# Arturo Escobar

We are taking the rather unusual action of publishing this very long paper by Arturo Escobar on the politics of contemporary South America. South American politics play a large and important role in many contemporary discussions of global politics and political possibilities. We want to stimulate some debate in cultural studies around these questions. In the near future, we will publish some invited responses from other leading scholars and we invite others to submit such responses.

## LATIN AMERICA AT A CROSSROADS

## Alternative modernizations, post-liberalism, or post-development?

*This paper examines the socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations that have been taking place in South America during the past ten years, particularly in Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Whereas at the level of the states the transformations do not seem to venture beyond alternative forms of modernization, the discourses and strategies of some social movements suggest radical possibilities towards post-liberal, post-developmentalist, and post-capitalist social forms. To entertain such a possibility requires that the transformations in question be seen in terms of a double conjuncture: the crisis of the neoliberal project of the past three decades; and the crisis of the project of bringing about modernity to the continent since the Conquest. At stake in many cultural-political mobilizations in Latin America, it is further argued, is the political activation of relational ontologies, such as those of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendents, which differ from the dualist ontologies of liberal modernity.*

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

### Introduction: the 'turn to the left' and the current conjuncture

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 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 200 years founded on private property and representative democracy. *Socialismo del siglo XXI*, pluri-nationality, 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 concepts that seek to name the ongoing transformations. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano perhaps put it best: '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, p. 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 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; 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.' 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 at best. It was on the basis of the early Latin American experiences that the Washington Consensus was crafted. The fact that many of the reforms of 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 also an acute sense 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? 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 important elements of the investigation; this also means that the investigation is, more than ever, simultaneously theoretical and political.

This specificity also has to do with the multiplicity of long-term histories and trajectories that underlie the cultural and political projects at play. 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. 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. 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 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, p. 4). Latin America can be fruitfully seen as a crossroads: a regional formation where critical theories arising from many trajectories (from Marxist political economy and post-structuralism to 'decolonial thought'), 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 neo-liberal 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 features of the current socio-economic, political, and cultural transformations in South America. Part II presents the thrust of the argument: do they constitute alternative forms of modernization, or could they be said to be moving in the direction 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 selected changes introduced at the level of the states in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia and their relation to social movements. For the Venezuelan case, I highlight certain innovations 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 Chaves' Bolivarian Revolution between popular organizations and the State. The Ecuadorian case will allow 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-developmentalist, certain tendencies in the environmental and cultural arena are seen as providing openings towards post-development.

The section that follows focuses on an emergent approach that sees the contemporary Bolivian process as a struggle among cultural-political projects, 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 embarking 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-descendents. These relational ontologies can be differentiated from the dualist ontologies of liberal modernity in that they are not built on the divides between nature and culture, us and them, individual and community; the cultural, political, and ecological consequences of taking relationality seriously are significant; relationality refers to *a different way of imagining life* (socio-natural worlds). The Conclusion, finally, raises 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 demands of social movements; for the latter, a key question will be the extent to which their politics of difference can develop infrastructures that might confer upon them a reasonable chance to vie for the re-design of social life along non-liberal and post-capitalist criteria, while retaining their autonomy.[1]

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

*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 social inclusion but about the character of knowledge itself and 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 activation of communal forms of organization based on indigenous practices. Anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena echo these contentions; for Blaser, the transformations evince 'cultural-political projects that seem to overflow modernist criteria' (2007, p. 11), which de la Cadena (2008) sees in terms of an ontological-political de-centering of modern politics. Cultural studies scholar Jesús Martín Barbero says that what is at stake in the transformations is '*el sentido de lo latinoamericano,* of what we share as ethnic groups, regions, or nations.'[2] Finally, sociologist Fernando Calderón (2008) 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 of what counts as development.

The sense that the transformations under way entail a rupture with the past was eloquently expressed by President Correa in his inaugural speech by the contrasting of 'epoch of changes' with '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 15, 2007)

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

> 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.

As a first approximation, the novelty and tensions of the transformations could thus be seen as a series of contrasts: between neo-liberal 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 Latina' and 'Abya Yala,' the name given to the continent by indigenous movements; between capitalism and development and twenty-first century socialism; 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 is far from been so neatly divided; the novelty of the new is often exaggerated and the continuities with the old downplayed.

A frequently broached question 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 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 regulation of markets and the pursuit of redistributive policies. That the new Left is not so enthralled by the orthodox Marxist script and that it is less hostile towards private property do not invalidate it as 'Left,' in Arditti's view. However, part of this paper's argument is that the contemporary transformations call for moving beyond Left-Right formulations; to anticipate, a more apt formulation for political forms – suggested by Walter Mignolo – would be that of 'the left, the right, and the decolonial,' opening up the political spectrum beyond Eurocentric frameworks. The transformations involve not only a turn to the left, but a decolonial turn (Mignolo 2006, Paco 2007, p. 328).

### Some features in common

In the post-Washington Consensus climate, Left ideas have moved from a defensive to a proactive stance; 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, p. 71).[3] Considering the three cases most clearly associated with the 'turn to the Left' (Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador), one can identify some features in common. All three regimes offer radical proposals to transform State and society, including: (a) 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; and (d) to a lesser extent, development models that involve an ecological dimension. A main vehicle for the refounding of the State and society has been the Constituent Assemblies. Also in common are: significant popular mobilization, the heightening of social conflicts, the strengthening of the State, and the

abandonment of traditional political parties (*partidocracia*), 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[4] to a proposed common currency) and globally, as in the case of the Israeli attacks on Palestinian territories in January 2008.

### The current conjuncture

Mario Blaser (2007) 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 neo-liberal modernizing model of the past three decades; and the *long durée* of the more than 500 years of hegemony of the modern project since the Conquest, that is, the crisis of the project of bringing about modernity to the continent. It is important to address, however briefly, both dimensions of the conjuncture.

*The crisis of the neo-liberal model.*    Neo-liberalism in Latin America started with the brutal military regimes in Chile and Argentina of the 1970s; by the early 1990s it had encompassed all of the countries of the region (except Cuba). The global dimension of this hegemony began with Thatcherism in England and the Regan-Bush years, when 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 the North American Free Trade Agreement (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 – 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 in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the anti-GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) demonstrations in India in the early 1990s, and the Zapatista uprising since 1994 to the large-scale demonstrations in Seattle, Prague, Barcelona, Québec, Genoa and the like, the 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 in March, 2003, there was a renewed

attempt on the part of the US elite to defend its military and economic hegemony, affecting world regions in particular ways.

Known as 'market reforms' in Latin America, 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 macro-economic 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 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), a sharp increase in inequality in most countries and an increase in poverty levels in many of them. 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 three decades ago; on the contrary, there are many countries in which inequality has increased' (Ocampo 2004, p. 74). 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.[5]

The crisis of the neo-liberal project would have to be qualified in ways that are beyond the scope of this paper. According to Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas, many of the neo-liberal reforms are still in place; in this way, rather than 'the beginning of a new dream,' the transformations brought about by progressive governments might be more properly described as 'the dream of a new beginning' − that is, more rhetoric than reality.[6] Yet some important elements of the neo-liberal mantra have been reversed. The State is back as a main actor in the management of 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. Besides the policy level, it would be important to investigate the extent to which the processes under way have changed those imaginaries and desires that became more deeply ingrained than ever during the neo-liberal 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.*    A word about how I use 'modernity' in this paper (see Escobar 2008, for a lengthy discussion). I use modernity to refer to the kinds of coherence and crystallization of forms (discourses, practices, structures, institutions) that have arisen over the last few hundred years out of certain cultural and ontological commitments of European societies. There is an interesting convergence between certain philosophical, biological, and indigenous peoples' narratives in asserting that life entails the creation of form (difference, morphogenesis) out of the dynamics of matter and energy.[7] In these views, the world is a pluriverse, ceaselessly in movement, an ever-changing web of inter-relations involving humans and non-humans. I believe it is important to point out, however, that the pluriverse also gives rise to coherences and crystallizes in practices and structures through processes that have a lot do with meanings and power. With the modern ontology, certain constructs and practices, such as the primacy of humans over non-humans (separation of nature and culture) and of some humans over others (the colonial divide between us and them); the idea of the autonomous individual separated from community; the belief in objective knowledge, reason, and 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 self-regulating entity outside of social relations − all of these ontological assumptions became prominent. The worlds and knowledges constructed on the basis of these ontological commitments became 'a universe.' This universe has acquired certain coherence in socio-natural forms such as capitalism, the state, the individual, industrial agriculture, and so forth.

This does not mean that 'modernity' is one and unchanging; on the contrary, it is always changing due to its own dynamism and critique and pressures from within and from without. In this paper, 'modernity' refers to the dominant type of Euro-modernity based on the said divides. There are other forms of modernity, and perhaps even modernities that are not so indelibly shaped by their relation to Euro-modernity (Grossberg 2008). Just to state the point, the dualist ontology 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 & Varela 1987); the embeddedness of the economy in social life and the restricted character of the market; and a deeply 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. We shall return to this discussion in the last part of the paper when we discuss the concept of relationality. For now, I want to underscore the co-existence of two projects − 'the world as universe' versus 'the world as pluriverse' − with the sources for the second project stemming from many

sites of intellectual, social, and biological life, while the first one continues to inform the cultural design we call 'globalization.'[8]

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; this is a process that involves other world regions (see, e.g. Starn & de la Cadena 2008, for the new indigeneities in various parts of the world). The Zapatista uprising and the election of Evo Morales as President of Bolivia in 2006 did much to put this fact in international circles, but the phenomenon goes well beyond these markers. Even in countries like Colombia that have a small percentage of indigenous peoples, they have occupied a prominent role in resistance movements, particularly against a free trade agreement with the United States. Over the past two decades, sizeable movements of afro-descendents have also appeared in Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador. Indigenous and black resurgence bring into light the arbitrary (historical) character of the dominant Euro-modernity, that is, the fact that 'modernity' is one cultural model among many. 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. 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 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 and the self-redefinition as *pueblos originarios*, as opposed to the Eurocentric *pueblos indígenas*, are telling elements in the constitution of a diverse set of indigenous peoples as a novel cultural-political subject (Porto-Gonçalves 2007). 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 & Escárzaga 2006, p. 16). This assertion has been validated in the last few years, most notably in the creation of the *caracoles* or *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* (boards 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' (Ramírez 2006a) are widely debated. The key elements of this offensive have to do with, first, the defense of the territory as the site of production and the place of culture; second, the right over a measure of autonomy and self-determination around the control of natural resources and 'development'; and third, the relation to the state and the nation, most cogently articulated in the notion of pluri-nationality.

None of this is free of contradictions. The label *pueblos originarios*, for instance, might situate these societies outside of time and history, whereas the territorial focus tends to constrain indigenous groups in geo-cultural spaces (Cusicanqui 2008). Bolivian vice president Alvaro García Linera (2007b) warns about essentialist readings of indigenous worlds, which he sees as hybrids of modern and non-modern practices rather than as bearers of non-modernities. But the force and significance of indigenous and Afro-Latin American mobilizations are undeniable.

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

My argument is the following: The current socio-economic, political and cultural transformations suggest the existence of two potentially complementary but also competing and contradictory projects: (a) *alternative modernizations*, based on an anti-neo-liberal 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 neo-liberalism 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 (as we will see with the analysis of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions). Conversely, while the second option can 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 can 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. 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, I understand the *post* before capitalist, liberal, and statist in a very specific manner. For Arditti and Lineras, post-liberalism means a state of affairs characterized by hybrid practices, as a result of a partial displacement of the dominant forms of Western liberalism and the acknowledgment of other social and political forms, such as those of peasant and indigenous groups. I mean something similar but a bit more. My understanding of the *post* is post-structuralist. It has been said of the notion of post-development (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* and which, even more, visualized 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, private property, and so forth as characteristic of liberalism modernity. It is not a state to be arrived at in the future but something that is always under construction. 'Post-capitalist' similarly means looking at the economy as made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist practices; it signals a state of affairs when capitalism is no longer the hegemonic form of economy (as in the capitalocentric frameworks of most political economies), where the domain of 'the economy' is not fully and 'naturally' occupied by capitalism but by an array of economies — solidarity, cooperative, social, communal, even criminal economies that cannot be reduced to capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2006). In other words, the 'post' signals the notions 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 that 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 Euro-centered modernity — what might be called alternatives to modernity, or transmodernity (Dussel 2000). Operating in the cracks of modernity/coloniality, this expression 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.

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. It is in these spaces that new imaginaries and ideas about how to re/assemble the socio-natural are not only hatched but experimented with, critiqued, elaborated upon, and so forth.[9]

## 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; 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 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 diverse economy as defined earlier.[10]

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 assessments (e.g. Coronil 2008, p. 3); this is an extension of what has been termed a 'partisan historiography' that has simplified twentieth century history (Ellner 2008, p. 10), and a reflection of the polarization of Venezuelan society in recent years, particularly after the popular uprising against International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed reforms known as *El Caracazo* of 1989 (e.g. Maya & Lander 2008). It is commonly agreed, however, that the decline of the 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 include: the 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 in August 2004; Chávez's re-election in December 2006 with 62.9 percent of the votes; the announcement, during the campaign for re-election, 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 the 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 for the reform of the Constitution proposed by the President and the National Assembly on December 2, 2007 (50.7 percent against, 49.3 percent in favor, 44 percent abstention) − this referendum included, among other items of reform, the unlimited re-election 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 percent 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 mandated State ownership of natural resources, particularly oil, and 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.[11] 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.[12]

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 have taken place since 2006, including in 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 the socializing economy remains undefined (Ellner 2008, 2009). Progressively, and despite contradictory strategies, the government is moving towards an alternative to neo-liberalism with strong social economy and social policy sectors. The increase in social expenditure has been sharp, 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, p. 66).[13] 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.)[14]

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. There were also community organizations around urban and rural lands and property. Another well-known instrument of social policy has been the 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 and as contributing to a decrease of poverty and unemployment (see e.g. Weisbrot & 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.[15]

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' during Chávez's second term. This has been 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. Communal councils (CCs) 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 CCs 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.' This is doubtless an 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' (Maya & Lander 2008, p. 12, Maya 2007, 2008b). Among those cited are: the fact that popular organizations are too local, lacking middle-level structures that could aggregate their efforts; their inability to maintain autonomy *vis-à-vis* the State; and tensions 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.[16]

The unevenness, tensions, and ambiguities in the process of building communal power raise many questions. 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, p. 130; see also Lander 2007b, pp. 79–81). Two tendencies are identified: 'technical-clientilistc' (those CCs who see themselves as in charge of managing government resources) and the 'empowerment vision' (represented by those CCs which see themselves as instruments of popular power, 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 can be seen as co-opted; those more inclined towards autonomous popular power run the risk of conflict with the government. In this author's view, the first tendency predominates; this means that the CCs are not operating effectively as spaces for the construction of new subjectivities or alternative societal models (García-Guadila 2008).

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 compared to other Andean countries, various forms of mobilization, particularly belligerent ones, have steadily increased since 1989.[17] During the 1989–1999 period, these forms of protest were advanced 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 for participation at the municipal level in order to press for social services (Maya & Lander 2008). From 1999–2006 (Chávez's first period), various forms of collective action continued to be practiced, this time by a broad array of actors with contrasting political motivations. Popular sectors supporting the change

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

The closing of political space came into view with the process leading to the referendum for the reform of the constitution of 2007 (see Lander & Maya 2007, 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 for 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' (Lander 2007b, p. 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 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' (Maya 2008b, p. 169).[18]

The above tensions are well exemplified by the women's movements. Left and anti-capitalist 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, p. 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 established Left parties (see, e.g. Sternbach *et al.* 1992), and between the 'feminism of equality' and the 'feminism of difference'. 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-patri-archal.... [This requires] questioning and debunking the cultural model of androcentric domination at all levels.

(Blanco 2007, p. 11)

Carosio (2007) similarly emphasizes the need to incorporate feminist thought and values into the constitution of the new society; pointing at the paucity of feminist discussions on the Bolivarian process, Espina (2007) emphasizes 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.[19]

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 (e.g. Chávez' authoritarian tendencies, most controversially staged in areas such as communications, in ways that many see as reducing freedom of expression). 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 statism 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, p. 31, emphasis added). One of the issues most highlighted by critics is 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 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 21st century' (Coronil 2008, p. 4). 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, forms of popular power towards a socialist alternative ... the main challenge *is how to imagine a different society*; *what would constitute a post-capitalist society*?
>
> (Coronil 2008, p. 4, emphasis added)

For this author, the path to this question lies in imagining an alternative civilizational model capable of radically transforming 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 limited extent. While it has transformed the development model to some degree, it is still mired in neo-developmentalism and oil rents. With its anti-neoliberal stances it could be said to be moving on a post-capitalist path (particularly considering the social and popular economies), but 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 transformation of society towards post-capitalism and post-development? 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* guiding a different path rather than as fully worked-out alternative models. This has been said of endogenous development in particular (Parker 2007b). As Parker argues, 'To speak of an endogenous development based on a popular economy means to discuss a process that is in its infancy' (p. 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 whose results are 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' (p. 79).

Finally, whereas post-liberalism 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. 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 in principle. It should be added that post-liberalism 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 twenty-first 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 is willing to do. As we will suggest with the Bolivian case, only a veritable *society in movement*, where autonomous social movements get to play an important cultural-political role, might move the socio-natural formation towards the elusive goal of post-liberalism.

## IV. Ecuador: between neo-developmentalism and post-development

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 post-development. By neo-development-alism I mean forms of development understanding and practice that do not 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 post-development, I mean the opening of a social space where these premises can be challenged, as some social movements are doing.

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 pre-dated 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 November 29 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 new Constitution '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.' 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. More than a constitutional declaration, 'the *buen vivir* [collective wellbeing] constitutes an opportunity to construct collectively a new development regime' (Acosta 2009, p. 39). 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 guides for the re-founding of the Bolivian and Ecuadorian state and society' (2009a, p. 5). And for Uruguayan ecologists Eduardo Gudynas (2009a, 2009b), 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 mandate 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 neo-developmentalism and post-development.

The Plan is based on a concept of *desarrollo humano* as the basis for the *revolución ciudadana*. It establishes 12 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 the collective wellbeing (*buen vivir*) of everybody, in peace and harmony with nature, and the unlimited survival of *human cultures*. The *buen vivir* presupposes that 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 develop-
ment 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 development 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' (SENPLADES
n.d., p. 59), the need for growth pervades most aspects of the Plan; 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'
(p. 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*; the government's recent mining policies operate under this
principle. One could also ponder whether there are not 'strategic areas' that
are fundamental to the *sumak kawsay* and that should be similarly strengthened?
There is an 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*.[20] This asymmetry emerges at every aspect of the
Plan, as shown by the following section, which refers back to an economistic
and technocratic view of development:

> This view of *human development* requires a sufficiently broad platform of
> *economic growth*, fostered by 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 productiv-
> ity gaps, and contributes to broaden the supply of higher products with
> greater incorporation of *added value*. To the extent that *markets* are not
> 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 relation to dominant conceptions, the notion of development as *buen vivir* (a) questions the prevailing 'maldevelopment' (Tortosa 2009, 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, emphasizing that development is 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 the question of the sustainability of the model; (e) it has made possible the discussion on other knowledges and cultural practices (e.g. indigenous and Afro) at the national level.

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 assume 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 *biopluralismo*, within which the economy could 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, calling for mixed and solidarity economies (see SENPLADES n.d., p. 47); (d) it introduces issues of social and inter-generational justice as spaces for development principles; (e) it acknowledges cultural and gender differences, positioning interculturality as a guiding principle (Walsh 2008, 2009b); (f) it enables new political-economic emphases, such as food sovereignty, the control of natural resources, and seeing water as a human right.[21]

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-developmentalist orientation is maintained, which militates against environmental sustainability; and (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 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 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 it. On the contrary, the unified, modernist vision of development is seen as counter to it. And while the Plan incorporates a view of a pluri-national State, according to indigenous organizations, the government has not embraced their proposal of pluri-nationality, based on 'the existence of a diversity of nationalities and peoples, which constitute 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 neo-liberal 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 co-exist 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, p. 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, p. 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, speaking 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 eighth 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 (Walsh 2009b, p. 151). The articulation between pluri-nationality 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 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 *et al.* (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 and lack of coherence 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 as far as the Constitutions are concerned, in that the new Constitutions are deeply negotiated and contradictory documents, open to multiple interpretations and to continued political processes in 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.'[22]

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. 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.[23]

## 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 – scarcely a month before the election of Evo Morales to the presidency of Bolivia on December 18, 2005 with 53.7 percent of the votes – encapsulate 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 to close to a million people in less than three decades, heavily populated 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 visions of the world; politically speaking, these struggles represent contestations 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' (Paco 2007, p. 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. This interpretation envisions the possibility of 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 neo-liberalism – in its particularly virulent application in Bolivia since the mid-1980s – and modernity. Census data show that 62

percent of the population is of indigenous descent, although some Aymara intellectuals have estimated it as being as high as 75 percent (Mamani 2006a). Notwithstanding, class and ethnic domination by a non-indigenous minority has been among the harshest in the continent, which explains the breath and depth 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.[24]

The 2008 Constitution declares that Bolivia is 'a unitary, pluri-national, communitarian, free, independent, sovereign, democratic, social decentralized state, with territorial autonomies' that is founded on 'political, economic, judicial, cultural, and linguistic pluralism.' This definition evidences the complexity of the 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 neo-liberal 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 conceived in terms of equality and redistribution, as explained 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 (Linera 2007a). 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, p. 12).

Akin to the Ecuadorian case, the Bolivian Constitution states the goal of society as the *suma qamaña* (*vivir bien*, or *vivir bien en armonía*, or 'living well'), a notion that is deeply ingrained in indigenous ontologies or cosmovisions.[25] The Constitution envisions an alternative model of development and a mixed economy that allows for public, collective, individual, communal, associative, and cooperative forms. Needless to say, the tensions entailed by this conception abound, for instance between indigenous autonomies within the context of a pluri-national State and the forms of departmental autonomy defended by private business groups; between direct democracy and representative democracy; radical redistribution of land in accordance with the rights 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. Underlying the opposition

to Morales and the demand for autonomy by the departments of the *Media Luna* is the control of natural resources, particularly land and hydrocarbons. In Bolivia, 0.2 percent of the population control 48 percent of the land; the 'autonomy' demanded by regional elite groups – what Chávez (2008b, p. 8) has aptly called *el bloque señorial*, or seigniorial bloc, also often referred to as the *oligarquía camba* – thus amounts to a rejection of the land reform. Hydrocarbon revenues are 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 élites 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).[26]

The struggle between liberal and indigenous worldviews is seen as being at the basis of indigenous struggles since at least the rebellion of Tupaj Amaru and Tupaj Katari in 1780–1781. 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' (p. 20). At times, indigenous groups have been able to creatively combine liberal forms of representative democracy (e.g. through the unions) with the *ayllu* direct forms of democracy.[27] 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 and negating their own culture (p. 24). Generally speaking, most political forms (e.g. unions) have operated against the logic of the ayllus, 'thus blocking their autonomous expression' (p. 32); the nation-state building process has thus been 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, p. 7). This calls for a 'radical decolonization of the social and political structures on which our social co-existence has been built' (Cusicanqui 1990, p. 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, starts 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? 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 this hypothesis.

Historically, a 'national-popular' tradition of resistance, as it has been called,[28] 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 & Thompson 2007, p. 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' (Cusicanqui 1990, p. 28) – was already at play in the mobilizations against the drastic neo-liberal reforms of 1984–1985 by Siles Suazo (infamously advised by Jeffrey Sachs of the Harvard Institute for International Development), the cocalero movement of the 1990s and, 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 later. 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 pluri-national – and possibly a more open, just, and participatory society – in short, a new concept and practice of democracy and the nation (PNUD/IDEA 2007).[29]

Vice-president and sociologist Alvaro García Linera has best articulated the main 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 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), up from 7 percent 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. 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, he considers that positions stated on the basis of indigenous difference romanticize and essentialize indigeneity; 'deep down,' he says, 'they all want to be modern' (Linera 2007b, p. 152). Hence the emphasis on equality as opposed to difference, which is best expressed in his conceptualiza-tion 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 (pp. 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 has a series of novel elements yet remains within the confines of established Eurocentric and modernizing Left perspectives.[30] 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 shared by liberal and Left positions. These interpretations suggest the possibility of non-capitalist, non-state and non-liberal forms of politics and social organizations. 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.

## 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.[31]

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 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 (population 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 from 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' (Paco 2004, pp. 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.
>
> (Mamani 2008, p. 23, emphasis added)[32]

The claims made by these interpretations are bold; what is at stake is the organization of society in terms different from those of liberalism. Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar stated the argument most succinctly; 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 Aguilar 2008, p. 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; from this perspective, states 'are not appropriate instruments to create emancipatory social relations' (Zibechi 2006, p. 25). These interpretations go beyond State-centered frameworks to focus 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, p. 161).

The focus of these works is on *the practices* underlying the uprising and insubordination that took place in 2000–2005, including: (a) the autonomous urban struggles of El Alto; (b) communal indigenous rural uprising; (c) the struggles of the *cocaleros* and other peasant and indigenous groups in the eastern

parts of the country.[33] The aim is to show the ways in which non-capitalist and non-statist forms of self-regulation became structuring principles of social re/ composition. The distinction between 'communal forms' and 'State forms' allows these intellectuals to make visible forms of 'self-regulation of social co-existence beyond the modern State and capital' (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008, p. 18), and to unveil the existence of a society 'characterized by non-capitalist and non-liberal social relations, labor forms, and forms of organization' (Zibechi 2006, p. 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; these are 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, p. 40). These forms appear as *micro-gobiernos barriales* (neighborhood micro-governments) or *anti-poderes dispersos*, that is, diffuse, quasi-microbial, intermittent forms of power. Mamani (2006b) suggests 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 (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. The struggles followed a dynamic of self-organization aimed at the construction of non-state forms of power. In the Aymara society, 'these functions (*capacidades*) appear distributed and dispersed throughout the entire social body and are subjected in the last instance to the assemblies, be it in the countryside or in the cities' (Zibechi 2006, p. 29, Mamani 2005, Cusicanqui 1990, pp. 33–38 for ayllu organization, Yampara 2001). 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 specialization as the basis for rational action.

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 possible, ni control de la poblacion* (In El Alto, the one gave way to the multiple; thus there is no representation nor control of the population; Zibechi 2006, p. 59, Mamani 2005, 2006b).

3  The struggles sought to counteract the tendency, by the State and the Left, 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 co-existence of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist forms (Gibson-Graham 2006).

4  A type of struggle that emerges from a differentiated set of cultural norms and practices; as such, they can be seen as communal struggles by ethnic groups that seek to perpetuate themselves. What was obtained from the insurrection based on the communal logic was *una sociedad otra* (an other society); the objective was not to control the State, but *organizarse como los poderes de una sociedad otra* (to become organized on the basis of the powers of another society; Zibechi 2006, p. 75), or, as Mamani put it, 'to engage with the State but only to dismantle its rationality in order to imagine another type of social rationality, one capable of disrupting the colonial rationality based on departmental territorial divisions' (2008, p. 25). These are clear statements about a post-statist logic and a non-liberal spatiality (later).

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, p. 127). The perspective just sketched, on the contrary, takes the social relations created from below with the goal of survival as a point of departure and then follows 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' (p. 129). There is always a tension between movement-displacement and movement-institution. At play in the wave of insurrections are veritable *sociedades en movimiento* (societies in movement) rather than *movimientos sociales* (see, e.g. Zibechi 2006, pp. 127−129, Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008). This is an

important distinction that is at the crux of the argument about post-liberalism.[34]

This perspective also implies a different view of power; according to this view, the challenge posed by the popular dynamics is 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 Aguilar 2008, p. 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 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 and naturalized forms of power (see Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008).

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 Aguilar 2008, p. 46). The concept of 'communal system' and communitarian logic makes it possible to delve into the complexity of this question.

## The 'communal system'

The alternative reading of popular struggles proposed by the earlier interpretation suggests that the struggles 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. In one conceptualization, these forms are theorized in terms of a 'communal system.' It is instructive to quote at length the words of one of its proponents, the Aymara sociologist (and first minister of education of the Morales government), Félix Patzi Paco (2004, pp. 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 by 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; as important as the economic dimension is the political dimension; power is not anchored in the individual or a given group, 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 (Paco 2004, p. 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; (2) the decentering 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 interculturality among the various cultural systems (Paco 2004, p. 190). This last point is important, given the tendency to disqualify positions based on a strong view of 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 is not a call for a new hegemony, but for an end to the hegemony of any system, to take leave of the universal of modernity and move into the pluriverse of interculturality, and as a way to build more symmetrical relations among cultures. To achieve this goal requires a significant transformation, perhaps a re-founding of the societies of the continent based on other principles of sociability.[35]

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 not 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.' He places the communal and liberal system as part of the same social space, not as existing separate from each other. As the Colectivo Situaciones put it in its Epilogue to Zibechi's book (2006), 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 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 amplified non-statis modes of cooperation (Colectivo Situaciones 2006, pp. 212, 215). 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 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 assertion of non-modernity in the post-liberal framework assumes a pluriversal perspective; it does not imply a rejection of the ability of subaltern groups to 'be modern' or to function in modern milieux. 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, indigenous groups are not opposed to growth or technology *per se*, in fact they are seen as necessary in some areas of social life, but this growth needs to be seen from the perspective of another rationality, different from the economistic one.

There are important differences around the term 'communal' among Bolivian intellectuals and social movements. Since the early 1980s, the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (THOA) has been embarking 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 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. 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 14 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.[36]

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 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, p. 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, p. 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 a defense of the binarism, of the modern divides. 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. 'Indians' have been historically more open to the pluriverse, as intuited by Rivera Cusicanqui:

> From their very first acts of rebellion [e.g. 1771–1781 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.
>
> (Cusicanqui 2008, p. 4, emphasis added)

Or, as Marisol de la Cadena put it, 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, p. 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 Aguilar 2008, p. 46). It should be clear by now that emancipation within the liberal framework or most 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 has been 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 an experience of emancipation that works on three fronts: decolonization – to transform dominant ideologies of indianism; anti-capitalism; and a transcultural citizenship that goes beyond the frontiers of liberalism and that includes strengthening the communal' (Rojas 2009, p. 9). This means moving towards the decolonial as a 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 and its attempts to control 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, p. 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, p. 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.[37]

## VI. The communal form and relational ontologies (with Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena)[38]

Underlying the discussion of post-liberalism has been the idea that there are cultural worlds that differ from the liberal one. The existence of these worlds has been particularly salient in 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 has been broached in novel ways in the 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.

Stated in anthropological and philosophical terms, many 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 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 '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.[39]

The emergence of relational ontologies disorganizes in a fundamental way the epistemic foundation of modern politics. Dualist ontologies, we propose, are being challenged by the emergent relational ontologies in which there only exist subjects in relation, including the relations between humans and non-humans. To give an example, that nature or the *Pachamama* is endowed with 'rights' in the Ecuadorian Constitution goes 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; the notion is unthinkable within any modern perspective, within which nature is seen as an inert object for humans to appropriate. Its inclusion in the Constitution may thus be seen as an epistemic-political event that disrupts the modern political space because it occurs outside such space, as a challenge to liberalism, capitalism, and the State. Something similar can be said of the notion of *sumaq kawsay* 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. Indigenous claims are usually taken as 'beliefs'; 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 indigeneities,' 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 indigeneities 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' (de al Cadena 2008, p. 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-credible alternatives to what exist by dominant discourses – such as those that have maintained a certain attachment to place, territory, and culture.

The concern with relationality is springing worldwide 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, non-dualist and relational ontologies, emergence and self-organization, horizontality, hybridity, virtuality, and the like.[40] 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 constitute 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 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 Aguilar 2008, 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 a 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 pervading the progressive states, as we have seen, despite important openings. The situation is more dire, of course, if one considers regimes like those of Mexico, Perú, and Colombia which, in their imposition of a brutal form of neo-liberal modernity, repress with particular virulence the mobilization of relational ontologies by indigenous, peasant, 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? Post-capitalism and post-liberalism would require first and foremost a critique of the cultural regime of the individual, its alleged autonomy and separation from community. Mired in the production of 'modern citizens' – that is, individuals that produce, consume, and make decisions out of their own free will – the State seems unable to tackle any re-composition of the cultural production of persons and communities. One of the greatest achievements of neo-liberalism 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 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 [see Plumwood (2002) for a forceful argument in this regard].

The emergence of relationality also makes apparent the arbitrariness of the spatial orders deployed by liberalism. The neo-liberal reforms to promote decentralization and territorial reorganization in the 1980s and 1990s were aimed at further rationalizing long-standing forms of territoriality in terms of

pre-constituted political divisions (nation states, departments, provinces, municipalities), without substantial mutation. The wave of collective territories and collective rights for ethnic groups enabled in part by the reforms of that period, however, signaled the possibility to move in a different direction. Non-liberal territorialities have of course always been in existence [see, for example Yampara (2001) and Rivera Cusicanqui (1990) for explanations of the cultural-spatial organization of the ayllus, sharply contrasting with modern ones], and they are coming to the fore with greater acuity. This path towards non-liberal territorialities could be helped along by the progressive governments; Hugo Chávez' 'new geometry of power' potentially aims in this direction. 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 kind of relational thinking that emphasizes first, that 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 calls for a politics of responsibility towards those connections that shape our lives and places. This last aspect is what Massey calls 'geographies of responsibility'; it highlights the ethics of connectedness that follow from any relational conception, and which calls on us to act responsibly towards those entities with which we are connected, human and not (Massey 2004).

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 these 'wider geographies of construction' (Massey 2004, p. 11). It is important 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, p. 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 (see Santos 2007b); the liberal desire for an alternative blueprint should be avoided. The geographies of responsibility that emerge from relationality link 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 interculturality 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, liberal spatiality and modernity's politics of responsibility might indeed be collapsing. They need 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, p. 189).

The emphasis on the constructed – historical and spatial – character of every place and community is also a deterrent against essentialized readings of community. 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. 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 can be seen 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 individual autonomy and rights; and to question the exclusions and oppressions that might be embedded in particular constructions of subaltern identities, 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 Castillo 2009, p. 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 (Hernández Castillo 2009, p. 9, see also Speed *et al.* 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 and 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. 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 talking 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 that 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 2010).[41]

To get back to relational ontologies and to conclude this section. As understood by its indigenous proponents, and partially adopted by the State, interculturality calls into question the 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. This is why the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions should be seen as important attempts at re-founding state and society, besides ending with the neo-liberal 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-multiculturalism (Walsh 2009b, p. 231), or falling back from 'the pluri' to 'the multi.' Taken together, Walsh argues (2009b, p. 232), interculturality, decoloniality, and the *buen vivir* have the potential to lead to novel designs for society, the State, and life for everybody, including the relation between humans and nature. To quote from Walsh's conclusion:

> 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.
>
> (Walsh 2009b, pp. 235, 212)

## 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 a move forward towards a veritable change of epoch – a *Pachakuti* – to lean once more on Rafael Correa's inaugural speech formulation. If one is to heed the opinion of right wing think-thanks in Washington and in the region, the Left turn is already nearing its end and a decided return to modern values against the 'barbarism' of the last decade is in sight.[42]

During the period of neo-liberal reforms, the transformation of the State led to the spatiality of decentralization (political reform), multi-culturalism (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 1999–2009 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 interculturality, 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 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 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 post-capitalist 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 lessen authoritarian tendencies and be more open to the autonomous organizing efforts from the popular sectors, women, 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-developmentalist alternative to modernity, if one takes into account certain views and proposals put forth by intellectuals and activists working with organized peasant, indigenous, and poor urban communities. At play in periods of intense mobilization were non-liberal and non-capitalist 'modes of self-regulation of social-coexistence' (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2008, p. 18) based on communal logics that overflowed the parameters of liberalism. At some moments during the 2000–2005 period, what was obtained was *una sociedad en movimiento* that enacted the practices 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 re-emerge at any moment (as it has been happening in Oaxaca and Chiapas, and with the indigenous Minga in Colombia).

Latin America is stirring up a new politics of the virtual, of 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. 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 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.[43]

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 elusive 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 to dignify and protect human and non-human life and to 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?

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

1    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 and constitutional reforms. The practices of the progressive states are susceptible to being examined through frameworks such as those of biopolitics and 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 contested (used by the Bolivian right, for instance, to preserve privilege), I have in mind the meaning given 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 Maturana 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 and Osterweil (2009) for a discussion of this notion]. Third, I should make it clear that this paper does not deal with the traditions of liberalism or its many forms to any significant extent. This is not the point of the paper; rather, I follow the way in which 'liberalism' is used currently in certain intellectual debates in the continent. Broadly speaking, the liberal model of economy and politics is seen as emerging in the seventeenth 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 on the meanings of liberalism, see Hindess (2004), who argues that it is important to go beyond standard accounts of liberalism as concerned with regulating the relations between the State and its subjects and the promotion of individual liberty and private property, and even beyond the Foucauldian focus 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 link to capitalism via the market as a 'fundamental instrument of civilization' (p. 34).

2    Remarks made at the event at the Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, August
     22, 2006.

3    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'
     (2008, 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' (p. 74, see also García Linera quoted in Svampa & 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.

4    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 which seeks to break away from imperialist
     domination.

5    For a global treatment of the rise and expansion of neo-liberalism, see the
     excellent book by Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), which contains
     well-documented accounts of neo-liberalism in the countries of the Southern
     Cone.

6    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,' University of North Carolina (UNC)-Duke
     Consortium in Latin American Studies, February 6, 2006.

7    In some indigenous narratives, the creation of form is seen as the passage
     from 'indistinction' to 'distinction' [see, for example, Blaser (in press) for
     the case of the Yshiro of Paraguay].

8    This is a very incomplete statement on what is a complex debate involving at
     least four positions: (a) modernity as a universal process of European origin
     (intra-Euro/American discourses); (b) alternative modernities (locally-
     specific variations of the same universal modernity); (c) multiple moder-
     nities, that is, modernity as multiplicity without a single origin or cultural
     home (Grossberg 2008); (d) modernity/Coloniality, which points out the
     inextricable entanglement of modernity with the colonial classification of
     peoples into hierarchies, and the possibility of 'alternatives to modernity' or
     transmodernity (e.g. Mignolo & Escobar 2010, Mignolo 2000). For a recent
     statement of the debate, particularly between Grossberg and Blaser, see
     Blaser (forthcoming).

9    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, and Osterweil's PhD dissertation (2009) for a compre-
     hensive development of it for the Italian case.

10    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. Many of their works are still unpublished papers which I obtained directly from the authors. A second set of sources 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 Salas (2007). 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.

11    For the development plan, see http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/gobier no_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 Minis-terio del Poder Popular para la Economía Comunal: http://www.minec. gob.ve/

12    The frameworks for social economy, endogenous development, and popular economy were developed by specialized teams in various ministries. In his in-depth discussion on 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 shaping the concept; for Parker, what emerged 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 bright and dedicated group of experts 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 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.

13    See also www.venezuelatoday.org/05-05-31_es.htm for figures on state expenditure.

14    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 (2006) formulation of the diverse economy and post-capitalist politics. This is a research I have not done, and to this extent what I say about Venezuela's 'post-capitalism' 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 in 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 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. '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), 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).

15    See the special issue of the *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales* vol. 14, no. 1, 2008, devoted to 'Dynamics of Participatory Democracy in Venezuela,' edited by Margarita López Maya. This includes an analysis of the capacity of the high-profile technical water committees to contribute to the revolutionary process based on two years of research (Maya 2008a).

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

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

18    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 critically at the process.

19    In a meeting in 2006 in Caracas with representatives of social movements in which I participated, those from women's and feminist organizations echoed Espina's concern with the paucity of the feminist debate on the political process of the revolution. 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*.

20    According to Alberto Acosta, although Correa's mining law is a significant improvement in relation to the existing ones, it violates some aspects of the

Constitution. Correa's agrarian policies favor large agribusiness and the use of agrochemicals. In both areas, then, the improvements are undermined by a lack of coherence between actual policies and the socialist principles (interview in Quito, August 18, 2009).

21 For presentation and analysis of the notions of buen vivir, rights of nature, and plurinationality, see the useful short volumes by Acosta and Martínez (2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

22 '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).

23 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 easing 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 a post-petroleum economy, climate justice and the ecological debt owed by the North to the South, and is supported by President Correa. 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 21st century, where the generation of value, not only of commodities, is compensated' (Correa 2007). For information on the Yasuní proposals, see http://www.sosyasuni. org/en/; www.amazoniaporlavida.org; oilwatch.org; Martínez Alier (2007); Acosta et al. (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.

24 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, 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 a new constitution, composed of 411 articles, approved by the required two-thirds of the vote on December 9, 2007, causing riots in Sucre and other eastern and southern departments of the 'Media Luna' (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 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).

25    See Medina (2001) for an early attempt to establish a dialogue between dualist Western visions of development and the holistic *suma qamaña*; see also Yampara (2001) for a thorough elaboration of this notion in the context of a particular Aymara community.

26    In speaking of 'élites enfermas,' Mamani counters dominant representations of the indigenous majority as 'diseased.' On the autonomy declared by the Santa Cruz providence and the re-organization of the *oligarquía camba*, see the extended discussion by Patzi Paco (2007, pp. 299–319); see also Stefanoni (2007). The political economy of resource control underlying the right's opposition is well documented in Weisbrot and Sandoval (2008b).

27    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' (Cusicanqui 1990, p. 13). For a book-length presentation of the territorial, organizational, and cultural dimensions of a particular ayllu as a cultural model, see the excellent work by Yampara (2001).

28    See Hylton and Thompson (2007, p. 7), following Bolivian political theorist René Zavaleta Mercado.

29    For background on the neo-liberal period and the meaning of popular and indigenous struggles see, besides Hylton and Thompson (2007), Postero (2007), Crabtree and Whitehead (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; 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 Investigacion Estrategica en Bolivia, PIEB y Revista TINKAZOS: http://pieb.com.bo/

30    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 compilation of his writings by Pablo Stefanoni (2007) and García Linera (2008).

31    The interpretation explained in this section is proposed by a number of intellectuals and activists, including 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 in their approaches. It is interesting to note that this interpretation differs significantly from most 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 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 geopolitics of knowledge that needs to be made visible and examined. A salient feature of this geopolitics is the visibility of Aymara and other indigenous intellectuals and researchers (such as Mamani, Patzi, Simón Yampara, and some members of THOA), who are crafting an alternative interpretive framework.

32  Mamani 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, p. 25).

33  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, p. 15)

34  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: pp. 75, 82; he also draws on some complex notions, such as how movements create forms of coherence and non-linear social dynamics from below.) Emancipatory mobilizations run counter to the search for 'articulations' or unification of struggles pursued from conventional enunciative positions. Finally, it should be stressed that these authors' interpretations are based on a close reading of the day-to-day and insurrectionary moments of mobilization over the 2000–2005 period.

35  Patzi's conceptual framework includes a distinction between 'system' and 'environment' that recalls similar views by Maturana and Varela and other systems theorists.

36  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 (Osco 2000), and Yamila Gutiérrez Callisaya, 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 failed to move 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).

37    This in no way should be read as meaning that the Left governments should not be supported. It is my personal credo that they should be supported and defended; indeed, it is crucial to do so. But the debate about them is as important. 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 by Left thinking. For some, Left thinking precludes the MAS from understanding the indigenous struggle as more than a political flag (una banderita para ganar; Quispe 2008, p. 30). Mamani faults García Linera's negotiation in the process of the Constituent Assembly as a mistake (2008, p. 26). In this way, the vision and politics of decolonization announced during the initial months of Morales' government have been progressively compromised by Morales' power circle; 'it would seem' – Patzi concludes in examining his own short-lasting attempt at decolonizing the educational structures as Morales' Minister of Education and Culture in 2006 – that 'Evo Morales is no longer interested in profound transforma- tions' (Paco 2007, p. 346). García Linera describes his approach as 'the dialectic between movement and the State, between social energy and the objectification of such energy' (2007, p. 159). The perspective of 'societies on movement' cannot be accommodated within dialectic thought.

38    The ideas in this section are part of a collective project with Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser. I use the first person plural for this reason. See Blaser et al. (2009), de la Cadena (2008), Blaser (in press), Escobar (in press).

39    I should make it clear that I use ontology more in a 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 produce socio-natural worlds of 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.

40    Three important pioneers in the study of relationality have been Tim Ingold, Marilyn Strathern, and Philippe Descola, whose works continue to be extremely relevant. Today, 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 (in press) for a fuller explanation and references.

41    The last two aspects are just beginning to be tackled. There is, of course, 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, pp. 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 traditional authorities must include men and 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, p. 59; Rivera Cusicanqui (1990) on the dual complementarity among Aymara communities). On decolonial feminisms, see Suárez Navaz and Hernández (2008). This volume establishes a dialogue among feminisms of the South partly through a rethinking of post-colonial 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 (2010) expands the feminist notion of 'inter-sectionality' by looking at the inter-connections not just between race, gender, and sexuality but by placing them within the modern/colonial world system and the ongoing debates to both decolonize imperial knowledge and generate de-colonial knowledge.

42    During the second neo-conservative conclave in Rosario, Argentina (September 2009) several speakers referred to 'the battle between civilization and barbarism' under way, in their view, in Latin America, and which they of course see as being won by the *civilización occidental*, much as in the nineteenth century. Among those in attendance was former Spanish primer minister Aznar and Alvaro Vargas Llosa.

43    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, p. 3). What is most interesting in these cases, as Zibechi goes on to say, is that those deploying the new practices are often leftists 'who know the ins and outs of the popular sectors' because of their experience in resistance movements against neo-liberalism. 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 neo-liberal model. Once those ties and the autonomous wisdom that was generated by the social movements disappear, the people will be much more easily controlled' (p. 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 about 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 http://www.countercartographies.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=36&Itemid=32

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