

Resource Extractivism and Alternatives: Latin American Perspectives on Development ¹

Maristella Svampa

Even when these nations try to break free from their colonial heritage, that is, their dependence on the export of primary products, through the implementation of development plans directed at diversifying their economies, they generally need foreign currency to achieve this. But they can only access foreign currency by exporting primary products, which again increases their dependence on exports. Paradoxically, by trying to exploit their comparative advantages, these countries that are exporters of natural assets, are frequently reassuming their colonial role as exporters of primary products- a role now redefined in terms of the neoliberal rationality of globalising capitalism. For them, neocolonialism is the next step on from post-colonialism. (Coronil 2002)

Transition into the ‘Commodities Consensus’ and the change in the extractive economy

Over the last decade Latin America has switched from the Washington Consensus with its focus on finance to the Commodities Consensus based on the large-scale export of primary products. Although the exploitation and export of natural assets is by no means a new activity in the region, increasing growth was evident in this area towards the end of the 20th Century. Against the backdrop of a changing system of accumulation, the expansion of projects geared towards monitoring, extracting and exporting natural assets without (greater) added value intensified. What we are therefore referring to here as the ‘Commodities Consensus’ is the beginning of a new economic and political order sustained by the boom in international prices for raw materials and consumer goods, which are increasingly demanded by industrialised and emerging countries.

This new economic cycle is characterised by extraordinary profitability and the high growth rates of Latin American economies. According to CEPAL (2011a: 65), “in spite of recent trends to stabilise prices, increases during the first half of the year were so great that a significant improvement in exchange terms in Latin America is expected.” The majority of the region’s exported commodities grew exponentially during the last few months of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. Food prices reached an all time high in April 2011 (maize,

soya and wheat). Prices for metals and minerals too were above the maximums registered before the crisis of 2008. CEPAL data projected a 4.7% growth in GDP for 2011 compared to the 6% achieved in 2010 (see CEPAL 2011a; Bárcena 2011). Thus, even within the context of an international economic and financial crisis that heralds great uncertainty and volatility in the markets, Latin America will continue on a positive track.

Nonetheless, and in despite the promise of further economic growth, which cannot be valued highly enough after decades of economic austerity and structural adjustments, the current economic model displays numerous structural fissures. On the one hand, compared to the 1980s, the demand for raw materials and consumer goods has led Latin American economies to rapidly become providers of primary products. An earlier report by CEPAL demonstrated this trend. The figures for 2009 showed an increase compared to the year before. In the Andean Community the percentage of primary products exported went from 81% in 2008 to 82.3% in 2009. This growth was even greater in the MERCOSUR, rising from 59.8% to 63.1% (CEPAL 2010). As Gudynas (2009) showed, Bolivia leads this process of *re-primarisation* (92.9% of Bolivia's exports are primary products), but this dynamic even affects a country like Brazil. During Lula da Silva's two successive presidencies, the share of primary products in exports rose from 48.5% in 2003 to 60.9% in 2009.

It is also worth mentioning that this process of re-primarisation is accompanied by a loss of food sovereignty, which seems to be linked as much to the large-scale export of food as to the end purpose of this food. The growing demand for these products is increasingly geared towards livestock feed or biofuel production. This is because other energy sources are becoming more expensive and also because of the adverse climatic conditions in other countries.

In terms of the logic of accumulation, the new Commodities Consensus adds to the dynamic of dispossession of land, resources and territories whilst simultaneously creating new forms of dependency and domination. It is no coincidence that a large number of critical Latin American authors believe the result of these processes will be the consolidation of a model of development based on an extractive economy. Inherent to such an economy is a type of accumulation based on an over-exploitation of – largely non-renewable – natural resources as well as the expansion of frontiers to territories formerly considered 'unproductive'. This definition of an economy based on extraction is not limited to activities normally falling into this category (mining and oil), but also includes other sectors such as agribusiness or the production of biofuels. This is due to the fact that they consolidate a model that tends to follow a monoculture, the

destruction of biodiversity, a concentration of landownership and a destructive re-configuration of vast territories.

In addition, it includes the transport infrastructure projects (waterways, harbours, bi-oceanic corridors, and so on), energy projects (large hydro dams) and communication infrastructure projects planned by IIRSA, the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (*Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana*), a programme various South American governments agreed upon in the year 2000 with the central goal of facilitating the extraction and export of products to their destination points.

Another of the current extractive economic model's traits – consolidated under the Commodities Consensus – is the large scale of the projects. This can be seen in the magnitude of capital investments (in fact these projects are more capital- than labour-intensive), the types of players involved (large transnational corporations) and the major impact and risks these projects pose for social, economic and environmental issues in the territories where they are executed.

These projects usually lead to the consolidation of export enclaves with little or no connection to local chains of production. They create strong social and regional fragmentations and configure socio-productive spheres dependent on the international market and the volatility of the prices on this market (Gudynas 2009; Colectivo Voces de Alerta 2011). Lastly, the large scale of such projects not only challenges the existing economic and social structures; it also curtails democracy in the sense that the population has no say in the development of projects. This generates all kinds of social conflict, divisions in society and a spiral of criminalisation of resistance which will undoubtedly open the door to a new and dangerous chapter of human rights violations.

Talking of a 'consensus' that it does not just invoke an economic order. It also consolidates a system of domination. This consensus is different to that which existed in the 1990s because it refers less to the emergence of a single dominant discourse that downplays the role of ideologies or celebrates neoliberalism as the unrivalled goal of our times; rather, it points more to a series of ambivalences and paradoxes that mark the coexistence and interweaving of neoliberal ideology and new progressive development.

The Commodities Consensus can therefore be understood in terms of a series of ruptures as much as that of continuities from the prior period. As already occurred during the Washington Consensus phase, the Commodities Consensus also establishes rules that imply the acceptance of new asymmetric environmental

and political relations and inequalities by Latin American countries in the new geopolitical order. It helps to stress the links between one period and the next, because the transformations suffered by the state and the policy of privatising public goods during the 1990s effectively established the normative and legal basis for the extractive economy. They guaranteed 'legal security' for the invested capital and high profitability for companies that in general terms will persist – notwithstanding specific variations – in the commodities era.

Nevertheless, there are significant elements of differentiation and rupture. We must not forget that in the 1990s, the Washington Consensus put finance at the top of the agenda, bringing with it a policy of important structural adjustments and privatisations that ended up redefining the state as simply a mediating, regulatory agent. The system also brought about a homogenisation of politics in the region, characterised by the identification with or great proximity to neoliberal models. At present, the Commodities Consensus focuses on the implementation of large-scale, export-oriented extractive projects by establishing the role of the state and its relation to society in various ways. This enables the establishment and co-existence of progressive governments that question the neoliberal consensus and other governments that continue a conservative political agenda within the neoliberal framework. Whereas the former show evidence of a change in political language and ways of intervening in society, while following heterodox economic policies (Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and others), the countries in the latter group continue along an orthodox economic route (Mexico, Colombia, Peru).

Consequently, from a political perspective, the Commodities Consensus is a sphere of changing power constellations that allows for a kind of dialectical progress that combines the aforementioned continuities and ruptures in a new 'post-neoliberal' context; however, this does not mean that it supersedes so-called neoliberalism. As a result, this context confronts us with a series of new theoretical and practical challenges. These encompass various spheres, which are at once economic, social, and ecological while also political and civilisational.

Progressive governments and fractures in critical thinking

One of the characteristic traits of the Commodities Consensus is that it is accompanied by an explosion of socio-environmental conflicts linked to the disputes over land and common goods. It is therefore no coincidence that Latin America has experienced innumerable struggles spurred by socio-

environmental conflicts that involve new and interesting political and theoretical challenges and also create strong tensions and ruptures within critical Latin American thinking.

What Enrique Leff (2006) referred to as the 'process of environmentalisation of struggles', is now, without doubt, a central aspect that is creating new turns, junctions, demands for articulation and shifts in the field of Latin American intellectual thought. And this in turn within different disciplines and knowledge systems such as sociology and critical philosophy, political ecology, cultural studies, environmental studies, social economy, feminism, indigenous studies and new Latin American constitutionalism among others.

It is certainly important that such knowledge systems and critical disciplines gain nourishment not only from historically cosmopolitan traditions – feeding off and invoking the most varied schools and currents of critical western modernity – but that they also build on other, formerly undervalued or epistemologically negated traditions, especially those related to local knowledge systems and the indigenous world view.

This recent 'ecology of knowledge systems' as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) has coined it, also includes the recovery of certain older themes and debates that extended across the history of social sciences and humanities in Latin America. As is well-known, these themes and debates have typically been characterised by a lack of articulation, which is a factor that worked against their recognition within the continent and internationally. In this sense the extractive economic model and the current socio-environmental struggles have helped resurface a set of debates that cross critical Latin American thinking on concepts of progress, views on nature, the role of indigenous peoples in the construction of national and continental identities, as well as matters surrounding the persistence of national popular identities, debates that seem as belligerent and radical as perhaps never before.

These debates and shifts in positions have brought about a fracture within the field of critical thinking. Effectively, and in contrast to the 1990s, when the continent appeared re-formatted by the single neoliberal model, the new century is marked less by a unique discourse than by an ensemble of tensions and contradictions that are hard to integrate and crystallising in a set of ideological positions that are, it appears, increasingly antagonistic.

Schematically and in general we could say that there are currently three discourses or positions on development. Firstly there is liberal neodevelopmentalism, then

progressive neodevelopmentalism and lastly the post-developmental perspective. We will discuss these three positions with reference to some national cases.

Liberal neodevelopmentalism

Even though the Washington Consensus is being questioned, the liberal or neoliberal discourse is far from defeated. In essence, the basic orientations of this position have not changed, but faced with the Commodities Consensus they have been updated to a certain degree. Two decades after it was ousted, we are therefore witnessing the strong return of developmentalism as the overarching homogenising discourse that resurfaces as a word and a concept full of promises related to growth, productivity and modernisation. However, this time it surfaces in relation to the development of ‘mega’ extractive projects and not to an ideology of industrialisation. In addition, the neoliberal discourse continues to equally emphasise the idea of a state subordinate to the market and above all to the now supranational regulatory institutions (that is, a *meta regulatory state*). Nature, in spite of the new ecological framework established by the environmental criticisms of the last two decades, continues to be seen as a ‘resource’ or as inexhaustible ‘capital’.

However, a new element of the Commodities Consensus is the combination of elements of neoliberal discourse with a global liberal discourse that seeks to neutralise criticism. By this we mean for example the concept of sustainable development, associated with a ‘diluted’ idea of sustainability (Gudynas 2011) that implies shifting the limits proposed by environmentalists. This ‘diluted’ vision promotes an eco-efficient position towards sustainability that confirms the idea of nature as capital (linked now to over-exploitation and the expansion of areas where such exploitation takes place) whilst looking for ‘clean’ solutions – supposedly through new technologies – to any ‘problems’ (Martinez Alier 2005).

A second axis of the neoliberal discourse is the concept of corporate social responsibility. The concept was promoted by the large transnational corporations and achieved institutional status under the Global Compact in 2000. It is based on the recognition of two factors: firstly that corporations are the primary subjects of the globalised economies and secondly that they themselves must deal with the conflicts with local populations relating to the social, economic and ecological impacts and risks created by their economic activities.

Corporate social responsibility is connected to the concept of governance as a micro-political conflict resolution device between multiple actors in the context

of a consciously complex society (Svampa 2008, 2011a). Not only does this framework promote the belief of a symmetrical relation between those involved, but it also presents the different levels of the state as another participant. Added to this are other players – specialists, journalists and symbolic mediators among others – that contribute to the process of ‘social discursive production’ (Antonelli 2009) aimed at gaining ‘social permission’ by convincing and disrupting communities.

In short, the combination of the three axes – sustainable development, corporate social responsibility and governance – configures the shared framework of the dominant discourse which aims to legitimise extractive economic projects. At the same time it develops their local acceptance through a powerful mechanism of bio-political control of the population.

Of course, from a political point of view, the neoliberal vision can be very brutal and direct, as happens in countries with a strongly militarised or war-faring neoliberalism (Seoane et al. 2006) such as Peru, Colombia and increasingly also, Mexico. In Peru’s case this position was illustrated by former President Alan García, who in October 2007 published an article in the conservative newspaper *El Comercio* of Lima with the title ‘The syndrome of the gardener’s dog’ (*El síndrome del perro del hortelano*) that crudely and brutally anticipated his policies for the Amazonas region and the resources to be found there: There are millions of idle hectares for forestry; millions more hectares not farmed by the communities and that will never be farmed, as well as hundreds of mineral deposits that cannot be exploited and millions of hectares of ocean that will never be used for mariculture and production. The rivers flowing down both sides of the Andean mountains are worth a fortune but are draining into the sea without producing electric energy. (García 2007)

The idea of the gardener’s dog began to materialise in December 2007 when Congress granted Alan García legislative powers to establish norms with powers equal to laws that would ‘facilitate’ the implementation of the free trade agreement with the United States. In June 2008, the executive passed around 100 legislative decrees, among them the 11 laws that affected the Peruvian Amazon region. These legislative decrees, baptised ‘the law of the jungle’ by indigenous groups and environmental NGOs, were criticised as unconstitutional from various sides.

This came to a head in the repression in Bagua in June 2009 that cost the lives of over 30 people from the Amazonas region, as well as 10 police officers and resulted in the disappearance of an unknown number of people. This, combined with the protests that ensued, forced García’s government not only to repeal the decrees

that directly affected the people's right to be consulted, but also brought attention to the peoples of the Amazonas region who historically had been excluded. The Peruvian Amazon is home to 11% of the Peruvian population and 66 different peoples, 14 of which have no contact with western culture.

Most recently, in 2011, and in spite of the expectations generated by the election of Ollanta Humala as President of Peru, the government has again turned to militarist solutions to the conflicts in the Cajamarca region where people are resisting a mega mining project. This confirms the tendency to return to the classical approach of 'order and investment' associated with this neoliberal project.

The blind spots of progressive neodevelopmentalism

Neodevelopmental progressivism and neodevelopmental liberalism overlap and share a common framework in certain areas but there are also important differences, especially with regard to the role of the state and spheres of democratisation. One must stress that, concerning the differences, the rise of progressive and left-wing governments is intrinsically linked to the cycle of anti-neoliberal struggles in recent decades. The protagonists of these struggles were different social movements and peasant-indigenous organisations. The era that began at the very beginning of the 21st century offers a new framework for deciphering the relationship between society, politics and the economy, a new public agenda and politics related to the expansion of rights and the need to reduce poverty.

In countries, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, concepts including decolonisation, the plurinational state, autonomy, *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) and the 'rights of nature' marked the new constitutional agenda within the framework of strong participatory processes. At the same time they set the foundations for the ecological and territorial turn of today's social and environmental struggles (Svampa 2011b). Still, over the last 10 years and with the consolidation of these regimes, other concerns have become more central. Even though the platforms for political action of many progressive or centre-left governments appear to be marked equally by an epic discourse as well as by actions leading to tensions and antagonisms (frequently in a nationalistic and popular tone) that stress and exaggerate the diversion from the neoliberal model, these governments nonetheless promote a productivist concept of nature and nature's 'comparative benefits', a concept today nurtured by the high prices of commodities.

Without doubt this vision is connected to what the Bolivian sociologist René Zavaletta called the ‘myth of profit’ nearly 25 years ago. Zavaletta (2009 [1986]: 29-46) argued that this myth was based on the idea that the subcontinent is “the locus par excellence of natural resources”. By this, the Bolivian author made reference to the myth of El Dorado, “that every Latin American bears in his soul”; the idea of a sudden discovery (of a resource or natural good) which without doubt creates a profit, but a profit which is “magical” and “which in most cases has not been used in a balanced fashion.” While the author’s focus on magical profits are of little relevance to today’s environmental concerns the author’s obsession on the control of this profit (its conversion into “material for the state”) is very relevant.

The current return of the myth of magical profit in the guise of a new developmental illusion related to the abundance of natural resources also makes Zavaletta an important reference. The theme of abundance has been developed by several Latin American authors, among them Fernando Coronil (2002) who wrote about ‘the magical state’ (*El estado mágico*) in Venezuela, linking it to the profit mentality and the ‘culture of the miracle’. In the same vein, Alberto Acosta and Jürgen Schuldt (referring to what is known as the ‘Dutch disease’) also reflected on the ‘curse of abundance’: There are countries which “are poor because they are rich in natural resources” these two authors confirmed (Schuldt/Acosta 2009: 11; Acosta 2009), and then went on to analyse the connection between the paradigm of the extractive economy and the population’s increasing poverty, rising inequality, the distortion of the productive structure and the depredation of natural resources.

Consequently, in the framework of a new cycle of accumulation, progressive governments seem to have resurrected this founding and rudimentary myth, which in today’s context nurtures the *developmental illusion*, expressed in the idea that, thanks to current economic opportunities (the rise of prices for raw materials and increasing demand, especially from Asia), catching up with industrialised countries can be achieved *quickly*, as can the promised but never realised development of these societies.

In the shorter term the developmental illusion is related to the experience of crisis, that is, the neoliberal legacy of the 1990s associated with the rise of inequalities and poverty and the possibility to now escape the consequences of the international crisis thanks to comparative advantages. The fiscal surplus and the high annual growth rates of Latin American countries are to a large extent based on the export of primary products and form the foundations for a triumphalist discourse of a ‘specifically Latin American pathway’ that alludes to political, social and economic ruptures. For example, the end of the ‘long

neoliberal night' (as the Ecuadorian President Raphael Correa put it) has its political and economic correlate, which is linked to the great crisis at the turn of the 21st century (unemployment, fewer opportunities, migration). This theme has also been commonplace in the discourse of the Kirchners in Argentina, who look to oppose today's economic and social indicators with the figures of the neoliberal years (the 1990s neoliberal cycle under Carlos Menem) and of course with the figures during the great crisis in Argentina from 2001 to 2002, when the system that pegged the Peso to the Dollar broke.

In this sense the case of Bolivia is one of the most emblematic and at the same time most paradoxical Latin American scenarios for the developmental illusion. In fact, the extraordinary rise in prices of commodities, to the extent that the nationalisation of companies translated into a multiplication of the income linked to the export of raw materials, created enormous expectations. At the beginning of the President's second term there was an opening of the economy up to new exploitive projects. After a phase of struggle for hegemony (which ended with the defeat of the so-called half-moon oligarchy in 2008), a new phase began in 2010, characterised by the consolidation of a new hegemonic project. Consequently, the Bolivian government has now intensified its pro-industrialisation discourse (the 'great industrial leap' as Vice-President Alvaro García Linera called it), which focusses on a series of strategic megaprojects based on the expansion of extractive industries: participation in the first steps of lithium exploitation, expansion of mega open-pit mining operations of large multinational corporations, construction of roads and large hydroelectric dams in the context of IIRSA, and other projects.

In more general terms this developmental illusion so deeply rooted in the Latin American political imaginary, appears related to the actions of the state (as the producer and as far as globalisation allows, as a regulator) and to a whole set of social policies geared towards the most vulnerable sectors of society and financed through the profits from extractive projects.

It is undoubtedly true that in a context where neoliberalism is no longer seen as natural, but called into question, and this questioning is nurtured by the emerging new progressive governments, the nation state has recovered institutional tools and options by becoming an economically relevant player and, in certain cases, an agent of redistribution.

Nonetheless, in the framework of critical state theories the tendency is clearly against the state becoming a 'mega player' again. As mentioned previously, the return to the regulatory state takes place within a sphere of variable geometries,

that is, in a setting of multiple stakeholders (increasing complexity of civil society illustrated by social movements, NGOs and other stakeholders), yet closely linked to private multinational capitals, whose importance in each of the national economies is becoming ever greater.

One must not forget that the state's regained distributive functions are rooted in a new social fabric (a worker and peasant matrix with strong plebeian elements), itself a product of the transformations of the neoliberal years. They also frequently – openly or secretly – continue with the compensatory social policies applied in the 1990s through the models of the World Bank. Moreover, beyond the official industrialist rhetoric of the governments, the reality is that ongoing economic changes have tended to deepen the primary extractive model.

In intellectual terms it is necessary to remember that, maybe more than in other regions, the left in Latin America – whether in its anti-capitalist or its national-populist guise – has strongly resisted ecological currents that critique the productivist paradigm. Not only did such criticisms question some pillars of Marxist theory, a clear heir of modernity, but the ecological problem was also seen by a large part of the Latin American left (with a few notable exceptions) as a concern imported from the agendas of rich countries. It was seen as an agenda that would deepen inequalities between industrialised countries and those on the road to (or aspiring to) industrial development.

From this perspective Latin American progressivism, rooted in the developmental tradition, today shares a common platform with neoliberal discourse concerning the advantages of the Commodities Consensus. In the most extreme cases, it shares and promotes the productive 'Development/Corporate Social Responsibility/Governance' triad as the dynamic axis of neodevelopmental discourse. Furthermore, both positions promote extractive mega projects with the argument it will create employment, thereby creating hopes for jobs among the population that are hardly ever fulfilled because these projects are typically capital- and not labour-intensive: Large-scale mining projects are among the most capital-intensive economic activities. For every million dollars invested only 0.5 to 2 direct jobs are created. The more capital-intensive an activity is, the fewer employment opportunities it will create and the lower the share of the total added value created by workers through their work they receive in the form of salaries: the largest profit goes to capital. The metal mining industry directly employs 2.75 million people globally, which is 0.09% of the total number of jobs globally. Small-scale mining employs about 13 million people. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), one third of miners in the 25 most important mining countries lost their jobs

between 1995 and 2000. This is mainly due to technology replacing people. (Colectivo Voces de Alerta 2011: 27)

Moreover, both positions share the idea of the inexorable 'destiny' of Latin America as 'nature exporting societies' (Coronil 2002) within the framework of the new international division of labour and in the name of comparative advantage.

Lastly, both progressive and neoliberal language also share the orientation towards an economy that adapts to the different cycles and booms and busts of accumulation. This confirmation of a divided global economy - split into those that produce primary commodities in and those that manufacture goods and services - is one of the unresolved continuities at the core of both the Washington Consensus and the Commodities Consensus. It suggests that progressive governments have accepted the international division that has marked the continent since colonial times in spite of their emphatic discursive rhetoric that demands economic autonomy and postulate the establishment of a political Latin American sphere.

To conclude, while the Commodities Consensus develops a more flexible field of action than the Washington Consensus, it still establishes clear restrictions on the actions of the state (which already is no longer seen as a major player) and even deeper restrictions on calls for democratisation by communities and villages affected by the large extractive projects.

Post-developmentalism and criticisms of the extractive economy

A third discourse and position opposes the Commodities Consensus, both in its neodevelopmental as well as in its neoliberal guise.

We must not forget that in recent decades the crisis of the idea of development, in its hegemonic form, led to the revision of the paradigm of modernisation. Particularly important is the ecological position that began to become part of the global agenda after the Meadows report *The Limits to Growth* (1972). This ecological position helped question the ruling model for developmentalism whilst sending the countries of the global south clear signals that the model of industrial development was far from a universal blueprint (Mealla 2006).

Since the 1980s, many Latin American authors also critiqued the macro-social, planning and centralist vision of development, calling for an inclusive and participatory concept of development, based on respect for peasants and

indigenous cultures, and strengthening of local and regional economies (Unceta Satrustegui 2009).

The notion of 'sustainable development', which would go on to install itself in the political-ideological debate, was born at that time too. Besides its complexity, it is important to point out that there are two very different sides to the definition and limits of this concept. On the one hand there is a strong position that sees growth as a means and not an end in itself and is centred on the idea of responsibility (to today's and future generations) and respect for the integrity of the natural systems that make life on the planet possible (political ecology, economic ecology, deep ecology and other paradigms). On the other hand there is the diluted position that believes in sustainable development based on technological progress and the efficient use of such technologies. Whilst the strong position is currently upheld by different social organisations, ecologists and critical intellectuals, the diluted position is part of the rhetoric of corporations and is used by government officials from a range of different countries.

More recently, the Colombian author Arturo Escobar (2005) coined the notion of 'post-development', which aims to dismantle the modern category of development as a discourse of those in power. Escobar's goal was to reveal the principal mechanisms of domination (the division between development/underdevelopment; the professionalisation of the problem – that is, by means of 'experts' – and its institutionalisation in a network of regional, national and international organisations. He also showed how modern development concealed other local experiences and local knowledge and practices (the idea of epistemicide as Boaventura de Sousa Santos 2007 would later call it).

Before continuing, it is worth adding that during the 1990s, under the Washington Consensus, the category of development as an overarching narrative associated with the state as a main player disappeared. Now, under the Commodities Consensus we are witnessing its strong return, as much on the political as on the academic agenda, although, as we have seen, this cannot easily be compared to that which existed in other times.² It takes the guise of diluted versions of sustainable development in combination with other concepts like ecological modernisation, corporate social responsibility and governance). The resilience of development as a leading narrative is highly problematic for transformation proposals which need to think through the complexities to transform production and consumption.

With the resurgence of the concept of development, critical thought is re-considering the notion of 'post-development' and further elements of the strong

sustainability position (in line with indigenous currents of thinking). The post-development perspective formulates a radical critique of the hegemonic version of development as it was reformulated by neoliberalism and progressivism. It also criticises their vision of nature and promotes, as Gudynas (2011) states, a different valuation of nature based on alternative world views (such as indigenous world views, ecological perspectives, eco-communitarian views, eco-feminist positions, anti-colonial positions and the approaches by eco-territorial movements). Such positions demand a different type of ecological rationality, a utopian vantage point from which to rethink the relationship between peoples/societies and nature in the context of the crisis of civilisation.

Still, as we have already pointed out, one of the fundamental critical categories of this position is the notion of the extractive economy. In a recent article, the Marxist economist Bob Jessop (2011) proposes the interaction of four processes to understand the crisis. Firstly, he suggests the global ecological crisis (oil, food and water); secondly, the decline of the United States, the return to a multipolar world and the rise of China; thirdly, the crisis of the global economy in the shadow of neoliberalism and the contradictions and struggles inherent to capitalism; and lastly, the crisis of a system of accumulation led by financial capitalism and its contagious effects.

A focus on extractivism gives us an important vantage point to analyse the multiple crises, because it warns us about the global ecological crisis and the increasing risks of this form of appropriation of nature and the modalities of consumption. Secondly, it warns us about the decline of the United States and the emergence of new extractive powers such as China and India and the consolidation of regional sub-imperialist states such as Brazil. It also warns us about the global economic crisis, to the extent that the current extractive economic model arose from the neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, the normative and legislative framework of which remains in place; and lastly, it is associated with financial capitalism in as far as this defines the prices of commodities.

Furthermore, and as we have already pointed out, the extractive economic model reminds us that a new cycle of abuse of ecological and collective human rights is beginning, even though these rights are protected by national and international norms that also include the rights of indigenous peoples (ILO Convention 169). It is no coincidence then that one of the contested issues is the application of the ILO's Convention 169 that demands the right for indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent. This norm has become an important tool to control/regain territories threatened by the current model of development. This struggle is visible not only in the Andean countries such as Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, but

also in Argentina and affects other human rights too such as freedom of speech and the right to petition. This has led to a dangerous spiral of the criminalisation of and litigation against social demands. From this perspective, the outlook for democracy in Latin America is beginning to look very bleak (and worrying).

Finally, the extractive economic model highlights the crisis of modernity, or, as Arturo Escobar (2005) and Edgardo Lander put it, shows the need to think of alternatives to modernity, or, more specifically, to think from the perspective of colonial difference.

Nevertheless, even though a focus on the extraction-based economy has proved a powerful tool for mobilisation and helped highlight a whole set of defining dimensions of the current crisis, we believe that excessive use of this term to denounce certain situations conspires against its potential for describing and analysing the problem. We risk turning it into a kind of demonising concept, applicable to any situation related to the exploitation of natural goods. This would thus disqualify other potential agents of transformation (like unionised urban populations). More careful use of the term can help us deactivate current myths related to development as well as assist us in building bridges to other sectors of society.

The Postdevelopmental perspective has a strong critique of neodevelopmental progressivist positions for their failure to locate extraction in the current model of accumulation and for minimising the reality of dispossession. Progressive neodevelopmentalists have sought frequently to only counter the 'ecological' criticism of social movements and intellectuals (disqualifying them as 'environmental fundamentalists'), negating other – political, economic, social and civilisational – dimensions that this problem implies.

There are still many countries - particularly in the Andes - where, despite discussions on the risks of the extraction-based economic model and an increasing dynamic of dispossession, the production-oriented vision remains dominant. Ecuador is without doubt the Latin American country where these issues are discussed most seriously. Within the context of a new ecological institutional setting, the theme of *Buen Vivir* is postulated as an alternative to conventional development. By way of example, it should not be forgotten that the new constitution (2008) proclaims the rights of nature, describing nature as a subject with a right to be restored and defended.

In the same vein, through the National Secretary of Planning and Development SENPLADES (*Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo*), the government

prepared the Plan for Living Well 2009–2013 (Plan del Buen Vivir, 2009–2013) that proposes, in addition to a ‘return of the state’, a change in the regime of accumulation from that of an exporter of primary products towards a more local development, centred on life and based on the use of biodiversity, knowledge and tourism.

Yet despite this, the government of Rafael Correa has taken a clearly neodevelopmental path, for instance with its support for mega mining projects that have met with considerable resistance in the country. Another noteworthy contradiction is the current criminalisation of social and environmental struggles as ‘sabotage and terrorism’. Around 170 people have been affected by this, most of them in connection with social and environmental struggles. Correa’s declarations on the ‘childish environmentalism’ of organisations have not helped establish a dialogue in an atmosphere of open conflict between grassroots organisations and the government. This division is reproduced within critical thinking, and the unity that existed during the constituent process of Montecristi (2008) has been lost. We should not forget that when Rafael Correa took office, his cabinet had a developmental and an ecological wing. One of the representatives of the ecological wing was the economist Alberto Acosta, who was president of the Constituent Assembly in Montecristi and is currently one of the intellectuals most critical of the extractive economic regime.

In Bolivia the situation is equally controversial. Obviously, due to the conflict between the government and regional oligarchs, internal differences basically played no role during Evo Morales’ first term. However, during the last two years, internal differences have surfaced with the re-consolidation of the national state. With this consolidation, several strategic laws were passed that limit the right to be consulted and the territorial autonomy of indigenous territories. This is aimed at facilitating extractive projects that include everything from lithium mining to mega opencast mining projects. In this mood of tension, certain indigenous organisations such as CIDOB, the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (*Coordinadora de Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano*) and in some cases CONAMAQ, the National Council of Ayllus and Marcas of the Qollasuyo (*Confederación Nacional de Ayllus y Marcas del Qollasuyo*) have demanded their right to be consulted as established in the ILO convention 169 and have called for respect for their own political structures (as well as the installation of parallel indigenous authorities and the rejection of elections) and demanded coherence between the discourse of the defence of Mother Earth and the practised extractive regime (Svampa 2011a).

One of the turning points that put the extractive model on the agenda in Bolivia

was the counter summit in Cochabamba in April 2010 that paralleled the official Peoples' Summit on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. The official summit, convoked by the Bolivian government, sought to bring together social movements from around the world to work collaboratively on an alternative global agenda for action following failures by governments to act at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December 2009. However this openness did not extend to internal national debates on the environment and the expansion of extractivism in Bolivia and Latin America. As a result an autonomous 'Workshop 18' was organised by various organisations to discuss environmental problems within Bolivia (that proceeded without the authorisation of the Bolivian government).

Another key moment was in 2011: TIPNIS, the Indigenous Territory and National Park Isiboro Sécure (*Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure*), turned into a conflict zone between its inhabitants and the government because of plans to build a road. TIPNIS is a very isolated and protected zone whose autonomy was recognised in the 1990s. The conflict surrounding TIPNIS is of multiple dimensions. The government defended the construction of the road, alleging it would help with the integration of the different communities and would grant them access to healthcare and education and help them market their products. However, it was also true that the road would open the door to numerous extractive projects with negative social and environmental consequences (backed by Brazil and other partners) and that the government was looking to curb the region's autonomy without consulting the affected indigenous population. In this sense, the blindness of the government after the *Gasolinazo* (a controversial hike in gas prices that took place December 2010 that was rapidly reversed after widespread protests)³ means we are faced with a process of construction of hegemony that is hardly pluralistic. Social organisations are not consulted and when they are, the government patronises them. After a march by indigenous inhabitants of TIPNIS to La Paz that was supported by several indigenous and environmental organisations and after a widely denounced repression of the marchers, the administration of Evo Morales initially backed away from its plans, even though the final outcome of the conflict is still unclear. Nevertheless, what occurred in TIPNIS had the merit of restarting the discussion on the construction of hegemony in the more pluralistic framework of 'leading by obeying', which was one of the stated founding principles of Evo Morales' government.

Nevertheless what happened in TIPNIS was to mark a watershed because this conflict revealed the contradictions between an eco-communitarian discourse, protective of nature and in favour of protecting Mother Earth (*Pachamama*) and the reality of the extraction-based political practice of Evo Morales' government.

At the same time, it revealed the deep dispute over how one was going to define decolonisation in Bolivia, creating tensions between the strong position of the state and that of the attempted construction of a plurinational state. The fact that various intellectuals and important civil servants, who had been part of this project of change, left Evo Morales' government, shows the fracture within critical thinking in Bolivia as well. In July 2012 several intellectuals who had been government civil servants published the *Manifiesto for the Renewal of the Process of Change* (*Manifiesto por la Reconducción del proceso de cambio*, see *Coordinadora Plurinacional de la Reconducción* 2011), albeit with a more nationalistic than environmental tone. Vice-president Alvaro García Linera quickly answered this manifesto, calling his former colleagues "resentful" (among other epithets). In the end, the conflict surrounding TIPNIS helped to clarify criticisms of the model for development.

Argentina, with the governments under the Kirchners (Néstor Kirchner 2003–2007, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner 2007–2011, 2011 until today), is firmly on the traditional developmental track, with a discourse that, unlike Andean countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia, leaves little room for other ideas. Of course, there have been several conflicts that have put environmental issues on the public agenda. This has happened, sometimes directly, as was the case in the conflict with Uruguay surrounding the building of a paper mill (leading to a long-standing blockade of the international bridge between the two countries by local activists from the *Asamblea Ambiental de Gualeguaychú* movement between 2005 and 2010). Another such issue was the contamination of the Riachuelo basin and the discussion in Congress regarding a national law for the protection of the glaciers in 2010. Further conflicts, such as the one between agrarian corporations and the federal government on applicable variable export taxes in 2008, showed in more detail the process of dispossession of peasants and indigenous peoples in areas today called marginal, especially in the northern provinces and associated with the production of soya. This latter conflict went beyond the binary schematic of Argentinian politics and helped align a set of intellectuals with the central government, today connected in a group called *Carta Abierta*.

In the context of a strongly polarised political climate that tends to impoverish any debate, intellectuals and the new political youth linked to Kirchnerism tend to use an 'armour-plated' discourse when faced with complex problems such as the models to follow for mining, agribusiness and the policy of concentration of agricultural land. They deny the central government's adherence to the logic of dispossession which is characteristic of certain state policies, underlining, in contrast, the results of social policies and the revitalisation of labour institutions such as collective bargaining. Currently, criticism of the extractive model is

a primary issue for a set of territorial (not only social-environmental) and intellectual movements⁴ linked to autonomy and the independent left. To a lesser degree it is also an issue for the classical left that centres its most important arguments on the dynamic of increasing precariousness inherent to the model of labour relations.

In conclusion, with or without its popular-nationalist side, progressivism continues to understand the problem in developmental terms linked to the ideas of economic growth, modernisation and the expansion of productive forces. In certain cases it does grant to a limited degree, due to the pressure and mobilisation of social organisations, the opening of a political and theoretical debate on the different dimensions and criticisms of development, as has happened in Ecuador and recently in Bolivia. However, progressivism's practice and policies ultimately correspond to a conventional and hegemonic idea of development based on the idea of infinite progress and supposedly inexhaustible natural resources.

Theorising transition and its challenges

We mentioned that post-developmental positions unite a large number of currents with ambitions of decolonisation that aim to dismantle and deactivate arrangements of power, myths and imaginaries which form the basis of the current model of development. Simultaneously they aim to create new concepts for the future and recuperate others from the tradition of critical Latin American thinking, without renouncing either their *mestizo* consciousness or their indigenous past and present. This in turn demands, as so many Latin American intellectuals underline, the inclusion of critical thinking within a regional and global dimension of current processes (see Lander 2000, and others).

There are multiple perspectives that all share the idea of decolonisation. For example, there is an integral environmental perspective that emphasises the idea of *Buen Vivir*; an indigenous, communitarian perspective; an eco-feminist perspective with a focus on the care economy and the struggle against patriarchy; and an eco-territorial position linked to the social movements that have developed a political grammar based on the ideas of environmental justice, common goods, territory, food sovereignty and living well. Within this framework a discussion surrounding the rights of nature has recently begun and these rights have become part of the Ecuadorian constitution.

Categories such as decolonisation, anti-patriarchy, the plurinational state, interculturalism and *Buen Vivir* are general notions and concepts under

construction, which form the backbone of new Latin American thinking in the 21st century. Nevertheless, and in spite of the advances and discussions - especially in Bolivia and Ecuador - , a search for multidimensional strategies and concrete actions to further these general principles and ideas seems urgent.

In this vein, discussions have begun in many Latin American countries on alternatives to the extractive model and the need to work out ideas for a transition from a matrix of multidimensional intervention scenarios. Due to the scale of the extractive model, a basic agreement would require examining responses on a larger scale. We believe that one of the most interesting and thorough proposals has been developed by the Latin American Centre for Social Ecology (CLAES) directed by Eduardo Gudynas (2011) from Uruguay. According to this proposal, the transition will need a set of public policies that will make it possible to consider the link between social and environmental concerns in a different light. It also considers that, faced with the extractive model, a set of 'alternatives' within the framework of conventional development would be insufficient, and that therefore it is necessary to think of and draw up 'alternatives to development'. Lastly, it stresses that this discussion must be analysed at a regional level and within a strategic horizon of change, which indigenous peoples term *Buen Vivir*.

Although these debates have resonated more strongly in Ecuador, it was in Peru that a group of organisations and members of RedGE, the Peruvian network for a balanced Globalisation (*Red peruana por una Globalización con Equidad*), made a breakthrough. Shortly before the presidential elections in 2011, they presented the main political parties with a declaration that had a strong impact. In this declaration they drew up a possible transition to a post-extractive economy based on measures that aim at a sustainable use of land, the strengthening of tools for environmental management, changes to the regulatory framework, the application of the right to be consulted and other important issues. Maybe this idea lacks the radical nature of proposals in other countries such as Bolivia or Ecuador because there is no talk of *Buen Vivir* or the 'plurinational state', but it at least shows the need to think of specific scenarios, a discussion still lacking in countries like Argentina (see RedGE 2011). As the economists Vicente Sotelo and Pedro Francke (2011) showed in their recent book, it is possible to envision a transition through public policy, that is, a scenario that combines economic and ecological reforms. The book presents several possible scenarios and shows that two measures in particular enable a viable transition to a post-extractive economy: firstly, a tax reform for greater revenue collection (higher taxes for extractive projects or a super-tax for particularly high profits) and a moratorium for mining, oil and gas projects that began between 2007 and 2011.

At the same time, it is necessary to analyse successful experiences of development 'from below' at a local and regional level, but not with the idea of mechanically reproducing them, or in terms of simply aggregating them; instead, one should analyse the diversity of these experiences and what makes them different to others. In reality, the Latin American social, communitarian and solidarity-based economy offers a whole range of possibilities that must be explored in order to diversify the existing dominant capitalist economy. This would undoubtedly require the appreciation of the value of other types of economies that in turn demands strategic planning directed at strengthening alternative, local economies (agro-ecology and social economy amongst others) scattered throughout the continent. It is not unusual for governments to seek to hide the possibilities and alternative modes of production in the region through public policies that aggravate the 'crisis' and through extractive projects promoted on the basis of untrustworthy environmental impact studies that claim to minimise the effects of this activity on the local economy. (Colectivo Voces de Alerta 2011). Supporting alternative local economies not only requires the greater participation of ordinary people but also the greater support of the state (see Coraggio 2011).

One major challenge we face is to develop an idea of transformation that configures a 'horizon of desirability' in terms of lifestyles and quality of life. The resilience of the notion of development is largely due to the fact that the patterns of consumption related to the hegemonic model of development permeate the whole population. By this we refer to the cultural imaginary that builds on the conventional idea of development and on what is generally understood as 'quality of life'. The definition of 'a better life' is usually associated with consumption, which for the poorer parts of the population and after so many crises, is becoming possible in the context of the commodities consensus.

On the other hand we must ask ourselves whether we should perhaps change the focus of the discussion. Before asking about the direction we wish to go in, we should perhaps develop a theory of human needs based on certain fundamental questions. We should ask what the minimum requirements are for a decent, and with regard to future generations, reasonably sustainable life. How can we satisfy these needs without hurting ourselves and without damaging our ecosystem? How can we decolonise social needs that translate into new forms of slavery, self-destruction, and destruction of the environment? How can we construct a decolonised consciousness that then becomes a political force for change?

In this sense, and to conclude this article, we would like to mention three approaches that might help us re-consider a theory of requirements. A fundamental approach is the one developed by the economist Manfred Max-Neef. Traditionally, he says,

it has been believed that human needs tend to be infinite and that they constantly change, from one era to the next and from one culture to the next. However, this is not true. The mistake lies in not differentiating clearly between the requirements and the means to satisfy those requirements. “Basic human needs are the same, in all cultures and throughout every historic period. What changes over time and from one culture to the next, is how or by which means these needs are met” (Max-Neef 1993: 50-1).

According to this author, every economic, social and political system adopts its specific forms to satisfy the same fundamental human needs. One of the defining aspects of a culture is its selection of (always culturally constructed) means to meet those needs. Goods are the means by which the individual strengthens the elements required to meet his or her needs. When these goods become an end in themselves, life is at the service of these goods (instead of the other way around). Therefore, in light of the current crisis of civilisation, “the construction of a humanistic economy calls us to rethink the dialectic relation between needs and the means to satisfy those needs and goods” (ibid.).

Secondly, in Latin America and the global south there are numerous examples of social and solidarity-based economies whose social subjects belong to the most excluded sectors (women, indigenous, young people, workers and peasants). We might note here an interesting contribution by Franz Hinkelammert, who has developed criteria for what he calls ‘an economy for life’ order to construct an alternative. (Hinkelammert/Mora 2005). From the perspective of the economy for life the purpose of human work is the production of use values or means for life. The systems of the organisation and social division of work are only considered rational if they allow for the reproduction of life over time. “The most important aspect is the human being as a being with needs and the necessary reproduction of the material conditions for life” (ibid.). When examining the reproduction of external nature and of the human being, it is important to consider “the non-use values, which also condition existence and the possibility to reproduce the system of life. Our perspective must no longer centre on work value, instead we should focus on life value” (ibid.; see also the review of Hinkelammert’s book by Vargas Soler 2008).

Hinkelammert’s interpretation is very close to another perspective, the *ethic of care* advocated by eco-feminists. “By ‘caring work’ we refer to tasks related to human reproduction such as bringing up children, satisfying basic needs, promoting health, emotional support and facilitating participation in society” (Pascual/Yayo Herrero 2010: 3; see also León 2009). This is important, not only because of its criticism of essentialisms, but also because the new variants of eco-

feminism can provide a view of the needs, not from the perspective of deficiencies or human suffering, but instead from one of retrieving a culture of care as a central inspiration for a social and ecologically sustainable society through values such as reciprocity, cooperation and complementarity.

In conclusion, Latin American thinking in the 21st century needs to create a new epistemic system and re-consider existing contributions to develop a theory of human and social needs, not only as a basis for strong sustainability but also as a basis for strong interculturality that incorporates and recognises the traditionally subalternated subjects of our societies.

Translation by Tim Jack

Notes

1. This article is based on discussions during 2011 of the Permanent Working Group for Alternatives to Development (*Grupo Permanente de Trabajo sobre Alternativas al Desarrollo* 2011) supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. Within this framework an initial version of this text was presented for collective discussion in Quito and Brussels in June and July 2011 respectively. Furthermore, a later version was presented during the Latin American Seminar *Derechos de la Naturaleza y Alternativas al extractivismo* (Rights of Nature and Alternatives to the Extractive Economy) that we, as the Collective of Warning Voices (*Colectivo Voces de Alerta* 2011) jointly organised with CLAES, *Jóvenes por la Igualdad* (Youth for Equality) and CEPPAS in Buenos Aires in November 2011.

2. Certainly towards the 1990s, development as an overarching narrative temporarily disappeared off the political and academic agenda, not only in Latin America but in other parts of the world too. This abatement was related to the fact that, within the context of a crisis amongst the left and neoliberalism at its peak, Latin American social sciences – and in particular (political) economy and (political) sociology – which had led social thought for decades reached a significant political and epistemological turning point.

3. This is also the basis for UAC, the Union of Citizen Councils (*Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas*), consisting of different grassroots organisations against mega mining projects and organisations that question the agribusiness model, of the Frente Darío Santillán as well as human rights organisations like the Peace and Justice Service Serpaj (*Servicio de Paz y Justicia*) directed by Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and the Colectivo Voces de Alerta that several authors in this publication are members of.

4. At the end of 2010, President Evo Morales announced a rise in the prices of petro and

diesel (of between 57% and 82%) with the aim of ending the cross-border contraband in these products. After a week of intense street protests and even demands for resignation, Morales announced an end to the price hike, admitting that it was a mistake.

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