 2008: 16). It should be said, however, that debates within Chavismo have been active at various moments; they include a high level of critique, even if marked by a sharp difference between the position of those in government and that of activists outside the State who look more critically at the process.

The above tensions and contradictions are well exemplified by the women’s movements. Left and anticapitalist feminists find themselves in a quandary: whether to fit their struggles within the Bolivarian process as defined by its leadership, or to develop more autonomous processes in pursuit of their own agendas. The dependency on Chávez (“not precisely a feminist,” see Blanco 2007: 96) is seen as particularly problematic. Blanco finds at play in Venezuela the long-standing split in Latin American feminisms between the *autónomas* –those who advocate for autonomous organizations—and the *políticas*, that is, those who favor working within the established Left parties, the PSUV in this case (see, e.g., Sternbach, Navarro, Chuchryk, and Alvarez 1992), and between the ‘feminism of equality’ and the ‘feminism of difference’. In other words, the political polarization that characterizes the current government and popular sectors finds its way into the Venezuelan women’s and feminist movements in particular ways. For Blanco, although the gains obtained by the feminism of equality working within the State and the PSUV have been notable, only the development of autonomous organizations can advance the project of a feminist socialism. As she concludes,

feminists, or those women struggling for socialism, find ourselves mired in the contradiction between fighting our struggle against any and all forms of oppression and discrimination on the basis of gender and on the basis of class, that is, how to wage the battle against patriarchy and against capitalism at the same time. In the latter fight, we feel *acompañadas* (supported) by our comrades in struggle; but we feel very lonely when it comes to the anti-patriarchal struggle.

This is why we have a great historic task ahead of us, that of engendering and giving birth to a socialism that is not only anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist but, above all, anti-patriarchal. ... [This requires] questioning and debunking the cultural model of androcentric domination at all levels. (Blanco 2007: 11).

Carosio (2007) similarly emphasizes the need to incorporate feminist thought and feminist values into the constitution of the new society; pointing at the paucity of feminist discussions on the Bolivarian process, Espina (2007) goes on to emphasize the patriarchal character not only of capitalism but of all the real socialisms, calling for a radical democratic approach that really works for women. We shall get back to this important issue in our discussion of relationality (Part V), from the perspective of a decolonial feminism.<sup>18</sup>

Generally speaking, then, the main tension emphasized by independent observers is that between the need to foster autonomous organizations and the tendency, especially after 2006, to re/concentrate power in the State and, particularly, in the presidency. Will community councils and other popular organizations, such as the well-known technical water and land committees, be able to maintain their independence from a single-party political movement led by the State? The struggle is seen as between tendencies to strengthening etatism and those for greater transparency, participation, and popular sector autonomy. Only the latter path “could consolidate the Venezuelan experience as a genuine and novel *post-capitalist democratic alternative*” (Lander 2007a: 31; emphasis added). One of the issues most highlighted by critics is thus the need for a broad debate on the actual conditions and limitations of the Bolivarian process; this involves discussions about the possibilities of deepening democracy, and the risks of not doing so. Additional aspects of the debate concern very concrete problems, such as the deficiencies of public management, insecurity, and corruption.

Most conclusions emphasize both achievements and a sense of incompleteness, conflict, and, above all, partial closure of the process. Coronil summarized it well: “No matter where one stands or how one views Chávez’s Venezuela, few would dispute that under Chávez the nation is different”; for him, “the Chávez regime has sought a different modernity by rejecting capitalism within a class-divided society and promoting collective welfare through social solidarity within a yet to be defined socialist society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Coronil 2009: 4). How we understand the “difference” makes all the difference. For Coronil, it represents an alternative modernity; for Lander, while the first few years constituted a form of social democracy, the post-2006 period has entailed a further radicalization, yet one that exhibits

a constant tension in the Bolivarian process between the government’s neo-developmentalism –with its mixture of State and private capitalism (referred to in Bolivia as ‘Andean-Amazonian capitalism’ by this country’s vice-president García Linera)-- and the will of certain political sectors (inside and outside Chavismo) and social movements to radicalize, from the base, organized forms of popular participation and popular power towards a socialist alternative .... the

main challenge is how to imagine a different society; what would constitute a post-capitalist society? (emphasis added) (2009: 4).

For this author, the path to this question lies in imagining an alternative civilizational model capable of transforming radically how the economy and politics are understood, so as to insure the survival of life on the planet. But the debate on the environmental sustainability of the Bolivarian model has hardly begun, which constitutes a big gap in the process, to say the least.

The Venezuelan process takes us in the direction envisaged by Lander only up to a certain point. While it has transformed the long-standing development model to some degree, it is still mired in neo-developmentalism and oil rents. With its anti-neoliberal and partial anti-capitalist stances it could be said to be moving on a post-capitalist path (particularly considering the domains of social and popular economies), but only in a very limited way; it stalls frequently along the way because of its contradictory political economy. A main question remains pending: Is the State an effective vehicle for the democratization of society and the economy and, moreover, for their transformation towards postcapitalism and postdevelopment? There are serious doubts that this is the case. However, it might well be the case that all of the pillars of the process --endogenous development, popular economy, and the new geometry of power anchored in the community councils and other forms of popular power—should be understood as *horizons* that guide a different path rather than as fully worked-out frameworks or an alternative model. This has been said of endogenous development in particular (Parker 2007b). As this author argues, “To speak of an endogenous development based on a popular economy means to discuss a process that is in its infancy” (76); and he continues, “endogenous development implies the search for a unique path in that it places at the heart of the project the augmented role of the people as its main protagonist. . . . It is an audacious proposal that results incomprehensible to those who have not assumed consciously the need for a radical rupture with the premises of a society that showed its exhaustion in 1998. It is a question of assuming this rupture with all the uncertainties and loss of references that it implies” (79).

Finally, whereas postliberalism is not on the radar of the State, there are two important developments that erode cherished liberal principles (at least in its “really existing” forms); the first is the introduction of more direct forms of democracy and *popular* protagonism in lieu of, and in addition to, liberalism’s more common (hierarchical or top-down) representative democracy. The second is the transformation of what could be called the spatiality of liberalism, that is, the commonly held political division of the territory into regions, departments, municipalities, and the like, and which the “new geometry of power” seeks to unsettle, at least in principle. It should be added that, as a whole, liberalism also seems far from the scope of most popular organizations (partly a consequence of the strength of the developmentalist oil imaginary with its individualistic and consumerist undertones); in other words, the society defined by the Bolivarian revolution and 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism still functions largely within the framework of the liberal order; for post-liberalism to emerge the autonomy of the popular sector would have to be released to a greater degree than the current government seems to

be willing to do. As we will suggest with the Bolivian case, it might be that only a veritable *society in movement*, where autonomous social movements get to play an important cultural-political role, could move the socio-natural formation towards the elusive goal of postliberalism.

#### **IV. Ecuador: Between neo-developmentalism and postdevelopment**

Ecuador exemplifies well the tensions between alternative modernizations and moving beyond modernity, which in this section I will discuss as a tension between neo-developmentalism and postdevelopment. By neo-developmentalism I mean forms of development understanding and practice that do now question the fundamental premises of the development discourse of the last five decades, even if introducing a series of important changes (Escobar 1995, 2009). By postdevelopment, I mean the opening of a social space where precisely these premises can be challenged, something that some movements can be seen as doing at both knowledge and practice levels.

First, some well-known facts about Ecuador. Rafael Correa was elected President in November 2006 with the support of a broad-base political movement *Alianza País*. His campaign was based on the concept of a *Revolución Ciudadana* and the promise of significant social and economic transformations. Correa's ascent to power was predated by a wave of indigenous uprisings since 1990. These uprisings crystallized in various forms of indigenous alliances among the 14 nationalities and 18 *pueblos* in the country. On April 15, 2007 the constitutional reform process was approved by popular vote, with the government party achieving a significant majority (73 out of 130 *asambleistas*) in the subsequent *Asamblea Constituyente* (AC). Installed on 29 November to last for 180 days, the AC resulted in a new Constitution, ratified by popular referendum in September, 2008. The 2008 Constitution is seen as a means to transform the institutional framework of the State; it seeks to enable the structural transformations needed to advance the social and political project of *Alianza País* and to bring about a new model of society through a different vision of development, territorialization, identity (pluricultural), and nation (plurinational).

As stated by the its President, Alberto Acosta, in his inaugural speech, the AC was seen as a space for the re-politicization of society:

The Constituent Assembly is probably the most important aspect of the *Revolución Ciudadana* ... [it has] a fundamental objective: the re-politicization of the Ecuadorian society, reflected in a growing consciousness on the part of the majority about the need for and, above all, the possibility of change ... This re-politicization goes hand in hand with the proposal for the *Revolución Ciudadana*.

The new Constitution states that the goal of development is the *sumak kawsay* (in quechua) or *buen vivir* (in Spanish). This entails a “conceptual rupture” with the conceptions of development of the previous six decades (Acosta 2009). As Acosta states,

“more than a constitutional declaration, the *buen vivir* (collective wellbeing) constitutes an opportunity to construct collectively a new development regime” (2009:6). For Catherine Walsh, “the integral vision and the basic condition of the collective wellbeing have been at the basis of the cosmovisions, life philosophies and practices of the peoples of *Abya Yala* and the descendants of the African diaspora for centuries; they are now re-apprehended as guide for the re-founding of the Bolivian and Ecuadorian state and society” (2009a: 5). And for Uruguayan ecologists Eduardo Gudynas (2009), the rights to nature, or the *Pachamama*, recognized in the new Ecuadorian constitution represent an unprecedented “biocentric turn,” away from the dominant modern anthropocentrism, that resonates as much with the cosmovisions of ethnic groups as with the principles of ecology. The Constitution’s proposal to rethink the country as a pluri-national and intercultural society are equally impressive. All of these authors, however, emphasize the tremendous obstacles to actualize these principles in concrete policies and practices. Moreover, it seems clear that many of the policies implemented by the progressive governments are at odds with the principles of the *buen vivir*. The *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007-2010*, subtitled *Planificación para la Revolución Ciudadana* allows us to illustrate these difficulties, and the tensions between neodevelopmentalism and postdevelopment.

The Plan is based on a concept of *desarrollo humano* as the basis for the *revolución ciudadana*. It establishes twelve goals of human development concerning a) democracy and participation; b) an alternative economic model, linked to inclusive social policies; c) a genuine Latin American social, political, and economic integration. The human development concept includes endogenous development, cultural diversity, the *buen vivir*, and environmental sustainability. The Plan defines development as follows:

By development we understand the pursuit of a good life (*buen vivir*) of everybody, in peace and harmony with nature, and the unlimited survival of *human cultures*. The *buen vivir* presupposes the real liberties, opportunities, abilities and potentialities that *individuals* have be broadened in such as way that they allow to achieve simultaneously those goals valued as desirable by each individual –seen simultaneously as *a particular human being and as universal--* as well as by society, the territories, and the diverse cultural identities. Our concept of development pushes us to recognize, value, and understand each other in order to enable the self-realization and the construction of a shared future. (SENPLADES n.d., p. 59; emphasis added)

This is an interesting definition; however, the attentive reader will notice the mainstream concepts that find their way into the definition (and which I have suggested with italics in this and the other quotes in this section). First, even if the Plan states the need for a broad definition of development that “does not subscribe only to the goal of economic growth” (p. 59), the need for growth pervades most aspects of the Plan; in other words, the premise of growth is questioned as an end but not as a means. To some extent, the Plan affirms the important possibility of subordinating growth to other goals (e.g., “the right to preserve the natural and cultural *wealth* should take precedence over the need for economic growth,” p. 71), yet the contradictions are patently clear. It is

telling, for instance, that the Plan speaks of “*strategic areas* to amplify the economic growth that can sustain human development (energy, hydrocarbons, telecommunications, mining, science and technology, water, and rural development)” as deserving “special attention by the State” (73). This notion of strategic areas is problematic since they seem exempt from the cultural and environmental criteria that underlie the conception of the *sumak kawsay*; it is not a coincidence that the government’s recent mining policies operate under this principle. One could also ponder whether there aren’t “strategic areas” that are fundamental to the *sumak kawsay* and that should be similarly strengthened? Here we find a profound asymmetry in the Plan, between those elements that contribute to economic growth, and those which could make viable social and environmental strategies for the *buen vivir*. This asymmetry emerges at every aspect of the Plan, as shown by the following section, which again takes us back to an economic and technocratic view of development:

This view of *human development* requires a sufficiently broad platform of *economic growth*, fostered by ongoing gains in *productivity* under conditions of social, economic, and environmental *efficiency* in the use of *resources*. A *competitive insertion into global markets* must be based on harmonious local and regional development that integrates productive, social, and environmental policies. Along with *external demand*, the promotion of demand in internal markets multiplies the possibilities for *integral growth*, reduces productivity gaps, and contributes to broaden the supply of higher products with greater incorporation of *added value*. To the extent that *markets* are no self-regulating, the correction of its imperfections ... calls for an independent, collaborative, and *technical* institutional structure (SENPLADES n.d., p. 64)

To sum up, the Development Plan 2007-2010 and the 2008 Constitution open up the possibility “to dispute the historical meaning of development,” as Acosta aptly put it in the text already cited (2009: p. 12). In many of the countries with progressive governments in the region, the search for different development models has revitalized political discussions. In some cases, it has also made possible to start the discussion on other knowledges and cultural practices (e.g., indigenous and afro) at a national level; in other words, it has opened up the discussion of development to other ways of understanding and constructing the world (interculturality). In relation to dominant conceptions, the notion of development as *buen vivir* a) questions the prevailing “maldevelopment” (Tortosa 2009; Ospina Peralta 2008), highlighting the undesirability of a model based on growth and material progress as the sole guiding principles; b) displaces the idea of development as an end in itself to one which sees development as a process of qualitative change; c) it enables, in principle, strategies that go beyond the export of primary products, going against the “reprimarization” of the economy in vogue in the continent; d) it broaches a certain degree of seriousness the question of the sustainability of the model.

Other innovative aspects of the plans and constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia include: a) the notion of *buen vivir*, as understood by some indigenous and afro communities, does not imply a stage of “underdevelopment” to be overcome, given that it

refers to a different philosophy of life; b) in seeing nature as constitutive of social life, the new constitutions make possible a conceptual shift towards biocentrism or biopluralism, and the economy comes to be seen as embedded in larger social and natural systems, following the dictates of ecological economists. This makes possible a novel ethics of development, one which subordinates economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice and the collective wellbeing of the people (Acosta 2009); c) development as *buen vivir* seeks to articulate economics, environment, society and culture in new ways, which in turn calls for mixed and solidarity economies (see p. 47 of the Plan); d) it renews the frameworks of public policy and of social and inter-generational justice as spaces for development principles; e) it acknowledges cultural and gender differences, positioning inter-culturality as guiding principle (Walsh 2009b); f) it enables the introduction of new political-economic emphases, such as food sovereignty, the control of natural resources, and seeing water as a human right.

These are all positive changes. But the question arises: Do they constitute a “conceptual rupture” ample enough for the radical changes that the Constitution and the Plan envision? To answer this question, it is necessary to point at some persistent problems: a) there remain a series of contradictory conceptions, including around the role of growth, already mentioned; b) there is a lack of clarity about the type of processes needed to implement the Plan given these contradictions; c) an overall macro-developmental orientation is maintained, which militates against environmental sustainability; d) there persists a strong individualist orientation, in contradiction with the collectivist and relational potential that underlie the vision of the *buen vivir*; this problem is inherent in the conception on the basis of ‘human development’ based on ‘capabilities.’

Other problems have been pointed out, such as the fact that while Rafael Correa prizes the role of academic knowledge in illuminating social change and in cultivating a well informed citizenship (many of his cabinet members belong to intellectual/academic circles rather than political circles), this means his government is seen by some as based on urban middle sectors and that it marginalizes non-academic knowledges, such as those of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian minorities. New citizenship practices that give content, up to a certain point, to the *Revolución Ciudadana*—such as the creative use of information technologies, such as the weblog for the AC—are seen as contributing to this bias (Santacruz 2007). Very important is the sustained criticism that the CONAIE, the largest indigenous network organization in the country, has maintained of many of the aspects of Correa’s government. While the Plan and the Constitution adopt the principle of interculturality, for CONAIE this is not adequately defined or dealt with. On the contrary, the unified, modernist vision of development is seen as counter to it. And while the Plan incorporates a view of a plurinational State, according to indigenous organizations the government has not embraced their proposal of plurinationality, based on “the existence of a diversity of nationalities and peoples, which are different historical, economic, political and cultural entities.”

CONAIE’s proposal to the AC, elaborated throughout 2007 through workshops with communities, included economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions. It was a *propuesta de vida* that contemplated a critique of neoliberal policies; integral agrarian

reform; social, cultural, environmental and economic reparations in response to the damages caused by the oil, timber and mining industries; the termination of concessions to foreign companies; and a conception of self-government of each ethnic group within the State and an intercultural society within which the various groups can coexist in peace and mutual respect. Many of these demands were sided in the 2008 Constitution. As a whole, many indigenous organizations see Correa's government as upholding an alternative modernization based on academic knowledge, with insufficient participation of indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and workers despite its anti-neoliberal stances.

Interculturality is a key concept originally developed by CONAIE and refined over the years by indigenous and afro organizations. It refers to the dialogue and co-existence among diverse cultural groups under conditions of equality (Walsh 2009b: 41). It seeks to break away from the centuries-old imposition of a single cultural vision. More than anything, it represents a horizon –that of ongoing and continuous interactions among diverse groups marked by tensions and conflict and always under construction. Interculturality can be seen “as a dynamic process and project of creation and construction on the basis of people's actions, who recognize and face the still alive colonial legacies and that invites to a dialogue among logics, rationalities, *saberes* (modes of knowing), worlds and modes of being which have the right to be different” (Walsh 2009b: 59). Needless to say, the viability of the notion requires profound changes in the social structures that underlie the monocultural, monoepistemic, and uninational State; as a political project, it is more likely to be struggled for from below than from above.

The State, however, has embraced this horizon to an important extent; it even speaks of a *revolución intercultural* in conjunction with the *revolución ciudadana*. We find this goal clearly stated in both the Development Plan 2007-2010 and the 2008 Constitution. The Plan states that interculturality opens up a “new political agenda” that should influence “the long-term vision of development.” Its eight objective reads: “To affirm national identity and to strengthen the diverse identities and interculturality” For Walsh, the State discourse on interculturality takes on some of the aspects of the critical framework developed by the indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian organizations, such as the strengthening and promotion of diverse knowledges, policies to end discrimination and foster inclusion, the defense and valuation of cultural and natural patrimony, and the creation of special instruments to further interculturality. Despite these advances, “the significance and implications of interculturality vis à vis the change process continues to be slippery,” particularly in relation to the structural changes needed to create conditions for differences to become really visible (p. 151). The articulation between plurinationality and interculturality –involving fundamental aspects such as the definition of the nation, territoriality, education, rights and the law-- also remains elusive. To move more decidedly in the direction of radical interculturality in order to overthrow the cultural, political, and epistemic structures of coloniality, Walsh concludes, would require a decolonial turn. We shall return to this notion towards the end of the last section of the paper.



This is to say that, whereas important elements for an alternative State framework have been laid down, it is necessary to raise the question of the political will necessitated for *effective* social, cultural, and environmental policies in terms of *buen vivir*, interculturality, and the rights of nature. As Gudynas, Guevara and Roque (2008) have argued in their provisional yet well-documented evaluation of the social policies of the progressive regimes in South America, in all of the cases there is a significant gap between pronouncements and the actual practice. The results, in short, leave much to be desired. This gap is not accidental; on the contrary, it reflects the fact that all of the progressive regimes continue to be trapped in developmentalist conceptions. This might be an unfair conclusion, however, strictly speaking, as far as the Constitutions is concerned, in that the new Constitutions are deeply negotiated and contradictory documents, opened to multiple interpretations and to continued political processes for the development of their normativity. As Coraggio put it, “it seems to me that to demand a coherent discourse from the Constitutions is to ask far more from them than the political process and the transitional character of the period allows, including the impossibility of anticipating a practical discourse for an epoch which is not yet ours.”<sup>19</sup>

To sum up for the case of Ecuador: although in the new discourses ‘development’ has been decentered up to a point, opening up spaces for culture, nature, and non-economic aspects, the proposed model continues to be modernizing and expert-driven in important ways. In this way, even if it adumbrates a post-development era, it does not move towards it decidedly. We shall discuss at the end of the paper what additional conditions would have to be met for this to be the case.<sup>20</sup>

## **V. Bolivia: A post-liberal and decolonial project?**

“What exists in El Alto *es una escuela de pensamiento comunal*”. These words, by aymara sociologist Félix Patzi Paco at a presentation in Chapel Hill on November 17, 2005 –that is, scarcely a month before the election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia on December 18, 2005 with 53.7% of the votes—encapsulates the highest stakes in the Bolivian process: the very forms of thinking and being. El Alto, the largely aymara city close to La Paz which grew up to close to a million people in less than three decades, engrossed by peasant migrants expelled by the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s, has become, Patzi said, a school for an other thought, a communal thought. In some ways, what Patzi says of El Alto could be said of the country as a whole, in the sense that the struggles going on in Bolivia since Morales’ ascension to power reflect conflicts over fundamental questions about models of life and visions of the world; politically speaking, these struggles represent contestations among ‘the right, the Left, and the decolonial,’ to use Walter Mignolo’s formulation, or about the simultaneous process of emancipation *and* decolonization, as Cristina Rojas put it (2009); socially and culturally, they reveal “a paradigmatic crisis, an emptying out of the hegemonic ideology” as a result of the “rebellion against the racial structure of Bolivian society” (Patzi Paco 2007: 308).

This section will ask the question of the extent to which it is possible to go beyond the 'Right-Left' political spectrum in order to entertain the idea of a third political space, that of the decolonial, a question that can be posed in Bolivia today perhaps in more cogent ways than anywhere else in the Americas, particularly when considering the most forward looking interpretations of popular struggles and social movements emerging from this country. These interpretations, as we shall see, envision the possibility of a move towards a post-liberal society. In fact, decolonial politics and post-liberalism emerge as two aspects of the process by which some groups in this country are imagining, and perhaps constructing, 'worlds and knowledges otherwise.'

As in the case of Ecuador, Bolivia's process unfolds against the background of the double crisis of neoliberalism—in its particularly virulent application in Bolivia since the mid 1980s—and modernity. Census data show that 62% of the population is of indigenous descent, although some aymara intellectuals have estimated it as being as high as 75% (Mamani 2006a). Notwithstanding, class and ethnic domination by a non-indigenous minority has been among the harshest in the continent, which explains at a general level the breath and depth, and importance, of the indigenous uprisings that have been taking place since the 1970s and, especially, since the 2000-2001 so-called "water wars" (against the privatization of water in Cochabamba) and the popular uprising of October 2003 against the privatization of natural gas and president Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada's neo-liberal reforms, and the ensuing calls for a Constituent Assembly.<sup>21</sup>

The 2008 Constitution declares that Bolivia is "a unitary, plurinational, communitarian, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, social decentralized state, with territorial autonomies" that is founded on "political, economic, judicial, cultural, and linguistic pluralism." This definition in itself evidences the complexity of the project of re-founding of the nation-state, even more when it claims that, as stated in the Preface, *dejamos en el pasado el estado colonial, republicano y neoliberal* (we left behind the colonial, republican, and neoliberal State). Part of the novelty of the document, and perhaps the main source of tension, is that the Constitution seeks to harmonize liberal and communitarian forms of government at all levels. The liberal side is clearly conceived in terms of equality and redistribution, as exemplified by the country's vice-president, who stated the aim of the MAS movement as "the two conquests of equality"—political rights for the indigenous people and economic equality through redistribution of national wealth (García Linera 2007). Statements on the communal logic are also present, since the state is also seen as building "*a communitarian state at the service of excluded majorities,*"<sup>22</sup> and the Constitution places communal political forms on the same level as representative democracy, and sees education as democratic but also as participatory, decolonizing, and communal (article 78, cited in Rojas 2009: 12).

Akin to the Ecuadorian case, the Bolivian Constitution states the goal of society as the *suma qamaña* (*vivir bien*, or "living well"). To this end, it envisions an alternative model of development and a mixed economy that allows for public, collective, individual, communal, associative, and cooperative forms, including those of the peasant and indigenous communities. Needless to say, the tensions entailed by this conception abound, for instance between indigenous autonomies within the context of a plurinational

State and the forms of departmental autonomy defended by private business groups; between direct and participative democracy and representative democracy; radical redistribution of rural and urban land in accordance with the right of its original indigenous owners (to be administered along collective-communitarian rules, limiting the size of individual holdings) versus proposals of mixed property regimes that allow for both communal and private property but without limits to the latter; administration of natural resources by the State in accordance with integral development versus a mixed economy model where resources are allocated by the market, that is, through private initiative. Underlying the opposition to Morales and the demand for autonomy by the departments of the *Media Luna* is the ownership and distribution of natural resources, particularly land and hydrocarbons. In Bolivia, 0.2% of the population control 48% of the land; the ‘autonomy’ demanded by regional elite groups –what Chávez (2008b: 8) has aptly called *el bloque señorial*, or seigniorial bloc, and also often referred to as the *oligarquía cambia*-- thus amounts to a rejection of the land reform. Hydrocarbon revenues are very unevenly distributed, with the Media Luna provinces reaping the bulk of the benefits. This fierce elite resistance has led some aymara intellectuals to say that “*Bolivia sufre de elites enfermas*” (Bolivia suffers from sick elites), not only because of their rapacity in the control of resources but because of their imposition of a civilizational model which is inimical to that of the indigenous peoples (Mamani 2007).<sup>23</sup>

The struggle between liberal and indigenous worldviews is seen as long-standing and as being at the basis of indigenous struggles since at least the rebellion of Tupaj Amaru and Tupaj Katari in 1780-1781. In fact, as Rivera Cusicanqui (1990) states in her pioneering discussion of liberal and communal forms in Bolivia, liberal and communal ways of life have gone hand in hand for much of Bolivia’s history, interwoven “in a chain of relations of colonial domination” (20). At times, indigenous groups have been able to combine creatively liberal forms of representative democracy (e.g., through the unions) with the ayllu direct forms of democracy.<sup>24</sup> Yet even in the aftermath of the 1952 Revolution, the ‘liberal spirit’ found its way into the conception of the agrarian reform, further undermining the distinct social and territorial organization of the ayllu and pushing the indigenous groups further along the road of learning the dominant logic, thus contributing to their self-negation (24). Generally speaking, most political forms (e.g., unions) have operated against the logic of the ayllu, “thus blocking their autonomous expression” (32); the same can be said of the nation-state building process as a whole, based on the negation of the Andean alterity. As Rojas states, “[t]his is the liberal paradox: the mechanisms of integration –market, school, and the trade union-- are new sources of exclusions” (2009: 7). In short, the recognition of difference and of Bolivia’s pluricultural character has been historically denied; this calls for a “radical decolonization of the social and political structures on which our social coexistence has been built” (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 51).

Rivera Cusicanqui identifies three great historical cycles or horizons that overlap and articulate in specific ways in particular regions and historical moments. The first, *colonial* cycle, lasts from 1532 to the present; the second, *liberal* cycle, starts with the liberal reforms of the late nineteenth century (the abolition of the ayllu and the emergence of citizenship); the third, or *populist* cycle, stars with the 1952 National Revolution and

extends to the present. Would it be possible to say that the election of Evo Morales initiates a fourth, *post-liberal* cycle, building on Rivera Cusicanqui's framework? Again, this would not mean that the previous horizons have disappeared, only displaced somewhat and perhaps rearticulated in significant ways. It was indeed the case that by 2000, the tension between liberal and communal logics had reached a heightened intensity. Could this be read as the exhaustion of this very conflict in its known historical forms, and perhaps even of the liberal model? The rest of this section is devoted to exploring precisely the hypothesis of the exhaustion of the terms of the conflict and the crafting of new languages to understand it.

Historically, a "national-popular" tradition of resistance, as it has been called,<sup>25</sup> culminated in the well-known 1952 revolution, when working class, peasant, and middle class sectors overthrew the oligarchic order in power since national independence in 1825. The strength of this tradition of popular organizing from the bottom up has been such that it has been said that "in no other Latin American country have popular forces achieved so much through their own initiative" (Hylton and Sinclair 2007: 8). In the 1970s, staying with this argument, popular and peasant class consciousness overtly started to converge with ethnic consciousness around the resurgence of *katarismo* and the work of influential indigenous intellectuals such as Fausto Reinaga. The partial transformation from a national-popular to an indigenous-popular orientation -- "the cautious coming together of the mine and the countryside" (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 28)-- was already at play in the mobilizations against the drastic neo-liberal reforms of 1984-85 by Siles Suazo (infamously advised by Jeffrey Sachs of the Harvard Institute for International Development), the cocalero movement of the 1990s and, very centrally so, in the popular uprisings of 2000-2005, in which the aymara discourse in particular became prominent. Today, there seems to be a co-existence and partial overlap between traditional Left, ethnic/indigenous, and popular orientations, some of which will be discussed below. What is emerging from this wave of plural mobilizations is unclear. At the very least, some argue that the MAS government is bringing about a new State order --autonomous and plurinational--and possibly a more open, just, and participatory society --in short, a new concept and practice of democracy and the nation (UNDP 2007).<sup>26</sup>

Vice-president and sociologist Alvaro García Linera has best articulated what could be called the dominant Left perspective. For him, the goal of the MAS government is to achieve a high degree of control over the production of wealth and the distribution of the surplus (with a goal set on controlling 30% of the GDP, up from 7% in previous governments). This control of the economy would be the basis for a pluralist process of articulation of "three modernizations": the modernization of the industrial sector; urban artisan micro-entrepreneurial modernization; and the modernization of the rural communal sector. This in turn would require the formulation of rational State policies capable of articulating the three modernizations. García Linera recognizes that there is indeed a logic that is proper to the indigenous worlds, and that this logic is neither separate nor antagonistic in relation to the Western one. This is a novel view for the Left; however, his overall framework of social transformation is not free of the eurocentrism and teleology of the Marxist framework which inspires it. Similar to Rafael Correa, who accused ecologists and indigenous activists of "infantile environmentalism" for their

opposition to the government neo-developmental approach, so does García Linera considers that positions stated on the basis of indigenous difference romanticize and essentialize indigeneity; “deep down,” he says, “they all want to be modern” (2007b: 152). Hence the emphasis on equality as opposed to difference, which is best expressed in his conceptualization of an “Andean-Amazonian capitalism” which articulates capitalist and non-capitalist forms and which, through virtuous State action, can generate the surplus needed to support a transition to a post-capitalist order (p. 158, 159). The MAS’s post-neoliberalism thus becomes “a form of capitalism which we believe contains a set of forces and social structures which, in time, could become postcapitalist” (p. 154); this might be arrived at in a “new period of universal ascension of society,” following the dialectic between movements and the State

This state-centric, dialectical and teleological view of social transformation doubtlessly has a series of novel elements yet remains within the confines of established Eurocentric and modernizing Left perspectives.<sup>27</sup> It re-actualizes developmentalist imaginaries (Stefanoni 2007). The rest of this section will be devoted to presenting and examining an altogether different interpretation that attempts to break away from the framework of modernization and the State which is shared by liberal and Left positions. These interpretations are converging in suggesting the possibility of non-capitalist, non-state and non-liberal forms of politics and social organizations; they are at the heart of the argument developed in this paper about postliberalism, postcapitalism, and alternatives to modernity. The approach is based on a different social theory and locus of enunciation, from which there emerges a different view of the struggles, in terms of movement dynamics, forms of organization, and aims. In what follows I explain such a characterization and the theoretical perspectives from which it emerges.

*On popular protest and the communitarian form of politics.*

It could be said that there are three projects in Bolivia at present: the MAS project, oriented towards an alternative modernization, led by Morales’ government; the rightist or seigniorial project, based on capital, the control of land, and regional autonomy, particularly in the provinces of the Media Luna; and the cultural-political project of (some) social movements. This section analyzes the role of social movements in Bolivia, building on a series of works that inquire into their capacity to go beyond capital, the State, and the liberal form of society.<sup>28</sup>

From 2000- 2005, Bolivia witnessed a wave of unprecedented popular uprisings characterized by a strong presence of indigenous groups. The “water wars” in Cochabamba and the “gas wars” for the nationalization of hydrocarbons of 2003 (“the rebel year,” as it has been called) were only the most well known moments in this insurrectionary wave. Some observers have seen the uprisings as a strong indication of a resurgence of indigenous worlds and the rejection of the liberal system based on representative democracy and private property. This has been particularly the case after 2003 in the large urban area of Los Altos (pop. of about 800,000, mostly indigenous who arrived in the city less than a generation ago, displaced from mining and agricultural

livelihoods by neo-liberal reforms), where a novel type of politics, with significant influence of indigenous communal practices, is thought to have emerged.

For aymara sociologist Félix Patzi Paco, these movements “bet on the transformation from the perspective of their own philosophy and their own economic and political practices ... To this extent, the indigenous autonomies respond to a new political paradigm” (Patzi Paco 2004: 187, 188). For him, it is a struggle about the kind of society that Bolivians want to construct. Similarly, Pablo Mamani speaks of an ‘indigenous-popular world’ in movement, defined as

a great political, cultural, ideological, and territorial articulation between the indigenous and the popular. The indigenous as the great civilizational matrix with its population, linguistic, cultural and territorial dimensions; the popular, made up of indigenous people in the urban sectors who no longer feel indigenous, plus workers, intellectuals, and other sectors that do not belong to the elite. Here, *the indigenous appears as the orienting matrix of the project*, whereas the popular constitutes the ideological matrix of the new political articulation. (2008: 23; emphasis added)<sup>29</sup>

The claims made by these interpretations are bold; what is at stake is the organization of society in terms different from the Western/liberal one. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar stated the argument in its most succinct form; in Bolivia, she wrote,

the communal-popular and national-popular forms fractured after 2000 the liberal paradigm in an indubitable and abrupt way ... What was demonstrated was ... the possibility of transforming (*alterar*) social reality in a profound way in order to preserve, transforming them, collective and long-standing life-worlds and to produce novel and fruitful forms of government, association and self-regulation. In some fashion, the central ideas of this path can be synthesized in the triad: dignity, autonomy, cooperation” (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 351).

The uprising, in other words, set into motion a steady process of social re/construction from the local and the communal to the regional and the national. Rather than reconstructing the social order from the heights of the State (as in the MAS project), the indigenous-popular project goes beyond the State; in fact, from this perspective states “are not appropriate instruments to create emancipatory social relations” (Zibechi 2006: 25). This is a fundamental feature of these interpretations, that they go beyond State-centered frameworks and focus instead on the people mobilized as a multiplicity, and on the actions of a communal social machine which disperses the forms of power of the State machine (Zibechi 2006: 161).

The focus of these works is on *the practices* underlying the uprising and insubordination that took place in 2000-05, including: a) the autonomous urban struggles of El Alto; b) communal indigenous rural uprising; 3) the struggles of the *cocaleros* and other peasant and indigenous groups in the eastern parts of the country.<sup>30</sup> The aim is to show the way in which non-capitalist and non-statist forms of self-regulation became

structuring principles of social re/composition. A key theoretical intervention is that of establishing a distinction between “communal forms” and “State forms.” This distinction allows these intellectuals to make visible forms of “self-regulation of social co-existence beyond the modern State and capital” (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 18), and to unveil the existence of a type of society “characterized by non-capitalist and non-liberal social relations, labor forms, and forms of organization” (Zibechi 2006: 52). The main features of non-statist and non-liberal regulation include deliberative assemblies for decision making, horizontality in organizations, and rotation of assignments.

*The characterization of the struggles:*

The struggles are characterized in terms of self-organization aimed at the construction of non-state forms of power, defined as “forms of power that are not separate nor divided from society, i.e., that do not create a separate group in order to make decisions, to struggle, or to deal with internal conflict” (Zibechi 2006: 40). These appear as *micro-gobiernos barriales* (neighborhood micro-governments) or *anti-poderes dispersos*, that is, diffuse, quasi-microbial, intermittent forms of power. Mamani (2006b) summarizes this state of affairs by suggesting that in El Alto an alternative territoriality to that of the State was set into place which replaced instituted forms of power. Underlying this territoriality are social relations based on a system organized communally at the economic and political level (Pazi Paco 2004). Further features of the struggles include:

1) A type of struggle which does not aim to seize power but to reorganize society on the basis of local and regional autonomies from below and non-state, non-bureaucratic forms of power. In other words, the struggles followed a dynamics of self-organization aimed at the construction of non-state forms of power. In the Aymara society, “these functions (*capacidad*) appear distributed and dispersed throughout the entire social body and are subjected in the last instance to the assemblies, be it in the country side or in the cities” (Zibechi 2006: 29; Mamani 2005; Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 33-38 for ayllu organization). In other words, there exist in aymara society mechanisms that limit the formation of a separate decision making and representative body, such as collective deliberation in decision making, the rotation of representatives, and the steady pressure from below on social movement institutions. Organizations are made up of *órganos indivisos* (undivided organs), in contradistinction with the modern division and specialization as the basis for rational action. (This can be related to the tendency in some recent Latin American struggles to dispense with a vanguard or leadership apparatus, thus eschewing to some extent at least the classical split between leaders and the rest.)

2) A type of struggle that is characterized by the setting into movement of non-capitalist and non-liberal social relations and forms of organization. This also happened in urban areas, where the communal forms were reconstituted on the basis of similar principles of territoriality and organization (in terms of family units, economic practices, gender relations, networks, forms of organization, etc.). In El Alto, *lo uno cedió paso a lo múltiple. Por lo tanto, no hay representación posible, ni control de la población* (In El

Alto, the one gave way to the multiple; thus there is no representation nor control of the population; Zibechi 2006: 59; Mamani 2005, 2006b).

3) The struggles sought to counteract the inclination, by the State and the Left, to neutralize the tendency for dispersion and differentiation of the social groups (i.e., to cancel out differences), for instance, through development and modernization projects (see also Medeiros 2005). In this way, self-managed forms of economy, even when articulated with the market, are not organized according to liberal principles -- implying organizations that are separate from daily life and based on hierarchies, rational planning, and instrumentality-- but following communal principles. The resulting array of economic forms could be characterized as a “diverse economy,” one in which the multiple relations between types of transaction, forms of labor, and type of organization or enterprise result in the coexistence of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist forms and the suspension of capitalism and the market as an all-determining logic (Gibson-Graham 2006).

4) A type of struggle that in the last instance is supported by, and emerges from, a differentiated set of cultural norms and practices and that as such can be seen as a communal struggle of the ethnic group intended to perpetuate itself. What obtained from the insurrection and revolt based on the communal logic was *una sociedad otra* (an other society); the objective was not to control the State, but to establish other forms of power, that is, *organizarse como los poderes de una sociedad otra* (to become organized on the basis of the powers of an other society; Zibechi 2006: 75), or, a Mamani put it, “to engage with the State in principle, but only to dismantle the rationality of the State in order to imagine another type of social rationality, one capable of disrupting the colonial rationality based on departmental territorial divisions” (2008: 25). These are indeed clear statements about a post-statist logic and a non-liberal spatiality (below).

These are important theoretico-political interventions. The conventional view of social movements “considers that the movements of the oppressed, by themselves, do not have the capacity to create a new world, since this can only be created from the state and occidental rationality” (Zibechi 2006: 127). The perspective just sketched, on the contrary, takes as a point of departure the social relations created from below with the goal of survival and then follow the movement, flows, and displacements of this type of society. Theoretically speaking, this entails prioritizing “displacement over structure, mobility over fixity, society in flow rather than the state’s codification of such flows” (129). There is always a tension between movement-displacement and movement-institution; what happens below is a veritable society in movement. The implication is that what is seen at play in the wave of insurrections are veritable *sociedades en movimiento* rather than *movimientos sociales* (see, e.g., Zibechi 2006: 127-129; Gutiérrez A. 2008). This is an important distinction that is at the crux of the argument about postliberalism.<sup>31</sup>

At the basis of this perspective is also a different view of power; according to this view, the challenge posed by the popular dynamics is none other than the emancipation from the instituted power relations of modernity: *cambiar el mundo sin tomar el poder*,



or to change the world without seizing power (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 41, echoing John Holloway's and the Zapatista formulation). Emancipation becomes a praxis of both overturning and flight (*trastocamiento y fuga*): material *overturning* of the existing order and *flight* from the semantic and symbolic contents that confer material existence and meaning upon that which is instituted (*éxodo semántico*, or exodus from dominant discourses). This also implies a positive valuation of the disarticulating character of the struggles (the movements' capacity to disorganize, to *desordenar*, *desconfigurar*), that is, their role in subverting the instituted forms of power and the naturalized functioning of things (see Gutiérrez A. 2006).

Emerging from this interpretation is a fundamental question, that of “*being able to stabilize in time* a mode of regulation outside of, *against and beyond* the social order imposed by capitalist production and the liberal state” (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 46). The concept of “communal system” and communitarian logic makes it possible to visualize further the complexity of this question.

### *The “communal system”*

The alternative reading of popular struggles proposed by the above interpretation suggests that the struggles can only emerge from the historically sedimented materiality and cultural forms of the groups involved in them; this cultural and material background is conceptualized in the works cited in terms of non-state and non-liberal forms of politics and social life. A related conceptualization does it by theorizing a “communal system,” which is presented as radically distinct from the liberal order. It is instructive to quote at length the words of one of his proponents, the Aymara sociologist (and first minister of education of the Morales government), Félix Patzi Paco (2004: 171-172):

By the communal or communitarian concept we mean the collective property of resources combined with their private management and utilization. ... Our point of departure for the analysis of communal systems is doubtlessly the indigenous societies. In contradistinction to modern societies, indigenous societies have not reproduced the patterns of differentiation nor the separation among domains (political, economic, cultural, etc.); they thus function as a single system that relates to both internal and external environments (*entorno*). ... The communal system thus presents itself as opposed to the liberal system. The communal system can appropriate the liberal environment without this implying the transformation of the system [and vice versa]. .... My proposal is to replace the liberal system with the communal system, that is, with communal economic and political practices.

In the communal economy, as practiced among many urban and rural indigenous groups, natural resources, land, and the means of labor are collectively owned, although privately distributed and utilized. The real owner is the community, although the individual and the family are the owners of their labor. The entire system is controlled by the collectivity. In urban areas, this might take the form of communal enterprises, including in the culture sector. This entails both rights and obligations for all within the

community, in clear contrast with the liberal economy based on private property and alienated labor. As important as the economic dimension is the political dimension of the communal system; at this level, power is not centered on the individual or groups of persons, but in the collectivity. In the communal form of politics, “social sovereignty is not delegated; it is exercised directly” through various forms of authority, service, assembly, etc.; in short, the representative *manda porque obedece*, or rules through obedience (Patzi Paco 2004: 176).

To sum up, the proposal of the communal system implies three basic points: 1) The steady decentering and displacement of the capitalist economy with the concomitant expansion of communal enterprises and other non-capitalist forms of economy; that is, the emergence of what we have called *a diverse economy*; 2) the decentering and displacement of representative democracy and the setting into place of communal forms of democracy; and 3) the establishment of mechanisms of cultural pluralism as the basis for a genuine communication and interculturality among the various cultural systems (p. 190). This last point is important, given the tendency to disqualify positions based on a strong view of historical cultural difference on the grounds of “separatism” or even “reverse racism.” Patzi is clear in stating that the communal system is not predicated on excluding any group. It utilizes the knowledge and technological advances of liberal society but subordinates them to the communal logic; in the process, the communal system itself becomes more competitive and fair. The proposal can be read not as a call for a new hegemony, but of an end to the hegemony of any system, as a call to take leave of the universe/sal of modernity and move into the pluriverse of interculturality, and as a way to build more symmetrical relations among cultures –modern, differently modern, and non-modern. But to achieve this goal requires a significant transformation, perhaps a re-founding, of the societies of the continent –in other words, the end of modern/colonial societies and the emergence of societies based on other principles of sociability. The bottom line is to avoid the colonialist imposition, where one culture or group inferiorizes another through knowledge and power relations, from whatever group it might come.<sup>32</sup>

The second common, and often sensible, critique of proposals based on positing an order of alterization, such as Patzi’s, is to argue that such proposals are romantic, localistic, or essentializing. Patzi is careful in asserting neither purity nor timeless cultures. He historicizes the liberal system: “We consider that capitalism and the liberal form of society have fulfilled their cycle; they have been able to spread to the entire globe over the past four centuries.” At the same time, he places the communal and liberal system as part of the same social space, not as existing separate from each other; for him, the communal model “does not exclude any group; the one thing that is not allowed in the communal system is for anybody to grow and potentiate himself or herself at the expense of others, which is precisely the golden rule of the liberal system” (p. 190-91). As the Colectivo Situaciones put it in its Epilogue to Zibechi’s book quoted here, this view of the communal always implies *comunidad en movimiento*; more than a pre-constituted entity or an “unproblematic fullness,” the community “is the name given to a particular organizational and political code, a singular social technology”; in resisting being rendered into an anachronism by the modern, the notion of community evokes “actualized collective energies”; as such, and “against all common sense, the community

produces dispersion,” and this dispersion could become central to the invention of non-statist, amplified modes of cooperation (Colectivo Situaciones 2006: 212, 215). Hence, this community dynamic becomes key to reading the new political constitution of Bolivia. We will have more to say about other risks involved in the language of community from a decolonial feminist perspective in the next section. Suffice it to say for now that this approach emphasizes the need to always look at the concrete struggles within particular communities, including the conflicts around who speaks for ‘community’ and its ‘cosmovision,’ and to take women’s struggles as a standpoint for the actual reconstitutions of community that are always taking place.

A third common critique of positions articulated on the basis of difference is that they deny the modernity of those seen as different. It is indeed important to avoid implying that the indigenous is ‘not modern’; yet it is also crucial to understand in what ways it is more than that. The denial of the modernity of indigenous groups almost invariably takes place within a Eurocentric framework in which the indigenous is seen as backward, anti-technology, opposed to ‘progress,’ and so forth. The assertion of non-modernity in the post-liberal framework, on the contrary, assumes a pluriversal perspective, in which these premises are seen as modern/colonial, so it does not imply a rejection of the ability of subaltern groups to “be modern” or to function in modern milieus. Even foundational modern notions such as growth and technology have a place within a pluriversal perspective of indigenous modernity and non-modernity. As it can be gleaned from the works of Patzi and Mamani, for instance, indigenous groups are not opposed to ‘growth’ or technology per se, in fact they are necessary in some areas of social life, but this growth needs to be seen from the perspective of another rationality, different from the economic one.

There are, however, differences around the term “communal” among indigenous intellectuals and social movements. Since the early 1980s, the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA) has been embarked on a very important project centered on the reconstitution of the ayllu. One of the main interventions of this group has been to argue for the need for an epistemic rupture with conventional knowledge and representations through the use of oral history as a way to ground transformation efforts *desde lo propio*, that is, from indigenous thought and history. From this perspective, *lo communal* is seen as a reductive concept that needs to be subjected to epistemic critique (see also footnote 22). The THOA emphasizes the reconstitution of the ayllu, a process that reaches out to the whole of the social, cultural and territorial experience of the indigenous worlds, with the potential for a veritable *Pachakuti*, a profound transformation in which everything changes, recentering life on the *vivir bien*. This vision upholds the importance of the *territorios ancestrales* of all aymaras and quechuas (ayllus, markas and suyus) and the harmony among all beings. Politically, the emphasis is on the re/construction of original authorities and forms of government; the continued search for autonomy of the fourteen aymara and quechua nations on the basis of original conceptions and social practices (the complementarities, including gender complementarity); and the development of a conception and practice of autonomy through the use of the *categorías propias*, or one’s own thought.<sup>33</sup>

Whether the emphasis is put on the communal logic or on the reconstitution of the ayllu, it is noteworthy that indigenous intellectuals and movements emphasize the pluriversal character of their world vision. As Pablo Mamani puts it, “Indigenous cultures are complex and dynamic ... they have their own plasticity that enables them to appropriate and render original what is alien, to make it their own” (2007: 7). As he says elsewhere, “it is not a question of building a totalizing indigenous-popular hegemony, but a bifurcated hegemony, a much more complex one that articulates a cultural and historical project capable of convincing the other and to govern on the basis of this agreement” (2008: 26). The right’s attack on “Indians,” on the contrary, is not simply racist, it reflects ontological intolerance; it is a war against non-modern ways of being, against people who, nevertheless, also practice modern ways.

Generally speaking, the indigenous and Afro-descendent mobilizations of the past decade are instances of a “becoming-other” (e.g., Aymara, Afro), and as such threaten the cultural complacency of the elites. The counter-insurgency is thus also a defense of the binarism, of the divides, the imposition of the binaries of modernity. The open-ended politics of becoming indigenous necessarily calls on the non-indigenous to open up to other possibilities of being; this creates the potential for overcoming the dualism of modern/non-modern. It is, of course, white and mestizos who have opposed any pluralist social formation for centuries. It might be the case that “Indians” have been more open to the pluriverse historically, as intuited by Rivera Cusicanqui:

From their very first acts of rebellion [e.g., 1771-81 in Bolivia], indigenous groups have always proposed an inclusive model of society. Today, they similarly seek to reverse the colonial situation for the benefit of all groups, albeit *recognizing the fact of an indigenous majority*. This opens up the possibility for a “deep decolonization” –an “indianization” of the entire society, one that incorporates the communally-based indigenous modernities, with their different sociability that is alternative to the western one (2008: 4; emphasis added)

Or, as Marisol de la Cadena put it generally, in Latin America today, indigeneity (from the Zapatista to the Mapuche) “is a historical formation characterized by its eloquent embrace of modern and non-modern institutions” (de la Cadena 2008: 9).

We go back to Gutiérrez Aguilar’s conclusion in order to close this section: a fundamental question arises from the previous analysis, that of “*being able to stabilize in time* a mode of regulation outside of, *against and beyond* the social order imposed by capitalist production and the liberal State” (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 46). It should be clear by now that emancipation within the liberal framework or current Left conceptions will not do. What is needed is a decided move towards the decolonial or, as Rojas put it, to think in terms of emancipation-decolonization; if emancipation-decolonization was at stake, and practiced, at various points in history, is it also the case today? Rivera Cusicanqui’s notion of the indianization of society (a crucial reversal of the hegemonic occidentalization) seems to point in this direction. For Rojas, the emerging decolonial narratives –such as the *suma qamaña* or *vivir bien*—“illustrate that at the root of this transition is a experience of emancipation that works on three fronts: decolonization –to

transform dominant ideologies of indianism; anti-capitalism –to transform Marxism; and a transcultural citizenship that goes beyond the frontiers of liberalism and that includes the strengthening of the communal” (2009: 9) In other words: stepping out, and beyond, of liberalism, Marxism/the Left, and eurocentrism. This means moving beyond the Right-Left political spectrum towards a more complex space that includes the decolonial as cultural-political option. To do so, however, would require a veritable “epistemic declassing” by the Left –that is, the Left would have to give up its assumed role as purveyor of the truth about the transformation and its attempt at controlling the actions of the subaltern groups.

As the Bolivian case shows, this “epistemic declassing” is not easily accomplished from State positions. The Constituent Assembly was indeed a theatre of this struggle. Even though the Assembly was seen by indigenous-popular movements as an important space to reconstitute the colonial-republican order, the Constitution ended up “harboring the liberal in a big way,” even if of course it also included important elements of the indigenous-popular worlds (Mamani 2008: 27). We thus end up back with the same tension discussed for the Venezuelan case, that between autonomous popular organizations and the State. For Morales and the MAS government, the challenge is that of “maintaining an open dialogue with the *bases*, a dialogue capable of reactivating the potency and creativity of the extraordinary, multiform, and polyphonic social capacity –proper to the Bolivian indigenous and popular masses—to disorganize the constituted order on the basis of their own organizational forms, reinventing and proposing new rules of the game” (Linsalata 2008: 17). From the cultural-political perspective and the autonomous politics principles shared by most of the authors presented here, there are serious doubts as to the capacity of the State and the Left to open up to the languages and demands of autonomous movements in just this way.<sup>34</sup>

## **VI. The communal form and relational ontologies**

Underlying the discussion of post-liberalism has been the idea that there are political and social worlds that differ from the liberal world. The existence of these worlds has been particularly salient in the analysis of the Bolivian case, but they are present in all countries of the region (actually, in all parts of the world). At issue is the co-existence and co-construction of multiple worlds, a question that is being broached in novel ways in the most recent years. A thorough discussion of this notion is beyond the scope of this paper; however, I would like to make some observations concerning these trends in ending. To start with the communal system, what underlies this system, or logic, is an entirely different view of life and the world. As we saw, besides a strong tradition of communal organizing, peasants and indigenous groups have a collective life-world that values simultaneously autonomy and obligation. The re/creation of communities and the re/organization of territories, as in El Alto over the past two decades along the basis of a communal logic, is a reflection of the dynamic of self-organization, of the activation of the potential of communally-oriented groups.

Stated in anthropological and philosophical terms, many communal and place-based worlds can be seen as instances of relational worldviews or ontologies. Relational ontologies are those which eschew the divisions between nature and culture, individual and community, us and them that are central to the modern ontology (that of liberal modernity). This is to say that some of the struggles in Bolivia (and, more generally, in other parts of the continent, including struggles for autonomy in Chiapas and Oaxaca, indigenous and afro struggles and some peasant struggles in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and other countries) can be read as *ontological struggles*. Well beyond a ‘turn to the Left,’ these struggles suggest a much more significant rupture towards the emergence of worlds, knowledges and practices that differentiate themselves from those of the dominant forms of liberal modernity. These ‘worlds and knowledges otherwise’ have the potential to de-naturalize the hegemonic distinction between nature and culture on which the liberal order is founded and which in turn provides the basis for the distinctions between civilized and Indians, colonizer and colonized, developed and underdeveloped.<sup>35</sup>

The emergence of indigenous-popular and afro worlds as ‘societies in movement’ disorganizes in a fundamental way the epistemic foundation of modern politics based on the said distinctions. These dualist ontologies, we propose<sup>36</sup>, are being challenged by the emergent relational ontologies in which there only exist subjects in relation, including the relations between humans and non-humans. This opens up the question of the co-existence and co-construction of multiple ontologies in the context of modern ontologies which continue to be dominant. To give an example, that nature or the *Pachamama* is endowed with ‘rights’ in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions goes well beyond being a reflection of environmental wisdom; the *Pachamama* is a strange entity that cannot be easily fitted into the philosophical structure of a modern constitution; moreover, the notion is unthinkable within any modern perspective, within which nature is seen as an inert object separate from humans and for humans to appropriate. Its inclusion in the Constitution may thus be seen as an epistemic-political event that disrupts the modern political space and politics as usual because it occurs outside such space, as a challenge to liberalism, capitalism, and the State. Something similar can be said of the notion of *suma qawsay* or ‘buen vivir’ (and the similar one in the Bolivian constitution) already mentioned. Both notions are based on ontological assumptions in which all beings exist always in relation and never as ‘objects’ or individuals. Relationality also underlies the Zapatista dictum of *mandar obedeciendo* and the strategies of representation based on the non-separation of community and the representing entity, already discussed for Bolivia.

The defense of relational worldviews can be seen at play in a number of contemporary struggles, increasingly common in the Andes and the Amazon, that mobilize non-humans (e.g., mountains, water, soil, even oil) as sentient entities, that is, as actors in the political arena (for instance, in anti-mining protests, protests against dams and against oil drilling, genetic modification, intellectual property rights, deforestation, etc.). These struggles against the destruction of life conjure up the entire range of the living. It is not easy to take seriously the indigenous claims, since they can only be heard as ‘beliefs’ by modern ears; yet the stakes in taking them at face value are high, as argued

by Marisol de la Cadena in discussing the eruption of “Andean ritual” in political demonstrations by indigenous groups against mining in Perú. “Emergent indigenities,” she says, “may inaugurate a different politics, plural not because they are enacted by bodies marked by gender, race, ethnicity or sexuality demanding rights, but because they deploy non-modern practices to represent non-human entities.... Emergent indigenities mark an epoch in that they terminate a four-centuries long split, and meet scientists [and moderns in general] with their discussion of a different politics of nature” (2008: 6).

The implications of this potentially epochal transformation are momentous. It means, first and foremost, that the very notion of the re-founding of society and the State that is at the core of the Constitutions escapes the logic of capital, politics, and the State and the modern frameworks that have made them possible. The re-founding would entail a more substantial transformation of modern institutions in order to create multiple spaces for those alternative worlds and knowledges that have remained invisible, or, to paraphrase Santos (2007a), that have been actively produced as non-existent or as non-credible alternatives to what exist by dominant discourses –such as those that have maintained a certain attachment to place, territory, and culture.

Relational views seem to be springing world-wide and in a broad variety of theoretical terrains –from geography, anthropology and cultural studies to biology, computer science and ecology. Some of the main categories affiliated with this diverse trend include assemblages, networks and actor-networks, relationality, non-dualist and relational ontologies, emergence and self-organization, horizontality, hybridity, virtuality, and the like.<sup>37</sup> Taken as a whole, these trends reveal a daring attempt at looking at social theory in an altogether different way –what has been termed “flat alternatives.” In these works, there is a renewed attention to materiality, whether through a focus on practice or relations, networks, embodiments, performances, or attachments between various elements of the social, biophysical, and –in some cases--supernatural domains. The emphasis is on ascertaining the production of the real through manifold relations linking human and non-human agents, bridging previously taken-for-granted divides (nature/culture, subject/object, self/other) into architectures of the real in terms of networks, assemblages, and hybrid socio-natural formations. Space is no longer taken as an ontologically given but as a result of relational processes. These approaches appear as viable proposals to work through two of the most damaging features of modern theory: pervasive binarisms, and the reduction of complexity. The notions of autonomous, dispersed, self-organized, and non-state forms of politics already mentioned in this paper suggest that some of today’s movements seem intuitively or explicitly to be aiming at a practice informed by relational conceptions (e.g., Zibechi 2006, Gutiérrez A. 2006; Ceceña 2008). It remains to be seen, of course, how they will fare in terms of the effectiveness of their action.

The implications of relationality for the argument presented here are enormous in at least four ways: ecological, political, cultural, and spatial. First, the break with the nature/culture divide –de facto embedded in the relational practices carried out by many social groups as part of their daily life, and strategically by some social movements— must be seen as a central element of many of the current political and ecological

mobilizations. Is the State prepared to do so? Unlikely, as judged by the weight of the liberal and developmentalist conceptions still pervading the progressive states, as we have seen, despite important openings. The situation is even more dire, of course, if one considers regimes like those of Mexico, Perú, and Colombia which, in their imposition of a brutal form of neoliberal modernity, repress with particular virulence the mobilization of relational ontologies by indigenous and afro-descended groups.

In Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, post-capitalism is being thought about largely from the State enunciative position (including by much of the Left); what would happen if we imagined it from the vantage point of relational worlds? Postcapitalism and postliberalism, of course, would require first and foremost a critique of the cultural regime of the individual, its alleged autonomy and separation from community. Again, here the State seems unable to tackle any re-composition of the cultural production of persons and communities, since it is mired in the production of ‘modern citizens’ –that is, individuals that produce, consume, and make decisions out of their own free will. One of the greatest achievements of neoliberalism was precisely the entrenchment of individualism and consumption as cultural norms. It could be said that the liberal order could reconstruct a relational order; in the formulation by some of the most celebrated philosophers of the West, this reconstruction takes the form of ever more rational, communicative practices. This project makes sense up to a certain point; yet again we believe that any relationality that does not question the binarisms of modernity and their colonial underside will be insufficient to imagine a different society and to face the planetary environmental challenges. Finally, to reduce contemporary political mobilizations in the Americas to an improved or ‘more rational’ form of the liberal order would be a disservice to the relational politics enacted by many movements.

The emergence of relationality also makes apparent the arbitrariness of the particular spatial orders deployed by liberalism. The neoliberal reforms to promote decentralization and territorial reorganization of the 1980s and 1990s were aimed to further rationalize the long-standing modern forms of territoriality in terms of pre-constituted political divisions (nation states, departments, provinces, municipalities, etc.), but without a substantial mutation. The wave of collective territories and collective rights for ethnic groups enabled in part by the reforms of that period, however, already signaled the possibility to move in a different direction. Non-liberal territorialities have of course always been in existence (see, e.g., Rivera Cusicanqui 1990 for an explanation of the cultural-spatial organization of the ayllus, sharply contrasting with modern ones), and they are coming to the fore at present with greater acuity. This path towards non-liberal territorialities is being deepened by various proposals introduced by the progressive governments, and even more by the amplified demands for territorial control and autonomy of social movements. Hugo Chávez’ ‘new geometry of power’ potentially aims in this direction, as already mentioned. This notion (first proposed by British geographer Doreen Massey) is meant to convey a sense of the complexity of the relations between space, place, and scale. It involves a particular kind of relational thinking according to which first, there is always the need to think of places (and “communities”) within networks of relations and forms of power that stretch beyond the local; second, that places are always the sites of negotiation and continuous transformation; and third,



that any relational notion of space and place ineluctably calls for a politics of responsibility towards those connections that shape our lives and places. This last aspect is what Massey calls “geographies of responsibilities”—that is, a politics and ethics of connectedness that follows from any relational conception (Massey 2004).

A politics of responsibility is a sequitur of the fact that space, place, and identities are relationally constructed. We are all implicated in connections, and our awareness of this fact must be such as to enable us to act responsibly towards those entities with which we are connected—human and not. Analysis of these “wider geographies of construction” (Massey 2004: 11) is central to this awareness. At stake in the Latin American transformations—very clearly in places like Oaxaca, Chiapas, El Alto, and many others and less so in some State practices—are precisely these geographies of construction. Second, we need to be mindful that “a real recognition of the relationality of space points to a politics of connectivity...whose relation to globalization will vary dramatically from place to place” (Massey 2004: 17); so *there is no ‘geometry of power’ that could fit all cases once and for all*; it will always have to be a variable geometry, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos has stated (2007b); the liberal desire for an alternative blueprint should be avoided. Third, the geographies of responsibility that emerge from relationality links up with issues of culture, subjectivity, difference, and nature. This is to say that the new geometries of power need to deal head on with our cultural and ecological embeddedness. In this way, pluri-nationality and inter-culturality need to be explicitly thought about as spatial processes that reach out from the local to the global, and from the human to the non-human. Liberal society solves the question of responsibility in a fashion that no longer works; stretched out in all directions and by all kinds of processes, from migration to environmental destruction to name a few, liberal spatiality and modernity’s politics of responsibility might indeed be collapsing. It thus needs to be rethought in more significantly relational ways if one is to heed Massey’s call; to quote from her one last time, “The very acknowledgement of our constitutive interrelatedness implies a spatiality; and that in turn implies that the nature of that spatiality should be a crucial avenue of inquiry and political engagement” (2005: 189).

The emphasis on the constructed—historical and spatial—character of every place and community is also a deterrent against essentialized readings of community in terms of tradition and difference. Towards the end of the previous section, we referred to the emergent understanding of community in terms of movement and dispersion; this understanding is consonant with a view of place as both relational *and* grounded in a particular environment, a social group, and a set of practices (as in the case of indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, and many peasant groups). Yet the dangers of essentializing differences are real; these dangers are perhaps felt most acutely by feminists from, or working with, ethnic groups and movements. There are, of course, many positions on the subject, and I will refer here to only one of them, what could be called an emergent Latin American decolonial feminism. This feminism sees itself as having two main tasks: to question and deconstruct the colonialist practices of modernizing Western discourses, including feminism, particularly their reliance on the liberal notions of autonomy, the individual, and a particular notion of rights; and to question the exclusions and oppressions embedded in particular constructions of subaltern identities found within

ethnic movements, particularly when they rely on discourses of authenticity, territory, and community –to question, in other words, “those constructions of ‘being indigenous’ that may be leading to new exclusions” (Hernández 2009: 3).

What is most interesting about this trend is that it is closely attuned to those cultural and political concerns of indigenous women which enact “non-essentialist perspectives that include reformulating traditions .... from perspectives that are more inclusive of men and women,” thus pointing at the need to change those ‘customs’ that exclude and marginalize them (p. 9; see also Speed, Hernández, and Stephen 2006). In other words, this decolonial feminism, while questioning Enlightenment-derived modern/colonial feminist discourses, also unveils patriarchal constructions of womanhood harbored within appeals to tradition and cultural difference. Two spaces have been prominent for this task: the growing Latin American and global transnational networks of indigenous women (to which should be added the Afro Latin-American women’s networks), in which women committed to the struggles of indigenous peoples are finding a space to articulate gender perspectives; and particular social movements, where women embark on challenges to patriarchal constructions of indigeneity on a day-to-day basis (e.g., Rivera Zea 2008). A third aspect of this feminism is its nascent questioning of the very category of “gender” as embedded in dualist conceptions and thus inapplicable –at least in its liberal form-- to relational worlds. For the case of relational ontologies, is it possible to imagine ways of taking about ‘women’ and ‘men’ (female and male) that do not bracket the profound relationality of the worlds in which they are embedded, while making visible the forms of power than inhabit them? Fourth, there is the attempt in some of the decolonial feminisms to subject the very concept of coloniality to epistemic critique as insufficient to accommodate the experience of women (Lugones in press).<sup>38</sup>

To get back to relational ontologies and the politics of responsibility it implies, and to conclude this section. As understood by its indigenous proponents, and partially adopted by the State, interculturality calls into question the entire colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000), opening up a decolonial horizon for the entire society. It does so because it makes visible the institutions and structures that position certain groups and knowledges within colonial, racialized and gendered hierarchical scales, calling for their radical transformation. The concept of *buen vivir* similarly undermines the liberal notions of welfare, happiness, and so forth. This is why the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions should be seen as an important attempt at re-founding the State, besides ending with the neoliberal economic model. The risk is that, in the absence of significant economic and political changes, interculturality might give way to one more round of pluri-multi-culturalism (Walsh 2009b: 231), or what could be called falling back from ‘the pluri’ to ‘the multi.’ Taken together, Walsh argues (p. 232), interculturality, decoloniality, and the *buen vivir* have the potential to lead to novel designs for society, the State, and life for everybody. More than resistance, decoloniality implies an ongoing project of transgression and construction of new structures, experiences, and relations; it bets on the radical reconstruction of power, but also of ways of being and of the relation between humans and nature. To quote from Walsh’s conclusion (2009b: 235, 212)

Here lies the urgency of interculturality as a project of convergence and collective wellbeing that has in sight new decolonial historical horizons. It is a project that entails, and demands, the creation of radically different conditions of existence and of knowledge, power, and life, conditions that could contribute to construct really intercultural societies, where the values of complementarity, relationality, reciprocity, and solidarity get to prevail. .... The new Constitution doubtlessly offers some clues in this respect. Notwithstanding, the crucial question is: do the majority of Ecuadorians [and Latin Americans] possess the interest and will to subscribe to this critical, ethical, political, and epistemic project of interculturality? Are they willing to think and act *with* the historically subordinated and marginalized peoples; to unlearn their uninational, colonial, and monocultural learning; and to relearn to learn so as to be able to complement each other, and co-exist and co-live ethically? Only an affirmative answer to these questions could give real and concrete meaning to the refunding project.

### Conclusion

Deeply enmeshed in the history of Western modernity since the Conquest, the region known as Latin America and the Caribbean could be poised at the edge of epochal changes. Current assessments of these changes range from sheer reformism to a radical rupture or a bifurcation point. It is of course too early to tell whether the transformations examined here will amount to an epoch of changes within the cultural-political space defined by Euro-modernity, or move forward towards a veritable change of epoch—a *Pachakuti*—to lean once more on Rafael Correa’s inaugural speech formulation.

During the period of neoliberal reforms, the transformation of the State led to the spatiality of decentralization (political reform), multiculturalism (cultural reform), and flexibilization of the economy (market reforms, often leading to reprimarization) These reforms sheltered the cultural and spatial constructs of the modern nation-state, with all their forms of violence against cultures and places; it further entrenched the regime of the individual; and it made of nature an even more abstract and remote entity to be mercilessly appropriated for the sake of a globalized extractivist model. The current decade has seen important challenges to these processes in some countries at the level of both the State and social movements and, perhaps most productively, at their nexus (such as in the case of the Constitutional reforms in Ecuador and Bolivia); this has included important efforts to rethink the State in terms of pluri-nationality, societies in terms of inter-culturality, and economies in terms of combinations of capitalist and non-capitalist forms.

Fernando Calderón (2008) has suggested a useful typology of regimes: Conservative modernization (e.g., México, Perú, Colombia); pragmatic reformism (e.g., Brazil, Chile, Uruguay); popular nationalism (Venezuela, Argentina); and indigenous neo-developmentalism (Bolivia, Ecuador). To this, we must add a fifth, more radical, possibility, still to be named, but which combines features of post-capitalist, post-liberal,

and post-statist societies that some social movements in the three countries discussed here embody and are beginning to theorize. The most interesting cases might arise at moments when the State/social movement nexus is capable of releasing the potential for imagination and action of autonomous social movements, as it perhaps happened in Bolivia for a brief period around the election of Evo Morales.

For the case of Venezuela, the *Socialismo del Siglo XXI* seems to be laying down elements for a more diverse society and economy; given the current dynamics, it might be too early to tell whether this will lead to a postcapitalist future; to move forward on this path would require that the Bolivarian Revolution question the developmentalist oil imaginary that is still dominant and for the State and the PSUV to be more open to the autonomous organizing efforts from the popular sectors, women, and afro-descendants and indigenous groups. As Lander put it, the question of how to imagine a different society, a post-capitalist society, is still to be articulated explicitly and effectively and collectively discussed.

Ecuador constitutes a courageous example of alternative development, with important socialist and ecological undertones, yet it still seems to be largely framed within a modernizing perspective. The alternative modernity that might come about as a result of the State-led transformation is already a significant accomplishment, one that could be radicalized by welcoming more decidedly the proposals of indigenous peoples and nationalities, Afro-Ecuadorian groups, environmentalists, and women's groups. This is particularly important in terms of moving forward with the articulation of pluri-nationality and interculturality envisioned by these groups, one that could effectively contribute to transforming the structures of coloniality at social, political, cultural and epistemic levels. Only then would the *revolución ciudadana* and the *revolución intercultural* move in the same direction.

Finally, Bolivia might be moving along the lines of a post-liberal, post-developmental alternative to modernity, particularly if one takes into account certain views and proposals put forth by intellectuals and activists working with organized peasant, indigenous, and poor urban communities. What appears to be at play in these cases –at least at intense periods of mobilization-- are “modes of self-regulation of social-coexistence” that go beyond capitalism and the State (Gutiérrez A. 2008: 18), non-liberal and non-capitalist social relations based on communal logics that overflow the parameters of liberalism. At some moments during the 2000-2005 period, what obtained was *una sociedad en movimiento* that enacted the practices and forms of organization of *una sociedad otra*. Whereas the conditions for the continued activation of this society in movement seems to have changed over the years with the MAS government, they are by no means completely closed down and the mobilizations and uprisings may reemerge at any moment (as it has been happening in Oaxaca and Chiapas, and with the indigenous Minga in Colombia).

Latin America is stirring up anew a politics of the virtual, of actualizable worlds and knowledges otherwise; it can be said that this is a task that it fulfills for the entire world, and perhaps the most overarching reading of the conjuncture. We have attempted

to read this politics of the virtual most directly from the actions of states and social movements; it can also be read from the reactions to it, and from those aspects and moments in which the project wavers and stumbles. Besides the fierce defense of established orders by the *nuevas derechas*, or new right wings, the tensions and contradictions of the transformative projects are enormous. To begin with, because of the historical weight of liberalism, the State is more equipped to control or govern, rather than release, the energies of social movements. Similarly, the sturdy sedimentation of capitalist and modern practices for several centuries means that these keep on fueling the hegemony of particular ways of organizing the economy (capitalist markets), culture (e.g., the individual), and society. The peculiar spatialities of liberalism can now be readily seen, yet the ‘new geometries of power’ that could support non-liberal formations seem if not difficult to imagine, impossible to implement, as in the case of the defense of “departmental autonomies” by the Bolivian elite; states and movements claim to work for justice yet the struggle for difference and equality invariably falters when it comes to women –and often concerning indigenous and afro-descendant groups-- pointing at the need to decolonize patriarchal and racial relations as a central element of any project of social transformation. Overall the development model is such that it continues to wreak havoc on the natural environment due to its dependence on accumulation fueled by the exploitation of natural resources (e.g., hydrocarbons, soy, sugar cane, African oil palm). Finally, those movements that most clearly bring into light a politics of the virtual are often those most explicitly targeted for repression (as in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru), or most eagerly seduced into participating in the progressive State projects, perhaps abdicating their most radical potential.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the historical possibilities gleaned from the discourses and actions of some movements and, to a lesser extent, states are also real. We end with some questions in this regard. Can non-liberal logics (e.g., ‘communal’) reach a stable expansion of their non-capitalist and non-state practices? Can the practices of economic, ecological, and cultural difference embedded in relational worlds be institutionalized in some fashion, without falling back into dominant modernist forms? Can communal and relational logics ever be the basis for an alternative, and effective, institutionalization of the social? Can the new non-statist, post-capitalist and post-liberal worlds envisioned by the Zapatista, the World Social Forum, the Oaxacan and many other social movements be arrived at through the construction of local and regional autonomies? And can these alternatives find ways to co-exist, in mutual respect and tolerance, with what until now have been the dominant, and allegedly universal, (modern) forms of life? A measure of success would imply the emergence of that ever illusive goal of genuinely plural societies. As we saw, the social movements of subaltern groups are better prepared to live within the pluriverse than those groups which until now have benefited the most from an alleged universal cultural and social order.

To talk about “alternatives to modernity” or transmodernity thus means: to disclose a space of thought and practice in which the dominance of a single modernity has been suspended at the epistemic and ontological levels; where Europe has been provincialized, that is, displaced from the center of the historical and epistemic imagination; and where the examination of concrete decolonial and pluriversal projects

can be started in earnest from a de-essentialized perspective. Alternatives to modernity point to forms of organizing economy, society, and politics *—formas otras—* that offer other, if not better, chances both to dignify and protect human and non-human life and the reconnect with the stream of life in the planet.

A final question insinuates itself: Can the emergent cultural-political subjects in Latin America reach an activated and stable condition of alterity capable of re-constituting socio-natural structures from within, along the lines of decoloniality, relationality and pluriversality?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Three caveats are in order. First, this is not a study of the State per se, even if it will examine a number of State discourses and practices, such as development plans, constitutional reforms, some frameworks (e.g., endogenous developments), elections, and so forth. The practices of the progressive states are, of course, susceptible of being examined through contemporary frameworks, such as those of biopolitics or governmentality originally developed by Foucault. For recent Latin American analyses of the State, see the special issue of *Iconos* (FLACSO, Quito) on “Etnografías del Estado en América Latina” (No. 34, 2009). Second, while the concept of autonomy is of course contested (used by the Bolivian right, for instance, to preserve privilege), I have in mind the meaning giving to it in the literature on autonomous politics inspired by social movements such as the Zapatista, or its meaning in Bolivia, to be reviewed in the pertinent section. These forms of autonomy can be seen as autopoietic, in the sense given to the term by Marturana and Varela (e.g., 1987), that is, as self-producing entities that are not determined by their environment but rather relate to it through structural coupling (see Escobar 2008 for a discussion of this notion). Third, I should make it clear that this paper does not deal with the traditions of liberalism to any significant extent, nor with the forms taken by liberalism throughout history. This is not the point of the paper; rather, I follow the way in which ‘liberalism’ is used currently in certain some intellectual debates in the continent. Broadly speaking, the liberal model of economy and politics is seen as emerging in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Hobbes and Locke; it became consolidated with the scientific, French and industrial revolutions. It is based on the notions of private property, representative democracy, individual rights, and the market as central principles of social life. For a useful discussion of the meanings of liberalism, see Hindess (2004), who argues that it is important to go beyond standards accounts of liberalism as concerned with regulating the relations between the State and its subjects and to the promotion of individual liberty and private property, and even beyond Foucauldian focusing on the governing of conduct, to include liberalism’s coercive side (‘illiberal’ techniques), its role in intra-state relations (including colonialism and imperialism), and its fundamental role in capitalism via the market as a “fundamental instrument of civilization” (p. 34).

<sup>2</sup> Remarks made at event at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, August 22, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For Arditti, the left “is more post-liberal than anti-liberal. The prefix does not suggest the end of liberal politics and its replacement with something else, yet it is clear that the *post* of *post-liberal* designates something outside liberalism or at least something that takes place at the edges of liberalism” (p. 73). It makes visible a host of hybrid politics and forms of representation, liberal and non. “Post-liberalism designates something that is already happening: it is an invitation to partake in a future that has already begun to occur” (74; see also García Linera in

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Svampa and Stefanoni 2007). The distinction between post- and anti-liberal will become important later in our argument, once we move from politics to the larger domain of the cultural.

<sup>4</sup> ALBA is the Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América Latina y el Caribe; created by Hugo Chávez in 2001, it currently has nine member states. It is seen as a Latin American anti-neoliberal framework of economic and political integration and as away to break away from imperialist domination.

<sup>5</sup> For a global treatment of the rise and expansion of neo-liberalism, see the excellent book by Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, which contains well-documented accounts of neoliberalism in the countries of the Southern Cone.

<sup>6</sup> This distinction and argument was made by Gudynas at the main talk for the two-day conference, “Knowledge, Policy, Environments, and Publics in Globalizing Latin America,” UNC-Duke Consortium in Latin American Studies, February 6, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> A word about how I use modernity in this paper (see Escobar 2008 for an extended discussion; see also the related reference to liberalism in Note 1). Very schematically, for our purposes what characterizes modernity the most are certain constructs and practices, such as the idea of the autonomous individual separated from community; the primacy of humans over non-humans (separation of nature and culture); the belief in objective knowledge and in science as the only valid modes of knowing; and the cultural construction of “the economy” as an independent realm of social practice, with “the market” as a “real,” self-regulating entity outside of power and social relations. This contrasts with other cultural constructions, particularly those that emphasize relationality and reciprocity; the continuity between the natural, the human and the supernatural (and between being, knowing and doing; Maturana and Varela 1987); the embeddedness of the economy in social life and the restricted character of the market; and a deeply collective and relational worldview that shapes the notions of personhood, community, economy, and politics. In universalizing itself, and in treating other groups as different and inferior through knowledge-power relations (coloniality), dominant forms of Euro-modernity have denied the ontological difference of those others. This is why the current political mobilizations should be seen as ontological-political projects (de la Cadena 2008; see last section of the paper on relational ontologies). Generally speaking, finally, I adopt the notion developed by the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality group that modernity emerged with the Conquest of America and has, since its inception, involved the suppression and marginalization of other knowledges and cultural practices—that is, coloniality—and that it is thus more proper to speak of modernity/coloniality or of the modern/colonial world system than just ‘modernity.’ See Escobar 2007 for a review of the works of this group and complete bibliography; Mignolo (2000); Mignolo and Escobar, eds. (in press).

<sup>8</sup> The argument about the politics of the virtual in relation to movements derives from Deleuze and Guattari; see Escobar and Osterweil (2009) for an initial statement of this notion, and Osterweil’s PhD dissertation (2009) for a comprehensive development of it for the Italian case.

<sup>9</sup> This section has a number of sources; the main one is a series of writings by well-known scholars, particularly Margarita López Maya, Edgardo Lander, Fernando Coronil, Luis Lander, and Steve Ellner. May of their works are still unpublished papers which I obtained directly from the authors. There is a second set of useful sources, which includes published accounts, particularly the special issue on Venezuela of the *Harvard Review of Latin America* (Fall 2008), edited by Fernando Coronil; see also Ellner (2008) and Ellner and Tinker Salas, eds (2007).

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There are also several blogs devoted to discussing the Venezuelan process; see, e.g., <http://saberypoder.blogspot.com/> maintained by the sociologist Reinaldo Iturriza. Finally, the sources include two week-long visits to Caracas (May 2006 and May 2007), which included lengthy conversations with staff of the Ministerio de Economía Popular, academic activities, meetings with activists, and visits to popular neighborhoods.

<sup>10</sup> For the development plan, see [http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/gobierno\\_al\\_dia/plan\\_desarrollo1.html](http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/gobierno_al_dia/plan_desarrollo1.html); for endogenous development, see <http://www.mct.gob.ve/Vistas/Frontend/documentos/Folleto%20Desarrollo%20Endogeno-2.pdf>; see also the official webpages for the government: <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/misc-view/index.pag>; and for the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Economía Comunal: <http://www.minec.gob.ve/>

<sup>11</sup> The frameworks of social economy, endogenous development, and popular economy were developed by specialized teams in various ministries. In his in-depth discussion of endogenous development, Parker (2007a) examines the various influences on the idea, from Sunkel's neo-structuralism and CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) thought in general, to President Chávez' own vision of the process. Two high-level government officials, Elías Jaua and Carlos Lanz, played an important role in giving shape to the concept; for Parker, what emerged at the end was a framework closer to "local sustainable development" than to any CEPAL or neo-structuralist vision, even if these are also represented within the State apparatus. During one of my visits to Caracas (2006), I spent two days with the main group of experts at the *Ministerio de Economía Popular*. This group of bright and dedicated young professionals was in charge of refining and implementing the endogenous development framework. As they saw it, President Chávez had to create a sort of parallel government within the State structure in order to develop the kinds of instruments needed to advance his Bolivarian revolution, given the inertia and opposition that often times affected many of the older ministries and offices; this particular ministry was part of such a structure. "Social Economy" is an area of intense development in Latin America at present. For an introduction to *economía social*, see the special issue of ALAI's journal, *América Latina en Movimiento*, No. 430 (18 March 2008), devoted to "Economía Social y Solidaria," edited by José Luis Coraggio, a main leader of this movement; and the special issue of *Iconos* (FLACSO's journal in Quito) on "¿Es posible otra economía? Ensayos de economía social y solidaria," No. 33 (January 2009), with contributions by Coraggio and Franz Hinkelammert, another one of the leaders of the social economy movement (e.g., Coraggio 2009; Hinkelammert and Mora (2009)).

<sup>12</sup> See also [www.venezuelatoday.org/05-05-31\\_es.htm](http://www.venezuelatoday.org/05-05-31_es.htm) for figures on state expenditure.

<sup>13</sup> The question of how the surplus is appropriated and re-circulated is a key criterion for deciding whether an economy is capitalist, alternative capitalist, or non-capitalist in J.K. Gibson-Graham's formulation of the diverse economy and postcapitalist politics (2006). This is a research I have not done, and to this extent what I say about Venezuela's 'postcapitalism' is very tentative. Is the popular and social economy sector in particular enabling forms of utilization of the surplus that are non-capitalist and alternative capitalist?: This is an important question to pursue this line of argumentation. From the Latin American perspective of the *economía social y solidaria*, the promotion of diverse/mixed economies needs to reconstitute the economy on the basis of the articulation of several principles, of which the market is only one (other principles being reciprocity, redistribution, self-management, and social and ecological sustainability); it also needs to make inroads into the State and capitalist sectors, democratizing them, in order to sustain



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itself in the long run. It is easy to see how this framework could be powerfully applied to the Venezuelan case in order to strengthen the social and popular economy sectors already under way. See Coraggio (2009).

<sup>14</sup> See the special issue of the *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales* 14(1), 2008, devoted to “Dynamics of Participatory Democracy in Venezuela,” edited by Margarita López Maya. This includes a preliminary assessment of the capacity of the high-profile technical water committees to contribute to the national revolutionary process based on two years of research with some of the committees (López Maya 2008).

<sup>15</sup> President Chávez apparently borrowed this notion of the geometry of power from British geographer Doreen Massey.

<sup>16</sup> This also means that the support for Chávez goes well beyond spontaneous poor and “popular” masses, as it is often portrayed in the media. Rather, Chavismo is a diverse and broad phenomenon. On the main Chavista political organizations, see Valencia (2007).

<sup>17</sup> On the history of political organizing in Venezuela leading up to the rise of Hugo Chávez see López Maya (2005a, 2005b); Ellner (2008).

<sup>18</sup> In a meeting in 2006 in which I participated in Caracas with representatives of social movements, those from women’s and feminist organizations echoed Espina’s concern with the paucity of the feminist debate not only on the political process of the revolution but in general. We got the impression that feminist movements in Venezuela were just beginning to take off. For more on feminist scholarship in Venezuela, see the work of the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer at the UCV (Universidad Central de Venezuela), and its journal *Revista Venezolana de Estudios de la Mujer*.

<sup>19</sup> “Me parece que pedir a las Constituciones un discurso coherente es exigir más de lo que el proceso político y el carácter de transición epocal permiten, incluyendo la imposibilidad de anticipar un discurso práctico para una época que aún no vivimos” (personal communication, July 19, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> A promising proposal is that of keeping about 920 million barrels of oil on the ground in the Yasuní National Park, inhabited by indigenous peoples and with rich biodiversity, as a way to contribute to ease climate change. In exchange, the government requests a compensation of about 4.6 billion dollars (much less than the foregone revenues if exploited). The Yasuní proposal is a political proposal, based on the concepts of climate justice and the ecological debt owed by the North to the South. The proposal “seeks to transform old conceptions of the economy and the concept of value. ... It is a question of inaugurating a new economic logic for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where the generation of value, not only of commodities, is compensated” (President Correa at a speech in New York in September 2007). Post-petroleum economy  
For information on the Yasuní proposals, see <http://www.sosyasuni.org/en/>; [www.amazoniaporlaviday.org](http://www.amazoniaporlaviday.org); oilwatch.org; Martínez Alier (2007); Gudynas (2009). Another promising proposal in which Correa’s government has played a leading role is that of intensifying Latin American integration, to create a great South American community through, for instance, support for the *Banco del Sur*.

<sup>21</sup> The election of members for the AC took place on July 2, 2006; the AC included representatives of 14 political forces: 137 from Morales’ party, the Movimiento al Socialismo,

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MAS (out of a total of 225) and 60 for PODEMOS, the main opposition group. There were 21 commissions on issues such as the vision of the country, nationalities, rights, state organization, regional autonomies, integral social development, hydrocarbons, coca, and Amazonian development. The Constituent Assembly met in Sucre, presided by a Quechua and women's rights leader Silvia Lazarte; it drafted of new constitution, composed of 411 articles, approved by the required two-thirds of the vote on December 9, 2007, leading to riots in Sucre and other eastern and southern departments of the "Media Luna" (initially, Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija) led by right wing and regional agribusiness and land holding elite, who declared autonomy and threatened with secession. Morales declared the move divisive and illegal. While the US Embassy at the time continued its hostility, the Morales government received support from the Union of South American Republics. For a useful analysis of the various proposals for the Constitution from the perspective of the tension between 'departmental' and indigenous conceptions of autonomy, see Chávez (2008a).

<sup>22</sup> Edmundo Novillo, president of the Chamber of Representatives, August 17, 2006 (from ALAI news electronic message).

<sup>23</sup> In speaking of 'élites enfermas', Mamani counters dominant representations of the indigenous majority as 'diseased.' On the autonomy declared by the Santa Cruz province and the reorganization of the *oligarquía camba*, see the extended discussion by Patzi Paco (2007: 299-319); see also Stefanoni (2007). The political economy of resource control underlying the right's opposition is well documented in Weisbrott and Sandoval (2008b)

<sup>24</sup> The ayllu "is the basic *célula* (unit) of Andean social organization since pre-Hispanic times; it constitutes a segmentary complex territorial and kinship organization. From the nineteenth century on, the terms 'ayllu' and 'community' became synonymous, due in large part to the process of fragmentation experienced by Andean society since colonial times" (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990: 13).

<sup>25</sup> See Hylton and Thompson (2007: 7), following Bolivian political theorist René Zavaleta Mercado.

<sup>26</sup> For background on the neoliberal period and the various takes on the meaning of popular and indigenous struggles see, besides Hylton and Thomson (2007), Postero (2006), Crabtree and Whitehead, eds. (2008), Powers (2006), Arbona 2007, Medeiros (2005), plus the sources in Spanish mentioned in the rest of this section. The following webpages contain useful Bolivian perspectives on current events: Presidencia de Bolivia: <http://www.presidencia.gob.bo/>; Portal del gobierno de Bolivia: <http://www.bolivia.gov.bo/>; Capítulo Boliviano de Derechos Humanos: [capbol@derechoshumanosbolivia.org](mailto:capbol@derechoshumanosbolivia.org); Universidad para la de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia, UPIEB: <http://www.upieb.edu.bo/>; Periódico PUKARA. Cultura, Sociedad y Política de los Pueblos Originarios: <http://www.periodicopukara.com/>; Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia, PIEB y Revista TINKAZOS: <http://pieb.com.bo/>

<sup>27</sup> This brief presentation of García Linera's position is extremely schematic, and does not pretend to account for the complexity of his thought; rather, I want to point at some features of it to demarcate this position from those that follow. See the useful compilation of his writings by Pablo Stefanoni, García Linera (2008).

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<sup>28</sup> The interpretation explained in this section is proposed by a number of intellectuals and activists, including the the aymara sociologists Félix Patzi Paco and Pablo Mamani, the Uruguayan writer Raúl Zibechi, and the Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar. The works of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and other Bolivian intellectuals to be discussed in this section are also important for the perspective I develop in this section. Although these authors have diverse experiences and academic and intellectual influences, there are some shared aspects to their approach. It is interesting to note that this interpretation differs significantly from that of most of the recent works on Bolivia that circulate in the Anglo-Saxon academy. A discussion of why this is the case is beyond the scope of this paper; I am not suggesting that one set of works of interpretations (the “Latin American” or that of “aymara intellectuals”) is somehow “better” than the other (“Anglo-Saxon”), nor that they are completely distinct. I am pointing at the difference as an aspect of the geo-politics of knowledge that needs to be made visible and examined critically. A very salient feature of this geopolitics is the visibility of aymara and other indigenous intellectuals and researchers (such as Mamani, Patzi, and some members of THOA), who are crafting an alternative interpretive framework.

<sup>29</sup> Mamani further on speaks about the indigenous component as the *kollada* or indigenous masses that inhabit all regions of the country. There are, however, some specificities in that the *mundo kolla* of the Andean region –largely aymara and quecha-- with its diversity of languages and historical forms is seen as leading the current cultural-political project. This has led the right to speak about an ‘aymara fundamentalism,’ given the powerful demands for self-determination of the aymara groups (2008: 25).

<sup>30</sup> As Gutiérrez Aguilar puts it, the inquiry is situated in between the *practical reach* of the popular actions and the *autonomous horizons of desire* and meaning of the sectors confronting the established order (2008: 15)

<sup>31</sup> It is important to point out that not only the approach but the locus of enunciation differ from standard academic social science research, particularly in the area of social movements. In these works, there is a clear injunction to approach movements from below and from within, unlike the view from the state-academy-political party locus of enunciation, in which ‘social movements’ are treated as external objects of study for detached empirical investigation. (Drawing on Maturana and Varela, Zibechi sees the movements that enact non-statist and non-liberal logics in the moments of insurrection as ‘autopoietic multiplicities’ with self-learning and structural coupling to their environment; 2006: 75, 82; he also draws on some complexity notions, such as how movements create forms of coherence and non-linear social dynamics form below.) Emancipatory mobilizations run counter to the search for “articulations” or unification of struggles pursued from the conventional enunciative position. Finally, it should be pointed out that these authors’ interpretations are based on a detailed and close reading of both the day-to-day and insurrectionary moments of mobilization largely over the 2000-2005 period, in some cases out of a prolonged engagement with the situations at hand.

<sup>32</sup> Patzi’s conceptual framework includes a distinction between “system” and “environment” that recalls similar views by Maturana and Varela and other systems theorists.

<sup>33</sup> This short account of this important group, which gathered around Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui in the early 1980s and has since continued producing very important historical and political work, is extremely inadequate. It is based, above all, on presentations and subsequent conversations with Marcelo Fernández-Osco, a member of THOA since the early 1980s with important works on traditional legal systems and the ayllu (Fernández-Osco 2000), and Yamila Gutiérrez Callisaya,

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of the Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu, CONAMAQ (Chapel Hill, Spring 2009). For both of these aymara intellectuals, the MAS government has not been able to get out of conventional forms of political representation (unions, left parties); in this way, it has failed to move out of Left thinking (García Linera) towards a decolonial space where the reconstitution of the ayllu could become thinkable. This does not mean that THOA has a fully worked out proposal; for both authors, a satisfactory theory of autonomy and politics from the ayllu itself is still lacking (see Gutiérrez Callisaya 2009).

<sup>34</sup> There is a sense among the authors discussed in this section that the MAS government has represented important advances yet at the same time it does not represent indigenous thoughts and desires, being overshadowed, as he is seen to be, by the conventional Left thinking of the MAS; so in a way the MAS government has been a disillusion (Conversations with Marcelo Fernández-Osco and Yamila Gutiérrez, Chapel Hill, April 2009; Gutiérrez Callisaya 2009). For some, Left thinking precludes García Linera and the MAS from understanding the indigenous struggle as more than a political flag (*una banderita para ganar*, Quispe 2008: 30). Mamani also faults Linera's negotiation and MAS thinking as a mistake in the process of the Constituent Assembly (2008: 26). In this way, the vision and politics of decolonization announced during the initial months of Morales' government has been progressively compromised by Morales' power circle; "it would seem" –Patzi concludes in examining his own short-lasting attempts at decolonizing the educational structures as Morales' Minister of Education and Culture in 2006—that "Evo Morales is no longer interested in profound transformations" (2007: 346). Linera describes his approach as "the dialectic between movement and the State, between social energy and the objectification of such an energy" (2007: 159). It is clear that the perspective of 'societies on movement' cannot be accommodated within the dialectic thought. For a critique of the dialectic, based on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, see Escobar and Osterweil (2009).

<sup>35</sup> I should make it clear that I use ontology more in an historical than a metaphysical ('the way things really are') sense. In other words, ontologies reflect collective assumptions about the kinds of entities that are thought to exist in the world. That said, the modern ontology (based, say, on the separation of nature and culture) has produced socio-natural worlds of a particular kinds (e.g., plantations, genetically modified organisms) which have tended to be destructive of the biophysical integrity of the planet. Some relational ontologies, on the contrary, have informed – or can inform, in principle—more sustainable designs. Today's emergence of relational ontologies, as this section argues, is related to the sustained destruction of 'nature' over the past few hundred years by modern ontologies (coloniality of nature) and of course by the sustained marginalization of those living with relational worldviews (coloniality of knowledge). Let me emphasize also that today dualist and relational worlds overlap significantly.

<sup>36</sup> I use the first person plural in these paragraphs since these ideas are part of a collective project with Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser. See Blaser, de la Cadena, Escobar (2009), de la Cadena (2008), blaser (in press), Escobar (forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> The trend is fueled most directly by post-structuralism and phenomenology, and in some versions by post-Marxism, actor-network theories (ANT), complexity theory, and philosophies of immanence and of difference, such as Deleuze and Guattari; in some cases they are also triggered by ethnographic research with groups that are seen as embodying relational ontologies or by social movements who construct their political strategies in terms of dispersed networks. See Escobar, forthcoming for a fuller explanation and references.

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<sup>38</sup> The last two aspects are just beginning to be tackled. There is, of course, a significant anthropological literature on non-dualist gender relations (in terms of vernacular gender, analogic gender, and gender complementarity), and these are essential points of departure for a further deconstruction of “gender” and the search for other idioms to describe relations between women and men (see Escobar 2008: 236-250 for a discussion of non-modernist notions of gender difference and its application to Afro-Colombian movements). The notion of *poder diárquico* in Bolivia, according to which the presence of men in all ceremonies must be accompanied by that of women, seems particularly promising in terms of non-modernist idioms of complementarity and shared authority (conversation with Marcelo Fernández-Osco, Chapel Hill, April 2009; see also Chávez 2008b: 59; Rivera Cusicanqui on the dual complementarity among aymara communities). On decolonial feminisms, see the excellent volume edited by Suárez Navaz and Hernández (2008). This volume established a dialogue among feminisms of the South partly through a rethinking of postcolonial theory. Lugones’ critique of the category of coloniality of power as formulated by Quijano suggests that the very category of “woman” is shaped by colonial processes and Western patriarchy. Lugones also expands the feminist notion of “intersectionality” by looking at the inter-connections not just between race, gender, and sexuality but by placing them within the modern/colonial world and the ongoing debates to both decolonize imperial knowledge and generate de-colonial knowledge.

<sup>39</sup> The question of the autonomy of movements vis à vis the State is a matter of debate at the present moment. Espousing a radical autonomist position, Raúl Zibechi sees a steady loss of autonomy by movements in their dealings with the progressive states. “It is virtually impossible for grassroots movements,” he writes, “to overcome their dependence on and subordination to the state, especially given that the new ‘leftist’ and ‘progressive’ governments have instituted new forms of domination including social programs aimed at ‘integrating’ the poor. These play a leading role in the design of new forms of social control” (2009: 3). What is most interesting in these cases, as Zibechi goes on to say, is that those deploying the new practices are often leftist “who know the ins and outs of the popular sectors” because of their experience in resistance movements to neoliberalism. For Zibechi, this amounts to *an offensive against autonomy*. Moreover, “social programs are directed at the heart of communities that have engaged in rebellion. The state seeks to neutralize or modify the networks and methods of solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual aid created by those from below to survive the neoliberal model. Once those ties and the autonomous wisdom that was generated by the social movements disappear, the people will be much more easily controlled” (5). Seeing social programs as discourses and apparatuses for social control can be linked to the analysis of State practices in terms of biopolitics and governmentality. In other words, governmentality is not only about control but about the production of particular kinds of (governable) subjects. Many on the Left, however, hold on to a different view of the State, one that allows for greater interaction between movements and the State. At an event with the Colectivo Situaciones and Walter Mignolo held in Chapel Hill, Michael Hardt argued for finding ways to think constructively about the manner in which movements can take advantage of “the partial recognition” they get from the State at present. For him, the question of the relation between social movements and the State has been badly posed, and needs to go beyond usual notions such as cooptation, while acknowledging the complexity of the relation. Hardt was talking particularly about Bolivia and the positions taken by the MAS and García Linera. Here again we have an instance of the difference between the Left and the decolonial. The event, *Conocimiento en Movimiento / Knowledge in Movement: Challenges and Practices of Activist Research in Times/Spaces of Crisis*, was sponsored by the Social Movements Working Group at UNC, Chapel Hill on April 27-28, 2009. For the audio of the event, see

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[http://www.countercartographies.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=36&Itemid=32](http://www.countercartographies.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=36&Itemid=32)

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