

Complementary and conflicting transformation projects in heterogeneous societies

Edgardo Lander¹

During the decades of neoliberalism, the weakening of nation states - especially those of the global South, but most recently also of the North - has been a fundamental neoliberal strategy geared at making societies less democratic and thereby more vulnerable and helpless in the face of global markets. Under these conditions, in many of the debates of the Latin American left, the recovery of the state has been considered a necessity for strengthening national sovereignty, for recovering the public good, and for the very possibility of any significant societal change. Without material, symbolic, and institutional state resources, any attempt at societal change could be more easily halted and/or defeated by privileged national/international interests. However, this leads to severe contradictions, given that these very institutional state frameworks have historically operated as instruments and structures for the reproduction of the existing relationships of colonial domination and exploitation.

In his classic formulation, James O'Connor (1973) stated that the liberal capitalist state is inherently penetrated by tensions and contradictions. It operates not only as an instrument of capital accumulation, but also guarantees the legitimization of capitalist society. This state complexity becomes even greater in the peripheral countries of the world system. Latin American states have been, and fundamentally continue to be, *monocultural colonial states* in heterogeneous and pluricultural societies.¹ To this historical heritage has been added decades of neoliberal policies geared towards the dismantling of the state. By giving full priority to the demands of accumulation over democratic legitimacy, these states were largely privatised and placed directly at the service of capital. Additionally, to different degrees, these states have been characterised as inefficient, clientelistic, infiltrated with corruption, and, even in the best of cases, as having weak representative democracies that have excluded large proportions of the population. This raises important questions in relation to the role these states could play in enabling social change in Latin American societies. Are these states simply obstacles to change, or can they in some way further a transformative agenda?

In this paper, these contradictions and tensions will be explored in the context of the current processes of change in the three South American countries with the most radical agendas for societal change, countries that in recent years have

carried out ambitious constitutional transformations, namely Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009).

The state in multiple and heterogeneous processes of change

The state's actions in the current processes of change in the continent are affected by strong and distinct tensions. The reflections made in this paper about these tensions relate to three fundamental areas: the complex *historical-structural heterogeneity*² of these societies; the heterogeneity and internal contradictions of states that do not constitute unitary bodies, but rather complex territories in dispute; and the presence of various transformation logics and partially complementary, partially contradictory projects for change that are simultaneously played out in these political processes.

All this must be seen in the context of profound transformations in global patterns of accumulation and hegemonic structures.

Revolutionary transformational projects identified with socialism over the past two centuries were supported by theories of progress, by faith in the ascending linearity of historical development, and the claim that it was possible to guide the whole of society in one direction, towards a predefined horizon, the general attributes of which were considered to be known. The necessity of a vanguard capable of foreshadowing future society was a part of the same idea of revolution. Although the capitalist societies that were confronted were recognised as complex and heterogeneous, the notion of a principal contradiction (capital/labour or bourgeoisie/proletariat) led to an attempt to articulate all the contradictions of society and the direction of their processes of transformation around a single main axis. Moreover, these projects on the whole operated within the pattern of Western civilisation and of unlimited confidence in progress.

The current worldwide processes of social transformation face radically different historical contexts. The dominant logic of modern politics has suffered an implosion as a result of the crisis of Western monocultural modernity and its idea of progress. This has become particularly visible in South American politics over the last decades and is increasingly evident both in the impossibility of endless growth on a planet whose limited carrying capacity has been exceeded, and by the strong presence of other societal options that radically deny the 'end of history' and reject the belief in liberal capitalist society as the only possible historical option, as the inevitable destiny of all humankind.

Today's processes, projects, and imaginaries of change cannot be reduced to any single unitary logic.

The *internal* heterogeneity of the processes of change has been conceptualised in many ways. According to Arturo Escobar: "the current conjuncture can be said to be defined by two processes: the crisis of the neoliberal model of the past three decades; and the crisis of the project of bringing about modernity in the continent since the Conquest" (Escobar 2010: 3). According to this view, the contemporary transformations move beyond the left-right continuum in which the politics of the Western world have operated in the last two centuries. Escobar considers that the proposal by Walter Mignolo is a more apt formulation of these political forms. Mignolo speaks 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" (Escobar 2010: 6).

According to Raúl Zibechi, in Latin America today, "political and social reality is not only shaped by a single scenario but by three of them": the struggle to overcome the dominance of the United States, to overcome capitalism, and to overcome development (Zibechi 2010, translation AN/SN). This involves the simultaneous presence of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist tendencies and the search for alternatives to development. It would make sense to add at least a fourth scenario or direction for societal change. This would refer to national-popular projects that give priority to industrialisation, democratisation, inclusion, and redistribution, which together could be characterised as the pending tasks of the project to establish national democratic states, an aspiration that is still operative in these societies. It is not a question of fully complementary or necessarily mutually-exclusive historical alternatives or future projects, but of tendencies and imaginaries that are closely intertwined in current political confrontations.

As Escobar indicates, the terms used for the current processes of change illustrate this extraordinary complexity: "*Socialismo del siglo XXI* [21st century socialism], plurinationality, interculturality, direct and substantive democracy, *revolucion ciudadana*, [citizens revolution] endogenous development centered on the *buen vivir* [good life] of the people, territorial and cultural autonomy, and decolonial projects towards post-liberal societies" (Escobar 2010: 2, emphasis orig.).

These different projects condition the tensions and confrontations of these processes of change and are simultaneously present in public discourses and in some ways articulated in the government proposals of these countries. However, at different junctures, one or another of these central threads may acquire special relevance or urgency. The effect of this is that at times other dimensions are

put on a back burner, and can thus lose visibility either in public debate or in governmental priorities.

A major focus of the current political strife is built around conflicts between the popular democratic processes, on the one hand, and the interests of privileged national and transnational sectors, on the other. These confrontations may be understood as the classical opposition between left and right, or of popular national struggles against an exclusionary social order. These agendas often appear associated with socialist horizons. In this national-popular logic the priorities are national sovereignty, democratisation and the redistribution of wealth. This is associated with the idea of development, with a demand for a stronger state, and with key issues such as national control of the commons as well as struggles for land distribution and the pursuit of greater levels of equality.

In the decolonial logic the main priorities are plurinationality, the recognition of diversity, the sovereignty of indigenous people over their own territories, autonomy of peoples, communities and movements, judicial pluralism, the rejection of the developmental state and extractivism, as well as the recognition of the rights of Mother Earth. The decolonial struggle points towards a deep social transformation that questions not only capitalism but the dominant Western patterns of production and knowledge. This is best captured in the ideas of *vivir bien* or *buen vivir*, a term in Spanish that can be translated as “living well,” but with a distinctive meaning in the Latin American and particularly indigenous context (Mamani 2010).

The future of these processes of change depends on whether or not these different logics of social transformation manage to articulate and supplement each other. The political projects associated with the idea of socialism are not easily compatible with the historical projects of decolonisation: they correspond to different histories, theories, socio-political subjects, as well as different notions about a desirable future. On the part of those who defend the validity of a form of socialism, this requires a penetrating criticism of the experience of 20th century socialism and of the struggles of the Latin American left of the last century, in particular its limited confrontation with patriarchy, its monocultural or colonial character components, and its developmentalist, predatory conception of a better future.

These different heritages can become complementary parts of the same heterogeneous, non-linear, plural and democratic process of social transformation only through complex negotiations, difficult processes of dialogue, alliance building and – above all – dynamics of reciprocal learning and reflexive self-questioning

within each of these political/cultural traditions. The inevitable conflicts arising from settling on priorities have to be dealt with by non-violent means.

If these various transformative logics (popular-national, socialist, decolonial) are politically constructed as contradictory or antagonistic, the result can only lead to the defeat of these projects of change, thereby consolidating or strengthening capitalist domination, and accelerating the environmental crisis of the planet. With the current fissiporous state of popular movements, with their profound political and cultural heterogeneity, it certainly does not seem likely that one of these projects might achieve hegemony over the whole of society.

The tensions between these logics or projects of change outlined above (popular-national, socialist, decolonial) are also present within the state itself: in the ideas and actions of those politicians leading these processes of change and in the claims and demands made of the government by the most diverse sectors of society. Likewise, these tensions and perspectives exist in different expressions in the popular classes and even operate within the same subjects and/or movements, giving priority to some dimensions over others, depending on the situation. These multiple demands addressed to the state cannot be realised simultaneously. They constitute sources of permanent tensions and conflicts which require constant negotiations. There are, therefore, calls to – variously – recover the state, strengthen the state, democratise the state, decolonise the state, make the state an instrument of transformation, maintain the autonomy of the movements and organisations with regard to the state, ensure sovereign control of the commons and their use for the collective benefit, and confront an extractivist economy based on the export of unprocessed commodities.

Extractivism and modes of insertion in the global market

One of the issues around which these tensions have become more evident since the new constitutions came into force has been that of extractivism and the modes of insertion of these countries in the global economy. Throughout Latin America today many of the main popular struggles are related to the defence of territories against oil exploitation, the accelerated expansion of single-crop farming (monocultures), and large-scale open-pit mining. These issues are particularly crucial in Ecuador and Bolivia, where the organised struggles of indigenous people and movements have played such a central role and where the new constitutions or subsequent legislation established the rights of nature, or Mother Earth, for the first time in history. Given the limits of the planet and the global environmental crisis threatening the conditions for the reproduction of life

- or at least human life,- it is evident that there is no possibility of any significant social transformation if alternatives to the predatory order of unlimited economic growth are not a central component.

As was pointed out earlier, the current processes of change in Latin America have occurred after decades of neoliberal policies, hallmarked by privatisations, the reduction of the public sphere and the opening of economies to global markets. It was precisely the popular struggles against neoliberalism and their consequences - mobilisation against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and other free trade agreements, overthrowing neoliberal presidents etc. - and the accumulated political capacity generated by these disputes, that made the electoral victories of the current so-called 'progressive' or left-wing governments possible. However, this did not imply that the deep economic, political, and cultural transformations caused by neoliberalism ceased to be present. These effects included more unequal societies, less solidarity, and less democracy; more unstable countries; more open economies and the weakening of productive processes directed at the internal market. This reinforced both the economic and political roles of the entrepreneurial sectors connected with primary export activities, finance and, in general, the groups more directly associated with the external sector of these economies.

'Progressive' or left-wing governments are likewise in a very different global economic and geopolitical context from the years when the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) used to defend the need for import substitution. The political and economic tools available to them now are much more limited. New conditions have been created by neoliberal globalisation. Given the opening of the markets created by the new global institutions - such as the WTO and the various multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements,- as well as the vast differences both in salaries and in the existing productivity in the world today (especially *vis-a-vis* China), the obstacles confronting any attempt to boost industrial politics are formidable, particularly in small countries with limited internal markets. The steps taken towards productive regional integration have until now clearly been insufficient and tend to benefit large economies, especially that of Brazil.

The new accumulation patterns of capital have stressed the colonial forms of the international division of labour and the international division of so-called 'nature'. This model of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2004), has reaffirmed the roles of Africa and Latin America as suppliers of primary goods, of agricultural, energy and mining *commodities*. The tendencies towards the deepening of extractivism present in the whole region have to be regarded within

the context of these structural conditions of global capitalism, which can be properly characterised as processes of re-colonising the planet.

All of this has acquired the shape of a new geoculture of the planet. The cultural patterns and social beliefs characteristic of a globalised individualist and consumer culture ('possessive individualism') spread by the global corporate culture industry, in particular from the United States, are a fundamental part of this logic of re-colonisation and have likewise become serious obstacles in the search for alternatives.

Any process of significant change in these societies necessarily requires profound ruptures with these forms of insertion in the world market, the consequences of which are not only economic. Without these ruptures the current colonial insertions will consolidate, strengthening the internal economic, political and cultural bases – as well as state structures – of this pattern of accumulation, creating even greater obstacles for anti-capitalism for progressive alternatives to development, and even the possibility of decolonial transformations.

Several years after these governments were elected - more than a decade in the case of Venezuela - it seems clear that extractivism and the logic of primary exports have been continuously reinforced. In this sense, there are no significant differences between the so-called 'progressive' or left-wing governments and the neoliberal governments. In almost all countries of Latin America, the share of primary goods in the total value of exports has increased in the last decade, in most cases significantly. With regard to the whole continent, the proportion of primary products in the total value of exports grew from 41.1% in 2002, to 52.9% in 2009 (CEPAL 2010: 105). This tendency has been evident even in Brazil, the most industrialised country in the continent, where the percentage of primary goods relative to the total value of exports increased from 47.4% in 2002 to 60.9% in 2009 (*ibid.*: 105).

The export of primary goods has become a direct source of relatively abundant public income, which could not be obtained through other means. The increasingly significant role of China in global geopolitics is contributing to the consolidation of this mode of insertion in the world market (Bridges 2009). Among other paradoxes concerning these South American political processes is the way in which an anti-imperialist discourse (i.e. that of the United States or the EU) is used to justify steps that tend to consolidate the subordination to another global capitalist power: China.

Trade between Latin America and China depends even more on primary

products than does trade with the United States and Europe: Exports from Latin America to China are almost exclusively based on extraction and intensive use of natural resources. These are exported with very low or no processing as in the case of soya, fish-meal, grapes, sugar and copper. This has led to strong pressure on ecosystems, removal of the natural resources of Latin American territory (farmland, biodiversity, water, fish resources and energy resources) and undermined the sovereignty of local communities over their natural resources and their territories and the services they supply (food, water, etc.). This is particularly irreversible in the case of mining. (Larrain et al. 2005: 47)

In the three countries, there is an important and growing distance between, on the one hand, the discourses and the legal texts referring to the rights of nature and the critique of development, and on the other hand, the content of some of the main political and economic decisions.

Obviously, it is impossible to demand from the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, or Bolivia the closure of their wells, oil, and gas pipelines, and that they stop exporting hydrocarbons overnight. However, if the target is to change the productive model based on extractivism, clear and effective decisions have to be taken today that are geared towards a *transition* to productive models that overcome extractivism. There have so far been very few signs in this regard. Furthermore, in all three countries the government discourse has taken an increasingly developmentalist and extractivist tone.

This distance between discourses, projects, norms, and laws, on the one hand, and some of the main political/economic decisions, on the other, has led to important confrontations in these three countries. A notorious example was the – strongly opposed – decision in Bolivia to open large parts of the Amazon region for the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons (Morales Ayma 2010), a decision taken almost simultaneously with the introduction of the *Law of Rights of Nature* in the legislative assembly. The subsequent decisions of the Bolivian government regarding the construction of a motorway through the indigenous territory of Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécore (TIPNIS), in spite of the firm opposition of its indigenous inhabitants, have been even more conflictual. This project has produced deep divisions in Bolivian society, a very controversial national debate, and conflicting positions between popular movements and organisations with different visions in relation to what is at stake (Prada Alcoreza 2010a, 2010b; 2010c; Arkonada 2011; Toer/Montero 2012; Mamani Ramírez 2012).

In Ecuador the Mining Law – portrayed by indigenous and environmental

organisations as directly breaching a constitution that grants rights to 'nature' for the first time (CONAIE 2009) - is only one of many disputes between the government of President Rafael Correa and indigenous and environmental organisations within the context of the pro-developmental policies which have characterised that government.³

Of all these countries, anti-developmental and decolonial disputes have the least public presence in Venezuela. Accentuating the country's century-old oil dependency, this product accounted for 95% of the total value of exports in 2010 (Banco Central de Venezuela 2011). This phenomenon is not just the result of the inevitable inertia caused by this historic centrality of oil (in the economy, the political system, and the Venezuelan State), nor can it be explained as a result of a temporary statistical distortion caused by high oil prices in the international market. It also corresponds to the productive model proposed as an indispensable condition to make 21st century socialism possible.

During the last decade, a sustained policy of investments and partnerships with international – state-owned and private – companies, both in gas and oil, was carried out with the aim of considerably increasing production. According to the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Venezuela has 296 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, the largest in the world. Those reserves represent a quarter of OPEC members' total reserves, and 20% of global oil reserves, the bulk of which are in the Orinoco oil belt (OPEC 2011: 11, 22-23) . According to Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. : The Orinoco oil belt is situated in the southern part of the Guárico, Anzoátegui and Monagas regions; forming a huge reservoir with a geographical area of approximately 55,000 km², with superficial hydrocarbon-bearing sand covering about 12,000 km². It contains accumulations of heavy crude and extra-heavy crude oil with an average gravity of 8.6° API. (PDVSA 2010: 92). Furthermore, Venezuela also has two-thirds of the total gas reserves in the whole of Latin America

Agreements were entered into for the quantification and certification of the reserves of the Orinoco belt (ibid.: 93) with 28 companies from 21 countries, including Russia, China, the United States, France, Japan, Brazil, Spain, Iran, India, Norway, and South Africa. In the Strategic Plans for Gas Development, apart from investments by US corporations, there were investments by corporations from Italy (ENI) and Norway (STATOIL) (see PDVSA n/y).

Official announcements of projected future production levels have changed over time. According to former President Hugo Chávez, Venezuela would double its production between 2011 and 2021, and will be able to produce six million

barrels of crude oil a day. “We estimate a daily production of six million 120 thousand barrels a day by 2021 [...] The price of this barrel will be about 200 dollars,” which will be used for the purpose of sustaining “the development of a world power, namely, the Venezuela motherland” (RNV 2011). In January 2012, the president declared that a daily production of 10 million barrels would be achieved by “around 2030” (Durand 2012).

In order to accomplish this increase in production, a large proportion of the national territory has been opened for oil and gas exploitation, including huge areas of the territorial waters (Red Alerta Petrolera-Orinoco Oilwatch 2005). Bearing in mind the extraordinary magnitude of reserves, the planned increase in the scale of production, and the complex technology required to extract these heavy and extra-heavy crude oils, and oil from the hydrocarbon-bearing sands of the Orinoco belt, massive investments by transnational corporations from all over the world have been planned in the form of joint ventures with the state owned PDVSA. The characteristics of these crude oils inevitably imply a greater environmental and socio-cultural impact than that involved in the exploitation of traditional lighter crude oils.

The centrality given to hydrocarbon in the production model of the country is expressly found in the first national plan for development, conceived as a project leading to socialism: the *Simón Bolívar National Project* (República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Presidencia 2007). One of the seven central themes or targets defining this development project is to make Venezuela a “world energy power”. According to this project: “Oil will continue to be decisive in gaining financial resources from abroad, in generating productive internal investments, in meeting the country’s own needs for energy, and in consolidating the Socialist Productive Model” (ibid.).

The politics relating to the internal market are an expression of the fundamental continuity in the development model and energy pattern based on oil. A litre of ‘ecological’ gasoline with the highest octane level is sold in Venezuela at a price of between two and three cents (US\$). This massive subsidy has inevitably promoted a sustained increase in the consumption of hydrocarbons in the country, thus reinforcing energy waste and a rentier culture.

The most significant foreign investments of recent years have been Chinese. In response to the unquenchable thirst of the Chinese economy for a reliable and growing supply of hydrocarbons, Rafael Ramírez - the Minister of Energy and Petroleum - announced that the Venezuelan government had signed contracts to the value of \$32 billion (Aporrea 2011).

In September 2010 the law authorising the most important of these contracts was published. China would provide a \$20 billion credit line over ten years China to Venezuela, half of which would be in Chinese renminbi yuan. Venezuela agreed to supply China with between 200,000 and 250,000 barrels of oil every day for the first two years and thereafter no less than 300,000 barrels daily until the loan has been repaid. Neither the barrel-price of the oil, nor the interest rate of the loan are specified in the contract. The latter “will be jointly determined by the lender and the borrower, based on direct negotiations and market principles” (Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela 2010). These futures sales – used to finance current expenses or investments – not only consolidate a long-term dependency on oil, but also generate structural demands for increased levels of production over time, if only to maintain the same levels of fiscal income.

President Hugo Chávez talked about this relationship with China in the following terms: “I think that China is showing the world that it will be the leading world power. This is good for the world because it is becoming a great world power without knocking down, invading or blocking anybody, without knocking down peoples or imposing leonine conditions: without breaching the sovereignty of the peoples. With modesty, we say, all the oil that China will need for its growth and consolidation as a great world power, and to continue to improve the living conditions of its people, is here - not only crude oil, but also iron” (Venezolana de Televisión 2010).

Processes of change in democracy

Among the fundamental challenges of the current processes of change are demands for deep cultural transformations, and the establishment of new state forms and institutions that can articulate these plural societies within the current national territorial limits. These frontiers, which completely ignore previous history and the entire socio-cultural reality that existed before the arrival of the colonisers, have been assumed as fixed by the governments of these three countries. The integrity of these national territories has only been questioned by right-wing opposition movements when they have found it convenient to use separatist threats as a political weapon. This implies that the processes of change have to operate within the deep historical, structural heterogeneity existing within these national territories. This is what the ideas of plurinationality, interculturalism, and decolonialism signpost (Walsh 2008).

These new/other political-cultural forms will only be possible if built democratically, both for pragmatic political reasons and for much more

fundamental reasons, related to the desired type of future society. The current processes of change in the continent have been carried out by means of elections. This implies that the continuity of these governments is only possible through the preservation of political legitimacy and majority electoral support (unless a decision is made to interrupt the current constitutional frameworks, which does not seem to be on the agenda). In this context, public policies face the challenge of contributing to the transformation of the beliefs and shared common sense of majorities without distancing themselves too much from that shared common sense, since that would lead to electoral defeat.

History has taught us what happens when a state – against the will of large sectors of the population – tries by force to impose political transformation and radical reorganisation of society. The dramatic impacts of the authoritarian imposition of the utopian collectivisation of the Soviet farms, or of the Cultural Revolution in China are well known. These not only had extraordinarily high human costs but contributed to the loss of legitimacy of the revolutionary projects and severely undermined processes of transformation towards a post-capitalist society. There are severe limits to the actions that can be undertaken by the state in its quest to transform society. Pretending to substitute the complex and necessarily slow transformations and intercultural negotiations of deeply heterogeneous societies with the raw use of state power has well-known results. Perhaps this is one of the fundamental lessons of the revolutionary processes of the last century. The state, assumed as the subject or principal agent of transformation, ultimately imposes authoritarianism, thereby undermining the possibilities for building a democratic society.

An exceptional historic situation

Latin America is at an extraordinary, historic juncture. The so-called ‘progressive’ and left governments were elected as a result of prolonged processes of broad-based struggles and popular mobilisations – for democracy and against neoliberalism – struggles in which indigenous organisations played a key role. These are not right-wing governments, in spite of the existing continuity in some areas of public policies (in particular in the economic model of exporting unprocessed commodities), and in spite of the less-than-democratic intolerance in how they reply to their critics. But above all, and beyond the extraordinary importance that the head of state has in each of these cases, they are not monolithic governments. They are governments and states in dispute. Owing to their origin and composition, they are governments crossed by tensions, contradictions, and a multiplicity of tendencies. The popular, peasant, and indigenous organisations – which

contributed through their mobilizations to the election of these governments and are now disappointed with their policies – are now challenged to identify these tendencies and to look for allies in order to strengthen the transformational trends and to stop those that boost monocultural developmentalism. However, total confrontation with these governments, as if they were nothing more than a continuation of the policies and basic orientations of previous governments, can only contribute to reducing the capacity to influence their policies.

Today, the obstacles confronted in the struggle for the rights of the indigenous peoples and the rights of nature are not only found in governments and in public policies. As argued in this paper, the culture of these societies is deeply heterogeneous. In spite of the results of the referenda approving the new constitution, the ideas of *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña* (with all their potential as an alternative civilisation) cannot be assumed today to express a common understanding shared by the majority of the inhabitants of these countries. Five centuries of colonialism and three decades of neoliberalism have left deep footprints. The corporate media continues to play a fundamental role in the reproduction of possessive individualism, identifying *Buen Vivir* with US patterns of material consumption.

Many sectors of the excluded population, without access to the basic material conditions necessary for a dignified life, demand development, employment, public health programmes, education, and social security from these governments. Nor are the contradictions between the aspirations of indigenous people and government policies clear-cut and simple. This is particularly the case when the social programmes of these governments reach the bases of the indigenous organisations, improving their everyday lives, and contribute to creating a split between the base and the more politicised and demanding leadership of these organisations in terms of how they view the government. These contradictions and tensions also take place within indigenous peoples and communities. These are also heterogeneous and have been deeply impacted by colonial history. If the leadership of the organisations does not identify these tensions within their own ranks, the door is open for the welfare politics of the governments (even in the case of Venezuela, where these are expressly modernising and colonising policies) to undermine the bases of such organisations.

There are some severe shortcomings, limitations, and even serious setbacks in these processes of change that can be attributed to the inertia of State institutions, and the bureaucratic and political resistance taking place within the State. Added to this is the limited capacity - and at times, lack of political will)- of the leaders of these processes in the difficult tasks of, on the one hand, exploring and linking

the complex relationships between immediate administrative and social demands and, on the other, taking the necessary steps in the direction of productive models beyond extractivism and development.

However, the challenges faced are not only found in the need to build political and social consensus, in the lack of political will of the government, or in the structural limitations that the dominant pattern of accumulation imposes. Severe shortcomings are being confronted, both theoretical and in terms of the type of political and social organisations and instruments of democratic, collective public administration appropriate for the desired transformations. There is much more clarity over what needs to be rejected than over the characteristics of the alternative society.

The criticism of development – as an attempt to reorganise and transform peripheral societies in the capitalist-colonial-world-system along the path taken by metropolitan societies – has been made with rigour and depth (Escobar 2007). There are multiple community, local and regional experiences that illustrate that there are ways to live and produce and relate to ‘nature’ that are ‘actually existing’ alternatives to development. However, there is little experience - or theoretical and conceptual elaboration - with regard to the public policies required to deal with the contradictions faced in the process of building alternatives to developmentalism and extractivism. There is a lack of concrete policy proposals of transition that are politically feasible in the short term, and which are capable of leading these societies from development/extractivism to ‘beyond development’. These cannot be invented, they can only arise from multiple, diverse, collective experiences. The various government Ministries, and the so-called ‘development plans’, even if they are called ‘plans for living well’ (SENPLADES 2009), are not the most appropriate instruments for this kind of collective innovation. Their planning and governing tools are not neutral. They are the product of a type of state conceived after the the Second World War in order to ‘develop’ the so-called Third World, according to the monocultural patterns of the West. It is not possible to centrally ‘plan’ what necessarily would have to be an open process of plural and democratic experimentation based on the acknowledgement of the structural heterogeneity of these societies, and on the fact that the old assurances about the characteristics of the society of the future have ceased to exist. The alternative society cannot be technocratically designed or budgeted.

There is much at stake in these processes, not only for Latin America, but in terms of the possibility of advancing alternatives to the predatory logic that is undermining the foundations of life in the planet. In spite of their profound contradictions, these Latin American processes⁴ are where it is possible to the

find the most vigorous alternatives to the pattern of civilisation in crisis. The reversal of these processes would constitute a serious regression for anti-capitalist struggles throughout the world.

Translation by Aida Nelson and Stuart E. Nelson

Notes

1. When I speak of monocultural colonial states, I mean the Latin American states that both during colonial and republican times have colonised these profoundly heterogeneous societies (different peoples, languages, modes of relating to 'nature', etc.). These have – with varying levels of success – attempted to impose a colonial monoculture: one valid form of knowledge, one language, unique forms of property, a unitary legal system, an official religion, a single way of belonging, inclusion and participation (unique model of citizenship).
2. The concept of historical structural heterogeneity was formulated by Aníbal Quijano as part of his critique of Eurocentric and colonial patterns of knowledge that remain hegemonic in contemporary social sciences. With this category, he intends to dismantle the binary categories that presuppose a certain internal homogeneity of each of the parts: primitive/civilised; traditional/modern; oriental/western. According to Quijano, historical, structural heterogeneity is a feature of "all the realms of social existence". There are no homogeneous societies. "That which is really notable in the whole of societal structure is that elements, experiences and products, historically interrupted, varying, distant and heterogeneous, are able to join together in spite of their inconsistencies and their conflicts, in the common framework that binds them in a joint structure." Given its colonial historical experience, it is impossible to understand Latin American societies without a recognition of this historical structural heterogeneity, especially those countries in which the indigenous presence and slavery have been more pronounced (Quijano 2000, translation AN/SN).
3. In spite of the fact that Correa's government had kept high levels of backing in opinion polls, there has been a deep break with the major indigenous and environmental organisations. Evidence of the extremes that this confrontation has reached is the Manifesto of the Conference of Ecuador's Social Movements for Democracy and Life in August 2011, signed by a large number of indigenous, peasant, trade-union and women's organisations of the whole country, in which it is alleged that "Correa's project represents an authoritative and corrupt model of capitalist modernisation" (ABONG 2011).
4. Throughout the paper, references to the 'processes of change' in the three cases analysed

always refer to the societal processes of transformation, not only to the government's project. Thus the continuation and/or deepening of the processes of transformation does not necessarily mean the continuation of the current heads of state or even of their political parties.

References

ABONG – Associação Brasileira de Organizações não Governamentais (2011): Manifiesto del Encuentro de Movimientos Sociales del Ecuador por la Democracia y la vida. In: ABONG, Quito, 9.8.2011. <http://www.abong.org.br/noticias.php?id=4195>, 20.7.2012.

Aporrea (2011): Faja del Orinoco will produce 4 million barrels of oil per day in 2014. In: Aporrea, Caracas, 16.11.2011. <http://www.aporrea.org/energia/n188670.htm>, 17.9.2011.

Arkonada, Katu (2011): TIPNIS, el contradictorio camino del cambio. Quito: ALAI, América Latina en Movimiento, 5.9.2011. <http://alainet.org/active/49173&lang=es>, 8.9.2011.

Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela (2010): Ley aprobatoria del acuerdo entre el gobierno de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y el gobierno de la República Popular China sobre la cooperación para financiamiento a largo plazo. Gaceta No. 39.511, 16.9.2010. Caracas: Gaceta Oficial de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela. http://www.pgr.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&Itemid=4&fch=20100916, 10.7.2012.

Banco Central de Venezuela (2011): Exportaciones e importaciones de bienes y servicios según sectores. Balanza de pagos y otros indicadores del sector externo. Caracas: Banco Central de Venezuela. <http://www.bcv.org.ve/c2/indicadores.asp>, 5.9.2011.

Bridges, Tyler (2009): China's big move into Latin America. In: McClatchy Newspapers, Río de Janeiro, 12.7.2009. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/2009/0712/p06s10-woam.html>, 5.9.2011.

CEPAL (2010): Cuadro 2.2.2.1. Exportaciones de productos primarios según su participación en el total. Anuario Estadístico de América Latina y el Caribe 2010. Santiago de Chile: CEPAL.

CONAIE – Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (2009): Demanda de Inconstitucionalidad de la Ley Minera por parte de CONAIE. In: Acción Ecológica, Quito 2009 http://www.accioneologica.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1144&Itemid=7558, 5.9.2011.

Durand, Irelis (2012): Chávez asegura que aumentará la producción de petróleo en Venezuela. In: El Nacional, Caracas, 8.1.2012.

Escobar, Arturo (2010): Latin America at a Crossroads. Alternative modernizations, post-liberalism, or post-development? In: Cultural Studies 24 (1), 1-65.

Escobar, Arturo (2007): La invención del tercer mundo. Construcción y deconstrucción del desarrollo. Caracas: Fundación Editorial El Perro y la Rana.

Harvey, David (2004): The 'New' Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession. Panitch, Leo/Leys, Colin (eds.): The New Imperial Challenge. Socialist Register 40. London: Merlin, Press, 63-88.

Larraín, Sara/Aedo, M. Paz/Sepúlveda, Pablo (2005): China y América Latina: Comercio e Inversiones. Conosur Sustentable. Santiago de Chile: Fundación Heinrich Böll/Chile Sustentable.

Mamani, Fernando Huanacuni (2010): Buen Vivir / Vivir Bien. Filosofía, políticas, estrategias y experiencias regionales andinas. Lima: Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas (CAOI). <http://www.reflectiongroup.org/stuff/vivir-bien>, 20.7.2012.

Mamani Ramírez, Pablo (2012): Las contradicciones no son hermosísimas sino catastróficas. Crítica a García Linera y su estadía en UNAM-México. La Paz: Bolpress. <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2012021503>, 23.9.2011.

Morales Ayma, Evo (2010): Decreto Supremo No. 0676. La Paz: Gaceta Oficial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. <http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo>, 4.9.2011.

O'Connor, James (1973): The Fiscal Crisis of the State. New York: St. Martin's Press.

OPEC – Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (2011): Annual Statistical Bulletin. 2010–2011. Vienna: OPEC. <www.opec.org/opec_web/static_files_project/.../ASB2010_2011.pdf>, 5.9.2011.

PDVSA – Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (n/y): Planes estratégicos. Desarrollo de gas. Caracas. <http://www.pdvs.com/interface.sp/database/fichero/doc/571/10.PDF>, 4.9.2011.

PDVSA – Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (2010): y sus filiales. Informe de Gestión Anual 2009. Caracas. www.pdvs.com/interface.sp/database/fichero/free/5889/1049.PDF, 4.9.2011.

Prada AlcCoreza, Raúl (2010a): La coherencia de las demandas de la marcha indígena. La Paz: Bolpress. <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2011090501>, 8.9.2011.

Prada AlcCoreza, Raúl (2010b): Anotaciones en torno a la defensa del TIPNIS. La Paz: Bolpress. <http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2011090206>, 8.9.2011.

Prada AlcCoreza, Raúl (2010c): La defensa de los derechos de la Madre Tierra en el TIPNIS. In: Other News, 30.8.2010. <http://www.other-news.info/noticias/index.php?p=4053>, 8.9.2011.

Quijano, Aníbal (2000): Colonialidad del Poder y Clasificación Social. In: Journal of World-System Research 11 (2), 342-386.

Red Alerta Petrolera-Orinoco Oilwatch (2005): El Plan Estratégico de la Nueva PDVSA: ¡Un nuevo salto al abismo! 27.8.2005. http://www.soberania.org/Articulos/articulo_1474.htm, 5.9.2011.

República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Presidencia (2007): Proyecto Nacional Simón Bolívar. Primer plan socialista. Desarrollo económico y social de la nación 2007–2013. Caracas. <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/noticias-view/shareFile/PPSN.pdf>, 5.9.2011.

RNV – Radio Nacional de Venezuela (2011): Venezuela alcanzará producción de 6 millones de barriles de crudo. Caracas, 29.7.2011. <http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/?act=ST&f=4&t=162459>, 4.9.2011.

SENPLADES – Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo, República del Ecuador (2009): Plan Nacional de Desarrollo. Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2009–2013. Construyendo un Estado Plurinacional e Intercultural. Quito: SENPLADES.

Toer, Mario/Montero, Federico (2012): De las transnacionales al Estado y del Estado a la sociedad productiva. Entrevista a Álvaro García Linera. In: La Jornada, México, 16.1.2012.

Venezolana de Televisión (2010): China otorga 20 millardos de dólares como parte de Mega-Financiamiento para Venezuela. In: Venezolana de Televisión, Caracas, 17.4.2010. <http://www.vtv.gov.ve/noticias-economicas/33971>, 4.9.2011.

Walsh, Catherine (2008): Interculturalidad y Plurinacionalidad: Elementos para el debate constituyente. Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Sede Ecuador.

Zibechi, Raúl (2010): Luces y sombras de la década progresista. In: *La Jornada*, Mexico, 31.12.2010.