

A POSTCAPITALIST  
PARADIGM:

THE COMMON GOOD  
OF HUMANITY

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Brussels**

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# **A POSTCAPITALIST PARADIGM: THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY**

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**A postcapitalist Paradigm: The Common Good of Humanity**

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# Content

## Introduction

Birgit Daiber | François Houtart 7

## Chapter I

### From 'common goods' to the 'Common Good of Humanity'

François Houtart 11

Why associate the notion of 'common goods' with the concept of 'Common Good of Humanity'?

What solutions?

The multiple facets of the crisis

The new paradigm

The Common Good of Humanity as a global objective

Towards a Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity

## Chapter II

### Building axes of the Common Good of Humanity: additional reflections

#### 1. The relationship with nature

Commons goods, socio-ecological metabolism and the Common Future of Humanity: a North/South analysis

Gian Carlo Delgado Ramos 57

#### 2. The production of life (economy)

Reflections on the crisis and its effects

Rémy Herrera 85

Prioritizing use value over exchange value

Marc Vandepitte 109

Making the Common Good of Humanity concrete:

Free Public Transport – for a Life in Solidarity

Michael Brie 133

The Commons, the Public and the Left	
Rainer Rilling	159
On Common Good, Money and Credit	
Pedro Páez Pérez	163
3. Social and political collective organization	
Some memories of the future	
Birgit Daiber	183
Commons: social justice by sharing	
Tommaso Fattori	195
4. Culture	
The concept of Sumak Kawsay (Living Well) and how it relates to the Common Good of Humanity	
François Houtart	207
What modernity, what interculturality?	
Reflections from South America	
Gabriela Bernal Carrera	233

### **Chapter III**

#### **The Common Good of Humanity seen from different perspectives**

1. The Workers' Movement.	
A comment from the viewpoint of workers	
Eduardo Estevez Marin	255
2. The Farmers' Movements.	
The Common Good of Humanity, Good Living and the Peasants Movements	
Ivo Poletto	267
3. Afro-descendants Women.	
The Women of African Descent	
Gabriela Viveros Padilla and Marisol Cárdenas Oñate	277

4. Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The poetics of Sumak Kawsay on a global Horizon Armando Muyolema	293
5. The People's Science Movement, India. People's Science for the Common Good of Humanity Vinod Raina	309
6. The Arab Awakening. From "Common Goods" to the "Common Good" of all living species on the Planet Earth Hassan Abdou Bakr	325
7. Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum. Restoring the Right to Life and a Life of Dignity for All – The Campaign for Transformative Social Protection in Asia Tina Ebro	335
8. Today's World and the Winding. Search for the Common Good Aurelio Alonso	347

## **Chapter IV**

### **Conclusions and Transitions**

François Houtart	363
Regulations versus alternatives	
The transition	
Bibliography	375
The Authors	389

## INTRODUCTION

There are various sources that can be used for a rethinking of the idea of the Common Good of Humanity and how to apply it to the life conditions of the human species and the planet.

First of all, the crisis we are experiencing today, which is by no means confined to its financial aspects, clearly shows that it is not enough to regulate the system that is at the origin of all these dysfunctions. What is required is a change of paradigm for the collective life of human beings on earth, as said at the UN General Assembly in October 2008, shortly after the eruption of the crisis.<sup>1</sup> The way this crisis has expanded in all its aspects since then makes the need for a profound transformation all the more relevant today.

In January 2009, during the first session of the UN Commission on the international financial and monetary crisis (aka the Stiglitz Commission), it was proposed for the first time to draft a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity (parallel to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), affirming the need for a change of paradigm to save the planet and humanity. Miguel D'Escoto, President of the UN General Assembly during the 2008-2009 session, relaunched the idea in his farewell address, proposing a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Mother Earth and of Humanity.

The defence of the 'common goods', initiated by various social movements around the world as neo-liberalism set its mind to privatizing public services, both in the North and in the South, also served to promote new thinking, showing that the issue was about much more than a mere economic endeavour to integrate public services into the logic of the market, as the only way to make them contribute to profitability and capital accumulation. This new thinking showed that the exacerbation of the individual, the loss of the sense of the collective, the disappearance of pride in public service were all results of this endeavour.

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<sup>1</sup> François Houtart, *No bastan las regulaciones*, UN General Assembly, 30 Oct. 2008

In the 1990s, Riccardo Petrella made great efforts to give a new meaning to the traditional notion of the 'common good' and the notion of public interest, showing their contrast to neo-liberalism. He published various works on the subject and founded the 'University of the Common Good'.

A most recent proposal concerns transformative social protection. This proposal was put forward by the Asia-Europe Forum in the Philippines and was in turn inspired by the ideas of a universal social subsidy, of the social security in the more advanced industrialized countries, of the programmes of struggle against poverty in the progressive regimes of Latin America and the awareness of the non-renewable, unsustainable character of the capitalist logic.

The European office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation organized a seminar on the theme 'From common goods to the Common Good of Humanity', which took place in Rome in April 2011, the occasion being the Italian referendum on the privatization of water and the use of nuclear energy. Three weeks later the results showed unequivocally the common feeling of public opinion against an all-privatizing capitalism and its insatiable appetite.

In the same spirit, the Canadian NGO Development and Peace, convinced of the importance of a theoretical reflection to guide the collective action of social movements, contributed by funding studies and meetings, as well as the preparation of work on the Common Good of Humanity on a large scale.

These activities produced several results. The first was the publication by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of a basic text on the subject: From common goods to the Common Good of Humanity, translated in several European and eastern languages. The next step was the preparation of this book, also by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, with analytical feedback and commentaries on various aspects of the 'Common Good of Humanity' notion and its social and political functions.



The economic and cultural aspects are those that have received the most attention. We would like here to thank the authors and especially Gabriela Bernal and Renato Sabbadini for their contribution to the work.

However, much still remains to be done. Besides clarifying the concepts and broadening the field of their application, it will be necessary to define strategies and social actors, and to reflect on the transition between the logic of capitalist accumulation and the post-capitalist society of the Common Good of Humanity, as the achievement of socialism in its fullest meaning. It will also be necessary to continue preparing the Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity, in collaboration with the progressive social and political movements of all continents.

Birgit Daiber  
François Houtart

## **Chapter I**

# **FROM 'COMMON GOODS' TO THE 'COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY'**

**FRANÇOIS HOUTART**

All around the world there is deep unease caused by the growing divisions in society, lack of respect for justice, youth unemployment, abuse of power, destruction of nature. A new wave of social movements has emerged. The Social Forums enabled their globalization. A collective social consciousness is developing that things cannot go on like this. The economic development model that we have, with its political, cultural and psychological consequences, is at the origin of these imbalances. But it is necessary to find solutions urgently. The time has come to put forward new orientations and not just adaptations of the existing system. To reflect on this and to bring together the forces for change has become a top priority.

Alongside the Italian initiative for a referendum on water (one of the 'common goods'), the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation organized a conference entitled From 'Common Goods' to the 'Common Good of Humanity', at Rome in April 2011. The aim was to reflect on the connections between the two notions, i.e. 'common goods' and 'Common Good of Humanity', in order to encourage thinking about the links between the two notions and to integrate the demands and social struggles for a change of society.

### **Why associate the notion of 'common goods' with the concept of 'Common Good of Humanity'?**

The defence of the 'common goods' is, these days, an important priority for many social movements. The phrase includes both the indispensable elements for life, such as water and seeds, as well as the 'public services' that are today being dismantled by neoliberal policies, both in the

South and in the North. The struggle consists of opposition to the wave of privatizations that are affecting many public utilities and networks, from railways, electricity, water, transport, telephones, woods, rivers and land to health and education. What in England used to be called, before capitalism, the 'commons'<sup>2</sup>, has been gradually reduced in order to give rise to an economic system which transforms all aspects of life into merchandise – a necessary step for the accumulation of capital, now accentuated by the dominance of finance capital. Common land was considered wasted land and all non-capitalist use of it was considered 'non-utilization' (Michael Brie, 2011).

Let it be clear that the primary purpose of revaluing 'common goods', in whatever form (nationalizations or other kinds of collective control), has been to break away from that lengthy period when economic logic emphasized the private and the individual, in order to promote the development of the productive forces and freedom of private initiative – so eliminating most of the public sector from its objectives. We have reached the stage when human life itself is being commodified. This new economic logic has taken hold of the political sphere, as became obvious during and after the financial crisis of 2008, through the operations put into effect to save the financial system without nationalizations, leaving them in the hands of those who were responsible for the crisis in the first place (and only indicting a few delinquents). Such policies have led to national-wide austerity measures, making ordinary citizens pay the price for the crisis, while neoliberal policies have been maintained.

The defence of public services and of 'common goods' forms part of the resistance to these policies, but it risks becoming a rearguard struggle if these are not seen in a broader context, that of the Common Good of Humanity of which they form part – that is to say the life of the planet

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<sup>2</sup> The Commons were the communal lands of the peasantry in England which, starting in the XIII century, were gradually transformed into the private property of landowners through the Enclosures, who used these measures to fence off land, particularly for sheep raising. This provoked numerous peasant revolts.

and of humanity. Indeed, even bodies like the World Bank may recommend restoring certain sectors of public service. A number of the top businessmen are of the same opinion, too, after having seen that the wave of privatizations did not prove to be as profitable as anticipated.

The approach of the concept of the 'Common Good of Humanity' might seem overly theoretical, considering the social and political concerns that now confront us. Nevertheless it can serve as a useful working tool in dealing with contemporary problems, like the multiple crises that face us, as well as the convergence of the initiatives and struggles against a system that destroys nature and societies. It involves very concrete realities, the first being solidarity, weakened as it is by competitiveness and individualism, but also altruism, respect for nature, tenderness – in sum, everything that constitutes a human being.

Let us start with the crisis and all its aspects, showing how systemic it is. This enables us to see the problem of the 'common goods' and even the 'common good' (as opposed to the individual good) in a new light, integrating them into the perspective of the 'Common Good of Humanity'. We shall then move on to the need to revisit the paradigm of the collective life of humanity on this earth, emphasizing the practical aspects of such an approach in relation to national and international economic and social policies, and concluding with the proposal for a Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity.

Let us go back to the concepts. The first one, i.e. 'common goods', has been described before. The second one, i.e. the 'Common Good' that we are talking about is that which is shared in common by all human beings (men and women). Already Aristotle, in his *Politics*, believed that no society could exist unless it shared something in common, even if he thought this should be reduced to a minimum<sup>3</sup>. However, we do not

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<sup>3</sup> It was Riccardo Petrella who had the idea of re-introducing into progressive thought the notion of 'Common Good', confronted as it was by neoliberalism and the domination of the market (1998). He based his view of "a new world social contract" concerning assets, culture, democracy, land. According to him it is a question of formulating the principles and establishing the appropriate regulations, institutions and culture.

intend, in this document, to develop the philosophical aspect of the issue, but rather to look at it sociologically - in other words to study the way in which the Common Good of Humanity notion is posited today. In fact, this third concept is different from 'common goods' because of its more general character, involving the very foundations of the collective life of humanity on this planet: our relationship with nature, the production of life's necessities, collective organization (politics) and the interpretation, evaluation and expression of reality (culture). It is not a matter of heritage, as in the case of 'common goods', but rather of a state (of well-being, of *buen vivir*), that results from the way parameters combine to govern the life of human beings men and women, on this earth. It is also to be distinguished from 'common good' – as opposed to 'individual good' – as it is defined in the construction of a State, in other words the *res publica*, even if the concept of 'universal common goods' was introduced by the UNDP in its 1999 Report. In fact the concept of the 'Common Good of Humanity' includes the production and reproduction of life on the scale of all humanity: in sum it is a question of life and its capacity to reproduce itself.

Clearly, the concept of the 'Common Good of Humanity' includes the practical notions of 'common goods' and of 'common good' as currently interpreted. If we are starting out with some reflections on the current crisis, it is for the simple reason that this crisis is jeopardizing, not only 'common goods' and the 'Common Good' but also the very survival of human life on the planet and the capacity of nature to regenerate itself, i.e. the 'Common Good of Humanity'. Thus a review of the nature of this crisis becomes urgently necessary. It was indeed the accumulation dynamic that began to undermine the 'common goods' in Europe in the XIII century. Today, the land grabbing going on in the continents of the South for developing industrial agriculture (particularly agrofuels) and for mining is a new phase of the 'enclosure movement'. The same logic has impaired the idea of the 'Common Good of Humanity', both at the centre and in the peripheries of capitalism. It is the logic of death that prevails and not that of life. If we are to find solutions we must tackle the problem at its roots: in other words we must redefine the require-

ments for building the Common Good of Humanity today. This is why we should begin by illustrating the fundamental and systemic nature of the crisis and its principal elements.

## **The multiple facets of the crisis**

When more than 900 million human beings live below the poverty line, while their numbers keep increasing (UNDP, 2010); when every 24 hours tens of thousands of people die of hunger or its consequences; when, day by day, ethnic groups, ways of life and cultures are disappearing, endangering the very heritage of humanity; when the inequality between men and women is reinforced in the formal and informal economic system; when the climate is deteriorating: when all this is happening, it is simply not possible to talk only about a conjunctural financial crisis, even though such a crisis exploded violently in 2008.

## **The different crises**

### **The financial and economic crisis**

It is a fact that the social consequences of the financial crisis are felt far beyond the borders of its origin and that are affecting the very foundations of the economy. Unemployment, rising costs of living, the exclusion of the poorest, the vulnerability of the middle classes: the number of its victims is expanding all over the world. This is not a matter of some accident along the way, nor is it only due to abuses committed by some economic actors who ought to be sanctioned. We are dealing with a logic that has persisted throughout the economic history of the last centuries (Fernand Braudel, 1969, Immanuel Wallerstein, 2000, István Mészáros, 2008, Wim Dierckxsens, 2011). From crisis to regulation, from de-regulation to crisis, as events unfold they always succumb to the pressure of the rates of profit: when these rates increase, regulations are relaxed; when the rates diminish, the regulations increase – but always in favour of the accumulation of capital, considered to be the engine of growth. What we are seeing now is nothing new. It is not the first crisis of the financial system and there are many who say that it will not be the last.

However, the financial bubble created over recent decades – thanks, among other things, to new information and communication technology – has increased the problems beyond measure. As we know, the crisis exploded with the phenomenon of the sub-prime mortgages in the United States: i.e. the insolvency of millions of people, which had been camouflaged for a time by a whole series of derivative financial products (Reinaldo A. Carcanholo and Mauricio de S. Sabadini, 2009, 57). In the industrialized countries, consumption has increased more rapidly than incomes (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010, 12). However, the phenomenon is much older, dating from the time when the virtual economy became more important than the real economy: in other words, when financial capital began to be more profitable than productive capital (Jorge Beinstein, 2009, 29). One of the main origins of this process, according to Joseph Stiglitz (2010,22), was the decision of President Nixon, in 1972, to suspend the conversion of the dollar into gold, which initiated new monetary policies within the framework of increased international economic interdependence (globalization).

Capitalism has experienced financial crises from very early on. The first was at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and they were to reoccur over subsequent years, the most recent one, at world level, being that of the years 1929/1930. This was followed, after the Second World War, by regional crises (Mexico, Argentina, Asia, Russia). In the countries at the centre of the system, the new world financial crisis of 2008 triggered a series of specific policies: indebtedness of the State, restriction of credit, austerity measures, etc. But the countries of the South were also affected, through decreases in exports (China) and in remittances (Central America and the Andean countries, the Philippines), and through rising oil prices, etc. They were less affected by insolvencies, which were characteristic of the North, and in fact many benefited from the rise in the prices of natural resources and accumulated important monetary resources. This created, however, as far as energy was concerned, an imbalance between the countries that produced oil and those that did not. As for food products, the rise in prices mostly affected the poorest consumers, particularly the women.

The fundamental cause of the financial crisis lies in the very logic of capitalism itself (Rémy Herrera and Paulo Nakatani, 2009, 39). If capital is considered to be the engine of the economy and its accumulation essential for development, the maximization of profits is inevitable. If the financialization of the economy increases the rate of profit and if speculation accelerates the phenomenon, the organization of the economy as a whole follows the same path. Thus, the first characteristic of this logic, the increase in the rate of profit as a function of the accumulation of capital, becomes very evident in the process. But a capitalist market that is not regulated leads unavoidably to a crisis. As the report of the United Nations Commission states specifically: "This is a macro-economic crisis" (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010, 195).

The context is similar to the crisis of the 1930s. However, the main difference is that the current financial and monetary imbalance is now combining with other kinds of crises, in the fields of food, energy and climate: all of which, though, linked to the same economic logic.

### **The food crisis**

There are two aspects to the food crisis. One is a conjunction of short-term factors, the other is due to (structural) long term factors. The former can be seen in the sudden rise of food prices in 2007 and 2008. It is true that this can be attributed to several causes, such as dwindling reserves, but the main reason was speculative, with the production of agrofuels being partly responsible (maize-based ethanol in the United States). Thus over a period of two years, the price of wheat on the Chicago stock exchange rose by 100 per cent, maize by 98 per cent and ethanol by 80 per cent. During these years appreciable amounts of speculative capital moved from other sectors into investing in food production in the expectation of rapid and significant profits. As a consequence, according to the FAO director-general, in each of the years 2008 and 2009 more than 50 million people fell below the poverty line, and the total number of those living in poverty rose to the unprecedented level of over one billion people. This was clearly the result of the logic of profits, the capitalist law of value.



The second aspect is structural. Over the last few years there has been an expansion of monoculture, resulting in the concentration of land-holdings – in other words, a veritable reversal of land reform. Peasant and family agriculture is being destroyed all over the world on the pretext of its low productivity. It is true that monoculture can produce from 500 and even 1,000 times more than peasant agriculture in its present state. Nevertheless, two factors should be taken into account: first, this kind of production is leading to ecological destruction. It eliminates forests, and contaminates the soil and the waters of oceans and rivers through the massive use of chemical products. Over the next 50 to 75 years we shall be creating the deserts of tomorrow. Second, peasants are being thrown off their lands, and millions of them have to migrate to the cities, to live in shanty towns, exacerbating the tasks of women and causing urban crises, as well as increasing internal migratory pressure, as in Brazil; or they are going to other countries (Mexico, Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria, West Africa).

Together with public services, agriculture is now one of the new frontiers for capital (Samir Amin, 2004), especially in times when the profitability of productive industrial capital is relatively reduced and there is a considerable expansion of financial capital seeking new sources of profit. Recently we have witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon: the land grabbing by private and State capital, particularly in Africa, for the production of food and agrofuels. The South Korean corporation Daewoo obtained a concession of 1,200,000 hectares in Madagascar for a period of 99 years, which provoked a serious political crisis in that country and finally a revision of the contract. Countries like Libya and the Gulf Emirates are doing likewise in Mali and various other African countries. European and North American mining and agro-energy multinationals are securing the opportunity to exploit tens of millions of hectares for long periods, as Chinese State and private enterprises are also doing.

There is very little concern in these initiatives for the ecological and social implications, which are considered as 'externalities', i.e. external to

market calculations. And this is precisely the second aspect of capitalist logic, after the growth of the rate of profitability. It is not capital that is having to deal with the negative effects, but local societies and individuals. This has always been the strategy of capital, even in the countries of the centre, with no concern for the fate of the working classes, or for the peoples in the peripheries under colonialism. There is no concern, either, for nature and the way of life of local populations. It is for all these reasons that the food crisis, in both its conjunctural and structural aspects, is directly linked to the logic of capitalism.

### **The energy crisis**

Let us now look at the energy crisis. This goes well beyond the present explosion in the price of oil and forms part of the drying-up of natural resources, which are being over-exploited by the capitalist development model. One thing is clear: humanity has to change the sources of its energy in the coming 50 years, moving from fossil fuels to other sources of energy. The irrational use of energy and the squandering of natural resources, have become especially evident since the Second World War and in particular during the recent era of the Washington Consensus, i.e. the generalized liberalization of the economy which is the hallmark of the neoliberal epoch of capitalism.

The individual consumption (in housing and transport) that is typical of this model is voracious in its energy requirements. And yet the liberalization of foreign trade is causing more than 60 per cent of our merchandise to cross the oceans, with all that this entails in terms of energy use and the contamination of the seas. Each day, more than 22,000 ships of over 300 tonnes, are navigating the seas (M. Ruiz de Elvira, 2010). This traffic ensures a desirable exchange of goods, but it is also perpetuating the principle of unequal exchange with the peripheral countries that produce raw materials and agricultural commodities. It enables, too, the utilization of 'comparative advantage' to the maximum. Products can be sold cheaper, in spite of having to travel thousands of kilometres, because the workers are more heavily exploited and because laws to protect the ecology are non-existent or too timid.

The precise years when the oil, gas and uranium peaks will be reached can be debated, but we know that these resources are finite and that the dates are not so far off. In some countries, like the United States, Great Britain, Mexico and various others, the process has already begun. Inevitably, as these resources run out, the prices of their products will increase, with all the social and political consequences. International control over the sources of fossil energy and other strategic materials becomes more and more important for the industrial powers and they do not hesitate to resort to military force to secure it. A map of the military bases of the United States indicates this clearly: the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan confirm it. The role of the United States as the universal guarantor of the global system is fairly obvious, in view of the fact that its military budget amounts to 50 per cent of the military expenditure of all other countries combined. No country – not Great Britain, nor Russia, nor China – spends a quarter of what the United States spends in this sector. Clearly this is not only to control the sources of energy, but to ensure the perpetuation of the whole economic model.

The question of agrofuels has to be seen in the context of the future scarcity of energy. Because of expanding demand and the foreseeable decline in fossil energy resources, there is a certain urgency to find solutions to the problem. Since new sources of energy require the development of technologies that are not yet sufficiently advanced (like solar and hydrogen energy) and since other solutions (like wind energy) are interesting but marginal or not economically profitable, agrofuels appeared attractive for the time (François Houtart, 2009). They are often referred to as biofuels, because the basic material is living and not dead as is the case with fossil fuels. However peasant movements in particular contest this terminology because the massive production of agro-energy actually destroys life (nature and human beings).

For a while, the agrofuel solution was supported by ecological organizations and movements, while it was dismissed by business leaders. Around the middle of the 2000s, the attitude of the latter changed. Experience in the production of ethanol based on cane sugar in Brazil and

maize in the United States proved that the technology was relatively simple. The same went for agro-diesel based on oil palm, soya and other oil-producing plants, like *jatropha*. In Brazil the beginning of the ethanol wave coincided with the 1973 oil crisis, making it possible to reduce the importing of very expensive crude oil. In the United States the problem was to reduce its dependence on external sources of oil, as it did not consider the countries concerned very reliable. This justified the production of ethanol assisted by large State subsidies, with maize yielding less agrofuel than cane sugar.

A number of countries have started to legislate the use of a certain percentage of 'green energy' in their overall consumption. The European Union decided that by 2020 the proportion should be 20 per cent, with 10 per cent in green liquid, that is, agrofuels. These plans mean it would be necessary to convert millions of hectares to cultivation for this purpose. In fact, Europe in particular (but also the United States) does not have enough land to satisfy the demand, given its enormous consumption. As a result, towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there has been a growing interest in the continents of the South that possess a lot of uncultivated land.

Agrofuels are produced as monocultures, that is, by the utilization of huge areas of land to grow a single crop. In many cases this entails the elimination of enormous forests, as is happening in Malaysia and Indonesia. In less than 20 years, 80 per cent of original forest in these countries has been destroyed to make way for plantations of oil palm and eucalyptus. Biodiversity has disappeared, with dire consequences for the reproduction of life. Not only is a great quantity of water needed to produce these crops, but large amounts of chemical products are used as fertilizers and pesticides. As a result the underground water and rivers flowing into the sea are heavily contaminated. Furthermore, the small landholders are being expelled and many indigenous peoples are losing their ancestral lands, which has led to numerous social conflicts, and even violence. If current plans are implemented between now and 2020, tens of millions of hectares will be dedicated to agrofuel monoculture

in Asia, Africa and Latin America – continents that contain most of the nearly one billion hungry people on the planet. All this for a marginal result in terms of energy.

To implement these projects, what we are seeing is, on the one hand, financial and speculative capital entering into this sector and, on the other, a wave of land grabbing, especially in Africa. In Guinea Bissau there are plans to convert 500,000 hectares – one seventh of the country's territory – to jatropha cultivation to produce agrodiesel. The capital will be coming from the casinos of Macao (where Portuguese is spoken, as in Guinea Bissau, which facilitates business discussions). The Prime Minister is the principal shareholder of the bank responsible for this operation. Up until now peasant resistance and the doubts of several ministries (including that of the Prime Minister) have halted the project, but this may not be possible for long. Dozens of similar projects exist in many other countries, such as Tanzania, Togo, Benin, Cameroon, Congo and Kenya.

In October 2010 an agreement was concluded between President Lula, Mr. Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council and Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, to develop 4,800,000 hectares of sugar cane in Mozambique (this also represents one seventh of the country's cultivable land), using Brazilian technology and European funding in order to supply Europe with ethanol. This will enable Europe to achieve its plan to use 'green' energy but there is little concern about the effects for the natural environment and the population of that country.

The development of agrofuels overlooks the ecological and social 'externalities', following the characteristic logic of capitalism. It is based on a short-term calculation, which does not take into account the costs that the market will not carry and which will be borne by nature, societies and individuals. These practices also correspond to the laws of accumulation and the immediate interests of financial capital. In other words, it is a typical capitalist project.

## The climate crisis

The climate crisis is well recognized and, every day, information becomes increasingly precise, thanks to the various conferences of the United Nations on the climate, on biodiversity, on glaciers, etc. Here we shall just briefly sum up the situation. While the present development model is emitting greenhouse gases (especially CO<sub>2</sub>), the carbon sinks - that is, the natural places where these gases are absorbed, particularly forests and oceans - are being destroyed. In addition, the destruction of ecosystems through the massive application of chemical products, monocultures, exploitation of natural resources like oil, gas and minerals are producing irreversible damage which can even affect the climate.

There are two more aspects that are not always sufficiently emphasized. The first is the 'ecological debt'. Since the beginning of mercantile capitalism, the natural resources of the South have been exploited at enormous human and ecological cost. The 'externalities' of this plundering have been borne exclusively by the colonized regions. The political independence of these countries did not change the logic of the relationship. Over the last few years, the land grabbing and over-exploitation of mines to satisfy the needs of the North have accelerated, causing ecological disasters, not to mention social conflicts. Thus the ecological debt must be taken into account in the external public and private debt of the countries of the South. It is only fair that the consumers of products that have been extracted from the South should be the ones to pay the consequences of these 'externalities' (ecological and social damages). Indeed, in this way, they really have contracted a debt. The other aspect is the ecological costs of military activities. First, wars are extremely wasteful and affect nature by the ecological destruction caused by bombing, the utilization of chemical products<sup>4</sup> and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Moreover, the production of armaments involves using materials that

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<sup>4</sup> Agent Orange, used during the Vietnam war to destroy forests where the guerrillas were fighting in the South, is still causing – forty years later – a huge amount of destruction and affects thousands of children who are born with deformities because of the accumulation of toxic products.

exhaust the natural wealth of the earth and their production processing emits greenhouse gases. It is just not possible to spend some 1,000 billion dollars a year without creating serious destruction for ecosystems.

The warming of the planet continues, the level of the sea rises. Our ecological footprint is so great that, according to a body that is specialized in the matter, by about the middle of August 2010 the planet had exhausted its capacity to renew itself naturally. As we have access to only one planet, this means that the model is unsustainable. Furthermore, according to the report by Dr. Nicholas Stern to the British Government, it was stated, already in 2006, that if the current tendency continues there would be between 150 and 200 million climate refugees by the middle of the present century (Nicholas Stern, 2006). More recent statistics give even higher figures.

All this is unfolding within a landscape in which wealth is concentrating, including among the economic and political decision-makers. Twenty per cent of the world population, according to the UNDP, consumes 80 per cent of the planet's economic resources. It is true that there are many millions of people who, over recent decades, have attained a certain level of consumption but they represent a minority among the more than 7 billion human beings. The 20 per cent of the richer ones have a purchasing power that is very useful for the replication of capital and provides an outlet for financial derivatives. The rest of humanity is considered, as Susan George has said, 'superfluous billions' (S. George, 1999). In fact, they do not contribute to the production of surplus value and have hardly any purchasing power. As the World Bank has recognized, the distance between the rich and the poor continues to increase (World Bank Report, 2006)<sup>5</sup>. As a result of these upheavals, the development model is globally in crisis. Some talk of a crisis of civilization, which can be seen in uncontrolled urbanization, the crisis of the State, the increase in violence to resolve con-

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<sup>5</sup> In 2010, the 500 largest fortunes in France saw their assets grow by 25 per cent, from 194 billion euros to 241 billions, while the crisis was severely hitting other sectors of the population (Manila Bulletin, 8 July 2011)

flicts and many other manifestations of the same kind. To extricate ourselves from a situation that is globally so disturbing, we clearly need solutions. The different opinions on the question can be classified in three categories.

## **What solutions?**

### **Changing the actors, not the system**

Some people, preoccupied mainly with the financial crisis, are in favour of castigating and replacing those directly responsible for the economic mess – “the chicken thieves” as Michel Camdessus, former director of the International Monetary Fund, calls them. This is the theory of the capitalist system (the neoclassical theory in economics) that sees favourable signs in all crises, since they make it possible to get rid of weak or corrupt elements in order to resume accumulation on a sounder basis. The actors are to be changed, not the system.

### **Establishing regulations**

A second view proposes regulation. It is acknowledged that the market does not regulate itself and that there should be national and international bodies that take on the task. The State and specific international institutions should intervene. Michel Camdessus himself, in a conference with Catholic entrepreneurs in France, talked of the three hands: the “invisible hand” of the market, that of regulation by the State and charity for the victims who do not benefit from either of the two other hands. One of the main theorists of this regulation was John Maynard Keynes, the English economist. For this reason the term ‘neo-Keynesian’ is being used in the current context. To regulate the system means saving it and thus redefining the role of the public bodies (the State and the international institutions), so necessary for the replication of capital, a fact that neoliberalism seems to have forgotten since the 1970s (Ernesto Molina Molina, 2010, 25).

Nevertheless, there are various practical proposals. The G8, for example, proposed certain regulations of the world economic system, but of a



minor and temporary nature. In contrast, the United Nations Commission on the Reform of the International Financial and Monetary System (Joseph Stiglitz, 2010) presented a series of much more advanced regulations. Thus it was proposed to set up a UN Global Economic Coordination Council, at the same level as the Security Council, as well as an International Panel of Experts to monitor the world economic situation on a permanent basis. Other recommendations involved the abolition of tax havens and of bank secrecy, as well as greater requirements for bank reserves and a more stringent control of rating agencies. A far-reaching reform of the Bretton Woods institutions was included, and also the possibility of creating regional currencies, rather than having the US dollar as the world's only reserve currency. In the words of the Commission's report, all this would aim at promoting "new and robust growth". These were fairly strong measures in opposition to the current neoliberalism in vogue, but the United Nations conference that took place in June 2009 passed only a few cautious measures that were soon interpreted in a minimal way by the big Western powers.

Although the regulations proposed by the Stiglitz Commission to reconstruct the financial and monetary system made a few references to other aspects of the crisis, like climate, energy and food and, in spite of using the word 'sustainable' to qualify the growth to be restored, there was not enough in-depth consideration about the objectives. "Repairing the economic system": for whom? Was it to develop, as before, a model that destroys nature and is socially inequitable? It is very probable that the proposals of the Commission to reform the monetary and financial system would prove effective in extricating us from the financial crisis, and much more so than all that has been done so far – but ... is this enough to solve our contemporary global challenges? The solution is still being sought within capitalism, a system that is historically worn out, even though it possesses all kinds of ways of adapting itself. The transition to a system that is built on different bases evidently requires regulations, but not just any kind but rather in the sense of creating another situation, instead of adapting the system to new circumstances.

## Seeking alternatives to the prevailing model

This is why a third approach seems necessary: one that questions the development model itself. All the crises that have become acute in recent times are the result of the same fundamental logic: 1) it conceives of development in a way that ignores 'externalities' (that is environmental and social damage); 2) it is based on the idea of a planet with infinite resources; 3) it prioritizes exchange value over use value; and 4) it equates the economy with the rate of profitability and the accumulation of capital, creating enormous inequalities. This model, which is at the origin of a spectacular development of global wealth, has reached the end of its historical function, through the destruction it has wrought on nature and the social inequity that it has brought about. It cannot replicate itself or, in contemporary parlance, it is not sustainable. "The economic rationality of capitalism" comments Wim Dierckxsens, "not only tends to deprive large majorities of the world population of their lives, but it destroys the natural life that surrounds us" (2011).

The Argentinean economist Jorge Beinstein states that in the last four decades capitalism has become decadent on a world scale (a drop in the productive sector) which has only been disguised for a while by the artificial development of the financial sector and huge military expenditure (J.Beinstein, 2009, 13). For this reason therefore, let it be clear that we cannot only talk about regulation: it is necessary to think of alternatives. These should not be the result of purely theoretical reflections, but must necessarily lead to practical policies with long-term objectives, as well as for the short and medium-term.

To talk about alternatives to the capitalist economic model that today prevails in all fields through its globalization and its social, political and cultural dimensions means reviewing the fundamental paradigm on which the collective life of humanity on the planet is based, such as it was defined by the logic of capitalism. This paradigm is composed of four elements that we can call the fundamental ones, because they form part of the vital needs of all societies, from the oldest to the contempo-

rary ones. Let us recapitulate them: 1) the relationship with nature; 2) the production of the material basis of life – physical, cultural and spiritual; 3) social and political collective organization; and 4) the interpretation of reality and the self-involvement of the actors in constructing it, that is, culture. Each society has to achieve this.

The current paradigm, that guides the construction of the contemporary world, can be summed up in one word: modernity. This was the result of a profound transformation of European society and culture that for centuries has defined its own paradigm. Undeniably, it represented an advance (Bolivar Echevarria, 2001). However, modernity was not a social abstraction that happened by chance or came out of nowhere. It concerned a collective way of life on the planet, with its material and social bases and its production of ideas. It became well established in history while, at the same time, through a dialectical process, manifesting its contradictions. The emancipation of the individual, human rights, the idea of democracy, the progress of science and its technological applications are some of its products. However, the hegemony of the capitalist market and the imposition of its laws reduced most of these advances to class privileges and colonial relationships that were brutally maintained for five centuries. A number of social struggles enabled some subordinate groups to share in the advantages of modernity, but without changing the paradigm. Now the latter, through its contradictions, has endangered the four fundamental elements for the collective life of humanity on the earth. Because of the distance that had developed between humans and nature, the modernity paradigm led to the over-exploitation of nature: in other words, to the devastation of the source of life (Mother Earth). It gave birth to the capitalist market economy that, by its logic, invaded all aspects of life. In the political field the highly centralized Jacobin State resulted from this vision. In the cultural field, unbridled individualism was developed as an ethical necessity, together with the concept of the unlimited progress of humanity, living on an inexhaustible planet and capable of resolving its contradictions through science and technology. This model oriented the development model, including that of the socialist societies of the XX century.

The global dominance of this project became apparent early on, through the destruction, absorption or submission of all pre-capitalist modes of production, through the various colonial adventures, through the establishment of unequal exchange between the centres and the peripheries, and through what has recently been called 'globalization', which finally brings together the concepts of growth and Westernization, that is to say, the spread throughout the universe of the latest forms and dominance of capital.

There was a reaction against this model, expressed in 'post-modernism'. However, this mode of thinking, which developed in the second half of the twentieth century, also incorporated a particularly ambiguous critique of modernity, which was generally limited to the cultural and political fields (M. Maffesoli, 1990). The idea of history as something constructed here and now by individual actors, the refusal to acknowledge the existence of structures and the denial of reality by systems defined exclusively in vertical terms, as well as the explicit desire not to accept theories in human sciences, have turned this current of thinking into the illegitimate child of modernity itself, so that people have become depoliticized. Post-modernism has transmuted itself into an ideology that is pretty convenient for neoliberalism. At a time when capitalism was building the new material basis of its existence as a 'world-system', as Immanuel Wallerstein has termed it, the denial of the very existence of systems is most useful for the advocates of the 'Washington Consensus'. It is important to criticize modernity, but with a historical and dialectical approach (actors interacting, who have different degrees of power) and with the desire to recover the emancipatory nature that characterized one moment of European history. It is not possible to identify modernity with capitalism, but neither can one talk of modernity without including capitalism.

This is the reason why it is imperative that we reconstruct a consistent, theoretical framework, benefiting from the contributions of various currents in human thought, including those of a philosophical nature, as well as the physical, biological and social sciences. It is important to sit-

uate each new initiative to create a new paradigm within the whole, thus giving coherence to what could seem a series of separate actions, without much connection with each other (empiricism). This is also valid for international politics.

As we have already said, the foundations of the collective life of humanity on the planet are fourfold: the relationship with nature; the production of the basics for living (the economy); collective organization, social and political; and interpretation or the symbolic expression of reality. It is the fulfilment of a new paradigm with its four elements that we would call the achievement of the Common Good of Humanity, that is, as we have already said, the production and reproduction of life. It is an objective that has to be continually pursued, but which cannot be defined once and for all because historical circumstances change the context. However, the current crisis requires a radical re-thinking, one that goes to the roots of the situation (István Mészáros, 2008, 86) and this means a complete reorientation of the paradigm compared to capitalism. The concept of the Common Good of Humanity has been expressed in many different ways, according to the traditions of thinking and the collective experiences of peoples - for example in the philosophies and religions of the East and of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (the Sumak Kwasay, or *buen vivir*), as also in the Marxist tradition of the system of universal needs and capacities (A. Salamanca Serrano, 2011, p. 46 and S. Mercier-Jesa, 1982).

## **The new paradigm**

Summing it up, we can say that the paradigm of human development expressed by modernity is indefinite material and scientific progress, on an inexhaustible planet at the exclusive disposal of human beings, so that they can benefit, with increasing liberty, from goods and services. This way of life is based on the effectiveness of a competitive economy (a particularly masculine characteristic) and it is now being exhausted because of all its social and ecological contradictions. Hence the need for a radical change to ensure the continuity of life on earth and of humanity in the long term.

The new paradigm proposes, as a fundamental option, a balanced social dynamic between individuals, genders and social groups in harmony with nature in order to promote life and ensure its reproduction. It is a question of 'vivre bien', achieving the 'Common Good of Humanity', which means, as a first step, respect for the wholeness of nature as the source of life (Mother Earth).

Its construction and applications in the fundamental elements of the collective life of humanity on the planet are processes: not just academic exercises, but something to be worked out in society, where thinking has an essential place, but so does practical experience, particularly with regard to social struggles. Each one of these corresponds to a failure in the achievement of the 'Common Good of Humanity' and a related search for solutions. As the destructive globalization of capitalism has exercised its supremacy in the economies, societies and cultures of the world – without however totally eliminating their specific characteristics – the reconstruction task belongs to us all, men and women, according to our social characteristics and historical experiences. No one should be excluded in this common effort to re-elaborate the necessary conditions for life.

In fact, this paradigm is not so new as it seems. In pre-capitalist societies all round the world there are references to it, that is, to a holistic vision of the human destiny on earth. In many cases this is expressed in religious terms and in traditions with a philosophical base (Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam) as well as in the traditional religions of indigenous peoples. It is a question of rediscovering the appropriate visions and concrete practices in contemporary terms for the diverse societies of today.

### **Redefining the relationship with nature: from exploitation to respect for it as the source of life**

Modern civilization with its strong control over nature, its high degree of urbanization, has made human beings forget that, at the last resort, they depend totally on nature for their lives. Climate change reminds us of this

reality, sometimes in a very brutal way. This means therefore seeing nature not as a planet to be exploited, nor as natural resources that can be reduced to the status of saleable commodities, but as the source of all life. As such, its capacity to regenerate itself physically and biologically has to be respected. This obviously entails a radical philosophical change. Any relationship with nature that is exclusively utilitarian must be questioned. Capitalism considers ecological damage as 'collateral' and inevitable – though perhaps to be reduced as far as possible; or, even worse, ecological damages are considered as 'externalities', since they are ignored in market calculations and consequently in the accumulation of capital.

Some authors go much further, and question the anthropocentric bias of these perspectives, proposing new concepts like 'the right of nature', which the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff has defended in some of his writings. It was on this basis that the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D'Escoto, proposed, in his farewell speech in 2009, a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth and of Mankind. The same Assembly had previously approved unanimously through the votes of 192 countries the adoption of a Mother Earth Day. It was rightly pointed out that the human being is a part of nature and that a dichotomy should not be set up between the two but rather a symbiosis. Different speakers, supporting this position, maintained that only a shallow anthropocentric attitude could consider the human being as the centre of the world, without taking into account other living beings, including the planet itself. This attitude is indeed having negative ecological effects that are becoming dramatically visible.

On the other hand, what we are calling the 'Common Good' of the Earth can only be tackled through the mediation of the human species. It is only human intervention that can allow the Earth to regenerate – or prevent it from doing so through our own predatory and destructive activities. This is why the Common Good of Humanity involves the survival of nature - that is, of biodiversity. If we use the expression 'the rights of nature' (Eduardo Gudynas, 2009), this can be understood only in a sec-

ondary sense, since it is only the human species that can infringe or respect those rights. Neither the Earth nor the animals can claim respect for their rights.

It is human beings who are responsible for the destruction of the ecosystems. In this sense, according to the jurist Antonio Salamanca, using the legal categories of *droit titulaire* or *droit vicair*e (subsidiary or secondary law) the human community must act on behalf of the 'in-capable' (animals, newly born babies, people with severe mental disabilities) who, for the reproduction of their lives require human mediation. Such a position is not anthropocentric, but anthropo-responsabilisante, i.e. making humans aware of their responsibilities. In this way, by broadening the concept of the juridical subject, one can talk of climate justice, without necessarily resorting to the personalization of the earth and its elements. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that there is a link between the relations that human beings have with nature and class relations. All social classes do not behave in the same way vis-à-vis the Earth. It is a case of power relations, put into practice by the logic of capitalism.

In any case, what is at issue is the principle that the planet should be sustainable - able, in other words, to conserve its biodiversity - so that it can renew itself in spite of human activity. We can also embellish nature, using its plant wealth to create new landscapes or gardens for more beauty. The Earth is also generous and can contribute, even with non-renewable elements, to the production and reproduction of life. But this is totally different from exploiting it to produce a higher rate of profit.

In the great philosophical traditions of the East, the deep bond between the human being and nature is a central characteristic of their thought. Respect for all life, such as we find it in Hinduism and Buddhism, exemplifies this conviction, as does the belief in reincarnation as an expression of the unity of life and its continuance. The belief that man was created from clay (the earth), which we find in the Judeo-Christian tradition and subsequently taken up by Islam, expresses the same idea. The Bible represents man as the guardian of nature (Genesis 1, 26-28).



Even if it affirms that nature is there to serve him, this obviously excludes its destruction. Creation myths in many cultures in Africa and the Americas contain similar beliefs.

For the indigenous peoples of the American continent, the concept of Mother Earth (Pacha Mama) is central. As a source of life she is seen as a real person, with anthropomorphic features. The natural elements are also alive with their own personalities and serve as the objects of Shamanistic rites. At the Climate Summit in Cochabamba in 2010, various texts (the preparatory document and also interventions by different groups and individuals) went beyond the metaphorical nature of the expression 'Mother Earth', attributing to her the characteristics of a living person, capable of listening, reacting and being loved – and for these reasons, with rights of her own. The final document called for a re-evaluation of popular wisdom and ancestral knowledge, inviting us to "recognize Mother Earth as a living being, with which we have an indivisible, interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship." This is a strong reminder of the link between nature and humanity, expressed in the framework of the cosmovision of the indigenous peoples who moreover, also stress the maternal (feminine) character of the relationship.

Nevertheless it has to be admitted that, when confronted by the logic of capitalism, by development and the advances of urbanization, as well as by the attractions of mindless consumption, the great oriental philosophies and the traditions of the first nations have difficulties in resisting it. They are transforming themselves rapidly or even disappearing from the cultural scene, as has been the case with the 'Asian Tigers', in China and Vietnam, and also among the indigenous peoples of the American continent and the peoples of Africa. Neoliberalism is accentuating this phenomenon all over the world: it has been an individual and collective aspiration for many to participate in the values of the dominant culture. What happened among the subordinate classes of Europe and with Christianity – this being the first religion to be confronted with capitalism – is being repeated elsewhere. Ideological pollution is very real.

However, traditional concepts are now once again being invoked, as tools for historical memory, cultural reconstruction and affirmation of identity, all of which can be very useful when questioning capitalist logic. There is a certain pride in being able to refer to historical cultures and in using its concepts to contribute to a process of social reconstruction, although there is always some danger of falling into a paralyzing fundamentalism, more oriented to the past than to the present.

The references to Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) and the Sumak Kawsay (buen vivir) of the Quechua peoples and to the Suma Gamaña (living well together) of the Aymara peoples (Xavier Albó, 2010, 45-55) belong to these categories. These are two of the founding concepts of indigenous peoples which, in concrete historical conditions, signified a specific cosmovision and practices regarding respect for nature and for shared collective life. As such they can inspire contemporary thinking and social organization and can revitalize the symbol. However, success will depend on making the adjustments that will be necessary "in such a way", as Diana Quiroga Suarez writes, "that the transformation provides an opportunity to combine the best of ancestral and modern wisdom, with knowledge and technology working in step with nature's processes" (D. Quiroga Suarez, 2009, 107).

This, obviously, does not mean questioning the necessary harmony between nature and the human species, or swallowing the capitalist concept of the exploitation of nature as a necessary by-product of the kind of development conceived as just endless material growth. Nor is it to deny the need to revise the philosophy of the relationship with nature which ignores other living species and the capacity of nature to restore its balance. Nor should we undervalue or marginalize the cultures that can offer a healthy critique of humanity, both in its exploitation, brought about by the logic of capitalism, and in the rampant individualism of the consumption model and all the other kinds of behaviour that go with it. Nevertheless it has to be acknowledged that different cultures do exist. If we try to describe the necessary change only in terms of symbolic thinking, representing the symbol as reality, this will come into collision

with the cultures that have an analytical approach, and which place the causality of all phenomena into their specific categories, whether physical or social.

At the present time the two cultures co-exist. The first comes with a wealth of expression that reflects the strength of the symbol and the importance of ideal, particularly as regards relations with nature. It brings with it truly practical elements, which can easily be translated into knowledge, behaviour and policies. But its cosmovision is difficult for an urban culture in any part of the world to assimilate. The second has clearly reduced itself to a mere practical rationality or even a pure 'superstructure' (the "cherry on the cake", as the French anthropologist Maurice Godelier puts it), thus reinforcing capitalist logic and contributing to extending it further, while also admittedly making possible a great advance in knowledge that is useful for resolving practical and political problems. It would be unwise, in fighting against the globalized capitalism that is leading humanity and the planet into disaster, to state one's case in only one cultural language. On the contrary, this is the moment to apply the principle of interculturalism in all its dimensions.

We have already referred to the contribution of Karl Marx. He considered that capitalism had provoked an artificial and mechanical separation between nature and the human being. The rupture in the metabolism, that is the material exchange between the earth and the satisfaction of the needs of human beings, such as defined by the capital accumulation process, has ended up in irrational practices, wastage and destruction (Capital, Vol. 1, 637-638, cited by Gian Delgado, 2011). For this reason, according to Marx, it is necessary to reduce the material energy flows in a way that is socially fair, so as to ameliorate the quality of life. According to him, only socialism can re-establish the metabolic balance and put an end to the destruction of nature.

Calling for a new concept of our relationship with nature brings with it many practical consequences. We shall cite some examples, grouping them into: necessary prohibitions and constraints; positive initiatives; and then discussing their implications for international policy.

First, we must outlaw the private ownership of what are called 'natural resources': i.e. minerals, fossil energies and forests. These are the common heritage of humanity, and cannot be appropriated by individuals and corporations, as happens now in the capitalist market economy – in other words, by private interests that ignore externalities and aim at maximizing profits. A first step in a transition, then, is for countries to recover sovereignty over their resources. Of course this does not necessarily ensure the desired result of a healthy relationship with nature: national enterprises often operate with the same capitalist logic, so that State sovereignty would not necessarily imply a philosophy of respect for nature rather than its exploitation. The internationalization of this sector would be the next step, but only on condition that the relevant institutions (like the United Nations and its agencies) are made really democratic: in many cases they are still under the influence of the dominant political and economic powers. The introduction of ecological costs of all human activities into economic calculations is also a necessity, making it possible to reduce these and to counter the utilitarian rationale that excludes "externalities": one of the reasons for the destructive nature of capitalism.

Another aspect of the necessary prohibitions and constraints is the need to forbid the commoditization of those elements necessary for reproducing life, such as water and seeds. These are common goods that must not be governed by commodity logic but should be handled in different ways - which does not necessarily mean by the State, but under collective control. In more concrete terms, this principle involves putting an end to the monocultures that are preparing 'the deserts of tomorrow', particularly those producing livestock feed and agrofuels. A tax on the kilometres covered during the exportation of industrial or agricultural products would make it possible to reduce both energy use and the contamination of the seas. Other such measures could be proposed.

On the positive side, reserves that protect biodiversity should be extended over more territory. The promotion of organic agriculture would be part of this initiative, as would the improvement of peasant agricul-

ture, which is in fact more efficient in the long run than capitalist productivist agriculture (O. de Schutter, 2011). Legislation requiring the extension of 'life expectancy' for all industrial products would make it possible to save primary materials and energy and reduce the production of greenhouse gases (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

Finally, in the field of international politics, the struggle against the basic orientations of the financial institutions, which contradict the principle of respect for nature, has to be fought on a number of fronts. There is the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the regional banks and also the private banks, that are so powerful at this time, when the world economy is being financialized. The policies of the WTO promoting the liberalization of the world economy also have ecological implications, since most of them are implemented without taking externalities into account. Member states of this international organization have a huge responsibility in this field; alliances between ecologically conscious nations could influence decision-making in this body.

The promotion of international conventions is another very important aspect. For example, there are the conventions on the climate (Cancún), biodiversity (Bonn and Nagoya), those on the protection of water (rivers and seas) and of fish, on waste (especially nuclear) among others. The extent of awareness of this dimension of the new paradigm will be the basis of the international effectiveness of progressive states, and should form part of their foreign policy.

The redefinition of the 'Common Good of Humanity' in terms of our relationship with nature is an essential task, considering the ecological damage already inflicted, with its harmful effects on the regenerating capacity of the planet and on climate stability. This is a new factor in the collective conscience, but it is far from being shared among all human groups. The socialist societies did not really incorporate this dimension in their planning, as is illustrated in the spectacular economic development of a country like China, which is being achieved without giving much attention, at least for the time being, to externalities. A socialism

of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would tend to incorporate this as a central plank of its policies.

## **Redirecting production of life's necessities, prioritizing use value over exchange value**

The transformation of the paradigm as far as the economy is concerned lies in giving priority to use value, instead of exchange value as is the rule under capitalism. We talk of use value when a commodity or a service is useful for the life of someone, rather than being simply the object of a transaction. The characteristic of a market economy is to give priority to exchange value: for capitalism, the most developed form of market production, it is its only 'value'. A good or a service that cannot be converted into merchandise has no value because it does not contribute to the accumulation of capital, which is the aim and engine of the economy (M. Godelier, 1982). According to this view, use value is secondary and, as István Mészáros says, "it can acquire the right to exist if it adjusts to the requirements of exchange value" (2008, 49). Any goods, which are not at all useful (the explosion in military expenditure, for example, or the white elephant projects of international development assistance), can be produced as long as they are paid for or, if artificial needs are created through advertising (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011), or if financial services are expanded through speculative bubbles. In contrast, putting the emphasis on use value makes the market serve human needs.

In fact, the concept of necessity is relative. It changes according to historical circumstances and the development of productive forces. The principle is that all human beings have the right to satisfy their basic necessities. This is emphatically affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, this cannot be achieved in the abstract, but in well defined economic, social and political circumstances. But relativity cannot mean unfair inequalities, some having more needs than others, according to their class, gender and ethnic origins. The satisfaction of needs must be defined by the human community at different levels through a democratic process and by competent bodies (national and

international parliaments, representative assemblies). This is what could be called the establishment of a 'moral economy', which is subjected to ethical requirements that contradict the predominance of the exchange value, as a source of the accumulation of capital – the ultimate objective of the economy and therefore the only value.

It is not possible to achieve this without challenging the private ownership of the principal means of production, which is what places decision-making power in the hands of the holders of capital goods and subordinates labour to capital, both directly, through wages and indirectly, through other mechanisms like monetary policies, national debts and budget deficits, speculation on the price of food and energy, the privatization of public services etc.<sup>6</sup> It is the exclusive control of capital over the production process that also lies behind the degradation of working conditions (Jorge Beinstein, 2009, 21) and the devaluation of women's work, which is so essential for the reproduction of life in all its dimensions. However, total State control as a counterweight to the total market is not a satisfactory solution, as past socialist experiences prove. There are many different forms of collective control, from cooperatives to citizens' associations.

Thus what we need is a totally different definition of the economy. It would no longer be a matter of producing aggregate value for the benefit of the owners of the means of production or of finance capital, but rather a collective activity aimed at ensuring basic needs for the physical, cultural and spiritual lives of all human beings on the planet. A national and world economy that is based on the exploitation of work to maximize profits is unacceptable, as is the production of goods and services destined for 20 per cent of the world population who have relatively high

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<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that 70 per cent of the work in the world is informal, which makes it difficult for workers to organize. Nevertheless there are now various initiatives, like the Confederation of Self-Employed Workers (CTCP-FNT), which is affiliated with the National Federation of Nicaraguan Workers (FNT), and Streetnet International (Orlando Nuñez, 2011).

purchasing power, excluding the remaining 80 per cent because they do not produce any added value and have insufficient income. Redefining the economy thus means a fundamental change. Privileging use value - which still involves the development of productive forces – and presupposes the adoption of the first fundamental element, that of respect for nature, like those to which we shall be coming shortly: generalized democracy, and interculturalism. This does not exclude exchanges necessary also to satisfying the new use values, but on condition that they do not create imbalances in local access to use value and that they include externalities in the process.

‘Growth’ and ‘development’ are not the same thing: this is what neo-classical and neo-Keynesian economists seem to forget. As Jean-Philippe Peemans, professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, has said, “the logic of accumulation as the only development logic” is well entrenched. But a new approach is evolving, which takes various forms. One of them is to take up the concept of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, ‘el buen vivir’ or ‘living well’ (Sumak Kawsay). This is a much broader notion, which not only implies the complete opposite of growth as an end in itself, but also harmonizes with nature (Diana Quiroga, 2009, 105). Already in the 1960s the Club of Rome had proposed zero growth as a solution for what, even then, was felt to be a non-sustainable way of life. In the Democratic republic of Germany of the 1970s, Wolfgang Harich wrote a highly original book entitled *Communism without Growth*.

The idea was taken up again, although this time much more radically, by Serge Latouche in France, who in the 1990s launched the concept of ‘de-growth’, inspiring a series of movements, mainly among the middle classes of Europe, to reduce consumption and to respect the natural environment. While the content is positive and it is important to denounce the myth that claims growth will solve all the problems, the underlying notion is rather Eurocentric and limited to the consuming classes. It would seem somewhat indecent to preach ‘de-growth’ to African peoples or even to the impoverished classes of industrialized societies. A concept like ‘living well’ or ‘buen vivir’ has a broader and more



positive connotation. In Bhutan, under the influence of Buddhism, they have the notion of happiness, which has been officially adopted as a political and social objective. These are perhaps small islands in the ocean of the world market, but they herald the development of a critical vision of the contemporary model, with a clearly holistic perspective.

Prioritizing use value over exchange value also means rediscovering the territorial aspect. Globalization has made people forget the virtues of local proximity in favour of global interchanges, ignoring externalities and giving primacy to finance capital - the most globalized element of the economy because of its virtual character. Territorial space, as the site of economic activities but also of political responsibility and cultural exchanges, is the place to introduce another kind of rationale. It is not a matter of reducing the question to a microcosm, but rather to think in terms of multidimensionality, in which each dimension, from the local unit to the global sphere, has its function, without destroying the others. Hence the concepts of food sovereignty and energy sovereignty, by which trade is subordinated to a higher principle: the satisfaction of the requirements of the territory's dimensions (Jean-Philippe Peemans, 2010). In the capitalist perspective, the law of value imposes priority for commercialization, and hence it gives precedence to the export of crops over the production of food for local consumption. The concept of 'food security' is not adequate, because it can be ensured by trade that is based on the destruction of local economies, on the over-specialization of certain areas of the world, and on globalized transportation that is a voracious consumer of energy and polluter of the environment.

In the same line of thinking, the move towards regionalization of economies on a world scale is a positive step towards delinking from the capitalist centre that transforms the rest of the world into peripheries (even if emerging economies). It is also a positive step in relation to both to trade and the monetary system, as it allows to re-design the globalizing model.

This brings us to practical measures. They are numerous, and we can give only a few examples here. On the negative side, the predominance of finance capital cannot be accepted, and for this reason tax havens of

all kinds must be abolished, as well as bank secrecy – two powerful instruments the dominant class uses in the class struggle. It is also necessary to establish a tax on international financial flows (the ‘Tobin tax’) to reduce the power of finance capital. ‘Odious debts’ must be denounced, after due audits, as has been done in Ecuador. Speculation on food and energy cannot be permitted. As said before, a tax on the kilometres consumed by industrial or agricultural goods would make it possible to reduce the ecological costs of transport and the abuse of ‘comparative advantage’. Prolonging the ‘life expectancy’ of industrial products would allow to save raw materials and energy, and could diminish the artificial profits of capital resulting purely from the circulation of trade (Wim Dierckxsens, 2011).

From a positive viewpoint there are also many examples to be cited. The social economy is built on a logic that is quite different from that of capitalism. It is true that it is a marginal activity at present, compared with the immense concentration of oligopolistic capital, but it is possible to encourage it in various ways. The same goes for cooperatives and popular credit. They must be protected from being destroyed or absorbed by the dominant system. As for regional economic initiatives, they can be the means of a transformation out of economic logic, on the condition that they do not represent simply an adaptation of the system to new production techniques, thus serving as means to integrate national economies into a capitalist framework at a higher level. Restoring the common goods privatized by neoliberalism is a fundamental step to be taken in public services like water, energy, transport, communications, health, education and culture. This does not necessarily mean the State taking them over but rather setting up many different forms of public and citizen control over their production and distribution.

Redefining the ‘Common Good of Humanity’ in terms of a new definition of the economy is thus a necessary task to be undertaken, confronted as we are by the destruction of our common heritage as a result of forgetting the collective dimension of production for life-needs, and by the promotion of exclusive individualism.

## **Reorganizing collective life through the generalization of democracy in social relations and institutions**

Our third central theme, in revising the paradigm of collective life and the Common Good of Humanity, is the generalizing of democracy, not only in the political field but also in the economic system, in relationships between men and women and in all institutions. In other words, the mere forms of democracy, which are often used to establish a fake equality and to perpetuate unacknowledged social inequalities, must be left behind. This involves a revision of the concept of the State and the reclamation of human rights in all their dimensions, individual and collective. It is a matter of treating every human being, with no distinction of race, sex, or class, as partners in the building of society, thus confirming their self-worth and participation (Franz Hinkelammert, 2005).

The concept of the State is absolutely central in this field. The model of the Jacobin centralized state of the French Revolution, erasing all differences in order to construct citizens who were in principle equal, is not enough to build a real democracy. Such a state was without doubt a step forward when compared to the political structures of the European ancient régime. But it is now necessary not only to take into account the existence of opposing classes, and to realize that any one class, or a coalition of them, can take possession of the State to ensure that their own interests dominate; but also to acknowledge the existence of all the various nationalities that live in a territory and who have the right to affirm their cultures, their territorial reference points and their social institutions. This is not a matter of falling into the kind of communitarianism that weakens the State, as has happened in certain European countries in the neoliberal era or of accepting the neo-anarchism of certain legitimate and massive protests. Neither is it a matter of retreating into nostalgia for a romantic past, like certain politico-religious movements, nor of falling into the clutches of powerful economic interests (transnational enterprises or international financial institutions) that prefer to negotiate with small-scale local bodies. The aim is to reach equilibrium between these different dimensions of collective life, international,

regional and local, recognizing their existence and setting up mechanisms for participation.

The role of the State cannot be formulated without taking into account the situation of the most marginalized social groups: landless peasants, lower castes and the dalits (the former untouchables), who have been ignored for thousands of years, as well as the indigenous peoples of America and those of African descent who have been excluded for over 500 years and, within these groups, the women who are doubly marginalized. Juridical processes, even constitutional ones, are not enough to change the situation, as necessary as these are. Racism and prejudice will not rapidly disappear in any society. In this field the cultural factor is decisive and can be the subject of specific initiatives. Social policies protecting people against the aggression by the 'global market' and providing for the basic necessities constitute an important step in the transition process, as long as they are not considered as just a form of charity, detached from structural reform.

It is also important to look out for the use of vocabulary twisted from its original meaning. The Right is outstanding for making pronouncements in this vein. And now there are those who speak of 'green capitalism'. But even in countries that want change, traditional concepts such as Sumak Kawsay (buen vivir) must be analyzed in function of their real meaning, which could serve as elements of the transition to another way of collective life, or simply be an adaptation of the existing system. It is the general political context that will make it possible to understand the difference and evaluate it.

The generalization of democracy also applies to the dialogue between political entities and social movements. The organization of bodies for consultation and dialogue must be part of the same approach, respecting mutual autonomy. The project for a Council of Social Movements in the general structures of ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance of The Peoples of our America) is an original attempt in this direction. The concept of civil society, often used in relation to this issue, remains, however, ambiguous, because this too is a ground where class struggle takes place: in

reality we do have a bottom-up civil society and a top-down one. The unqualified use of the term makes it possible to create confusion and present social solutions that overlook class differences.<sup>7</sup> Forms of participatory democracy, as can be seen in various Latin American countries, also follow the same logic, that of generalized democracy. Real independence of the various executive, legislative and juridical powers is a guarantee that democracy is functioning normally. A democratic state must also be secular: that is to say, free from the intervention of religious institutions into the organs of power, whether they are majority religions or not. This is in fact the basis of religious freedom. This does not mean a state is so secular as not to acknowledge the public aspect of the religious factor (the social-ethical dimension of Liberation Theology, for example) or worse still, as was the case in the countries of 'real socialism', that it imposes atheism as a sort of state religion.

Other institutions should be guided by the same principles. Nothing is less democratic than the capitalist economic system, with the concentration of decision-making power in just a few hands. The same goes for the social communications media and is also applicable to all social, trade union, cultural, sport and religious institutions.

The notion of non-violence is obviously associated with generalized democracy. The conflicts in human societies, whether in the family or at the international level must be resolved by appropriate non-violent mechanisms, formal or informal. The German sociologist Max Weber's concept of 'legitimate violence' as a State monopoly is dangerous because it leads to an easy justification, for example, of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. However while non-violence is desirable and desired principle, the reality is that we live in a violent world.

Violence has nearly always been caused by the pursuit of economic and political hegemony. In modern history, the reproduction of capitalism as a system was a dominating factor in the exercise of violence, both for

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<sup>7</sup> A few years ago, on a wall in a popular neighbourhood of Bogotá appeared the slogan: "We, too, have human rights!"

the accumulation of internal capital (the military-industrial complex in the United States, for example) or to ensure the predominance of one nation over another and finally to guarantee the control over natural resources (oil and strategic metals). The cultural and religious arguments have often been, consciously or unconsciously, the ideological legitimacy capable of motivating peoples and the masses to support conflicts that are economic and political. But such arguments have also served as the immaterial ammunition of oppressed groups fighting for justice.

In this way wars, like dictatorships, represent a failure of democracy and a rupture in the pursuit of the 'Common Good of Humanity'. Now, with the availability of technologies for killing there are no more just wars except for popular resistance when all democratic solutions have been excluded. But only a socio-political and historical analysis of all the (holistic) elements at play can pronounce on their ethical and political justification.

The organization of the struggle against racism or gender discrimination comes into this category. So does action to democratize mass communication media, for example, through prohibiting its ownership by finance capital. Rules ensuring democratic functioning (equality between men and women, alternating responsibilities, etc.) can be the conditions for public recognition (and, possibly, for subsidies) of non-State institutions, such as political parties, social organizations, NGOs and cultural and religious institutions.

As for international politics, there are many possibilities of applying the principle. An obvious one is the United Nations, whose various organs, starting with the Security Council, are hardly democratic. The same goes for the Bretton Woods institutions, particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Supporting efforts in this direction can be a priority for governments of the periphery. The meetings of the G8 or G20, although informal, carry real weight and should be challenged. Courts of justice to respect human rights, institutions that are desirable in themselves, should still be subjected to the same norms of democracy, as well as given new fields to deal with, such as economic crimes, 'odious debt' and ecological damage. All the new Latin American re-

gional institutions, like the Banco del Sur, regional currency (the sucre) and ALBA, should be given special attention in this sense, as well as regional institutions on other continents.

The destruction of democracy by capitalism, especially in its neoliberal phase, has been so great that societies, at all levels, are now organized to serve the advantages of a minority, provoking a degree of inequality in the world that is without precedent in history. To re-establish democratic functioning as a universal paradigm thus constitutes a central pillar in the concept of the 'Common Good of Humanity'.

### **Instituting interculturalism while building the universal Common Good**

The objective of the cultural dimension is to give to all forms of knowledge, cultures, philosophies and religions an equal chance of contributing to the Common Good of Humanity. This cannot be the exclusive role of Western culture, which in reality is totally identified with the concept of 'development', eliminating or marginalizing all other perspectives. Undertaking this, involves not only an understanding of reality or its anticipation, but also the necessary ethic for elaborating the Common Good, the affective dimension necessary for the self-motivation of the actors and aesthetic and practical expressions. Multiculturalism also obviously entails the adoption of the organizational principles of the three other themes: the relationship with nature, the production of life's basic needs and the organization of democracy on a broad scale. It is also important for the transmission of ideas and values within different peoples. To speak in everyone's language and to express oneself in culturally comprehensible terms is an essential requirement of democracy.

However, multiculturalism is not enough. Open interculturalism should also be promoted, with dialoguing between cultures and opportunity for exchanges. Cultures are not objects in a museum, but the living elements of a society. Internal and external migrations, linked to the development of the means of communication, have created many cultural changes, clearly not all of them desirable but which can be enriching. In

order to exist, cultures must have material bases and means, like territorial reference points (in various forms) and educational and communications media, as well as various opportunities to express culture like fetes, pilgrimages, rituals, religious agents, buildings, etc.

This brings us to the practical aspects of designing the organization of a multicultural State. In countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept has been specifically translated into constitutions by the establishment of multinational States, although not without difficulties when it comes to putting them into practice. The central idea is the obligation for the State to guarantee the basics of cultural activity for different peoples and, in particular, to defend them from the assaults of economic modernity and the dominant culture. For this purpose, bilingual education is an important instrument. However the notion of interculturalism must also have an influence on general education, like the teaching of history and the reshaping of an education philosophy at present guided by the logic of the market. The publication of inexpensive books, the organization of book fairs, artisanal centres, inter-active museums, etc. are useful tools. Communications media are important as they transmit not only information but also values, provided that they do not go against pluralism or democracy. This problem must be tackled as a whole, to promote local cultures, to counteract monopolies and to destroy the dominance of a handful of international agencies. Ethical bodies, such as associations for the defence of human rights, watchdog groups of various kinds, religious institutions, must also have the opportunity to express themselves.

Culture includes a spiritual dimension, which is a characteristic of human beings, raising them above the concerns of everyday life. This is a central theme in a period when civilization is in crisis. All over the world there is a search after meaning, for the need to redefine the very aims of life. Spirituality is the force that transcends the material world and gives it a meaning. The sources of spirituality are many and are always to be found within a social context: they cannot exist without a physical and biological base. The human being is indivisible: spirituality presupposes matter that, on the other hand, has no sense without the spirit. A



culturalistic view of spirituality, ignoring the material aspects of a human being - which for an individual is their body and for society is the economic and political reality - is a conceptual aberration, leading to reductionism (culture as the single factor in change) or alienation (ignorance of social structures). Spirituality, with or without reference to a supernatural, gives sense to human life on the planet. How it may be expressed is conditioned by the social relations in each society, but it can also give a direction to these relations. A change of paradigm cannot be carried out without spirituality, which has many paths and multiple expressions.

The vision of the world, the understanding and analysis of reality, the ethics of social and political construction and the aesthetic expression and self-motivation of the actors are essential elements when designing alternatives to the model of capitalist development and the civilization that it transmits. They form part of all the dimensions of the new paradigm: our relationship with nature; the production of life's basic needs; the redefinition of the economy; and finally the way in which we conceive the collective and political organization of societies. In all their diversity, these cultural elements can contribute to the change that is necessary for the survival of humanity and the planet.

## **The Common Good of Humanity as a global objective**

It therefore follows that the 'Common Good of Humanity' will result from successfully achieving all these four goals, each of which is fundamental to the collective life of human beings on the planet. The goals defined by capitalism, guaranteed by political forces and transmitted by the dominant culture, are not sustainable, and so cannot ensure 'the Common Good of Humanity'. On the contrary, they work against the continuance of life (François Houtart, 2009). There has to be a change of paradigm, to permit a symbiosis between human beings and nature, access of all to goods and services, and the participation of every individual and every collective group in the social and political organizing processes, each having their own cultural and ethical expression: in other words to realize the Common Good of Humanity. This will be a

generally long-term process, dialectic and not linear, and the result of many social struggles. The concept as used in this work goes well beyond the classical Greek conception of Common Good, taken up by the Renaissance (J. Sanchez Parga, 2005, 378-386), and beyond the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, based on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas.

It is for this reason that a complete theoretical rethinking is necessary, on the one hand dealing with all the elements that have led the world into a systemic crisis situation and with the wearing out of a historical model; and on the other hand, redefining the objectives of a new social construct that is respectful of nature and capable of ensuring human life as a shared endeavour. As Enrique Dussel (2006) has said, what must be ensured are the production, reproduction and development of the human life of each ethical subject (each human being). This is what the Common Good of Humanity means. The ultimate reference of any paradigm of human development is life in its concrete reality, including relations with nature, which is, in fact, negated by the logic of capitalism.

There may be objections that this is a fanciful utopia. The fact is that human beings need utopias, and capitalism has destroyed utopian thinking, announcing the end of history ('there are no alternatives'), so that the search for the Common Good of Humanity is indeed an utopia, in the sense of a goal that does not exist today, but that could exist tomorrow. At the same time utopia also has a dynamic dimension: there will always be a tomorrow. All political and religious regimes that claim to embody utopia end up in catastrophe. Utopia is a call to advance.<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason that it is not simply a 'harmless utopia' (Evelyn Pieiller, 2011, 27). The need for it is felt by hundreds of thousands of social movements, citizen organizations, political groups, all in their own way

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<sup>8</sup> Apropos of utopia, Eduardo Galeano wrote: "I go forward two steps and it moves away two steps. I go forward ten steps and the horizon withdraws by ten steps. I can always go forward and I shall never reach it. What is the use of utopia? Precisely that: it is to advance." (cited by Maurice Lemoine, 2010)

struggling for better relations with nature and for its protection, for peasant and organic agriculture, for a social economy, for the abolition of illicit debts, for the collective taking over of the means of production and for the primacy of work over capital, for the defence of human rights, for a participatory democracy and for the recognition of the value of different cultures. The World Social Forums have made it possible to visualize this reality, which is gradually creating a new global social consciousness.

However, it is a dynamic process that requires a coherent holistic vision as the basis for coming together in action, with the aim of building a force powerful enough to reverse the dominant contemporary system in all its dimensions, economic, social, cultural and political. This is precisely what the 'Common Good of Humanity' seeks to express: a coherent theoretical basis, enabling each movement and each social and political initiative to find its place in the edifice as a whole. Achieving this cannot be the work of just a few intellectuals who think on behalf of others, but a collective work, using ideas of the past, particularly that part of the socialist tradition more challenged by capitalism, and integrating new elements. Nor can its dissemination be the exclusive responsibility of one social organization or one avant-garde party monopolizing the truth, but rather of many anti-systemic forces, fighting for the Common Good of Humanity. Of course, many theoretical and strategic issues remain to be studied, discussed and tried out.

## **The transition**

We cannot go into detail in this text, but it is worthwhile introducing, in this moment of reflection, another notion, which is the concept of 'transition'. Karl Marx developed it apropos the shift from the feudal mode of production to capitalism in Europe. It is "the particular stage of a society that is having increasing difficulty in reproducing the economic and social system on which it was founded, and seeks to reorganize itself on the basis of another system, which becomes the general form of the new conditions of existence" (Maurice Godelier, 1982, 1, 165). Evidently it is a question of long, but not linear processes, more or less violent according to the resistance of the social groups involved. Many analysts believe that

capitalism has reached the end of its historical role because, as Karl Marx already observed, it has become a system that destroys its own bases of existence: nature and work. And this is why Samir Amin talks of 'senile capitalism', why Immanuel Wallerstein published an article in the midst of the financial crisis, saying that we were seeing 'the end of capitalism' and why István Mészáros refers to its incapacity to ensure the maintenance of the 'social metabolism of humanity' (I. Mészáros, 2008, 84).

While one can accept the idea that we are living in a transition from the capitalist mode of production to another, and that the process can be precipitated by the climate crisis, we must not forget that such a change will be the result of a social process, and this cannot be achieved without struggles and a transformation in power relationships. In other words, capitalism will not fall by itself and the convergence of all social and political struggles is a prerequisite for this to happen. History teaches us that capitalism is capable of transforming its own contradictions into support for the accumulation process. Developing a theory of the concept of transition, within the historical context of the current system's crisis, will enable us to work out the tools for evaluating the social and political experiences now under way. This is particularly the case for Latin America where regimes have embarked on a process of change, heralding the socialism of the twenty-first century.

The concept can also be applied to particular processes within a general evolution. Without losing the radicalism of the objectives, it is a matter of identifying actions that can lead to the desired result (i.e. another mode of human development), bearing in mind both the concrete circumstances of material development and the existing power relations in the socio-economic and political fields. A typical example is that of the extraction-based economies which, in spite of the ecological and social destruction that they cause and although very much dominated by the interests of capital, cannot be brought to a sudden halt in the progressive countries. This is because, among other things, they provide the financial backing for new policies, as is the case of Venezuela and Bolivia. The transition phase would consist of 1) introducing a long- and

medium-term economic policy based on the needs of the internal market; 2) promulgating stricter ecological and social laws to counteract damage in the economic sector; 3) making users pay the costs; and 4) promoting international legislation to avoid the phenomenon of 'comparative advantage' that favours those whose legislation is less restrictive. In other countries that are less involved in these activities, like Ecuador, a moratorium of some months or years could be proposed, in order to negotiate a transition process with the various social movements.

Using this conceptual instrument cannot serve as a pretext for making political and ideological concessions of the social-democrat variety - in other words accepting that the development of the forces of production cannot happen without the adoption of the principles, tools and formulas of capitalism. That would mean reinforcing the power of those social classes most opposed to a change in the model, as has been the case in Brazil – in spite of advances in other fields; or, as in the socialist countries, establishing new social differences that will inevitably lengthen the transition process, as in China and in Vietnam. All this does indeed pose a more fundamental problem: how to develop productive forces with a socialist perspective, that is to say, in terms of the Common Good of Humanity? And what forces should be developed first? It is a problem that the socialist countries and progressive regimes that came into power after the Second World War, were unable to resolve; and it was the origin of their failures, as well as of the present neoliberal orientation of most of them. As Maurice Godelier said in his courses at the Catholic University of Louvain: "The drama of socialism is that it had to learn to walk with the feet of capitalism". The idea of developing organic peasant agriculture, as was proposed in an Asian seminar at the University of Renmin in Beijing in 2010, instead of promoting the monocultures of an agro-exporting agriculture; the idea of reorganizing the local railway network in Latin America, instead of adopting the projects of IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America). These are some of the examples that could be proposed. Many others could also be worked out in order to promote a genuine transition and not just an adaptation to the prevailing system.

## **Towards a Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity**

Another function of the concept of the Common Good of Humanity would be to prepare a Universal Declaration, within the framework of the United Nations. Obviously a simple declaration is not going to change the world, but it could serve to organize the forces for change around a project that would continue to be fleshed out. It could also serve as a useful pedagogical tool for promoting the theoretical work necessary to mobilize social movements. It would be at the same level as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was the result of a long cultural and political process that started in the Enlightenment and at the beginning of 'modernity', and signified the emancipation of individuals and the recognition of their rights. It was developed by the French and US Declarations at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We know that it is not perfect. It was drawn up in a context that was heavily influenced by the social vision of the Western bourgeoisie, and it has provoked responses like the African Charter of Human Rights of the OAU and a similar initiative in the Arab world. It is used by the Western powers to establish their hegemony over the world. However, it exists: it has saved the freedom, even the lives, of lots of people, and has guided many useful decisions for the well-being of humankind. It has been improved over time, adding second and third generation rights. Nonetheless, to deal with the dangers that the planet and the human species are facing, a new equilibrium is necessary, demanding not only a broadening of human rights, but also a redefinition of the Common Good of Humanity on the basis of a new paradigm.

The preparation of a new Universal Declaration can thus be an instrument for social and political mobilization, creating a new consciousness and serving as a basis for the convergence of social and political movements at the international level. Clearly it is a long-term task, but it needs to be started. Not only can the coming together of social movements like the World Social Forum and political parties like the Forum of São Paulo contribute by promoting such a Declaration, individual countries

can also do so through their representatives in international organizations like Unesco and the Organisation of the United Nations itself. There will be a political struggle, but it is worth doing and can be seen as one of the symbolical elements of the revolution necessary for redefining the paradigm of the collective life of humanity on the planet.

It is very important to make the links between defending 'common goods' like water, re-establishing the priority of a 'Common Good' and the vision of a new construction of the 'Common Good of Humanity'. On the one hand, because the holistic vision embodied in the latter concept requires practical implementation - as in common goods for example - if it is to emerge from the abstract and be translated into action. On the other hand, because specific struggles must take their place in the overall plan too, in order to characterise the role they are playing, not simply as mitigating the deficiencies of a system (thus prolonging its existence), but rather as contributing to a profound transformation - one that requires the coming together of the forces for change in order to establish the bases for the survival of humanity and the planet.

## Chapter II

# BUILDING AXES OF THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY

## 1 The Relationship with Nature

### COMMON GOODS, SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL METABOLISM AND THE COMMON FUTURE OF HUMANITY: A NORTH/SOUTH ANALYSIS

GIAN CARLO DELGADO RAMOS<sup>9</sup>

#### Introduction

The common goods, or that heritage which is essential for the collective life of humanity and which also supports the very existence of the planet's biological diversity, have in modern times become increasingly the object of appropriation and commercialization. The original accumulation of capital was the first step in dismantling the system of individual ownership based on labour and on the collective ownership of common goods, especially of the land. This led in its turn to private ownership of the means of production, and so to the possibility of buying up the labour of dispossessed peasants, thus establishing capitalist agriculture properly so called.

This original accumulation of capital goods became possible after the collective ownership of the land was dissolved, along with other common goods connected with it. Such dispossession was then established as a structural element in the current production system. It was in fact a double dispossession, both of common goods and of labour, whereas the latest is understood as the human form of mediating, regulating and controlling the metabolism between the human being and nature.

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As Marx put it, the process of labour “is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction (stoffwechsel) between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence.” (Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1: 637-638). Because of the above, this (socio-ecological) metabolism has become more relevant as a dialectical and also analytical-conceptual tool, since it allows us to resolve the artificial – and mechanical – separation of nature and the human being which has been well established in the body of dominant knowledge in modern science, or ‘normal’ science as Kuhn understood it (1971).

Since then, this process of appropriation has modified and extended itself in time and in space, adjusting and renewing itself to adapt to whatever conditions might be necessary to prolong and deepen the capital accumulation process, thus resolving, at least temporarily, any systemic contradictions such as over-accumulation<sup>10</sup>. It is thus a process in which “the right of ownership changes in the course of accumulation into appropriation of other people’s property” (Rosa Luxemburg, 2003: 432). Such appropriation is only made possible through the dispossession of others and, as Harvey points out (2003: 115) it is a permanent force in the historical geography of capital accumulation; a process that takes specific features not only within the nation-States but above all between central and peripheral nation-States.

These social-spatial relationships are not just spontaneous but are produced (within society) in obedience to the logic of furthering the accumulation of capital. Thus the territorial space is ordered in a functional manner, establishing practices, processes of organization and the planning of production, distribution and consumption. In the same way the relationships of specific and unequal powers become ‘natural’ and even

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<sup>10</sup> For Harvey (2003: 116) it is clear that there is a ‘continuous and persistent role of the predatory practices of ‘primitive’ and ‘original’ accumulation and hence he considers that it is not very appropriate to call ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ a process that still exists and continues to develop at the present time

'legal', thus increasing the dispossession still further (and hence intensifying the tragedy of the commons)<sup>11</sup>.

Up until now, neoliberal practice has been consolidated as "the" contemporary approach of appropriation of wealth and, in practice, of nature and labour, in a way that is now more aggressive and unequal than it has ever been in the history of humanity. This means that not only has the plunder of common goods been maintained and deepened and the exploitation of labour heightened, but closely associated with these developments there has been an enormous increase in the biophysical flows (or material-energy flows) in contemporary societies – though here too in a markedly unequal measure. In this process, ad hoc techno-scientific development has played a key role, influencing to a large extent not only the method, but also the rhythm, intensity and complexity of socio-ecological metabolic interactions, or *stoffwechsel*.

However, whereas this process has certainly in the short term contributed to mitigating the problem of over-accumulation, it has also shown up more clearly than ever the social and natural – relative – "limits" of the current system of production, its contradictions and potential implications which are far from behaving as linear processes. This is true, for example, for the case of environmental implications as well as for technological ones.

The result of all this is that the dynamic of capital accumulation in concrete territorial spaces is threatening the preservation of common goods, including the very viability of life – and not only human life. In other words, the effect of the present production system is increasingly

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that international law and law in general have permanently blocked collective rights. At the same time, these laws have become instruments for the plundering and commercialization of common goods. Of course, the challenge is how to re-formulate law as a political instrument, first, as a formal (juridical) solution to social injustice and the violation of human rights – though always in association with social mobilization. And, second, how to prepare the ground through other forms of law for an eventual articulation of legal and regulatory principles that seek to protect and guarantee the common good of humanity – that is, short, medium and long term collective interests (which should replace the present situation in which only private, short-term interests are protected and guaranteed).

and dramatically to endanger the expectations of future generations, diminishing the possibility of establishing the collective construction of the Common Good of Humanity in its multiple forms and methods.

It is precisely for this reason that territorial space is also beset by contradictions, arguments, conflicts and social responses, as are other forms of appropriation and its construction. In the process, the issue of socio-ecological metabolism is no small matter. On the contrary, it is hugely important in any efforts to build alternatives as it enables us to analyse labour (in its various forms), taking into account the material-energy flows required and the extent of its viability, both in time and space.

It is hardly necessary to point out that the act of production is an act of producing space and as such it is a historical category that is not given for the eternity because it is indeed a social construction (Santos, 1990: 135-137)<sup>12</sup>. The way the space is produced depends not only on immediate and direct economic activities, but also on future expectations. It follows that the space dimension is not neutral, since it serves social reproduction (Ibid: 156) wherever it takes place.

### **Socio-ecological metabolism and global change**

Modern society is becoming ever more complex because it is taking resources from nature, many of which are finite, and at the same time is depositing large quantities of waste back into nature. This process is changing the ecosystems, and the very functioning of its biochemical cycles of the planet. However, in contrast with past civilizations, the scale and rapidity with which the current system of production is plundering resources and producing entropy (spent energy and materials) makes for a unique situation.

The effects of this dynamic are multiple, the global warming caused by human activities being one of the most visible symptoms. This is pro-

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<sup>12</sup> For Milton Santos, space is a combination of the representative forms of social relationship of past and present on the one hand, and on the other a structure represented by social relations that take place under our eyes and that can be seen in its processes and functions (Santos, 1990: 138)

duced, above all, by the indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels. Thus, the quantity of carbon in the atmosphere, which has been constant in the last 10,000 years at about 280 parts per million (ppm) reached 360 ppm in 1998, 383 ppm in 2006 and 391 ppm at the beginning of 2011 (Heinberg, 2003; 32; co2now.org). This latest figure is already considered by the climate scientists to be 'dangerous territory' in the sense of potentially reaching a no-return point<sup>13</sup>. The indicated means that from the pre-industrial era (1790) up until today, the concentrations of carbon dioxide have increased by slightly over 35 per cent, while those of methane almost 150 per cent and nitrous oxide nearly 20 per cent (IPCC-WGI, 2007:3).

The polarization in the individual (and national) contributions to the destruction of the environment is evident: 20 per cent of the world population living in the metropolitan countries has, in the past, generated 90 per cent of the greenhouse gases (Godrej, 2001:95).

Furthermore, to climate change implications it is to be added the transgression of nitrogen and phosphorus cycles' limits; the acidification of oceans; the ozone layer destruction; the intervention with more than 50 thousands dams of the hydrological cycle, in addition to an over-consumption of fresh water; an increase land-use change and land-cover change; the preoccupying rhythm of biodiversity loss; among other issues such as the ice cover diminishing which pass from 7 millions of km<sup>2</sup> in 2000 to 4.9 millions of km<sup>2</sup> in 2010. Data of the current state of the planet in relation to proposed ecological planetary boundaries -which humanity should not violate in order to avoid irreversible changes), are offered in Table 1.

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<sup>13</sup> As was stated, for example, by James Hansen of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Table 1. Ecological Planetary Boundaries			
Planetary Boundary	Pre-industrial State (before 1850)	Proposed Boundary	Current State
Climate Change (Transgression of carbon cycle)	280 particles per million	< 350 particles per million	391 particles per million by 2010)
Ocean Acidification*	3.44 $\Omega$ arag*	2.75 $\Omega$ arag	2.90 $\Omega$ arag
Ozone Layer	290 Dobson units**	276 Dobson units	283 Dobson units
Nitrogen Biogeochemical Cycle	0 tons per year	35 million of tons per year	121 million of tons per year
Phosphorus Biogeochemical Cycle	1 million of tons per year	11 million of tons per year	8.5 – 9.5 million of tons per year
Human use of fresh water (Transgression of water cycle)	415 km <sup>3</sup>	4,000 km <sup>3</sup>	2,600 km <sup>3</sup>
Land-use change	Low	15%	11.7%
Biodiversity Loss (Rate of species loss)	0.1 – 1 species per million	10 species per million	100 species per million
Chemical and other type of pollution	Non-existent	Unknown***	Unknown***

Source: Rockström et al, 2009.

\* A diminish on the value means an increase on the acidification. Data indicates the saturation state of aragonite ( $\Omega$  arag).

\*\* A Dobson unit is equal to  $2.69 \times 10^{16}$  molecules of ozone/cm<sup>2</sup> or about 1 mm thick of ozone layer under normal pressure and temperature conditions.

\*\*\* This is due to the fact that there are no available indicators that allow us to measure in a standardized manner most of this type of pollutants concentrations in the environment, not to say their implications. In this context, particular attention certainly entails the cases of persistent organic pollutants, plastics, endocrine disruptors, heavy metals and radioactive wastes.

Considering the above it is logical that to have negative data regarding the world ecological footprint. This an indicator that calculates – on the basis of our present way of life – the territory needed both to produce the resources and energy being used up, and to assimilate the residues generated by humanity. It shows that they have already surpassed those of Planet Earth by anything from 25 to 39 per cent, depending on the way it is calculated<sup>14</sup>. Accordingly we need, in the best-case scenario, another quarter of a planet to maintain the consumption and wastage levels at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most of this consumption is however attributed to metropolitan or central countries, since in the periphery a little less than half of the population does not even have access to the most basic ‘blessings’ of modernity (e.g. sufficient energy, above all electricity, and drinking water, not to mention sanitary and health services of quality, let alone telecommunications, among others)<sup>15</sup>. The data on the distribution of world wealth is in this context revealing and consequently of great importance. In 2007, 20 per cent of the richest owned 82.7 per cent of the wealth, while 20 per cent of the poorest owned 1.4 per cent (and the penultimate 20 per cent only 1.9 per cent).

In this state of situation we should remind ourselves that the short to medium term, just the impacts of greenhouse gases include: the contamination of vegetation; the infiltration of pollutants of aquifers and hence to the rest of the food chain; acid rain; various illnesses such as asthma, heart disorders, cancer, inflammation and allergies, etc. (Epstein and Selber, 2002: 35-42). The long term or ‘indirect’ impacts are essentially linked to the implications of global warming, a phenomenon that has been confirmed over the last three decades (see the reports of the International Panel on Climate Change –IPCC– on [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch)) and

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<sup>14</sup> Estimates vary. For the Global Footprint Network, humanity had used (in net terms) half of the biocapacity of the planet by 1961 and 1.25 times by 2003 (Global Footprint Network, 2004). According to *Redefining Progress*, the biocapacity of the planet had been lowered, for the year 2005, by 39 per cent (Venetoulis and Talbert, 2005)

<sup>15</sup> As an example: the energy consumption in the richest countries is 21 times per capita more than in the poor countries. Similarly, 85 per cent of the use and consumption of fresh water is allotted to only 12 per cent of the richest population in the world (Delgado, 2005: 25).

which is believed to have many and complex implications, mainly around four key areas: 1) an increase of temperature, even of more than 3 degrees C; 2) the melting of the polar icecaps; and, as a consequence, 3) the rise in sea levels of over one metre, and 4) greater frequency of extreme meteorological events. Some of the impacts foreseen calculate a reduction in the accessibility of water resources (from 10 to 30 per cent in temperate latitudes and the humid tropics), accompanied among other things by loss in food production; the salinization of continental waters through the infiltration of seawater; an increase in the irreversible loss of species and the generalized erosion of many ecosystems; loss of land in the coastal areas due to the increase in sea levels, leading to the displacement of millions of people (the climate change migration); an increase in the risk of flooding in certain areas; a greater spread of particular infectious vectors, among others. And yet the expected costs and eventual impacts of climate change will be higher and/or more difficult to deal with in those countries whose contribution to greenhouse gas emissions has been very slight.

Since all these variables reinforce or feed into one another, at the same time producing results that are non-linear and therefore synergetic (although to a certain extent unpredictable), this whole ensemble of processes and implications has been called 'global change'. It involves a series of changes that are happening more or less simultaneously and are already affecting the planetary system (including, obviously, ourselves as part of it) in many and various ways, and often with unequal effects. It is the first change of such magnitude to be caused by human beings and was certainly beginning to become visible some time ago. This is what Leakey and Lewin (1997) have termed the Sixth Extinction. The phenomenon is thus the result, to a large extent, of the kind of metabolism or *stoffwechsel* that humanity has developed. One that is essentially determined by placing the accumulation of capital beyond any other socio-environmental considerations and which has led, among other things, to irrational, wasteful and destructive patterns and actions. 'Development' in the present system of production is thus understood as exclusively economic growth, leaving aside other considerations such

as the social, environmental and cultural spheres which, as a consequence – and for other reasons as well– are all in a state of crisis. Hence, it is properly to talk of a conjunction of multiple crises at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The limited contemporary view of development is as something automatically and mechanically assumed to be good and desirable because it is seen as the lever that makes it possible to generate jobs and wealth. Whether through the medium of the market or, on occasion, through State mechanisms, in one way or the other wealth is socially distributed (how effectively this is done can be seen from the data quoted above on the distribution of wealth at the world level). Given such a view, widely assumed and disseminated by the ruling and governing classes (Domhoff, 1969), it is not surprising that most of the political agendas of the nations of the world are likely to be imbued with this mercantilist notion of development. As a consequence, all political objectives are linked to the promotion of economic growth. Evaluations of the ‘well-being of a country’ or of management by officials tend to have the same criteria. This even includes associating the quality of life with how much materials and energy are consumed - thus presupposing that consumption is everything, that only the utilitarian provides a logic and meaning to human life.

Hence, by introducing the ‘environmental’ variable, the ‘natural’, in such a context, is to find “the” formula whereby we can have continued growth while at the same time conserving the environment. This assumes, on the one hand, that while economic growth will lead to an increase in environmental impact or ‘externalities’ at the beginning, these will reach a maximum and will then decline (following the Kuznets environmental curve). On the other hand it is considered that such a trend for the environmental impact to diminish can accelerate if the economic surpluses resulting from growth are then partially used in green development and the conservation of the ecosystems.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which was held in Stockholm in 1972, was a forerunner of this economic-envir-



mental perspective. It was seen as the first effort of the capitalist system to take measures to combat the world's ecological problems, which even then had become evident.

Later, in 1974, the idea of 'eco-development' was informally presented within the framework of the Cocoyoc Declaration. It questioned the nature and aim of development because, as it was argued: "[this] must not be the development of things but of the human being" (Cocoyoc Declaration, 1974). The Declaration, which was the result of a meeting of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), included some valuable proposals<sup>16</sup>, calling for the objective of economic development to be to improve living conditions among the poorest. However it was speedily adjusted to serve the logic of the system by the adoption of a notion, to be called 'sustainable development', that enabled the dilution of any social component and the corresponding prevalent power relationships.

The concept first appeared in the Brundtland Report in 1984 where it was conceived as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, transmitted to the General Assembly as an Annex to document A/42/427 – Development and International Co-operation: Environment. Chapter 2) However, sustainable development made a formal and institutional commitment in "an integrated approach to policy- and decision-making in which environmental protection and long-term economic growth are seen not as incompatible but as complementary, indeed mutually dependent: solving environmental problems requires resources which only economic growth can provide, while economic growth will falter if human and natural resources are

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<sup>16</sup> Among these was the need for what is now called the 'de-globalization' of the economy, giving more importance to the local; the need to break with economic dependency between rich and poor countries; the reorientation of scientific-technological agendas to solve environment problems, especially those related to energy; and a change of consumption patterns and strategies for the use of land. Among other, more questionable ones was the proposal to apply taxes on the use of global common goods as a point of departure for establishing a system of global taxes that would serve as a platform for transferring resources to assist the poor countries.

damaged by environmental degradation.” (United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in <http://www.un.org/esa/documents/ecosoc/cn17/1997/ecn171997-3.htm>). Since then, the discourse has been more and more elaborated, with the Earth Summit at Rio serving as a milepost in the process. More recently there has been a return to a commitment to ‘green’ capitalism in the context of measures to be taken on climate change.

‘Green capitalism’, being at least three decades in construction, on the one hand defends economic growth as a precondition for ‘sustainability’ and, on the other, puts forward market mechanisms as the way to organize all ‘adaptation’ and ‘mitigation’ activities (i.e. tradable green certificates markets such as the carbon market, the water rights market, clean development mechanisms, REDD+ projects, etcetera). The point has even been reached when the global environmental crisis of the beginning of this century is actually being seen as an opportunity to consolidate new market niches for achieving economic surpluses and hence for business. Accordingly, the role of novel techno-science is seen as key to the eventual adoption of technological changes. It is even considered a change of concrete actors, but of course not of the system itself.

Thus we have seen, for example, timid support for the development and expansion of renewable energies, a niche which plays a limited role within the current world energy pattern but that is causing already, on one side, considerable tensions among inter-capitalist competitors in the case of wind<sup>17</sup> and photovoltaic energies, and on the other hand, con-

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<sup>17</sup> The fight for the market in alternative energies is already evident, above all between the central countries and potential challengers like China, which is already an important producer of turbines and photoelectric cells at the global level and is beginning to develop its own technology in these fields. Thus we see the promotion of plans to subordinate the production of the peripheral countries in wind, solar and other technology to enterprises in the central countries. Hence a technological imperialism in these fields is being consolidated. For a view of the US interests, read Levi, Economy, O’Neil and Segal 2010: 111-121

siderable criticism over agrofuels as an alternative clean energy and as a measure to fight climate change since it has been demonstrated that they deepen socio-environmental problems (at least for the case of the so called first generations) (see Delgado, 2009A; Houtart, 2010; Giampietro and Mayumi, 2009).

The conventional discourse then tells us that with the development of these type of technologies, among others, we can extricate ourselves from the problem of global change, without ever questioning for a moment the biophysical patterns that support the present production-circulation-consumption system that enable surpluses to be made and hence, capital accumulation to be generated. Such a position ignores the 'Jevons paradox', which states that in the current system of production, an increase in the efficiency of the use of material-energy resources only generates an increase in demand, because efficiency brings with it an increase in economic expansion.

In this way, by assuming that the market alone can solve the environmental crisis, productivist logic ensures that the goal of ever increasing economic growth can remain unaffected. Thus capitalism can subscribe to the green charter and still not make any important structural changes. In other words, it can maintain accelerating exploitation and capital accumulation within a context of clearly 'uneven development' (Smith, 2008).

For Georgescu-Roegen (1971), 'sustainable development' is seen as merely 'balm', given that economic development necessarily and inevitably involves, to a greater or lesser extent, a transformative effect on the environment. In this sense the concept becomes an oxymoron, as Daly and Townsend (1993) have pointed out.

And, as it has already been stated, growth requires not only maintaining the level of exploitation but quantitatively and qualitatively increasing it, both in the labour force and in the use of natural resources (materials and energy). This in turn obliges capitalism to stimulate the growth of consumption patterns, both on the part of individuals and of the institutions that shape the system.

From all that has been said it is therefore clear that the 'natural limits' of any production system will come up against the fact that it is only a sub-

system of the biosphere which makes its existence possible in terms of materials and energy. This means that the capitalist system of production cannot grow exponentially in a natural system that is finite, at least not without incurring heavy socio-environmental costs, many of which may well be irreversible.

This is the limitation that O'Connor describes as the second contradiction of capitalism, the first being the tendency of the rate of profit to decrease - even if this, in turn, forces the capitalist production system to generate counter mechanisms like a greater exploitation of labour and of nature, reduction of product lifetime, technological innovation, or warfare. According to O'Connor, "capitalist threats to the reproduction of production conditions [work, infrastructure, nature, etc.] are not only threats to profits and accumulation, but also to the viability of the social and natural environment as means of life and life itself" (1997:30). And notice, the first and second contradictions are synergetically linked. While the first is a factor of the heightening of the second, the second is, in principle and up to a certain point, the limiting factor of the first. This is why, as Bellamy-Foster observes (2009: 206), the second contradiction does not necessarily block the capacity of the system to generate profits and accumulate capital. In other words, it can achieve continuity within a context of destruction, even to the point of no return.

In this sense, the second contradiction of capitalism must not be understood as 'the' variable that will unquestionably block the capitalist production system insofar as it submits the system to the conditions of underproduction. The commitment to green capitalism shows the way and the forms that the system will take to preserve itself, strengthening itself even as it is completely eroding and destroying not only the common goods but the Good of Humanity, now and increasingly in the future. Therefore, the first contradiction of capitalism (and its neutralization) as well as the class antagonisms typical of the system still are the central elements limiting alternative projects, specially those that tend to less aggressive metabolic interactions (stoffwechsel) which aim at the common good. In that sense, taking nature's limits into account seems extremely relevant for the transition towards the common good of humanity and the constructing of it. Metabolism's characteristics, and the

relative limitations of the present system, are thus key issues, mainly because it is necessary to know the departing point, meaning the dimensions and types of current biophysical flows.

Georgescu-Roegen (1971) described the economic process from such a viewpoint, looking at the economic process from a thermodynamics perspective and in particular from the law of entropy (the Second Law of Thermodynamics) which proves that there is a continual and irrevocable deterioration from free energy (or low entropy) to dependent energy (or high entropy). This led Georgescu-Roegen into noting that the material basis of life is therefore an entropic and hence finite process since we consume orderly or free energy and expel disordered or dependent energy. Something similar happens with materials, the difference being that they are to a large extent recyclable, although never completely so (of course the process requires elevated amounts of energy).

However, it is characteristic of the contemporary human being to use energy not only endosomatically (by using instruments that are part of each individual organism by birth) but also more and more using it exosomatically (by using even more complex machinery and tools). The capitalist economic system consists of an exponential transformation of low entropy into waste, and given that this transformation is irrevocable (because of the 1<sup>st</sup> Thermodynamic Law), the environment, in principle, establishes limits to the economic subsystem if it is to continue under known circumstances. Or, as Georgescu-Roegen put it (1996: 67), "if we abstract from the other causes that may sound the death knell of the human species, it is clear that natural resources represent the limitative factor as concerns the life span of that species. Man's existence is now irrevocably tied to the use of exosomatic instruments and hence to the use of natural resources." And he adds: "we need no elaborated argument to see that the maximum of life quantity requires the minimum rate of natural resource depletion [...] There can be no doubt about it: any use of the natural resources for the satisfaction of non-vital needs means a smaller quantity of life in the future." (Ibid.)

It can therefore be said that development, understood as merely economic growth, comes up against serious socio-environmental limits be-

cause in principle there is not enough of the planet to sustain an exponential production process that is based on patterns of spendthrift consumption. In other words, the capacity load of the planet is being exceeded because nature is not growing at the same rate or rhythm as capitalism is doing and intends to continue doing so. In fact, if the system is able to overcome its contradictions and ignores the biophysical dimensions of the economic process, eventually it will reach a point of no return - at least for life as we know it, including human life.

### **Growth, environment and the search for alternatives.**

The tension between economic growth and the environment has encouraged many debates and alternative proposals. There are positions that defend the environment as a 'cult'; those that advocate a slowing down of growth; and those that talk of eco-development, or even 'de-growth'.

While the cult of the environment is unreal, since, strictly speaking, it means changing our surroundings as little as possible and thus not using materials and energy, even to satisfy many of our basic needs; a mere slowing down of economic growth will only delay the inevitable socio-environment crisis that is associated with it.

The eco-development suffers instead from a serious conceptual problem, according to authors like Latouche (2008). This is because it is usually rooted in developmentalism, understood as economic growth for the sake of economic growth. However, it should be borne in mind that there are notions of 'eco-development' that are different from the proposal of green capitalism and that they even put forward the idea of 'de-growth', or an economy in dynamic equilibrium, i.e. with zero growth (Daly, 1992).

For example, the perspective of eco-development proposed by Ignacy Sachs (1981) is in general pro-active, and in certain aspects close to that of Daly or Latouche, even if –and here the latter author is right in saying this- from the political and practical viewpoint it is still linked, in the eyes of the non-experts, to the notion of a 'good', sustainable development that has more 'green' and 'social' content.

In spite of that, it is possible to argue, in Sachs's favour, that the debate over concepts is necessary. This would mean that if the concept of eco-development was to be made positive (so to speak) it would involve detaching it from the notion of capitalist development and building another, completely different vision of development – one that abandons developmentalism and has a strong and genuine socioecological metabolic awareness.

Sachs hits upon making use of a positive notion of development, exploring different aims for the development process, at the same time as emphasizing the need for the cultural contributions of the people. He is concerned, among other things, about the possibility of getting bogged down in the mistaken tendency to find homogeneous solutions, induced by what he calls "cultural imitation, uni-linear vision and the impoverishment of development" (Sachs, 1981:16). His idea is therefore to promote endogenous and pluralistic solutions based on autonomy in decision-making and self-confidence, as well as being more selective in connections with the outside world (Ibid.).

This argument, to a large extent, is in line with the 'degrowth' proposal of Latouche (2008:145), who calls for the 'decolonization of the imaginary' and the 'deconstruction of progress and progressivism'. In the same way, Daly talks of the need for 'moral growth' as being fundamental for implementing what he calls a zero growth economy, a process that requires, apart from good management, a debate on 'ultimate objectives' (Daly, 1992).

From his perspective, Sachs visualizes 'other form of development' which means improving the material and non-material conditions of people (Sachs, 1981:18). For him, this has to be supported by five pillars: to be endogenous and count on one's own forces; to take the logic of necessities as a point of departure; to concentrate on promoting the symbiosis between human societies and nature; and to be open to institutional change (Sachs, 1981: 17). It is a blueprint in which not only the global but above all the local is key, because, for Sachs, development cannot be achieved outside this dimension and, in his words, "eco-development cannot happen without the initiative and the engagement of the people's imagination to attain the social objectives and highlight the

specific solutions that should be achieved, which brings us down, once again, to the local level” (Ibid: 18). Therefore, ‘local eco-development’, rural and/or urban, seems to be an obligatory point of departure.

As for Latouche, he advocates downgrading ‘good-having’ in order to advance ‘good-living’, so that for him the central problem is not in changing the patterns of value so much as starting to change values themselves and to start drawing the consequences for the concepts (Latouche, 2008:82). The society of ‘degrowth’, according to Latouche, involves limiting economic growth and therefore capital accumulation. However, it can only happen if there is a reduction in the patterns of spendthrift consumption, which would have a negative effect on surpluses, the rates of profit and capital accumulation. This should imply a biophysical ‘degrowth’, both in material and energy flows. Latouche however is not clear or consistent because at times he seems to refer simply to economic ‘degrowth’ as though it were equivalent to biophysical ‘degrowth’.

Accordingly, biophysical degrowth or ‘sustainable degrowth’<sup>18</sup> has been defined in the following terms:

“an equitable down-scaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term ... [is a tendency in which] certain social qualities, small/medium-scale economic activities and impoverished groups or regions may still selectively need to grow. [...Therefore] sustainable degrowth should be accounted at multiple levels.” (Schneider et al, 2010:512).

Biophysical degrowth can only come about, not as a result of negative fluctuations in the economy such as crises or recessions that merely discourage consumption, but by establishing concrete limits and reductions, in absolute terms, in the use of materials and energy. Thus the concept of degrowth, according to Schneider et al., implies the need “to construct an alternative for a sustainable future” (Ibid.) -in other words,

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<sup>18</sup> I prefer to use the term ‘biophysical degrowth’ given the ambiguity in the meaning of sustainability (see foregoing paragraphs on this subject).



a genuine socio-environmental sustainability or of harmonious socio-ecological metabolism. It is therefore important not to strip the concept of its content, either political or social, since it must not be used to justify an authoritarian (and thus unequal) imposition of limits in an acute crisis. But neither should we think of it as a mere reduction in the flow of energy and materials. It should be a reduction that is socially just, based on a fairly distributed increase in the quality of life. That is to say, the biophysical reduction should not be made general, but should only affect spendthrift patterns of consumption, and not only the final consumption but of the whole system itself.

In these alternative modalities of production and of continuance of life, reducing consumption patterns therefore does not mean depriving people of basic necessities. It does mean limiting extravagance and consumption that is clearly unnecessary (at present stimulated, as already indicated above, by publicity and fashion, a deliberate reduction in the quality of goods in order to reduce their shelf life, destruction through warfare, etc.) (See Baran and Sweezy, 1966.)

The 'biophysical de-growth society', as it can be called, will therefore lead to a general reduction in consumption in the central or metropolitan countries and a temporary increase of consumption in the periphery, in order to satisfy, at least, the basic necessities of everyone. For this to happen it will be necessary to break existing ties and dependencies between the centre and the periphery, and at the same time seek viable ways of reconstructing territorial space in all its dimensions –including social, political and cultural ones. This reconstruction, both in the metropolitan and peripheral areas, must be seen above all in terms of the local and the regional, because this is where people live and can concretely construct a 'new geography'. Technology for a "biophysical de-growth society" would play of course an important role, and certainly it would be of a different kind and rationality.

## **Dispossession and transfer of the periphery's natural resources: Limits of the transition towards the Common Good of Humanity.**

At the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the tendency to maintain and even expand national economic projects that revolve around extractive activities, primarily 'enclave' exporters or those economies concentrated on exploiting natural resources with little (and irrelevant) or no productive endogenous linkages, is taking on new features and an even more ruthless dynamics. The bleeding of these (peripheral) regions has been going on since colonization up until the present and is indeed intensifying.

This is not only due to the growing rhythm in the extraction of natural resources that the world economy demands (especially certain countries), but also to the fact that, unlike in those years when import substitution was the economic model, Latin America – with the relative exception of Brazil and Argentina – is constantly losing its ability even to produce its own food. The neoliberal model in the region is enthusiastically embracing non-food crops (or ones that are marginal to the basic diet) and certain products clearly destined for export. The process has turned the region into a vast market for the surplus production of US farmers and other 'partners' of world agribusiness, this being only possible thanks to the technological advances of the last century which are mostly based on high inputs of chemicals and fossil energy. Thus Mexico, for example, has become dependent on imported food (including maize and beans that are the basis of the Mexican diet) which had represented 10 per cent of the total before the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and which rose to a little over 40 per cent at the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Colombia is also heavily dependent on imports for more than 50 per cent of its food, including almost all its wheat, lentils and barley, two-thirds of its maize and a quarter of its rice and beans. Chile and Venezuela have similar percentages of dependency, particularly in basic grains like wheat and maize, and some oleaginous products (<http://faostat.fao.org>).

In spite of the enormous agricultural potential of Argentina and Brazil, the expansion of monocultures of improved seeds and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is creating a complicated and somewhat un-

favourable situation for them, as it tends to homogenize most of their crops while increasing the environmental and social costs in the medium and long term. This is evidently the case for their soybean production, as well as for Brazilian sugarcane, which is concentrated on the production of agrofuels. However, these two countries are not the only ones with this monoculture model (also of soybean, sugarcane, as well as of pineapple, African palm, cellulose, among others): it is being spread, although perhaps so far with relatively less intensity, to other parts of Latin America.<sup>19</sup>

The extractive nature of the enclave economy, clearly locates Latin America at the system's periphery, with no sufficient food in spite of its great natural and human wealth. It can thus be said that Latin America is subordinated, in varying degrees, to the interests and flows of metropolitan capital.

Marini (1973) gave clear warning of this, and since then there have been several decades in which the structural dependency of the region has grown, caused by that particular international division of labour typical of *sui generis* Latin American capitalism. He added: "...as the world market becomes more developed [...] international exploitation can more and more rely on reproducing economic relationships that perpetuate and increase the backwardness and the weakness of these nations." (Ibid: 32)

It is evident that the political sovereignty of the Latin American nations did not and do not lead automatically to economic independence. Political sociology, or the study of power relations, behaviour, interests and contradictions of the governing classes and local powers (i.e. oligarchy) in Latin America go a long way to explain this situation, which otherwise would not be possible (for the Mexican situation see: Delgado, 2009B). Of course it is also to notice the no less important interference of foreign interests and pressures from international organizations like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization

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<sup>19</sup> The various examples are given in Emanuelli, Jonsén and Monsalve, 2009. For a critique of the dispossession of land in Latin America, see Grain, 2010a and 2010b, which advises on and monitors the land dispossession among other agrarian themes (<http://farmlandgrab.org>)

or the Interamerican Development Bank, as well as agencies and other bodies of the defence and security apparatuses of countries like the United States of America, assistance (and development aid) from various countries, including China, business representatives and their lobbies, etcetera (see: Saxe-Fernández and Delgado, 2004; Wallach and Woodall/Public Citizen, 2004; Toussaint, 2006; Toussaint and Millet, 2009; Ugar-teche, 2010; Delgado and Romano, 2010).

From the socio-environmental viewpoint, extractive activities have a negative influence on peoples in the short, medium and long term. Acosta (2009) rightly warns that the economic model based on extraction is problematic, since the natural and human wealth of Latin America has distorted the structure and allocation of its economic resources, redistributing the national income regressively and concentrating national wealth in few hands, while causing widespread poverty. This situation has been responsible for recurrent economic crises, while it reinforces, as Acosta says, the 'rentier' mentality, weakens already feeble institutions that are limited in scope, encourages corruption and leads to the deterioration of the environment (Ibid: 11).

Extractive economies are responsible for the production logic of peripheral countries like those of Latin America, which are being driven by external demand since they do not need an internal market and can function with diminishing numbers of wage labourers. This increases the destitution of the population, which contrasts markedly with the tremendous amount of their natural resources (Ibid: 29; read also: Marini, 1973). Summing up, says Acosta, "... it is as if this wealth is slipping through our fingers and ending up beyond our borders, feeding into the channels of international trade but without triggering a qualitative leap forward in national development" (Acosta, 2009: 15).

This situation can be explained by the fact that today, as in colonial times, the pillage of the periphery is continuing all the time (though with all the complexity and distinctive characteristics of each historical moment), as is also the firm control of the strategic means of production and key areas of the Latin American economies by foreign capital, although they leave some business, essentially in the service sector, to their 'minor partners' (regional monopolies) (See: Delgado, 2009B).

The role of Latin America as a strategic reserve of natural resources that is crucial for the world economy becomes clear when one analyses the economic and geopolitical imperialism of countries like the United States of America in the region, which is due, among other factors, to their increasing dependency on materials and energy. This is becoming more and more acute, especially since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when scientific and technological progress made it possible to accelerate the production/ accumulation cycles and thus to transform nature at even more unsustainable rates. It is a situation in which the access, management and usufruct of natural resources are clearly the central aspects of dispute. Thus it is clearly useful and necessary to constantly monitor the region's political ecology, i.e. the study and diagnosis of the complexity of existing interests, power structures and conflicts around strategic natural resources for the functioning of the world economy – all this within a context of biophysical factors and specific environmental limits that if are infringe, degrade and even mortgage the future of the peoples and their natural surroundings.

The US financial flows into Latin America make this international division of labour and the role of the region highly visible. Thus, for 2009,<sup>20</sup> while the US invested, under the heading of chemicals, a total of 15,759 million dollars, out of this 11.596 million dollars were invested in Europe and only 1,898 million dollars in Latin America and 152 million dollars in Africa. Under machinery, for a total of 3,627 million dollars, 2,035 million dollars were invested in Europe. There was a similar tendency for electrical equipment, with a total of 1,316 million dollars, of which 738 million dollars were destined for Europe, 229 million dollars for Latin America and 3 million dollars for Africa. For professional and scientific services, the disparity between centre and periphery is again confirmed, with a total of 6,545 million dollars being invested, of which 3,887 million dollars went to Europe and only 171 million dollars to Latin America, 68 mil-

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<sup>20</sup> All data relating to the aggregates provided by the US Department of Commerce under 'US Direct Investment Abroad: financial outflows without current cost adjustment, 2009'. This is available on [www.bea.gov/international/xls/fin\\_09.xls](http://www.bea.gov/international/xls/fin_09.xls)

lion dollars to Africa and 1,680 million dollars to Asia. In contrast, the total US investment in mining was 22,259 million dollars, the biggest share (10,795 million dollars) being allocated to Latin America, while Canada took 2,572 million dollars, Africa 5,733 million dollars and Asia 3,052 million dollars. Europe is recorded with negative investment under this heading: -576 million dollars.

From the kind of foreign companies operating in Latin America and the most important Latin American enterprises, one can also see the international division of labour in operation, especially the persistence of uneven and hence disadvantageous trade for the region. However nothing more clearly reveals it (apart from a few exceptions) than the extractivist, assembly-plant and strategically offshore nature of the Latin American economy.

According to data offered by América Economía (2010), out of the 500 biggest companies of Latin America, 25 per cent of their sales in 2009 were in the oil and gas sector, 7 per cent in the generation of electricity, 5 per cent in mining, 4 per cent in agribusiness and 2 per cent in cement and paper. This means that half of the income for Latin America came from natural resources and the rest from low technology sectors more linked with trade, telecommunications, drinks and processed food, and manufacturing assembly.

Meanwhile most of the equipment and machine tools, as well as oil and petrochemical products were provided by foreign industry, coming less or more from one country or another. The Mexican case is really shameful because, in spite of being an oil producing country, it imports some 40 per cent of the gasoline that it consumes.

It is generally known that, in addition to this uneven trade, Latin America is not only an strategic reserve of natural resources but it is also crucial for the realization of metropolitan surpluses, which is achieved through capital exports or what is known as foreign direct investment (FDI) but also through technology transfers. Meanwhile Latin America transfers its surpluses through paying down its external (and also internal) debts. So, while Latin American external debt cannot be paid off because it is based on a mechanism that seeks to expand and deepen the depend-

ency of the region,<sup>21</sup> the United States and other metropolitan powers maintain large flows of capital with which they have speculated and profited on the leading activities of the Latin American nations, from oil and mining deposits to seaports and airports, roads, railways, etc.

The yields from the FDI alone are just as great. For example, the 60 largest non-financial corporations alone in Latin America –most of them foreign—<sup>22</sup> generated, in consolidated sales in the region for 2007, some 424.862 million dollars. That is little less than four times the total FDI of that year, which was 113,157 million dollars (CEPAL, 2009: 26, 55, 56). This statistic shows the considerable effect of FDI on the realization of exported capital, and enables one to see more clearly the significance of the fact that Latin America and the Caribbean absorb 8 per cent of the world FDI, or a quarter of the world FDI destined for the countries of the periphery (Ibid.20).

The above figures indicate that both the FDI and the debt stimulate more and more extraction activities. While the FDI seeks to ensure the transfer of surpluses as quickly as possible, without considering social or environmental 'externalities', the external debt and its interests stimulate greater exploitation of the region's own resources, i.e. the labour force and nature.

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<sup>21</sup> From 1985 to the beginning of 2004, the debt of Latin America rose from 672 thousand million dollars to 1,459 billion dollars (Toussaint, 2007: 163). In fact, if one looks at the annual net financial transfers (the difference between payments to service the debt and the repatriation of profits for foreign multinationals, compared with the gross exogenous income from grants, loans and investments), the net transfer was negative for Latin America for almost all of the 1980s and 1990s, as well for the first decade of the millennium.

<sup>22</sup> According to the statistics of CEPAL (2009: 56), only four corporations were Latin American and all the others were foreign. The United States accounted for 23, although the Europeans, if taken all together, came to 26. There were also three Japanese, two Korean, one from Singapore and one Anglo-Australian. The Latin American corporations were huge monopolies: América Móvil/Telmex of Mexico (telecommunications), Techint of Argentina (steel and metallurgy), the State-owned Petrobras of Brazil (oil), and Cencosud of Chile (supermarket chain).

Hence the FDI and the debt are mechanisms that consolidate dependency and imperialism in Latin America.

## **Final Thoughts**

The need to devise, debate and construct new paradigms of development is increasingly evident, meaning those that take history into account and are fundamentally critical, socio-environmentally more harmonious and fair, as well as promoting biophysical de-growth. This means, for the periphery, that it is vital to move away from extraction activities and to rethink seriously how to arrange and manage the territory. At all events, science, technology and industrialization, while important, should never be seen as ends in themselves, but as appropriate tools for building other possible kinds of development.

This is a challenge that requires inter-disciplinary reflection specific for each country and region in the world. Experiences can be and indeed should be shared, but concrete solutions will require much effort at the local level so as to implement activities that correspond to the specific reality of each case.

It is thus important to stress that the current vision of 'sustainable development' or 'sustainability' have negative effects when they are used by ruling and governing classes to greenwash their action and speeches. However, these terms have a positive aspect in that they enable social actors, who were unable to dialogue and who had no terms of reference, to use the argument on what is 'sustainable' (or the defence of common goods) in creating discussion networks, alliances and agreements. These alliances and agreements should ideally be much more refined, for they should be based on constructing not only a much stronger social fabric, but also a process of cultural and conceptual decolonization that facilitates a broader vision of the socio-environmental issues as at the beginning of this century and the possible paths for moving towards the common good of humanity. It could therefore be said that the ecological crisis is more than any other issue relevant to the exploited classes, above all the poorest, as they are the first to be



affected by the havoc being wrought on their immediate natural surroundings. Social struggles against dispossession and to defend the environment, both by people in the metropolitan areas and by those in the peripheral areas, constitute the social fabric of the genuine 'ecology of the poor'.<sup>23</sup> For what is at stake is not only the right to a healthy environment but the very existence of these peoples, which is being threatened increasingly by accumulation through dispossession (Harvey, 2006). As for the rest, what could be called the 'ecology of the rich' or that of the ruling and governing classes, including a good part of the middle classes who have adapted themselves, it is mainly 'balm' or demagoguery, only made possible thanks to prevailing class structures and power.

The construction of different but interlocking alternatives for other ways of making or building territorial space in all its complexity, must be socially and environmentally harmonious, fair and democratic. These should be collective processes which not only require a commitment to the Common Good of Humanity (continuance of life), a great capacity to promote knowledge(s) dialogue, socio-political responsibility and a historical memory (of society and nature), but above all there should be acknowledgement by the actors that they are anti-systemic in as much as they seek to reproduce good quality living conditions for everyone, while also accepting the diversity of life among those who share the planet with us.

Thus the construction of 'other kinds of development' requires, from the beginning, raising the level of awareness, organization and cohesion of peoples in their various magnitudes and viable modalities.

At the heart of the present situation, as I have indicated, is that what is at stake is not only the eco-social viability of certain territorial spaces, but -for the first time in the history of humanity- the very frame of reference of life itself.

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<sup>23</sup> Martinez-Alier has proposed the concept of the 'ecology of the poor' referring to the social movements of the periphery who are fighting for their natural environment, not as a result of a mere ecological consciousness, but because it is their only and very often last means of subsistence. See the impressive review of cases of the 'ecology of the poor' that have been documented by the author in: Martinez-Alier, 2002

The struggle for the Common Good of Humanity thus involves the struggle for freedom, for liberty seen from the viewpoint of natural necessity. This means, in the words of Marx: "...that socialized man [...] govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their own collective control rather than being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature." (Karl Marx, Capital, Vol.3: 959.)

## 2 The production of life (economy)

### REFLECTIONS ON THE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS

RÉMY HERRERA

#### Introduction

One of the most frequent errors made in interpreting the present crisis is that it is a financial crisis which is contaminating the sphere of the real economy. It is, in fact, a crisis of capital, of which one of the most visible and publicized aspects has emerged within the financial sphere because of the extreme degree of financialization of contemporary capitalism. We are dealing with a systemic crisis that affects the very heart of the capitalist system, the power centre of high finance that has been controlling accumulation over the past three decades. It is not due to a combination of factors: it is a structural phenomenon. The series of repeated monetary/financial crises that have successively hit different economies over the past thirty years are part and parcel of the same crisis, since the 'financial coup d'état' of the United States in 1979: Mexico in 1982, the debt crisis in the 1980s, the United States in 1987, the European Union (including Great Britain) in 1992-93, Mexico in 1994, Japan in 1995, so-called 'emerging' Asia in 1997-1998, Russia and Brazil in 1998-1999 and Ivory Coast at the same time, and the United States again in 2000 with the burst of the 'new economy' bubble, then Argentina and Turkey in 2000-2001 – and so on. It is a crisis that has worsened recently, above all since 2006-2007, starting with the hegemonic centre of the system and becoming general, developing into a crisis with socio-economic, political, even humanitarian and also financial dimensions, but also concerning energy, climate and food, and particularly affecting countries such as Iceland, Greece, Ireland and Portugal. It is not "the beginning of the end of the crisis" as perceived by the advisers to President Barack H. Obama. It is not the usual credit crisis, nor yet a temporary liquidity crisis through which the system reorganizes and reinforces itself and begins to function normally', with a new growth of productive forces in a framework of modernized social relations. It appears to be much more serious.

## First part: The reference to Marx

### A.

1. I shall start by saying that, in order to analyze this particular capitalist crisis, as for capital-ist crises in general, it is absolutely fundamental to refer to Marx because, in spite of some difficulties and uncertainties, Marxism, or Marxisms (including some Marxisant mixtures) provide us with very powerful tools, concepts, methods and theories for making this analysis, as also of the political outcomes. It is the strongest and most useful theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing the crisis and above all for comprehending the current transformations of capitalism and trying to clarify the post-capitalist transitions that are opening up and getting under way, for reasons and in conditions that I shall be developing below.

2. The (unbelievable) fact is that, at the moment, there does not exist any theory of crisis in the dominant economic thinking of the neo-classical mainstream. More amazing still, 'crisis' does not appear to exist in standard economics as an element of theory, so that most of its 'orthodox' encyclopaedias do not even contain any chapter or entry for 'crisis'. Whether in theory (which for standard economics is a matter of mathematical formalization) or in practice (which in this same standard economics consists of econometrics), there is scant interest in the subject of crisis. Very little academic work in the neoclassical school is dedicated to it, including its (internal) neo-Keynesian frontiers.

For the mainstream in general, money is not integrated into the cycle and dynamic of the reproduction of capital: value equals price; rate of profit equals rate of interest. In micro-economy, money does not appear in the Arrow-Debreu version of the general equilibrium, while in macro-economy, money is in general considered to be neutral, so that equilibrium is automatic and crisis thus becomes structurally prohibited. It is therefore important to bear in mind from the beginning that the scientific ideology of capitalism does not consider crisis as an object of study and hence it cannot understand the crises of capitalism as they are unfolding today. Unfortunately, this does not mean that, on certain points, some neoclassical analyses do not do better than the Marxists, because on these points, orthodox economists can grasp better what is going on

(for example, concerning the transmissions of the effects of the financial sphere to the real economic sphere, or even in finance (mathematical finance) as Marxists are not very well up in this subject).

To keep up with it all therefore, it is necessary to read Marx, but also the writings of our enemies, including the press of the Establishment, all the more since different segments of the dominant classes debate among themselves as if the [ordinary] people were not there or that they understood nothing at all, and since, contrary to most of the 'left' trade union and party leadership, they have in no way abandoned the defence of their class positions, nor a certain international (or, rather, inter-imperialist) solidarity.

As the crisis is however a fact that is difficult to deny in practice, those among the neoclassical economists who are interested in analyzing it, do so based on factors that are outside the markets and that disrupt the automatic mechanisms of price correction: State interventions, information technology 'bugs' (as most of the financial transaction orders are transmitted by computers, with a reaction time measured in a billionth of a second [in nanoseconds, at  $10^{-9}$ ], or the excesses in behaviour of certain agents (from Madoff's Ponzi-type frauds to M. Kerviel's hole).

But in fact speculation is not an excess or an error of corporate governance: it is a magic potion against the structural evil of capitalism, a remedy to counteract the tendency for the rate of profit to diminish and it provides outlets to the masses of capital that are no longer able to invest profitably: the bursting of the 'bubbles' being the price to pay (and to be paid by the people). In the orthodox view of things, the concentration of private ownership and the logic of the maximization of individual profit are not considered as problems. The neoclassical conception of the State is that of a body separated from the economic sphere and not dominated by the interests of capital. Trade unions exist, at least in theory, but not class warfare.

Such interpretations must be discarded, because we know that crises play an integral part in the contradictory dynamic of the expanded reproduction of capital.

3. Let's be a bit provocative: the heterodoxies become stronger as soon as they come close to Marx. This is so in the case of Keynes. In his crit-

icism of the neoclassical economists, Keynes has drawn part of his ideas from a theoretical source common with Marx. Both of them reject Say's law. In one sense, Keynes returns to the theory of labour value, without emphasizing it or even mentioning exploitation. Even in his *Treatise on Money*, he takes up the 'reproduction' schematic of Volume II (probably without being aware of it, because he did not really read Marx, but he knew the Russian Tugan-Baranovski's work on *The Industrial Crises in Contemporary England*) in order to tackle the problem of the crisis from the monetary angle, following the 'business cycle' theories of that period, and therefore in a different way from Marx, concluding that it was insufficient investment (and not savings) that gave rise to the crisis.

Like Marx, Keynes saw capitalism as ending in collapse for reasons that were inherent in the system. And looking at it closely, the ultimate cause of the crisis for Keynes was close to the Marxist analysis. In the last analysis, the crisis was to be explained, not so much by the insufficiency of investment (due to a reduction in the marginal efficiency of capital, itself linked to the obsolescence of capital and possibly accentuated by the rise in interest rates) as by capitalist competition – what Marx calls the internal contradictions of capitalism. The definition of profit by Keynes is closer to that of Marx than to that of the neoclassical economists. For Keynes if the profits diminish, lowered expectations will reduce investment (Kalecki is right in correcting this when he says that expectations reduce investment plans). This will put the economy into crisis - characterized by an equilibrium without full employment and without spontaneous structural adjustments by the markets.

It is therefore necessary to go beyond enquiring into the question of sharing out the added value (between wages and profits), as is done by most of the Keynesians, true or false.

## **B. What is a Marxist interpretation of the crisis?**

1. The crisis is interpreted in Marxist terms as a crisis of over-accumulation of capital. For some years now, there has been a certain number of us who maintain that the devaluation of capital was inescapable and that it would be brutal and on a large scale. This crisis was certainly going to happen... Basically it can be explained by an over-accumulation of

capital that ensues from the very anarchy of production and leading to a pressure on the tendency for the rate of profit to diminish when countering tendencies (including the new ones, linked as we shall see, to the new financial instruments) have dried up. And this over-accumulation manifests itself through an excess of sellable production, not because there are not enough people who need and desire to consume, but because the concentration of wealth tends to prevent an increasingly large proportion of the population from being able to buy the goods. But, instead of it being a question of a standard over-production of goods, the growth of the credit system makes it possible for capital to accumulate in the form of money-capital, which can take forms that are increasingly abstract, unreal and fictitious.

2. The concept of 'fictitious capital' is, I believe, important in analyzing the crisis. Its basic principle, which is the capitalization of revenue based on future surplus value, as well as its various forms (banking capital, stock transactions, public debts etc.) were identified by Marx in his time. He sketched out the study of this, along with studies of interest-bearing capital and the development of the capitalist credit system, in Section 5 of Volume III of *Das Kapital*, particularly from Chapter XXV onwards and above all in Chapter XXIX ("components of banking capital") up to Chapter XXXIII.

The ideas were incomplete – and they remain so still (in spite of the work of important writers). Things have greatly changed since the times of Marx (money has changed form, becoming even more immaterial, and the exchange markets have immeasurably expanded since the system has no longer been tied to the gold standard).

But Marx left us elements that are still useful in comprehending the fictitious movements of capital, which integrate the credit system and monetary capital. Analysis of these leads to that of 'expanded reproduction', together with the exorbitant development of ever more unreal forms of capital, as sources of autonomized valuation that appear to be separate from surplus value or appropriated without labour, as though 'by magic'. Marx talks here of capital functioning as an 'automat' – one could call it an 'autocrat', as one could, elsewhere, have called the State machinery.

Fictitious capital is above all formed in the credit system, which links capitalist enterprise to the capitalist State. At this intersection are to be found the stock exchanges and the banks, but also the pension funds, the speculative investment or hedge funds, that are situated in the tax havens, and other, similar bodies. The most favoured vehicles of fictitious capital these days are securitization (which transforms assets [for example debts] into financial securities) and the trade in derivatives, which are the 'supreme powers' of fictitious capital.

3. But there are problems here both theoretical and practical, multiple and delicate. Among the theoretical problems there is, for example, 1) how to distinguish the different sources of fictitious capital, according to their support from the sphere of the real economy or their detachment from it; or 2) how to show that the profits from fictitious capital are also real: or 3) how to show how these "fictitious profits" (which are also real) can be attributed as a countering tendency to the reduction in the rates of profit. There are also empirical problems: 1) how to demonstrate the origin of fictitious profits; or 2) how to recalculate the rates of profit and to know to what extent fictitious capital plays a part in rectifying the rates of profit; or 3) how to divide the surplus value between the different capitalist segments.

Fictitious capital is by its nature complex, dialectic, at the same time both unreal and real. Its nature is partly parasitical, but this kind of capital benefits from a distribution of surplus value (its liquidity gives its owner the power to convert it, without loss of capital, into money, 'liquidity par excellence'). And this capital nourishes an accumulation of additional fictitious capital, as a way of remunerating itself.

In a more general way, one of the most serious problems of this subject is the virtual impossibility of formalizing it, whether or not one is a Marxist in economics, without being obliged to separate the real and financial spheres. This is not very satisfactory. Even if it is true that capital in the form of goods and in the form of money must be separated only to become finally inseparable.

Let us return to the origins of the crisis.



## **Second part: The origins, manifestations and effects of the crisis**

### **1. The origins of the crisis?**

#### **A. The supposed financial origins**

a) The crisis that broke out in the subprime section of the US housing market had been prepared for by decades of over-accumulation of fictitious capital. One must understand this crisis within the context of a long period of worsening dysfunction in the regulation mechanisms of the world system under the hegemony of the United States, at least since the over-accumulation of money capital in the 1960s, linked to US deficits (caused partially by the Vietnam war), to the untenable strains on the dollar and to the proliferation of Eurodollars, then petrodollars, on the inter-bank markets.

b) In this process certain events played a fundamental role, among them being, in the exchange market, the dismantling of the Bretton Woods agreements because of the US decision, in 1971-1973, to abandon the convertibility of the dollar into gold and to de-monetize gold – hence dismantling the system of the gold standard under Nixon (and Paul Volker, now adviser to President Barack Obama) and to introduce flexibility in exchange rates.

This was the cause of the huge waves of deregulation of the monetary and financial markets that started at the end of the 1970s, especially with the ‘liberalization’ of the rates of exchange and rates of interest. The debt crisis of the countries of the South stems from the rise in the rates of interest of the Fed in 1979 and from the ‘financial coup d’état’ through which high finance, essentially that of the United States, re-established its power over the world economy.

The deep origins of the crisis lay in all these processes of deregulation (and then re-regulation by the financial oligopolies) and the integration of the financial markets into a globalized market, which displaced the centre of gravity of world power towards high finance, thus enabling it to impose its diktats on the whole economy.

c) In this new ‘neoliberal’ era the financial markets have been modernized, particularly through the growth of hedging instruments. These instruments have been made necessary by the flexibility in exchange rates

and interest rates in markets that have been progressively integrated. I am talking here about derivatives, i.e. contracts supporting transactions, whether 'firm' (with fixed terms – 'futures'), with terms made by mutual agreement ('forwards'), or by exchange flows ('swaps'); or 'optional', fixing future financial flows as a function of the variations in price of the underlying assets, which could be a rate of exchange, a rate of interest, the prices of shares or raw materials, or a future predictable event. All these are technically hedge instruments, but in fact they more often serve as speculation strategies, playing on the 'leverage effect' by taking a risk based on a limited investment; above all when they are hybrid and lead to short sells without offset, where the most risky operations can, in theory, bring about mathematically infinite losses (for example: with sale or put options).

As a result the amounts corresponding to the creation of this fictitious capital have very quickly and broadly overtaken those destined to reproduce productive capital. As an example: in 2006, the annual value of world exports was equal to three days of trade in over the counter contracts: 'off-exchanges' negotiated by mutual agreement without intermediaries, therefore outside the stock exchanges – with 4,200 billion dollars traded each day. This value means nothing, or tells us nothing any more. But these 4.2 billion dollars are traded by a restricted number of financial oligopolies, the primary dealers referred to by the Fed as the G15: Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and 13 others.

It is above all those that are called credit derivatives, with their very complex arrangements of credit default swaps (CDS) or collateralized debt obligations (CDO), which have created problems by completely changing the traditional vision of credit and bringing into play several degrees of fictitious capital [of the CDOs of CDO, or CDO to the power of 2]. These are problems from which we have not yet extricated ourselves, because one of the most recent innovations of finance has been the CDO of CDO2, which means the CDO to the power of 3. Obviously these are traded outside the stock exchanges, not recorded on balance sheets and created with almost no precautionary restrictions.

## **B. The real origins**

a) But it is important to understand this crisis also and above all in terms of the interaction between the financial and real economy spheres. The contradictions that the crisis has revealed have long-term roots in the exhaustion of the motors of economic expansion after the Second World War, which has led to these profound financial transformations. In the real economy sphere, the forms of extraction of surplus value and the organization of production had reached their limits; they had to be replaced by new methods (of the Kanban type) and given new dynamism by technological progress (information technology, robotics), which has upset the social bases of production, particularly by substituting capital for labour. After the long over-accumulation, concentrated increasingly in the financial sphere in the form of money capital, excess supply has accentuated the pressures lowering the rate of profit that has been observed since the end of the 1960s.

b) In its (fictive) efforts to resolve this problem, the Fed in the United States, influenced by monetarist policies, had unilaterally increased its interest rates at the end of the 1970s, which marked the beginning of the so-called 'neoliberal' era (this term has no meaning unless it is given class content and attached to the power of the oligopolies of modern high finance).

Certain important factors of the crisis are 'real' and linked to austerity: the subprime crisis, which has caused many poor families to find themselves defaulting on their mortgages, is also explained by the neoliberal policies which have been followed for more than thirty years and pursued implacably, and which have destroyed wages, made jobs flexible, massively increased unemployment and reduced standards of living. They are policies which have shattered demand, and set in motion mechanisms that have rendered demand artificial and unsustainable.

c. The neoliberal regime has thus been unable to maintain growth except by doping to death the demand of private consumption while promoting lines of credit to the maximum. It is this exorbitant growth of credit that has ended by revealing the crisis of over-accumulation in its current form. In a society where increasingly large numbers of individuals are being excluded and without rights, the expansion of outlets offered to

the owners of capital can only delay the devaluation of the excess capital placed on the financial markets. It can certainly not avoid it.

The crisis has been caused by the logic of the dynamics that lie at the heart of the US economy with, on the one hand, a re-balancing of the internal and external imbalances created by the draining off of foreign durable capital - which can be seen as an operation by the dominant US classes, tapping the wealth of the rest of the world; and, on the other hand, as the greatest concentration of wealth within the United States that has been seen for a century. This can be shown by some statistics: out of total revenues, the proportion of income monopolized by the wealthiest 1 per cent was 10 per cent thirty years ago: it is now 25 per cent. The share of the wealthiest 10 per cent was one-third of the total in 1979 and in 2009 it has risen to a half. The tremendous inflation of the financial profits (from fictitious capital) of the dominant classes hugely deformed the economy of the United States, particularly the rate of savings which had become negative just before the crisis. Hence, via the sphere of the real economy, we are experiencing the present catastrophe.

### **How does this catastrophe manifest itself?**

#### **2. The manifestations of the crisis**

##### **A. The financial manifestations and the real ones**

a. The first manifestation of the crisis was a brutal destruction of fictitious capital. In the year 2008, the total capitalization of the world stock exchanges dropped from 48.3 to 26.1 billion dollars (whether millions of millions or thousands of billions, this equals 10<sup>12</sup>)! This descending spiral in the value of assets was accompanied by a loss of confidence and a situation of illiquidity on the interbanking market – in a world which was already over-liquid, the most probable explanation being the insolvency of numerous banks.

As a consequence, in a context in which the price of composite bonds and the risks which they carried was increasingly badly assessed (because assessment was impossible, not to speak of the aberrant behaviour of the rating agencies like Moody's), the problems moved from the subprime sector to that of the credits of housing credit (i.e. from ficti-

tious capital of the first degree to fictitious capital of the second degree), then towards solvent loans (the primes), before the bursting of the bubble of the instruments linked to the housing mortgages contaminated the other sectors of the financial markets and from there, the actual money market.

And thus the whole financial system of the economy became blocked.

b. The devaluation of capital had a real dimension through the credit crunch, the disappearance of credit, particularly of loans for consumption. The economies entered into depression conjointly as from 2007, but also for structural reasons, in a world where the peak had been reached for certain strategic natural resources (with oil being in the forefront) and where the search for new sources of energy poses objective limits to growth – giving rise to pressures to wage wars).

As a result the economic indicators have been affected: falls in the rate of growth, in trade and household consumption, losses of exploitation in industrial companies, unemployment, losses in housing, savings, etc.

c. A very worrying aspect of this crisis, finally, is the indebtedness of the public authorities, particularly the States (who have partially 'nationalized' the private debt) and the consequence difficulties in public finances, including local authorities, particularly as regards social budgets (education, health, pensions). Hence the restructuring (through repurchasing and regrouping) of sovereign debts that is currently being discussed.

## **B. And then there is war ...**

a. Crisis and war are very closely linked. First because war is integrated into the cycle, economically, as an extreme form of the destruction of capital, but also politically, for reproducing the maintenance of control by the leading segments of the dominant classes – high finance – over the world system.

During the Cold War, the growth of productive forces was partly stimulated in the United States by military expenditure and the military-industrial complex, through the arms race and related technical advances (IT systems, robots controlled by computers, internet, etc.) These days, military expenditure remains high (a fifth of the federal budget, more than

half the world's military expenditures, and over 1,000 bases round the world) and the military-industrial complex continues to pay a key role, although from now on under the control of finance. The ascendancy of finance over the US armament companies is growing and this can be seen by the taking over of the ownership structure of their capital by institutional investors, themselves prisoners of the great financial oligopolies. At the beginning of the 2000s this proportion reached 95 per cent of the capital of Lockheed Martin, 75 per cent of General Dynamics, 65 per cent of Boeing, etc. It is the same thing for the private military companies; an increasingly large number of them have passed under the control of finance as the State 'outsources' its defence activities. MPRI has been bought up by L-3 Communications, Vinnell by Carlyle, DynCorp by Veritas and so on.

Military expenditure has become a major source of profit for capital in a context in which the use of armed forces is the strategy imposed on the world by US high finance as a condition for its reproduction, in which militarization is a mode of existence for capitalism, and in which the role of the (neoliberal) State is fundamental for capital (because it is indeed the State that goes to war on behalf of capital and it is the governmental agencies that allocate astronomical amounts of military contracts to the transnational armament companies, via their lobbying (e.g. General Electric, ITT).

Moreover, it is significant that the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq were launched at a very specific time: the year 2001 was already a time of crisis (just as 1913 and 1938 were crisis years). It was a crisis that emerged just as changes were taking place in US monetary policy, following the worsening of the country's internal and external debts – the first because of the need for financing linked partially to the imperialist wars, the second being due in part to out-sourcing, above all to China. Thus, following the slowing down of growth in 2000, the Fed greatly reduced its interest rate (from 6.5 per cent in December 2000 to 1.75 per cent in December 2001, then to 1 per cent in mid-2003, and it was kept at this very low level until mid-2004. It was precisely at this time, when real interest rates had become negative, that the mechanisms of the sub-prime crisis were set up, with greater and greater risk-taking, espe-

cially in the housing sector. Because of the increased pressure caused by the war effort, the Fed - notably but significantly - had then had to raise the interest rate again as from 2004, a year after the beginning of the Iraq war, to 5.25 per cent in mid-2006. And shortly after this, from the end of 2006, began a massive defaulting on mortgage payments by debtors – their numbers increasing because of the contraction in growth and the stagnation in wages.

And the Fed maintained this rather high rate of interest, above 5 per cent, until mid-2007, although the signs of the crisis were already apparent. It was only as from August 2007, therefore very late, that the Fed started giving the banks quantities of credit at reduced rates, gift rates, close to zero – without, however, averting financial panics (modern panics: cries no longer coming from financial traders but from IT mice). And the crisis exploded when a critical mass of debtors had difficulties in repaying their loans. This was the case at the end of 2006, after the Fed had raised its interest rates to attract the capital for financing the military budgets that had been inflated by the new imperialist wars. All that, without there being a military victory by the United States, nor a revival of accumulation through the destruction brought about by the imperialist wars. And the pursuit of these wars is exacerbating the capitalist contradictions still further...

### **3. What are the effects of the crisis?**

#### **A. In the North**

a. First of all, in a highly uncertain environment, the massive creation of money and the fixing of interest rates just above zero, together with massive budgetary deficits (nearly 10 per cent of the gross domestic product of the United States) and the disproportionate increase of the public debt: all this has brought about a depreciation of the dollar and a 'currency war'.

It is a currency war that has for the time being been won by the dollar (but for how long?), for the fundamental reason that the United States has at its disposal an extraordinary weapon of 'mass destruction': their central bank can create limitless amounts of money which is accepted by other countries because the dollar remains the world's reserve cur-

rency. This enables the United States to impose on the rest of the world the terms of a capitulation that obliges them to pursue neoliberal policies, as well as supporting the dollar's rate of exchange that best suits the strategy of US domination, which entails a considerable depreciation of the currency reserves held by the monetary authorities of other countries, like China.

The United States thinks that a depreciated dollar will reabsorb their trade deficit and stimulate their internal production. This is incorrect, for we have been seeing for years that these variables react very little, indeed less and less, to the lowering of the dollar value. The result is very weak growth in the United States, which is almost stagnation. But it will be said that the growth of the neoliberal regime was already feeble: this is true, but the situation has worsened because the causes are now due to problems of the whole system of the financing of economies.

Another related upheaval is also taking place in the raw materials markets, particularly in oil, against a background of the exhaustion of world energy reserves, which is provoking the current meteoric rise in prices.

b. As we know, the worst consequences of the real effects of the crisis are borne by the poorest of the popular classes, creating enormous damage, including in the United States, which is still the top economy in the world, but displaying very bad social indicators compared with the other rich countries of the North (for life expectancy, infant mortality rates, the right to health and even education).

The damage also includes, in the North, a generalized mal vivre, particularly at work (for those who have it), including the phenomenon of individuals having psychological break-downs to the point of suicides, as has been observed by industrial health specialist. I am referring here to the combined effects of the threat of unemployment and the methods of individual evaluation, causing competition among workers within the same production unit, thus breaking the ties of respect, loyalty, solidarity and conviviality. Hence the distrust among workers, surveillance, auto-control and fear at work. Pathologies of loneliness have appeared, accompanied by feelings of moral betrayal of oneself, an awareness of the lies about total quality and certification by the market, in worlds where the collective spaces for thinking and acting together are being reduced,



the loss of moral frames of reference, a loss of the sense of responsibility and a sense of the need to regain the means for transforming work relationships. These depressions are no longer economic, but psychological – even to the point of psycho-analysis.

c. And on the political level, I think I do not really need to emphasize the risks of the rise of the extreme right, in their diverse variants, from a religious spectre to neofascism, via the drift of the so-called ‘traditional’ right.

None of this, unfortunately, excludes the risk of new wars.

## **B. What about the effects of the crisis on the South?**

a. First, there is the increase of transfers from the South towards the North, through the different channels that we know: repatriation of the profits from direct or portfolio investments, repayment of foreign debt, transformation of reserves from changes in credit (immediately given to the United States), but also unequal exchange, flights of capital, etc. And these transfers towards the North are going to have to accelerate in the future to try to finance the rescue of the central capitalist system – knowing that the US hegemony has at its disposal the key currency of the international system and the military arsenal that goes with it, to impose this haemorrhage of capital from the rest of the world. The United States has up until now been able to impose it on everyone – from their imperialist partners to their potential rivals (China, especially) –, but for how much longer?

b. The effects of the crisis vary, according to the characteristics of the economics of the South and the degree of their integration into the world system. Some countries are so excluded from the world system and drowning in destitution that the crisis seems not to be affecting them. But it will be affecting all of them, whether they are ‘emerging’ or not.

The agricultural sector plays a preponderant role in most of these economies, for example. But the dysfunction and paradoxes of this sector are very serious: three billion people on the planet are suffering from hunger or food deficiencies, while agricultural production greatly (by at least 50%) exceeds food needs (there is a crisis of over-production there

too). Besides, three-quarters of these people are peasants. The extension of lands being put under cultivation at the world level is accompanied by the reduction of peasant populations vis-à-vis those of the cities, which are absorbing the rural exodus. An increasing proportion of land is being cultivated by the transnationals, who no longer aim at producing for consumption but for industrial or energy outlets. In most of the countries of the South that are excluded from the benefits of 'globalization', a (relative) dynamism in agricultural exports from commercially grown crops coexists with the importation of basic food products.

And here I would even suggest interpreting the events that are shaking the Arab-Muslim world (without, of course, underestimating their complexity) as being related to a capitalism that has destroyed their structures over a long period as well as the neoliberal form of this capitalism that has created, under the cover of 'good governance', the basis for the current social explosion, particularly the precipitous rise in the prices of food products. At this moment imperialism is watching carefully.

c. But apart from that, it would seem that the conditions are combining so that a major consequence of the crisis could be the deepening of the North-South confrontation – in spite of the cooptation of the 'G20'. The North-South confrontation is taking place in a world where the levels of contradiction are becoming more and more complex: contradictions between the ruling classes and the classes they dominate, between the different ruling classes that control the State, between the countries of the South themselves, but with a relative predominance at the moment of the contradictions between ruling classes, together with the rise of the so-called 'emerging' countries.

Internally the path chosen by a large majority of these ruling classes is that of capitalism, or one of its variants. But, not only is there no way out by this path because the resolving of the contradictions produced by capitalism is absolutely impossible in the South, but it leads them into conflict with the imperialist powers of the North. One of the risks weighing on the popular struggles in the South is to see their resistance taken over, neutralized and transformed into pro-systemic forces by the ruling classes, while these ruling classes in the South, above all those which have the most consistent and rational strategy (as in China) will

probably not make the internal transformations that would change the power relations in favour of the popular classes. And that is certainly valid for Latin America – for Bolivarian Venezuela for example.

**Third part: Anti-crisis policies-What have they been, what are they now and what will they be?**

#### **A. Criticism of orthodox policies**

1. The first anti-crisis policies consisted of coordinating the actions of the central banks to inject liquidity into the inter-banking market by creating a 'primary' currency, offering lines of special credit to the banks and reducing interest rates. The main aim was to avoid the total collapse of the system, and also to limit the devaluation of fictitious capital by braking the fall of the markets (particularly so that the derivatives were paid at more or less their face values), but this in no way resolved the fundamental contradictions of the system.

A turning point was, as we know, the non-intervention of the currency authorities – as neoliberalism requires – when Lehman Brothers failed in mid-September 2008. From all evidence there has been no assessment of the implications of this failure to act, in terms of the reduction of the risk of destabilizing the whole system, including through State indebtedness.

Hence, in a few hours there was a complete 180° turn-around of the Treasury and the central bank: a number of financial firms in danger (like the insurance company AIG) were nationalized (usually without the right to vote and no new criteria for control); short sells were temporarily suspended; then the Fed opened lines of credit to the primary dealers in special conditions (with almost no rate of interest); the State helped these dealers in organizing the take-over of bankrupt groups and re-capitalizing them. In other words it strongly supported the hyper-centralization process of the financial oligopolies' power over the ownership structures of capital which became increasingly concentrated (Lehman Brothers was taken over by Citigroup, Merrill Lynch by the Bank of America, the Washington Mutual savings bank by Morgan, etc.). A 'dis-mantling' structure was created so that the State guaranteed the 'toxic'

securities; and - a crucial measure - the Fed extended in October 2008 its organization of swap lines ('temporary reciprocal arrangements on currency') for the central banks in the North and the large countries of the South, rendering them almost 'unlimited'.

Then there were the Paulson plans No. 1 and No. 2 and the plans for the general support of the economy (including General Motors and others, without preventing massive lay-offs), with, along the way, the recapitalization of the Fed, which was at the end of its resources. And, finally, at the beginning of 2011, the President of the Fed warned the Treasury that it would not continue to finance public deficits, that there had to be a return to greater rigour, that the rates of interest had to be increased. This incurred two major risks: for the United States that the burden of public debt became still heavier and for the rest of the world that capital flows would return to finance the US deficits, enabling the country to continue to live once again beyond its means.

All that was happening under the eyes of the general public, who realized that not only had the State turned against the public good but that they themselves would be made to pay for the rescue of the high finance which controlled the State.

2. In light of all this, a small but significant minority among neoliberal currents of thought continue to become more and more radical in their support of the ultra-neoliberal theses inspired by Hayek, Mises and Rothbard. Their analyses of the crisis, for example by Rockwell and Rozeff of the von Mises Institute, are based on a reaffirmed faith in the automatic character of market re-equilibrium.

Clearly this is annoying for the neoliberals, insofar as these ultra-liberals defend the idea that the crisis came about from an excess of interventionism and that the State should not save the banks and companies in difficulty. What needs to be done, according to them, is to put an end to State regulations that limit the freedom of agents on the markets. As an example, while public housing policies claimed that citizens could all aspire to house ownership, the markets (which were not 'populist') have demonstrated that this is not so. These ultra-liberals are therefore against any anti-crisis plan and in particular against any regulation of interest rates by the central bank.

The most extreme among them go so far as to call for the suppression, pure and simple, of State institutions – including the army – as well as a privatization of the currency. Of course they are aware that these measures would push capitalism towards chaos, but they think that, thanks to the market mechanism, such chaos would benefit capital and that capitalism would reconstitute itself faster and better than through State interventions in the form of artificial public assistance to enterprises that in any case were doomed to fail.

3. And what about the reformist positions? The gravity of the situation has favoured a return to the theses of Keynes: “Keynes is today, more than ever the flavour of the month” wrote Paul Krugman, who is a neo-classical economist! In fact, even if they oppose the traditional neoclassical theses about State interventions, neo-Keynesian interpretations come from the same theoretical matrix, which we would call ‘bourgeois’.

For the most advanced among them, in spite of nuances, variants and subtleties, their visions are hardly ‘reformist’ since they consist of introducing minimal changes in the functioning of capitalism in order that it can survive as long as possible.

The report of the Stiglitz Commission is a good illustration. Its final document, drawn up in 2009 at the request of the president of the United Nations General Assembly, does not question the bases of the dominant ideology. The old neoliberal certainties have only to be re-vised, not to be abandoned: exchange rates should be flexible, the virtues of free trade are reaffirmed as against the ‘dangers of protectionism’, the defects of corporate governance should be corrected, but the management of risks continues to be entrusted to the financial oligopolies and the regulation of the world system remains under the hegemony of the US dollar.

We are a long way from the rejection of globalized financial liberalization as expressed by an increasing number of the countries of the South – not without contradictions, it is true – from the People’s Republic of China to Bolivarian Venezuela.

## B. Keynes

1. Let's be clear: the anti-crisis policies are not Keynesian. While 'Keynesian' measures are perceptible – in the G.W. Bush plan of 2008 for example (with its handover of part of the taxes) and above all, with the programme of President Barack H. Obama (with works of infra-structure, etc.) – priority is clearly given to neoliberalism to save as much as possible of the over-accumulated fictitious capital. The emergency conversion of plans to rescue capital by State interventionism, organized in an extremely anti-democratic way by the governments of the North, should not deceive us. The anti-crisis policies and their initiators have not extricated themselves from orthodox dogmas.

The Fed and the other central banks of the North continue to create primary currency on a massive scale, only just recently again, with Quantitative Easing No. 2. But this monetary policy which is apparently 'Keynesian' has in fact fallen into the 'liquidity trap', where the strategy of lowering the rate of real interest has shown that it is incapable of correcting the marginal effectiveness of capital and of transferring monetary capital from the financial sphere into the productive sphere.

Hence the current concern in the United States since the beginning of 2011, which is the indebtedness of the State: of the Treasury, of the federal State, but also of the federated states and local authorities. The president of the Fed (Bernanke) recently warned the Secretary of the Treasury (Geithner) and Congress that the hour has come for tightening the plans for budgetary adjustment. In fact, that what must be done is the exact opposite of what Keynes recommended (which was to 'clean house'): reabsorb the deficit by increasing taxes and reducing expenses by lowering the number of civil servants and their salaries, thus putting the burden on to the workers including measures on health, pensions, etc. The same thing for us in Europe.

So in fact there is no return to 'Keynesian' policies, either in the United States or in Europe, and the dominating concept of the State remains that of a neoliberal State, at the service of capital, particularly for the credit system.

2. And even if there were to be (which is highly unlikely) a 'return to Keynes', it would come up against several problems.

First, there would be the theoretical problems. There is no 'general theory' of Keynes on crisis. There are some theoretical elements scattered here and there, partial, and sometimes contradictory, which have often given rise to confusion and misunderstandings among some observers or his own disciples – beginning with the complex concept of 'effective demand' (which has to be understood to be supply as the anticipated value of sales). Keynes tried hard to find a strategy for getting over the crisis in order to save capitalism, by discovering the secret of a 'capitalism without crisis', a capitalism that was regulated, in which the solution was the creation of an effective demand through an exogenous factor, the State, whose intervention could, in the contraction phases of cycles, minimize the impact of crises. He had understood, like others, notably Schumpeter, that the course of history was moving towards an overtaking of capitalism. But his theory ran up against difficulties in treating money in general and the financial system in particular.

These limitations of Keynes in understanding the crisis – limited when compared to Marx, I mean – were perceived and stated by certain lucid and honest Keynesians, like the brilliant Joan Robinson, who said: "Keynesian theory elaborated a number of refinements and complications overlooked by Marx, but the essential is found in the analysis of Marx on investment as 'a purchase without sale' and savings as 'a sale without a purchase'". Keynes then retorted to Joan Robinson, who had tried to reconcile him with Marx in an essay published in 1942, that there was no point in "wanting to give sense to what has no sense".

But it is above all the fundamental quality of money functioning as capital, which was analyzed by Marx, that was not developed, or even clear, in Keynes' work – and clearly even less so in the orthodoxy's quantitative theory.

3. Keynes' limited analysis of the system of credit, and his lack of differentiation between state money and credit money, logically – but improperly – led him to attribute too much importance to money, above all giving excessive responsibility to the State in setting rates of interest. According to him, the central bank pushes the rate of interest down thanks to the growth in the supply of money, through the 'primary' creation of money, in order to stimulate investment in assets in which the

marginal effectiveness of capital is higher – and this until such a time when the “shocking aspects of capitalism”, as he calls them, disappear (unemployment, inequalities, etc.). Now, as we know, the monetary policy implemented by the central banks, whose objectives are the stabilization of money and the fight against inflation, has completely reversed the process by which the rate of interest is determined by the market. They use the rate of interest as the main instrument, with its financial and real effects on the whole economy. And we know that the rate of interest of the central bank is above all influenced by the rates fixed by the great financial oligopolies on each segment of the markets over which they have a dominant position.

Hence the problems, or the political illusions, transmitted by Keynes’ conception of the State: the Keynesian belief in the all-powerful capacity of the State, which is very different from Marx. For, in spite of the limitations of the Marxian theory of the State, even in this field he is superior to Keynes.

At what point are we today? Is the State not sustained by capital, through the public debt, for example? Is the creation of money not essentially of private origin? Do the Fed’s rates of interest not depend greatly upon those fixed by the oligopolies? Is the Fed itself not largely infiltrated by the private interests of the oligopolies? Does the State not allocate military contracts to those companies that are controlled by finance? Is the neoliberal State all the more active because it is subjugated by high finance? In sum, the Keynesian State is a fiction! And its ‘reformism’ can only spread illusions and false hopes.

So, what are the alternatives?

Conclusion

There is a very high probability that the present crisis will become more acute as a systemic crisis of capital, since all the conditions are there for that to happen. Finance recently invented the CDO of CDO of CDO, or CDO3 – but this game of cubes will collapse. The measuring unit here is the million dollars, or the teradollar (10<sup>12</sup>). I think that something will burst before we get to the petadollar (10<sup>15</sup>)!

Capitalism is in danger, above all at the centre of the system. You will say that there have been other capitalist crises, many of them, and that



the system has always come out of them stronger than ever, more monstrous, more monstrously concentrated. Yes, that is true, there have even been pre-capitalist crises. I am not about to announce the end of the world (in 2012?). It is an illusion, yet another - perhaps due to impatience - to believe that capitalism is going to collapse from the effects of the current crisis: the monster is going to survive and will continue to kill.

Over the course of history, especially during the great depression of the 1930s, capital has known how to create institutions and instruments of public intervention, essentially linked to the policies of the central banks, that have made it possible to 'manage' the crises to some extent, and to cushion its most destructive effects - at least in the North, at the centre of the world system. But these reorganizations of the domination of capital have never overcome its contradictions. We are therefore going to suffer for a long time yet the evils of ageing capitalism, and, in the South, the 'silent genocide of the poorest' for which it is responsible.

I would say rather that the present situation does not resemble the beginning of the end of the crisis but the beginning of a process of a long period of collapse of the present phase of capitalism, which is oligopolistic and financialized. And this process of collapse opens up great possibilities for a transition, in which the class struggle will become tougher and more complex. This will force us to reconsider the alternatives of post-capitalist social transformation, which more and more of us, in spite of our differences, hope to be socialist (if not something more).

Now, if the structural problem for the survival of capitalism is indeed that of downward pressure on the rate of profit, and if financialization is not a sustainable solution, the only thing that this system will offer, until it is in its death agony, is the worsening exploitation of labour. Because fictitious capital demands to be remunerated and it obtains this by transferring the surplus of productive capital and by a constant pressure to increase the exploitation of the labour force.

To be able to re-launch a cycle of expansion at the centre of the world system, the crisis that we are currently experiencing must destroy the absolutely gigantic amounts of fictitious capital, most of it parasitical. But the contradictions of the capitalist world system have now become

so deep and so difficult to resolve that such a devaluation will risk pushing it towards collapse.

There are some orthodox thinkers who also believe that the present crisis will lead to the collapse of capitalism, like for example the analysts at the Global Europe Anticipation Bulletin, whose predictions about the worsening of the situation lead to the total geopolitical dislocation of the system, the collapse of the dollar, the disappearances of the bases of the globalized financial system. Then there are those of Money&Markets in the United States, who foresee the forthcoming deepening of the crisis in a much more traditional sequence: the hollowing out of the budgetary deficit, the swelling public debt, insufficient defence of the dollar by the monetary authorities, etc.

For us, therefore, it is time to reconstruct alternatives and radical proposals – on the left. And among the most difficult questions to deal with are those concerning money and finance. These questions relate to the external component of monetary policy (to the exchange systems, with a debate between us about getting out of the euro, its relevance or not, its effectiveness or not in re-appropriating the margins of manoeuvre) and to the internal component of this policy (should there be political control of the central bank?). Other questions relate to the financing of the economy (how to regulate the financial oligopolies or, better still, how to nationalize and control them democratically?); to the control of foreign capital, together with the balance of payments; to common strategies on the external debt; to those about building alternative regionalizations (with continental nationalizations, to break with the logic of the system and respond to the social needs of peoples – which should in fact be the main objective of the science of economics). Finally, there are questions about new forms of planning in the socialist transitions now under way or to come – from the theoretical viewpoint (going as far as suppressing money?), but above all involving the democratic participation of the people in all the processes of decision concerning their collective future.

It is true the difficulties that lie before us are very serious, but – we have no choice – we must not lose hope!

# PRIORITIZING USE VALUE OVER EXCHANGE VALUE

MARC VANDEPITTE

The starting point of the text: the difference between use value and exchange value, is bang in the middle. It is the most fundamental contradiction of capitalist economy. Indeed, each commodity both has an use value and an exchange value; but it is the latter out of which profits are generated; which is the source of accumulation. In order to maximize profits and to maximize accumulation, every economic actor in the capitalist system reduces commodities to their exchange values and tries to produce as much exchange values as possible. This maximization is not a question of ambition or endeavour, it's a necessity because of the iron law of concurrence.

## 1. A voracious dynamics

This maximization of profits and accumulation engendered in the past, and engenders until today a colossal historical dynamic. A dynamic that changed really everything in the world and through which history gained momentum. Capital conquered the world with the power of a tsunami. Why? In order to maximise profits capital tries to transform every good, every commodity and all human activities or even activities of nature, into exchange values. But that transformation is a radical and no easy process. It supposes that capital dominates, submits and instrumentalises all the goods and activities it wants to change into exchange values. It's a never ending process of subsumption, of subordination. This process is more about commodification, more than converting goods in merchandise. It's also moulding and re-creating the entire planet, the whole society, all social relations and ideas in function of the needs of capital. In other words, capital acts as a permanent demiurge of society. So it's important to see that the basic economic paradigm is part and parcel of an overpowering dynamic. One cannot separate the former from the latter. If one wants to change or transform the economic paradigm one has to stop and break that all-embracing dynamic. If one wants to fly, one has to stop or neutralise the laws of gravitation. Let me give some important aspects with relevance to the text.

## Inequality and the balance of power

The never ending accumulation of capital – based on the exploitation of labour - has unleashed the creation of wealth at a pace and a scale unparalleled in human history. But the underlying mechanism is a conflicting one: the lower the salary the higher the profit. So polarisation is a built-in mechanism of the system, with the result that wealth is largely concentrated in the hands of the owners of the means of production. In Belgium, my country, the ten percent richest possess more than 50% of the national wealth. In the US the one percent richest even possess around 30% of the wealth.<sup>24</sup> But wealth also means power. The concentration of wealth goes hand in hand with concentration of power. [cfr. 74] The real power in every capitalist country is in the hands of a small elite. They have power over the levers of economy and finance, they control the media and determine the room of manoeuvre for the politicians. They celebrate their annual high mass in Davos.

This mechanism of concentration and polarisation within the borders of the nations has been repeated on the international level: i.e. the exploitation of South by the North. In order to guarantee the transfer of wealth from the South to the North the international division of labour was settled and organised. Samir Amin rightly states that the North-South (centres-peripheries) conflict is an essential part of the entire history of capitalism.<sup>25</sup> The polarisation between rich and poor is incredible. The income of 950 multimillionaires exceeds the revenue of 40 percent of the world population.<sup>26</sup> The same is true for the balance of (military) power. The US with 4,6% of the world population takes 43% of the total military expenditure worldwide.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/social/whatisrightisright/jan-schakowsky-income-tax\\_n\\_836624\\_80927908.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/social/whatisrightisright/jan-schakowsky-income-tax_n_836624_80927908.html).

<sup>25</sup> Amin S., *From Capitalism to Civilization. Reconstructing the Socialist Perspective*, New Delhi 2010, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Calculated on *The Economist*, 'The world's richest people', March 17, 2007, p. 110 and UNDP, *Human Development Report 2010*, New York 2010.

<sup>27</sup> SIPRI, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>; <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2010/100602yearbooklaunch>.

## Labour

Because it's the source of the surplus value (profit) and accumulation, labour is the good par excellence where exchange value has taken the upper hand is labour<sup>28</sup>. We exist only as we exchange our labour in the market. The subsumption of labour to capitalist needs has resulted in exploitation (850m workers, or 28% of the total, are considered as 'working poor'<sup>29</sup>), alienation, inhuman conditions or intolerable stress, informal labour (between 52 and 78% in the South<sup>30</sup>) or structural unemployment (another 7% worldwide<sup>31</sup>). Activities in function of reproduction, mostly practised by women, are neither remunerated nor estimated.

## The market

Capitalism didn't invent the market. The market, locally but also on an international level, existed many centuries before capitalism came into being. Capitalism neither abolished the market, it simply used and transformed it to its needs, and more specific to the strongest players of the market. Capitalist market has nothing to do with free market, it's a oligopolistic and managed market. That means that in every sector a handful of multinationals dominate the whole and – with the help of 'their' corporate states - they impose the rules: competition is eliminated when it's harmful for them and imposed when it is favourable. Capitalist corporations themselves are all plan economies on a scale that exceeds often that of countries.

So far the 'real' market, the market of commodities and services. The predominance of exchange value over use value also affected and trans-

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<sup>28</sup> Dierckxsens W., *The Limits of Capitalism, An approach to globalization without neoliberalism*, London 2000, p. 147.

<sup>29</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends January 2010*, Geneva 2010, p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> WTO & ILO, *Globalization and informal jobs in developing countries*, Geneva 2009, p. p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends January 2010*, p. 12.

formed the capitalist market entirely. Financial markets have surpassed by far the markets of commodities and services to absurd and dangerous proportions. Even Financial Times has to admit it: 'the most glaring and lethal example of this madness has been the growth of the unregulated derivatives market, which has ballooned in size to \$600,000bn'. This speculation juggernaut is worth 40 times the world trade in merchandise and services. It's also is the equivalent of nearly 10 years of the of global economic output or the equivalent of almost \$100,000 per person on Earth.<sup>32</sup>

### **The corporate state**

A very important part of the subsumption process is the 'silent takeover' of the state by capital.<sup>33</sup> In a capitalist system the role of government is not the common good, its priority is not to give a decent life to the citizens or to patronize their cultural and social development. The primary goal is to provide the best possible conditions (infrastructure, low costs, low taxes, low salaries, etc.) that business needs to flourish. If that requires war, it means war, as is illustrated by the bombardments of US since 1945. The 'European state' is also a good illustration of the silent takeover. The most powerful political entity of the EU is the European Commission. Almost all present commissioners were former CEO's and the exceptions who are not, will probably be in the future. The Parliament has almost no real power and for every deputy there are six lobbyists.<sup>34</sup> The financial crisis and the repeated shocks afterwards shows the complete subordination of the politicians to the dictates of the commanding heights of finance.

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<sup>32</sup> *Financial Times*, February 16, 2011, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Hertz N. *The Silent Takeover*, London 2001.

<sup>34</sup> European Transparency Initiative, 'Registering the Brussels lobby – five years after', [http://www.nujcec.org/brussels/index.php/latest-news/past\\_evts/bursting-the-brussels-bubble-alter-eu%E2%80%99s-new-look-at-corporate-lobbying](http://www.nujcec.org/brussels/index.php/latest-news/past_evts/bursting-the-brussels-bubble-alter-eu%E2%80%99s-new-look-at-corporate-lobbying).

## US Bombardements since '45

China 1945-46	El Salvador 1980-87
Korea 1950-53	Grenada 1983
China 1950-53	Libya 1986
Guatemala 1954	Panama 1989
Cuba 1959-61	Iraq 1991-2008
Guatemala 1960	Somalia 1993
Vietnam 1961-73	Bosnia 1995
Congo 1964	Soedan 1998
Laos 1964-73	Afghanistan 1998, 2001-2011
Peru 1965	Yugoslavia 1999
Guatemala 1967-69	Pakistan 2005-2011
Cambodia 1969-70	Yemen 2009
Nicaragua 1980-87	Libya 2011

### The colonization of mind

To rule support of public opinion is essential. That public opinion is being moulded more and more by the mass media and that mass media is now almost completely in the hands of big capital. Here too there was a silent takeover. Even military industry has not been absent in this takeover. Dassault, a French arms manufacturer is a very good example. The following pronouncement of Marcel Dassault, the founder, speaks for itself: 'My group should have a newspaper or review in order to express its opinion and perhaps also to reply to a few journalists who have written in a very unpleasant way. I'm tired of being insulted in several newspapers, because there are people who are incompetent and who do not know the real problems. So I want to be able to respond.'<sup>35</sup> Today the poor man controls more than 70 newspapers or reviews. It is just one example. By some calculations, 70 percent of the French press is now in the hands of defence firms.<sup>36</sup> The result of this takeover is that public debate is not being held by the citizens but being held (or not being held) by the corporate media. One must admit, the commercial

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.acrimed.org/article1519.html>

<sup>36</sup> *The Economist*, July 8, 2006, p. 32.

media have become real experts in 'manufacturing consent'.<sup>37</sup> It should be no surprise that even short after the obvious debacles in Afghanistan en Iraq the elite has succeeded almost without problem to convince public opinion for a new military adventure. If that is true for going to war it's also true for the discussion on the common good of humanity.

### **The manufacturing of taste and identity**

Normally one should expect that an economy produces what consumers need or desire. But capitalism has inverted this order. The production is orientated on the maximisation of profit of producers and not on the needs of consumers. That encourages the production of superfluous goods and inexpensive commodities of low quality that are frequently replaced. The result is the tyranny of fashion cycles, a throwaway culture and the piling up of waste.<sup>38</sup> But it goes very much beyond the moulding of taste. The very identity of man is affected by this inversion. Like God in the bible Capital created a New Man and a New Woman in his own image. A Man or Women in which the mode of having prevails over the mode of being. The identity of the New Man is being sought through products.<sup>39</sup> In order to fabricate the New Man and Woman a veritable industry of seduction has been set up: marketing and advertising. This catering of our subliminal and irrational desires can be considered as the Air Force of capitalism. One has to realize that the total marketing expenses even exceeds the military spending worldwide.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Herman E. & Chomsky N., *Manufacturing Consent. The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York, 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Dawson M., *The consumer trap: big business marketing in American life*, Illinois 2003, p. 132v; Foster J., Clark B. & York R., *The Ecological Rift. Capitalism's War on the Earth*, New York 2010, p. 394; Dierckxsens W., *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Fromm E., *To Have or To Be?*, London 1976; Hedges C., 'The Collapse of Globalization', March 27, 2011, [http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the\\_collapse\\_of\\_globalization\\_20110328/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/the_collapse_of_globalization_20110328/).

<sup>40</sup> Exact and recent dates are hard to find. UNDP calculated that global advertising expenditure in 1998 was more than 3% of world GDP. Today that would mean about \$1.8000 bn. UDNP, *Human Development Report 1998*, New York 1998, p. 63. And that's just about advertising. Dawson puts that the US on its own expends about \$2.000 bn. Dawson M., *op. cit.*, p. 1, footnote 1.



## Grip on the climate

The subsumption of nature by capital has a huge and dangerous impact on climate. It becomes more and more evident that stopping the global warming can not be achieved within the capitalist logic. So one will have to choose: saving the climate or saving capitalism. It seems now that the capitalist elite has opted for the latter. The Economist, probably the most influential review of the world and mouthpiece of the capitalist elite, is outspoken: 'Global action is not going to stop climate change. The fight to limit global warming to easily tolerated levels is thus over.' We must no try to halt global warming, 'the world needs to look harder at how to live with it'. The sea level will rise possibly with one metre, maybe two. We have to accept this and prepare us by building dikes, move tens of million people to higher places, tune health care to tropical diseases, etc. Bad luck for the people in the South: they will be hit most but lack the means 'to adopt'. Never mind, climate change gives new opportunities to the business class. Construction enterprises that will build dikes and also assurance companies will see their business soar. Trade of emission right is another promising source of profit. And of course in the sector of green technology and energy there are golden opportunities.<sup>41</sup> So far The Economist. EU Commissioner for Climate Connie Hedegaard is on the same wavelength. In the recent past she talked about 'the moral responsibility' or about 'the survival of humanity'. That's no longer her priority, now it's business that counts. On the occasion of the Climate Summit in Cancun she said: 'those in the end who improve energy efficiency and improve innovation will save money'. And those who did not, she warned, risked being overtaken by Chinese competitors.<sup>42</sup> Greg Barker, the UK climate change minister, said that the deal in Cancun would 'send a strong signal of confidence to business investing billions in the new global green economy'. According to Financial Times businesses welcomed the outcome of the talks...<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'Facing the consequences', *The Economist*, November 27, 2010, p. 79-82.

<sup>42</sup> *Financial Times*, December 1, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Financial Times*, December 13, 2010, p. 4.

## Hierarchy of society<sup>44</sup>

Capitalism was a rupture with all preceding societies. From about five hundred BC, all existing societies, except primitive ones in remote areas, were characterized by the same hierarchy between the different spheres. The Greek philosopher Aristotle analysed the ideal type of such a society in great detail. The economy (oikos) was at the bottom level and was subordinate to the political level (polis). But also politics, responsible for the distribution of wealth and the arrangement of social order, stood not on its own, but was just as economics subordinated to something else. Decisions in that sphere were not just a question of majority or hegemony, but were determined and oriented by a set of values, ideals and ideas, in short by the desire for the good life (eudamonia), or Common Good.

Of course, we should not idealize the ancient societies. In society that Aristotle described the citizens were exempted from work that was done by slaves. Yet his description offers an interesting model because the entire society focused on the most precious thing there is: the good life.

Capitalism turned the hierarchy between the spheres upside down. The economic sphere came at the top: originally it is small family businesses, today it is transnational giants who dominate the world market and concentrate unprecedented amounts of capital and means of production. As we saw above, the political sphere is entirely subjected to those oligopolistic powers. Finally the sphere of the values and ideas, is also geared to economic interests. The peak values being promoted are consumerism, prestige, exclusive individualism [68], self-development, the law of the jungle, the superiority of the white race and Western civilization ... Cynicism and pragmatism are rampant. People or peoples who fight for a better world are dismissed as dreamers and bunglers.

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<sup>44</sup> This paragraph is inspired by van Leeuwen A., *De nacht van het kapitaal. Door het oerwoud van de economie naar de bronnen van de burgerlijke religie*, Nijmegen 1984.

## 2. Counter Dynamics

To realise the Common Good of Humanity, we need to stop the Common Bad. That means that we have to put a stop to the dynamic described above and reinstall another, new dynamic. Such a new dynamic or logic is in some way a reflection and antitype of the old one.

### Buen vivir

The most fundamental task is to restore the hierarchy of the spheres. In this respect Aristotle is very useful, but one has to notice that nature and environment were not present in his view. So we have to add this vital dimension. With this indigenous traditions (Pacha Mama) can be very helpful. The good life (eudamonia) has to be completed with respect for nature [The first of the new paradigms]. I think this combination comes close to the meaning of the concept buen vivir. [50]

In the first place the economic sphere has to be submitted to the political. The allocation of capital and distribution of economic surplus, trade and finance, etc. must be subordinated to the priorities and needs of the community of the present and future generations. That implies that the economy must be regulated within a democratic framework of citizen-based social accountability.<sup>45</sup> In the second place both economic activities as the political decision making have to be thoroughly permeated by values like tenderness and carefulness (towards men and nature), equality, solidarity, cooperation, responsibility, altruism, respect, dignity...<sup>46</sup>

The October Revolution (1917) and the Chinese Revolution (1949) were the first to break with the capitalist system and logic. Both societies changed the capitalist hierarchy of spheres. In the Soviet Union – and later in the Eastern bloc – the economic sphere was again submitted to the political sphere, i.e. the communist party. But for various reasons the sphere of the ideas and ideals was gradually neglected, alienating the population from the political line. There was a gap between the leadership and the people and the system finally collapsed.

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<sup>45</sup> Dierckxsens W., *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>46</sup> Mészáros I., *The Structural Crisis of Capital*, New York 2010, p. 162-3.

The Chinese Revolution also subordinated the economy to politics, but tried to go a step further. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was an attempt to let revolutionary ideas and values prevailing over everything else, neglecting the economic sphere. However, it was a forced and brutal attempt that completely failed. From sheer necessity the revolution stepped back: the economic sphere was given more space and the sphere of values and ideas was considerably scaled down to almost merely pragmatism.

In a way the Islamic awakening of the last decades is also an attempt to break with the capitalist logic and to restore a better hierarchy of spheres. But those attempts are to some extent anachronistic or sometimes show a democratic deficit.

In my opinion, societies where one has come closed to a satisfying restoration of the spheres, or try to do so, are ALBA countries like Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia. I limit myself to Cuba, which I know best.<sup>47</sup> Sources of inspiration of Cuban revolution were Marx and Lenin, but also José Martí. This has resulted in an original mix in which consciousness, ideas, ethics and even utopia occupy a prominent position, in contrast with classic Marxism where those aspects are marginal or even excluded. In my view the most important contribution of the Cuban revolution to Marxism is the reintegration of the ethical and utopian dimension.<sup>48</sup> But also on the issue of the environment the Cuban revolution is at the vanguard. Already in 1992 at the conference of Rio, Fidel Castro warned that the survival of humanity was endangered.<sup>49</sup> Sustainability is a top priority

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<sup>47</sup> In this article I will mention Cuba three times as an example. To avoid misunderstandings, I have not the slightest intention to idealise the Cuban revolution. For those who suspect me of that I recommend to read my analysis of the huge challenges of the Cuban society today: Vandepitte M., 'Los desafíos económicos y sociales de la revolución cubana en 2010', May 23, 2010, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=106387>. Neither do I want to present Cuba as a model. One of the biggest mistakes of 20<sup>th</sup> century was considering particular countries of revolutions as models to imitate or to export. If I mention Cuba it is as a illustration, as a source of inspiration or as a prove that something *is* possible.

<sup>48</sup> Demuyck K. & Vandepitte M., *De Factor Fidel*, Antwerp 2008, chapter 4.

<sup>49</sup> Castro F., 'Speech given at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development', Rio de Janeiro, June 12, 1992, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1992/ing/f120692i.html>.

and it is not by accident that a Cuban engineer received the Goldman Environmental Prize (known as the 'Green Nobel prize') in 2010.<sup>50</sup>

### **Self-determined labour**

Giving priority of use value to exchange value has to be applied first of all to labour. Labour can no longer be seen and instrumentalised as a 'thing', as a commodity, bought and sold on a market. Labour must be emancipated in a qualitative way. That implies that we have to end alienation and abolish exploitation. Workers must control the conditions of production and dominate their own products. Self-determined labour means going beyond both personal and material dependence.<sup>51</sup> Firstly, we have to end the domination of the owners of the means of production over people who, in order to survive, have 'to sell' their labour power. Workers must become the real subjects of their labour and their life-activity, they must become free and associated producers. Secondly, we have to end the domination of the product over the producer. In the words of Foster et. al.: 'The ultimate goal is the rich development of individual human powers. ... This requires the creation of free, disposable time, and distancing of society from the treadmill of production.'<sup>52</sup>

This aspect is not explicitly elaborated in the text. Paragraph 62 focuses on the outcome of the production in function of exchange value and not on the production process itself. Human beings are both consumers and producers. Both aspects are affected by the domination of exchange values over use values.

I further completely agree with paragraph 61. As a matter of fact the goal of self determined labour supposes 'challenging the private ownership of the principal means of production', which indeed doesn't imply the 'total State control' [61].

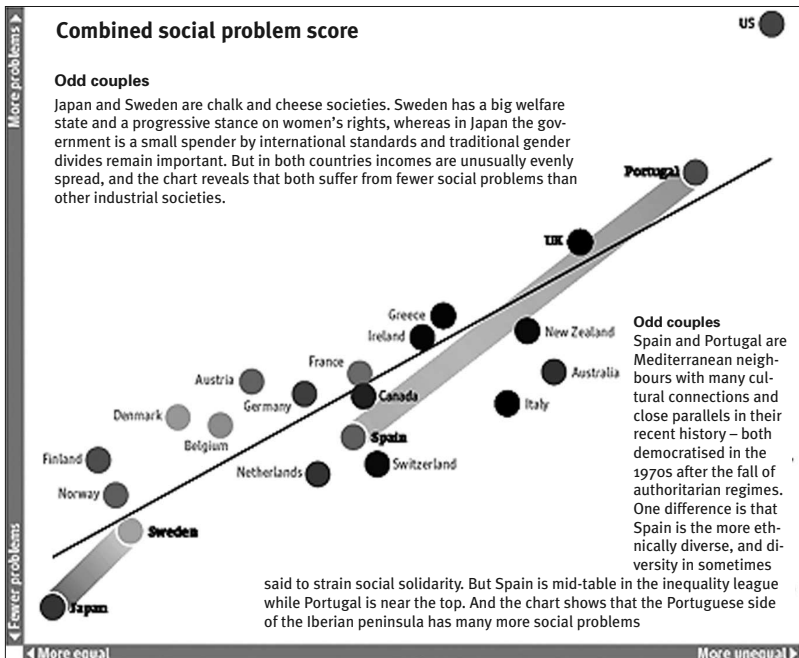
<sup>50</sup> The prize went to Humberto Rios Labrada. See <http://www.goldmanprize.org/2010/islands>. For the discussion on the ecological question in Cuba, see Vanbrabant I. & Demuyne K., *Cuba. La révolution au cœur vert*, Brussels, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Chattopadhyay P., 'Towards a Society of Free and Associated Individuals: Communism', in Saad-Filho A., *Anti-capitalism. A Marxist Introduction*, London 2003, 247-58, p. 250-1; Mészáros I., *op. cit.*, p. 152f.

<sup>52</sup> Foster J., Clark B. & York R., *op. cit.*, p. 396.

## Substantive equality and the end of domination

Capitalism engenders inequality on a scale never seen in history. Abolishing this scandalous disparity is essential in the struggle for Common Good. Because, as Mészáros puts it, only on this basis 'it is possible to envisage the necessary non-antagonistic forms of mediation among human beings at all levels, in a historically sustainable way'.<sup>53</sup> This is about equality on all possible levels: North/South, wealth within national borders, production relations (see previous point), gender, sexual inclination, ethnicity, faith, etc. As long as people of the South are victims of the system while people of the North benefit from it Common Good is out of the question.<sup>54</sup> And the same is true for the other mentioned inequalities. Wilkinson and Pickett demonstrate convincingly that inequality within rich countries causes a lot of pernicious effects. Among others it shortens life and make people more unhappy, it increases the rate of violence, teenage pregnancies, addiction and imprisonment, and encourages excessive consumption.<sup>55</sup> In my view the aspect of equality is underexposed in the text.



To achieve this one will have to dismantle some existing power blocks. And I use deliberately the word 'dismantle' because as long as those power blocks exist 'generalisation of democracy' [73] will be out of the question. It are those commanding heights that hold entire economies in their grip and condemn billions of people to misery and poverty, that drag us into war, cultivate political apathy and a false consciousness, and cause environmental degradation. It are those commanding heights that seized control of our education, our health care system, our press and our governance, and above all it are those commanding heights that will decide on what to do (or not to do) about global warming. In the words of Hedges, those are the 'mortal enemies to be vanquished'.<sup>57</sup> So that means we will have to dismantle the three MIC's: the Marketing Industrial Complex, the Media Industrial Complex and the Military Industrial Complex. And of course also NATO and all military bases abroad. We will have to dethrone the financial and industrial juggernauts and all their collaborating international intuitions. The text goes a long way towards this direction but doesn't explicit mention the wish to dismantle those institutions [74-76].

## Planning

The text only once mentions the practice of planning the economy. He does so in a negative way, referring to the lack of ecological concerns in the planning of socialist economies in the past and of China at this moment. [59] For those countries this is correct,<sup>58</sup> but one mustn't stop here. The economic planning in the Soviet Union was the first experiment to subordinate the market to the needs of the citizens. As such it

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page 120

<sup>53</sup> Mészáros I., *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>54</sup> Amin S., *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>55</sup> Wilkinson R. & Pickett K, *The Spirit Level. Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, New York 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Wilkinson R. & Pickett K, p. 20; <http://www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/?p=250>.

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<sup>57</sup> Hedges C., *art. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Cuba is a different story. See below.

had a lot of construction faults, but it was one particular implementation of planning, and the same goes for China. Other models are desirable and possible, and above all will be necessary. It will be necessary to cope with the huge and urgent ecological challenges. It will also be necessary to meet the basic human needs for all the people on the planet and to reduce the inequalities mentioned above. It will be desirable to raise the cultural level and living standards for everyone.

That the market is unable to meet the basic needs can easily be illustrated in two key sectors: food and health. The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) calculated that \$24 billion a year in public investment, associated with additional private investment would lead to a boost in annual GDP of \$120 billion as a result of longer and healthier lives. Conversely, because of hunger poor countries lose \$450 billion every year.<sup>59</sup> The investment is a modest 8% of the subsidy of farmers in the North (which disrupts markets in the South and therefore causes hunger in the South). This is a return of 500 per cent! Not to mention the millions of lives that could be saved. And the amount to invest is very modest: \$24 bn is about 0.004% of the turnover of the derivatives market. But still, the market function is not capable to implement the necessary investment. The same story for health care. According to the World Health Organisation an annual investment of \$35 billion, or about 1% of the health care spending of the US and Europe, would be enough to save eight million lives a year and would give a yearly return of at least \$360 billion.<sup>60</sup> On thing is for sure, the hundreds of millions of sick people on this planet will not be cured by the invisible hand.

One could define economic planning as the capacity to impose democratically decided objectives on the course of sustainable economic development.<sup>61</sup> There are different degrees and levels of planning. We totally agree with Mészáros that planning must be put into practice in a

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<sup>59</sup> FAO, *State of Food Insecurity in the World* 2004, Rome 2004, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report* 2003, p. 98 & 101.

<sup>61</sup> I borrow the definition from Cockshott and Cottrell, adding the word 'sustainable'. Cockshott P. & Cottrell A., *Towards a New Socialism*, Nottingham 1993, p. 65. My ideas on planning are inspired by chapter 4-7 of that book.



qualitative way, i.e. in its vital correlation to human needs, and that a bureaucratic implementation of planning must be avoided. That can only be avoided when labour will be emancipated (see above).<sup>62</sup>

### 3. Growth or development?

I totally agree with the distinction between growth and development the text makes in paragraph 63. I want to give this issue body with some fact and figures and by asking the question if a 'another growth', i.e. a growth which harmonise with nature, is feasible, and also which are possible pitfalls.

Growth as such is desirable and even necessary when there are not enough resources to give all people on earth a decent life. What's the actual situation? An average family worldwide consists of two adults and three children. If wealth were distributed equally such a average family would have a disposable income of 2.884 dollars.<sup>63</sup> This is more than enough to give all inhabitants on this planet sanitation, electricity, drinkable water and a comfortable house, even if all this would be produced according to sustainable standards. Still, 40 percent of world population lack basic sanitation, one in four has no electricity, and one in six has no drinkable water or a decent house.<sup>64</sup> To put it in another way, with the wealth produced today, a single person could possible have on average a disposable income of \$ 19 a day, but in reality one out of five persons has less than \$1.25 per day.<sup>65</sup>

What is more, to meet the basic needs and eradicate extreme misery worldwide, no further growth of the world economy is necessary. On

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<sup>62</sup> Mészáros I., *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>63</sup> Figures of 2008, in \$ PPP, based on UNDP, Human Development Report 2010, New York 2010.

<sup>64</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, New York 2006, p. v, 35; Shah A., *Poverty Facts and Stats*, September 20, 2010, <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>.

<sup>65</sup> Amounts in \$ PPP. World Bank, *Measuring Global Poverty (2009)*, [http://sitere-sources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/469232-1127252519956/measuring\\_global.html](http://sitere-sources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/469232-1127252519956/measuring_global.html).

the contrary. At the one hand the amount to achieve such development goals is very small, almost peanuts, and at the other hand some unnecessary expenses are incredible and in fact scandalous. So one just has to change some priorities in this world. A very interesting report of the UNDP of 1998 lists all the points in a rather cynical way. The dates and even the title stems from this UN institution.<sup>66</sup>

World's priorities (UNDP 1998)	
• Eradication of hunger	• \$ 5 billion
• Basic education	• \$ 6 billion
• Water and sanitation	• \$ 9 billion
• Healthy delivery	• \$ 12 billion
• Basic health and nutrition	• \$ 13 billion
• Eradication of extreme misery	• \$ 60 billion
• Business entertainemt Japan	• \$ 35 billion
• Alcohol drinks Europe	• \$ 105 billion
• Narcotic drugs worldwide	• \$ 400 billion
• Military spending	• \$ 780 billion
• Publicity marketing	• \$ 1.000 billion
• Daily speculation	• \$ 1.800 billion

Reflecting on this theme, James Wolfensohn a former president of the World Bank noted the following: ‘We live in a world that is of six billion people, in which one billion in the rich world control 80 percent of the income, and five billion, more than 80 percent of the world, in the developing world have 20 percent of the income. If a Martian came to the Earth to do a report on us and started with the Millennial Goals and then read what we’re doing, he would have come back with the following conclusions. He would have said, you know, these people are interesting. ... They’re spending \$900-plus billion a year on military expenditures. They’re spending \$350 billion a year on agricultural subsidies and

<sup>66</sup> Dates go back to 1998. The proportions staying equal, for current figures one should multiply the figures of 1998 roughly with two. *Human Development Report 1998*, New York 1998, p. 37 and 63; cfr. Vandepitte M., *De kloof en de uitweg*, Berchem 2004, p. 35. For the figure of daily speculation, see Bank for International Settlements, *Annual Report 1998-1999*, p. 117.

tariff protections. And they're spending \$56 billion a year on the thing that they said they wanted to do. And of the \$56 billion, maybe only 30 gets there in cash. So ... the Martian would get back into his spaceship and say there's really no worry about the Earth. They don't even do what they say they're going to do.'<sup>67</sup>

It could rightly be argued that these are interesting ciphers that show very well in which surrealistic world we live, but that eradicating poverty or misery is more than mathematics. It is more than transfer of money, it is in the first place about other structures and it's far from certain that the investment of the needed money – yearly some 80 billion or 0.15 % of GDP of the rich countries<sup>68</sup> - would really change the situation in a fundamental way. And beside it, what about sustainability? So two questions force themselves upon us. 1. Is a high human development possible with a low GDP per capita? 2. Can a high human development be combined with a small ecological footprint?

For both questions, Cuba shows the answer is affirmative and I suppose the same is true for the Indian state Kerala.<sup>69</sup> Cuba has a GDP per capita that is about ten times lower than the countries of OECD, worldwide it ranks on the 75<sup>th</sup> place. But its Human Development Index exceeds even that of Belgium, a country know for one of the best systems of social security of the world.<sup>70</sup> The chart below is revealing.<sup>71</sup>

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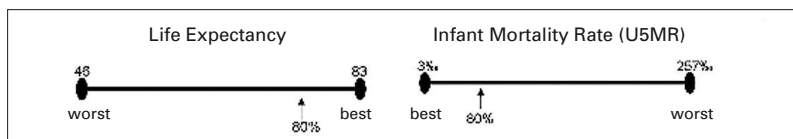
<sup>67</sup> February 24, 2004, <http://www.worldbank.org.md/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/MOLDOVAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20177096~menuPK:34475~pagePK:34370~piPK:42770~theSitePK:302251,00.html>.

<sup>68</sup> UNDP, et. al., *Implementing the 20/20 Initiative. Achieving universal access to basic social services*, September 1998, p. 20.

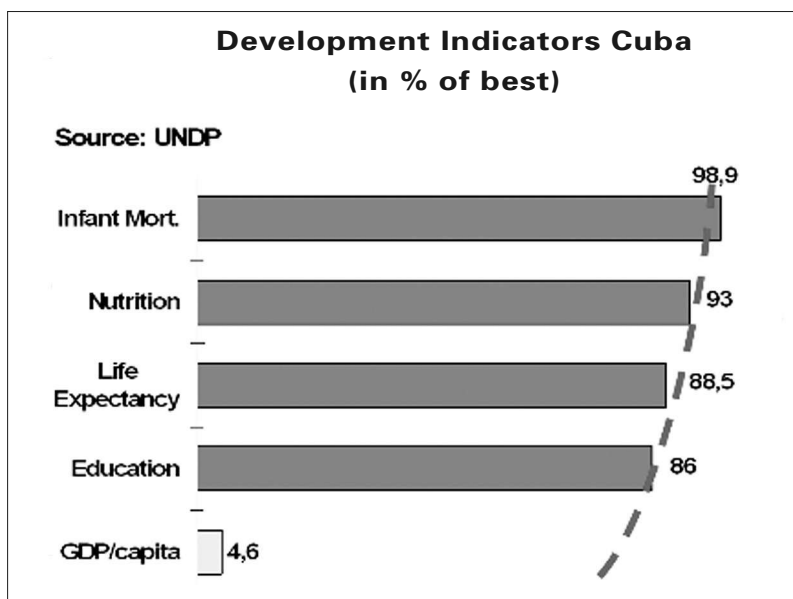
<sup>69</sup> Vandepitte M., '15 jaar na de val van de Muur: het onbekende Kerala', November 17, 2004, <http://archive.indymedia.be/news/2004/11/90238.html>.

<sup>70</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>; CIA, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html>; UNDP, *Human Development Report 2010*, Washington 2010, p. 143 and 146..

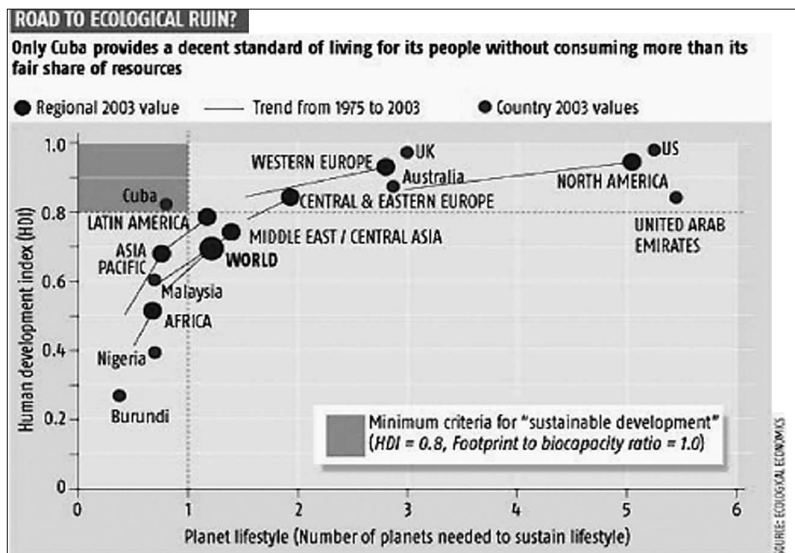
<sup>71</sup> All dates stem from UNDP, *Human Development Report 2010*. A score of 100 means you are the best of the world and 0 the worst of the world. The scores among them means your position relative to both. If you have for example a score of 80%, that means that you are one fifth of the difference between the best and the worst, apart from the best.



The dotted line is the score of the OECD, the club of thirty richest countries. In terms of infant mortality, life expectancy, nutrition (underweight children), education (percentage of primary and secondary education) Cuba gets a score around the average of the OECD. In terms of GDP per capita Cuba lies very far below. This chart shows that with relative few economic resources one can achieve a high human development. Besides, it should be noted that Cuba has to realise this in a hostile environment. When you extrapolate this to the world level, this chart confirms that, as we mentioned above, no huge amounts are necessary to eradicate the extreme misery in this world. Cuba shows this is no theoretical possibility, it is realistic and feasible. It is reassuring to know that. But it is also reassuring in the opposite direction. So called rich countries can keep their high level of development even if they reverse their economic growth.



Also for the question if a high human development is possible with a small ecological footprint, Cuba shows it is. In general it's one or the other. Countries with a high human development index (HDI) have a big foot and countries with a small foot have a low HDI. Emerging countries have none of both, but some of them are on a short distance from the zone that combines a high foot with a high HDI. Unfortunately for them, as the chart shows, the trends are not going in the right direction. Cuba again is the exception. It is a country with a high standard of living and a low consumption pattern.<sup>72</sup> And once more, I suppose the same is true for Kerala. Here again one can read this information in two directions. For poor and emerging countries who want to achieve a higher social development, a bigger foot print is not compulsory. Inversely, rich countries can scale down their environmental impact without necessarily losing on life quality.



<sup>72</sup> This does not mean that Cuba hasn't got ecological problems. To give one example: Cuba still needs to import a large part of its food. So food security [64] is a big problem. But in general the care for the environment is very high (see above). For the dates see, World Wildlife Fund, *Living Planet Report 2010. Biodiversity, biocapacity and development*, Gland 2010, p. 73. The slide is taken from <http://cow.neondragon.net/index.php/cuba-the-only-sustainable-developed-country-in-the-world>.

So 'another growth' or even a 'de-growth' [63] is not only necessary, it's also feasible. We have to reject consumerist delusions and orient the economy towards human development in harmony with the boundaries of nature.<sup>73</sup> According to Foster et. al., quantitative growth has to be substituted by qualitative growth. That means 'bringing mere quantitative growth (in aggregate terms as currently measured) to a halt in the rich countries, and then reversing growth, while at the same time qualitatively expanding the range of human capacities and possibilities and the diversity of nature.'<sup>74</sup> To achieve this goal, new measures of the economic activity are necessary. In the recent past there were interesting proposals to substitute GDP by the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) or the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW).<sup>75</sup>

The idea of a fundamental change of the economic logic is slowly gaining ground in government circles. At the World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, April 2010, Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Minister of Cultural Patrimony of Ecuador stood up for a radical review of the economy: 'We must no longer grow and accumulate. We must found a new way of building the economy and of interacting with nature. The structural causes of climate change and of all the world's problems are of the same order, and so also must be the responses. They must be structural, revolutionary, and deep.'<sup>76</sup> So it's reassuring that the desire of another economic paradigm and practice is not limited to academic circles or pressure groups. But, as we all know, a lot remains to be done.

I conclude this part mentioning two possible pitfalls. The first pitfall is to see consumption as the whipping boy. It is true that we will have to alter our consumption pattern. But it is production and not consumption

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<sup>73</sup> Herrera R., *Un autre capitalisme n'est pas possible*, Paris 2010, p. 80f.

<sup>74</sup> Foster J., Clark B. & York R., *op. cit.*, p. 396.

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/Training/Indicators/GPI.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Espinosa M., 'Climate Crisis: A Symptom of the Development Model of the World Capitalist System', Speech to the Panel on Structural Causes of Climate Change, World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Cochabamba, April 20, 2010, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/espinosa300610.html>.

that is the motor of capitalist economy. Above we have seen how The Marketing Industrial Complex has an overpowering grip on our buying behaviour. Beside that municipal waste is only a fraction of total waste. The big boys of waste are industry, construction and demolition, mining, fuel production, metals processing, etc.<sup>77</sup> In short, it is the production process that is the real trouble, there are the levers to reorient the economy, consumption as such is a derivate problem.

The second pitfall is the 'praise of poverty' heralded in certain circles.<sup>78</sup> As we mentioned above the material conditions of a substantial share of the world population still has to improve a lot. So there considerable growth is necessary. A drastic slowdown or reduction of capital accumulation as such means economic crisis. And giving the present balance of power we all know who will pay the bill.<sup>79</sup> If you leave the overall system intact, heralding to consume less plays perfectly into the austerity policies of the current neoliberal governments. That cannot be the purpose.

#### 4. Practical measures

I conclude with a proposal of an alternative economic programme. It's a more detailed elaboration of the points 64 to 67 in the text and of my proposals. I distinguish between the international and national level. For the former we inspired us on texts of the G77 and the Forum of São Paulo. For the latter we base ourselves on the programme of Unidad Popular, that won elections in Chile in 1970 and of the Sandinist project in Nicaragua.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Foster J., Clark B. & York R., *op. cit.*, p. 382.

<sup>78</sup> Herrera R., *op. cit.*, p. 87-8.

<sup>79</sup> Foster J., Clark B. & York R., *op. cit.*, p. 396.

<sup>80</sup> For the G77 see Van de Meersche P., *Noord-Zuid confrontatie en Nieuwe Internationale Economische Orde. Een historische - thematische - kritische inleiding*, Antwerp 1981. For the Forums of São Paulo, see *Alternatives Sud*, diverse years of publication. For the programme of Unidad Popular, see Cockcroft J. (ed), *Salvador Allende Reader. Chile's Voice of Democracy*, Melbourne 2000, p. 257-285. For the programme of the Sandinists, see Ramírez S., *Las armas del futuro*, Havana 1987; Wheelock J., *Imperialismo y dictadura: crisis de una formación social*, Mexico 1979; Fonseca C., *Bajo la bandera del sandinismo. Obras Tomo 1*, Managua 1985; Girardi G., *Sandinismo, Marxismo, Cristianismo: La Confluencia*, Managua 1986; NCOS, *Nicaragua. De ondermijnde revolutie*, Brussels 1985; Núñez O., et. al., *La Transición Difícil. La autodeterminación de los pequeños países periféricos*, Managua 1987.

## **International Level**

A new, just economic order is established. The transfers from South to North are reversed.

- **Protectionism:** trade barriers for all the countries of the North are prohibited; countries of the South can protect their economies until they reach a certain level of development (e.g. measured by GDP per capita).
- **Fair prices:** prices of commodities are raised to a level comparable with that of other products. Mechanisms are being developed to prevent excessive price volatility: futures contracts, creation of reserves, compensatory finance when there is a sudden price drop. This is combined with a system of preferential tariffs for the poorest countries.
- **Technological assistance:** there is an international institution that provides technological and scientific assistance to the third world countries.
- **Intellectual property:** the abolition of intellectual property.
- **International institutions:** WTO, IMF and World Bank should be replaced by institutions that are suitable for the listed targets.
- **Capital flows:** Financial flows are strictly regulated, capital flight is impossible. Speculation is made virtually impossible, for example through a variant of the Tobin tax. Tax havens are abolished.
- **Development Aid and Compensation:** a UN institution will calculate how much every ex-colonial power has to pay back yearly to his ex-colonies for the damage caused. Ditto for the damage done due to imperialist wars. In anticipation of this arrangement these countries spend 1% of their GDP to development aid.
- **Economic Integration:** the pursuit of economic cooperation and integration between countries of the South.

## **National level**

The economy is oriented towards social and sustainable development. This requires first of all a planning of the whole, not in all its details, but enough to realise the desired objectives. Second, it is necessary that the grip of the domestic and foreign big business (large estate, management, bankers) on the macro-economy is broken.



- Investments: Priority investments go to the disadvantaged social sectors: education, health, housing ...
- Domestic market: The focus is on strengthening the domestic market. Production of basic goods for domestic use has priority. Capital flows to or from abroad are subject to strict control.
- Modernization: the accelerated modernization of economic sectors, starting with the rural sector.
- Agricultural Reform: large landownership is abolished and the land be divided among the peasants, both in countries of the South and in the North.
- Infrastructure: priority goes to electricity, water, telecommunications, roads ...
- State Sector: key sectors are nationalized. Foreign investments are subject to strict control.
- Economic democracy: workers' councils and peasant councils are established. They help to decide on production and trade and hence on the overall planning. They choose their top leadership and can remove them.
- Environment: emergency programs to further reduce environmental degradation and restore as much damage as possible.

I like to end with the beautiful words Augustine wrote about hope: 'Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> [http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Augustine\\_of\\_Hippo](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo).

# MAKING THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY CONCRETE: FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT – FOR A LIFE IN SOLIDARITY

MICHAEL BRIE

## Part One: Human Rights and the Common Good of Humanity

In his important paper for this conference “From ‘Common Goods’ to the ‘Common Good of Humanity’”, Francois Houtart proposes that a “Universal Declaration of the Common Good of Humanity” be drafted. What significance could such a new Universal Declaration of the United Nations have? Why is it necessary at all, since we already have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been repeatedly updated and fine-tuned by additional human rights declarations of the second and third generations?<sup>82</sup> Why do we need a further addendum to these declarations in the form of a reference to a “common good of humanity”? What more, in fact, is needed than a simple statement – albeit difficult to put into practice – to the effect that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>83</sup> Supervising the draft of this declaration was Eleanor Roosevelt, the widow of former U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt; she was aided by such prominent personalities as the Canadian lawyer John Humphrey, the Lebanese politician and philosopher Charles Malik, the French lawyer René Cassin and the Chinese philosopher Chang Peng-chun.<sup>84</sup> The first step had been a global survey of leading intellectuals from the

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Hermann Klenner: *Marxismus und Menschenrechte. Studien zur Rechtsphilosophie* [Marxism and human rights: Studies in the philosophy of law], Berlin 1982; Christoph Menke & Arnd Pollmann: *Philosophie der Menschenrechte. Zur Einführung* [Philosophy and human rights: An introduction] Hamburg 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. on the history of the development of the Declaration, see Glen Johnson & Janusz Simonides: *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A History of Its Creation and Implementation, 1948-1998*, Paris 1998.

great civilizations of the time. Of great significance was the fact that the conflict between western liberalism and Soviet communism forced the authors to take into account the unity of political and civil rights on the one hand, and of economic and social rights on the other. That unity was further deepened during the 1960s and '70s.

What then is missing from this and other human rights declarations? I would like to answer that question by highlighting two controversial traditions, – the thought of ancient China and that of modern western Europe. One major idea that entered into the Human Rights Declaration was a great concept of Confucius that moral behaviour reflected human fellowship or kindness, was philanthropy in the basic meaning of the term, the love of people, or in Chinese, *ren* (仁), that which connects two or more people.<sup>85</sup> Such as human fellowship, or to use a term from European cultural tradition, community of solidarity, is much more than merely a random social relationship between people, for that could include slavery and torture, the mere exchange of advantage, or the disposal of disadvantage onto the shoulders of the already disadvantaged. The true human community emerges, says Confucius, “When the superior man conscientiously does his duty without fail, and always encounters other people with respect and politeness... then all within the four oceans [i.e. within the cosmos of Chinese civilization] will be his brothers.”<sup>86</sup>

However, Chinese thought includes another tradition alongside Confucianism which has been repeatedly suppressed and is much less subject to misuse for purposes of domination. That is Taoism, which would later be linked closely to Buddhism in China. The basic text of Taoism is the *Dao-de-jing*, which replaces *ren*, or human fellowship, with the concept, which it newly created in the Chinese cultural sphere, of *ziran*. Wikipedia

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<sup>85</sup> »The character ‘*ren*’ consists of the two elements meaning “man” and “two”. the structure of the character thus emphasizes that ‘*ren*’ is not an abstract moral value, but rather, and primarily, has a certain quality of human behaviour.” Ralf Moritz: Introduction to his translation of *Konfuzius: Gespräche (Lun-Yu)*, Leipzig 1982, p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> Confucius, op. cit.

defines it as “a two-character compound [consisting] of zi (自)’nose; self; oneself; from; since’ and ran (然)’right; correct; so; yes’, which is used as a -ran suffix marking adjectives or adverbs (roughly corresponding to English -ly). It is worth mentioning that in Chinese culture, the nose (or zi) is a common metaphor for a person’s point of view (Callahan, 1989).” in a previous Taoist work from the mid-fourth century B.C.E., the Zhuangxi, the concept of Dao [in the old transliteration, Tao] had been explained as “the unchanging unity underlying a shifting plurality; the primal unity underlying apparent multiplicity,” but at the same time as the “vital spirit” underlying life and motion.<sup>87</sup> The cautiously exploring definition of the Dao – literally, the path – given in the Daode jing now refers to the ziran, which is explained as follows: “There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still it was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and in no danger (of being exhausted)! It may be regarded as the Mother of all things. I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Dao. ... Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Dao. The law of the Dao is its Being What It Is” (ziran).<sup>88</sup> The Being What It Is of nature in its concrete form – “between the four oceans” – is that in which “all people have their origins”<sup>89</sup>, and what forms the basis for their unity and their proximity.

Chinese thought was historically split between one school, Confucianism, which primarily addressed interpersonal relationships necessary for life in dignity and harmony, and another tradition which explored the question of the common origin of each and of all together – Taoism in Chinese Buddhism. This split generated a living unity of opposites, and

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<sup>87</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and its Place in Chinese Thought*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1934.

<sup>88</sup> Chinese text project, *The Dao De Jing*, <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>, Ch. 25.

<sup>89</sup> François Jullien: *Das Universelle, das Einförmige, das Gemeinsame und der Dialog zwischen den Kulturen*. Berlin 2009, p. 100; German translation of *De l’universel, de l’uniforme, du commun et du dialogue entre les cultures*, Fayard, 2008 (not yet available in English).

reproduced it throughout two millennia. The dual recognition is: we can only live humanly in a society of human fellowship, and we can only live if we draw the power, the substance, for such a life from something else, something completely different from us humans that Is What It Is, or “it is so by virtue of its own”<sup>90</sup>. This reaction of people alone is not a sufficient guarantee for that. Morality cannot justify itself, otherwise it will succumb to an abstract and empty moralism which is the equal opposite of barbarism.

A different tradition, upon which the Declaration of Human Rights draws, is that of modern European thought. It is rooted in the Old and New Testaments, and in the Graeco-Roman history of civility and private property. One of the points of departure of Judeo-Christian tradition is the claim to domination over nature and the transfer of nature to the ownership of humankind. As the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament states, “God created man in his own image, said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1, 28). Not living in and with nature, but the use of nature is what is at the beginning. But this thought is deeply contradictory: how can this claim to dominion be reconciled with the preservation of creation? The unbridled power of people over nature and against one another, and the will to freedom intrinsic in that, will necessarily be transformed into antagonism against nature and among people, unless strong counterforces rein it in.

To the extent that modern western bourgeois thought refers to the founding mythology of the Old Testament, it faced the problem of how the transfer of ownership of creation to humankind as a whole could be reconciled with the exclusive property rights of individuals. Let me elucidate this using the example of the work of John Locke, “An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government”, (1679-’89). Locke took both natural law, such as it emerged in ancient Rome, and the Christian “Revelation” as his points of departure. Natural

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<sup>90</sup> Chan Wing-Chuek, quoted in: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziran>.

law stated, he said, “that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink, and such other things as nature affords for their subsistence;”<sup>91</sup> The Revelation, on the other hand, proved that God had created the world for humankind. Locke addressed this double challenge, and in turn attempted to show “how men might come to have a property in several parts of that which God gave to mankind in common, and that without any express compact of all the commoners.”<sup>92</sup>

How, however, can this transition from the “omnia sunt communia”, from the common use of the earth and its resources, to a private property which excludes all other fellow humans, be justified? For Locke, it is the freedom of the individual that explains this transition: “Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person.”<sup>93</sup> This, says Locke, thus also applies to the labour of the individual. And since the fruits of the earth only through labour achieve a form in which they can be useful to humans, so, he adds, such a thing “hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men.”<sup>94</sup> To avoid leading these two stated premises ad absurdum, Locke adds in very brief – and also inconsequential – form, “at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others.”<sup>95</sup> We should hold this condition in our memories: what if private property of the one leads to the lack of all property by

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<sup>91</sup> John Locke, “An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government”, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, 1690, <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtreat.htm>, Ch. 5, Sec. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, Sec. 27. Locke, who himself accepted slavery in the British colonies in North America, was at the same time critical of it for fundamental reasons, since he justified capitalist private property through the freedom of the individual. Slavery, he said, was “the state of war continued, between a lawful conqueror and a captive.” Cynically, he asserted the acquiescence of the slave to his slavery, for should the slave find that “the hardship of his slavery outweigh the value of his life, it is in his power, by resisting the will of his master, to draw on himself the death he desires.” (ibid, Ch. 4, Sec. 23).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, Sec. 27.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

the other, and deprives him of the possibility of realizing his right to sustenance, since “enough, and as good” is not “left in common for others”? What happens if this private ownership destroys those goods which nature and previous generations have passed onto us? First of all, we should note, John Locke postulates the grand utopia of individual property – or acquisition – under conditions of societal and natural plenty. But it is interesting how his utopia is transformed into the opposite in light of his own arguments.

The next section of the same essay expands upon this thought, and asks whether such property requires the acquiescence of all others. The already stated justification for private property lets Locke speak more freely than before. This is expressed first of all in his turn of phrase, which becomes personal in a very special way. First, Locke speaks of the property of some neutral other, of “his” property, to which “he” has a claim, using the personal and possessive pronouns in the third person singular. Then however he switches to the first person plural, to “we”. Thus does Locke assume the position – which he apparently considers completely natural – that is shared by his own social group, and writes “We see in commons, which remain so by compact [!], that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which begins the property; without which the common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners.”

Behind the reference to the concrete case of the commons, which existed before Locke’s very eyes, was a centuries long struggle that had begun as early as the thirteenth century, and was to continue for another 150 years after Locke’s death. By then, virtually all agricultural land in England and Scotland had been definitively removed from common ownership, and privatized by the large landowners. Peasant rebellions such as that under the leadership of Kett in 1549, or of Midland in 1607, shook England. The violent transformation of commonly used land in the form of open fields to pasture land, particularly for raising sheep, with the goal of raising wool for export, destroyed the foundations of life of millions of free peasants, and transformed them into an excess

population which was then forced by means of brutal violence into work-houses, forced labour on warships – a measure which Locke, too, proposes a “plan” for the elimination of unemployment<sup>96</sup> – or into capitalist wage labour.

Behind the reference to the communist heritage of the gift of speech to humankind as a whole in the Old Testament, is a sharp class conflict. And it is the bourgeois Locke who calls for a blatant breach of contract, for he is fully aware that by right and by law, common land had to remain open to common use. In the face of all historical fact, he assumed that this common land “lay waste”<sup>97</sup>, and was hence worthless; he compares it with the broad expanses of North America, and in both cases derives from the fact of non-capitalist use of the land – which to him is equivalent to non-use – the “right” of dispossession. He writes, “If we will rightly estimate things as they come to our use, and cast up the several expences [!!!] about them, what in them is purely owing to nature, and what to labour, we shall find, that in most of them ninety-nine hundredths are wholly to be put on the account of labour.”<sup>98</sup>

What labour is meant here? That becomes clear if, starting from the above quoted sentences, in which Locke uses the “we” of his class, in whose interests he proclaims the dispossession of the commons, we move on to those sentences where he then switches to the personal and possessive pronouns in the first person singular, to “I” and “my”. Here, it is clear what work is, for him real work, which is “rightly estimated”: “Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut;

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<sup>96</sup> Among other things, Locke proposed to the King of England that the children of women dependent upon public support be taken away from them at the age of three and placed in “working schools”, where they might, for no pay, process that very product, wool, which had robbed their parents of the foundations of their lives; such work, he noted, would best “benefit the kingdom” (his essay *Scheme of Methods for the Employment of the Poor*). For a history of these “workhouses”, see Simon Fowler: *Workhouse: The People: The Places: The Life Behind Closed Doors*, *The National Archives* 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Locke, op. cit., ch. 5, Sec. 45.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, sec. 40.



and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body.”<sup>99</sup> The horse and the servant, being “his”, are pronounced as equivalent to his own body as instruments of work, and are likewise organs for the appropriation of common goods. In this manner, capitalist wage labour is identified by sleight-of-hand as the individual labour of the person performed on his or her own behalf, and by the way also naturalized by way of identification with one of the subjugated forces of nature (the horse). Everything subject to the will of the owner and which carries out his purpose, can be “estimated” and brings a profit – be it the forces of nature, a wage labourer or a slave (wives and prostitutes are ignored; machines are not yet at issue), or one’s own physical efforts – is classed as “one’s own work”, for the purpose of justifying private, exclusive property, be it dispossession in the form of “enclosures” or colonial conquests, or be it the appropriation of surplus value in capitalist enterprises. The people put the situation to verse:

They hang the man, and flog the woman,  
That steals the goose from off the common;  
But let the greater villain loose,  
That steals the common from the goose.

Thus there was not only the bourgeois justification of this primal and permanent dispossession of the people, but also an equally theoretical and practical protest against it. One prominent example is the communist movement of the “Diggers”, which emerged during the real English Revolution of the seventeenth century – not the coup d’état of 1688–89, which was then euphemistically titled the “Glorious Revolution”. Like Taoism as the “sub-dominant” tradition of thought of ancient China, communism is the suppressed flip side of western European liberalism.<sup>100</sup> Several months after the English King Charles I had been sentenced to

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., Sec. 28.

<sup>100</sup> Cf: *Omnia sunt communia – Von der Möglichkeit des Kommunismus nach seinem Scheitern. Eine Skizze – Lothar Kühne gewidmet.* In: Klaus Kinner (ed.): *DIE LINKE – Erbe und Tradition. part 1: Kommunistische und sozialdemokratische Wurzeln.* Berlin 2010, pp. 19 – 58.

death and then beheaded under the revolutionary pressure of the army, in those April days of 1649, a small group of men and women occupied untitled common land near St. George's Hill, at Weybridge near Cobham in Surrey. In a situation where food prices had reached an unprecedented peak, they resolved to farm the common land in common, as an "entry project"<sup>101</sup> to a just world. In so doing, they invoked the same creation myth from the Bible to which John Locke would refer thirty years later. In a declaration signed by fifteen men under the leadership of Gerrard Winstanley, they addressed the "powers of England" to explain their intent. Peacefully and rejecting all use of weapons, they had determined "To dig up Georges-Hill and the waste Ground thereabouts, and to Sow Corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows."<sup>102</sup> Their goal, they said, was to remove "Civil propriety of Honour, Dominion and Riches one over another, which is the curse the Creation groans under."<sup>103</sup> The lords of the manor and the armoured power of the state, and its courts, reacted quite differently than they had in cases of the private dispossession of common land, although the Diggers had done nothing other than that which John Locke would call the rightful transfer of ownership from nature to property through one's own labour. This however was a common appropriation and transfer to, and ownership by, the labourers in the institution of a grassroots democracy, with the goal that "...everyone shall put their hands to till the earth and bring up cattle, and the blessing of the earth shall be common to all"<sup>104</sup> – with no servants, maids or wage slavery, no private property or money, or purchase and sale of the necessities of life, with no plenty for the few and want for the many.

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<sup>101</sup> For this concept, see: Brangsch, Lutz: »Der Unterschied liegt nicht im Was, wohl aber in dem Wie«. Einstiegsprojekte als Problem von Zielen und Mitteln im Handeln linker Bewegungen. In: Brie, Michael (ed.): *Radikale Realpolitik. Plädoyer für eine andere Politik*. Berlin 2009, pp. 39 – 52.

<sup>102</sup> Winstanley et al., *The True Levellers Standard*, <http://www.rogerlovejoy.co.uk/philosophy/diggers/diggers2.htm>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness*, a brief quote at <http://www.spunk.org/texts/quotes/sp000109.txt>.

A few more attempts are known in greater detail, in which communist “diggers” attempted to communally cultivate wasteland. Repeated false accusations in court, arbitrary arrests, attacks, arson and expulsion destroyed these communist settlements. By 1651, the movement had been crushed. Gerrard Winstanley drew the conclusion that “There is but bondage and freedom, particular interest or common interest; and he who pleads to bring in particular interest into a free commonwealth will presently be seen and cast out, as one bringing in kingly slavery again.”<sup>105</sup> The battle against these experiments, and the appropriation of the common lands, paid off for the landlords. In 2007, real estate prices in this area had reached £3,000,000 per property.<sup>106</sup> The Song of the Diggers is both true and current:

You noble Diggers all, stand up now, stand up now,  
You noble Diggers all, stand up now,  
The waste land to maintain, seeing Cavaliers by name  
Your digging does disdain, and persons all defame  
Stand up now, stand up now.

So, to get back to the original question, what is missing from the Human Rights Declarations in its various versions, where they obviously proclaim all necessary rights indispensable for a life in freedom, security and self-determination, at least to the extent that the state of the societal debate current at any given point is rooted in the general consciousness?<sup>107</sup> While they receive their justification only from the real struggles of people against their experience of deprivation of rights, their exploitation, their oppression and their discrimination, against hunger and un-

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<sup>105</sup> Winstanley, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*, Ch. 4, <http://www.bilderberg.org/land/lawofree.htm>.

<sup>106</sup> More than 350 years after the Diggers, the *Land is Ours* movement in England tried to occupy until the land again; like their predecessors they were repeatedly driven away (<http://www.tlio.org.uk/>).

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Jürgen Habermas: Das utopische Gefälle. Das Konzept der Menschenwürde und die realistische Utopie der Menschenrechte [The utopian gap: The concept of human dignity and the realistic utopia of human rights], in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, no. 8, 2010, pp. 43 - 53.

employment, against lack of access to education, healthcare and clean water, hence, to denial of any of the totality of “the goods of freedom”,<sup>108</sup> their realization depends upon these struggles, to create the basis for their redemption. Otherwise, they are merely demands with no “substrate”, form without content, a formal imperative with no “ground” in reality.<sup>109</sup> Without such a “ground”, human rights become the rights, the liberties of those with the private means to realize them, become privileges of the propertied, and cease to be human rights. That they become only when the common basis for their realization – natural, social and cultural wealth – are accessible for each and all, even to the least of our “brothers and sisters”. These foundations are earthly nature, their incredible yet today so endangered wealth of life and of the possibilities of life are the historical and present cultures without which we would long since have been nothing more than just another long extinct species of biological evolution. They are the economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual structures of our lives, to the extent that they can be useful in realizing human rights. All this is the “common good of humanity”.

If John Locke says that private property grows out of one’s own labour, since it is that which justifies wealth, he completely ignores the fact that the real economic power of individual labour power depends first and foremost on the natural conditions under which it is used, second on the cultural heritage of knowledge, skills, and productive forces in their broadest sense which have been passed on to us by previous generations, and third on the productive force of cooperation with living generations. We owe 99.9% of our labour productivity today to these three conditions, and not to our own efforts. That shows clearly, however, how much of the results of these efforts we are obligated to repay for

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. Michael Brie: Freiheit und Sozialismus. Die Programmatik der PDS in der Diskussion [Freedom and socialism: The Programme of the PDS under discussion], in: Michael Brie; Michael Chrapa; Dieter Klein: *Sozialismus als Tagesaufgabe* [Socialism as an everyday task], Berlin 2003, pp. 7 - 64.

<sup>109</sup> For the terms “ground” and “substrate”, “content” and “form”, cf. G.W.F. Hegel: *Science of Logic*, Part 2.

the common good. The real differences in access to “the goods of freedom” would therefore, even if we accept Locke’s argumentation, only amount to 0.1%.

Let me sum up this part of my presentation: the Human Rights Declaration explicitly mentions “dignity”; a Declaration of Common Good would explicitly specify the common natural, social and cultural heritage of humankind. Let us extrapolate on that with further examples, paraphrasing the Declaration of Human Rights.

### **“Preamble**

Whereas a recognition of the common natural, social and cultural heritage of all members of the human family, the Common Goods of Humanity, and their equal and inalienable claim to the sustainable use of this heritage in solidarity, constitute the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world;

Whereas the destruction, privatization and exploitation of this heritage, and contempt for common claims, have resulted in barbarous acts which have condemned millions of people to lives of hunger, disease and misery, and sentence many millions to death every year;

Whereas a life in dignity for each and all is only possible through the free and equal access to this heritage;

Whereas future generations depend upon the people and nations living today to preserve this heritage for them and enrich it further, as we have received it from our foregoing generations;

Whereas we have the duty not to continue inflicting irreversible damage, especially to the earth’s nature, but also through the destruction of great cultures, which has already begun;

Whereas life in peace will only be possible if this heritage is used with care and solidarity...

## Therefore be it resolved that

### Article 1

The Common Good of Humanity is the foundation of human life in dignity, both in the present and in the future. Its preservation and enrichment is the task of each individual, of the nations, and of their communities.

### Article 2

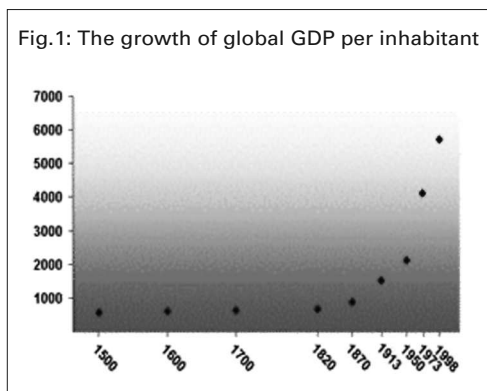
1. Everyone and each nation is entitled to equal rights of use of this heritage without distinction, be it of power or of property, of military or of political force, of culture or of gender.

2. The inequalities existing today in the rights of use of this heritage must be removed over the course of the next fifty years. This is an obligation particularly upon those who have hitherto achieved the greatest privileges and gains from the use of this heritage.”

## Part Two: The Transformation from Capitalism to Socialism and a Concrete Entry Project

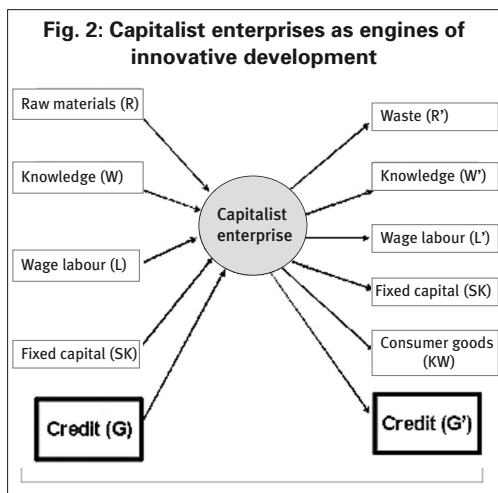
### The emergence of modern bourgeois societies

The late eighteenth century was shaken by two momentous events, the Industrial Revolution in England and the political revolution in France. With the English Industrial Revolution, capitalism created for itself the technological base from which it could destroy all traditional forms of



production, such as the peasant household economy and the handicrafts. A historically unprecedented boost to productivity and growth was ushered in (Fig. 1).

As Marx and Engels wrote in their eulogy to this revolutionary aspect of capitalism: “The bourgeoisie



cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes" (Marx/Engels 1848: 465).

The subjection of society and the entire mode of production and way of life in the name of unbridled capital utilization and profit maximization and permanent, more or less "creative destruction" (Schumpeter) of all traditional forms of production, institutions and convictions, were the two sides of the unbridled capitalism that had been advancing steadily since the late eighteenth century. Capitalist enterprises became engines of modernity that absorbed credit, raw materials, energy, labour, knowledge and culture and reproduced them in an altered form (Fig. 2).

While the English Industrial Revolution swept away the technological-economic pillars of the traditional modes of production and living, and made capitalism universal, the political French Revolution destroyed the foundations of all traditional rule. Not religion or heredity, not tradition or inherited privileges, but the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen", in short, the human rights that the National Assembly approved on August 26, 1789, became the sole legitimate point of reference for the entire social and political order. As Hegel was to proclaim forty years later: "Thus in the notion of law a constitution has been set up, and from now on everything is to be based on this. As long as the sun has been in the heavens with the planets revolving around it, we have never yet seen that man has put himself on his head, that is to say

on this mind, and built reality in accordance with it... This was ... a marvellous sunrise." (Hegel 1831: 557 -8). Constantly expanded efforts by broad social and political movements for the universal granting of human rights on the one hand and their subordination to a bourgeois class society and the hegemony of the owners of capital or state bureaucracies on the other have marked the last two hundred years. Burgeoning hopes of a free and equal society based on solidarity and the creation of a new, modern unfreedom and inequality have gone hand in hand.

Both revolutions, the capitalist Industrial Revolution and the bourgeois political revolution – had, as we have seen, internal contradictions. And furthermore they themselves were in contradiction to one another. The imperative of capital utilization and the norms of democracy and human rights are nothing less than congruent. Unfettered utilization of capital has a double effect. First, its potential for dissolving and destroying existing forms of production and ways of life is usually far greater than its ability to create new forms. Whole continents can be turned into poverty-stricken zones, as happened to India or Latin America during the nineteenth century, and is now happening to Africa. Secondly, capital utilization is not capable of generating, by its own efforts, the most important conditions for its own reproduction and development: educated and motivated workers, an intact natural environment, and financial stability (Polanyi 1978). On the contrary, profit maximization relies on low wages, cheap raw materials and speculative capital investments. This however turns human rights into a farce, and democracy is reduced to submitting to material constraints. Imperialism, racism and nationalism are the consequences. Capitalism is dependent on a countervailing power, and on non-capitalist sectors.

The double transition to a society based on unfettered capital utilization and seeking to legitimize itself in terms of democracy and human rights may be called the first great transformation of the modern era. The new order was however extremely unstable, and marked by sharp antagonisms. The struggle against these tendencies, which threatened the destruction of society, the state and its culture, characterized the whole of



the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two world wars, the Great Depression of 1929 – which brought capitalism to the brink of collapse – fascism and the Holocaust were the results. The state socialist etatism and communism that arose as counter-movements degenerated for decades into the Stalinist Terror and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

After the Second World War, a solution seemed to have been found which would reconcile capitalism and democracy and end the self-destruction of modern capitalism. Capitalism, the welfare state and democracy entered into a state of symbiosis (Marshall 1992). A permanently high growth rate lasting almost three decades enabled the Western world to reach the so-called Fordist distribution compromise between employers and wage earners, the development of the welfare state, and a consolidation of representative democracy – not least as a result of concessions made to the workers out of fear of the competing system. The slackening of economic growth in the 1970s caused the short-lived “dream of everlasting prosperity” (Burckhardt Lutz) to burst. The over-accumulation of capital made a comeback. New capital investments brought in ever lower returns, or turned out to be completely unprofitable. The domination of capital ran up against the very same limits drawn by the welfare state and democracy: a strong working class; an expanded social sector; demands for democratic co-determination at the workplace, in the enterprise, in community and society; the call for self-determination at work and in the individual’s own life. The “old” social movements became radicalized, while “new” ones arose.

Society was faced with a choice: either there would be a further repulse of the domination of capital and increasing democratization of the economy and of enterprises, as well as a shortening of working hours and the creation of individual leisure opportunities going beyond mere consumption, or else new sources of accumulation would have to be created by unleashing capitalism and deregulating the financial, capital, commodity and labour markets in the course of “globalization”. The latter included expropriation through privatization of facilities built by and for the public, or the reduction of social assets, rights and achievements

(Harvey, 2003; Zeller, 2004). The economic and political power elites were banking on a radical market development in the form of neoliberal capitalism, and largely held the social, democratic and ecological counter-movements in check. A way out of the stagnation was to be offered by the growth areas of high-tech capitalism. This proved insufficient to halt the slowdown of growth however, and led to one speculative bubble after the other. Although globalization strengthened the winners of international cut-throat competition, it deepened the gulf between rich and poor countries, thus making it impossible to tackle the problems of poverty, hunger, environmental pollution and violence.

The development of financial-market capitalism seemed to be the last chance to somehow satisfy the drive for a maximization of profits. As productive capitalism had reached its limits, the financial markets with their ever more opaque “products” outside of the so-called real economy were to supply the returns for the propertied classes. In some strange way, money was supposed to multiply itself indefinitely by a process of manipulation. But the result was the deepest financial crisis since the 1930s. Governments were forced to guarantee the gigantic over-accumulation of the last thirty years, thus preparing a new, second phase in the crisis of 2008. Just one percent of the annual real interest rate on the \$200 trillion in cash assets is bound up with the redistribution of four percent of global GDP, i.e. almost the total increase achieved during the good growth years went into the hands of the “moneyed class”. The way out of the crisis of the 1960s and ‘70s has turned out to be the way into the most serious crisis of capitalism in eighty years. The model of a modern bourgeois-capitalist society that arose out of the first great transformation is not sustainable. The crisis of capitalism is thus also a crisis of civilization.

### **A multi-dimensional crisis of civilization**

This crisis of civilization is above all a crisis of reproduction. For the first time in the history of humankind, the natural foundations of its global existence are acutely jeopardized by the crisis in the relationship between society and nature. The non-renewable raw materials and sources

of energy of the planet are running out. The waste created by our manufacturing and lifestyle and released into the atmosphere in the form of toxic gases is threatening the life of billions of people by causing climate change, desertification and extreme climatic events. If the extermination of biological species continues at its present rate – some thirty to seventy species a day, as opposed to one species a year under normal terrestrial conditions – the earth's greatest natural resource will be destroyed. The ecological crisis, with its threat to human survival, will be the central problem of the twenty-first century.

Secondly, Western societies and many developing and emerging countries find themselves in a crisis concerning people's relation to one another, a crisis of social integration. The domination of profit under neoliberal capitalism has dramatically deepened the social divisions in societies and between them. Capitalist, patriarchal and ethnically or racially based ruling hierarchies are dividing societies, and undermining the solidarity that holds them together. At the same time, growing insecurity, fear, poor working and living conditions and atomization caused by precarious jobs, consumerism and egoism are generating anomie. For growing sections of the population, work and commitment are losing their significance as sources of social recognition and self-realization.

Thirdly, the grave aberrations and crises of neoliberal capitalism against which the majority of the population feels powerless, are leading to an erosion and a crisis of democracy and, in a number of countries, to strong authoritarian tendencies. The established regulatory institutions are failing to cope with social problems. Confidence in the institutional framework is dwindling. A crisis in the relationship between citizens and the institutions which they expect to look after their interests is also calling the legitimacy of the rulers into question. The prevailing Western order is becoming illegitimate, as it is losing touch with democracy and human rights.

Fourthly, a threat to the security of the human race is another aspect of the crisis of civilization. The danger of nuclear wars is increasing, and is

threatening the existence of a large part of humanity. Access to raw materials, water and land is being extorted by neo-colonial methods, and militarily secured. A new, completely unpredictable round of the global and regional arms races has been ushered in. Many countries are being destabilized by wars and military conflicts, with terrible consequences for the population. The effects of climate change are causing waves of migration, and coinciding with other causes of migration, thus contributing to military conflicts. Some forty countries are considered "failing states"; they are sinking into corruption and violence. Even in prosperous countries, poverty, exclusion and growing injustice are producing violence and crime.

The modern bourgeois-capitalist era that emerged from the first great transformation is not capable of securing the conditions necessary for its own reproduction on a lasting basis, of integrating society sufficiently, of universalizing legitimate democratic rule and observance of human rights, or of assuring peace both within and outside national borders. Unlike in traditional societies, no relatively stable state of human development is possible. The transition to a modern mode of development is not yet complete. We may talk of a half-way modern era that is not built to last. There are three possible scenarios:

First, we can try to continue the present path of development. This is the dominant tendency, though it has many natural limitations. A whole chain of crises is to be expected. It is scarcely imaginable that there is sufficient problem-solving capacity to continue such a course of development, as the weight of problems under the present institutional conditions and power structures far exceeds the capacity to solve them. In reaction to this dilemma, a second path of development may emerge, for which there are already clear indications. Experts at the Tellus Institute make the following forecast: "If the market adaptations and policy reforms of Conventional Worlds were to prove insufficient for redirecting development away from destabilization, the global trajectory could veer in an unwelcome direction. Fortress World explores the possibility that powerful world forces, faced with a dire systemic crisis, impose an au-

thoritarian order where elites retreat to protected enclaves, leaving impoverished masses outside. In our troubled times, Fortress World seems the true business-as-usual scenario to many. In this dark vision, a global archipelago of connected fortresses seeks to control a damaged environment and restive population. Authorities employ geo-engineering techniques to stabilize the global climate, while dispatching peace-keeping militia to multiple hotspots in an attempt to quell social conflict and mass migration. But the results are mixed: emergency measures and spotty infrastructure investment cannot keep pace with habitat loss and climate change, nor provide adequate food and water to desperate billions. In this kind of future, sustainable development is not in the cards, a half-remembered dream of a more hopeful time” (Raskin et al. 2010: 2630). Under conditions of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and ecological disasters, this path of development can also lead to a complete collapse of civilization and open barbarism, a collapse of the kind that loomed during the Second World War or threatened during the nuclear arms race between the USA and the Soviet Union.

A third path of development could arise as a result of crises, social struggles and new political arrangements – the path of development of a socio-ecological transformation towards a sustained post-capitalist modernity. This would be the second great transformation in the modern era. If the first transformation created modernity in its bourgeois-capitalist form, the second transformation would complete the transition to a modern mode of development (Reissig 2007: 14) that would be made to last.

### **Dimensions of transformational politics**

When at the height of the global financial crisis, financial-market capitalism began to reel, when for a brief historical moment even the inner circle of power-holders saw themselves on the brink of the abyss, as the market ideology was discredited and the rulers confronted with a crisis of acceptance, the left reacted with a plethora of separate, justified demands for bringing the banks under control and saving the bulk of the population from having to bear the brunt of the crisis.

But in the public search for answers to the crisis, the left was unable to draw the contours of any alternative societal project, to take advantage of the crisis of market radicalism and seize the opportunity for public discussion of a leftist counter-model, and for a change in the terms of political discourse in its own favour. This failure revealed a profound weakness of the left.

This is not to suggest, however, that there was any expectation that the left draw up a plan for a new society. Rather, it is a question of combining the ideas which outline a society based on solidarity with suggestions for how its progressive transformation might be achieved, and of explaining what qualities a society must have in order to move closer to freedom, equality, solidarity, sustainability and peace. It should be recalled that: "The negative and the destructive can be decreed, the constructive and the positive cannot. A thousand problems. Only experience [is] able to make corrections and open up new ways. Only untrammelled, burgeoning life can come up with a thousand new forms and improvisations, draw upon creative power, and correct all aberrations itself. Public life in states with limited freedom is therefore so meagre, so impoverished, so schematic, so barren, because by excluding democracy, it cuts itself off from the vital sources of all intellectual wealth and progress" (Luxemburg, ... : 360).

It could turn out that the most important task in preparing for a second transformation is to strengthen the capacity for transformation of today's societies. The key demands are:

- Raising the degrees of freedom: ensuring a maximum variety of options (organizations, knowledge, modes of operation, forms of socialization) through a constant process of social innovation;
- Growing equality: expansion of a broad public infrastructure to facilitate the information, self-organization and cooperation of citizens and securing their participation in a democratic search for new paths and in decision-making, through access to the conditions for a self-determined life;

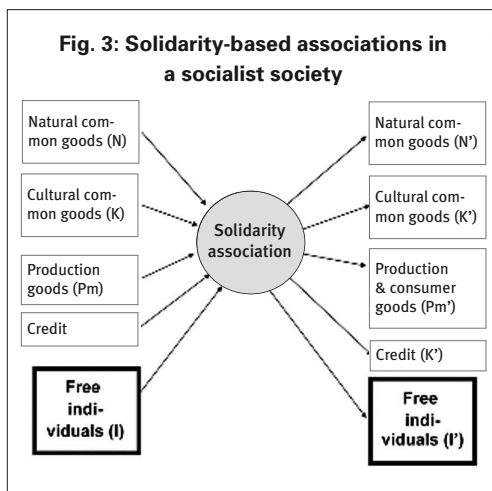
■ Rethinking solidarity: commitment to the common weal must no longer be allowed to redound to the disadvantage of individuals, while others just see to their own well-being. Instead, the design of institutions, bonuses and sanctions must especially recognize the success of individuals when that contributes to the overall development of communities and the welfare of others;

■ The expansion of decentralized fields of activity: self-regulation and renewal from below is the elixir of emancipatory transformation processes. Experiments in political change will only be successful if citizens are able “to set up not just one but several governing authorities at various levels” instead of having to subordinate themselves to a central authority or the market mechanism (Ostrom, 2005: 242).

Bearing these considerations in mind the art of transformational politics might lie in combining four dimensions of a transformation process: (1) the outlines of a convincing and feasible alternative social project as a framework of solidarity-based democratic development; (2) the permanent renewal of the capacity for transformation on the part of social, democratic and ecological actors by making them realize that a society based on solidarity or democratic socialism will only arise out of the rich variety of struggles and experiences of very different forces; (3) the detailing of concrete individual policies up to the first steps of their realization as initial projects in transformation processes; and (4) working on alternative options for achieving political power through broad civil-society alliances and cross-over processes in the leftist party spectrum as well as arrangements for Centre-Left alliances with sections of the ruling classes.

## **Double transformation – in capitalism and beyond**

Under the necessary condition of a radical leftward shift in the balance of power, we may assume that an initial transformation within capitalism could be won on the basis of an eco-social reform alternative. In such a post-neoliberal form of capitalism the dominance of profit would be



weakened and driven back by economic democracy and more participatory elements of political democracy; by restoring decent working conditions and the welfare state on the basis of solidarity; by making a start on socio-ecological reconstruction; and by adopting a more peaceful foreign, security and development policy.

“Must not the transition

be thought of – and promoted – as a series of evolutionary steps in the course of which the ‘nature’ of capitalism changes (or is changed) and the ‘nature’ of socialism gradually emerges?” asked Jörg Huftschmid in 1988. Marx’ writing of 1871, that the working class had “to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant” applies all the more today (Marx, ... MEW. vol. 17: 343).

For the left, this would mean recognizing the evolutionary potential of capitalism, strengthening its significance for transformational politics, making full use of its capacity for reforms, and helping it to develop in ways that go beyond capitalism. In the course of the transformation of capitalism, one could increasingly add elements of a second great transformation, which would overcome capitalism. The left would base its strategy on the concept of a double transformation.

If one were to draw up a general formula of solidarity-based reproduction analogous to Marx’s “general formula of capital”, it would be what he himself expressed in the Manifesto: “in place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition of the free de-



velopment of all” (Marx/Engels 1848: 482). It would be characteristic of the socialist production of wealth that each and every individual (I) be enriched and developed as a human being (I') in contexts of action that contribute to the development of others on the basis of solidarity (S). The “self-augmentation” of capital in the M-C-M' process, as the dominant moment and form of development of social wealth, would be replaced by I-S-I'. The crucial question is how the substance of this general formula of such a solidarity-based or socialist society might look in practice. To put it another way: in what ownership and power structures, in what forms of socialization, in what modes of production and way of life and, finally, in what civilizational forms can the general formula of socialism be realized? This implies a complete revolution of the innermost structure of society (Fig. 4).

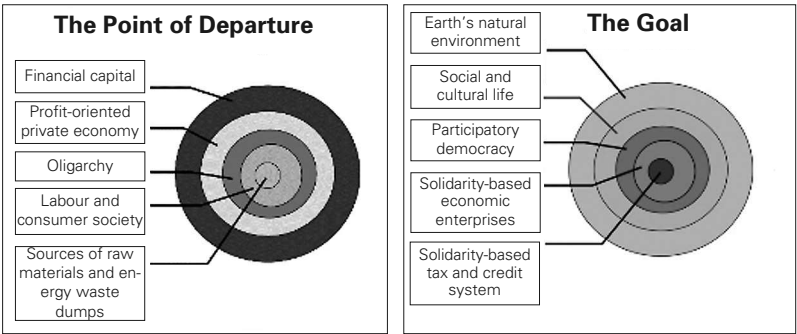


Fig. 4: The transition from financial-market-capitalism to a society of solidarity (socialism)

The problem is how to preserve and even enhance the capacity of modern societies for development and innovation, as they first arose in capitalist form, while liberating them from the narrow obsession with profit maximization and the desire to have ever more, and to usher in a radical change in the entire structure of civilization. We have to overcome financial market capitalism, in which a wage-earning and consumer society is ruled by oligarchies under the ferule of shareholder value, while the earth is plundered of its ever scarcer raw materials and sources of energy and turned into a scrap heap in the process. The vision is of a society for which the physical world is a home (“Heimat”), where social

and cultural life is lived on the basis of solidarity, and in which each and every individual has a stake (Fig. 5).

The point of departure and the goal of a socio-ecological transformation		
	Present	Alternatives
Social character	Neoliberal capitalism	Eco-social reform alternative: solidarity-based society/ democratic socialism
Dominant social goal	Dominance of profit	Dominance of personal development
Society's relationship to nature	Dominance of a profit-oriented economy over the relationship to nature: exploitation of non-renewable resources, pollution	Embedding of social development in nature; subordination of the economy to culture
Type of economy	Profit-oriented market economy	Solidarity-based, multi-sector economy
Dominant interests	Interests of capital	Solidarity-based interests of the common wealth
Dominant political group	Oligarchy	Citizenry
Political system	Representative democracy/ authoritarian national or international organizations	Participatory democracy
Path of development	Profit-oriented growth	Lifeworld-centred, sustained development

That kind of transition toward a new civilization would be a redirection toward the “common goods of humanity”, their preservation, their enhancement, their transformation toward the foundations of our global home. Solidarity needs the caress for those goods in the broadest possible sense. In the tradition of emancipatory movements, of movements like the diggers trying to re-appropriate these goods stolen from the commons, a new struggle is in the beginning, combining the strive for human rights with the encounter for the common goods of humanity.

## THE COMMONS, THE PUBLIC AND THE LEFT

RAINER RILLING

The issue of property is given great importance by the left, which approaches it essentially with the classical concepts of nationalisation, socialisation, public ownership and private property. The central point of contention is how much nationalisation. Some conceptual and political initiatives on economic democracy and worker-owned enterprises try to avoid authoritarian state traditions, and as a counter-concept to the neoliberal policy of privatisation, the “public” has been brought into the debate. However, a left discourse of the commons, aimed at political intervention, hardly exists in the Federal Republic of Germany.

In parts of the Green Party, on the other hand, this debate is picking up speed, and here it connects to a tradition that reaches from the autonomy movement of the 1960s in Italy through the environmental movement since the 1970s and the globalisation-critical movement of the 1990s to the anti-neoliberal movement in the last decade with its struggles against privatisation and commodification. In contrast to the left, this tradition clearly works on the transformative potential and perspectives of the commons initiative and its promise to go beyond or even against “market and state”. The commons is taken here as a strategic transformative concept.

The commons contemplates a culture and economy of communi-care, of “doing together”, “sharing”, “communicating with each other”, “participating” and also of “caring about what is in common” or “the general” (common). It stands for the multi-faceted aspects of another economy and culture than the political economy of the private. As commoners, citizens are active. They transform themselves into commoners when they make into common cultural symbols and take into their symbolic or real possession something that previously was “private” or “only” public property. As we see in many places in the world, there is a demand to recover the commons that had been lost through privatisation

and commodification (reclaim the commons), and new common property (including a global commons) has also been created, these goods then obtain the social quality of common goods. This character of being a common good does not result from the material sensuous nature of a thing – it is produced in the process of social appropriation.

Through the alteration of the relations of ownership, through practices of use, and therefore of the relations of real appropriation, the quality of relations of property can be changed. Typical aspects of private relations of property, such as restriction of access and exclusion and monopolisation of decisions, are not unaffected by this; they can be pushed back, devalued and largely be annulled. A movement politics of appropriation definitely has possibilities of shaking deeply engrained and powerful relations of property.

From the left point of view, the understanding of the commons that prevails in the green milieu has fundamental weaknesses:

- The commoners, who, in a communal and self-organised way according to rules they determine, take care of common natural, social or cultural resources, are understood as communities acting in a communitarian way – what inequities, class natures, relations of domination arise, exist and are reproduced in such communities are hardly contemplated.

- The prevalent high esteem in which the “community” is held within the discourse on the commons, to the detriment of the individual, of individuality, of singularity, etc. ignores the by now centuries old problem of the anchoring of this community discourse in pre-political, romantic and then raw and violent bourgeois nation-state and corporatist-identity discourses and practices, which are anything but progressive or left – instead of consistently re-articulating them from the point of view of a politics of democracy and difference.

Positioning the commons, in the liberal understanding, as the realisation of an autonomous, civil-society concept “beyond market and state” and

then seeing in this merely the sustainable business model of a Green capitalism, gives up any attempt to foreground the potential of commoning to resist rationalities of profit and domination and working out its political economy as its own mode of production, one that is non-capitalist and anti-domination. The debates around the commons, and efforts to develop these debates, would then be attempts to open up experiments and paths to non-capitalist modes of production.

### **Commons and public**

In contrast to this, the left reinforces the “public”. The public appears as the adequate description of very diverse situations: public goods, public basic services, public property, public employment, public sector or public service, public power, public interest, public spaces, public life or participation of the public in decisions. The concept, with its variety of utilisations, tries to project a clearly visible difference in respect to the neoliberal cult of the “private”. In its history, the “public” has evoked and transmitted, to the present day, four major significations: It has in mind the non-secret, the accessible and transparent; it claims an orientation to the common good (the general interest); it stands for stateness and, in the last analysis, as public it means media – public opinion mediated by the media. In distinction to the private it signifies a context (a relation) between protagonists, which, beyond private and individual, takes account of the other, and finally of the general. It is a space for discussion and action, in which society always inserts itself as such: as a context in which not only private interests, but also those of others are pursued, and thus a societal common or general entity is generated and made accessible through participation. How these social and political qualities of the public are formed depends on the societal struggles and constellation of forces and on the projects, strategies and politics/policies put into play.

A progressive, left project of the public would have to mean and aim at the democratisation of power, the promotion of political, economic, as well as social equality, a prioritisation of a common-good orientation and the opening of paths to individuality through the right to participation in

the elementary conditions of life. To advocate the “public” means to shape property and social relations, enterprises, goods, spaces or instruments for basic care provision, of communication, public power or political decisions in such a way that, through their orientations to the general interest (orientation to the common good) the inequitable distribution of resources in society and likewise the inequitable distribution of political goods (participation, access) are attenuated, access to them systematically opened and their arrangement democratised and thus also generalised. In the confrontation with the neoliberal politics of the private, the political left has in the meanwhile developed initiatives of an alternative politics of the public in the most diverse areas and in some cases tied them to ideas of a transformation of the actually existing public. However, the key element of a transformation strategy of the public – a left concept of the state – is missing. And there is no bridge to a new dynamics of a politics of the commons.

The state, however, can not only contribute to the destruction of the commons, but also to securing it; it can function as a trustee, as an arbiter, co-governor, and also as a promoter of the commons. In doing so, how the state should be changed is an issue. How can the commons assert itself in a world of large-scale industrial capitalist production, highly socialised mega-conglomerates and large-scale technologies of global scope? That is, how can the commons generalise itself beyond the communities? A progressive politics of the public could be an answer, which conceptualises the commons also on the basis of the public and helps consolidate the parallel goals of both politics into a new politics of transformation, and, in so doing, change both political cultures. For the left, a politics of the public and a politics of the commons must go together.

## ON COMMON GOOD, MONEY AND CREDIT<sup>110</sup>

PEDRO PÁEZ PÉREZ

### UTILITARIST INDIVIDUALISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

As Kosick maintained, *homo oeconomicus* is not only a theoretical aberration, it is an aberration of reality. The idea of human beings that Neo-classical Economics portrays is, without a doubt, a degeneration, and does little as the explicative axis of current society and even less in relation to the structural crisis in which we are living. Nevertheless, the hedonistic and automatic reductionism of the insatiable consumer that informed Bentham's utilitarianism, and that absorbs the mainstream of Economics and the Social Sciences, is not only an intellectual fallacy with apologetic purposes: indeed, it significantly captures the ontological unilateral transformation of modern man as a product of the historical development of a specific mode of life and the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, this view of extreme individualism has played a very relevant role in the construction of the society that it pretended to theorize.

*Homo oeconomicus* is in itself a societal project functional to the needs of the dominating elites. Marcuse clearly pinpoints the corrosive intensity of this social logic over modern life.

However, society's movement is much richer than the ideological illusions of its most conspicuous thinkers, and both the theoretical as much as the real aberration demand their immediate historical overcoming. The current structural crisis simultaneously and urgently shows the senility of the mode of life and mode of production that have promoted the one-dimensionality of the social logic, contained in the notion of the *homo oeconomicus*.

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<sup>110</sup> Extracts from a larger text "Reflections on Common Good, Money and Credit" to be published by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Brussels. Translation by J. F. Páez and P. J. Páez.



This overcoming requires efforts in theory and practice. Both, however, are fundamentally captive of the dominating paradigms, and as Kuhn pointed out, the verification of the logical or empirical bankruptcy of a paradigm does not guarantee its substitution. The heterodox views face this formidable challenge with an overdose of timidity. The dispute, this time, contains an immediate need for alternatives to this society that is disintegrating.

The debates surrounding the common good, the common goods, money and credit are directly immersed in this problematic. Each one separately and -even worse- together as a proposal, these concepts constitute a challenge not only due to their functionalization in the framework of the mainstream, but also because they are at the heart of alternative horizons of human activity.

The current notion of the common good underrates its long presence in the evolution of social, political and economical thought. Its existence as an explicit object of thought denotes in itself the historical process that gradually took it off its implicit automatism in the core of communal life. In Asian tradition, there are keen observations made by Confucius with respect to the obvious duty of the government and the edifying purpose of institutions. In Western tradition, at the very least, there is a precedent in the discussions made by Plato and Aristotle about the goals of society, laws and governments facing the (implicitly or explicitly stated) oligarchic interest.

Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas retake the concept for the Christian tradition, in different historical moments in which its centrality was threatened by the decomposition of society. The topic is later articulated by thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa and Machiavelli and integrated in the official catholic discourse from the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on. In progressive liberalism, it is implicit as a mere recovery of reason and rationality in the social order and expressed in the Kantian categorical imperative as a reformulation of love of fellow men which Jesus synthesizes.

This discussion, however, falls short since each culture already has implicitly or explicitly the concept at the heart of social coexistence. A dynamic matrix of mechanisms of social interaction have had to process the individual and the group visions with respect to the fate of collectivity, the societal project, for thousands - if not millions- of years. It is more important, thus, to stress in which moments it is necessary to defend these notions, and why.

Specifically, in the frame of the episteme that capitalist modernity generates, centered on the notion of the homo oeconomicus, the concept of the common good looks to take a back entrance, a defensive stance, like a concession or an anomaly. In the world of increasingly growing omnipresent commodification, the market would be the one to solve the common good, within the limits of "physical" possibilities, if allowed to operate freely.

Already in stating his metaphor of the invisible hand, Smith saw as counterproductive any effort to improve things outside of the search for individual interests. In modern Neo-classic Economics, the argument becomes more sophisticated, due to the fact that it is presented as a mathematical edifice, supposedly built, impeccably and irrefutably, from the axioms in preferences and technology up to the General Equilibrium Theory, in the transformation of the original normative proposal of the reformist Walras in the neo-positivist version of Arrow and Debreu.

The derivation of the Paretian General Welfare Theorems complete an ideological trap, while projecting beyond a mathematical result that is very unfeasible even in the sense of allocative efficiency as a rule of general reference for the debate around welfare, an innocuous way of referring to the common good in the mainstream. This theoretical construction will be of great use for Friedman and his Chicago Boys to back up the invisible hand with the manu militari in the imposition of neo-liberalism.

If the impossibility to demonstrate generality, uniqueness and stability in the mathematics of the General Equilibrium Theory had not been

enough to crumble this theoretical edifice (a discussion in which its creators, Arrow and Debreu have been protagonists), the introduction – even defensively- in footnotes, as special cases of issues such as common goods, public goods or externalities (positive or negative, in production or consumption) simply annihilates the validity of the reference in itself. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Schools as much as those of the Critical Thought, inside and outside Economics, are prisoners of this theoretical framework with all the necessary ad hoc excuses.

The most detailed discussion with respect to these concepts is pertinent in this framework. Common goods, public goods or externalities are different categories that reflect the inadequacy of the Neoclassical Paradigm to deal with the intrinsically social character of the consuming production and the productive consumption. Ironically mirroring the case of the concept of homo oeconomicus, these are not just theoretical anomalies, but also real anomalies in the sense that they establish serious practical challenges in the fields of Law, Finances, Economics, Sociology, and Politics for a society that pretends to solve everything in terms of the utilitarian individualism and the so called free market.

These types of distortions are clearly evidenced when historically and logically exploring the relationship between the individual and the collective in the functioning of society, reaching to deconstruct the dichotomy that the dominating discourse places in favor of individualism, artificially provoking an ocean of subjective impossibilities for concrete praxis.

#### **“DEBTS”, MARKETS AND MONEY AS ENGINES OF SOCIABILITY**

The subjects of money and finance come from different concerns regarding those mentioned above, but ultimately position themselves parallel as inadmissible enigmas to the dominating paradigm in Economics. Exiled from “real economics”, both concepts appear as “unexplained explanations” in Neo-classical Theory, and all the predictions and prescriptions that it places over them have shown to be completely flawed

during the current crisis. Authors so opposite to each other (and at the same time so internal to the establishment) as Keynes and Schumpeter established the critical role of money and credit in the functioning of the economy and, in one way or another, pointed theoretically towards the transformation of both concepts in line with the development of conditions for a better world.

The parallel, regrettably, deepens with respect to the Neo-classical capture of a fundamental part of the discussion of progressive thought in these matters. It would seem that, for some lines of thought, the narrow space that mainstream Economics gives to subjects such as common good, common goods, public goods and externalities is the last resource that should be held in order to defend the need for justice, democracy and solidarity. On the contrary, logical and historical perspectives that allow the understanding of these notions in a more central and appropriate context are required.

A quick exploration of human history from the concept of the noosphere of Vernadski and Teilhard de Chardin shows that the different relation individual-community is not a utopia, but rather has been the most extended way of existence of the species. The process of hominization of man and the humanization of the environment are two aspects of a same, very specific phenomenon: the appearance of the noosphere, in other words, of a field of existence of life that intentionally projects upon itself.

It is the human species that as a whole (in the dialectics between individual and collectivity), problematically defines this projection in the instance of the consuming production and the productive consumption. Simultaneously, satisfiers and senses are produced and consumed. In the organic core of the community, from the management-delimitation of “violences” and solidarities, a complex fabric of rights and obligations (“extra-economical” “debts”, both between quotes) automatically direct the destiny of the collectivity around the implicit understanding of the common good that configures the involved subjectivities. With the sep-

aration and standardization of production and consumption through the market, the mediations become more uncertain and contradictory, fetishizing itself as the dominion of the “thing” over human destiny.

The theoretical and practical importance of the notion of common good, seen through this new perspective, is crucial in the construction of alternatives, both because it is essential in building the backbone of the most exacerbated fetishization processes around the financial markets and their crisis, and because it’s the key to its own de-fetishization.

As recent contributions of the Theory of Regulation and the Post-Keynesian Schools demonstrate based upon the thesis of authors as diverse as Marx, Simmel, Mauss, Keynes and Girard, money is intimately tied to the notion of credit, from its historical origins in the most complex fabric of rights and obligations of diverse nature and quality, and in the sublimation of the violence that arbitrates it, in a process of dichotomization between individual and collectivity which is nuclear in the gradual alienation of a direct sociability in which the notion of common good is automatic.

The process of convergence of these “extra-economic” “debt” structures and of asymmetric exchange goes through the generalization of the market and of exchange of equivalents and the enshrinement of money as the new axis of identities and centralities in society. This convergence turns a very diverse matrix into a unilateral one since the “extra-economic” “debts” come from a complex syntax of a combination of generosities, dispositions, reciprocities and authorities and the asymmetric exchanges generalize them, especially through relations of reciprocity and redistribution. The development of mercantile production requires a process of standardizations and real abstractions of social life (concrete work and abstract work, use-value and value), indispensable in creating a relation of equivalence, while precluding perceptions of injustice or disputes that can question the order and open dynamics of violence.

This gradual alienation of sociability demands a series of social mechanisms that acquire their own dynamics in the objective and subjective fields, yielding to the disintegration of communitarian modes of life, to the concentration of power linked to the “originating” accumulation of capital with its hierarchal articulation of diverse forms of production, and to the historic generalization of capitalist modernity whose heart is in the “West”.

This alienation is also based on the separation of the processes of consuming production and productive consumption, organically integrated before in the bosom of the community and automatically recreating its destiny, therefore transcending as a societal project. In this separation resides the root of the unfolding of the current crisis. In consequence, transforming these roots becomes the key to recover the common good as a societal alternative to the oligarchic agenda that pretends a degradation of civilization in order to achieve its aspiration of profitability on an increasingly intense and generalized base of speculative bubbles, rent-seeking mechanisms, de-stabilization and wars.

If another world is possible, it will be on the basis of recovering that which is social in individual realization and that which is individual in social realization. Consequently, this requires constructing freedom and self-determination in the capabilities and intents of individuals within other horizons of sociability, necessarily solidary and holistic, in production and consumption.

## **HISTORICAL SOCIAL FABRICS AND RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS**

The challenges of the quantitatively and qualitatively exponential trajectory of the human species pose not only an overcoming of the mode of production but also of the mode of life, in a synthesis that allows to recover the dynamic coherence of society from the recuperation of the best features (even if many times idealized) of “cold” societies, in the sense of Levi Strauss, in the framework of a non-capitalist modernity, as postulated by Echeverría.

In the organizational unfolding of the noosphere, the development of exchanges historically opens the doors for a qualitative leap in the socialization- re-socialization process of individual projects. Marx's acute discovery of the dialectics between production of use-value and value, and the development on merchandise and money help to understand the progressive role of the division of labor in a given moment of the evolution of humanity. But only the contributions of Polanyi on exchanges of non equivalents, and those of the Feminist and Ecological Economics on energy, labor and valorization, the contributions of French Sociology and the School of Frankfurt on power, gift and subjectivities, give the correct perspective on the monetary phenomenon as a mechanism of re-socialization and power that can be retaken in a transformative perspective.

Marx, Keynes and Schumpeter are crucial in understanding the current crisis, together with the Latin American Social Sciences and the new critical currents of History, but without the contributions of Baudrillard on the virtual projections of modern reality, it is difficult to perceive, in all its magnitude, the depth of the rapid changes in the mode of production and the mode of life, and the gravity of the structural crisis in which we are living. It is from this perspective that theoretical and practical tools result adequate to advance in building a different, more sustainable, democratic, solidary and human mode of life.

Precisely, here is the starting point of this construction, that must incorporate immediate features with respect to economic policy and the institutions that allow for another regime of accumulation with a strategic orientation towards what in Latin America we are beginning to call, learning from the Andean indigenous peoples, the Sumak Causay, which roughly translates to good living or, better still, living in plentitude. A necessary but not sufficient condition for these transformations is a new financial architecture at a local, national, regional and world level, including other forms of money and credit, which allows for the recovery of the humane behind the fossilized relations of production, destroying the fetish and articulating a solidary and sustainable sociability from the free will and sovereignty of individuals and collectivities.

## COMMUNITARY SOVEREIGNTY VERSUS MONEY AND MARKETS IN THE CRISIS OF THE NOOSPHERE

The development of the market has generalized the rupture of the sovereignty of the community with respect to its destiny. Being a result and instrument of human progress, the market is a cause of de-sociability and, increasingly, the only mechanism of re-sociability. The general possibility of crisis resides in the separation of the process of emission of individual-social intentionalities in making objective the subjective, facing its de-codification- consumption when making subjective the objective. The qualitative and quantitative predominance of the logic of capital has hastily taken that general possibility to all dimensions of human life, including ethics. The centralities and identities that once recreated social cohesion in a predominant way in previous modes of life are absorbed and over-constructed by the market and the monetary phenomenon. This is the reason why it is so problematic to talk about “good” in modern debate; even worse to agree or to act on the perspective of common good.

The exponential development of capital has exponentially expanded to the noosphere and its role in the ecosystems in such a way that it has overtaken the whole planet as a sole world-system. The systemic man-nature difficulties, anthropogenic or not, demand the species’ ability to reason, as such, that has become systemically eroded, both by the extension and intensification of the fetish and by the predatory logic of the technological paradigms preferred by this specific mode of life.

The permanent concentration of the deciding power as a result of the incessant, and also exponential, process of concentration and centralization of capitals comes on top of that. The formidable tension between the interest of the increasingly narrow oligarchy and the transcendence of the noosphere defines the current juncture. In the axis of action of this concentrated power, are the mechanisms of virtual reproduction of modern money and credit. That is to say, the massive expropriation of the self-determination of individuals and collectivities in favor of a minority is a direct result of the control of the financial-mercantile fetish.



The incongruence between consuming production and productive consumption is manifested micro and macro-economically as market anarchy, uncertainty, risk reducible to actuarial calculation and risk irreducible to prefabricated statistical distributions, as a result of the non-ergodic character of the process, which is to say, of the historical phenomenon as a collective and free -not predetermined- creation.

Interstitially, this anarchy can be the opportunity for social improvements: anti-entropic efforts (that reduce disorder and uncertainty) in the field of market information can give way to significant rationalizations that avoid social waste of social energy. Nonetheless, the logic of society is organized from the interest of monopolistic capital, not from the whole of society and much less from its transcendence. Consequently, the efforts in this sense appear built upon the creation of (super) profits and the extension and intensification of the fetish.

The extension and intensification of the fiduciary money, of the fictitious capital from the definition scheme of property rights, consolidated with double-entry accounting, and the financial markets have been the backbone of this fetish, almost from the beginning of the capitalist mode of production.

These are inherent vectors to the development of capital, because systematically selling more than what you can buy on the basis of the magic of surplus value is essential to its internal logic, operated from the decentralized will of diverse and rival fractions of capitalists.

With the exponential movement of money that grows "itself" to be compulsively re-invested, this would mean that the gap between the means of payment that are injected in the market at the moment of consuming production and the payments made to allow for productive consumption would also grow exponentially. The circuit of inter-capitalist payments and part of the workers consumption, on one hand, and the so-called "third demand" (demand external to the purely capitalist circuit) on the other, would partially mitigate the problem, but also in a

growingly insufficient and uncertain way, including at a meso-economic level of specific sectors, worsening the irreducible uncertainty of the market.

Increasingly, money and finance appear as the axis of the mechanisms of regulation and recuperation, at least momentarily, from this incoherence. All this always, however, from the logic of capital in its concrete existence of fractions in competition that claim higher and higher profits. This has defined that the structuring of solutions is born plagued by the same genetic disposition to the crisis that it would supposedly mitigate.

The development of money, private speculation and the role of the Modern State (functionalized by an evolving capital), will assume-subordinate many of the historic mechanisms of social regulation, however, not just from a symbolic and coercive processing anymore, but also from its reconstruction from the silent fetish of the market's impersonal functioning. They do it from logics that exacerbate the concentration and centralization process of capital and from a structural near-sightedness that, in its interaction, weakens the collective sensibility and internal sovereignty of the noosphere.

#### **MODE OF REGULATION, REGIME OF ACCUMULATION AND ALTERNATIVES TO THE STRUCTURAL CRISIS**

The recuperation of the capacities of the noosphere to act with sensibility against the increasingly grave and urgent challenges passes through the recovery of the capabilities of choice and sovereignty, at an individual, collective and national level. This is precisely the agenda that humanity must follow to oppose that which is proposed by the oligarchic networks in order to maintain and produce perpetual destabilization and conflict. To be effective, the political praxis must recognize the systematic regularities and act upon them.

In the dialectics between "originating" accumulation and "ordinary" accumulation, the destruction of productive and consumptive processes is permanently provoked. The "ordinary" accumulation (namely, the normal re-investment in concurrence) has the advantage of obscuring-"nat-

uralizing" this process under the rationality and reason of efficiency. This provides the structure of the productivistic myth and rite for most of the modern human sacrifices, in the framework of the silent fetish of the market. The competition allows a cyclic cleansing of business practices, technologies, products and cultural traits of social relationships that prevent the ulterior deployment of capital, and gives way to the most vigorous moments of "ordinary" accumulation by the fractions of the surviving capital.

Given the governing logic in these processes controlled by the increasingly hierarchical network of decentralized actors, the solutions solve - in a gradually more distorted manner- the reproduction of the noosphere in the most transcending natural and social planes, multiplying grounds for social struggle.

This social struggle around the obvious social "absurdities" in which we live, has its efficiency compromised by the legitimizing mechanisms that are structurally programmed to generate subjective settings among the masses in order to produce senses from the sense-less. The axiological frame evolves in correspondence, but with autonomy and rhythms that are characteristic to the academic debates and legal and institutional changes.

These modern processes of solution- implementation are defined in the dialectics between civil society and political society (in the Hegelian sense). The specific combinations of economic policies and institutional arrangements, that allow the reactivation and correction of the modern mechanisms of management-delimitation of violence and solidarities, are known in specialized literature as modes of regulation.

These modes of regulation allow the processes of creative destruction, framed by entropic and centrifuge logics, to recover very partial levels of coherence over the whole. It is the civilizing promise of productivistic success that allows them, if possible, to eventually stabilize, extend and intensify themselves. By so doing, they make a specific regime of ac-

cumulation feasible, which is the concrete way of existence of capital in a given period of time. The modes of regulation peremptorily enter in crisis and evolve with eventual leaps to make the valuing of capital more effective within each regime of accumulation.

A regime of accumulation stabilizes at its core the dialectics between “originating” accumulation and “ordinary” accumulation. Regarding this, the relations within the diverse specializations of capital (marking investments’ rhythms and orientations), those between the logic of capital and other social and economic logics, the international division of labor and the resulting dynamic pattern in the distribution of income and, therefore, the generation of solvent demand are defined. Consequently, the internal dynamics of the regime of accumulation generates a logic and a culture specific to the dispute between classes and fractions: the Gramscian historic bloc is the conflicting and ill-focused recovery of the intentionalities, which surge from the social settings of the individual subjectivities on how their own interests are ideologically expressed as common good.

The success of capital accumulation depends on the triumph of specific fractions introducing crystallized work to give them technological advantage over the competition. The relations of productive capital with the fractions of capital specialized in the circulation of merchandises and finance, require permanent arbitrage from the state through the respective modes of regulation, for it supports networks of redistribution between the elites and, subordinately, the related dynamic pattern of remuneration-consumption among the working classes.

Cyclically, certain technological paradigm and the balance of power, fruit of the social struggle, transform the success of capital into its own straightjacket by producing too much to be profitable. The problems of over-production and relative sub-consumption and market anarchy can be mitigated and deferred through the arsenal of tricks that the mode of regulation offers, as long as the tendency of profit compression does not manifest itself.

The dispute among fractions and the class warfare against workers is exacerbated in these moments. Sometimes, changes in the mode of regulation satisfy the aspirations of the triumphant fractions of the dispute, in the frame of the resulting balance of power among classes. Other times, institutional changes and changes in policy are not sufficient and the transformations of business models surpass individual purges or the sanction of styles in order to demand changes in the entire technological paradigm.

In order to operate the change in the technological paradigm, not only is the availability of the relevant scientific-technological innovations required, but also, and above all, the creation of conditions to deploy these innovations and make profitable their commercial application. These are times of pervasive exacerbation of the competition and the destruction of capitals, which force a peculiar behavior of the law of value through the relation between the formation of local and international prices and, in an increasingly crucial manner, through money and finances (mainly virtual ones). This is the reason why regularities appear in the behavior of prices, the external markets and the speculative exuberance of these changes in the regime of accumulation, these so-called structural crisis that are usually registered as Kondratief cycles.

Let us remember, however, that these cycles operate on the basis of exponential behaviors. Therefore, there are no mechanic guarantees of recovery, precisely because behind the fetish are power relationships, not “natural” processes.

The global crisis we live in is not a repetition of the structural crisis: it is an implosion of the remedies to the structural crisis that the centre of the system has dragged for the last 40 years, through the forceful imposition of diverse “neo-liberal” modes of regulation. This is a gigantic crisis of over-production of merchandise and capitals that, paradoxically tried to solve itself by means of a regressive redistribution of income through technological changes, industrial de-localization and financialization. This time, however, beyond the growth of markets and capital, with

the involved massive transformations in the distribution of consumption, remedies that had considerable rates of success in prior cycles only worsened the disease now.

The formation of semi-peripheries, to produce the same whilst paying less, finally aggravated the problem of over-production of merchandise and capitals. Financial exuberance did not allow all the productive investment required for the qualitative leap in the technological paradigm that was so effective in other structural crisis, not because they didn't have available innovations, but because, in their vast majority, they became counterproductive. The fabulous leap of the current scientific-technological revolution has not provided a way out of the profit impasse.

The monopolistic competition, that cannot avoid the introduction of new technology, progressively dedicates more efforts to block innovation rather than encourage it, because it eventually reduces profit below its increasingly greedier aspirations. This is why its obsession with the so-called "intellectual property" is so vital for the system today.

The alternative to the sunk costs - in time and space- of fixed productive capital is financial innovation. The ductility and agility of speculative investments improved the profitability of the transnational oligopolies, in convergence with the stratified compensation of consumption through over-indebtedness in a frame of reduction of wages, and the social polarization founded in a scheme of remunerations linked with the new mechanisms of management-delimitation of the "violences" and solidarities, that post-Fordism required -generally, but above all in central countries -.

The global imbalance and the parasitical hypertrophy of the speculative apparatus have led the capitalist mode of production down a blind alley, not due to "technical" reasons, but due to the oligarchic and decadent logic of power concentration. As it is the core of the modern mode of life that has generated long lasting processes that have also fallen in crisis now, from relatively independent -but interrelated- internal logics

(ecology, demography, energy, etc.), it is the survival of the noosphere as a whole that is at stake.

**THE NEW FINANCIAL ARCHITECTURE, NECESSARY BUT NOT  
SUFFICIENT CONDITION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COMMON  
GOOD**

This convergence of processes of crisis are fed back in a particularly harmful way creating a historical bifurcation: either humanity as a whole recovers its sovereignty, its capacity to decide from a collective and transcendent sensibility; or these processes of crisis will be used by the minorities that control power to impose ulterior mechanisms of subjugation which will become progressively more reactionary.

Within the oligarchic agenda, there are no longer such promises of capitalist modernity that sustained its historical rise and lure for centuries. Now, they are, in general, essentially dysfunctional to the exercise of their power. Even the permanent revolution of the productive process, through the competitive introduction of prevailing technological possibilities, and the deployment of the instrumental rationality that this summons have become structurally counterproductive.

The new normality that these miniscule circles propose passes nowadays as the degradation of civilization, the dismantlement of social conquests and the return to archaic forms of exploitation and domination, but nowadays from the modern mechanisms that they control, in particular: perpetual war, the generalized “bubble-ization” of the economy, social and geopolitical polarization, and rent-seeking mechanisms as a privileged strategy of reproduction. In order to do this, they need to control more closely the financial machinery and the monopolized management of money in a global network of oligarchic interests.

The financial burst of 2008 marks the exhaustion of the “remedies” to the structural crisis of over-accumulation that has already manifested itself since the mid sixties. After decades of these “remedies” (particu-

larly, globalization and financialization), capital's behavior has acquired irreversible traits linked to the disproportionate expansion of the virtual economy, in the core of which is money and finance. For this reason, the "remedies" to the burst have also revolved around money and finance: bank bail-outs that acquire colossal proportions. In this case, as well, the "remedies" to the "remedies" have acquired very grave characteristics of irreversibility for capital: the basic and exclusive mechanisms of re-sociability built around the market, money and debt have been structurally damaged, putting the collectivity's pacific coexistence at risk.

Indeed, to illustrate this, the most important quantitative and qualitative markets for the reproduction of society are affected by speculative bubbles so enormous that the formation of prices no longer systematically reflects the evolution of the costs of re-production, creating a vital set of incorrect signals in the market regarding the future (long term investments, specializations, etc.)

On the other hand, the problems of structural insolvency have only worsened and generalized, after the injection of colossal quantities of means of payment within the same speculative circles that led to the financial burst. With these pillars being undermined, the monetary system that guarantees the global monopoly of liquidity on the basis of a virtually created dollar (fiat money) continues to sustain itself on the basis of the threat of chaos and aggression.

The construction of alternatives demands simultaneous joint efforts on different levels, from different fronts and geographies. The possibilities of organization of the noosphere's sensibility in the search for common good revolve around the articulation of different social relations from the plurality of options that history has shown to be successful in the past, but updated for the necessities and possibilities of each specific situation. This requires creativity and flexibility, based on the comprehension of the internal logic of the processes.



In the frame of such a violent deployment of the processes of the crisis in their multiple dimensions, the changes operate in such a fast way that they generate resistance to understand them and even denial; nevertheless, they come with significant and increasingly grave traits of irreversibility.

We live in a time of an ontological intensity without precedent. The historical dichotomization between the individual and the collectivity require an immediate resolution in the political mobilization of every one, in order to make a difference and solve the bifurcation of the juncture in the interest of humanity.

If the determinant pole of this crisis is given by the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production in the declining tendency of the profit rate and the impotence of the deployed counter-tendencies, the dominant pole, the immediate and more comfortable margin of action of the oligarchic structures of power - as before mentioned- is the control of money and financing. For this reason, it is urgent to revert this massive and ferocious expropriation of the will of individuals, collectivities and entire nations through the management of the processes of the crisis in their favor.

New relationships of solidarity, at all levels, must be at the base of the reconstruction of the mechanisms of re-sociability, in order to gradually replace, although not linearly, the prevalent mechanisms of utilitarian individualism that are crumbling. In the interest of achieving its effectiveness, viability, replica and sustainability, we need to re-create instruments such as markets, money and credit.

It is impossible to come out of this crisis of capital without surpassing the capital in crisis as a systemic regulator. Furthermore, to overcome the logic of profit as the articulating axis of society is not enough to overcome the crisis: we must change our mode of life. It is a complex and non-sequential process: to transform the mode of life, we must change the mode of production and to do this, we must restructure a transitional regime of accu-

mulation from a viable mode of regulation, including the institutions and economic policies that give immediate response to the accumulation of counter-hegemonic forces within this strategic perspective.

New financial architectures at a local, national, supranational and continental level are the urgent answer needed, despite it not being enough to block the immediate oligarchic agenda of war and degradation. It is also necessary to open the door to a strategic definition that will allow the articulation of popular, sub-national, national and supranational sovereignties, in order to construct as soon as possible a multi-polar and democratic world capable of confronting the grave challenges that we have accumulated, from a humane perspective.

### 3 Social and political collective organization

#### SOME MEMORIES OF THE FUTURE

BIRGIT DAIBER

*“In the social production of their existence, people inevitably enter into definite relations which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, upon which arises a legal and political superstructure, and which corresponds to certain societal forms of consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of people that determines their existence, but rather their social existence that determines their consciousness.”*

Karl Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.<sup>111</sup>

In our discussion on the common goods of humankind, we address the basic needs of humankind in the context of democratization, socio-ecological transformation, and overcoming the capitalist system. We are dealing with the capitalist mode of production and the relations of production. The state of the development of the forces of production – in general terms: the material composition of the relationship between humankind and nature – is an essential element of this process; in general terms: the material composition of the relationship between humankind and nature. In the capitalist mode of production, this relationship is determined by exploitation. At the same time, changes are coming about which have implications reaching beyond the capitalist system.

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<sup>111</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>; translation edited.

In the following, I would like to address these changes in with reference to two examples: the critique of technology, and the development of political ecology.

For most of human history, nature was the powerful, even violent, *conditio sine qua non* of the immediate conditions of life of human beings. For most of human history, the concept of controlling the forces of nature was inconceivable.

Only the development of the natural sciences and of technology and their utilization within the capitalist production process gave rise to the dream of the liberation of humanity from its subjugation to the forces of nature. Liberation from the dependence upon these forces of nature, and control over nature, constituted the core of modern faith in progress and omnipotence-mania – and for very long, indeed to this day, this faith has been the central ideology of the left. Let us recall Lenin’s popular slogan during the Russian Revolution: “Communism is Soviet power plus electrification.” No one can claim to have always got it right.

True, Karl Marx saw the development of society as the process of metabolism between humankind and nature, but the context of his theory, that which provides the guide to action, was concentrated on the direct capitalist process of utilization, and hence on the two factors capital and wage labour. Marxism concentrated on the consumption and disenfranchisement of the human being within this process. It did not however provide any critique of the process of capitalist relations of exploitation beyond that contradiction, i.e. the incorporation of the so-called free resources. These resources include, first, nature, and second, the immediately reproduction of human beings. One of the slogans of the women’s movement of the 1970s in Germany was, “Workers don’t grow on trees.” Rosa Luxemburg, by the way, was not a feminist; nonetheless, a reflection on the continued primitive accumulation within capitalism provided a basic theorem not only for the leftist critique of development ideology vis-à-vis the global South, but also for a materialist and ecological feminist critique of society (cf. Vandana Shiva & Maria Mies).

On the other hand, only the progressive control of nature revealed that nature and humankind constitute the societal process of reproduction, and that the societal process of reproduction needs to be much more broadly defined than it is in classical Marxist theory. The fact that science and technology have become the essential productive force in late capitalist society has not received an appropriate critical examination in the programmatic work of left sociopolitical strategies. However, they have a hard time incorporating the creative potentials which contribute to the development of society.

It's no wonder that the term ecology itself was not coined as a scientific concept until the nineteenth century, by Ernst Haeckel; it was also a key element in the teachings of Charles Darwin. It referred to the research on plants and animals, and was only politicized during the latter half of the twentieth century. This politicization process began during the 1960s with a critical examination of the use of pesticides and insecticides in agriculture, as described in Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*; later, in 1972, the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* showed the relationship between the consumption of nature and the development of society.

However, the political ecology movements did not come out of nowhere. Their predecessors were the protest movements against the dangers of a nuclear war between the two Cold War blocs.

Moreover, the epochal experience of the 1945 nuclear bombs on human history, and the threat of a full-scale nuclear war gave rise to a leftist critique of nuclear fission and technological developments at an early stage: Robert Jungk, in his book *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*, which appeared in 1956, described the dramatic development of the nuclear bomb in the USA, while Lewis Mumford's *Myth of the Machine*, published during the mid-'60s, provided a fundamental basis for the arguments of a critique of technology (or technics as he called it), focused on the capitalist utilization of natural sciences and technology, without rejecting those disciplines as such – while Herbert Marcuse, who referred to the natural sciences and technology as particles of the machinery of domination. The contradiction

between strict rejection and the attempt at a revision and a humanization of science and technology runs through the debate – including that within the ecology movements – to this day.

The history of the critique of technology is largely forgotten today. However, it is fundamental for political ecology. Moreover, it provides points of contact for a not only formal integration of political ecology into the left critique of society. Hence, it is worthwhile to briefly mention some essential demands of the critique of technology.

For Mumford, the issue is not the complete withdrawal from the use of scientific and technological processes as a productive force, but rather the centring of these processes to a human scale, and there subjugation to societal decision-making processes.

Two essential statements of Mumford's critique of technology are extremely current issues today, as they were in his time:

First, the embedding of technological and scientific knowledge into human societal consciousness, as polytechnical knowledge. This means that decisions regarding the design, implementation, operation and termination of technological processes must be subject to political decision-making processes.

Second, all scientific technological processes must remain at a human scale. This also includes the demand that all technological processes be reversible, in other words, that all changes in nature resulting from technological processes be capable of being fed back into natural cycles.

This demand for the reversibility of technological processes is the essential point of departure for the critique of three essential technologies which today determine the capitalist production process:

- the use of nuclear energy, with its uncontrollable risks, which have become a threat to humankind
- the use of genetic technological processes in food production, and
- the excessive use of fossil fuel sources and, recently, non-fossil bio-fuels for combustion processes, which are threatening the earth's climate through global warming.

All these technologies involve permanent changes which are not reversible, and of which no one knows how they can be fed back into the natural cycle. As regards nuclear fission, the events in Chernobyl and Fukushima have provided us with the ultimate proof that this technology is uncontrollable, and that it has a destructive power which we are hardly able even to channel. In Chernobyl, hundreds of thousands of people were needed to try to put out the fire with landfill, cover it with a sarcophagus and clean up the area; according to generally unofficial estimates, some 60 to 100,000 of these mostly young people died. In Fukushima, the technicians and fire protection crews are suffering the same fate. The truth today is much worse than anything such futuristic novels as *Brave New World* or *1984* could have predicted. The lives of thousands of young people are being sacrificed to save the exploding nuclear domination machines.

The demands of the critique of technology have been reduced to the shortest denominator: if you don't know how to stop a technological process, and feed it back into the ecological cycle, then don't start it in the first place. This central law of the critique of technology is unmistakably linked to Kant's categorical imperative.

Political ecology has seized upon these demands. The critique of the consumption of the planet, of nuclear power, and of a food processing industry completely determined by industrial, chemical and now also genetic modification processes is at the core of political ecology, which has thus moved two central material sectors of global capitalism, the energy and the food industries, into the centre of the critique.

Political ecology has reached many people. The ecology movements of the last forty years are beyond doubt the most successful social movements since the Second World War.<sup>112</sup> They are grassroots- democratic,

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<sup>112</sup> Although the ecology movements have been the most successful social movements, they have also been the most helpless. Global warming has not been stopped, even modest goals for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions seem unobtainable – see the pathetic results of the Copenhagen conference of 2009 – and nuclear power continues to be used worldwide; even at after Fukushima, investments in new nuclear power plants are still planned. For peasants and small farmers, access to land and to non-genetically patented seed – perhaps the most important socio-ecological issue of human survival – is subject to an attack of immensely accelerated proportions.

strongly fluctuating, and the expression of the hopes of many people for a future with a new way of living. They are metropolitan movements reaching from San Francisco to Berlin and beyond. No longer is the conquest of nature the goal; rather it is the sustainable and respectful dealing with nature and natural resources. In terms of its dimension in everyday life, the ecology movements can be considered the new lifestyle of the educated urban middle strata of western civilization. They are concerned with the thrifty use of energy, so that their single-family homes are designed as low-energy houses with solar roofs. They shop at small local organic food markets with ecologically produced food from their own regions, and also in terms of their physical mobility, they try to use means of transportation which use as little petrol as possible. These educated urban middle strata use the freedom of choice provided them by their social status to behave in ecologically rational ways, without having to do without comfort and prosperity.

In many countries of Europe, the ecology movements have moreover organized successful Green parties; in other countries, such as Italy, they are powerful as grassroots movements, and have from the outset been politically oriented towards the left. In Germany, the ecology movements and the Green Party have, together with the Social Democrats, pushed through the phase out of nuclear power in the country, and have initiated the use of regenerative energy sources, and in the economically most powerful region of the country, the foundation of its export industry, they have just won the state election. The Energy Turn toward the use of regenerative energy sources has however been reduced to the question of how solar and wind power technology – particularly with regard to the power-line and storage issue – can be improved so that the quantity and reliability of the production of electric power can be ensured, not only for private consumption, but also for industrial processes. That means that what is at issue is essentially the replacement of one energy technology with another, with no major disruption of the production process.

In all this, the critique of the capitalist mode of production has been somewhat lost sight of.



Internationally, the ecology movements have especially supported the preservation of the “green lungs” of the earth, the rain forests of Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia, and the Taiga in Russia, and they have supported indigenous peoples in these areas. In this respect, the western ecology movements have certainly had an effect on the development of indigenous autonomy movements in the world’s regions.

The economic policy concept of the German Greens, the Green New Deal, seizes upon the idea of qualitative environmentally compatible economic growth. That concept, again, concentrates on two central capitalist economic areas, energy and food production. The massive expansion of solar, wind, hydroelectric and geothermal power sources, the return from agribusiness to regional agricultural production cycles, and certain specific areas of action, such as ecological urban planning and resource saving concepts in the transport sector and concepts of ecological mass transit have been raised as responses to the looming climate catastrophe. What is involved here is nothing less than a third Industrial Revolution. This statement is correct, without a doubt. The world is undergoing a complete restructuring of its industrial productive apparatus, and the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions has become a standard for the entirety of industrial production. In this sense, investment in ecologically compatible production, is already much higher in such countries as China or South Korea than it is in Europe. Brazil for example, produces almost 85% of its electric power requirement from hydroelectric power. At the same time however that country is also the leader in the production of biofuels, with their massive land consumption through of monocultures, which are contributing to a new wave of desertification on the earth.

The concept of the Green New Deal propagates a change in the material composition of production and consumption processes, tied to the hope that the entire production process can be transformed. There is trust in the power of persuasion of the projects described. The history of the success of the ecology movements forms the matrix for this hope: if many people want the right thing, if business, the movements and civil

society work together, changes in society can be implemented. Finally, it is especially the history of the use of solar power and wind power that confirms these hopes: solar and wind technology were not developed in the research departments of major corporations, nor through research and development projects funded by national or European subsidies, but rather in small workshops in Denmark, by engineering students in aerospace technology, by small engineering collectives in Germany, and by development projects in less developed countries, who developed low-tech projects in areas where there was no supply of water or electric power. Only very late was it possible, with government subsidies, to develop a market capable solar and wind power industry. That however also virtually reproduced mode of production and life, as well as the power and ownership structures of contemporary capitalism and of financial market capitalism. That made the introduction of renewable energy sources almost too easy – and is now reaching its own limits.

Civil society movements and political control are the two strategic options of the Green New Deal. They are other inestimable value as guidelines for action in practical politics, since they depend on the common sense of people and the primacy of politics. However, the Green economic policy concept does not contain any socio-political project extending beyond the repair of the material elements of capitalist production processes. In that sense, the Green New Deal is a project for greening capitalism, adapted to the regenerative ability of the capitalist system. It precisely fails to combine the ecological question with the social question, or, too, with the question of power and property.

This Third Industrial Revolution will bring forth new processes of integration, but they will correspond to intensive destruction of nature, the destruction of the foundation of life for whole segments of the population, and to social processes of exclusion. Capitalism depends on the exploitation of nature and of people, with ever new appropriation mechanisms, and – as the global crisis has shown in its various forms, from the climate crisis and the food crisis through the financial crisis to the nuclear crisis – in ever more gigantic dimensions.

Has political ecology then become a lifestyle project of the urbane middle classes of the global North? And is this lifestyle part and parcel of the interests of the rule of the North over the global South? It is certainly possible to get that impression, for example in the major international conferences, where the rich countries of the North, the main perpetrators in the destruction of the climate, are demanding massive environmental protection investments from poor countries of the South. That however only touches the surface of the actual global power struggle, a struggle which goes to the very roots both of the capitalist and of the traditional socialist modes of production, and is also expressed in the debate surrounding the transformation of the societies of the emerging countries.

That debate has become especially intense in those countries of Latin America which are in a transition to a "socialism of the twenty-first century". By means of redistribution measures based on traditional industrial policy and the exploitation of rich natural resources, leftist governments are trying to improve the social conditions of life especially of those of their people who are suffering most from poverty and misery. At the same time, with a new standards of value, such as the concept of *buen vivir* enshrined in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador, and with respect for indigenous cultures, goals are being formulated which are in direct contradiction to classical industrial policy. The critique of extractivism is one expression of this contradiction.

Bolivia and Ecuador, by formulating new basic values and respecting the culture of the indigenous peoples, have introduced new goals for societal development and the relationship to nature into the international discourse. At the same time, the existential contradiction between industrial development and ecology remains unresolved – as is clearly visible in the development strategies of Venezuela and Brazil. On the one hand, the issue is the transfer of the rich natural and mining resources to national control, i.e. the struggle with the global capitalist major players, the development of national processing industries, and the introduction of minimal social standards for all citizens, in other words

classical redistribution policies. None of the oil-producing countries – Venezuela Ecuador or Brazil – can in view of the massive impoverishment of major sectors of the population due to centuries of feudal rule and imperialism, dispense with redistribution policies. None of the countries with valuable natural or mining resources, such as lithium or rare earth metals, can dispense with their exploitation.

This potentially conflicts with the preservation of the natural conditions of life of local communities, and investment in ecological technologies, the construction of a small farmer economy and stopping the destruction of the rain forests, and the participation of indigenous cultures in the political decision-making processes, as well as the attempt to re-determine the basic values of societies by respecting nature and living entities with their own rights, and the goals of good cohabitation of human beings beyond the structures of consumerism.

The contradiction between classical industrial development and the introduction of social standards on the one hand, and the realization of very ambitious ecological and socio-cultural goals on the other is neither theoretical, nor soluble in the real world – at least not under the capitalist conditions which are dominant globally today. This sobering fact only becomes bearable if the main emphasis is placed on implementing concrete projects, both for the practical and visible improvement of the social situation of the strata of the population affected by social exclusion, and, at the same time, for practical and visible projects of ecological and cultural renewal. Even if what is taking place in the Latin American countries ruled by the left, it is uncontested is a controversial process, it is obvious that we are seeing the beginning of transformatory social processes, in which both sides of the social contradiction confront each other.

Latin America teaches us that it is necessary to be aware of the contradiction between ecology and economy, and to ever again decide in a case-by-case basis and in the democratic process of negotiation in which direction we need to act – and to use as a standard for our own actions and ecological embedding in industrial processes.

This contradiction is without a doubt the most pressing expression of the conflict between the domination of nature and the re-conciliation of human beings with nature. But it cannot be resolved in the context of the current historic situation. What we can however demand of ourselves – regardless of whether we are leftists of the North or of the South – is that we create consciousness regarding this contradiction, and seek intelligent solutions in the concrete contexts of action, so as to make possible a step-by-step reduction of the domination of techno-capitalist processes over the human conditions of life on our planet.

# COMMONS: SOCIAL JUSTICE BY SHARING

TOMMASO FATTORI

## 1 Social bond, decommodification, democracy

The horizon of the Commons brings together extremely diverse experiences and social groups, such as the indios of Amazonia, digital communities, small farmers defending seeds and biodiversity, the water movements which win referenda against the privatization of water services in Uruguay or in Italy. There is a common thread running through concepts which have emerged in areas of the world, cultures and periods so distant from one another, such as the *res communes omnium* of Roman law, the Commons of the British legal tradition, the “Pachamama vision” of the Aymara from Bolivia who, when you thank them for quenching your thirst, answer that you must not thank them, because the water does not belong to them, but to Mother Earth. An Earth which does not belong to us because the opposite is true: we living creatures belong to her, in a network of systemic relations, as the science of complexity has also abundantly proved. From the Earth, or food, to free software, a growing number of social groups find in the Commons a paradigm and a shared horizon of sense which can lend weight to the struggles and social experiences of each movement.

We come from years in which the “common good” and the search for a “common wealth” (for example, a clean sea to swim in or a good school for our children) have been brushed aside by particularisms and individual interests, understood as unlimited accumulation of private wealth. Nowadays the idea of common good and cooperative social bonds is enjoying a renaissance and is taking a plural shape, both in theory and in practice: the shape of Commons. Commons, in their diversity, have one defining characteristic: sharing. That is, Commons are based on sharing and social bonds and, in their turn, they produce social bonds. Among the various conditions which Elinor Ostrom identified as important for attaining successful communal resource management (including the preference for resources with definable boundaries or resources that

it was impossible or very difficult to replace with other resources) is the capacity of a community to establish its own rules for self-governing the good and, even before that, of course, the presence of a community, in the sense of a stable population with a strong social network and social norms promoting conservation and reproduction of the good. However, it seems to me that there is a biunivocal correspondence between community and management of common resources: the more important a condition the presence of a community is for appropriate management of common resources, the more the common management builds up and nourishes the community itself, strengthening social cohesion and social bonding; vice versa, privatization of common goods breaks social bonds and undermines social cohesion, contributing to the growth of atomized societies of individual consumers competing with one another for access to scarce resources and commodified services. In an individualized world, the search for that which unites us and connects us to others, the heart of our being part of and making a society, takes shape around Commons. In an ever-more commercialized and privatised world, where the rule of maximising profit and accumulating wealth reigns supreme, a nucleus of extra-commercium is reconstructed around Commons, in other words, an arena not regulated by the logic of profit, an arena where the relationship between people and goods is structured beyond the constant “mediation” – typical of modernity – of ownership (be it public or private). The collective dimension goes beyond the public-private dichotomy; beyond proprietary individualism but also beyond the traditional and bureaucratic public management of goods, into a space which could even be defined a new non-state public area. Basically, two fundamental needs emerge in the Commons movement. The first is access to and decommodification of both that which is essential to life (in the social as well as the biological sense) and that which makes the free development of a person possible – so, for example, the right of everyone to drink clean water, to breathe unpolluted air, the right to health but also to knowledge, to a sharing of information, knowledge and culture. The second need concerns a radical form of democracy or autonomy, that is, the need to self-govern the shared good, to adopt rules and norms for its use, for sharing it and reproducing it.

## 2 Multiplicity

The one same basket of Commons holds, side by side, genes and bytes, water and Internet, land and knowledge, biodiversity and libraries, seeds and utility services, as well as many other tangible and intangible goods. Evidently, there are many unanswered questions, both on the theoretical level and as to the concrete forms of specific governance of such diverse spheres, in different places and different cultures. But the theory of Commons was not born of the Academy (which usually takes to flight, like “Minerva’s owl” in Hegel, only when the shades of night are gathering, and claims to offer us insight), but it is developed by Commoners themselves and among the movements’ activists, in the midst of social practices.

Numerous different possible taxonomies and definitions of the Commons have been proposed and developed, some more relational or more essentialist, more universalist or more communitarian: definitions which coexist within the Commons as a global movement, without conflicting, as each one can illuminate a different level of this multi-faceted reality. For example, one can distinguish natural Commons (such as water or a specific forest) from social and man-made Commons (such as language or free software); material from immaterial Commons; excludable ones (such as a road) from those which are not easily excludable (such as the atmosphere); rival (e.g. a pasture) from non-rival (e.g. knowledge); traditional Commons (e.g. fisheries) from “new commons” (e.g. the Internet); or yet again, global Commons (such as the oceans) and local ones (e.g. a specific river). Or one can identify some primary and irreplaceable Commons – access to which cannot therefore be discriminatory – as I will attempt to argue below, such as water, the air or knowledge.

Every distinction brings with it substantial implications. To separate Commons into global and local, for example, calls into play the definition of the “reference community” which is to decide and draw up the rules for joint enjoyment of the good and for its shared governance: who actually governs the Commons? Who establishes the rules on them? Who has the right to access them? Where are the borders, which may be



more or less porous, of this reference community? One thing is the whole human community (or maybe the community of the living, thus recognising the rights of nature and moving away, as far as the right to access natural Commons is concerned, from a purely anthropocentric view), another is the specific community which draws sustenance from a specific river, stream or forest.

Another fundamental distinction is that between natural-material Commons and non-material-digital Commons, because of the intrinsic element of “non-rivalry” which is a characteristic of goods such as knowledge, information and communications. If a good is non-rival, it means that the use of that good by one person does not limit the use of it by others, nor does it decrease the overall amount of the good available: if there are two of us in front of just one glass of water (rival good), we can drink half a glass per head, whereas if we are taught Pythagoras’ theorem (non-rival good), we will both be richer; it is not that we will only know half of it each. The same thing is true, for example, for freeloading in file sharing, given that a digital file can be replicated an infinite number of times: or rather, the more a file is downloaded and made available to other Internet users as well, the more the common resource available to everyone increases. On the other hand, natural Commons – such as the classic “common pool resources”- are rival goods, since they are finite resources (although not necessarily and “naturally” scarce).

For this reason too, one must be careful not to confuse the arena of Commons with that of public goods and with the classic economic categorizations. In 1954, the economist Paul Samuelson defined ‘pure’ public goods on the basis of their nature of non-rivalry and non-excludability, as opposed to private goods (rival and excludable) and separate both from “club” goods (excludable but not rival) and from “common pool resources”, that is, Commons (understood as rival but non-excludable goods). We have already seen what is meant by non-rivalry, whereas non-excludability means that it is technically, politically or economically impossible to exclude an individual from consuming the good in question. Characteristics such as rivalry and excludability are not always absolute and devoid of historical context: the capitalist development model

is nowadays making certain resources, which are potentially abundant and therefore have a low degree of rivalry, ever scarcer, and hence introducing a high degree of rivalry. For example, water has always been scarce in the Sahara, but never so in the Andes, whereas nowadays climate change (caused by our production-consumption system) is reducing the glaciers and consequently the flow of major rivers in the area. Just as serious acts of pollution of natural resources are putting whole communities of ecosystem-people (communities whose livelihoods are dependent on direct access to the natural resources) at risk, creating a scarcity of fundamental Commons. Even clearer is the case of excludability, that is, of the possibility of excluding someone from the enjoyment of a good: exclusion is a question of political choices, of costs to be borne for the exclusion, but also of technology. Technological progress now makes it extremely easy to exclude those who cannot afford to pay from accessing fundamental Commons. Nowadays, access to goods which once were non-excludable can be made excludable. Ever more sophisticated systems for excluding those who cannot pay have been invented to cut out the poorest groups of people from access to goods which are essential to life, such as water: the system of prepaid meters, for example, allows water to be distributed only to families who have paid the price of the goods in advance to the private company which runs the water service. Capitalism, pollution and technological progress are increasing both the scarcity (and the degree of rivalry) and the excludability of fundamental resources, both natural and non-material: consider the artificial creation of scarcity through intellectual property mechanisms. The poorest remain excluded from access to fundamental goods and services and lose the rivalry challenge. In short, the predatory and contaminating development model transforms natural resources which are theoretically abundant into scarce ones; technological progress offers the possibility of raising new barriers to limit access to those who are in a position to pay for it.

In the list of possible sub-divisions, I deliberately avoided mentioning the controversial distinction between regulated and unregulated Commons. Roman law distinguished between *res privatae* (private goods),

res publicae and res universitatis (two types of public goods), res communes omnium, that is, goods belonging to everyone and therefore which could not be appropriated by anyone, and the res nullius, or things belonging to no-one and therefore which could be appropriated by anyone. An objection always made, quite rightly, to Garrett Hardin, author of the famous essay on the tragedy of commons, is that he mixed up a Commons (such as the grazing land he used as an example) with an open access regime. He concluded that the inevitable outcome was over-exploitation and destruction of the grazing land as a consequence of the selfish behaviour of each herdsman (motivated to maximize his individual interest), but he forgot that the Commons and collective property arrangements are by no means things belonging to nobody, no man's land, or res nullius and that there are precise rules, norms and institutional arrangements that commoners adopt, working together to preserve the good, rather than competing destructively with one another as homines oeconomici. And so it is not the parcelisation and privatization of the common resource, nor the intervention of external state regulation (heteronomy) which saves the Commons, but the rules which the commoners themselves choose, and their capacity for self-government (autonomy): this is commoning. And this brings us to conclude that, in effect, Commons have always been regulated, even if the rule consciously chosen by the commoners was that of "open access", as in the case of digital commons, unlimited and non-rival goods. This truth – which originates from actual observation of the practices of commoning, with which Hardin was not acquainted – lies well with the anti-essentialist viewpoint, according to which Commons are indissolubly a form of social relation, directed at sharing a resource. In other words, one could maintain that there is nothing which is necessarily "of itself" a Commons, that is, which can be morally claimed as a Commons more than other things can: all around us we have only natural resources or social creations which can be managed as public property, as private property or as Commons. If there is no commoning and there are no commoners, then Commons do not exist. It is all up to us. On the other hand, it is also true, looking at the same problem from a different standpoint, that in human history a vast number of things have been shared

and managed as collective property. If this concept has the merit of illuminating a significant real-life fact, that is, the importance of commoning as a fundamental element of Commons, on the negative side it appears to cast shadow on, or fail to notice, another equally true real-life fact: the fact that some structures are common and shared regardless of our desire or capacity to recognise the fact – think intuitively of our language or our genetic code, but also of the water which makes up our bodies or the knowledge which circulates in our brains. These are what I will shortly refer to as fundamental or primary Commons. While it is true that to be really and actually Commons it is certainly necessary that there be social “recognition” and a Commoning activity behind the shared resources, at the same time it is difficult not to see how some gifts of nature and many social creations are, in themselves, goods belonging to everyone, that is to say, precisely, primary Commons. The privatization of seeds, of water or of our genetic code is misappropriation by the few of goods which belong to everyone: goods which pre-date us and to which we belong, to recall once again the ecosystemic point of view, but also the vision of so many indigenous cultures in Latin America. Water, the atmosphere and biodiversity existed long before man appeared on Earth and we are alive only thanks to these “goods” that we share. Natural Commons are not social constructs: they are also life’s building blocks (not only for human life). As Marx wrote in a famous and often-quoted passage, not even all human societies put together can be considered owners of the Earth, which we should, rather, take care of like “boni patres familias” for future generations. For this reason it is useful to continue to distinguish between primary Commons (material or immaterial resources, limited or unlimited common pool resources) and commoning activities, as a substantial social relation, the only one appropriate for managing and governing Commons.

### **3 Fundamental or primary Commons**

The right of access to fundamental or primary Commons must be guaranteed for everyone on this planet. This category of Commons is to include all shared goods that are irreplaceable and essential, either for material survival (such as, for example, water, air, food and energy) and

to ensure equality and free development of the person (such as knowledge). It is a question of ensuring access to all – in other words, to a community of commoners which comprises the whole human community – not in obedience to an abstract universalism of an illuminist-leaning mode, but because life itself and the quality and dignity of life, as well as social justice, are dependent on access to these primary and non-optional Commons.

In numerous societies, access to many primary Commons, and the opportunity to enjoy and use them, is not “immediate” but “mediated” by structures and services (services of general interest or public services): to give an example, in a large metropolis, people get water in their houses through a water service and do not go straight to the river themselves (shanty-towns and poor areas, on the other hand, are mainly excluded from the service, usually run by large private multinational companies). Therefore these very services themselves become Commons, that is to say, they are claimed as such, both in the north and the south of the world. This does not only mean claiming that access to water must fall outside the logic of markets, but also claiming self-government and democratic participation in the management of the service.

And so as far as primary or fundamental Commons are concerned – which are sometimes called common goods of humanity – there can be no discrimination in the right to access, just as collective rules are needed to avoid abuse and over-exploitation by individuals, in the case of finite and rival resources. In other words, there is a structural link between fundamental commons and fundamental rights: it is precisely the specific nature of these goods which makes them primary and fundamental, because their function is that of satisfying collective primary needs and actually implementing the fundamental rights of every human being. Consequently, the governance and management of fundamental Commons must be such as to guarantee universal access to the good and must entail direct participatory management (self-government of the good) by the community.

It is clear that the primary and irreplaceable commons do not cover the whole range of existing or imaginable commons. Although not covering

everything – not our bodies, for example – certainly a large part of things surrounding us can be transformed into common goods.

#### **4 Logic behind and structure of Commons**

To sum up, but without the presumption of concluding anything, we could say that the term Commons, in its broadest sense – which reaches from water to bytes, from traditional Commons to new Commons – generically means all the resources that we share and use in common. Resources which belong equally to all human beings, in the case of fundamental and primary Commons, or to the members of a specific user community, in the case of local and traditional “common pool resources”. Some Commons – air, water, knowledge - are fundamental, primary and irreplaceable inasmuch as linked to life itself, both individual and social, and linked to the full development of the person. Commons are natural and rival (local and global) or social. They can be material, as are the services of general interest and infrastructures of collective interest (schools, universities, hospitals, transport networks, public squares, etc.) but also non-material and non-rival (such as knowing and knowledge or digital Commons) and hence abundant and inexhaustible, even though they are often artificially made scarce by privatization mechanisms (e.g. by patenting, copyright, imposition of intellectual property rights). They can be gifts of nature but also social heritage, the result of combining the creative and intellectual activity of each and every one, as in the case of languages, of codes, of sciences: even new “discoveries” or inventions always come about as the result of the modification of a collective creative, cultural and scientific heritage which has been passed on (as the “chain effect” mechanism of Creative Commons shows in a transparent manner). Commons are goods which no single person has produced (at least, not in their entirety) and hence no-one has the right to appropriate themselves of their use in an exclusive manner: their use must be shared.

Apart from the cases where the term Commons is used to claim the collective right to access and self-regulation of a resource which can be considered “of itself” or morally a Commons (such as primary Com-

mons) but which in actual fact is managed privately and has been “enclosed”, behind a Commons there are commoners who give it life, that is, there is a commoning activity which regulates and governs the use and reproduction of the common resources. The process of collective self-government and management of the Commons – as Ostrom’s studies have shown - is nothing other than the capacity of the users to jointly establish a series of agreed norms and rules. These systems of rules are very different according to whether they deal with rivers or free software, and the rules can be more or less formal and more or less restrictive. Commons, since they require commoning, are therefore also a system of governance, that is to say, a form of social relations for collectively sharing and preserving all those natural resources and creations of society which we inherit or produce together. A social form for reproducing life and knowledge and to produce value and wealth which go beyond the capitalist market, according to criteria of sharing, cooperation and social justice.

Despite the extreme variety of Commons and forms of commoning, one can always identify the fundamental elements of a social and economic form which is alternative to the capitalistic one: cooperative rather than competitive strategies; use-value rather than exchange value; meeting the needs and rights of everyone rather than maximizing the profits of the few; “caretaking”, use and access to the good rather than ownership and “enclosure”; consensual self-government rather than relationships of command; autonomy rather than heteronomy; devolution of power and horizontal and polycentric forms of governance rather than concentration of power (a concentration on which both capitalist markets and the State are based); conservation and reproduction of the good in the case of natural resources, rather than over-exploitation; open access and multiplication of Commons in the case of inexhaustible non-material Commons rather than artificial production of scarcity; inalienability rather than alienability and commoditization.

The fact of inalienability is crucial: commoners are never “owners” of the Commons, perhaps they are guardians. They are responsible for passing them on to future generations in their entirety and they cannot

“sell” them as if they were the shares of a public company. The Commons is not the product of a sum of individual property rights, aligned with the atomistic and individualistic paradigm. Commons are common and shared resources and cannot be fragmented. Not even the State can alienate Commons: when in the Code of Justinian it is said that natural goods such as air and water are *res communes omnium*, this statement affirms that not even the roman emperor has the power to decide to alienate or enclose it (the doctrine of “public trust” originates from here).

In most countries, the legal category of common goods has substantially disappeared, having been reabsorbed in modern times into the polarity between private goods and public goods (in the sense of goods belonging to the State). Public goods – into which most of the Commons which have not been privatized have been transformed – are now being subjected to further cycles of privatization, determined each time by national or local governments. And this is the reason why the movements are now trying various different routes, including all legal and political tools at our disposal, in order to remove any power of governments to make decisions on collective and social goods, for example by “constitutionalizing” Commons and universal rights of access to them (the constitutional area is precisely an area which is removed from the discretionary powers of political majorities and governments), or by defining the legal category of Commons more specifically, as being located outside the dichotomy between public and private. The sole form of property which enjoys strong protection in our legal system is private property, while public property can easily be alienated and the category “common” is barely recognised. In order to save Commons and public goods from private appropriation, to react against privatistic and neo-contractualistic models of managing the public realm and to promote radically democratic forms of self-government of shared goods, social movements the world over are promoting referendums, Commons charters and citizens’ bills in the search for a way to become “direct legislators” and open together a new horizon for the future of Commons.



## 4 Culture

### THE CONCEPT OF SUMAK KAWSAY (LIVING WELL) AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY<sup>113</sup>

FRANÇOIS HOUTART

The concept of 'sumak kawsay' was incorporated into the Ecuadorian Constitution in 2008. It referred to the notion of 'vivir bien' or 'buen vivir' (living well or collective well-being) of the indigenous peoples. Afterwards it was taken up by the Buen Vivir National Plan for 2009-2013. Thus it is a central idea in the political life of the country. For this reason it is important to analyze its content and understand how it can relate to the notion of the 'Common Good of Humanity' that is being developed within the United Nations Organization with a view to its possible application in international relations. It is all the more relevant today, given the crises that have been brought about by the deliquescence of the capitalist system.

#### 1. The origin of the concept

In recent years, the indigenous peoples of Latin America, after suffering for more than 500 years from material destruction and cultural contempt, have been experiencing a renewal of their collective consciousness. As part of this process, they desire to and rites of human action in their natural and social environment. There were differences among the peoples, also various expressions, but they shared the same fundamental cosmovision.

Colonization destroyed the material basis of these societies and fought against their culture and visions of the world, above all by using religious arguments and symbols. It was genocide combined with ethnocide. As has been said by Rodolfo Pocop Coroxon of CONIC (National Indige-

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<sup>113</sup> Paper prepared for the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, 2011

nous and Peasant Coordinator) of Guatemala, concerning the Mayas of the pre-colonial epoch, "What the Spaniards found here was a profound respect and recognition of space, the universe and the human being. They all constituted the same element: life itself" (2008, 40). It was in fact the colonial discourse that created the socio-cultural category of 'indigenous' (José Sánchez Parga, 2009, 93), expressing an unequal relationship between the superior colonizer and the despised colonized peoples.

For centuries the world visions of the conquered peoples were transmitted clandestinely by oral tradition. The same social relations established by colonialism between indigenous, whites and mestizos (mixed blood) were reproduced after independence, autonomy being exclusively defined vis-à-vis the metropolitan power, and leaving power in the hands of the classes that descended from the colonizers. As time went by there were linguistic changes. According to José Sánchez Parga, already 30 per cent of the indigenous population of Ecuador do not speak their mother tongue (2009, 65) as a result of internal migrations and urbanization. However, the wave of indigenous emancipation that swept over many of the original peoples of Latin America created a new dynamic which, in some countries has led to constitutional changes and induced the indigenous movements to return to their traditional points of reference. Some of these, like 'pachamama' have survived the centuries while others have acquired new political functions like *sumak kawsay* (Ecuador) and *suma qamaña* (Bolivia). This shows the dynamism of the indigenous culture that has prevented the populations from becoming museum objects and, as Eduardo Gudynas (2011, 5) has written, they have embarked on a process of the 'decolonization of knowledge'. Quite rightly, Rodolfo Pocop Coroxon declares: "The peoples of Abya Yala (America) are not myths or legends: we are a civilization and we are nations" (2008, 43).

As from the year 2000, the crisis accelerated the process. In Ecuador, in particular, and already from the 1990s, the consequences of the war against Peru, the effects of the *niño* phenomenon, the repression and

corruption of the oligarchic governments and above all the neoliberal era aggravated the situation of the more vulnerable strata of the population, particularly the indigenous peoples. The reaction was, as Pablo Dávalos (2009) has said, anti-neoliberal in character and, we can add, an opposition to the multiple and systemic crises.

The indigenous movements very quickly realized that they formed part of the victims of the neoliberal phase of capitalism and to express their struggles they sought concepts that were the opposite of this logic (Floresmilo Simbaña, 2011, 21). At the same time many other social groups were concerned about the destruction of the ecosystem. All this helped to revive and reconstruct traditional concepts like 'buen vivir', "a category that is continually being constructed and reproduced" (Alberto Acosta, 2008, quoted by E. Gudynas, 2011, 1). José Sánchez Parga states that the concept of 'alli kausay' (good life) "in the sense of the quality of life, is not foreign to the recent past and has nothing to do with tradition, but rather more to do with the biography of indigenous individuals (2009, 137; "those who want to 'make their lives their own', rather than leave them to the mercy of factors that are alien and hostile to them" [Gudynas, 2011, 4]).

To help to understand the concept better, we give the word to those who are engaged in the current struggles, starting with indigenous personalities themselves. Luis Macas, who is a former president of the CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador), talks of the community space, in which there was reciprocity, sharing, social responsibility, consensus - in other words, buen vivir. Humberto Cholango, nominated president of the same organization in 2011, described *sumak kawsay* as a new model of life (as opposed to the Western concept) and that it is applicable not only to the indigenous peoples but to the whole planet (2010, 92). This notion presupposes harmony with Mother Earth (ibid. 96) and the conservation of the ecosystem (ibid. 93). For Manuel Castro of the ECUARUNARI (the organization of the Quechua indigenous people of Ecuador), the notion implies community sharing, social equality, equity, reciprocity, solidarity, justice and peace. It also

presupposes a harmonious relationship between humanity and Mother Earth, thanks to putting into practice the ancestral calendar and its cosmovision, particularly as concerns Father Sun and Mother Moon. For Manuel Castro, it is a question of specific cultural values and also of ancestral science and technology (2010, 4-7). In this sense, both Josef Esterman (1993) and Eduardo Gudynas (2009) talk of a 'cosmic ethic'.

Non-indigenous intellectuals have also made statements on the subject. Alberto Acosta, a leftwing economist and former president of the Constituent Assembly, writes that the adoption of *sumak kawsay* into political thinking in Ecuador means that it is "a demonstration that it is possible to open the door to the construction of a democratic society, receiving both the proposals of the indigenous peoples and nationalities, as well as broad sectors of the rest of the population. At the same time it contributes considerably to the debates for change that are developing in the world" (2009, 7). Acosta had previously stated that the concept of *sumak kawsay* "is concerned with a series of social, economic and environmental rights and guarantees" (*ibid.*). As for Magdalena León, from a feminist viewpoint she introduces the concept of the "economy of human concern" (2010, 150) as an expression of *sumak kawsay* because "it recovers the idea of life as the basis and central key of the economy" (2009, 63). For Pablo Dávalos, the idea "reintegrates nature into history as it is inherent to social existence" (quoted by E. Gudynas, 2011, 6). Jorge García has no hesitation in writing that *sumak kawsay* represents the "art of living" (2004). It is, however, Eduardo Gudynas who has published the most on the subject and we shall often be citing him on various occasions here. His position is very clear: the notion of 'buen vivir' is a criticism of the current development model and a call to build a quality of life that includes both people and nature (E. Gudynas, 2011, 2). René Ramírez, National Secretary for Planning, one of the authors of the National Development Plan, writes that the idea implies the satisfaction of needs, quality of life, loving and being loved, peace and harmony with nature, protection of culture and of biodiversity (René Ramírez, 2010, 139). In summing up his position, Ramírez refers to "bio-equality and republican bio-socialism", stressing the combination be-

tween concern for social justice, respect for nature and political organization (cited by E. Gudynas, 2011, 9). The economist Pedro Páez, former Minister of Finance and member of the UN Stiglitz Commission on the international financial crisis, speaks of “living life to the full” (Pedro Páez, 2011, 7).

As can be seen, in these discourses there is a considerable amount of interpretation in light of contemporary concerns, as well as the use of a vocabulary that differs from that used by the indigenous people. It indicates that the functions of the concept go beyond the work of recovering memory.

If we turn to the notion of *suma qamaña* of the Aymaras of Bolivia, we can also cite various authors. David Chopquehuanca refers to the contrast between ‘*vivir bien*’ (living well) and “*vivir mejor*” (better living) which, because of its desire to consume always more, has brought about the deviations of the capitalist system. In contrast, the *suma qamaña* represents social complementariness, refusing exclusion and discrimination, and seeking the harmony of humanity with ‘Mother Earth’, respecting the laws of nature. All this constitutes a culture of life, rather than a culture of death (D. Choquehuanca, 2010, 57-74). For Simón Yamparo, this notion is part of the Aymara philosophy that demands harmony between the material and the spiritual, integral well-being, a holistic and harmonious conception of life (text of 2001, cited by E. Gudynas, 2011, 6). Maria Eugenia Choque Quispe used another concept: *suma jakaña* which concentrates on dietary satisfaction, ensuring by the control of production, the fulfilment of life to its utmost and the development of the peoples (text of 2010, cited by E. Gudynas, 2011, 6).

The main theoretician of *suma qamaña* is without doubt the anthropologist Xabier Abo, S.J., for whom it means “to live together well” (and not to live better than others). It is not only a question of material goods, but also spiritual ones. It is first necessary to satisfy local needs, living together with Mother Earth and with reciprocity and affection for others. “*Vivir bien* implies access and use of material goods in harmony with

nature and human beings. It is the human dimension of affective and spiritual fulfilment. People do not live isolated, but in a family and in a social and natural environment. One cannot live well if one is damaging nature" (X.Abo, 2010, 57). It is a spirituality that involves peace and the construction of 'a land without evil'. Xabier Abo says that such a vision goes beyond *sumak kawsay*. Nevertheless, the Bolivian author J. Medina affirms that, as a philosophical category, the concept of *suma qamaña*, as it is formulated, is relatively recent. This is yet another indication of the dynamic character of this culture and its knowledge.

Thus it is not a question of idealizing the pre-Colombian societies, ignoring the contradictions existing among the autochthonous peoples of today – which exist in all human groups. The relationships of authority, the status of women, respect for human life were not always exemplary in these social groups and the character that today we call 'imperialist', of the Inca and Aztec reigns cannot be denied. The divinization of the Inca, for example, was an evident sign of the deterioration of the tributary relationships between local bodies and central power. Nowadays indigenous organizations have their conflicts about ideas and about power, there are dubious alliances between some leaders with political and economic forces, and ideological differences that range from neoliberalism to socialism. In other words their social groups, like others, have their own histories, aspirations and lives. This is why they deserve to be socially recognized, after half a millennium of oppression and destruction.

To remember *sumak kawsay* is to revive the 'practical utopia' of its traditions, which guided the collective ethic and hope for the action of its communities. It is the specific contribution that the original peoples of Abya Yala propose for the construction of a new civilization. They do it with their own cosmovision, an important element of a multiculturalism that can be converted into interculturalism.

There are similar notions in other indigenous peoples, like the Mapuche of Chile, the Guaraní of Bolivia and Paraguay, who refer to *ñande riko* (harmonious life), and the Achuar of Ecuadorian Amazonia to *tiko kavi*

(the good life), that are cited by Eduardo Gudynas (2011, 8), but also the Maya tradition in Guatemala, in Chiapas (Mexico) and among the Kunas in Panama, etc. The Tseltal people (Chiapas) thus talk of *lekil kuxlejal* (the good life), not as an impossible dream but as a concept that, even if it has degenerated, could be revived. Its application is fundamentally moral in everyday life (Antonio Paoli, 2003, 71) and it includes peace before anything else, both within each person as much as within the community and between man and woman in a couple. When peace reigns in the world, life is perfect: “this is the time of *lekil kuxlejal* (ibid. 77). Peace is established with justice and without justice there is no *lekil kuxlejal* (ibid., 82). The concept also implies a harmonious integration between society and nature: the happiness of the community is projected onto nature and automatically felt in the environment: the happy ecosystem makes people light-hearted and cheerful” (ibid., 75).<sup>114</sup>

Thus we can conclude that the reference to these concepts, that were important in the life of the original peoples of the continent, meet a need to create a new way of living, in spite of the contradictions inherent in the human condition. Awareness of the profoundly destructive character of capitalism as the economic basis of a culture of progress without limits and that ignores social and ecological externalities, is making headway among the indigenous peoples, as it is in many other social milieux of the continent. The defence of life, the proposal of an ethic of *buen vivir*, restoring the equilibria of the ecosystem and the importance of the collectivity as opposed to individualism, are values that are guiding left-wing movements all round the world. Such convergence enables us now to enter into greater detail about the actual functions of *buen vivir* and its usefulness in defining the foreign relations of a country like Ecuador.

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<sup>114</sup> A local song goes: “We feel our surroundings are smiling, like the birds in the field, like us, like them, that fly round the world” (Antonio Paoli, 2003, 75)

## **2. The functions of the concept in the present context**

It is possible to single out two functions in the collection of contemporary literature on *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña*. One is a criticism of the current socio-economic situation and the other, proposals for cultural, social and political reconstruction. We shall close this part of the paper with some thoughts on the relationship between the Common Good of Humanity and the possible deviations from the meaning of the concept of *buen vivir*, in function of prevailing ideologies.

### **i) The criticism of modernity**

Criticism of modernity is ambivalent. It all depends on what aspects of modernity are being criticized. Is it the economic model of production and consumption and its purely instrumental rationality in function of a 'mercantilist scientific/technological logic' (Dominique Jacques, 2011)? Is the idea of progress without any limits? Or is it the emancipation of the human being, scientific achievements, analytical reasoning? In fact there is a fundamentalist criticism of modernity that means restoring a pre-analytical culture, without historical vision. We are also aware of the criticism of post-modern philosophy, that refuses what its protagonists call 'the great narratives' – that is, social and political theories. These critics consider great narratives as totalitarian and instead favour 'small stories' – that is, personal stories by individual actors, denying the existence of structures and systems. Such criticisms are not really useful for the social and cultural reconstruction appropriate for our time.

Criticism from the viewpoint of *buen vivir* or *buen convivir* is selective. It is a question, as José María Tortosa says, of refusing "the bad development that leads to living badly" (J.M.Tortosa, 2010, 41). In fact we are experiencing a crisis of the dominant development model that is destroying ecosystems and societies. The fundamental reason for this lies in the 'ontology' of the West and its linear scientific and technological vision of history that considers nature as a series of separate elements (natural resources) and imposes an anthropocentric (utilitarian) vision of development.



Clearly, the logic of the capitalist economic system that transforms everything into merchandise (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 114) is the most visible expression of this kind of modernity. Capitalism, in this sense, is much more than a simple economic reality. It brings with it a certain 'cosmovision' and a social organization. In fact, "the accumulation of capital is not just a collection of assets, but a social relationship mediated by power" (Diana Quirola, 2009, 106). In the case of the indigenous peoples, capitalism was seen as colonization, with all its physical and cultural consequences. Nowadays, the system is exercising strong pressure on ancestral lands, through extractive activities and the grabbing of agricultural land for industrial purposes. For this reason, the indigenous peoples who started to claim their cultural identity in the World Social Forums, ended by radically condemning the capitalist system, as the primary cause of its current suffering (Belém 2009 and Dakar 2011). Efforts to soften the system, humanize it and paint it green are illusory. As Eduardo Gudynas writes, " 'Benevolent capitalism' is incompatible with buen vivir" (2011, 239). It is necessary to undergo a genuine philosophical change and to acknowledge, as Norma Aguilar Alvarado says, that the original peoples and those of African descent can be "inspirers of values, knowledge and theories and philosophies that are alternative and politically respectable" (<http://servindi.org/actualidad/opinion/22327>).

Nevertheless, in various Latin American countries, part of the indigenous movements have adopted political positions of a social-democrat nature. Some indigenous community leaders are involved in commercial activities and their stance is clearly neoliberal. In no country are the indigenous people a homogeneous block. While all claim for their own cultural and material existence to be recognized, not all have adopted the same interpretation of reality, or a unanimous political position. The autochthonous peoples of the continent do not live in a separate world: they are part of history. Their level of awareness is conditioned by their surrounding situation. It would be a serious mistake to consider them as 'socio-cultural islands' within contemporary societies. Hence the diverse interpretations of buen vivir, which range from 'fundamentalist' tendencies to 'revolutionary' ones.

We have observed, in the positions of the indigenous defenders of *sumak kawsay*, as in certain non-indigenous interpretations, a strong lack of confidence towards socialism. They criticize the 'materialism' of socialism, which conceives nature for its use and exchange value (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011,9): in sum, they accuse it of having the same rationality of modernity as capitalism and proposing only 'alternative developments' and not 'alternatives to development' (ibid., 3). Simón Yampara of Bolivia goes even further, affirming that the "Aymara [man] is neither socialist nor capitalist" (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 9) and David Choquehuanca adds that he has taken his distance from socialism "because [this system] seeks to satisfy the needs of men (in David Cortez and Heike Wagner, 2011, 9) and he refers to its lack of consideration for nature.

This is why David Cortez and Keike Wagner wonder whether *buen vivir* finally implies a utopian-liberating perspective of a socialist kind (2011, 2). They do however affirm that it is a 'decolonizing' project (ibid., 7). Luis Macas, cited by the same authors, stated in 2005 that it was "an alternative project for a new society and a new development" (ibid., 8). There is no doubt that the concept of *buen vivir* has genuine affinity with the 'Ecosocialist Manifesto' of Joel Kovel and Michael Löwy, quoted by the same source (ibid., 13) and it would be close to the content of 'Socialism of the XXI Century'. The Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Souza Santos, affirms the need of a civilizational change and talks of the 'socialism of *buen vivir*'; this could well represent the contemporary version of the concept.

Obviously, when there is a reference to 'real socialism' such as it developed in Europe or in the current Chinese and Vietnamese models, it is understandable that the above authors would have their reservations. But it is necessary to overcome this vision of present socialism which is too simplistic. Marx wrote, in the 1844 manuscripts, that "man is first and indissolubly part of nature and this primitive metabolism is redoubled in the process of preserving his being: the constant relationship of man with nature is nothing but the relationship with himself" (Karl Marx,

quoted by Jean Luc Cachon, 1999, 800). Marx also wrote, in the *Grundrisse* that it was capitalism that brought about the separation of man and nature: “with the appearance of capitalism, nature ceased to be recognized as a power in itself: it is transformed into a pure object for man, just a useful thing” (ibid.). On the contrary, as far as Marx is concerned, communism is the reconciliation between man and nature, the return to unity. It is “the real solution to the antagonism between man and nature, between man and man” (ibid., 799).<sup>115</sup>

Harmony between human beings and the earth was present in Marx’s thinking and in his socialist project. This is one of the ‘forgotten things’ of historical socialism that we must recover.

Thus *sumak kawsay* is not the only transmitter of criticism of capitalism and of modernity as an illusory project. All over the world we see ‘development’ being questioned, concerns with the environment, and women asserting themselves. Many of these currents of thinking have affinity with the specific thinking of *buen vivir*, born in the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Latin America (E. Gudynas, 2011, 8). This is what makes it possible to build up convergences, both theoretically and in practice.

## **ii) Theoretical reconstruction and practical contributions**

Evidently, making criticism is not enough: it is necessary to propose new orientations of thought and new practices. The concepts of *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña* claim to fulfil this role. Nevertheless, there need to be some conditions to which we shall now turn.

The basic condition is that the departure point has to be a holistic vision of the reality in order to reformulate development and for this it is necessary to ‘decolonize knowledge’ (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 15). Indigenous culture was holistic, that is, it integrated the various elements of

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<sup>115</sup> In Marx’s words, this consists of “the socialized human being governing the human metabolism in a rational way: controlling collectively instead of being dominated by it as if it was a blind power: managing less energy and in better and more appropriate conditions, according to human nature itself” (Marx, *Capital*, Vol.3, 959)

nature and affirmed the symbiosis between human beings and Mother Earth. The original peoples succeeded in organizing their practical living conditions with their knowledge, techniques and cultures, both from establishing the symbiosis with nature and for resolving its contradictions. They did this rationally and functionally. Their symbolic way of thinking (identifying symbol with the real) was adapted to their situations and the holistic vision was part of their cosmovision. Nevertheless, this kind of vision has also some contemporary expression: "What surrounds us (mountains, woods, rivers...) is part of a whole and because of this we have life" says Rodolfo Pocop Coroxon. "They are divinities (water, air, earth, the universe) whose energy is the same as that of the atoms that form human beings" (2008, 40). The Kunas of Panama call the elements of nature 'elder brothers' as they existed before human beings. Thus nature and its components are personified. Permission is requested from Mother Earth for all the actions needed to satisfy the necessities of human life but which constitute an 'aggression' to its integrity, like cutting down a tree or killing an animal (*ibid.*, 41).

These representations had their own logic in the specific historical circumstances of the society and of its culture. It is difficult to perceive if they are part of the expression of the real, reproducing ancestral way of thinking in function of the economic and social exclusion of the indigenous peoples, or if they transformed themselves into highly poetic allegories, capable of explaining the privileged relationships between man and nature and therefore, motivating actions that protect the surrounds and the necessary political commitment. At all events, declares Marion Woynar concerning the indigenous peoples of Mexico, "the awareness of the autochthonous peoples of a Mother Earth that is indispensable for life, motivates them to protect it through a sustainable economy" (Marion Woynar, 2011, 481).

Nevertheless, in approaching the theme of capitalism and its negative ecological and social effects, the holistic focus could also be disconnected from the symbolic way of thinking and integrated into an analytical way of thinking. The latter establishes the causes of natural phenom-

ena (the life of nature, including human beings) and social phenomena (the collective construction of societies, their physical, biological and sociological aspects). The holistic focus and the symbolic way of thinking are not necessarily linked and one of them can be separated from one another.

Such a position does not mean that all reference to symbolic way of thinking is irrational, or that it should be prohibited in a pluri-cultural society. However, the symbolic way of thinking cannot be imposed as the only way of transmitting the holistic character of the relationship between human beings and the earth. In practical terms, *buen vivir* means rescuing the harmony between nature and man, between the material and the spiritual – but in the present world. Constructing the future is the aim, not returning to the past. This does not mean a blind faith in scientific and technological progress, or contempt of ancestral societies. On the contrary, such an effort demands criticism of ‘progress’, as modernity has conceived it, and greater use of traditional knowledge. Nor is it a question of ethical value, as if one is better than the other, but of a historical perspective that is capable of condemning what we call ‘progress’, describing it as ‘mal-development’, and appreciating the knowledge and the material and symbolic practices of past societies. Today, the main task is to recognize plurality, in which everyone, with their own way of thinking, can contribute both to the criticism of capitalism as well as to the construction of post-capitalism.

Most of the indigenous peoples of the continent do not reject the dynamic (historical) character of their cultures and accept contribution from other ways of thinking, including those that stem from modernity, on the condition that they are not dominated and humiliated in the process. They defend the richness of life, ‘well-being and the good heart’ (Pablo Mamani Ramírez, cited by E. Gudynas, 2011, 7), which can be interpreted today as unity, equality, liberty, solidarity, social justice, responsibility, common well-being and the quality of life. These principles are applicable in the fields of education, health, social security, housing, transport, the social economy, conservation of biodiversity, food sover-

eignty, participatory planning, etc. (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 4). No doubt this illustrates the utopian character of buen vivir, but in the positive sense of the word, which means that it is an objective to aim at, an ideal to be fulfilled.

#### **a) Re-establishing harmony with nature**

As we saw, the relationship with nature is a priority in the Buen Vivir vision. For this reason it is important to look a little closer into what this implies. The point of departure is the recognition of the integrity of nature, which has its own value, independently of the perception of man and how he values it (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011 (2) 242). The earth represents more than a collection of material: it has life. For this reason the Uwa, indigenous people of Colombia, cry out, when facing the activities of oil extraction and mining, that, in their territory, to leave the forest destroyed, to pollute the rivers, to devastate the soils means killing the Earth (Esperanza Martínez, 2010, 111). However, there is not only life in nature. It is also the source of life (including consciousness). The earth is “the space where life is reproduced and fulfilled” affirms Ecuador’s Buen Vivir National Plan (2009, 44). This is the reason why there is a symbiosis and not a separation between human beings and nature. It is a sacred relationship.

David Choquehuanca writes, in his 25 postulates for understanding buen vivir, that the human being comes in second place to the environment, because the latter is part of nature. This affirmation, which at first sight seems disconcerting, is based on a profound philosophy. Nature is the fount of life (a mother) and the human being is its thinking element. Nature has priority because without it human beings cannot live – although they can destroy it. So, being concerned with humanity means, in the first place, defending the earth and establishing harmony between nature and human beings, which involves respect for our natural surroundings. It is understood today, more than ever before, that nature is the source of life, at a time when the logic of capitalist economic power is seriously upsetting the ecosystems of the planet and ultimately preventing both thinking and non-thinking life from reproducing themselves.

Changing economic practice and the cultural system that justifies it is now an ethical imperative. The criticism of the 'anthropocentrism' of modernity means nothing else but rejecting the view that promotes growth (unequal) without taking into account the damage to the life of nature and therefore human life (externalities, for capitalism). One might wonder if this is, in this case, genuine 'anthropocentrism', when a system leads, not only to the destruction of the planet, but also to a terrible social inequality and the hunger and destitution of hundreds of millions of human beings.

This logic leads us to declare that nature is the subject of rights (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 14). It would be the right to its own existence, outside human mediation, as the earth does not belong to the human species. Mother Earth has the right to regenerate its own bio-capacity, that is to a dignified life (David Choquehuanca, 2010, 73); it has the right to have guardians and defenders (Esperanza Martínez, 2010, 114-115). The Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes the right of nature, "the comprehensive respect of its existence, the maintenance and the regeneration of its cycles" (Article 72). It involves the duty, on the part of human beings, the only living things that are capable of destroying the equilibria of the ecosystem, to affect the symbiosis between man and nature, including climate change. These are obligations to respect and repair Mother Earth.

Another way of looking at the problem is to speak of the right of human beings to a healthy environment. This is what we see in the 'third generation rights' of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, approved by the United Nations Organization. Nevertheless, for the protagonists of *buen vivir*, it is not enough. Without necessarily rejecting this position, they think that it denies the character of nature as a subject and thus, subjects 'Mother Earth' to human mediation for the recognition of its existence. It would be to fall once again into an anthropocentric position, or worse still, adopt a Hegelian stance, affirming that men are the creators of nature, just through the act of thinking about it (Jean Luc Ca-chon, 1999, 798).

As can be seen, we have two concepts of the right of nature. The first considers Mother Earth as a subject of rights and attributes this to many of the elements and forces of nature. This is the anthropomorphic position of the symbolic way of thinking. The second is based on the need to ensure reproduction capacity on Earth and adopts an analytical approach, recognizing, nevertheless, that nature has its own life and that it is the source of human life itself. In this case, the word 'rights' has a metaphorical meaning, because in the classic juridical conception, only physical and moral persons are subject of rights. Both concepts are opposed to the logic of capitalism that only recognizes nature as a commodity. The problem in the future will be to introduce the rights of nature into international law in order to define ecological crimes and eventually to set up an international court on the crimes against nature – a subject that was discussed in the Earth Summit in Cochabamba in 2010 (François Houtart, 2010, 2).

#### **b) Constructing another economy**

According to *buen vivir*, the economy consists of satisfying the material and spiritual needs of human beings (Juan Diego García, 2011). Karl Marx talked about the system of needs/capacities, insisting on its historical dimension, that is on its changing aspect in function of the possibilities of satisfying them. On this basis, the Ecuadorian National Plan defines the economy of *buen vivir* as: "to integrate capacities and opportunities into development" (Buen Vivir National Plan, 20). Nevertheless, it is not only a question of seeking well-being, but also of being in itself (*ibid.*, 33). Economic activity is at the service of the happiness and the quality of life, which presupposes harmonious relations with nature (Diana Quirola, 2009, 103) and also 'a balanced life' (David Choquehuanca, 2010, 64). "Only taking from nature what is necessary to satisfy needs in food, shelter, health, mobility..." (Diana Quirola, 2009, 105).

In measuring what *buen vivir* means, the GNP is not an adequate tool and other criteria have to be taken into account, taking greater account of the level of peoples' material and spiritual living conditions (Buen Vivir National Plan, 31). The concept approaches that of solidarity economics,



demands egalitarian distribution (*ibid.*, 38) and implies promoting use value over exchange value. It poses the question of limits to growth in order to preserve the natural surroundings (respect for Mother Earth). For this reason, the vision of *sumak kawsay* has to take into account, not only the processes of production, but also those of reproduction (*ibid.*, 38). Finally it is a question of giving new meaning to geographical space (*ibid.*, 20): that is, to the territories that play a central role in the life of the indigenous communities.

### **c) Organizing another State**

The long struggles of the indigenous peoples have shown that they have a very negative view of the State. Not only did the colonial State radically destroy them; the post-colonial nation-State excluded them from public life. In addition, with neoliberalism the nation-State has lost much of its national status through globalized commerce. Hence the concept of a pluri-national State has been taken up by the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. It is a question of finding a difficult equilibrium between, on the one hand, the nation-State that is emerging from a neoliberal period that had reduced its functions in order to open up space for the market and, on the other, the indigenous people, who are recovering their identities and seeking their autonomy. For the National Plan of Ecuador, this means a decentralization and the organization of a 'polycentric' State, but not a weakened one (38). The conflicts between the indigenous organization in Ecuador and in Bolivia show that it is not easy to find practical solutions to this problem.

There are two different conceptions of the communal: the first conceives the community as a way of organizing a reduced segment of society (particularly rural), which, according to Floresmilto Simbaña is anachronistic and ineffectual in the contemporary situation. The other, quoting Luis Macas, considers the community as one of the key institutions "in the process of reconstructing the peoples and the ancestral nations ... [necessary] ... for the historical and ideological reproduction of the Indian peoples". According to the former leader of CONAIE, in this sense, the commune and the territory is a living totality that, as Norma Aguilar says, "is the fundamental axis that expresses and gives coherence to indige-

nous society” (Floresmilo Simbaña, 2011, 25-26). As for David Choquehuanca, he very strongly insists on ‘communal consensus’ as a way of functioning (2010, 66).

At first sight the two notions are not incompatible. The first (communal) serves as a basis in various countries (Venezuela, Bolivia) in organizing popular participation. With the exception of isolated regions, where the indigenous peoples constitute the whole territory (in Amazonia, for example), this territorial division cannot be very useful for the indigenous peoples. The second dimension (territory, community) is much broader, corresponding to the demands of the autochthonous peoples, but it is not easily transposed into norms and organization. Internal migrations and urbanization have created new social and cultural problems, which cannot be solved by decrees, only by gradual consensus. It is here that the principle of pluri-nationality (differences) should be accompanied by the principle of multi-culturalism (a collection of diversities) in a ‘national’ State (Catherine Walsh, 2008). As Boaventura de Souza says, “pluri-nationality reinforces nationalism” (2010, 22).

Sumak kawsay also implies a vision of the whole of Latin America, Abya Yala, ‘a great community’ as David Choquehuanca puts it. The Bolivian Constitution takes up this idea of “uniting all the peoples and returning to be the Abya Yala that we used to be”. Apart from the difference in content, it could be said that the concept has a certain affinity with Simon Bolivar’s ‘Great Country’ and José Martí’s ‘Our America’. However it is closer still to the ALBA (Alianza bolivariana para los pueblos de Nuestra América), which uses the concept of “grand-national”, implying initiatives at the continental level based on “solidarity, complementarity, justice and sustainable development”. Nevertheless, the autochthonous peoples, with the idea of pluri-national States, are adding in another dimension. The originality of their contribution is that Abya Yala should be constructed on the basis of buen vivir, that is, with more fundamental and integral perspectives that can strengthen Latin American integration initiatives, confronted as they are by the systemic crisis threatening the reproduction of life on the planet.

#### **d) Building inter-culturalism**

As a consequence, inter-culturalism is indispensable as a process in this period of history. It is the complementary aspect of pluri-nationality in the Andean countries, Mexico and Central America. It is an important element in building alternatives to 'development'. Recovering ancestral knowledge and combining it with modern knowledge contributes to the process of learning and unlearning (Diana Quirola, 2009, 107). Nevertheless it is not only a cultural process, for there are social and political relationships to consider. Inter-culturalism is an illusion in unequal societies and where transnational corporations monopolize knowledge. For this reason a collective vision is necessary.

There needs to be a discourse transmitting the orientations of a criticism of capitalism and sharing the requirements of post-capitalist construction in a way that is understandable by everyone and adapted in each language. The multicultural expression of the message is a condition for its success: the Left has a lot to learn in this field. There are already the theoretical bases for this kind of multiculturalism in Latin America – in the thinking of Mariátegui and in the texts of Sub-Commander Marcos – but there still remains a lot of work to be done.

#### **3. Deviations of the Buen Vivir concept**

There are two kinds of deviations from the buen vivir concept: fundamentalist and instrumental recovery. The former expresses the defence of nature exclusively in an anthropomorphic language, as can be seen in various documents at the Earth Summit in Cochabamba in 2010. It is what J. Medina calls 'the postmodernism of buen vivir (cited by Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 8) and others, less indulgent, describe it as 'pachamamism'. In other words, and as we explained at the beginning, this position consists of expressing the holistic view of the world – necessary in reconstructing a new relationship with nature – exclusively through a symbolic way of thinking, insisting that only such an expression is legitimate. Evidently this perspective is not easily understood and accepted by other cultures in a pluralist world. This discourse can be heard among the indigenous leaders involved in a tough social struggle and who use the

cultural apparatus of their tradition. Not only do they have the right to do so, their positions must be respected. At least they have a moral superiority over the capitalist discourse. However it is less acceptable when the discourse comes from intellectuals – indigenous or not – who want to be critical, both about modernity and radical postmodernism, and who tend to think that, from a political viewpoint, only cultural pluralism can bring about positive results.

The other deviation is the instrumentalization of the vocabulary by some of its adversaries or by the political power. Sumak kawsay is transformed into ‘the redistribution of development’, as René Ramírez says (2010, 24). In other words, it is changed into the opposite of what it means. This leads to promoting extractive policies or monoculture (to provide the resources to be redistributed), using the language of buen vivir, without even talking about transition. However, as Eduardo Gudynas says, the concept is being banalized: it is used to refer to social assistance policies in favour of the poor, or that it is only a claim by the indigenous people, or repeated as a slogan that finally loses its meaning. In some cases, the Government takes on the leadership of campaigns to promote it that are not very participatory (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011, 15). Other terms, like inter-culturalism meet a similar fate (Gabriela Bernal, 2011). Evidently this is the price of glory: if buen vivir were not so strong, it would not be so easy to appropriate.

#### **4. The political role of the concepts of sumak kawsay and suma qamaña**

Our remarks do not imply that the recognition of the notion buen vivir is not politically important. This has been proved by the changes in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions and also by the drawing up of the Buen Vivir National Plan in Ecuador. In both cases they show a serious effort to understand the concepts and their possible applications. They also involve a considerable intellectual honesty and have given rise to intensive work.

### **i) In the Constitutions**

In the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions the respective concepts of *buen vivir* and *vivir bien* were introduced as a fundamental basis. The indigenous words were used to express them (Ecuador, Articles 14 and 71; Bolivia, Article 8), which is quite significant.

The Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 specifically affirmed the Rights of Nature that belong to it and are independent of their utility for human beings (Albert Acosta, 2008, 24, and 2009, 44; Eduardo Gudynas 2009b, 38 and 40, and 2010, 14). This is, according to the spirit of the juridical text, an essential aspect of implementing *sumak kawsay* (Article 71). We explain this below. On the other hand, there are two components of the project in the document: the development regime (Title VI) and the *buen vivir* regime (Title VII), the first being at the service of the second. It is for this reason that the reference is to another development (Eduardo Gudynas, 2009a, 275), in which the quality of life, a fair juridical system, popular participation and the recovery and conservation of nature are key elements. Some are positive: the rights of *buen vivir* (food, healthy surroundings, water, communication, education, housing, health, etc.), which are of the same stamp as classic rights. Others are negative: for example, the rejection of neoliberalism and the opposition to the extractive-exporting model of development (Alberto Acosta, 2009, 24).

The philosophy of the Bolivian Constitution is very similar. The *suma qamaña* or *vivir bien* is at the base of it: “The Bolivian economic model is pluralistic and is oriented to the quality of life and living well” (Art. 306). Thus *suma qamaña* is taken up and promoted as the ethical-moral principle of the plural society of the country. In contrast with Ecuador, the notion of the Rights of Nature were not introduced into the Bolivian Constitution. Its approach is closer to the third generation of rights of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations (Eduardo Gudynas, 2011b, 236). Nevertheless, the link between indigenous knowledge and traditions is clearly spelt out (*ibid.*, 235). As in the case of the Ecuadorian Constitution, the practical consequences are to be seen in many aspects of collective life: the generation of the social prod-

uct, fair redistribution of wealth and, not without ambiguity, the industrialization of natural resources (Art.313).

## **ii) In Ecuador's Buen Vivir National Plan, 2009-2013**

The drawing up of Ecuador's Buen Vivir National Plan bases itself on the Constitution to clarify its thinking and its analyses. According to its authors, it is first a question of recognizing the actors who have been historically excluded and to adopt forms of the production and reproduction of life that differ from the logic of the market and acknowledging the differences of peoples (inter-culturalism) (2009, 43). They consider that the human being is central and that the economy must be at the service of life. This means overturning the perverse logic of capitalism whose motor depends on accumulation. "The logic of the accumulation of capital [must be] subjected to the logic of the extended reproduction of life" (ibid.).

On the other hand it is recognized that the link with nature is organic (life is indivisible), which implies recognizing nature's rights. It is not a case of 'natural resources' but rather 'the space in which life is carried out'. For this reason, Nature has "the right for its existence to be wholly respected and that its vital cycles, structures, functions and evolving processes maintained" (Articles 71 and 72) (ibid.).

These principles require practical application, a task that is then taken on by the Plan. It is a question of improving the quality of life and with it developing the capacities and potentialities of human beings, promoting equality through the redistribution of social goods and the benefits of development. Such an objective cannot be carried out without genuine participation of the people, recognition of cultural diversity, living in harmony with nature, a sound economic system, national sovereignty and Latin American integration.

As far as the Plan is concerned, the concept of 'development' is in crisis and there should be a moratorium while the principle of buen vivir (2009, 31) is established in its place: in other words, the possibility of achieving a full life and building harmony with the community and with the cosmos. Already Aristotle thought that the ultimate aim of human beings

was happiness. In the ancestral way of thinking of the indigenous peoples, there is the notion of 'full life', which is only possible if the reference is to 'us' and not to 'oneself'. "The community is the support and basis for the reproduction of the collective subject, which is what everyone is, [which makes it possible] to be part of that totality in a spiral, not a linear perspective" (ibid., 32). The link with nature is central and its elements 'are angry' because it is being destroyed by a false definition of development. According to the introductory part of the Plan, the two concepts reject "a fragmented vision of development, that is economic and concentrated on the market". It is the function of the Plan to translate these ideas into concrete policies through participatory planning, decentralization and genuine participation in diverse fields: rights, the different aspects of common goods, etc.

An analysis of this document shows that *sumak kawsay* is a new word for integrated development, inspired by the tradition and the discourse of the indigenous peoples and that it wishes to propose, through its original contribution, a change of paradigm from the capitalist conception of development. There are similar intellectual efforts being made in African and Asian societies and it is the bringing together of all these initiatives that help to clarify the objectives of the diverse social movements and political organizations that are struggling for a change of society.

Clearly, both the Constitutions and the National Plan are written documents and do not necessarily reflect realities. There is a broad tradition that seeks juridical perfection in Latin America without being overly concerned about its application. Nevertheless, certain discourses can 'perform', as is said in linguistics, and serve as a reference for action. This is the reason why the indigenous movements are struggling in Ecuador, Bolivia and other countries on the continent to obtain recognition of their nationalities in juridical texts and are still using ancestral language to express certain concepts, like *buen vivir*. Some people describe the *Buen Vivir* National Plan as a beautiful 'poem because the great principles, expressed in a very valid philosophical and anthropological language, are in the final analysis allegories that are not applicable – or worse still, a

parallel discourse for very different political practices. Only a self-critical analysis can resolve this dilemma.

## **5. The relationship between Buen Vivir and the Common Good of Humanity**

During the 2008-2009 session of the United Nations General Assembly, the concept of the Common Good of Humanity was presented as a way out of the multiple crises that affect humanity and the planet. It was not only a question of proposing regulations of the capitalist system, but rather alternatives to its logic of the creation of wealth at the cost of serious ecological destruction and deep social inequalities.

The Common Good of Humanity means the production and reproduction of life and it serves as a reference and a fundamental parameter for human social organization and for relationships with nature. In this case, the meaning of good is to 'be' and not to 'have', that is, to 'live'. In contrast, the logic of capitalism leads to death – of the human species and of nature. Therefore there has to be a broader meaning than the 'commons' which are however indispensable to satisfy the necessities of collective and personal life and have been so brutally demolished by neoliberalism. The Common Good of Humanity also has a meaning that goes beyond the Common Good, as opposed to Individual Good and which has been considerably weakened by the individualism of economic liberalism. The Common Good of Humanity takes on these two notions in its conception and in its translation into concrete practice.

If it is to be implemented, it is necessary to fulfil the basic requirements of the collective life of humanity on earth, that is, the relationship with nature and the recognition of the need to regenerate the earth, the material production for living, collective social and political organization and the expression of meaning and ethics. The Common Good of Humanity is put forward as an aim, an ideal, a utopia (in the positive sense of the word), that should guide action.

It is evident that the concept of the Common Good of Humanity and those of *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña* are very close: the two latter



are other expressions by other peoples and other cultures that it would be interesting to study. Certain religious expressions, that give a 'post-historical' reference to the human project, often have similar contents, rich in motivation for social action (the kingdom of God and its values in the Theology of Liberation and similar terms in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism). Satisfying Marx's system of 'needs/capacities' also has an affinity with the idea of the Common Good of Humanity that should be emphasized. Finally, it could be said that the concept of *sumak kawsay*, for its part, genuinely contributes to understanding the concept of the Common Good of Humanity.

# WHAT MODERNITY? WHAT INTERCULTURALITY?

## REFLECTIONS FROM SOUTH AMERICA

GABRIELA BERNAL CARRERA

### Introduction: what modernity?

It is a complicated task to try and trace the convergences between European, Latin American, African and Asian priorities because, in spite of all our new communications techniques, we simply cannot connect ourselves with the daily reality of all these worlds. The new technology has opened a door which it is impossible to pass through, even cursorily. The pressure of our everyday experiences is so intense that it is impossible to transmit them across these technological thresholds. This makes it difficult to find a starting point for analyzing the urgent needs felt by humanity at this complex historical moment.

Setting aside the discourses that write off the historical responses of colonized peoples as 'social resentment', it is precisely in the re-reading of colonial history that we can find a point of departure. As far as the present work is concerned, which seeks to reflect on the role that interculturality should play in forming the notion of the 'Common Good of Humanity', history enables us to identify the oppressive forms that cultural differences have created for a large part of humanity.

In the long process that is history, we can identify the conquest of the Americas as a departure point for both colonizers and colonized. We choose this as a milestone, not so much for its geographical relevance, but because after the 'Discovery' there was a change in the notion of 'We' as Humanity in the European world: the 'We' which took shape first in theological discussions about the humanity of 'The Other' (in other words Indian) and which has reasserted itself these days with discussions about the parameters for implementing or measuring the development of underdeveloped peoples. The arguments that are made from time to time in scientific circles and international organizations when discussing the plight of 'the losers' are more or less a continuation

of the debates among the 'winners' about recognizing the humanity of 'The Other'.

The worldwide colonial experience has thus been identifying one part of the population as the conquered and the other as the conqueror. This has encouraged some to take over political decision-making for the whole of humanity and others to resist their impositions in all sorts of ways. The colonial experience also assumed the task of continually shaping and maintaining a defensive discourse in terms of scientific norms, to justify or to discredit the knowledge and feelings of the different peoples of the world. Subjectivity, political practices, the engendering of knowledge, among other things, all respond to the development of a 'We' that does not include all of humanity.

However, to analyze the present situation as if the Conquest and the whole colonization process ended with the formation of the modern republics, is to ignore the processes of internal colonialism that developed, rooted in the subjectivities of the new nation states. It is true that, outside the territory of the 'New World', European colonial peoples also ended their subjection with the liberation struggles of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is most remarkable about the colonial process is its ability to reconfigure itself and adapt to different historical moments across all parts of the world.

It is possible to consider colonialism as an ongoing process if we incorporate two of its basic elements into the analysis: 'actually existing' modernity and capitalism. Modernity, as a human process linked to the development of techniques and co-opted by capitalism, has been exhaustively examined by Bolívar Echeverría (1989, 2007, 2008). He postulates that modernity is not the exclusive heritage of any one region in the world: it is necessary to consider it as an essentially human phenomenon, which has been turned into a synonym for capitalism and 'the West'.

There are many peoples around the world who have responded creatively to the challenges posed by relationships with nature, by using techniques that enable "human societies to build their civilized life on

an entirely different basis of interaction between human beings and nature” (Echeverría, 2008:9). If there is to be a different interaction between humans and nature there will have to be a new kind of technology that makes it possible to decide on “the introduction of new means of production and promoting the transformation of the technical structure of its tools and equipment.” (Echeverría, 2008:9). In this sense, changing productivity as the key to human work makes it possible, for the first time, to look at the relationship with nature, the non-human, as one of collaboration, and not to regard it as an enemy that has to be subjugated through ritual. This is what Echeverría terms ‘potential’ modernity.<sup>116</sup>

This potential modernity would make it possible to realize the basic essence of modernity among as many peoples as exist. However, the development of modernity has been coupled with the region known as ‘the West’, because of the expansion and productivity generated by this technical revolution. There were two reasons why Europe and capitalism became synonymous with modernity. First, the region is relatively small compared with other continents so that it was easier for a more rapid exchange in the different forms of this technical revolution (neotechnics). Secondly, features of capitalist attitudes were already present in the European mercantilist economy. These two factors enabled the modernity of European industrial capitalism to impose itself as Modernity at a world level.

Nevertheless, this ‘actually existing’ modernity, this capitalist modernity, has constantly been revealing its cracks. The modernity of industrial capitalism discards the possibility of a different relationship with nature and continues to see it as an enemy that has to be worked, to be exploited. As concerns the theme of the present work, it should be noted that one

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<sup>116</sup> Potential modernity can be described as the positive response of civilized life to a factor hitherto unknown, that productive practice recognizes when it ‘perceives’ that the key to the productivity of human work no longer lies in the improvement or inventive use of inherited technology but has moved on to concentrate on the invention of new technologies. That is to say, not in the gradual perfecting of the old tools, but in the planned introduction of new tools (Echeverría, 2008:11)

of the names most frequently used to refer to the American indigenous populations was 'natives'. The status of 'natives' which in the colonial period was applied to the peoples of America and in the forms of oppression that were established (and which are still maintained), also express this idea that natives, like nature, had to be treated as enemies to be subordinated, and not as possible partners.

The triumph of this capitalist version of modernity over other possibilities also generated a perpetual fragmentation of the various ways of being and understanding life: the public, which should be viewed as a matter of collective well-being, as opposed to the private, which does not affect everyone but only certain individuals: the analytical, which confers a legitimate and desirable character on rationality, as opposed to the symbolic, which sees itself as an unvalidated sphere and therefore of lower value, more concerned with some human beings than with others. The modern European "We" is seen as being pale-faced, masculine, educated, master of the public sphere as it exists. At the same time, this modern European "We" assumed its own historical process was the only valid one, the universal destiny, always in contrast to 'The Other' - those others who, although they belong to the human race, always see themselves as being part of the non-human. Thus the face of capitalist modernity (pale-faced, masculine, educated, conquering) creates around itself the notion of 'whiteness' (Echeverría, 2007:2), which is inherent in the triumphant spirit of capitalism.

For those peoples who are not part of the modern capitalist "We", the contradictions are posed in terms of tradition vs. modernity, civilization vs. barbarism, development vs. under-development, success vs. failure. And we are analyzed in this way both by ourselves and by foreigners. However, all cultural arguments that accommodate capitalism are welcome, whereas those that question it are seen as 'essentialist' and are condemned. All differences are permitted and can be supported by capitalism as long as they do not question accumulation and consumption. We see this every day, thanks to the effective work of the cultural industries, which have the power to show us that only accumulation and

consumption will convert us into 'modern' human beings. Accumulation and consumption alone are the requirements for obtaining our national identity cards for this unattainable, modern capitalist "We".

The apparent dichotomy of tradition/modernity obliges each people to abandon their own sense of themselves, emphasizing one particular interpretation of the relationship of human beings with nature, with other human beings and with themselves. Nowadays, modernity signifies consumption, which is the tip of the iceberg in understanding how the different kinds of personal relationships are established. We therefore ask: what modernity? Questioning concepts and perceiving them as a political project is no idle exercise because it involves us in a sphere of struggle against a project that dehumanizes us all. Thus this text aims to reflect on how we have understood 'interculturality' in one colonized country of South America, the uses to which its meaning has been put, and how concepts are converted into political weapons that directly influence peoples' lives.

Given that the fact of unending colonialism determines the limits of the 'We' and 'The Others' of capitalism and of 'actually existing' modernity, multiculturalism, as a recognition of the cultural diversity in everyday life among different cultures, cannot be an objective in itself. It is only a point of departure for moving towards interculturality, which cannot only be seen as an aesthetic contribution to the development of humanity. It is necessary that the peoples with their various cultures have the opportunity to participate actively and creatively in the construction of the paradigms necessary for the production and reproduction of life in this world.

At the present time, the situation in Europe, which is undergoing economic crisis and becoming aware of the gravity of the problems created by climate change, is to some extent different from what is happening in Latin America. In the Andean region, especially, it is urgent to put into practice the juridical provisions that have been developed in the new Constitutions (Ecuador, 2008; Bolivia, 2009), with all the challenges this involves, both for the State and for social movements. However, the

world crisis has not been felt with the same intensity in the Andean region as it has in Europe. In this sense the struggles for different conceptual developments have their different nuances, as a result of having to respond to different situations.

Here we focus on the Andean experience: we will show how interculturality as a concept can be used as another way of perpetuating unequal social relationships. That is why it is essential to establish that social actions also involve an element of cultural emancipation. This does not mean we should adopt a culturalist position, but that we must give opportunities for mutual questioning among the cultures, about the contexts in which such actions take place, and thus for the possibility of introducing into many dynamic cultures (that is, those in a process of change) the practical requirements for the life of humanity and of the planet. In other words, the Common Good of Humanity.

### **Uses, abuses and failures of interculturality<sup>117</sup>**

For many countries, among them Ecuador, culturally different populations have traditionally been analyzed, both in political and scientific terms, as a problem. In Latin America we have inherited from the indigenous past a phrase that clearly reflects the attitude of the nation-State towards the indigenous population: the indigenous problem. In spite of the ever-expanding publicity that the indigenous peoples of our sub-continent have received over the last twenty years, both State and non-governmental projects continue to refer to the indigenous populations as being a problem. It would seem that the term 'indigenous' is always associated with a problem or problems in the plural: economic, cultural, social, linguistic, political, educational – in sum, problems of all kinds. Clearly, from the indigenous viewpoint, the problem lies in the colonial power structures upon which the order of the State is based, as also in the social order and the cultural regime itself.

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<sup>117</sup> The reflections here are based on concrete experience in Ecuador, the struggles of the indigenous organizations of this country and one's own experience as a woman. Thus we acknowledge the inconclusive nature of this text.

Given these supposed problems, the efforts to solve the question in Latin America are always aimed at the 'integration' of the indigenous population into a single mixed-race (*mestizaje*), thus combining the worst vices and roots of the colonial past. This mixed-race ideal has become national policy, its degree of success in the different countries depending on the various kinds of resistance of the indigenous peoples and the strength that they have built up. However, after 500 years of conquest and colonization, the vigour of the indigenous peoples in protecting their own culture highlights the failure of the mixed-race concept as a basis for national coexistence. For it must not be forgotten that this mixed-race concept was based on acts of social violence, such as the violation of women's bodies and the exploitation of labour, as well as on those symbolic acts of violence that negated the very existence of 'The Other' and its future possibilities (rooting out 'idolatry', the denunciation by sons of their fathers, etc.). Indeed, the mixed-race ideal, far from unifying, has generated a myriad of different identities based on the racialisation of people, attempting to mask the real traumas of domination.

The notion of presenting the indigenous people as a problem (Trujillo, 1993) is a response to the modernizing process, and to the construction of a capitalist economy in countries like Ecuador. The underlying assumption is that the indigenous peoples present an insurmountable hurdle obstructing the future advance of capitalism as a destiny. In sum, the social concept of them and 'The Other' as being stuck in the past (Fabian, 1983), is not only a distortion of reality, but above all generates the perception that these 'others' are an obstacle hindering the construction of a capitalist nation-state, based either on the idea of Infinite Progress (during the 19th century), or of Development as the goal of humanity (in the 20th century). Far-off and alien - distant in both time and space - the consequences of thinking of distinct cultures based on these premises, continually manifest themselves at the local, national and global level, and are the direct descendants of capitalism.



### **A brief recapitulation on the ambiguity of the word 'interculturality'<sup>118</sup>**

For the modern State, the need to integrate or mix the indigenous populations meant developing educational policies aimed at their integration as one unique national project. The plans for educating the indigenous peoples on the whole continent were based on the assumption that Western and Christian education would transform them, eliminating their 'defects'. The idea of education as a civilizing project for the indigenous peoples can be traced back to colonization, and the native languages played a vital role in this. After the conquest, the missionaries realized that in order to Christianize the indigenous people, it was absolutely necessary to learn their languages. This view, that native languages were the best vehicle for Christianizing/civilizing/modernizing/ educating/developing, is still prevalent today.

The struggle between modern States and the indigenous peoples and their organizations is at the origin of interculturalism as an option for schooling, as opposed to the integration project. In this sense, its origin is linked to resistance to the educational projects that advocated bilingualism and biculturalism as the only way to educate the indigenous peoples. It gave importance to the indigenous languages, while at the same time it denied the symbolic validity of cultural practices of any other type. In subsequent discussions among the indigenous organizations, it was said that while interculturalism claimed that schools recognized the contemporaneity of the indigenous cultures, this recognition was limited to the use of language. What the indigenous people wanted was that forms of teaching/learning, their style and where they took place should all be part of the educational process.

In other words, the decision to carry out intercultural education in State educational projects was a response to the question of how to incorporate educational methods particular to the indigenous cultures; but underlying it were broader political implications about the validity and

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<sup>118</sup> This section is based on personal communication with Armando Muyolema

possible future of indigenous cultures. As Armando Muyolema, in a personal communication, put it: “interculturalism feeds a utopian fantasy: the possibility of lateral coexistence between all those who live in a ‘multi-nation’ territory. This would entail devising a totally different political order, a different system of representation, involving a more profoundly inclusive concept of utopia than the old concept of multi-nationalism. It is, as Galo Ramón has said, “a new way of thinking, one that has been trapped inside old concepts: in sum, political self-determination seen within a State order that itself needs to be newly conceived.”

However, while this was going on within the Ecuadorian indigenous organizations from the mid-1980s up to the first half of the 1990s, the German development cooperation organization GTZ financed and supported the Intercultural Bilingual Education project for Latin America and spread the concept to other countries in the region. It was quickly adopted by various organizations and countries, with different levels of serious reflection and in-depth studies of the implications of this intercultural proposal.

In the 1990s the word began to be used widely and this was linked, among other things, to the commemorative events of the 500 years of Indigenous Resistance in 1992 and to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples in 1993.

### **The ‘ethnic’ experts and the interculturality of the 1990s**

International assistance gave large sums of money during the 1990s for development projects for indigenous populations. In Ecuador, the World Bank’s showcase project, which was implemented between 1998 and 2004, was PRODEPINE (Project for the Development of the Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian people of Ecuador). Claiming to respond to the specific cultural needs of the indigenous peoples, it was sold as a development project ‘with an indigenous face’. Victor Bretón (Bretón, 2001, 1005, 2005b, 2006, 2007) made an in-depth analysis of how the most visible results of this project did little or nothing to remedy the structural poverty suffered by the indigenous population of the country. On the contrary, they showed that the political approaches of the strong indige-

nous movement had been resoundingly rebuffed. This became evident in the first uprisings of this decade.<sup>119</sup>

Confronted by the political strength of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement and its great power to mobilize people, the World Bank, in partnership with the State, had pledged to accept and support requests that expressed their special cultural needs – always on the condition that they do not “question the logic of the neoliberal model of capitalist accumulation of the turn of the century” (Bretón, 2007:98). Profiting from the impulse towards ‘development projects’, two basic objectives were convincingly achieved: 1) to cushion the social cost of the neoliberal model by giving capital to the indigenous organizations themselves; and 2) to divert the key discussions by the leadership and the grassroots on themes such as the structural factors of indigenous poverty, towards only one possible area of negotiation: the number and costs of the projects to be implemented.

The logic of handing over money for development projects to the indigenous peoples corrupted certain leaders, turning them away from a process that had been offering a fruitful political alternative to capitalism and the more traditional forms of politics.<sup>120</sup>

Perhaps more serious in the long run was that the development projects that claimed to have an ‘indigenous face’ hollowed out the real meaning of the word *cultura*. This led to cultural expressions being reduced to mere folklore, which easily became goods for the consumption of eco-

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<sup>119</sup> Two events, in particular, should be mentioned: in June 1990, when there was a resolution of the land tenure problems that the Agrarian Reforms of 1963 and 1973 had left unresolved, and in 1994 in a response to the Law of Agrarian Reform which, before the defeat of the Agrarian Reforms, claimed to promote an entrepreneurial capitalist approach to agriculture

<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that when the World Bank proposed a PRODEPINE II in 2004 to national indigenous organizations like CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), they categorically refused its implementation and the programme came to an end

logical, esoteric and simply ethnic tourism. The search for funds for projects exacerbated cultural plurality to such a degree that the possibility of building up a solid political project to face capitalism and the centralized nation-State was slowly undermined. In this way ethnicity became yet one more exercise in power, and in the colonial logic that imposed specific conditions for defining the authenticity of indigenous populations, which were always on the outside edge of contemporary life. The discussions on authenticity, that enabled access to project funding, gave birth to 'essentialist' positions, reinforcing exotic stereotypes that were easier to publicize on the world market, like a kind of living museum. Thus the old colonial trap set once again, using the concepts of time and space to dismantle any proposal that came from culture, and which could question the claim of capitalism as the only possible time and space.

This way of understanding culture (as folkloric goods for tourism) adopted the word 'interculturality' as its own, and its use was extended to form part of the conditions for financing the various projects. Meanwhile, the original meaning of the word was becoming blurred even inside indigenous organizations. Discussions and reflection on how to connect the richness of the symbolic, political, economic and educative elements of the indigenous world with a State whose intention was to unify and homogenize, were pushed to one side.

### **From interculturality to multiculturality**

From the mid-1990s up to the present day, the search for a supposed authenticity of the indigenous populations, oriented towards obtaining resources for development, was expressed through the creation of maps locating the various ethnic groups, defining how many different cultures exist, where they are to be found, and, of course, specifying their cultural particularities. The power of naming, of defining who is who, where they live and how many they are, is a colonial exercise that has not yet ended. But in this exercise of naming, demarcating and certifying the authenticity of peoples with different cultures. nothing is said about the mestizaje and even less about the descendants of other peo-

ples. Those whose names are not included on these maps - which turn subjects into minorities and diminish them - remain strong. "I believe that the essentialist and compartmentalized approach to ethnicity forms part of the strategies of the elites to reinforce their power, and that in this fragmented world, without any doubt, those whose names are left off the map - the people of mixed race - are those who command and organize the political society" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2008:4).

The spatial demarcation of populations into specific cultures, as an exercise in power, can have perverse effects in two practical respects:

1) Linking authenticity to a specific place hinders the perception of cultures as living social processes that are subject to constant changes - including those of place. 2) It also hinders perception of the way violence results from the exercising of power of one culture over another - in other words the social relationships that are constantly making themselves felt in all the interstices of coexistence between different cultures: in the streets of the cities, the schools, the airports, the transport systems, etc. But at the same time it magnifies violence inside the various cultural groups by focusing on territory. Spatial demarcation also leads to the notion that the best way of coexisting is by setting up ghettos. However, ghettos not only deny the right to make use of space as something inherent in humanity; they also negate the possibility of co-existing - in the sense of learning from others.<sup>121</sup>

The thinking that had been putting forward interculturalism as a possibility by imagining a different economic, social and political order, has in fact been undermined by these maps which claim to identify and locate

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<sup>121</sup> The idea of Indigenous Territorial Districts, which was accepted by the new Ecuadorian Constitution in 2007 aimed at reducing the socio-political conflicts that were the result of the political demands being made by the indigenous organizations, based on their questioning of the reigning development model. When the State gave these territories to the indigenous peoples, it did not take into account the different political currents within the indigenous movement. It was only a recognition of cultural diversity, but it hindered the cultures from developing a real political option for the whole country. In Bolivia the same thing is happening. See Rivera Cusicanqui, 2008

the different cultures. And when the cult of the Indians receded, when they had fragmented into social groups, when money for development was finished, it was clear that the idea of interculturality was for people to be all together in the same space, without showing the power relationships and hiding the class conflicts, including those within the indigenous populations themselves. From interculturality as a utopia, the move was to interculturality as goods for tourism.

Emphasis on the 'lite' characteristics of the cultures (those that make differentiation possible without contesting the logic of capitalism) led to interculturality being experienced as multiculturalism, which is certainly a point of departure, but which is very far from the interculturality proposal that had been worked out by the Ecuadorian indigenous organizations of the 1980s. This interculturality 'lite' always conceals the fact that the development discourse, with all the money poured into the structural poverty of everyone, actually maintains intact the logic of capitalist colonial domination.

### **When rural living ends, the challenges of the city begin**

It has already been mentioned that space and time are the two key elements underpinning domination based on cultural difference. When entire peoples are condemned to live eternally in the past because of their culture, it in fact essentializes them: forcing on them models that are always rigid, static and dead. No living culture can be essentialized. Defining and demarcating the spaces for peoples with specific cultures to live, makes them exotic. The idea of existence as a place where everything good or everything bad exists in total forms, obscures and dehumanizes entire peoples and regions. And behind the essentializing and exoticizing, the voices of power are concealed, fixing the parameters of who is who and where and how they may exist. Existence outside these systems is persecuted or, more easily, delegitimized by a judgement that excludes someone from membership of a group: acculturation or mixed-race status as a verdict of that judgement are two of the strategies most utilized.

Almost all subjugated cultures have been exclusively relegated to rural areas: their own symbolic space has been defined as rural. Accordingly, development projects always aim at building so-called interculturality in the rural areas. This makes the place and its inhabitants exotic, while fostering the sale and promotion of cultural expressions as goods - like, for example, the Andean markets, that are now being included in the tourist circuits. However reality cannot be pinned down and always occurs outside the established dictates.

And the reality is that urbanization is mushrooming in the whole of Latin America. In former times, migration was used to explain the presence of indigenous cultures outside their 'real' territories, as a phenomenon that would inevitably lead to mestizaje or acculturation. In Europe, in certain contexts, it led to the ghetto. Povera Vieira (1994) has shown, for example in the case of the Royal Audience of Quito (1563-1822), that migration, far from facilitating cultural assimilation, became a strategy for cultural expansion simply using another kind of space. At the present time the persistence of cultural differences in urban areas shows that a change in space does not in fact necessarily involve breaking with the original culture.

The continued presence of different cultures in the urban areas is a challenge to imagining co-existence among different social practices. In fact, we see that urban life enables cultural expansion in a constantly changing dynamic (not surprisingly, since cultures are living things). But at the same time, urban life promotes encounters that overcome cultural differences. The impoverishment suffered by those who live in the great urban sprawls is indiscriminating: it does not respect religious or symbolic differences. Nevertheless, this is also the place where culture as a non-capitalist process of signification is exercising a fundamental role.

Breaking the spatial boundaries between cultures encourages learning, questions stereotypes and dispels the idea of cultural expressions as merchandise for tourism. However, it is also true that in the urban areas there is a constant risk for any culture: consumerism. Since consumerism

is the spearhead that capitalism uses to penetrate everywhere, all cultures that move into urban areas are tempted more than any others by consumerism. Young people are the most vulnerable because they are abandoned by their parents and communities: pressing economic factors prevent the 'handing down' process which is part of the cultural logic of the indigenous peoples. The overwhelming barrage of advertising which sells love, tranquillity, recognition, power and prestige has eager recipients among the youth of cultures which are battling both destitution and discrimination.

It should also be mentioned that the urban mentality is even extending into the most remote areas, thanks to the development of the new technologies and means of communication. Unfortunately this trend increases through the expansion of markets, although it is interesting to note that some opportunities are created for meetings between men and women, such as those provided through social networks on the Internet.

### **Diversity, difference and interculturality**

We have tried to show that cultural uniqueness can be considered in two ways, which necessarily depend on two distinct political approaches. If a piece of fabric is considered to be a beautiful piece of craftsmanship because of its colour, form and design, its destination, outside the cultural context in which it was produced, can only be the market: one more item of merchandise among others. However, if this same piece of fabric is seen as a message, as a text, when one is able to understand the symbolic framework linking the design, colours and textures, obviously its destiny will not be the market. The interpretation of this cultural difference and its purpose comes into play depending on whether it is produced according to capitalist colonial logic or whether it is rooted in the struggles of a political approach that claims its own manner of being and having in the world, which comes from a particular cultural experience and which can break with the logic of capitalism. This is the genuine idea of interculturalism, based on forms of relationships between different cultures.



### **Diversity, a 'lite' way of thinking about cultures**

Homi Bhabha (2002) explains that cultural diversity seeks to regard culture as an object of empirical knowledge. It would describe cultural differences in terms of ethics, aesthetics and comparative ethnology. But to acknowledge cultural expressions, it is not enough to establish a relationship between different cultures: we need also to acknowledge the political and symbolic assumptions and the whole process of cultural replication that lies behind each element. When the objects of material or symbolic culture that are most visible are considered out of their context, it usually leads, not to dialogue, but to studies of the market. Nevertheless, it is this idea of cultural uniqueness that has in fact served to construct the notion of interculturalism in Latin America. If cultural expressions are essentialized and exoticized, they are seen as a scarce commodity, to which very few have access. It is an excellent point of departure for any advertising campaign.

However, while this has been happening because of the logic of development projects, as far as the State is concerned there is no great difference, even when States declare themselves to be plurinational, as is the case with Ecuador. Tourism is seen as a 'development alternative' in whose name images have been disseminated both inside and outside the country, that portray Latin American countries as one enormous living museum, a kind of journey into the past but with all the conveniences of the present. The selling image of 'real Indians' (see Bernal, 2010) reflects an oppressive colonial reality: poverty, alcoholism and violence. However, all the modern-day professionals who see themselves as indigenous do not conform to this stereotype. Interpreting cultural difference on the basis of ethics or aesthetics promotes racism and prevents the perception of contemporary social processes as a whole.

State political messages are transmitted on national TV channels with the avowed aim of recognizing and supposedly implementing actions to generate interculturalism. Naturally the languages used is Spanish, with a small box on the screen where sign language is used for the people who have hearing difficulties (though it is impossible to distinguish it

clearly) and there are subtitles in Quechua. This is more of a mockery than a genuine recognition of the Quechua cultures of the country: the highest percentage of illiteracy in the country is found among the indigenous peoples (28.2 per cent), while the degree of functional illiteracy is around 45 per cent (SIISE, 2008) - without even mentioning that the indigenous cultures are basically oral cultures.

### **The political implications of difference**

At the time when development projects were at their height in Ecuador, many communities sought to differentiate themselves from the others in order to be acknowledged as unique on the ethnic map that the State was elaborating. Its presence on these maps meant concrete projects, money and the entry of one of its members into the nascent indigenous bureaucracy. They were continually seeking roots, traditions and limits that proved their authenticity, their cultural difference. But apart from the projects, there were no certainties: the families were the same in the upper and the lower parts of the territory; the women were debating whether to maintain traditions or leave for the cities; the youth were asking new questions about ideas and about solutions; the economic structure of the indigenous world was changing faster and faster; participation in national policies was requiring new strategies to resist the progress of neoliberalism.

There were two forces at work here: on the one hand, "the intention of dominating in the name of cultural supremacy" (Bhabha 2002:55), which was being implemented by the State and the international organizations that drew up and certified the ethnic maps. But, on the other hand, the conflicts that were taking place within the indigenous worlds, with some of them requiring "one model, one tradition, one community, a stable reference system and the necessary denial of (?) certainty in articulating new demands, practices and cultural strategies in the current political climate, which practises domination or resistance". (Bhabha. 2002:55)

There is a remarkably interesting development in the towns: the Quechua singers. Many of them are indigenous and they sing both in Quechua and in Spanish. They have their fans among both the rural and urban indigenous people and, above all, among the poor mestizos of the big cities. The daily innovations that the challenges of everyday life impose do not fall within the requirements of authenticity. However, because of the impossibility of defining them as one or the other, among academic and political mestizo circles they are considered to be in bad taste. They are not Indian enough to be folklore (high quality goods), nor 'decent' enough to be completely mestizo. If recognized as being mestizos this would necessarily imply self-recognition by those who inhabit the academic and political world, where so-called ugliness and bad taste are the general rule.

And it is precisely in this area, where the definition of 'The Other' necessarily questions one's own definition of oneself, that 'Difference' is produced: 'Difference' as a possibility of becoming part of today's world and an escape out of the classifications of the past, hence out of essentialism. It means discarding traditional rules in order to deal with the present, in other words re-creating culture – by integrating, abandoning, conserving, innovating. To talk about 'Difference' means that "the 'right' to be have meaning as a person outside authorized power and privilege should not depend on the persistence of tradition. It means drawing on the power of tradition to cope with the conditions of eventualities and contradictions that affect the lives of those who are 'in the minority'" (Bhabha, 2002:19).

Enrolling everyone in the present, acknowledging the internal contradictions of each culture, means recognizing that we ourselves do not exist as finished products in ourselves, neither as individuals, and still less as cultures. It also means recognizing that the relations which are 7 Decency is a quality that, according to Marisol de la Cadena (2004), is one of the indicators of mestizo ethnicity in the Andes established are not exclusively dualist, i.e. 'I and the Other'. It means acknowledging plurality, the multiplicity of one's own identity and that of others.

### **Interculturality or interculturalizing?**

There are a number of questions we could pose. Where does interculturality come from? Is there an interculturality that is a distinct category, a fixed entity, or is it a requirement 'lite' for obtaining funding? What does interculturality mean for States that, although they recognize so-called interculturality, are busy blasting indigenous territory 'with blood and fire' to implement mining projects for neo-development? Or are there genuine activities, linked to everyday life, that assume a questioning of oneself, as well as asking who 'The Others' are? And is it possible that a State can be intercultural while it maintains its old institutional structures which certainly continue to be colonial?

Various writers have presented interculturality as a dialogue. However, the conditions for dialogue have not been analyzed in depth. Little is said about the power relationships that open up an almost invisible gap between those participating in the dialogue. Nor is mention made, at the outset, of the ventriloquism that some elements of the population have developed to negotiate on behalf of the indigenous populations with the State (Guerrero, 1994). The leftwing mestizos have to admit that for many years they have served as the ventriloquists of the indigenous population.<sup>122</sup>

The reflections here focus mainly on two issues: posing the question about interculturality and where it comes from, and stressing the idea that interculturality does not exist as a complete entity that will just happen one day. The capacity of human beings to differentiate themselves is intrinsic and it is therefore impossible to pin down a moment or a specific situation as Interculturality. It is to be found in everyday efforts, in actions that represent an advance or a retreat. This is how interculturalism as a utopia was conceived by the indigenous communities and organizations of the 1980s.

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<sup>122</sup> In the case of Ecuador, the misunderstandings between the present government have been sustained by the great ventriloquist exercise that the leftwing mestizos (now in power) carried out in the 1990s

## Conclusions

The present crisis obliges us to look for the points on which to base political convergences and to critically confront the capitalist system. Historically, one key starting point is the colonialism that was unleashed from another part of the world, the one that embodies the modernity of industrial capitalism and claimed that it had 'discovered' another large part of humanity. However, as with other aspects of reality, the modernity of industrial capitalism divided humanity into 'We' and 'The Others'. This has had all kinds of consequences.

This same modernity imposed itself over the whole world and installed a model of civilizing development that was considered the only possible destiny. In order to sustain itself, political and economic arguments and dynamics - and even an epistemology - were constructed which, for a long time, justified the necessity that the peoples of the earth submit to the modernity of industrial capitalism.

It has to be acknowledged that, of all the forms of modernity that the world has known, the most effective and functional so far achieved has been the modernity of industrial capitalism (see Echeverría, 1989). Based on the certainty of infinite progress (in time the idea developed that technical efficiency would be able to counteract any limitations imposed by nature), the modernity of industrial capitalism seemed supported by enough arguments to show its eternal relevance and validity. The core of the whole project generated the feeling of an inexhaustible abundance that is not generated by nature but by technology developed by human reason.

However the ecological disasters that we are already witnessing (climate change, not to mention the inability to control the nuclear tragedy in Japan) are proof to the contrary. Apart from the huge commercial centres (malls), the feeling is not one of abundance but of increasing desperation. Here the failure of the modernity of industrial capitalism comes up against a very special problem. This is the need to recognize, at all governmental and social levels, that the false sense of abundance, of

wealth without limits, has come to an end. This offers us an important opportunity for unmasking capitalism to show it up in all its brutality.

There is no doubt that the modernity of capitalism has succeeded in selling a notion of truth and security, supported by science, technology, production and consumption. But in fact this security is rather more fragile than it might seem. Capitalism and its modernity need constantly to recycle terms that they pick up from the most diverse places. This is the case of interculturality, a term which like others (most recently in the case of Sumak Kawsay and Suma Qamana) has been emptied of its initial political content in order to serve the system.

The struggle for concepts is necessarily a political struggle. A struggle for meaning from different milieux, from other possibilities for meaning, in order to be able to be different. Struggling for the meaning of these concepts is a constant fight against symbolic usurpations that constantly take place without reference to the future, for those who are trying to realize a historic project that is different from the one offered by capitalism and its modernity.

## Chapter III

# THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY SEEN FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

## 1 The Workers' Movement

### A COMMENT FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF WORKERS <sup>123</sup>

EDUARDO ESTÉVEZ MARTIN <sup>124</sup>

The 'common good' and the conservation of the 'common goods' have been fundamental objectives of the workers' movement, which later developed into a trade union movement and is now moving towards the building of a movement of workers. It is a contradictory concept of the model of neo-liberal capitalism from which we are presently suffering and that favours individualism and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a minority which is richer every day, with a growing majority that every day is poorer and more marginalized.

The text certainly deepens the analysis and situates it in the present serious systemic crisis that is overwhelming the [whole] world, particularly the more developed countries, although it doubtless have an impact on the whole of humanity if governments do not succeed in taking over responsibility for the control of the financial world.

In fact, at the present time the responsibility of the State as a guarantee of the 'common good' is being influenced, limited or greatly conditioned by the financial groups, linked to the huge transnational corporations (oil companies, medical laboratories, agro-industrial complexes, agro-chem-

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<sup>123</sup> This is a personal comment. However, it is based on different documents, declarations and positions taken by organizations.

<sup>124</sup> Former Secretary General of the Latin American Confederation of Public Service Workers (CLATSEP), ex Assistant Secretary General of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). Adviser to the Argentine Workers' Central Union and other worker organizations in Latin America

ical companies, etc.) and to the 'military industrial complex' (as was denounced by General Eisenhower at the end of his mandate as President of the United States), not forgetting the control of the enormous communication (or disinformation) media.

In a society based on a perspective of 'common good', finance must fulfil the fundamental mission of developing the real economy (production of goods and services) while the economy should be at the service of human beings, men and women, with equal dignity and rights. Today we are living in an upside-down world with the still dominant model (although in a profound terminal crisis) whereby people work to serve the economy (supremacy of capital over labour) and what is known as the real economy is controlled and conditioned by the financial market, particularly by speculation.

In this text on the 'common goods' and the 'Common Good of Humanity' there are many detailed analyses and proposals that converge with the perspectives of the organized workers, even though there are some definitions that do not meet with consensus in the trade union movement. I am going to concentrate on the former.

### **Politics at the service of Capital**

Where are the governments that are really governing? Politics (the politicians) has yielded to the interests of the large corporations. Even the politicians who have progressive ideologies are unable to carry out proposals and programmes, because the power of the economic and financial elite prevents them from doing so. After living in a bipolar world (United States/Soviet Union), we have passed to a unipolar world, with a new hegemonic power: financial capital, associated with the huge transnational corporations, dominated mainly by the United States.

This text compellingly analyzes the various crises that we are at present undergoing (financial, economic, food, energy, climate, etc.), the accumulation of which has clearly transformed into a systemic crisis. As for the financial crisis, it shows that it began when, as Jorge Beinstein affirmed (quoted in paragraph 11 of the document), "a virtual economy



takes precedence over the real economy; in other words when financial capital begins to be more profitable than productive capital". The Argentinian trade unionist Miguel Gazzera was saying more or less the same thing already at the beginning of the 1980s.

This is in line with the vision of the international workers' movement. In its Declaration to the Summit of the G20 that met in Cannes in November 2011, Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), stated: "The pressure of public opinion on the governments to take action in the interests of people and not bankers will continue to increase. Citizens are indignant. The international trade-union movement is in Cannes to demand measures and reforms that respond to the justified indignation."

The same union leader, in her presentation of the Proposals of the Trade-Union Movement to the Secretariat for the Sustainable Development Summit (RIO + 20) affirmed:

"Governments have to understand that if there is not a drastic change in the way that the world is governed, it will be impossible to achieve social equality and environmental protection. The trade-union movement is prepared to mobilize to produce a genuine transformation in production systems so that they offer decent work and prosperity, at the same time respecting natural resources for future generations."

In the South Area Forum on the 'Crisis of Capitalism, of Welfare Society and of Work' that took place in Madrid in November 2010 these same ideas were expressed and can be briefly summed up. Not only do governments not govern and politics are being controlled by economics and the speculative financial groups, but the fundamental values of democracy – equality, solidarity, justice, equity, ethics, etc. – have been subverted and replaced by individualism, the accumulation of wealth, concentration and the slogan "everyone for themselves".

At the ILO, governments, together with employers and workers, were able to reach important agreements and norms (Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Decent Work Agenda, Global Jobs Pact) but

then the same governments are taking measures and implementing programmes that violate and contradict agreements that they themselves have adopted. As Victor Baez, Secretary General of the Argentinian Trade-Union Confederation (CSA), rightly declared: "the international norms as a whole form part of the common goods that seek the common good of humanity and therefore they have to be preserved and strengthened." The international institutions are incapable of forcing the carrying out of resolutions that are reduced to simple 'wishful expressions'.

Hence it follows that when more money is made from financial speculation than in the productive activities of goods and services (that generate wealth) sooner or later the bubble will burst. In addition, we have "the free circulation of speculative capital at the global level, without controls or regulation, as well as the creation of financial instruments without real guarantees and the continuing existence of the tax havens which accumulate capital from speculation, corruption, crime, drug traffic and armaments, etc. All this inevitably results in a crisis of the economic and financial system, with serious consequences on employment, the environmental equilibrium, food, energy, the drying up of the water resources so that it constitutes a veritable systemic crisis.

I am not going to go into the details of the causes of these crises. Susan George and many others, particularly in the Madrid forum, have made important contributions to the subject.

They have particularly stressed the idea that if the governments do not govern, who governs is the military-industrial complex, the oil corporations, the banking and financial system, the medical laboratories, the huge communication and information monopolies. All these are linked and under the control of a dominant international elite which has the hegemonic power to govern the world.

As long as politics and governments (responsible for the common good) do not recover power and put it at the service of society as a whole, making the economy and finance serve human beings (men and women), we shall not see a real solution of the crisis.

A neo-liberal globalization has been imposed upon us, supported by a dominant elite that deifies the free market and weakens the State, which is relegated to its security and defence functions. Governments are forced to save the financial system and then, under threats from the private credit rating agencies, obliged to implement adjustment and austerity programmes to reduce the public deficit (which has been greatly increased by the bail-outs).

In Latin America and the other regions of the so-called developing world, we became familiar with these Structural Adjustment Programmes, imposed by the IMF and financed by the World Bank, which have had such catastrophic consequences by increasing unemployment, poverty and social marginalization, as well as a regression in social cohesion and political stability. For these adjustment programmes make the workers and the poorest sectors of society pay the price of a crisis created by the same financial and speculative groups that continue to accumulate benefits and wealth, while the States and the people become indebted and impoverished.

Already for many years the international trade-union movement has warned that this 'globalization model' is part of an unbridled capitalism (if you will excuse the repetition) that has brought about the accumulation and concentration of wealth into a few hands and the continuing increase of poverty and social marginalization.

The CSA, together with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC and the European Trade Union Confederation – ETUC), has been developing a unionism that, without renouncing the struggle and defence of the legitimate claims of the workers, goes beyond mere protest and is taking on the proposal of solutions for the short and medium term. They want to promote a new economic, social and environmental development model, based on the human being, work (which generates real wealth), and scientific and technological development at the service of the whole of society, preserving the environment, the equality of rights and opportunities, and gender equity – in other words, integral development.

## **The European experience of the Welfare State**

The economic and social development achieved in Europe in the post-war period was based on a social market economy, with an emphasis on the social. The best example was probably Germany (the leading European economic power) where workers had a genuine and participatory role in defining policies and the management of enterprises as well as the economy in general. There are also the examples of the northern countries that succeeded in promoting social peace, together with an impressive economic development and social agreements, as in countries like Belgium and the Netherlands.

We now see a frontal attack of neo-liberalism on these policies in the European Union. There are attempts to weaken (or destroy) the euro as a currency and, at the same time, to destroy the model of a welfare state that had been achieved thanks to the struggles of workers and a serious social dialogue. And the governments do not have the necessary ability and strength to prevent this. On the contrary, they introduce – as we have already said – adjustment policies (now called austerity programmes) to reduce the public deficit that will inevitably delay the recovery and reactivation of the economy, as well as the reduction of unemployment levels which in various countries (including Spain) have reached truly astronomical proportions. A merely capitalist logic, without the consumption of goods and services and without income cannot buy and consume and without the consumption of goods and services there will not be an economic reactivation. This is why the struggle of the trade unions is well aware of the need to defend the social achievements of the last 75 years and opposes the privatization of public services.

## **Possible paths to follow**

Any analysis of the documents of the international trade-union movement will show that the following themes are central: fair trade; integral development (economic, social, educational, cultural, ecologically sustainable); decent and dignified work; progressive taxation (those who earn most paying more, those who earn less paying less and those who earn nothing not paying anything); combating fraud and tax evasion; a

fair distribution of wealth; universal, integral, solidaristic and participatory social security; a tax on financial transactions, particularly those that are short-term and speculative; States that are genuinely democratic and participatory where the social actors (employers and workers) and other sectors of organized civil society are authentic protagonists; the development of renewable energies; ethics in political, economic and social action; the reinforcement and revalorization of public control bodies; gender equity and serious reform of the international institutions.

These are fundamental elements for changing the [present] situation and progressing towards a society that is local, national, regional and international and [above all] human, based on social justice and solidarity.

### **The environment and work**

In line with its fundamental role of defending the interests and aspirations of the workers, the trade-union movement also devotes its work and struggles to the right to free trade unionism, collective bargaining, security and hygiene in the work, job stability, the rights of migrant workers (starting with the right not to emigrate), non-discrimination for reasons of gender, colour or religion, fair wages, universal social security, permanent and life-long professional training, the participation of workers in the profits generated by their work – that is, the struggle for social justice.

Added to these historical struggles of the trade union movement, there has been a growing struggle to defend the environment. In fact, for a long time but mainly since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, there has been intensive work in favour of human ecology and a social ecology of human work. These are now inseparable from the struggles for the historical claims of the working class for a sustainable social and ecological development, against climate change and the greenhouse effect, the defence of humanity's water heritage, the promotion of renewable energies, the right to food and to universal education, access to health care, etc.

All these themes respond to the immediate needs of workers. Hence, in its decision to change globalization, the ITUC declared that its priorities for 2012 included the following:

- intensifying its efforts to avoid a new recession and achieve greater recovery of jobs, maintaining close ties with its work and the Rio+20 perspectives
- continuing to work with the international financial institutions to ensure that they give priority to issues of inequality and employment and turn the high-level declarations into effective changes at the national level;
- promoting the establishment of floors for social protection in all countries of the world;
- supporting the creation of a tax on financial transactions and protecting workers who are currently in precarious employment;
- launching a campaign, together with ILO's Bureau for Workers' Activities, to defend the minimum wage;
- reinforcing the network of the political economy to contribute to social and economic development through the Global Jobs Pact.

### **An exceptional testimony**

To illustrate the positions of trade-union leaders on the perspectives developed in the document on the Common Good of Humanity, we asked the opinion of Rodolfo Romero, former Assistant Secretary of the Latin American Confederation of Workers (CLAT) and leaders of the Organization of Workers in Education of Paraguay, Rodolfo Romero.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Rodolfo Romero (better known as RoRo) was the director of the Institute of Social Training for the South (INCASUR) of the University of Latin American Workers (UTAL) and Assistant Secretary General of the CLAT. He is now adviser to various Latin American trade union organizations, including the Unión Nacional de Educadores (UNE) of Paraguay

According to him, to start off on the level of principles, there are two points that have to be clarified, the concept of work and the notion of property. The view that we have of human work is somewhat misleading when described as decent work. It is said in good faith, however as a result we do not sufficiently consider the dimension and significance of work, which is one of the peculiarities of the human being and makes us different from all living beings. We should specify the dimension of dignified work as the fulfilment and liberation of the human being.

It is also essential to rethink what the right to property really involves, as all property is subject to a social hypothesis as is clearly laid down by the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>126</sup> It is not possible to continue defending the private property of a few people, in whose hands are concentrated all land, wealth and power. It is necessary to spell out very clearly what is meant by the universal destiny of goods, as a new culture can only be developed when the common goods and the Common Good of Humanity are at its centre. At present this is completely violated and distorted by neo-liberalism, which denies the existence of common good and all that this can mean: going behind individualism, mercantilism, consumerism and pragmatism.

Practically speaking, it is very important to be clear about what the State, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should be: a democratic, social State of law. As opposed to the liberal State of law, a social State of law was proposed and now it is time to develop the democratic, social State of law, as has been done by the Brazilian Confederation of Public Employees (CSPB).

Another question that is decisive for practice is participation, but it should be participation to decide and not simply to participate as in the old formula. All achievement of the common good requires establishing

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<sup>126</sup> The social doctrine of the Catholic Church affirms the principle of private property, including of the means of production, but it stresses the social responsibility of the owner. It also proposes the promotion of the common good by collaboration between all social classes

the right of participation in decision-making. Effective access to the use and regulation of common goods and services produced by humanity produces through a social process involves participatory democracy (which does not however eliminate the new meaning of bourgeois democracy, which is simply representative). This leads to autogestion or co-management, according to the situation, and to an agreement on the new vision, as is currently being expressed by the *indignés*. Organization is at the heart of all processes of participation. All this concerns the participation of the working class and of the workers' movement, side by side with other sectors of society.

Another burning topic is the question of equality and of citizenship. We cannot continue fooling ourselves with the formula that we are all equal before the law when we lack the status of citizenship with genuine rights, especially the equality of opportunity. We should remember what Hannah Arendt said: "being a citizen means having the right to all rights."

Finally, achieving the common good and the Common Good of Humanity requires a new education for a new culture, which means developing new content and new methods.<sup>127</sup> Human rights and the protection of the environment (ecology) form part of this contemporary educational effort. Education in values and in many other subjects play a central role in being able to rethink comprehensively our paradigms that have been inherited from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We must clearly spell out what this perspective involves, this new geo-political, geo-economical, geo-cultural and geo-spiritual culture, if we are to become citizens of the world where, in the future, nobody will be treated as a foreigner – a word we should eradicate from our vocabulary. The north and the south, the east and the west form a total unity within diversity, which is the greatest expression of human wealth. We are one and many at the same time. What I want to say is that we must be thinking in terms of world governance, without being tricked into capitalist

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<sup>127</sup> Work on this is being done by the trade union movement UNE/SN in Paraguay



globalization, the transnationalization promoted by the transnational corporations and the agreements on free trade designed to support imperial interests.

To crown our efforts, we must specify everything that challenges the culture of world peace and the counter-culture of imperial warfare, which has been loosed upon the whole planet. We must commit ourselves to peace, which is the product of international social justice or we shall destroy humanity.

### **By way of conclusion**

My aim has been to describe some aspects of the positions and declarations of the organized movement of workers, which converge with the theses contained in Houtart's valuable work. The importance of the text should be stressed because of its pluralist approach and the basic ideology of its theses.

In the various interventions that I have made in the World Social Forum, as representative of the World Confederation of Labour, as well as of the International Trade Union Confederation, particularly its International Council, I said that while we did not share the declaration about the end of history (as an expression of the triumph of capitalism over communism) or the end of ideologies (as an expression of the 'final' triumph of neo-liberal capitalism), we must nevertheless recognize the end of dogmatism. No one, in social, political, economic and cultural terms, has the absolute truth. We must be capable of constructing a new world society based on the supremacy of work over capital, the centrality of the human person, ecological and socially sustainable development and universal social justice. We must also acknowledge the pluralism that exists between the different strata of society that reject capitalism/neo-liberalism (the 99 per cent).

Defining as an objective the construction of a universal common good and the proposal to promote a Universal Declaration of the Common

Good of Humanity is an extremely valuable contribution to the perspective of achieving real democracy (the historical choice of the working class to obtain its liberation) and opting for life, hope and utopia. This is the reason for the call for social and political mobilization and the convergence of social and political movements at the international level. The organized trade union movement can and must play a fundamental role.

## 2 The farmers' movement

# THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY, GOOD LIVING AND THE PEASANT MOVEMENTS

IVO POLETTO<sup>128</sup>

### Introduction

My intention in this brief reflection is to clarify the relations and contributions of peasants' and indigenous peoples' practice and life proposals, so as to advance in the understanding and the quest for ways to guarantee not only the common goods of mankind to every person, but also to construct a paradigm that will make it possible to reach that common good, which is to say, "life and its reproduction."

In order to write about the organization of existential practice and the proposal for the organization of human coexistence which are present in the concept of Good Living and in peasants' practices and cultures, it is essential to exercise self-criticism. Placing the challenge in first person singular: would I be capable of understanding the richness of those experiences and proposals without the filter of the prejudices (family, religious and political) through which my ancestors have denied mankind itself, as in the case of indigenous peoples, and citizenship, as in the case of the peasants<sup>129</sup> who generously present these alternatives to mankind?

This is not a rhetorical question or one posed under false humility. What we want to highlight is the collective subject – each indigenous people and the group formed by all of them – that manages, after having sur-

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<sup>128</sup> A philosopher and social scientist. An expert on Educação Popular. In recent years he has been an advisor to the Forum on Climate Change and Social Justice. He was the first national executive secretary of the Comissão Pastoral da Terra, and advisor to Brazilian Caritas and to Pastorais Sociais da CNBB. He was part of the Program Fome Zero and he is the author of the book *Brasil – oportunidades perdidas. Meus dois anos no governo Lula*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Garamond, 2005.

<sup>129</sup> Martins, José de Souza (1981). *Os camponeses e a política no Brasil*, Ed. Vozes, Petrópolis, RJ, Brasil.

vived five hundred years of extermination decree<sup>130</sup>, to present itself as a political actor, bearer of ways of life, values, religion and millenary economic, legal and political practices from which Good Living originates, as a flower preserved with great love. It is necessary to bear in mind that these millenary practices were denied, as if they did not come from human beings. And I, who risk yielding to their proposal, cannot forget that I am a cultural and political descendant of the then so-called unique civilization, actually a very particular expression – European, modern, Christian and capitalist – of human history.

The world of peasant cultures, on its part, faced extermination decrees from capitalism and from socialism: from the former, for considering it backward; from the latter, for considering it an enemy of forced socialization, starting from the revolutionary prototype, the proletariat, and from the submission of everything and of everyone to centralized State control led by the proletariat dictatorship. So, I ask myself: am I able to grasp the wealth of its contributions to today's world, immersed in a deep crisis, without submitting it to the filter of the so-called unique civilization, Western capitalist modernity?

I undertake, as a challenge, the criticism of whatever cultural colonialism is left in me. And one of the steps in this exercise is materialized in the attitude of acceptance of what has subsisted and is presented by the peoples that survived colonization. Before any criticism, I need to ask myself if my doubts – and the doubts of others – do not carry, either consciously or unconsciously, the remnants of the supposed civilizing superiority that led my ancestors, and still leads many contemporaries, to judge these peoples incapable of generating anything better than the way of life born in Western Europe and extended all over the world through diverse forms of colonialism.

I also want to add a challenge common to those who were converted to Christianity in our Latin America. Will we be capable of being self-crit-

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<sup>130</sup> An expression used by Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, in an interview.

ical up to the point of accepting human practices more in keeping with Jesus Christ's evangelical proposal than those practiced in Christian churches? If we do not have the capacity to perceive and celebrate the presence and acts of God, – prior to the arrival of the preachers of His Word –, in the ways of life of the millenary peoples of America, as well as in the peoples that preserved the wealth of African cultures and of other peasant cultures, it turns difficult, if not impossible, to accept what has been lived and proposed through the concept of Good Living.

#### **THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY AND GOOD LIVING**

Which are the connections between what one seeks in the Common Good of Humanity and Good Living? Would Good Living be a result of the validity of the Common Good of Humanity, or would it be a path to guarantee this Common Good?

If we take into account the four basic characteristics of the world focused on the Common Good of Humanity, as elaborated in François Houtart's text: 1) to redefine the relations with Nature, of the exploitation of respect as a source of life, 2) to reorientate the production of life, favoring practical use over exchange value, 3) to reorganize collective life through the generalization of democracy in social relationships and in institutions, 4) to institute multiculturalism in the construction of the universal Common Good, we can declare that these values are already present in the life of indigenous peoples and that they are part of what those peoples continue seeking for their lives.

Through this we want to emphasize that Good Living has been the standard practice of indigenous peoples long before it became a proposal of society for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time, we want to highlight the concrete processes through which the peoples practicing Good Living enter through the door of Western democracy and modify it through the progressive introduction of the values present in their ways of living. Therefore, on carrying out changes in the environment of their territories, they create new conditions in their ways of Good Living.

## USING DEMOCRACY AND GIVING IT ANOTHER SENSE

So as not to restrict the understanding of Good Living to its philosophical dimension, it is important to take into account how indigenous peoples managed to achieve political citizenship for their values and practices. After trying to find other ways for more than five hundred years of colonialism and of invariably incomplete post-colonialism, including the revolutionary insurrections in Bolivia and Mexico, they decided to make use of the formalities of democracy as an alternative to redefine the foundations of that which was established in their own countries. In the case of Bolivia, after realizing that a candidate politically committed to the life projects of indigenous peoples would never be elected a second term, given the fact that this would always be defined in the National Congress, always controlled by the elites, they decided to struggle so as to obtain the victory in the first term by guaranteeing more than 50 % of the votes and trying to elect more than half of the members of Congress as well. That was absolutely necessary to introduce the practice of direct democracy, by means of referendums and plebiscites, as the path to consolidate Bolivia on other foundations. After months of debating and of a search for a dialogue, the innovative moment to achieve this consisted in the decision of the exclusive Constituent Assembly that it was its sovereign mission to create the Bolivian State again with other foundations; in fact, to institute democracy as real popular practice.

In the experience of Ecuador, the process is similar, but it was mediated by an economist, Rafael Correa, and not by a native. The natives reaffirmed themselves on electing him, even more so when they had the opportunity to choose, by means of a plebiscite, and they were able to determine their representatives to the exclusive Constituent Assembly. Once more their way of living, their values and their ways of political organization were recognized and incorporated, although partially, in the new Constitution.

In other words: for what reason are all of us, and so many other persons and organizations, debating on the meaning of Good Living? This is due to a historical fact: indigenous peoples present themselves as citizens,

making use of the mediation allowed by capitalist democracy, which is, equal legal power to all adult individuals of society—to each citizen, one vote –, in order to propose other ways of being and of constituting a State. In fact, in the Constituent, the natives, still elected as individuals, act as peoples and struggle so that the unity of the State be no longer defined from private property and from the competition among those who can practice free capitalist initiative – which are the real petrified clauses of modern Western democracies<sup>131</sup> – but from the territories in which each people live and from the cooperation which should exist between them and Mother Earth.

To further clarify the process of contagion of the constitutions of formally democratic societies by indigenous cultures, expressed in Good Living, while the recognition of the rights of each of the peoples that make up the multinational State made progress in Bolivia, in Ecuador this progress consisted in the recognition of the rights of Nature, of Pacha Mama. That is the reason why the political tensions and conflicts during the period of establishment of the new constitutions developed in a different way. Right now, recent news have reported the first Ecuadorean judicial decision condemning those responsible for the construction of a highway which caused the pollution and obstruction of a river, for a crime against the rights of Nature. And in Bolivia the natives mobilized to oppose the opening of a highway without the previous obligatory review foreseen in the Constitution, since the highway would tear in half their territory, called TIPNIS, and would put Amazonian biodiversity at risk. Repressed in their march towards La Paz, they won over national support from other brotherly peoples and from popular and labor union organizations. Upon resuming the march, when they arrived at the capital city, they were established as sovereign of democratic society by a multitude of thousands of people. And Evo Morales, the indigenous

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. “*A democracia está desaparecendo da Europa*”, interview with Michael Schlecht, published in Page 12, on 13/11/2011 [http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/index.php?option=com\\_noticias&Itemid=18&task=detalhe&id=49403](http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/index.php?option=com_noticias&Itemid=18&task=detalhe&id=49403)

President, reopened the dialogue, recognized the justice of the proposals and decided, together with the Legislative power, that no highway would pass through their territory. In doing so, he resumed his commitment to govern by obeying, as practiced by the peoples of Good Living, and the people, or rather, the peoples, are acknowledged as the sovereign power.<sup>132</sup>

In other words, the Good Living proposal continues on its way of contagion of the real politics, in which strong pressures persist in favour of development focused on capitalist economy. The indigenous peoples' opposition to this type of development gives continuity to their secular struggle against the capitalist mode of existence, criticized for being a threat to the life of the Earth, of its sons and daughters and of all living beings. It is also a persistent assertion that Good Living is a fundamental path to give back to human beings a good relationship with the others, with all living beings and with the Mother Earth. Then, this is all about a political dispute with new possibilities of power redefine all spheres of life and, specifically, that of producing what is needed to live, in a coherent manner with the new foundations. To say it explicitly, centering production and exchange on practical use and relativizing exchange value.

There are powerful enemies and deep fragilities in that process. The educated sectors, in order to defend privileges based on the constitutional legality of an individual's unlimited power, do not accept to renounce to their ownership of lands and of companies that generate income and profits, and they struggle so that legality will again defend their practice of capitalist progress, in which nature is nothing more than a deposit of raw materials having no value at all, except when they are used by the industry which turns them into goods. To do this, they have the support of companies, States and multilateral institutions committed in the defense of the supremacy of modern capitalist civilization.

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<sup>132</sup> Cf. *Viva o novo soberano*, article written by Ivo Poletto, in [www.ivopoletto.blogspot.com](http://www.ivopoletto.blogspot.com)



On the other hand, indigenous peoples are, at the same time, bearers of the alternative proposal of Good Living and vulnerable peoples as well, having practices marked by contradictions specifically derived from secular coexistence with the capitalist way of life. At the same time, they have the possible challenge of resuming their way of life in a free, acknowledged and constitutionally defended way, and of confronting it with the capitalist one, with a view to surpassing it, leading persons and peoples to live coherently with the new foundations of the State.

On recognizing and understanding Good Living as a practice of peoples and as a proposal for a new way of organization and democratic coexistence, one may reach the conclusion that this is not only the future result of a process, a utopia, but rather that indigenous peoples are the fundamental actors in the construction of the Common Good of Humanity as the aim of all peoples.

### **The peasant movements and the Common Good of Humanity**

An initial observation is necessary, although it may seem something obvious: not only are there peasant movements, indeed in plural, but different types of peasants as well. That diversity is based on the different forms of relations with the land: there are small family owners, lessees, those that use a small part of the land individually and the larger part as a community, those that have a collective territory legally demarcated, those that have right of possession without a title deed... Even indigenous peoples can be included as peasants. It is since the recognition of this diversity and of the search for common interests that Via Campesina (the Peasant Way) exists, as a wide global network of peasant movements.

### **Bearing this diversity in mind, where and how do peasants participate in the struggle in favor of the Common Good of Humanity?**

One of the important contributions is their struggle to democratize the access to agricultural land by confronting the large landowners, either traditional or modern ones, that is to say, all economic groups and political powers that defend and promote the transformation of the land into merchandise and a source of oligarchic power. What is perceived is that the transnational and neo-liberal phase of capitalism rests, among other

processes, on the submission of agricultural production to laboratories producing new technologies and to industry; that makes it follow the pattern of extensive monoculture – with intensive use of chemical inputs, toxic agricultural products, transgenic seeds – and production aimed at exportation that expands the commodities exchange; in other words, connecting it with the speculation that turns world economy artificial and makes the increase in food prices fit into the reproduction strategy of financial capital.

Peasants who are organized in Via Campesina strive to guarantee the collective territories of indigenous peoples and of traditional communities, as well as to put an end to the big estates, redistributing the land to increase the number of family peasants. They also fight for the recognition of peasants as the real producers of food for human beings. They even assert that, provided peasants have the necessary support, they can multiply production and evolve more and more towards supplying agro-ecological food.

It is here where a specific contribution by peasants comes into play: added to what is taking place in the collective territories of indigenous peoples and of traditional communities, the agro-ecological processes of land cultivation recover the natural vitality of the soil and combat the global warming process in the planet, contrarily to monoculture of chemical farming, responsible for the increase in methane emissions and nitrous oxide, powerful gases causing the greenhouse effect. They are, for that reason, essential actors in the search for the Common Good of Humanity.

It is worthwhile to further emphasize a contribution of the peasant world: the rescue, defense and assertion of traditional knowledge linked to agriculture and health, much of which was illegitimately appropriated and patented by laboratories and industries. This knowledge, of millenary history, was preserved and elaborately redeveloped by generations of communities connected to the care and cultivation of the land. It is practical and theoretical wealth, absolutely necessary in the recovery of soils exploited and almost exhausted by modern chemical agriculture. It is also useful, not only in relation to the rich diversity of seeds, characteristic of each biome and ecosystem, but also in relation to creating new

knowledge and applying the new technologies required to resume agro-ecological production.

These processes are based on other values of peasant cultures. Among them, that of community life, which favors the exchange of new knowledge, joint or cooperative work, the prospect of a supportive economy, and practices that favor new relations among democracy, food production and land care.

#### **BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: LIFE OF HUMANITY ON EARTH IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

There is virtually unanimous awareness that, without making deep changes in its way of being, based on the mode of production and consumption imposed by capitalism, mankind will have immense difficulties, or even real impossibility, in adapting to the environmental conditions which will exist from the middle of this century on. In other words, either we all change, or we all die, as the environmentalist theologian Leonardo Boff insists. Those who do not accept this are those who, while being mostly responsible for the imbalance existing on Earth, insist on their selfish blindness and invest strongly to prevent the advancement of agreements in favor of deep changes among the peoples on the planet.

It is within this context that Good Living and the cultural forms of peasants' life emerge like a light for all persons and peoples who want deep and structural changes, or rather, civilizing ones. A light for those who perceive that it is no longer possible to continue in the comings and goings of globalized capitalist neo-liberalism, but did not perceive alternatives; and light for the leftists who didn't give in opportunistically to the extended preservation of democratic formalities in States at the service of capitalists, and who still have doubts on how to organize socialist societies different from those built in the countries of real socialism. As light, they constitute practices and proposals for a path to reach the Common Good of Humanity.

This is about practices and proposals, not about models. Models should be rejected. Each people, each society, can be transformed, starting from the light shed by indigenous peoples' ongoing and always limited

practices of Good Living, and through the peasants' own mediations. They can be especially renewed starting from the rediscovery, in the forbidden and repressed history of their millenary and traditional peoples, of values that may serve as new foundations for the processes of constitutional re-foundation. They can also be inspired and have the lucidity and courage to overcome what has led them to capitalist productivity and consumerism, by building on practices developed in different territories and by reconquering popular sovereignty and new ways of production, distribution and consumption, now marked by principles of cooperation, solidarity and complementarity.

In fact, Good Living and peasant cultures are practices followed by many peoples, and they are, for that reason, proposals resting on solid ground, even when they present innovative forms of relations among human beings, with the rest of the living beings and with the land. They, certainly, have to do with concrete processes of socialization, without being socialism. They reach deeper and more coherently in many of the socialist and communist promises. They also have to do with democracy, challenging it to distance itself from the interests copied in the private appropriation of natural goods, of knowledge and capacities to produce value; to recognize collective subjects, and not only individuals; to practice political organization services based on authority and not on power originated by wealth, corruption and opportunistic falsehood ; to prefer decisions taken through direct consultations to popular sovereignty, preventing the representations from using to their own advantage and to that of dominant groups, the power granted to them.

Actually, those democratization processes in all the dimensions of existence will lead human societies to not submit to dominant groups any more, since the only power that all men and women should be submitted to is that of the land, and to popular power. To popular power, indeed, because it is the only sovereign, and to the power of Mother Earth because it was she the one who, in trillions of years, created the environment that made life possible and preserves it, so her rights should be regenerated, respected and guaranteed through new and filial relationships of human beings with her.

### 3 Afro-descendants Women

## THE WOMEN OF AFRICAN DESCENT

GABRIELA VIVEROS PADILLA and MARISOL CÁRDENAS

Following the text on “Common Goods to the Common Good of Humanity” by François Houtart, proposing reflection on and the construction of a new alternative paradigm, which has been disseminated through the support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, we would like to present our considerations based on the experience, history and emerging politics of the people of African descent, especially those from Ecuador. Taking into account the four major themes singled out, we start by explaining the problematic and then consider possible solutions, based on the realities as we have experienced them.

The text emphasizes that by ‘Common Good’ is meant a state of well being (*bien estar*) or living well (*buen vivir*), which is the universal basis of the lives of human beings. We shall however be expressing some concern about this and about the application of examples on which to reflect. Then we shall expound some of the most significant dimensions of the crisis that our people are experiencing and, finally, we describe, based on the notion of agency, various suggestions that we feel should be included in the proposal for the integral common well-being of the diverse peoples of our country and of the world.

Conceptualization of the ‘Common Good’ starts off the work and while there is mention of moving on from the *res publica*, we should consider some of the notions from which such moving on is desirable. The current paradigm has become a scientific category, but the new paradigm risks overlooking the fact that so many of our original and descendant cultures are thousands of years old, memories that have been forgotten or sanitized. Another example concerns the theme of the public and of the community: these are ideological constructions that have a different historicity. In parts of the text this is implicit, but we feel it is crucial to raise the issue so that it is clear when it is expository and what kind of

inclusion is being proposed in this notion. The community is a form of organization that does not support institutionalization, which is not the case for the public. In the text, *buen vivir* is used as a civilizing alternative insofar as it re-establishes relationships between human beings and nature, but it is necessary to locate, historically and ideologically, the category of civilization. We consider that we need another notion that does not refer to such a hegemonic and euro-centric concept.

By incorporating the concept of *buen vivir*, the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia make a break with the world economic system based on the global, capitalist, neo-liberal model, but that is not enough. The Sumak Kawsay agenda considers that priority should be given, *inter alia*, to the following: the administration of community justice, critical interculturality<sup>133</sup>, plurinationalism, the rights of nature and new relationships between nature and human beings, collective lands, systems that believe in 'other' kinds of spirituality, linguistic rights, the rights to forgotten memories. Only in this way is it possible to construct the right to de-hegemonize histories and political, ethical and aesthetic alternatives to the homogenization of cultures and the neoclassical economicism of the current system, as the conditions for social production will be different.

### **Modifications (?) of *buen vivir* for the 'common good'**

Sumak Kawsay, in the various meanings used by the indigenous communities facilitates the dialogical continuum between human beings and nature based on respect, equity and diversity in co-existence in order to generate new social relations that involve unity in exercising the Common Good. *Buen vivir* is not an objective, or an end in itself. It is a process, exercised by social actors who have been de-legitimized by the 'ethics of power' and who demand to participate but with no desire to be included in the modernizing projects of nation states.

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<sup>133</sup> That is, an interculturality which is not only based on inter-relationships of culture according to function, such as co-existence, tolerance, representation, but the ethical position of politics. It involves the right to criticism, allowing voices that denounce and propose, which is not always on the agenda of the institutions because this can be inconvenient. See Catherine Walsh, "Interculturalidad y colonialidad del poder" in *El giro decolonial*, 2009

As this is an irreconcilable oxymoron, our question is: how to solve this paradox about a construction that is not based on the legitimate power of the nation states? It is not only a question of existence, but power and knowledge are also involved. So this idea of enjoying the common good requires the inclusion of the political dimension and criticism of the relationships of domination, exclusion and marginality to which our peoples have had to submit.

It is necessary to ponder the role that the social movements have played – among others, those of the indigenous people, the black people, those of African descent, the peasants, the women, the ecologists, the workers – on such issues as the empowerment of collective rights, gender, nature, the right to water, food sovereignty, the pluri-nation state, among the other items that on the agenda of *buen vivir*.

For the people of African descent, the notion of ‘common goods’, ‘common good’ or ‘*buen vivir*’ can be conveyed by the term *ubuntu*, an ethnic ideological concept based on the loyalty of persons and their relations with the rest of humanity. The word comes from the Zulu and Xhosa languages and it is a traditional African concept.

Someone who has *ubuntu* is open and accessible to others and does not feel threatened. Part of this self-confidence stems from the knowledge that he or she belongs to a greater whole, and it is weakened when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed (Tutu, 2008)?.

“No man is an island.” We are inter-connected with others, with nature, with our ancestors, with all those to whom we must show generosity, reciprocity and complementarity. What we do affects everyone. Thus *ubuntu* extends to all humanity. It is a popular wisdom about life that supports the changes that are also necessary to create a harmonious future for a society that is economically and environmentally sustainable.

Nelson Mandela explains *ubuntu* by the metaphor of solidarity with a traveller who stops in a village and the local people offer him food and water. This is one aspect of *ubuntu*. Generosity does not impoverish, on the con-

trary it activates reciprocity: the gift, exchanges based on symbolic value and communal use that facilitate a better quality of life for everyone. With ubuntu we feel connected also with the men and women of the indigenous peoples, the montubios<sup>134</sup>, the mestizas, children, adolescents and grandparents, among others.

For the African descendants of Ecuador the notion of 'common goods', 'common good' or buen vivir is close to this concept of ubuntu, which means being on good terms with others, sharing, dignity, listening to and revering grandparents, respecting nature and taking from it [only] what we need. Thus the empowering notion of 'people' questions the notion of 'common good'. We recall the call of Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, to act as peoples, to do justice as peoples faced with institutions (in developed countries) that are corrupt, that are incapable of finding solutions for the world and are powerful enough to plunder [other] peoples' lives. Now the voice of the peoples must reach the decision-making level which, up until now, has not happened <sup>135</sup> (2010). From this viewpoint, wisdom would involve continuity between knowledge, actions (?) and feelings, [as practised by all human beings, in an elliptical movement, a spiral of dynamic, sustained and interpretative relationships]

However, it is not possible to achieve the 'common good' without the historical debt to the people of African descent being repaid.<sup>136</sup> Nor are words enough, offering to accept blame does not change the living conditions of our people. There needs to be more thinking, re-thinking and above all – as our grandparents in the south of Colombia in the Patía Valley used to say – we should start to 'feel-think'. Let us 'feel-think' this

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<sup>134</sup> *Montubios*: the inhabitants of the rural areas of Ecuador's coastal region, where it is more mountainous and far from the beaches. *Mestizas*: people of mixed race

<sup>135</sup> Reflections of the Head of State in a press interview in Ecuador, 2010

<sup>136</sup> In South Africa, after the apartheid era, *ubuntu* tribunals were created to make reparations by getting the oppressor society to ask pardon to the Africans who had suffered from this discriminatory institution, the idea being to generate social transformation through awareness of this practice. We should remember Michel Foucault's discourse on power and action.



spiral and complementary link between heart, word and action to produce wisdom and not only knowledge, which is how the eurocentric and androcentric enlightenment tradition has conceived development. Thus reparation involves acts of common good together with the peoples of African descent, taking into account the need to take responsibility for the historical debt and to repair gender relationships, as it is above all the women who, in our case, have suffered triple marginalization, from racism, xenophobia and sexual discrimination.

Understanding knowledge from its epistemological origins as a 'common good' involves questioning, geo-politically and 'ego-politically', the kind of knowledge that has prevailed up until now, for we can see how the knowledge of marginalized peoples has historically been made invisible by those who have colonized power, knowledge and existence in the world.

This is fundamental, as decolonization must enter into the awareness of the individuals that are form part of these peoples and not only in policies, laws and agreements. Only in this way can individuals with a consciousness of community and of empowerment through their rights make changes in their lives at all levels: family, collective and national. The 'common good' has to form part of the ethics of the individual person, as it cannot depend on police monitoring the waste of water. Every single person has to feel we are intimately linked with the nature that we are looking after because we shall therefore be doing it to our very selves. Thus the exercise of the rights of the 'common good' has to be achieved through the awareness, identification and enforcement of these rights as they are embodied in the practices of each person. It is therefore important that the text goes into greater detail about what is required to achieve the 'common good' of all persons.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> One of the issues that worry us about exercising participation for the 'common good' concerns unequal relationships, as the mere fact of having ethnic, gender, class, territorial and religious identities, inter alia, is no guarantee for a collective consciousness. Representation should be the result of the critical, collective conscientization of those who exercise their community's mandate and it starts with individual daily practice.

So it is fundamental that this proposal emphasizes the production and reproduction conditions of the common good as much as it is concerned with the question of access to this right. How are we going to ensure that this right is fulfilled and if it is not, how to generate a system of sanctions over the 'common good'? Who would be responsible for the failure?

As for the empowerment of this indigenous/Afro-descendant cosmovision, we feel it is relevant to enter into detail into some of the dimension of the crisis that is affecting our Afro-descendant peoples and that this concerns relations with nature, the production of life through use value, the reorganization of collective life and interculturality. For this reason it is important to contextualize the complexity of the situation.

In the specific case of the people of African descent these problems must be considered in three vital fields: political, socio-economic, socio-cultural/socio-historical. These form part of the agenda in the various discussions in different spaces, both institutional and alternative, and they are expressed in social crises concerning:

- the vulnerability of the territory;
- the poverty, racism, colonialism and symbolic slavery, residues of which are still causing suffering among our peoples;
- the need for reparations to become a right to development, as a matter of justice and historical truth.

### **The territorial crisis: the right to the 'Gran Comarca'**

The territories in which the Ecuadorian African descendants have traditionally lived has had to contend with the aggression caused by the extraction of natural resources and of monoculture, which affects their quality of life and in some cases they have been displaced by the corporations. They call on the collective territory for the right to ownership and possession to be guaranteed, that none are uprooted and that those who have had to leave have the right to return. [Juan García and] Grandfather Zenón reminds us that our ancestors paid for this right with their

blood and sweat. As he says: “the most important right that the children of African origin can claim from the State is to be born, to grow up and to live with dignity in the ancestral territories that are part of their history and where they can re-create their culture”.

Thus achieving the common good involves new, harmonious, equitable and realistic conditions of production and reproducing this *buen vivir* requires fulfilment in various fields: enjoying *buen vivir* through the productive use of the territory according to a people’s own ways of decision-making, based on socio-cultural respect for the land. We shall return to this point later on.

### **The educational crisis: the transversality of ethno-education**

One of the fundamental problems of the Afro-descendant population is the lack of access to education. Thus the problem arises: what kind of education will they accede to with all these policies? The colonial educational model continues to affect the mentalities of our peoples. There is no guarantee that an educated Afro-descendant brother will have the collective awareness to work for the ‘common good’. “At the political and organizational level, the Afro-Ecuadorians are totally distrustful and sceptical concerning their capacity to generate, based on their unity, their own, independent political and social force...because of their divisions and a leadership that is ineffective and discredited.” (Antón, 2011: 150).

At the present time there are alternatives to hegemonic education, like ethno-education, but this has been confused – or, rather, destabilized – by the capitalist regime, and its transversal capacity has not been understood by its very beneficiaries. Ethno-education means using pedagogical strategies that take into account the diversity of ethnic groups with their different kinds of knowledge: traditional, modern, technological, contemporary. Thus it cannot be limited to a cultural space where the population is the majority, without transforming the education imparted to the nation as a whole, as the territory is not only linked to the land.

This involves imparting interculturality and ecological rights, including the transversality of gender, to all the diverse populations. In turn, it implies having respect for and the right to knowledge acquired in other

ways and not necessarily passed on in a class room. In this sense broadening knowledge to include popular wisdom brings us close to the notion of the 'common good'. All human beings acquire wisdom over their lifetimes and this must be a right that requires favourable conditions for its fulfilment: it implies experience, access to various kinds of education and its exercise in cultural, daily practice.<sup>138</sup>

### **Crisis of values: returning to spirituality**

Spirituality, understood in its emo – tono – psico – biological dimension,<sup>139</sup> in the case of our people has acted as a bulwark of resistance, the support of social movements for the struggle of both real and symbolic survival and for equity ([or equality?]) and justice. Its religious cosmovision and practices form the basis of the Afro-Ecuadorian identity and it goes beyond its diversities. Its cosmogonic universe is nourished by ancestral African cultures, which are deeply spiritual, from Catholicism, the superstitious character of Spanish slavery and the indigenous mythical world. Spirituality is a dimension that penetrates individuals beyond their adherence to a religion. The Afro-descendant and black population have a ritual that expresses their total spirituality. This is certainly a common good that is also a collective right exercised by other peoples of diverse nations and nationalities. This invisible economy, by giving support to the common good enables one of the objectives as a principle of integral harmony because the common good is a renewable good, sustainable and transmissible, and also as an invisible good.

In our Afro-descendant traditions, asking our elders and our gods to put wise, precise words into our mouths represents respect for the Other, the desire to generate collective benefit and for discussions to connect with the heart.

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<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless this does not imply that we support illiteracy, on the contrary. Only those who are thoroughly conversant with the different forms of knowledge can decide how it should be carried out. It has been proved that the lack of access to education is what generates unfavourable conditions for its practice and enthusiasm for learning.

<sup>139</sup> We return to this category of the proposals for global systemic theory, in which the integrality of persons must take into account the emotional, spiritual, magical, as well as the other elements that are recognized like the body, biological needs, etc.

### **The crisis of representation: the right to collective, individual, political, cultural and generational memory**

The power of global capitalism is also to be found in the iconic field. The representations of images of the Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples are stereotyped in spite of legislation and policies for gender equality, cultural equality and 'inclusive' public policies. But it is necessary to go beyond decrees and root out the stigmas and stereotypes that are however unconscious and involve cultural, racial and class prejudices. Symbolic usurpation, as a colonial exercise, has left its mark above all on peoples' consciousness.

Changing these residues involves exercising the right to meaning and this means giving new significance to the practices, images, forms, membership, the various languages of our traditional cultures, viewed positively and creatively, also involving multi-sensorial equity.

Representation takes place through levels of perception that are cultural constructions so that individuals are not always aware of their prejudices and they are changed by these cultural constructions, which are justified as (poorly adopted) tradition, without considering the seriousness of their racist, sexist and macho connotations. In Ecuador, the policies concerning the communication media that have so far been implemented are still unsuccessful in changing the productive and reproductive orientation of the capitalism-colonialism that is practised in everyday life.

Changing the capitalist system, as the text proposes, involves a change in peoples' imaginary that has been inherited and transmitted. It is, in fact, impossible to think about a 'common good' if mentalities are still imbued with this 'subtle' kind of violence, which cannot be penalized. Positive representation is a source of well-being. There are things that can be useful or give satisfaction that cannot be bought and sold on the market (the beauty of nature and of the populations excluded through hegemony, like the Afro-descendants and the indigenous peoples) which, at most, are called 'externalities'. The EBT (Environmental BioTechnology?) under-rates this important source of human well-being (or suffering). Confronted by neo-liberal, economic capitalism, emphasizing goods and services leaves out the very thing that people value.

### **The food crisis, traditional medicine and respect for nature**

To achieve buen vivir it is necessary to guarantee the exercise of collective rights, but also to promote forms of participatory production and productive networks, as well as preventing the proliferation of monocultures that is displacing the Ecuadorian Afro-descendants and, instead, to create openings for markets based on fair trade.

Knowledge about traditional health cures, food, organizing bio-diversity, the know-how of midwives about childbirth, inter alia, involves self-knowledge and they must be re-valued for the survival of a population. The different meanings of water, the sense of land and co-existence should be treated as a whole, seen as open and continuing paths. They must be constantly brought up to date because the problem about the 'Common Good of Humanity' is how to include methodologically all the horizontal diversities.

Thus, for example, the traditional knowledge of herbal medicine, like the medicinal plants that help to cure fright, to calm pain and aching eyes and to treat polluted air (? has been verified by Western science. We should remember that allopathic medicine was based on herbs. In the Afro-descendant cultures people can be cured by song: listening to the voices of ancestors, of the family, of the community, to exercise empowerment, not only of the individual but also of the collective, both public and private, sacred and profane, intimate, emotive, affective, social: what Patricio Guerrero refers to as *corazonar*, the link between the mind and the heart.

### **The climate and energy crisis: the rights of *culturalaleza***<sup>140</sup>

The environmental crisis has come about because of a model of civilization that is based on combustible fuels, which has caused the greatest disaster in the history of humanity. And we cannot tackle it with solutions based on the market, as proposed by the Convention on Climate

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<sup>140</sup> As advocated by the Mexican anthropologist Raúl González who, in the context of proposals about Complexity, has created this neologism that expresses the intrinsic link between *naturaleza* and *cultura*. See 'La producción y reproducción de sentidos de los símbolos elementales de la *culturalaleza*' in *La arquitectura del sentido*. Julieta Haidar (coordinator), Escuela Nacional de Antropología y Historia, Mexico

Change and the Kyoto Protocol. There are many dimensions to the problematic and to deal with modern problems requires 'non-modern solutions', as Boaventura dos Santos suggests, or to dis-occidentalize, ethically and fairly, "all that which has previously been known as 'barbarism', 'exoticism', 'popular wisdom', '[haceres]' and 'folklore' " (Albán, 2006: 71). New relationships with nature will help us listen to the calls by the indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples who oppose oil exploitation, the cutting down of mangrove trees as is happening in the northern zone of Esmeraldas, the indiscriminate and inhuman encroachment of mining, the indiscriminate production of hydrocarbons – all of which adds to global warming.

Mangroves are an example of the ecological, climatic, alimentary and work crisis that directly affects the Afro-Ecuadorian communities and others too. They are wetlands that are invaded by salty and brackish water from the sea and consist of mangrove trees, beaches, tidal waters and other habitats associated with tropical and subtropical latitudes. These swamps form an eco-system, a fount of life which facilitates the reproduction of various marine species that spawn in the estuaries of the rivers and in some cases spend part of their development within these eco-systems, seeking food and protection. Some 80 per cent of these marine species depend on this eco-system to survive. They produce a large quantity of fauna because of their rich organic material, which feeds molluscs and crustaceans, from micro-organisms to mammals, including shell-fish, birds, amphibians, chelonians, reptiles and insects that form part of a complex chain that culminates with the human being, as many riverside communities survive on these species.

In Ecuador, out of a total of 1,229 kilometres of open rivers, 533 were originally bordered by mangroves (Vivanco, 2010: 271). The provinces of Oro, Guayas, Manabí and Esmeraldas benefited greatly from this system until, in the 1970s, the shrimp boom had an increasingly [negative] impact on them.

"The mangrove is a natural undertaking which does not require paper, does not ask for a C.V.: you come and go whenever you want. Through

the mangrove resources, thousands of people have been able to study because it provides education, food, clothing, but fundamentally culture, because in each of the mangrove roots there is culture, there are myths and legends. As the mangroves disappear so also does history disappear.” (Interview with Juan Zambrano, July, 2009, in Vivanco, 2010: 272)

In the declaration of the International Mangrove Network, dated May 2009, it was decided that the law on food sovereignty, which was approved in a first debate by the National Assembly, infringes on our lives and our biodiversity by giving a free hand to the large industries, the transnationals and agro-business for world food production. The destruction of the mangrove eco-system by industrial shrimp aquaculture is an infringement against the human rights of the local communities as it displaces them from their territories, impoverishes their economies, and violates their rights to a healthy diet – not to mention the rights of the fishermen and artisanal harvesters if they are prevented from access to their ancestral activities (Vivanco, 2010: 273). We should remember that mangroves have vital ecological functions for the planet: they desalinize the water coming inland enabling land to be cultivated to produce food as well as feeding animals, which in turn reproduce themselves, having started life in this natural and cultural environment.

**Capitalist economic crisis:  
political economy for ‘development as freedom’**

In response to [Enrique] Dussel’s quotation, we wonder what kind of reproduction and production of life he is referring to, as to live fully there is one crucial condition, which is freedom. For the Afro-descendant peoples this principle was shattered by the slave trade and despite the fact that 519 years have passed still the young Afro-descendants – as for example in our town – suffer from all kinds of humiliations and [anticipaciones], experiencing a negative identity based on race, which leads even to death due to xenophobia.<sup>141</sup> The criminalization and delin-

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<sup>141</sup> This is another example, like the Durban agreements of 2001 that, ten years later have been forgotten, as has been pointed out by María Inés Barbosa of the UN Health Programme



quency associated with black people still continues in spite of the Constitution having made us citizens with all human rights. Legal action needs to be taken that condemns these discriminatory practices based on racial hatred as a crime. Life as a common good must first of all involve the principle of freedom, which means empowerment both in time and space. One of these is the body, which is affected by gender, race and class and this extends to the community bodies in their diverse forms, discursive and symbolic.

Aware of the results of capitalism, neo-liberal economists are making alternative proposals from alternative theoretical bases, like those of Stiglitz, one of the greatest and best critics of the neo-classical model and Nobel Prizewinner for Economics in 1994. There are also the proposals of Amartya Sen who starts with the idea of 'development as freedom', taking into account the ethno-cultural and economic particularities of each people, so that we feel it is important to put forward some of the notions that contribute to the 'common good'.

Sen (2000) takes the notion of agency and uses it to give priority to generating proposals that start from the grassroots upwards, and not the other way round, while the person who takes action to bring about changes that become the 'common good' will be the motor for generating action for development with social justice. He bases his proposal for work with agencies and the public debate on the social participation of an economic policy that transforms the democratic system based on basic political, economic and human rights in accordance with the specific needs and values, both of use and of exchange and not only of rents, and usefulness based on the priorities of human groups. In this sense, his position goes further than the concept of human capital as is utilized in neo-liberalism, using it for an integral, relational and complementary life that includes harmonious links with nature. Only in this way can we understand conflictual situations like the famine experienced in countries that have a high percentage of Afro-descendants – where the problem is not necessarily one of production but poor mechanisms of distribution – and the link of production with nature, or between mortality

and poverty – which applies to many of the Afro-descendants of Ecuador, who constitute 7.2 per cent of the population.

We agree with Sen that the enormous scope for the agency of women is one of the most neglected questions in development studies. In the case of the Afro-Ecuadorian people there are a number of examples. Increasingly there are natural catastrophes such as drought, earthquakes and flood. But it is the women who are most affected by the climate crisis, as we have to continue maintaining the household, attending to the family, as well as getting food, searching for water, producing and reproducing life – in conditions that are tougher and tougher.

In the mangrove ecological system the lack of work has meant that men are the first to emigrate. And this is when the women have to take on the tasks of providing the needs of the family, anchored to its roots. The women charged with collecting shells and reforestation for organizations like FUNDECON are the first to suffer the consequences of this deforestation. Up to 56 per cent of the species have already disappeared, as in Muisne. Rosa Guillen, coordinator of the Women Transforming the Economy Network of Peru says: “the construction of a new model of social development that fights capitalism must recognize women as producers, their reproductive work and their leadership, without discrimination, in conducting society.” (2006)

We feel that we have covered discursively the four fundamental themes concerning the problems of the crisis of capitalism. In spite of some criticism we think that they are key themes for reflection although they do not include all the dimensions of the problematic and we suggest the possibility of other themes being included which, for other cultures, could be more important. We would call for the building of a new mode of political, socio-cultural production based on ethno-development. This would emphasize that this should start with a profound, complex and conscientious investigation, modification and production of individual and collective public policies that take into account the cosmovision of the time-space community and of the various values, arranged in order

of importance, of each culture, of the socio-cultural territorial interests, of the different kinds of communal traditions and customs. It should include everything that generates conflict, alliances and trade between the peoples, nationalities, pluri-nationalities, interculturalities from the 'feel-think' approach, our everyday history from memories, action and socio-cultural projection. This would involve the 'common good' as an inter-sectoral access to agreement on the priorities of resources for an integral life, a continuing micro and macro exercise of abundance based on the various inter-related, inter-subjective and intercultural factors of satisfaction.

## 4 Indigenous Peoples of the Americas

AN ESSAY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE  
INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS:

### THE POETICS OF SUMAK KAWSAY ON A GLOBAL HORIZON

ARMANDO MUYOLEMA

François Houtart's article "De los bienes comunes al Bien Común de la Humanidad" ("From the common goods to the Common Good of Humanity") visualises some emancipatory lines on the horizon of change in what is historically a time of risk and hope for humanity. The Utopian features of the emancipation project have their roots in current collective experience as much as in what Gerald Postema calls "prophetic memory":<sup>142</sup> the critique emerging as the counter-image of hegemonic enactments. The last few decades have seen the growth of a significant critical understanding of capitalism as a way of life based on the profit economy, the free market and the exploitation of man and nature. From a purposive standpoint, the need to move from the idea of "common goods" towards a global coexistence based on the Common Good of Humanity is an imperative of civilization that implies imagining new fundamentals of collective life. In this undertaking, the invocation and fragmentary resonance of non-western civilizations is notable. For someone who grew up and was educated in a cross-cultural context becoming less and less remote from the ideas of scientific knowledge, it is fascinating to witness that the growing global preoccupation with the preservation of humanity invokes the participation of just such civilizations. But it is even more surprising to learn that this preoccupation implies a search for global solutions in the cultural sources that have historically lain under the "civilizing" siege of the West; in cultural pluralism and the potential for the transculturation of concepts, objects and ways of life

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<sup>142</sup> See Gerald Postema. "On the Moral Presence of Our Past". *McHill Law Journal*. 36:4 (1991). p. 118.

now promoted under the umbrella of interculturalism. In the face of this new sensibility towards subordinated modes of life, any critical approach from an Andean pacha<sup>143</sup> - a locus of enunciation situated in the Andes - must not only wonder at the cross-cultural spread of concepts such as Pachamama (Mother Earth) and *sumak kawsay* (Good Living) but also ask itself if we are seeing a genuine retreat of scientific and philosophical Enlightenment or a process of Enlightened appropriation of “subjugated knowledge” in its Foucauldian sense.

Within this framework, Houtart poses important theoretical and practical questions related to the definition of the Common Good of Humanity (henceforward CGH). The fundamental idea underlying his reflections is that the CGH is not limited to a conception of the “common goods” of societies as assets of humanity. On the contrary, the conceptualization of CGH focuses on life in its essentials and the social forms that guarantee its reproduction, which implies the challenge of imagining the production and reproduction of life on a global scale on bases of collective coexistence radically distinct from those dominant today. For Houtart, the definition of CGH is not a point of departure but rather a human project whose full realisation invites all humanity, in its unity and cultural diversity, to participate in its construction. It is therefore a challenge in diverse senses for which the theoretical formulation, its institutional forms on different scales, and the creation of new collective subjectivities to sustain it, would only be rendered possible by the task of imagining the world in which we live otherwise. To this end, Houtart proposes re-thinking the fundamentals of collective life on the basis of the following elements: a) our relationship with nature, b) the production of life, c) collective (political) organisation and d) our reading of reality. His text offers important contributions on each of these elements, and this is

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<sup>143</sup> According to several lexicographical and historical sources, Pacha is the Andean concept, in Quechua and Aymara, that means space-time, world, cosmos; see *Gramática y arte nueva de la lengua general de todo el Peru : llamada lengua Qquichua o lengua del Inca* (Cabildo: Vaduz-Georgetown, 1975 [1607]); *Shimiyuk Diccionario Kichwa – Español / Español- Kichwa* (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Núcleo de Sucumbíos, 2008).

where I would also like to locate my contribution to reinforce, expand and clarify some concepts that are closest to me through experience and reflection. I will focus especially on elucidating the sense of the concepts of Pachamama and *sumak kawsay* in the light of their relationship with what constitutes – and this is my argument – a broader conceptual system, socially, culturally and historically situated in the Andes. The thrust of this essay articulates an argument that moves from the local to the global. Starting from a Kichwa tale from the Amazon, in which the key elements for understanding the flow between the human and nature are set out, I then propose a seminal conceptual elaboration of the notion of *minkanakuy* as the foundation of *sumak kawsay*. I also indicate some of the cultural conditions and the practical range of the category *minkanakuy* as regards the surprising cross-cultural spread of *sumak kawsay* and the creation of a broad collective subjectivity capable of sustaining a global alternative rooted in the Common Good of Humanity. I conclude by very briefly drawing attention to some of the risks and challenges involved in the use, diffusion and theoretical elaboration of conceptual categories of different cultural and linguistic origin.

### **The *machakuy runa*: the metaphor of becoming and the rupture<sup>144</sup>**

In Houtart's essay, the idea of defining what is understood by CGH, beyond what is understood as "common goods", is fundamental to establishing its bases. This takes place within a new paradigm based on "the profound union of human being", a dynamic social equilibrium between people, genders and groups and the cultural reconstruction of the historical memory of peoples.

If "capitalism causes an artificial and mechanical separation between nature and human beings", it would be useful to explore the historical memory and anti-/non-capitalist praxis of non-western peoples who re-

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<sup>144</sup> *machakuy* – snake; *runa* – human being, man. The gender of the *machakuy runa* figure goes beyond the limits of established genders. With regard to the human and, more strictly speaking, when it turns into a human, it appears to be masculine, while as the *machakuy runa*, and with regard to the ants – its family too – it is feminine. In Spanish we use the feminine article *la* when referring to the *runa* being as snake.

sist control of their collective imagination. This proposition implies, however, a challenge to the political and theoretical imagination. If indigenous cultures contain “foundational concepts” that “inspire contemporary social thought and organisation”, an obligatory question is how to take those foundational concepts in an intercultural conceptual elaboration, while at the same time demonstrating an ethical attitude of solidarity that does not silence the voice of indigenous people. A necessary departure point in this ethical attitude must be an awareness that concepts such as *sumak kawsay* (good living), or *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), persistently cited in liberation discourse, cannot be fully understood outside their cultural context, unconnected to a semantic and conceptual whole of which they form a systemic part. This anxiety, it is worth clarifying, is far removed from an essentialist attitude that seeks to defend a supposedly inaccessible conceptual purity. It is rather a matter of drawing attention to a necessary sensibility towards what “to speak for” and “to speak to” mean in terms of power and knowledge production. In fact, the same condition of imagining and constructing something new depends on tackling the matter of translation not solely in technical-linguistic terms but above all in terms of culture and political relations.

Interculturalism, as it has been imagined by indigenous peoples, assumes an open horizon for the spread of cultural practices postulated as their own<sup>145</sup> while at the same time expressing the willingness to learn from other peoples. The possibility for the transculturation of ideas cannot ignore that they originate in practices, desires and expectations that have a specific cultural and historical locus. I believe that one way of entering the collective imaginations in which those practices and concepts are rendered meaningful is the universe of local oral narratives. We will see briefly what such narratives can tell us by analysing a Kichwa story.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Dolores Cacuango, an indigenous leader from the north of Ecuador in the first half of the twentieth century, put forward a fundamental proposition in the orientation of the indigenous peoples’ political project: “We’re like the high moorland grass that is cut and grows again; we’ll sow the world with tall grass.”

<sup>146</sup> I will use Kichwa to refer to the dialectal variant Ecuadorian Kichwa, and Quechua when referring to the whole linguistic community.

In the 1970s, in the early days of oil exploration, an interesting collection of stories appeared, gathered from among the Kichwa communities of the Ecuadorian Amazon.<sup>147</sup> All of the stories are oral in origin and provide an account of the forms of life and of the relationship between the human and the non-human, of the flux between those worlds which in other cultural contexts are depicted as separate and opposed spheres. In the narrative universe we are dealing with, animals become human and vice versa.

The act of becoming dissolves the borders between culture and nature. Faced with the transculturation of concepts such as *sumak kawsay*, it seems fitting to turn the gaze to those stories as a hermeneutic and epistemological option that seeks to exercise control over the endogenous senses of those now nomadic concepts, wandering across different cultural borders. One of the stories is the “*Machakuy runa*”, the snake-woman, from the collection referred to above.

The story is an account of a failed amorous relationship. A young hunter in the middle of the jungle observes “*ukuy*” ants, a culturally significant variety, carrying away the feathers of the birds that he had hunted; the *maytus* (sheaths) from his first hunting days also disappear. When he is returning home, a beautiful young girl appears on the way; she asks for something to eat and declares her love for the young man, saying her family would look favourably on their setting up a home together. The young hunter gladly accepts her proposal, takes her home and they start a family. Every weekend the young girl’s father comes to visit them, drinks *chicha* (a maize or cassava liquor) and goes back to the jungle. One day, before going into the jungle, the young hunter advises his wife to drink *chicha* to her father and treat him well, while for her part the young girl warns him not to harm a snake if he sees one on the way back from the jungle because it is her father. The father comes to visit as usual and, in contrast to previous occasions, drinks too much *chicha*;

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<sup>147</sup> Juan Santos Ortiz de Villalba. *Sacha Pacha. El mundo de la selva*. Quito: CICAME, 1994.



then he goes off. The young hunter, returning home, comes across an enormous snake sleeping on the road, which – without thinking – he hits with a branch until he realises that chicha is coming from one of its wounds. When he gets home, his wife notices a strange attitude in her husband and intuits that something has happened with her father; she takes her daughter in her arms and runs into the jungle. There she finds the lifeless body of her father, the machakuy runa. Sobbing, she takes him to the ukuy ants' house. Soon her husband arrives and demolishes the ants' house in an attempt to take her home, although his wife repeatedly implores him not to do it because they are her family. The young hunter, who loves his wife very much, persists in demolishing the ants' house as he tries to get her back, but does not achieve his aim: his wife turns into a ukuy ant and disappears, together with his daughter, into the depths of the labyrinth that is the ants' house. The hunter returns home, inconsolable, without his wife and without his daughter.

What might this story have to tell us about the collective imagination of the Amazon peoples in a historical time marked by the advent of oil exploration and growing environmental concerns?

Without attempting a detailed interpretation, it can be taken as a possible way into understanding a different collective way of life. Thus, the first thing that stands out is a symbiosis between spheres that the West defines as nature and the social world; that is, not only in the sense that nature is where social life is reproduced but that it is a continuum that includes nature as an integral part of social life.

In effect, the young creature who appears on the road is an ant (ukuy) who becomes a woman in order to live with the young hunter.<sup>148</sup> The relationship that unfolds in the human sphere lasts by virtue of respect for the norms of the relationship with nature. In this sense, the story also embodies a normative universe, not just in the sense of a simple system of rules, but fundamentally as the world in which the rules live

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<sup>148</sup> Here we make use of the concept of becoming without further elaboration; for a theorisation of this concept it is important to refer to Deleuze y Guatari. *Mil Mese-tas* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2002).

and acquire meaning.<sup>149</sup> While the young woman lives in the human dimension of nature, her father moves between these two spheres of life. The young hunter enjoys this relationship through the generous gesture of sharing his food with the young woman and respect for her father. It is important to draw attention here to this act of reciprocity, which we will return to below. This symbiosis becomes more complex if attention is paid to the “kinship network” established between the ukuy ants, the machakuy runa, the young wife and her daughter: the girl establishes a profound link between the human and nature, in its diversity of life forms, incompatible among themselves from a viewpoint outside the universe represented in the tale.

This coexistence, which seems solid to begin with, ends abruptly in tragedy. The young hunter, on severing the life of the machakuy (runa), causes a rupture in the process of becoming that guarantees the harmonic culture-nature continuum. The tragedy is that this happens without there being a deliberately destructive intention. On the contrary, the destruction of the ants’ house to get his wife back constitutes a singular event that prompts reflection on the general relationship between organisms and their mutual environments and, in particular, on gender relations, paying more specific attention to the value of the feminine voice within a social order in which the masculine monologue reigns. In the context of the story, the ability to discern and heed the feminine voice is put to the test; it is a condition for maintaining a harmonic relationship in a social world which includes and extends the social sphere with the non-human. Ignoring her voice leads to rupture. The hunter’s forgetting of the warning issued by his wife before he goes out hunting cannot be understood in any other way. But even more serious is his destruction of the ants’ house without heeding his wife’s outcries. It can be inferred from the story that the young hunter loves his wife and wants her back, but his deafness and the centrality of his ego end up destroying not only

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<sup>149</sup> On the relationship between the law and narrative, see Robert Cover’s suggestive article, “Nomos and Narrative”, in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law*. Martha Minow, Michel Ryan and Austin Sarat, eds. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995).

his home but the close relationship between the human order and nature embodied in his wife and her kinship network integrating the human and non-human worlds. Love boils over, forgets its transitory nature and becomes an act of destruction and self-destruction.

In this interpretation, a central concept for visualising the dissolution of borders between the human and the non-human is, as already indicated, that of becoming which, in Deleuzian code relating to material bodies, is defined by reference to the ways in which these can become other. We know that we are playing with problematic concepts that have precision within a cultural history and complex intellectual tradition. Thus a deeper comprehension of the knowledge entailed in the story should ponder an alternative epistemology that puts the categories culture-nature, human-non-human under suspicion, and explores the ways in which the locus of the runa (machakuy-runu) is understood, lived and imagined with regard to its vital surroundings. However, the nature of the present work does not permit such an exercise. But I would like to point out that a normative universe can be perceived in the body of the story, the rupture of which triggers the tragic outcome of the events. With which, it can be flagged up that cultural entities do not exist without institutional forms and normative universes, and that their prescriptions do not exist outside the narratives that locate and give them meaning. Bearing this schematic approach to the tale in mind, we will go on to explore forms of reciprocity within Andean tradition and from them the process of epistemological invention of the *sumak kawsay*. It is important to remain aware of two aspects: first, the reciprocal act that leads to the founding of a family, a broad and complex system of kinship between the hunter and the young woman which underlies their way of life; and second, that the story, far from depicting a romantic vision of the Kichwa world, ends in tragedy, demonstrating the fragility of the relationships represented therein.

### **minka/minkanakuy as the foundation of *sumak kawsay***

Houtart does a good job of describing the depth and implications of the global crisis of capitalism. His text summarises some of the many critical voices that prove the unfeasibility of intra-systemic solutions and devel-

ops some programmatic lines for what could be a new paradigm of human coexistence with a global reach. This effort must be collective and the imagination must play a fundamental role. So the concept of *sumak kawsay* is invoked, from a politically and epistemologically open standpoint, as a “foundational” and “inspirational” principle, making use of a category that has enjoyed a notable success in the political debate both within and without its social, cultural and linguistic context in the Andes. The spread of this concept is, without doubt, significant. The conceptual wealth attributed to *sumak kawsay* includes, among other things, a “sense of life”, a “communal ethic”, the “relationship with nature”, the “attainment of a full life”, the “ought-to-be of the Plurinational State”, a “paradigm”, a “political project” (see Simbaña, Acosta, Dávalos, Tortosa, Santos). The convergence of these elements would lead to the establishment of a radically different civilization. The depth and reach attributed to the notion of *sumak kawsay* suggest that it would come to institute a state of affairs representing an authentic alternative to capitalism as a social and historical system that is today markedly in crisis and decline. What catches the attention in the use and spread of this category (in its cross-cultural epistemological course) is, however, the scant conceptual development as regards its cultural and linguistic sources, and the social praxis that it relates to and describes. This search is not a sterile but a necessary exercise when we consider that every concept forms part of a semantic field and a conceptual system that makes it not just a matter of linguistic translation but, as part of a historically located philosophical and cultural system, a different conception of the world. Such a consideration should take us back to its linguistic and cultural origin, to engage in an epistemological dialogue with different actors from the community of origin. A basic question in this dialogue stance ought to be: beyond the literal translation of *sumak kawsay* as good living, is there an ancestral genealogy existing as a hard philosophical category in the Andean cultural context? Are there other Andean (Kichwa-Aymara) concepts underlying or forming a system with that of *sumak kawsay* which could lead to the formulation of a new paradigm of human coexistence? I am convinced in my supposition that a Kichwa-speaker would answer in the affirmative. If *sumak kawsay* is a

“state of things” or a “political project” seeking the attainment of a full life (a harmonic and balanced state of things), it is logical to wonder about the principles and forms of social coexistence that make such a state of affairs possible. Do those elements exist within the Andean linguistic-conceptual corpus and in its social praxis? I would like to answer affirmatively and consider how, for example, notions of solidarity, of social transformation, of reciprocity, of poverty and wealth, of relating to the environment, of relating to experience and time, of the person and of the collective are codified in the Quechua/Kichwa language. In this perspective, I would like to put forward at least a schematic approximation of the widespread praxis of the minga in different Andean scenarios, both urban and rural, and show how this practice articulates a different social outlook that suggests a complementary conception of the individual and the collective, and leaves visible the constituent elements that sustain the networks of solidarity and the formation of the collective.

First off, it is necessary to point out that no Quechua/Kichwa dictionary, past or present, contains an entry assigning meaning to the compound phrase *sumak kawsay*. Each of the words appears and is defined separately. *Sumak* means «pretty, beautiful, lovely, nice», while *kawsay* means «life, to live». The combination of the two concepts, possible in daily communication, does not denote an extraordinary epistemological status in the way that other concepts such as *pacha* (space-time), *pachakutik* (profound transformation in the order of things) etc. do. It is not an ancestral category but an epistemological invention sustained by the ecological struggles occupying a world in crisis and refers to a whole set of practices that make up the Andean way of life. It is an interstitial concept, the power and legitimacy of which lie, however, in its capacity to become a life option through its rootedness in the practices which define the Andean way of life, such as the minga and the practical and conceptual field associated with it.

Minga is a mutual practice which simply calls for collective work. In this sense, people talk of “minga to mend the community school”, of “minga decoration of the city” or even, of “Global minga”.<sup>150</sup> The essential sense in such cases is collectively to look after an asset of common interest. It effectively amounts to the combination of a collective will to preserve a public good, or rather we could say, what are conceived of as “common goods”, on different social and geographical scales. This is the sense underlying the proliferation of working practices generically designated by the word minga. We can speak of a global minga to achieve the declaration of the Common Good of Humanity. However, considered in its sociocultural context, minga is a much more complex institution with deep historical roots and multiple dimensions: social and economic, ecological and ritual, political and normative. Etymologically, it comes from the Kichwa verbal root minka-<sup>151</sup> which means «to entrust», «to take care of something». From this point of view minka designates collective work, though not just any collective work but that which is done as an act of solidarity, be it towards a person, a family or a larger community. Community and individuality include the relationship with the place and other forms of life living there, as we saw in the tale of the hunter. Nor is this a question of just any kind of solidarity: the practice of minka goes beyond the sense of solidarity understood as a momentary adhesion to the cause of others. On the contrary, the act of taking care of something implies responsibility to look after it, a responsibility that makes sense in the construction of the social, such as in relationships and interactions that transcend the human (the ukuy ants, the machakuy runa). Minka entails a normative and continuous social responsibility derived from assuming the care of something or someone as a permanent mode of coexistence. Thus, on the everyday social level,

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<sup>150</sup> I refer to a rallying cry formulated in English: *Global Minga in Defense of Mother Earth and Her Peoples, October 12-16*, available at: <http://intercontinentalcry.org/global-minga-in-defence-of-mother-earth-and-her-peoples/>

<sup>151</sup> The orthographical difference is to differentiate the use of the word in Spanish and Kichwa. In the context of Spanish it is written minga; while in the Kichwa context it is written minka-, the verbal root or action to which other meanings can be added by using suffixes; the hyphen indicates this semantic opening.

when you arrive at someone's house it is normal to say, almost spontaneously, "wasíyuk, minkachiway" – literally, "owner of the house, take care of me, look after me"; clearly, the responsibility of the host goes beyond receiving them in their home. The praxis of minka has evolved and assumed different forms throughout the Andes. Although minka is usually distinguished from other forms of reciprocity<sup>152</sup>, it can be affirmed that conceptually it is the general framework within which other forms are defined and acquire meaning.<sup>153</sup> This general conceptual framework is apparent if we consider the minka- in relation to the reciprocal –naku-: minkanakuy: «to care for one another». The concept of minkanakuy thus designates a normative act of social responsibility that is not discharged in the voluntarism of a momentary gesture of solidarity. Quite the contrary, it is the conceptual and philosophical foundation that sustains all forms of solidarity between people, between individuals and the community, and between political communities – human and more broadly non-human. It is clear that the multiple human relations that derive from the practice of minkanakuy are fundamental in collective life in the Andes, relations that cannot be understood outside of the territory or inhabitation of a place, a pacha. We can say that the practice of minkanakuy, «looking after one another», does not refer only to collective work, but to the weave of relations that make up the collective; the sense, texture and durability of society. It is in this weave of relationships that work, exchange (ranti ranti), political matters, ritual and the manner in which a place is inhabited acquire meaning. Minka as a generalised practice, etched in the collective imagination, constitutes the cultivation of relationships as something worthwhile, even beyond the possession of goods. Still at odds with the market mediated by monetary transactions, the spirit of minka resists in parallel; and when negotiating transactions and interactions, outside of money. From this perspective it can be understood, for example, why the conception of poverty in the Andean world does not refer to the lack of goods but rather fundamentally

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<sup>152</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the forms of reciprocity and exchange in the Peruvian Andes, see the work of Enrique Mayer and Giorgio Alberti, eds. *Reciprocidad e intercambio en los Andes peruanos* (Lima: IEP, 1974).

<sup>153</sup> There are forms of reciprocity such as *ayni*, *rantiapak*, *maki-mañachi*, etc.

to the lack of social relationships. A poor person is a *wakcha*, which is to say, someone who is socially isolated or bereft. Private property is not a central element in individual happiness, though neither is submission to a state apparatus guaranteeing collective life. We cannot elaborate this assertion in detail here, but suffice to point out that it is the enjoyment of the gifts of nature and of human creations in terms of sharing them with others that frames and gives substance to the practices of *minkankuy*; wealth is not possession of things but the networks of the social relationships that are defined by the individual and collective responsibility to look after one another, to take care of others, or to ensure that the other lives well. The practice of *minkanakuy* is by definition opposed to competition, to the logic of *homo economicus* who, facing the flow of merchandise, thinks only of himself. In this respect, I insist that *minkanakuy*, the supportive practice of taking care of one another, of looking after each other mutually, cannot be confused with charity or philanthropy. To live in terms of *minkanakuy* is to negate the economy of profit and accumulation; in conceiving of wealth as social relationships, *minkanakuy* implies the protection of the individual so they don't become a *wakcha*, a person short of social relationships and socially bereft. The essence of pleasure - of individual enjoyment - is, according to Slavoj Žižek, good collective living: pleasure as a constituent element of social being that implies mutual care.

Without departing very far from our analysis, it is easy to discern that the praxis of the *minka* is an institution that articulates the social and the economic, the ritual and the political, the personal with the collective. And we are not speaking of essences or archaic forms in which Andean societies articulate the many practices of human action, but of knowledge, of practices, of a normative universe and of an ought-to-be ethic that sustains and gives meaning to social and societal relationships. It is imperative to point out that, far from being a reificatory idealisation, these forms of reciprocity have been or have come into being historically in both symmetrical and asymmetric practices, that they have been activated in varying degrees to generate surpluses; that they are forms of social relation historically transformed by contact with other socioeco-



nomie and political systems, and that their ethical bases are being undermined. All the same, their contents, the forms and the normative universe of these practices can be explored with the aim of regaining, reconstructing and reinventing them in the light of present and future needs and expectations. This needs to be a critical exercise of theoretical imagination and of historical commitment to deny any attempt at conceptual reification. It also implies a political and epistemological struggle against the denial of contemporariness that capitalism deploys against all forms of criticism of its cultural fundamentals. The concept of *sumak kawsay*, as imagined in political discourse, is a recent invention, it is a category that cites a way of life that needs to sink its roots into the practices of *minkanakuy* underlying the modes of production and multiple relations of collective life in the Andes. Otherwise, it runs the risk of ending up domesticated and reduced to its aesthetic dimension, and subsumed in the capitalist symbolism of cultural democracy.

The idea of the Common Good of Humanity, as formulated by Houtart, poses many questions and challenges. In my view its very definition could lead to misunderstandings. If it is a radically different collective way of life which humanity should reach, I do not understand why we should call it the Common Good of Humanity, in a historical time of grotesque global political impostures. The military interventions with the destruction and death that came in their wake in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, in the name of liberty, democracy and the “protection of civilians”, illustrate how socially and politically desirable concepts can be appropriated and used by the imperial powers. For its part, the United Nations, with its immovable power structures, has demonstrated not only its ineffectiveness in preventing wars but also something much more worrying: its usefulness for legitimising the military interventions of the big powers at a global level. The Common Good of Humanity series shows us a form of declaration to which this discussion certainly aspires, but it is much more important to work on the creation of new collective subjectivities that move away from the liberal ethos that sees individuals in perpetual competition among themselves and from the collectivism that distorts the solidarity-based liberty of *minkanakuy*.

In the immediate world political context, the construction of a collective way of life to replace capitalism is a political imperative of humanity. However, at a time of historical transition, we can only foresee advances at the edge of what our imagination can make out. Thus, Houtart's discourse abounds with NGOs, alliances between nations, international conventions, a series of initiatives already under way – still marginal, perhaps, but with potential to make change viable at a time of historical transition. What is novel and encouraging is the search for civilising elements and paradigms in the memories and local practices of (indigenous) peoples, which also represents a work of recovery, of invention and open and systematic elaboration. A work of elaboration that implies an intercultural practice that learns how to ask and to learn from others, before unleashing the imagination.

In conclusion, we have tried to give a historical and cultural foundation to the invention of *sumak kawsay* as a concept referring to a way of life historically situated in the Andes, based on the practice of *minka*, collective work implying the normative principle of social responsibility to care for one another. The question of its meaning and utility on different social and geographical scales remains open, not only because of the particular historical context in which it arose, but also because of the legitimacy that other ways of life might complement and even oppose it with. The same goes for the complexity of societies on the global scale, defined to different degrees by technological development. The transculturation of objects, of ideas, of ways of life is so important, as is the ability to listen and to learn from others.

## 5 The People's Science Movement, India

### PEOPLE'S SCIENCE FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF HUMANITY

VINOD RAINA

An acceleration of the economic crisis, violence due to war and militarism and the escalating ecological crisis broadly define the challenges at the end of the first decade of the twenty first century. The impact of these crises is so severe now that the search for alternative paradigms can no longer be a laid back academic pursuit; the survival of a large section of humanity and the earth could crucially be dependent on our ability to craft alternative visions and practices that keep both the humanity and the Earth happy. For long, the happiness of humanity has been dependent on the seemingly inexhaustible 'resources' the Earth has provided. These resources, once common, have gradually passed into private and monopoly interests causing immeasurable hardships to those, mostly farmers, adivasis (indigenous people) and poor, for whom these were available as common property resources – like water, forests and land (jal, jangal and zameen as they are called in India). The large scale destruction and monopolization of ecological resources has perhaps benefited a miniscule population, but it has left a majority destitute. The 1% and the 99% are therefore not only economic categories, they are ecological too. And war is an agency being used more often and aggressively to expand control on the ecological resources – oil, gas, seas, strategic lands and so on, in order that economic affluence of the 1% humanity may further increase to what can only be called obscene levels. It ought to be clear therefore that the three crises are linked, even though very often they may appear separated.

The ability of the humans to exploit the resources of the earth for accelerated economic prosperity and to wage more ferocious wars has a common element, namely the knowledge gained regarding the functioning of nature, what we call science. Science and technology are at

the very basis of our increased ability to tame and exploit nature for economic purposes, as also to develop more and more devastating weapons of war, including weapons of mass destruction. While many alternative visions and practices are explored in the area of economy, peace and ecology, much less attention has generally been paid to the knowledge areas like science and technology, even though it is this knowledge that has been the basis of exploitative economic, security and ecological practices. Scientific knowledge appears to be the holy cow that must remain untouched in the pursuit of alternatives. The question may be asked: 'Can the alternative vision like the common good of humanity be explored without critically examining and suggesting alternative approaches to the core of the knowledge system, namely science, that fuels the present dominant paradigm?'

The routes to counter the dominance of science in crafting the 'modern' are often the rather well-known anti-science or anti-modern formulations, a trend philosophically identified with Feyerabend and his followers, various strands of post-modernism, as also certain ecological and religious critiques of science. But demonizing science is unlikely to lead to any real solutions, since as will be argued later, science is not an 'out there' phenomenon that one can switch on or off; it is rather a part of humans and humanity, much like language and culture, which can be moulded, given different directions to craft alternatives, but hardly abandoned. Unlike rather naïve formulations that treat science as a value neutral activity, science is very much located within the social and political aspects of human endeavour, and therefore open to choices according to the kind of transformation one wishes to see in society.

### **Science and Nature**

Humans are different from other species on earth precisely because of the evolved brain that has powers of cognition and language. Human cognition and language have combined together to provide powers of reason that can be codified and communicated. This in many ways is also the origin of science – the study and control of nature, from ancient times to the present. Such an understanding of science was elaborated

in detail by J. D. Bernal in the four volume 'Science in History', a magnum opus which was described by the Times Literary Supplement thus: 'J. D. Bernal's monumental work, *Science in History*, is the first full attempt to analyse the reciprocal relations of science and society throughout history, from the perfection of the flint hand-axe to the hydrogen bomb. In this remarkable study he illustrates the impetus given to (and the limitations placed upon) discovery and invention by pastoral, agricultural, feudal, capitalist, and socialist systems, and conversely the ways in which science has altered economic, social, and political beliefs and practices. The third volume of *Science in History* covers the twentieth century, with chapters on the physical sciences and the biological sciences, with their impact on agriculture and medicine. This stupendous work ... is a magnificent synoptic view of the rise of science and its impact on society which leaves the reader awe-struck by Professor Bernal's encyclopedic knowledge and historical sweep.'

The fear felt by the hunting-gathering clans from nature's changes and furies – night (dark) and day (light), lightning's and thunder, heavy rains and floods, presence and disappearance of moon in the sky was perhaps the initial reason for the humankind to make sense of the functioning of nature. The discovery that seeds could be grown at one place to provide food and hence the change from nomadism to settlements with agriculture; of fire to cook food and remain warm in cold winters, of water sources and rivers as essential for irrigation for agriculture and hence the evolution of civilizations along rivers like the Euphrates, Indus, Nile, Yangtze; further contributed to the knowledge base of humans in their effort to battle and transform nature for their well-being and benefit. All this was empirical rather than theoretical knowledge, but yet science. Tool making, from stone to iron and then from alloys was perfected all over the globe, and with the advent of the wheel pulled by animals, humans learnt terrestrial transportation, since many accounts suggest that using the wind sail to travel over water had already been discovered.

Greece is generally credited as the site of mathematical abstraction, with Euclid and Pythagoras as shining examples. However Joseph Need-

ham's pioneering work on science in China has added to the already known historical work that confirms that scientific and mathematical abstraction was also well dispersed over the globe; in India, Arabia and China. Earliest accounts of astronomy and mathematics come from India, and Al-gebra was formulated in Arabia.

It is essential to remember these facts in order to get away from the stereotype that science emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, and all the problems on Earth can be traced to the European Enlightenment, of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is not to say that the 16<sup>th</sup> century European colonialism combined with the 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial revolution did not contribute to dividing the World into the rich and exploited categories, the point is that it is not as if science originated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Science, in rudimentary to somewhat sophisticated forms, as empirical and increasingly abstract knowledge existed wherever humans were, in particular, in the ancient river valley civilizations, which were made possible through a better understanding of nature's functioning's in those times. It is the combination of science with the political category called colonialism that began dividing the world into more and more rich and poor nations, and with the advent of the industrial revolution, it is science combined with capitalism that transformed the World into rich and poor nations; a transformation that persists under the particular form of capitalism of today, namely, neoliberalism. Science therefore was harnessed first to colonialism, later to capitalism and is now at the cutting edge of neoliberalism.

For a new vision, the question is: can science be harnessed to some other political category other than capitalism that may lead to the common good of humanity?

### **Science and Progress**

The October Revolution and the emergence of Soviet Union as a socialist republic was the first instance of science being harnessed to a political form other than capitalism, and the expectations were very high; that science for the common good of humanity would emerge from

within such a political location. This was encapsulated by the British Marxist scientist J.D. Bernal in his seminal and slim volume (as compared to his monumental four volume 'Science in History') titled 'The Social Function of Science', wherein he formulated the vision of how science could function for the betterment of masses under socialism. The context was the assumption that science had already demonstrated its usefulness for the betterment of society, but those fruits had accrued to only the elite under capitalism. Science under socialism, Bernal argued, had the potential to benefit the last person in the society; and this would be the true meaning of progress.

Science indeed had transformed a large part of the World before the October revolution. The discovery that coal could be burned to unleash the energy of steam to propel industry and transportation meant that the sole source of energy, namely muscular power, whether from humans or animals, would be less and less in demand. One must remember that slavery could also be seen as the method of controlling human muscle power, with all its attendant barbarism. Horse carriages, ox-carts and similar other transportation methods using a variety of animals all over the World too use energy stored in muscles. The steam engine, in ships, trains and in factories did help in eliminating the need of forced labour in certain tasks. With the advent of the internal combustion engine in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, fuelled by the till then 'black ooze of the Earth', namely petroleum oil of course changed things dramatically. The discovery of electricity and its growing uses was no less than a revolution by itself. The use of electrical signals to transit sound across oceans made Marconi a legend, and changed human communication permanently. Add to this the thousands of technical innovations of people like Edison, Graham Bell and so many others, science appeared like a magic that had the potential to give comfort to every human being on the Earth. This was further reinforced by progress in medicine. Deadly diseases like malaria, cholera, plague, typhoid and many other were tamed, saving millions of people who would routinely die from them. Longevity, mobility, communication, machines to take over back breaking work in farms, factories and houses – the promise of science was endless!

Science however was not just production; it was above all a different vision of life and society – it was reason. The societies of the World had evolved under strict religious or obscurantist dogmas, with rules and codes that not only decided human, household or societal behaviours and functioning's, but also of governance systems. These were often based on strict authorities, based on religious texts or edicts, and subservience to these authorities could be undermined at the risk of death. Science and reason secularized not only the civil society, but more importantly jurisprudence and governance systems. Arguments based on reason rather than on religious or similar dogmas, evidence, logical thinking were aspects that truly transformed many societies. Science was therefore seen not only as the force behind machines, more importantly it was perceived as the harbinger of a different social structure and discourse, firmly anchored in democracy. And that is how 'progress' was defined. Science was therefore not supposed to mean merely adding more scientific knowledge, techniques and machines; it was seen as the true source of human progress.

The Marxist thinkers of science saw great opportunity in achieving such progress under the socialist state. They argued that under capitalism, personal profit rather than the progress of the masses had become the agenda of the scientific endeavour. Therefore the potential benefit of science to humanity at large would unravel only under socialist practices. Even someone as influential and big as Einstein underlined this in his essay, 'Why Socialism?'. Since in the 1940s there was no socialist state except the Soviet Union, but many countries were on the threshold of gaining freedom from colonial rule, proponents of socialist science like Bernal, Haldane, Joliot-Curie amongst others particularly stressed on the need for state planning for science, rather than it being left to industry and other capitalist interests.

In a sense they cannot be faulted. The achievements of science and its impacts on society in the twentieth century were simply spectacular. Airplanes, ships, fast automobiles and trains, radio and television, films, CDs and DVDs and other entertainment technologies, nylon and other



synthetic yarns, new materials, agricultural products and machinery, health and medicinal products, medical imaging, nuclear power, space travel, and finally, computers and information and computing technologies made the 20<sup>th</sup> century so very different from all other centuries before. The Second World War was a great stimulus for many of these technological innovations, as it was for warships, submarines, better guns, missiles, more destructive ammunition, and finally the ultimate weapon of mass destruction, the atomic bomb. The century was not remarkable only for the range and uniqueness of the industrial products that science and technology produced, it was equally breathtaking for the theoretical insights into the workings of nature that science was able to uncover. Beginning with Maxwell's electromagnetic equations, structure of matter that Rutherford revealed by experiments with atoms, quantum mechanics, theory of relativity, Einstein's energy-mass equation, the understanding of the source of Sun's energy, astrophysics, cosmology and the structure of the Universe, semiconductors (the basis for making computer chips), molecular biology, genes and genomes; the list can go on. The mysterious nature that so overwhelmed the primitive human lay bare in its invisible functioning's so that humans could control it with unfailing preciseness to reap benefits and improve its lot.

For these 'old left' scientists of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, even when many of these products or laws of nature were not completely known, approval for science and its boundless frontiers was never a question for debate. In 1954, J.D. Bernal wrote in 'Science in History':

'The transformation of nature, along the lines indicated by the biological sciences, will be undertaken with the use of heavy machinery, including possibly atomic energy. All the river basins of the world can be brought under control, providing ample power, abolishing floods, droughts, and destructive soil erosion, and widely extending the areas of cultivation and stock raising.... Beyond this lie possibilities of further extending the productive zone of the world to cover present desert and mountain wastes and making full use of the resources of the seas, and beyond

that again lie the possibilities of microbiological and photochemical production of food’.

For Bernal, science made anything possible. Similar uncritical approval of science, days after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki came from the French physicist and Communist Party member, Fredric Joliot-Curie when he argued

“I am personally convinced that, despite the feelings aroused by the application of atomic energy to destructive ends, it will be of inestimable service to mankind in peacetime”.

As ought to be evident, such promises of science even if harnessed to socialism would appear incongruous today as we witness the threats to the Earth and a vast majority of humanity living on it, some sixty years since.

Even though the Soviet Union experiment went on for 70 years, and was replicated in some form or the other in countries like China, Cuba, Vietnam, erstwhile socialist countries of Eastern Europe, East Germany and so on, it would be hard to argue that the promise of the agency of science acting for the common good of the humanity has anywhere been realized. That is partly also because the manner of integrating science to socialism as was done in the Soviet Union in the initial years was gradually given up, and after it collapsed, except perhaps for Cuba, all other socialist countries, with China topping the list, made science subservient to the market in a new political thesis it calls market-socialism. If anything, many might argue that the conditions have in fact worsened.

That ought not to be seen as a condemnation of either science or of socialism. One could argue that the problem stems mostly from the complete neglect in factoring in the ecological dimension, inherent not only in capitalism but in the socialist practice too.

## Gandhian Vision

Where as socialism advocates distributive justice under the control of state, and differs totally from capitalism that advocates individual freedom to profit and monopoly mediated by the market rather than the state, one can argue that as far as increased and mass production of goods is concerned, both agree. So where as the difference is about 'public common goods' and 'privatized goods', there seems to be agreement about having more and more goods. Increased production of an increasing range of goods has an inherent assumption, that the earth has inexhaustible resources to sustain both the range and the extent. Sustainability of ecological resources was not seriously considered a hindrance to increased production even under socialism, one may argue. Moreover, the disruption of ecological balances and relationships that are critical for maintaining the regenerative capacities of the earth have remained completely outside the purview of high growth theses. It is not only the depletion of the earth's resources, but the tampering of its ecological cycles, like the hydrological cycle, the food chains, the photosynthetic processes, the climatic cycles, the gulf stream, the tropical cycles that have produced and sustained vital biodiversity; that have put humanity and earth under increasingly non-reversible stress. This has been brought around through large scale pollution, deforestation, tampering of river systems, changed agricultural practices for capitalistic farming, chemicalising the soil and above all now, through climate change. With the advent of globalized market economy, the roots of capitalism have so penetrated the production and reproduction of scientific knowledge so as to take it away more and more from the knowledge commons into private domains. The crafting of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade and the revised patent laws, overseen by the World Trade Organisation not only grant monopoly control on inventions and discoveries, but also make it possible to convert the nature's commons, like seeds and genes, into private monopoly through patenting of life forms. Consequently, the common good of humanity, which must also include the earth, is therefore so threatened that we can no longer postpone seeking alternative visions and practices of development.

Such an alternative vision was first voiced by Gandhi in the Indian context. From its inception, the Indian state was confronted by two different visions of reconstruction; the Gandhian project of reviving the village economy as the basis of development, and the Nehruvian plan of prosperity through rapid industrialisation that was influenced by the Soviet Union and Marxist scientists like Bernal and Haldane. Gandhi put his views together as early as 1921 in his book *Hind Swaraj* (India's Self Rule). Many years later, on the threshold of India's independence (October 5, 1945), Gandhi wrote a letter to Nehru in which he outlined his dream of free India.

"I believe that, if India is to achieve true freedom, and through India the world as well, then sooner or later we will have to live in villages - in huts not in palaces. A few billion people can never live happily and peaceably in cities and palaces...My villages exist today in my imagination.... The villager in this imagined village will not be apathetic.... He will not lead his life like an animal in a squalid dark room. Men and women will live freely and be prepared to face the whole world. The village will not know cholera, plague or smallpox. No one will live indolently, nor luxuriously. After all this, I can think of many things, which will have to be produced on a large scale. Maybe there will be railways, so also post and telegraph. What it will have and what it will not, I do not know. Nor do I care. If I can maintain the essence, the rest will mean free facility to come and settle. And if I leave the essence, I leave everything".

'God forbid that India should ever take to industrialisation in the manner of the West', Gandhi observed. 'The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million (over a billion today) took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts'. He had earlier in 1940 already expresses his misgivings regarding centralisation thus, 'Nehru wants industrialisation because he thinks that if it were socialised, it would be free from the evils of capitalism. My own view is that the evils are inherent in industrialism and no amount of socialisation can eradicate them ... I do visualise electricity, shipbuilding, ironworks,

machine-making and the like existing side by side with village crafts. But ... I do not share the socialist belief that centralisation of production of the necessities of life will conduce to the common welfare’.

The appeal of Gandhi lay in his programme of revitalising village communities and craft production by employing simple technologies to provide jobs and a decent livelihood to a predominantly rural population. The liberation that Gandhi promised was not merely an economic independence; it was, most profoundly, an assurance that the cultural traditions of the Indian peasantry would reign ascendant.

Gandhi’s vision struck no chords in the mind of Jawaharlal Nehru, who replied rather brusquely to Gandhi’s letter of October 1945: ‘It is many years since I read Hind Swaraj and I have only a vague picture in my mind. But even when I read it twenty or more years ago it seemed to me completely unreal ... A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment’. Having dismissed Gandhi’s plea thus, Nehru’s own ambivalence was to surface only a few years later when he talked of the evil of gigantic and mega projects.

The critical element in Gandhi’s vision was his aversion to centralised production - ... ‘I do not share the socialist belief that centralisation of production of the necessities of life will conduce to the common welfare’.

It is obvious that in his thesis, centralised production of goods was inherently violent; a violence that he averred could not be curtailed by making these goods as ‘public goods’ through a socialisation process. One could say that the ‘common good of humanity’ in his vision could only be achieved through ‘production by the masses’ rather than through ‘mass production’. His stress on village economy stemmed from such a vision of decentralised production of essential items. It is also evident that in his vision, decentralised production could not exist within a centralised governance structure and an education system that was not attuned to the skills and knowledge base of decentralised production. In

Hind Swaraj, he clearly expressed his disdain for the representative democracy of the British parliamentary system and proposed instead a local governance structure based on direct participatory democracy (the Panchayat system). As for education, he proposed the Nai Talim (new education) system that called for learning based on local production systems. Gandhi therefore proposed a holistic philosophy rather than a piece meal approach for practices that could lead to the common good of humanity.

### **People's Science and Practices of Decentralised Production**

Schools based on nai talim came up during Gandhi's time. One of the earliest attempts to put his ideas of decentralised production into practice, by working out appropriate and related science and technology innovations was taken up by one of Gandhi's associates, J.C. Kumarappa. He had already helped to set up the All India Village Industries Association, before he set up a center for appropriate rural technologies in central India in Wardha (where the main nai talim center was also established). Kumarappa summarized the concept of decentralised economy in a book 'Economy of Permanence' that he wrote while serving a prison sentence while fighting for India's freedom.

Since the new government in India after independence took the path of large scale industrial development, Gandhian ideas of decentralised development were and are still practiced by a fairly large number civil society groups in nearly all parts of the country.

One large organisation working in this direction is the All India People's Science Network (AIPSN), a prominent people's science movement in India.

People's science has emerged as a major mobilisational concept in India, evidenced by the fact that AIPSN has nearly half a million members. The movement first originated in the southern Indian state of Kerala when a group of left oriented scientists and writers got together to work towards the democratization of scientific literature. Since science was nearly totally transacted in the colonial English language in India, they began large scale translation of scientific literature into the local Malay-

alam language under the organisational banner Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (Kerala Science and Literature Association), or KSSP. Some of the first books they translated were Bernal's Social Function of Science and Science in History. Next, they innovated with new methods of science communication, using annual traveling theatre and music (kala jatha) groups to convey a variety of issues and concepts regarding science, development and education directly to people, from village to village. As more and more scientists, social scientists, teachers and youth joined the movement, reaching up to 70,000 by late seventies, KSSP started to address issues of development, particularly rural development.

Kerala is a unique region in the World in as much that in economic terms it is fairly poor; but in terms of social indicators like education and literacy, infant mortality rate, longevity, sex ratio etc, it is like a first world country. It therefore contradicts the neoliberal claim that high growth rates are a necessary pre-requisite for better social indicators. KSSP concentrated its efforts to work out avenues of development that were self-reliant and did not depend largely on imports and exports, or processes of globalization. This resulted in mapping out the entire resource wealth of Kerala, and using that as a basis, to formulate policies that would help farmers to become self-sufficient, to provide food sovereignty.

Though working on different issues, such people's science groups existed in other states of India too. The catastrophic Bhopal Gas Disaster brought them together in 1984. They worked together to help the victims of the gas disaster in analyzing the technical aspects that led to the disaster, on issues of health and injury and the legal issues in order that the victims got justice and proper compensation. This also led to these organisations to question the entire approach of science and technology being used for mega profits of mega businesses. Based on this work, twenty-six such organisations came together in 1987 to form the All India People's Science Network, as a nation wide organisation. By the year 2000, the participating groups were 46 with a combined membership of around half a million people.

The term 'people's science' signifies many things. Cognizant of the fact that science has become an exalted domain of knowledge, concentrated only amongst the professionals who work in elite universities, institutions and companies, the term 'people' signifies a democratization process whereby ordinary people must also understand science so that science policies, products and information that by now determines their life is also understandable to them so, that they can participate rather than be controlled by technocrats and science establishments. It also signifies that science is not only what the university or research scientist does, that the knowledge and practicing system of the ordinary people, namely the farmer, the handicraft worker, the indigenous (adivasi) people, the housewife working in the kitchen also have elements of science in them and it is the combination of the people's knowledge and the academic knowledge that can lead to more sustainable paths; or that the common good of humanity demands that the knowledge of the people be recognized and given due prominence, rather than being marginalized and replaced by knowledge produced and reproduced in universities and research institutions. And finally, 'people' also signifies that developmental policies must be worked out with peoples participation and not by the rulers alone.

Though the AIPSN is decidedly left oriented, many of its practices follow the Gandhian path, in particular the work in strengthening rural technologies for rural production. In order to reduce the dependence of rural populations on products flowing in from urban centers, as also to create avenues for earning livelihoods in areas where they live so that they do not need to migrate to find work, AIPSN units identify and work with a variety of rural populations, partnering them in upgrading rural production systems to create products at the local level for local consumption. The areas of work include leather manufacture, pottery, food and fruit processing, textiles and handicrafts, indigenous medicines, agro products, milk and dairying, wood and bamboo products, local watershed methods for irrigation, tree plantations, use and revival of indigenous seeds and so on. Combining the best of local knowledge and institutional science, AIPSN workers partner in working out the most suitable skills and pro-



duction processes in a particular area for value added products. These constructive efforts are complemented by struggles and resistances: to the patent laws, to bogus climate change negotiations of the governments, against rampant privatization; and for policies that establish rights of people to education, food, work and so on.

Realising that education plays a vital role so that local knowledge systems are not lost, are promoted and even brought into formal schools, AIPSN units have been engaged in documenting, publishing and distributing thousands of titles in rural areas, in nearly all the fourteen major languages of India. These are supplemented by nearly two dozen magazines and journals, in local languages. From time to time AIPSN units have also been successful in incorporating such knowledge in the formal school curricula.

The Indian state finally gave constitutional validity to the Gandhian concept of local governance (Panchayats) in 1994 through appropriate constitutional amendments. Since then every five years three tiers of local governance systems are elected in all parts of the country, the lowest tier being at the village level. AIPSN has not only made working with the elected Panchayats as a major focus of its work but it has encouraged many of its volunteers to contest these elections; thousands of them have been successful. One of the major areas AIPSN has concentrated its work on is equipping the village Panchayat to work out its own development plan for its area. The attempt has been to incorporate these local plans into the state plans, so that people plan and develop the way they determine, and not according to national planners. This resulted in 1997 for the state of Kerala to make its state plan by combining the Panchayat plans the people had made, and forty per cent of the state funds were allocated directly to the Panchayats to execute their own plans (a system perhaps more elaborate than the other successful initiative of local budgets in Port Alegre, Brazil). This comes perhaps closest to the direct democracy principle that Gandhi espoused.

## Well Being and Happiness

The New Economic Foundation (NEF) in London worked out the Happy Planet Index, an approach that can measure how humanity can be happy while the Earth too remains happy, meaning it is not over-exploited beyond its regenerative capacity. Rees and Wackermangel had already worked out in the nineties that the Earth could remain within its regenerative capacity if each human on the Earth had an ecological footprint of no more than 1.7 global hectares. Combining this footprint with longevity and a sense of well being, scientists at the NEF worked out the Happy Planet Index. On this index, the United States towards the bottom; so do most of the European countries. On top of the list stands Costa Rica and island countries of the Pacific like Vanuatu.

The only country in the World that has decided to report its progress through indicators other than economic, like the GDP and GNP, is the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. It has created and measures its progress through the GNH – the Gross National Happiness index. It is therefore evident that there are not only visions of a different World being proposed, like that of Pacha Mama (Bolivia) and Dharti Ma (India), but concrete ‘scientific’ measures of a an alternative kind are being attempted in order to establish that processes of development based on the common good of humanity can be crafted.

Creating a measurable ecological footprint and measures like the Happy Planet Index and Gross National Happiness is also science, just as creating science and technology for local production is. Therefore choices of a different science exist, that are linked to well being, happiness, ecological balance and local production. This should give hope that the common good of humanity is not merely a utopian vision, but an attainable objective.

## 6 The Arab Awakening

### FROM “COMMON GOODS” TO THE “COMMON GOOD” OF ALL LIVING SPECIES ON THE PLANET EARTH

HASSAN ABOU-BAKR

From the start of his paper, Houtart states that “the economic development model that “we” have, with its political, cultural and psychological consequences, is at the origin of these imbalances”. By “we” he means the “west”. What about our “we”? In the very moment I am writing these lines, another dictator in our Arab world was stepped down, actually killed by his people- in spite of the debate on the NATO intervention. What I am trying to say is that the economic and political models that prevailed in our region were very much worse. Do not forget, please, the hypocritical policies exercised by western states (US and Europe) that lead to the persistence of such policies and those who implemented them.

Peoples, not only in the Arab world, but also all over the world, have recognized the necessity of new systems. Demonstrations went out in almost 80 countries protesting against the existing financial system.

The pivotal question raised by Houtart’s paper, is “how to bring together the forces for change?”

#### **“Common goods” Redefined**

I want to extend the term “common goods” to include things such as the climate of our planet, the ice caps, the oceans, the rain forests and the “goods” of science, knowledge and technology. All the Humanity has contributed, in one way or the other, to the advancement of the human community. We recognize, of course, the magnificent contributions made by the western civilization, especially during and after the industrial revolution. But all nations had offered a lot for the accumulation of knowledge and human wisdom. Houtart is completely right when he states “we have reached the stage when human life itself is being com-

moditized". That was because of the neoliberal financial and economic policies. And the "defense of public services and "common goods" forms a part of the resistance to those policies". This is what the revolutions of the Arab Spring are doing. People are protesting against poverty, plundering of the national wealth, by the multinationals and the local capitalistic players as well, and unemployment, as well as the disrespect of public freedoms and human dignity. In Egypt, for example, part of the protests is against selling of some public-sector companies to private investors leading to thousands of workers sent to unemployment. Revolutionary forces are calling for the recuperation of the nation-owned assets that were privatized.

### **Not a theoretical approach**

Houtart mentions that the approach of the concept of the "common good of Humanity" might seem overly theoretical, considering the social and political concerns that now confront us. I think it has become a necessity. With reaching the "oil peak" in 2002, humanity needs to think of a radical paradigm shift. Humanity is at the threshold of the collapse of the "carbon civilization". Fossil fuels, i.e. coal, oil and natural gas, that mother nature spent millions of years to form them, have been depleted in a century, and we have to look for alternative sources of energy that will lead, with great sufferings, to different ways of life, different world views, and ultimately to new human civilization less dependent on carbon.

The "common good", described by Houtart, is "that which is shared in common by all human beings (men and women)". But the majority of human beings do not consider the simple fact that we, humans, are not the only who live on the planet. We are just one single species, among millions, who share the Earth. Actually, we are the latest arrivals. The rest of living organisms were here before us, and they succeeded to "manage" the planet without destroying it. That was because natural ecosystems are astonishingly wise. They have plenty of energy and no wastes. They are inter dependent, smart, multifunctional, and not greedy. Natural ecosystems, with their members and relationships, do not depend on us (humans), we (humans) depend on them. They can

continue without us, we cannot. That is why we should give them the respect they deserve, and we need to learn from them. This is not an ecologically fantastic view. On contrary, it is a must if we want to keep the life-supporting systems functional for our good and the good of all forms of life.

What Houtart is calling for, is a step forward to a wider concept that includes the good for all co-inhabitants of the planet. He briefly touched on the “capacity of nature to regenerate itself “. This concept of “regenerative capacity”, along with another related concept, i.e. the “carrying capacity of the ecosystems”, are both severely neglected by the majority of people. That is not because people are bad, but because of the absence of environmental education for school children and politicians alike.

The multiple facet-nature of the crisis, according to Houtart’s point of view, includes four aspects: the financial and economic crisis, the food crisis, the energy crisis, and the climate crisis. In fact we are not talking about four crises. Rather, it is one global crisis with four aspects.

As part of the third world, Arab countries, rich and poor ones, suffer a lot from the consequences of the financial and economic crisis. As exporters of raw materials-oil, oars and some agricultural products- and importers of high-tech products as well as food imports, Arab nations find themselves as victims of unfair exchange between North and South.

In regards to what Houtart wrote on food crisis, I want to reflect briefly on two subjects: the agrofuels and the monoculture. We should support the energy generation using agricultural wastes and crop residues, not food crops. Solving energy crisis should not be at the expense of food production. Moreover, there are several promising sources of renewable energy that are not explored or fully used yet. Solar, wind, sea tide, geothermal energies are examples. Politicians should be educated about the consequences of allocating agricultural and forest lands to energy production.

As for the second subject, monoculture has resulted in a type of agricultural production which is extremely vulnerable to shocks, extremely thirsty to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. It is unsustainable type of production. It has been well known that to produce one calorie of food, using the western-industrial-chemical way of agriculture, ten calories of fossil fuel are consumed. World cannot continue in this direction. And now there are growing movements of alternative agriculture all over the world, even in the west (e.g. organic farming permaculture, community supported agriculture, and natural agriculture ... etc.). Some of these alternatives proved successful and competitively productive with more fair distribution of revenues on involved parties.

The arguments that alternative sources of energy are not technologically advanced, and accordingly not economically feasible, are challenged by some scientists and politicians who claim that the technology is ready, but oil multinationals and industrial corporations are not willing to make a move in this direction, as long as cheaper oil sources in the Middle East are still under control.

The shifting of agricultural lands to the energy production will destroy the livelihoods of small farmers and poor communities in the third world. The tragedies of rubber and oil palm farmers in East Asia are still in mind. Moreover, it is the whole planet that was negatively affected by the removal of rain forests which resulted in devastating environmental impact on the ecosystem.

### **Climate change**

Although Arab countries' contributions to the emissions of greenhouse gases are very little, some Arab countries are heading the list of those who will be affected by the global warming and its consequences. Egypt is an example. A considerable part of the northern Nile Delta is endangered by the rise of Mediterranean Sea level. Nile Delta is the richest agricultural soil in Egypt, where the majority of the Egyptian population lives. Some scientists estimate that up to 30 % of the land in Nile Delta will be flooded by sea water or will lose its fertility because of salination

due to the intrusion of sea water. Millions of people will have to abandon their land, with all the economic and social consequences of such a mass displacement in a country that is already suffer from overpopulation. Climate change has also its impact on the amount of water in the Nile basin<sup>154</sup> which is shared by 10 African countries. Contradicting future scenarios make the situation of water supply more confusing and unpredictable. If Nile water is going to decrease, Egypt will be faced with major food crises, even famines. On the other hand, if the amount of rains is increased on the Nile source areas, Egypt will be threatened by floods. In the absence of national efforts or regional cooperation between the concerned parties, no more precise projections can be developed. The issue is not only scientific or technological. Political willing and support from international institutions are needed.

Most of Arab countries lie in arid and hyper-arid zones, with scarce water resources. Climate change will lead to the increase of atmospheric temperature. That will lead, accordingly, to more evaporation from soil and crops, which in turn requests more water for irrigation. The demand for water, which is already a source of conflicts now, will be aggravated. These threats will have their burdens on rural communities in the Arab countries. In view of the biased development policies that prevailed in our countries, capital cities, main harbors and industrial centers have acted as giant magnets attracting young people from countryside to big cities, which led, in many cases, to the deterioration of public facilities and the proliferation of non-formal settlements, in fragile and marginal areas around big urban centers where the poor are subjects to all known social and economic hardships.

Climate change, with its all consequences is expected to intensify these problems. Industrial countries who are the biggest producers of greenhouse gases should assist developing countries in mitigation and adaptation policies and programs.

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<sup>154</sup> Nile is a “common good”, like other common water resources in our region (Turkey, Syrian and Iraq is another example, and Lebanon, Jordan, Occupied Palestine and Israel is a third example of conflicts over common water resources).

### About the alternatives

"Reviewing the four elements of the fundamental paradigm<sup>155</sup> on which the collective life of humanity on the planet is based", should really be heading the agenda of all political and social forces that are now struggling to reshape the life in our countries. However, the emerging political powers, which were newly-born during and after the revolutions in a number of Arab countries, are mainly concerned, for the moment, with protecting the embryonic changing in their societies on one hand, and finding a foot step for themselves on the political arena, on the other hand. As a result, there are many important issues, related to the future of these nations, are still not obvious enough or even not obvious at all on the agendas of these new forces. Nevertheless, there are encouraging signs that small groups of young people are formed, and they are working seriously to engage with the fundamental issues of the development of their societies. These groups should be encouraged to be more open to what is going on in the world and to establish connections with their counter parts on the anti-capitalistic front.

Few days ago, hundreds of Egyptian young men and women were demonstrating in the Cairo downtown against imperialism and capitalism in solidarity with the international movement against capitalism. This internationalist spirit, which was absent for decades on the Egyptian political scene is a good sign of the new era which is in the making in Egypt in spite of all the obstacles and threats the Egyptian revolution is faced with.

Houtart's discussion of "modernity" is "important", although not new. It has special importance in the Arab society of today, particularly with the rise of political Islamic forces with their interpretation of the relationship between the individual and society, political region, different kinds

<sup>155</sup> Houtart defines these four elements in his paper as: 1) the relationship with nature; 2) the production of the material basis of life-physical, cultural and spiritual; 3) social and political collective organization; and 4) the interpretation of reality and the self-involvement of the actors in constructing it, which is culture. And he adds that "each society has to achieve this".



of freedom and the entire world in general. This debate is expected to last for the years to come. And it is one of the major domains in which the fate of the “Arab Spring Revolutions” will be determined.

### **A call for respecting Nature**

Houtart sees that climate change strongly reminds us with a simple fact that was forgotten: humans depend totally on nature for their life! How did ruling regimes in the Arab world see “nature”? It was just resources that they have exclusive right to exploit them up to the end. Respect of nature is no longer a slogan voiced by ecological groups; rather, it has become a precondition to the sustainable development of our societies, and our planet at large.

However, we agree with Houtart that this entails a radical philosophical change. The dominant idea that ecological damage is “collateral and inevitable” throughout the course of growth and development is now challenged in many parts of the world. The issue here is to differentiate between “need” and “greed”, as Ghandi once said.

Houtart’s mention of traditional thoughts, including religious ones, and the bonds between human beings and nature- as these thoughts express is very important – leads us to think of the great potentials that are included in indigenous wisdom, knowledge and old traditions, side by side with the discoveries of modern science, to educate people about their relation to the environment. This issue is, unfortunately, absent of the political agendas of almost all active players in the political- social arenas in our region. Dealing with these issues should be done in very conscious way. That is because there were increasing tendencies in our part of the world that globalization and western culture are eroding our identity. That is one major argument used by fundamentalist groups that are active on the political scene.

Another important issue raised by Houtart in his paper, is the relationship between the ownership of the human common resources on the planet and the democratization of international organizations (e.g. UN). In this

regard, commoditization of the basic life-supporting element must be resisted. The conclusion made by Houtart that “socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would tend to incorporate this (redefining our relationship with nature) as a central plank of its policies.

### **Use value versus exchange value**

“All human beings have the right to satisfy their basic necessities”. That necessitates the establishment of a “moral economy”. Which is subjected to ethical requirements that contradict the predominance of exchange value. But, it is not possible to achieve this “without challenging the private ownership of the principal means of production”. Let us look at these statements in the light of that is going on Egypt now. People recognizes the extended damage made by privatization policies exercised by Mubarak regime, and they are now demanding to restore re-nationalization companies and economic institutions sold to private sector through-out the last three decades. In addition, the primary motto of the Egyptian revolution in January 2011 was “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice and Human Dignity”. That was people recognized that these demands cannot be achieved without fundamentally changing the ruling political regime.

### **Democratization of Regional and International Organizations**

The discussion on the democratization of international (e.g. the United Nations, the Security Council ...etc) and Regional organizations (e.g. some Latin American entities) has its bearing on two important regional organizations in our region; i.e. the League of Arab States (briefly known as the Arab League) and the African Union (formerly the organization of African Unity). “The Arab Spring” revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya, the protests in Bahrain and Jordan, as well as the restless situations in Sudan, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, all opened the life of such organizations for a public discussion, Added to these are the regional unions of trade unions and syndicates, which were used to be, in most cases, formed by state security forces of the ruling regimes.

## **Towards a Universal Declaration on the Common Good of Humanity**

In order to respond to Houtart's call for "a universal declaration on the common good of humanity", this important paper should be available for the widest audience possible. The thoughts included in it should be subjected to discussion among social and political forces who are leading the struggle for a new world free of injustice, oppression, discrimination and violation of the basic human rights.

## 7 Asia – Europe Peoples’ Forum

### RESTORING THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND A LIFE OF DIGNITY FOR ALL – THE CAMPAIGN FOR TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION IN ASIA

TINA EBRO

The world is in crisis. The global economy is in shambles; the financial system in chaos. Energy supplies are rapidly dwindling. There is food scarcity in many parts of the globe, and over a fourth of the world’s population is starving. Climatic patterns are changing, bringing havoc to agriculture and unleashing typhoons and floods as well as severe drought that have devastated both cities and rural communities.

We are at a critical juncture of history. The crises are striking hard at the affluent countries of the North, causing indebtedness, joblessness and insecurity. Their effects are harsher still in poorer countries of the South, exacerbating the chronic poverty and inequality that has been rampant in these parts of the world even before the present crises. Social inequality and polarization have been aggravated as well, widening the already staggering gap between the haves and the have-nots.

However many states’ response to the crises is a continuing and even stronger commitment to free trade and the market. Their austerity policies are dismantling public utilities and services, withdrawing subsidies, dismantling and diminishing social safety nets, massive lay-offs, the destruction of decent jobs in favour of part-time precarious work, and other harsh measures which are transferring the crises from financial institutions onto the people.

States’ actions have sparked massive resistance. Expressed in the “Occupy” movements in the US and Canada, in the “indignados” and “Occupy” mobilizations across Europe, the anti-regime uprisings in the Arab world, and the social and economic justice movements in Asia, peoples in all

regions of the world are up in protest against their governments and rulers who seem to be oblivious to their suffering. The peoples of the North, on one hand, are rising in defence of their rights. The peoples of the South, on the other hand, are asserting a more fundamental right – the right to life, a life of dignity for all.

### **Restoring the right to life and a life of dignity in Asia**

Thirty years of neo-liberal economic restructuring in Asia have resulted in producing two-thirds of the world's poor and hungry – more than 900 million of them living in abject poverty. Despite claims by governments of positive economic growth, over 70 per cent of Asia's work force is being pushed to the informal sector where they endure precarious work, poverty wages, and sub-human living conditions. With the environmental crisis, Asia's poor have become even more vulnerable as their lives and livelihoods, as well as food security and habitats, are imperilled by the effects of global warming.

Faced with these challenges, Asian activists have joined together in the Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP) to initiate a militant campaign to restore the right to life and human dignity. They are calling for transformative social protection, pressing on governments in all countries to unconditionally guarantee all people the following fundamental economic and social rights:

- The right to work, including a guarantee of living wages, full employment or livelihood opportunity and decent working conditions;
- The right to food, which means full access to adequate food and subsidized prices of staple food items;
- The right to essential services, including quality health care and education, as well as water and electricity; and,
- The right to social security, including pensions for the elderly and disabled, insurance against risks of unemployment, illness and agricultural calamities.

Asian activists reject the ceaseless commodification of all essential goods and services. They oppose the relinquishing by governments of their prime responsibility to provide the people quality health care and education, clean potable water and electricity, and other goods and services so vital to life, to the caprices of the market. They are fighting for the de-commodification of these essential goods and services by demanding from governments that these be provided for free or at highly subsidized prices, to all people. This struggle acknowledges that people have the right to live a life free from want and deprivation. People's entitlement to these rights and to social protection is enshrined in international human rights covenants and laws, e.g. Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Network for Transformative Social Protection puts the poor and the powerless at the forefront of this struggle, being the overwhelming majority in the region. As a result, it is transformative; the poor in this struggle are conscious agents of change, working to lift their own selves from poverty and participating in this effort to improve the quality of life of their communities and societies as a whole.

Campaigning for transformative social protection is a significant social redistribution measure. But it is also a movement to empower the poor, to propel them into more inspired actions, into building their confidence and realizing their collective strength, into expanding spaces for political participation thereby strengthening the movement from below for a truly democratic societal transformation.

### **Affordability and do-ability**

The Network for Transformative Social Protection believes that universal social protection, even in developing countries, is affordable and doable. Both the United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are in fact spearheading a global advocacy for a social protection floor. This initiative includes the following:

- basic income security, i.e. pensions for the elderly and disabled, child benefits, income support and/or employment guarantees for working poor;

- affordable access to essential social services, i.e. health, water, education, food security, housing, and others.

Costing studies of the ILO in Africa and Asia clearly show that domestic resources can be generated to cover the social protection floor programmes and would cost no more than four per cent of the countries' national income.<sup>156</sup> A key requisite to realize this, however, is the exercise of the states' political will and determination.

Progressive economists highlight the following steps:

- Putting in place an effective tax collection and administration system;
- Realigning social priorities by doing away with non-essential expenditures such as capital outlay for the military and perks of state officials;
- Instituting progressive taxation programmes by shifting the tax burden to the local elite and big corporations through, for instance, higher corporate and income taxes and VAT on non-essential goods; and,
- Embarking on a debt moratorium and cancellation of illegitimate debts. Debt servicing has significantly contributed to budget deficits and depressed rate of growth. These debt payments can be channelled to social and ecological programmes.<sup>157</sup>

But while the UN and ILO's social protection floor is an outstanding initiative, it remains a policy of targeting and does not go beyond poverty reduction and its ultimate elimination. Activists should, however, capitalize on it, taking it as an opportunity to develop a broader and more transformative concept of social protection.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Bachelet, Michelle, *Social Protection Floor for a Fair and Inclusive Globalization*, Report of the Advisory Group chaired by Michelle Bachelet, convened by the ILO with the collaboration of the WHO, Geneva, 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Mestrum, Francine, *Universal Social Protection and Innovative Financing: Exploring Links*, Paris, UNRISD and Pax Romana Conference, October 2012.

<sup>158</sup> Yi, Ilcheong, *Building ASEAN Peoples' Unity, Framework and People-Centered Alternatives Towards Life of Dignity for All: Why Transformative Social Protection?*, Jakarta, ASEAN People's Forum, 4 MAY 2011.

## **Network beginnings**

The Network for Transformative Social Protection was formed in 2008 in the side lines of the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) in Beijing. At that time, the financial crisis was just beginning to unravel and the social movements and NGOs within the AEPF inter-regional network appealed to the heads of states of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to place at the centre of the ASEM agenda "people, planet and community" over "profit, capital and market." (This call has since become a slogan bantered by protesters to expose corporate greed and state complicity.)

Network members representing poor people's movements in Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and India saw the crises as an opportunity for the poor and the most affected to come forward and assert the right to decent work and decent life. At its founding conference in Manila, the Network resolved to pursue transformative social protection programmes in their respective countries and at regional and international bodies like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), European Union (EU), and ASEM. Network for Transformative Social Protection (NTSP), Communique, Manila, NTSP Founding Conference, 14 October 2009.

The Network agreed to first focus on public information and education as well as capacity-building activities to elevate the transformative social protection agenda at the centre of policy debates in member-countries and affirm its importance as an anti-poverty instrument. It also emphasized the need for a broad coalition of social movements, trade unions, sectoral networks and NGOs that are actively engaging governments at the local, national, and international arenas so the movement can move forward.

A powerful and commanding level of assertion and pressure from below from a mighty coalition led by grassroots organizations is deemed essential to claim these entitlements. Based on the experiences of Costa Rica, Mauritius and the state of Kerala in India, widely considered the "welfare states of the South," nationwide campaigns that move people



to collective participation and action had to be waged before effective social protection systems with wide coverage and institutionalized by the state could be achieved.<sup>159</sup>

In Costa Rica, for instance, peasants and small coffee producers worked together and pushed for institutionalization of social and economic rights. In Mauritius, farmers groups collaborated with the Agricultural Laborers Association and urban trade unions to spearhead social reforms. In the state of Kerala, anti-caste and land reform movements, with trade union federations and informal sector workers pushed the state to universalize social protection. In these three countries, pro-labour and socialist-oriented parties actively cooperated with people's movements to advance the campaign for social protection.<sup>160</sup>

### **Immediate agenda**

The Network for Transformative Social Protection's immediate agenda is to oblige the states in Asia to have a strong role in institutionalizing and legislating for at a national-level a system of universal social protection. To be universal means that social protection should be provided by governments unconditionally to all their citizens and residents, i.e. migrant workers and refugees. States should take the leading role in the delivery of basic services and infrastructure, and therefore assume the key responsibilities of financing, administering and regulating social protection programmes and institutions.<sup>161</sup>

These programmes should include social assistance such as the social protection floor, social insurances and pensions, social services like water and electricity, health and education, as well as labour laws that ensure living wages, decent work and full employment. Certainly all of these cannot be realized and provided all at once, but it is important for the states

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<sup>159</sup> Bangura, Yusof (ed.), *Politics of Poverty Reduction*, Geneva, UNRISD, 2007

<sup>160</sup> Ibid

<sup>161</sup> Saith, Ashwani, *From Targeting to Universalism: Some Reflections*, Quezon City, Southeast Asian Conference on Social Protection and Universalizing Socio-Economic Security organized by Social Watch-Philippines, April 2010.

to have a broad strategy to achieve all these universally and ensuring the legislative or constitutional frameworks to underpin them.<sup>162</sup>

The above agenda is in contrast to the neoliberal policy framework for social protection, promoted by the World Bank and adopted by most states in Asia. The Bank regards markets as the best solution to the vulnerabilities of the poor and relies on targeted safety nets to alleviate the adverse consequences of the economic and other crises. By extension, it perceives the role of the State as limited to being a provider of safety nets when market responses are insufficient.<sup>163</sup>

But according to the United Nation's Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), the Asian Financial crisis of 1997-98 exposed the failure of safety net responses in poverty reduction and social redistribution. The institute reveals that the neoliberal approach to social protection, which started in the 1980s and combined privatization of essential social services and targeted public provision, has resulted in a "lost decade of development" in many parts of the world. It asserts further that in countries where large sectors of the population are poor, the targeting method entails high administrative costs and substantial errors of under-coverage while stigmatizing the beneficiaries. UNRISD, *Combating Poverty and Inequality*, UNRISD, Geneva, 2010. UNRISD, *Combating Poverty and Inequality*, UNRISD, Geneva, 2010.<sup>164</sup>

### Strategic agenda

In the long-term, the Network for Transformative Social Protection will highlight the transformative aspect of social protection. Its struggle shall address the structural causes of poverty by pressing governments to

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<sup>162</sup> Yi, Ilcheong, *Building ASEAN Peoples' Unity, Framework and People-Centered Alternatives Towards Life of Dignity for All: Why Transformative Social Protection?* Jakarta, ASEAN People's Forum, May 2011.

<sup>163</sup> Messkoub, Mahmood, *On the need for the univerzalisation of socio-economic security in the aftermath of global financial crisis*, Quezon City, Southeast Asian Conference on Social Protection and Universalizing Socio-Economic Security organized by Social Watch-Philippines, April 2010.

<sup>164</sup> UNRISD, *Combating Poverty and Inequality*, UNRISD, Geneva, 2010.

implement alternative national development strategies that bring about social justice, equity and ecological sustainability. The universalization of social protection cannot stand alone and should be made an integral part of these strategies.<sup>165</sup> A central pre-condition to the implementation of alternative national development strategies therefore is for progressive forces to reclaim the State and to transform it into a pro-active and people-centred agent of development.

When the structural adjustment programmes were imposed in Asia in the 1980s by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, many states were pressured into supporting the infrastructure needs of big corporations, opening up their markets to international trade, allowing market forces to dictate the direction of the economy, and privatizing public resources and services. As most countries in the region took on this neo-liberal approach, their local industries and agricultural capacities were undermined, dramatically affecting their capacity for food production. This has also resulted in the loss in jobs and people's livelihoods, destroying the lives of farmers, workers, especially women, and other vulnerable groups in the region.<sup>166</sup>

From this experience, Asian activists see the utmost importance of developing a different kind of State, one which regulates and disciplines the market and subordinates the interests of corporations and the elite on behalf of the poor majority and the common good. More than social assistance and redistribution, the State must address power imbalances and develop mechanisms for the participation of the poor and marginalized not only during elections but at all levels of decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Under the present crises, states in Asia should campaign for alternative national development strategies that will overturn the failed strategies formulated by international financing institutions. These should replace

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<sup>165</sup> Lauridsen, Jesper, *Championing a South-South led Alternative Development Agenda through Transformative National Development Strategies that Include Social Protection*, Jakarta, ASEAN People's Forum, May 2011.

<sup>166</sup> Bello, Walden, *Food Wars*, London, Verso Books, 2009.

the current neoliberal policies on trade and investment liberalization, deregulation, privatization and export-led growth.<sup>167</sup>

Developing countries must strengthen their domestic markets to serve as the main stimulus of economic growth. They should increase the purchasing power of their poor through income and asset redistribution measures like reforming land ownership, providing living wages to workers, full employment and universal social protection programmes. Also crucial is regulating every country's relationship with the global economy to protect its market from unfair competition while still in the process of strengthening the capacity of its domestic agriculture and industry.<sup>168</sup>

In this regard, the developing economies should set a policy for the strategic use of tariffs and other trade mechanisms not only to protect the domestic market from unfair competition but, more importantly, to let it grow in depth and breadth. Agriculture should become the focal point of the economy, ensuring food sufficiency. To give agricultural development impetus, a thorough-going land reform programme should be implemented and state subsidies provided farmers. Industries should be made to support agriculture, especially in developing sustainable agro-technologies that are benign to the environment.<sup>169</sup>

These alternative strategies will forge closer linkages between agricultural and industrial growth and between rising incomes and their equitable distribution. These strategies can also set limits to economic growth in the face of pressing environmental concerns.

### **Priorities at the regional and global level**

The Network for Transformative Social Protection, in cooperation with Forum-Asia (a regional network of major human rights organizations in the region) and progressive Asian parliamentarians, plan to actively lobby

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<sup>167</sup> Romano, Jorge, *National Development Strategies: Back to the Future*, Kuala Lumpur, South-South People's Solidarity Network Conference, July 2010.

<sup>168</sup> Amin, Samir, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*, London, Zed Press, 1990.

<sup>169</sup> Bello, Walden, *The Virtues of Deglobalization*, Manila, Internet.net, 4 Sept. 2009.

regional bodies like the ASEAN for the adoption of a Social Agenda.<sup>170</sup> The Social Agenda will include the universalization of social protection as well as the de-privatization in the region of essential goods and services vital to human life. The creation of a Regional Social Protection Fund is also envisioned by Asian activists, financed from funds generated through the introduction of a financial transaction tax. This tax covers currency transactions and all transactions involving financial assets like equity bonds and treasury bills. Additionally, the Network will engage ASEAN governments to abolish their respective bank secrecy laws and dismantle their tax havens to generate additional funds for the proposed regional fund. The reduction of military budgets is also a strategic issue that activists can demand from their governments and regional bodies and redirect such expenditures to social protection programmes.<sup>171</sup>

At the global level, the Network for Transformative Social Protection, as part of an international alliance of civil society organizations, seeks universal social protection and innovative financing through the financial transaction tax. This alliance also includes the networks of the World Social Forum on Health and Social Security, Global Social Justice, Action Aid, the Asia Europe People's Forum and South-South People's Solidarity Network. The UNRISD provides the research and knowledge support for the alliance.

The Network for Transformative Social Protection is also supporting the initiative of progressive international NGOs, for a "UN Charter on the Common Goods of Humankind." This proposed Charter holds that "common goods" should not be subjected to commodification and trade in capitalist markets. It aims to reclaim the commons, which means the seas, water, air, forests, as well as all essential goods and services. It believes that if these commons stay in the hands of individuals and corpo-

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<sup>170</sup> Forum Asia, *Final Statement*, Bali, Regional Consultation on Democratization and People's Participation, 8 December 2011.

<sup>171</sup> Chhachhi, Amrita, *Democratic Citizenship or Market-based Entitlements? A Gender Perspective on Social Protection in South Asia*, Institute of Social Studies Working Paper No. 486, December 2009.

rations as commodities that can just be transacted in the markets, they will fall outside the realm of democratic control. At the rate the world's natural resources are plundered by these few individuals and corporations, the sustainability of these commons, and therefore the right to a decent life for both present and future generations, cannot not be ensured.<sup>172</sup>

Asian activists believe that this new UN Charter, which is envisioned to parallel the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is much-needed today. This can be an eminent framework, as well as an ethical and legal basis to which activists can refer. They can cite it in support of major advocacies for the well-being of humankind under this crisis: for universal social protection globally, and for the radical call of establishing at the international level a general law on the de-privatization of "common goods" through the public monopoly of strategic goods, services and utilities. This will include not only basic goods and services to survive, but also natural resources, transportation, information, finance and banking system, energy sources, among others.

## Conclusion

After plunging the world into untold suffering, capitalism is now at its worst crisis. But progressive forces have failed to seize this moment to challenge it with bold, workable alternatives. The problem lies not in the dearth of new paths to replace the failed and discredited dominant system. Alternative paradigms, based on social justice, equity, environmental sustainability and participatory democracy, that aim to restore humanity's relationship with nature and solidarity among peoples have been there for some time, presented by renowned activists and scholars.

The key problem lies in the failure of the Left to translate their vision and values into doable and transformative alternatives to address, on all fronts, the urgent needs of peoples affected by the crisis. The challenge

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<sup>172</sup> Houtart, Francois, *From "Common Goods" to the "Common Good of Humanity"*, Rome, Rosa Luxembourg Foundation Conference, March 2011.

therefore is to put forward these alternatives, forge them into unifying advocacies and make them flourish into global movements that would converge the struggles of peoples of the South with the struggles of peoples of the North.

The transformative social protection campaign is one such alternative. It is a movement to restore the right to life and restore a life of dignity for all humankind.

Poor peoples' networks in Asia, together with civil society organizations, are pursuing this campaign to actively confront the pervasive insecurity and deprivation brought about by capitalist globalization that is now heightened by the current crises. They know from their years of activism that the power of collective mobilization and struggle can challenge the limits of exploitative systems and press on to open new pathways that will allow people to live freely – free from insecurity, free from deprivation and want, free to live a life of dignity, and free to explore their full potential as human beings.

## 8 Today's World and the Winding

### SEARCH FOR THE COMMON GOOD

AURELIO ALONSO

The lines that follow are both mine and not mine. They are mine because I have written them and they express my thoughts, — though imperfect, in an unfinished process of formation. “As it should be!”, anyone wanting to obviate this clarification would sensibly say. But I do it anyway, to avoid the risk that my opinions seem apodictic. They are not, because they simply express reflections motivated by the reading and exchanges of opinions had with François Houtart<sup>173</sup> about the world that the turn of the century has left us, the catastrophic plans which imperial hegemony presages, the unexpected revival, with voices and a say, of the American protest, the possibilities to construct the other unresolved America, and the commitment of a generation to find solutions and routes for the survival of mankind. Routes that can only be conceived in the universal, theoretical and practical recovery of the Common Good of Humanity.

A few days ago I heard Eduardo Galeano assert, before reading some passages from his next book, and with that inexhaustible ingenuity which characterizes him, that he had reached the conclusion that time determines space. I did not take it too seriously from the outset, but his statement did not abandon me, and refloated in my memory when I was looking for the general scenario which would provide a context for these appraisals.

Today, as never before in history, it is essential to start from the fact that we are moving between extremes in a world with no cervices or recesses: that of the global system and the local system, to say it briefly and simply. The totum – that which, in this case, Immanuel Wallerstein

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<sup>173</sup> I refer to François Houtart's essays, “From the common goods to the Common Good of Mankind” and “The Concept of *sumak kawsai* and its correspondence to the Common Good of Mankind”, both included in this volume.



characterized as world-system – and the quantum – the innumerable local worlds, national or political perimeters. I use Latin so as to appropriate the words of a Catholic philosopher whom I read with interest and pleasure in my youth.<sup>174</sup> Very diverse perimeters, some minute and others colossal for their size and power; some poor and others opulent; generators, in both cases, of poverty and opulence as indissoluble opponents in the engineering of profits. The logic of power and the conquests globalized since early times in history, when they were distant, cut off plots of land, and the world, for the Europeans, consisted of Europe and a bit of the East, with its frontiers in the known.

So globalizing is not recent practice: before Christ was born, Alexander of Macedonia globalized the world known until then. But success used to be ephemeral for those who globalized in antiquity, and the territorial board would soon end up being dismantled by the distribution of the empires among successors, even if they were capable of creating splendour, as in the Ptolemy dynasty in Egypt. History shows that the Romans were the first to create a lasting empire, which they built through the conquests of Julius Caesar around the first century of our era, and which they revitalized under the rule of Constantine I almost three centuries afterwards, when he recognized Christianity; they still left what was perhaps their last significant mark with the Compilations by Justinian I (527-565), which were destined to become the fundamental body of Modern Law after many years. Historical time was starting to show itself as the sculptor of territoriality in that half of a century.

Much later Spain globalized in America with the brutality of their conquerors' weapons which modified the planet territoriality by expanding the world-system over that ocean, mysterious and forbidden until then, – although their stupidity made them believe that they were doing nothing else than stealing, murdering, fornicating and getting drunk. And that was the reason why they were here. Time would then again collate geography, as Galeano wishes. One of the most significant slights of His-

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<sup>174</sup> I refer here to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.

tory (with a capital letter because I now consider it a subject) is revealed by the fact that, thanks to the privileges granted to the Catholic King and Queen by Pope Borgia, the riches plundered from the New World, on which England, Holland, France and the German States built their processes of capitalist accumulation, led Spain to a totally subordinate, impoverished, and structurally fragile role within the European accord. In the middle of the past century José Ortega y Gasset used to say, with his proverbial irony, that Spain had no decadence because it had never known any splendour.<sup>175</sup>

I am not covering history, I neither want to nor can do so here; for that reason, I limit myself to running the risk of skipping from one point to another. At this point, I am doing so in order to recall that the first half of the XX century, in which the Marxists of the time, on perceiving that German capitalism had been late to the imperialist distribution of the world, revealed to us the seriousness of the fact that Germany's technologically flourishing economic power, which was territorially repressed by its European adversaries, was out of step. The attempt to impose a German globalizing project unscrupulously cost nine million dead in the First World War and sixty million in the Second. We know that, in the end, Nazi Germany failed in its globalization, – which could have virtually been called so –, thanks to the Soviets' resistance, which was as tenacious as the aggression had been. Had the Bolshevik revolution not taken place previously, the map of the world after 1945 would not have been the same.

However, the XX Century was not destined to end as a time of harmony, but in the entrenchment of imperial Washington. Although neo-liberal globalization originated from a British proposal with a view to responding to the mid- seventies crisis and to giving the green light to financial capital so as to get to the bottom at all costs, Washington took the most advantage of it and registered the globalizing device. And when the sys-

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<sup>175</sup> José Ortega y Gasset: *Invertebrate Spain*, Editorial Revista de Occidente, Madrid, 1956.

tem in the East was disintegrated, the domination of the world by the West turned absolute. Neither imperial Rome, nor colonial Spain, or emblematic Bonaparte, or Nazi Berlin had so much power in their hands. Once the order agreed by the Yalta Conference for the post-war period was dissolved, the White House had free hands to turn the world into influence zones of the United States of America, either by means of purchase and bribery or by persuasion or force. Its allies, especially the most important, became its subordinates. The Cold War period, together with NATO and the Marshall Plan, had provided it with the instruments needed to manipulate Europe.

That is how we received the relationship between totum and quantum in this century. Never in its history had the world been so polarized and so dominated. Neither was the need to define and defend the common good as evident as it is today, nor so hard to obtain. The Tobin Rate is the oldest, most sensible, acceptable proposal that causes financial transactions to make a basic contribution to the Common Good with no injury to contributing economies. It has never been possible to set it in motion due to lack of intention of the States, of international financial institutions, of private and public banks, of the world of capital as a whole, both in the centers of capital as in the periphery. This failure gives us the measure of the barriers to be overcome, and we are only speaking of the immediate, evident and obvious ones.

Today, – after counting the achievements within the socialist failure of the past century – it is deemed necessary to define the Common Good as a valid pattern of socio-economic globalization of what is public in counterpoint to the world dominated by what is private on the one hand, and in correspondence with national and sectorial common goods. The distinction between the Common Good and common goods is not only quantitative, but also, and above all, qualitative. Sectorialized responses can escape the observance of the principle of equity, while the comprehensive character of the Common Good imposes a convergence of purposes which can only be summed up in the level of what is public. If the capitalist project were capable of generating an equity device, it

would not be necessary to break the accumulative dynamics of capital, and the socialist proposal would turn trivial, but that variable is impossible because it contradicts head-on the logic of profit. Profit is the starting point of inequality, and inequality is the quintessential erosion factor of the Common Good.

We are fully in the center of the dilemma to be solved in contrast to the globalizing scheme within which the century and the millennium started, and it would be naïve to think that it will be resolved through linear and spontaneous logic or by the strict combination of local achievements. We place our hopes – those of Latin and Caribbean America, at least – on conditions that can be defined from the reality initiated in 1959 by the Cuban socialist experiment which has subsisted, with proved capacity of resistance to imperial hostility and to an aggressiveness without truce, limits or terms, until the radical transformations in Latin American geography contributed to propitiate an extended scenario of resistance and a prospect for integration based on the interests of our peoples.

Houtart points out that, in the cases of Venezuela and Bolivia, “transition would consist in (1) initiating an economic policy based on the needs of domestic market ( what is on a long-term or medium term basis), (2) promoting stricter ecological and social laws for ecological and social exploitation, (3) making users pay for their costs and (4) promoting international legislation to prevent the phenomenon of “comparative advantages” in favour of those who apply slacker regulations”<sup>176</sup> We have now started to talk and to associate in actions of common interest which take institutional form in the “ALBA” (BAPOA: Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) Project and in the establishing of “CELAC” (CLACS: Community of Latin American and Caribbean States). Cuba is no longer alone in America. Time returns again to show its determination over space and to prove Galeano right. It is worth stating that the search for the common good, which is the compass of the BAPOA Project and the axis of solidarity globalization, enters as a real possibility in the XXI cen-

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<sup>176</sup> François Houtart: “ From the common goods to the Common Good of Mankind”.

tury. A possibility that transcends the scenario of the isolated experiment and thus faces the prospect of becoming sustainable.

For the moment, it is not a question of finding a definition of Common Good as an abstraction. The level of what is general is satisfied with a consensus to which we can resort; it is a question of being able to identify it in the dimension it reaches by opposition to the process of global commercial exploitation effected by the neo-liberal model. In this sense, we can state that the starting point of revolutionary transformation in the XXI Century (inevitably socialist, there is no other option) is based on securing ways to rescue the Common Good.

We are not heading towards dynamics of simple oppositions. The last two decades of the past century underwent the effects of an unscrupulous privatization process in our America. But it seems indispensable to make sure that this long-lasting disarticulation of what is public in favour of what is private, which still prevails in many countries and attempts to perpetuate itself in others, will not generate a reverse response mechanically. The obsession to eliminate what is private in favour of what is public can be as dangerous as the lack of control of the market. There is the risk of confusing socialization processes with those of the nationalization of property, whose practical implications and theoretical effects deserve to be critically analyzed in the socialist experiments of the XX Century.

It is of the utmost importance that these dynamics serve to balance what is public and what is private in economy, to define the coordinates that complement one and the other, to discover the point of sustainable subordination of what is private in a term that should not be necessarily long, and to attain irreversibility (which will only be possible when a systematic and mature regime of social participation is formed: the democracy which radical socialist projects have lacked). In any case, local scenarios differ, and although the purpose of reinforcing what is public has generic value, the specific agendas will always have to be different.

It is now a challenge for Cuba to generate the changes that incorporate sustainability to its socialist project, in a genuine transition, insofar it is not a question of isolated effects, but of a transformation that surpasses the short term, covers all the aspects and which would not be conceivable without a significant shaking of structures. The sequences of the Cuban challenge are different from, and in some aspects inverse to those of the new Latin American revolutionary projects; it seems to me that they should be directed toward a coupling that will bring the projects closer in the integration purpose already started. The prospect of preservation, necessary so as not to introduce costly retreats, would have to keep in step with that of opening-up. This does not imply a weakening process of the Common Good, as it may be superficially inferred; on the contrary, it should strengthen it, as it strips it of erratic regulations (I do not consider I have to give ludicrous examples of functions concentrated and centralized on the public sphere which, strictly speaking, do not correspond to this study).

I would speak like this in relation to the quantum, to the level of local scenarios, with reference to generalities and excluding the space of specificities. Not for common goods, but for the Common Good; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say for one and for the other. However, there will be no feasible design for the quantum if we lose sight of the totum. I never refer to that which is general or capable of being generalized, but to the real, concrete totality: to the world-system such as it exists and moves. And the world-system has been left immersed in the most intense of its crisis – a typical capitalist crisis characterized by Marx – in the context in which it was its lot to live.

The present crisis has its most comprehensive antecedent in the crack that took place in 1929, even though we can point out at least two significant recurrences between that situation and the present one. The most significant was that which took place in the second half of the sixties, which led Margaret Thatcher to her repeated declaration, “There is no alternative”, referring to the neo-liberal establishment in the West. Today the crisis is triggered from a structure different from the world-

system, generated by a quarter of a century old neo-liberalism within which financial capital surpasses in size, rivals with, and imposes itself on productive capital; the release of finances that followed the dissociation of the dollar from the gold standard in Nixon's time. Real economy is replaced by virtual economy, in which millionaire transactions are carried out in a split second from one computer to another without moving a dollar. But what is more problematic –if there could be something more problematic—is that the crisis will no longer be only financial, and from now on its nature will present new complexity not restricted to the financial component, as we remember from previous crises.

The present financial crisis ( I am among those who think it is not possible to predict its end) unleashed in 2008 because of real estate indebtedness (more specifically of housing) caused by the so-called subprime mortgages in the United States. Allow me to emphasize that on this occasion it breaks out outside the productive sector, strictly speaking, which is not in correspondence with preceding crises. But it is fair to say that it could have equally broken out in other spaces – any connected to short-term credit enticements – and not only from a housing crisis.

The “Occupy Wall Street” Movement that has extended through the United States, the continuous anti-system demonstrations by Chilean students, the Movement of “the Indignant” against the brutal unemployment and neglect of the working class in Spain and the most intense deterioration of living conditions in Greece are indications of a response to the crisis that is coming from somewhere else – from the masses, from their outrage – and that demands attention.<sup>177</sup>

South European economies, totally inserted in the crisis scenario, reveal the generalized vulnerability and instability in which we find ourselves, and announce a time of inability of capital which, I dare to think, will be-

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<sup>177</sup> I have read somewhere that today's indignant persons were yesterday's resigned ones. This is possible, or almost certain. Perhaps this was highlighted to underestimate them. However, if it were accurate, it would be very positive. Let's hope that all those who are still resigned will start to become indignant, to resist and to say no as of tomorrow.

come irreversible. Europe, which was thought to be united and strengthened, is crumbling in the eyes of the world because the group of most vulnerable economies can not incorporate the readjustments imposed by regional leaders, and the latter are not willing to assimilate that the solution formulas should take a different route in order to be effective, and that the cost of effectiveness must be defrayed by their economies – those of the wealthy in the region.

But we must not forget that here we are looking towards the Common Good, and it turns out that in Europe the discourse is now expressed by the real-concrete (what is truly concrete) within some countries, while in other States, as European as the former, by something different.

If we want to differentiate the idea of a global crisis clearly – and it will be increasingly necessary to reveal its global architecture, no matter how hidden it may seem –, we are compelled to think about, and find, global solutions and not only local ones, at the risk of not becoming aware of the global nature of the Common Good in that search. We cannot overlook the multifaceted character that distinguishes the present systemic crisis from preceding ones, given by the relation of its economic-financial aspect with the crises caused by the exhaustion (of energy resources, of drinkable water) of food (which is not lacking but is mainly a distribution problem), of housing (that has strongly affected the middle classes), of accumulation of non-recyclable waste materials, of population (of demographic growth, employment, migratory), of environmental erosion (loss of biodiversity, deforestation and climatic change). I am trying to classify in the most encompassing and structural way those aspects that become critical in environmental conditions, so as to underline that, what is new qualitatively is given by the multifaceted character that links conditions causally and at the same time demands looking for comprehensive answers.

The solution given to the crisis of the year 2008 by way of gigantic financial injections, without paying attention to the unemployment and eviction problems associated to it, constitutes palpable proof of the in-



ability to focus on comprehensive salvation proposals starting from the logic of capital. The most powerful (and most responsible) States have similarly shown their reluctance to assume serious commitments in connection to preventing the increase of global warming and of other effects on the environment. The incompatibility of the logic of profit regarding the preservation of the Common Good of Humanity, which starts by its atmosphere, its soil and the vital environment of which it is part (the biosphere), becomes evident here once again.

Has the planet exhausted its natural reproductive capacity, as it was predicted to happen towards August 2010? It seems that nobody wants to undertake the risk of verifying this forecast. The correlation between “ecological mark” (EM) and “human development index” (HDI) is presented to us as a reverse function. Countries with a high HDI are those having higher consumptions and incidence in the depletion of resources and the erosion of the natural environment. The generalization of consumption indexes in the United States would require the existence of more than five and a half planets Earth; that of Western Europe and Australia about three planets; that of Eastern and Central Europe two planets, while the average in Latin America, Asia and Africa would require only one planet.

The countries that make up this last group are those which – in statistical terms – live off that which is allotted to them (to say it without beating around the bush); that is to say, those that present a sustainable ecological mark. The rest of the world, that of the “developed ones,” jeopardizes everyone’s subsistence. Meanwhile, those whose ecological mark is kept on an acceptable level, are placed under the lowest HDI, or, to say it differently, are more affected by poverty conditions. At present 20% of the world population absorbs 80% of the world material resources. Thus, expressing this in statistical terms, the plausible trend would be that of the global increase of the indexes of human development parallel to the decrease of the ecological mark. The improvement of the Common Good, seen over and above independent common goods and analyzed by tendencies, would consist in this. This is easy to

say, but its materialization covers all the fundamental challenges for the generations that enter the XXI Century as full adults or as they are leaving youth behind.

The paradigm of modernity, which caused the longitude of the man-nature axis to increase, surpassed the coordinates of capitalism in order to reproduce itself in the socialist experiment of the XX century and to still prevail in the world-system in our time. Modernity is the result and expression of capitalism, and there is no doubt about the legitimacy of this identification. However, it would be advisable to avoid reducing modernity to capitalism, no matter how paradoxical this may seem. This distinction implies scientific and technological modernity, and it is necessary to find (without rethorical forcibleness) the resources that can make it transcend the logic that creates it in order to recover it as an 'other' modernity in the search for a better world. We are not only before a deformation of XX Century capitalist modernity; this has a similar effect on the devices on which the socialist experiment of that very century was organized. Let us remember that one of the unresolved tasks is the in-depth, unprejudiced investigation of the recovery of liberal values contributed by encyclopedists and whose rescue, initiated by Marx himself, was disallowed by his successors. So, superseding capitalist modernity and restoring the positive aspects of the liberal thinking that preceded Marxism constitute an unquestionable challenge for us.

Houtart reminds us that "the paradigm of human development of modernity is a paradigm of unlimited material and scientific progress, on an inexhaustible planet, at the exclusive disposal of human beings so as to always enjoy goods and services more freely." What is evident is the need and possibility of setting up a new paradigm. A paradigm based on the criticism of political economy (the new and the old criticism), on Marx 's theory and on the valid corollaries that can be drawn from the developments made of it by its followers (and even the criticisms made by some adversaries), all of which contribute an essential precedent, though still a precedent. It is not enough to join Houtart in stating that: The new paradigm poses, as a fundamental option, balanced social dy-

namics among persons, genders and social groups, in harmony with nature, in order to promote life and guarantee its reproduction. It is a question of good living, of complying with the Common Good of Humanity, which implies, as a first step, respect for the integrity of nature as a source of life (the Mother Earth). Its construction and its applications in the foundations of collective life on the planet constitute a process. It is not only an academic exercise, but one of social elaboration as well, where not only thinking, but also concrete experience occupy an essential place, particularly social struggles, each corresponding to a failure in the compliance of the Common Good of Humanity and looking for solutions. Since the destructive globalization of capitalism has dominated economies, societies and cultures of the whole world but has not eliminated them altogether, the task falls on everyone, men and women, according to their characteristics and historical experiences. No one can be excluded from this common endeavor to elaborate the conditions of life anew.<sup>178</sup>

In the speech delivered by Manuel D'Escoto in the United Nations in 2009 we may find the most indicative effort to bring to the level of political decisions this world need to change an exhausted and irretrievable paradigm of modernity for another; for this, we can only count on preambles based on what should not be, so it is still waiting for precise concretions to define itself. A declaration of the rights of Mother-Earth is not enough for this, apart from clarity in the urgency to substitute the interaction of man with nature for the symbiosis of the part and the whole.

The need to identify and define the Common Good of men in connection with nature, with its reproduction, with the reciprocal contact of human beings who revered it in the origins of society, as expressed by totemic relationships with natural forces, and who protected it by defining taboo conducts, comes up again as a necessity of our time. We have to face the sense of shame for the lack of scientism underlying the assumed

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<sup>178</sup> François Houtart: op.cit.

scientific superseding of the deification of natural events, rain, irrigation of rivers, crops, and, on the whole, the security provided by the environment. Here lies the importance of recovering *sumak kawsay* offered to us by Andean cultures: transmitting to all our continent the Andean awakening to the rescue and protection of environment and the concept of the rights of nature which deeply reaches the contours of political economy.

*Sumak kawsay*, or the principle defined by Quechua thinking as “living well”, as opposed to the idea of “living better”, focuses on the ethics of a life pattern forged around the practical value of the work product over exchange value, distinctive of the conversion of the work product into merchandise. The question we have to think about is that of clarifying how to redesign economy on the basis of practical value, how to reduce the market to desirable and controllable dimensions in a specific society without its losing effectiveness, and which would be the communicating vessels that would link their action to a society organized macroeconomically and having human needs in mind. Market effectiveness can also be practiced to the benefit of the common good of society, and in the international solidarity market we can find one of the key instruments for compensating the Common Good on an international and potentially planetary level.

Economic growth indicators (GDP, per capita GDP) which have always been presented to us as being decisive to diagnose and quantify progress, are referred to economic dynamics which rest on the production of exchange values. Let us not say that this invalidates them, but I do say that they are inadequate to define a concept of well-being centered on the principle of “living well” as opposed to that of “living better.” For that reason, it is valid to assert that in ideal conditions, it would be necessary to talk about encouraging growth dynamics in the most depressed societies, and of restricting them in opulent societies. In the case of the former, by fostering a variable pattern to ensure that “living well” can be carried out in terms directed to the optimization of society’s productive potential, with regulated intervention of foreign capital and

an adequate and reliable socialization of the subsoil, the soil and the most significant material resources which will permit the public interest to predominate over the private one on a comprehensive level. Opulent economies would have to abide by different schemes based on the contention that prevents the overrun of profits and imposes patterns of distributive equity progressively. In a few words, a world where the countries, the sectors of economy, the projects and the persons mostly benefited in terms of income will take on the costs of balancing global subsistence.

Here we again enunciate a very old desideratum and begin dealing with a utopia repeated with the instruments of each period, as well as dealing with economic, political and social recipes which, though applied, have not managed to consolidate their achievements, – which are even forgotten –, while failures are turned into definitive proofs that the world will only find sustainable solutions outside the logic of profit.

Houtart quotes Evelyne Pieiller when talking about “inoffensive utopias”, a distinction that seems highly useful to differentiate those that, having paradigmatic potentiality, are of service to transformational orientation, from those that give free rein to ideal proposals without taking viability into account. The latter would be, in my opinion, the “inoffensive” ones, although I have no elements to verify if I am sticking to Peillier’s characterization. I suppose so because “inoffensive” seems to me a happy term to characterize utopias tolerable to the status quo. Utopias that are even useful to overturn or counteract radical proposals for change. False utopias basically, since their proposal will always distance itself, consciously or not, from the real utopian dimension.

The importance of the concept of utopia is connected to the horizon, the ideal locus that orients us without us supposing that we can reach it. However, inasmuch as the goal can be kept pragmatically identified from the large layout of what we want and what we don’t, the choice of ways requires a frame of hypotheses that may be very complex and that will always be very dynamic, subject to revision and changes, which

seems to me to be of the utmost immediate importance. Here I refer to that which I neither can nor want to identify with any other name than that of the transition. The concept of transition has had polemic development, mainly after the passage from the eighties to the nineties (and particularly since the very year of 1990).

North American political science appropriated the concept to characterize the supplantation of Latin American dictatorships by liberal democratic regimes that favoured the “lightening” of the public sector in benefit of privatizations and the support of resigned impoverishment with the palliative of the alternation of the parties in power. So once this concept was established in US political science in the second half of the eighties to magnify the virtues of this change of direction in the political and legal superstructure of Latin American periphery (O’Donnell and Schmitter<sup>179</sup>), it was transplanted very rapidly to define similarly the capitalist regression which “real socialism” was beginning to experience – let us remember that this was the name given to the regime led by Moscow until the end of the eighties.

This was a curious process of the misappropriation of a concept that had been previously credited in social science to explain the movements of passing from one socio-economic system to a new one replacing it. It was first used by Marx to refer to the passage of the feudal mode of production to the capitalist one in Europe, and afterwards, emphatically, – in his *Margin Notes to the Programme of the German Working Party*, in the Congress at Gotha (1875) –, to characterize the sequence of changes of all types that were evidently indispensable in the period between the supersedence of capitalism and the configuration of socialism. This connotation, as used by Marx, seemed to have been forgotten, and it was assumed that the term could be only applied to the processes heading towards capitalism in economy, and towards liberal bourgeois institutional building and thinking in politics.

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<sup>179</sup> See Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter: *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986.

I consider that working in the definition of the Common Good entails the task of working in the socialist theory of transition as well. It is irreducible as to the application of the concept to specific processes: “democratic transition” only refers to the political sphere; “mercantile transition” and “technological transition” (technical development) are applied to economy. But I stress the importance of not overlooking the integral concept of “socialist transition” in local specificities and in the big scene.

I finish these notes with two observations that seem indispensable to me. The first consists in the fact that if we want to specify a doctrine of the Common Good, we also have to try to specify the correlation between national and international dimension, and consequently, the relationship between the Common Good and internationalism. “A new project is necessary to face the dangers run by the planet and by the human race; a project demanding not only the widening of the scope of Human Rights, but also a redefinition of the Common Good of Humanity (on the basis of new paradigms)”<sup>180</sup>. For it to be totally comprehensive, or even for it to be real, our alternative, which should arise from as many local spaces as possible, has to aim at the totum.

My last observation refers to irreversibility. The most demobilizing disappointment transmitted by the Soviet collapse was that “real socialism” was not irreversible (ergo, neither was it real). So, what was it? Well, I have my hypothetical answer, but it is too complex to advance it here, where I am only interested in underlining that it is most important not to limit ourselves to the dissection of its failures: we must try to explain to ourselves what made it irreversible. And not out of strict Gnostic or academic need, but because the attainment of the Common Good has to aim at irreversibility. Either it is irreversible, or the better world we preconize is not feasible.

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<sup>180</sup> François Houtart, op. cit.

## Chapter IV

# CONCLUSIONS AND TRANSITIONS

## FRANÇOIS HOUTART

The general picture around the world is very disturbing. It is not only a question of the financial crisis, for which medium-term solutions can be found within the logic of capitalism. A combination between neo-liberal measures and a hardening of the class struggle on the part of the dominant forces would enable them to make the subordinate and middle classes pay for the crisis. Then capitalism could emerge triumphant, demonstrating its capacity to overcome medium-term crises, outmanoeuvring the protests of the workers and the 'indignés'. On the other hand, it is likely that if the recommendations of the Stiglitz Commission<sup>181</sup> on the international financial and monetary crisis had been accepted, the situation in 2011 would not have worsened.

There have however been various analyses of the evolution of the world economy that stress a gradual erosion of the model of capitalist development. They state that capitalism has ended its historic role of developing productive forces, creating such contradictions that they are heading for a "death foretold" (Samir Amin, Jorge Beinstein, Immanuel Wallerstein and others).

It is in fact important to look at the general reality from a holistic perspective, as opposed to the capitalistic vision that concentrates on accumulation. According to Karl Polanyi, capitalism disembedded the economy from society and then imposed its own logic of value, with mercantilism as the universal perspective. But the only way of resolving the contradictions is to reintegrate the economy into society. What we want to emphasize is Marx's concept of the value of use and the need to give it priority over the value of exchange.

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<sup>181</sup> *The Stiglitz Report*, The New Press, New York/ London, 2010



At the present time there is a new awareness about our relationship with nature that has become increasingly central in the discussions. Awareness that the earth is not an inexhaustible resource, especially as concerns energy, is one of the new factors that question the human development model that has prevailed over the last 500 years, together with greater understanding of the irreversible damage that is being done to eco-systems by industrial activities, the type of agriculture being promoted and irrational consumerism.

## **Regulations versus alternatives**

This being so, it is increasingly clear that regulations are not enough. It is the logic of the system that is being challenged. It is true that an apocalyptic discourse does not serve as a basis for action. But a rigorous analysis can be a guide to us for the future and create the consciousness that radical solutions are urgent. This is why we have worked on this book to present a panorama of all the aspects of the crisis that, when considered all together, are due to the logic of capitalism.

Many regulations have been put forward in international bodies like the United Nations, but the system is still not capable of accepting them, alternatives even less so. The Stiglitz Commission proposed a reform of the international financial bodies (World Bank, International Monetary Fund) and of the World Trade Organization, as well as the setting up of an International Panel of Experts to prevent the crises (the only measure accepted by the United Nations Conference). It also recommended the creation of a Council for Global Economic Coordination on the same level as the Security Council (with, however, a democratic function), the organization of a global reserve system as against the hegemony of the dollar as the reserve currency, the institution of international fiscalization, the abolition of tax havens and the bank secret, and a reform of the rating agencies.

However, the World Trade Organization and the European Union, like many countries following the capitalist logic, have continued to promote pro-cyclical measures (reduction of social policies, for example) that have

aggravated the economic disaster. This is the result of a 'capitalism of generalized monopolies', as described by Samir Amin,<sup>182</sup> that imposes its own political solutions.

As regards the climate crisis, the United Nations has organized several conferences: Rio de Janeiro, Kyoto, Copenhagen, Cancún, Durban, not to mention conferences on specific themes like the oceans, biodiversity, etc. Precise measures have been proposed to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and diminish environmental destruction. But the industrialized countries have put brakes on the decision-making and refused any kind of international agreement (in particular, the United States of America). Nevertheless in this sector, too, acceptable regulations have their limits: they must be market friendly.

The food crisis, as Jean Ziegler<sup>183</sup> has so well illustrated, is the result of the logic of the economic system. In a world in which has produced more wealth than ever before, the political will is lacking to apply effective measures. The United States, for example, with fewer agricultural surpluses, is indeed reducing its assistance to the World Food Programme (WFP). The integration of agriculture into the logic of monopolistic capitalism requires the growing concentration of land, the development of monoculture and the disappearance of family agriculture, and all this greatly increases the food problem.

The social crisis resulting from the growth of inequalities needs solutions for structural, agrarian, financial and political reforms that go further than would be acceptable by the bourgeois classes. The system that they dominate is so dogmatic that only light and provisional regulations are tolerated, such as programmes to combat poverty to reduce social pressures and ecological measures when environmental destruction affects the rate of profit.

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<sup>182</sup> Samir Amin, *Audace, plus d'Audace*, website of the World Forum for Alternatives, 2011

<sup>183</sup> Jean Ziegler, *Destruction massive – Géopolitique de la Faim*, Le Seuil, Paris, 2011

The dominant classes are convinced that these will result in growth – evidently a growth in the form of a champagne goblet, as was shown by the UNDP, increasing concentration in the wealthier categories of the population.

However, in the meantime there is a price to pay. This could be so high that it would be socially and ecologically insupportable. This is why, to take a long-term view, alternatives are necessary. In other words, a new paradigm of human development must be established. The present situation is affecting the very basics of life on the planet, particularly human life. It is a question of 1) the responsibility of the human species for the survival of the Earth; 2) finding ways to produce the material bases of life; 3) collective social and political organization; 4) understanding reality and the ethics of social construction (culture). Redefining a new paradigm involves revising these four aspects of the present system.

Obviously, opting for alternatives to the present system and proposing a new paradigm for human development does not hinder the adoption of measures to resolve the immediate problems that are the products of capitalist logic. It is in this sense that Rosa Luxemburg proposed a dialectical vision of the relationship between reforms and revolution. Thus it is not possible to scorn social policies that try to remedy the effects of neo-liberalism: we shall return to this further on. To find a solution, theoretical and practical, it is necessary to raise again the whole question of transition.

## **The transition**

As we know, Karl Marx used the concept of transition to describe the passing from feudalism to capitalism, showing how, little by little, the forms of the former were incapable of ensuring the conditions of social survival and its progress, and how new forms developed that transformed the general mode of production and social formation. Today the situation is different because, while capitalism has developed new contradictions and while some forms of socialism have appeared, the process must be planned in order to accelerate the latter. We do not

have the time for a gradual evolution. The transition must be organized, taking into account present power relationships and the state of the means of production – not only as a process, but as a struggle.

To achieve this, the fundamental question is how to define the objective. The transition should be a new paradigm in order to bring about the Common Good of Humanity, that is, the production, reproduction and improvement of life. This runs completely counter to the aim of capitalism, not only in the field of economics (the universality of the law of value), but also in politics (the State at the service of the market) and in culture (consumer individualism). The transition is necessarily a process that will take time. Not only that, but capital, as a monopolistic economic power, is capable, in order to reproduce itself, of inciting warfare (even nuclear), of sacrificing millions of people through hunger, and of corrupting the political bodies of the whole world to ensure its predominance. Its logic has penetrated so much into the culture, even of the subordinate classes and workers' organizations, that it has a veritable hegemony.

It is important to analyze what is happening at the present time. In fact, the measures that are now called transition are considered in two different ways: either as steps towards a new paradigm, or as an adaptation of the existing system to new ecological and social requirements. It is not so much the terminology that differentiates the two trends, but rather the actual policies. In both cases there is talk of the transition to socialism, of the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, of 'Buen Vivir', even of revolution, but the contents are different at the political level.

What is happening in the progressive regimes in Latin America illustrates the problem very well, with differences according to each case. There are the countries that are clearly opting for a social democrat solution, in which the tool for economic growth is capitalism, including national and international financial capitalism and where social justice is to be achieved by programmes of social redistribution, often large-scale and effective, of part of the surplus value (as for example, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua).

Then there are others, with a more radical discourse, which also have large-scale social programmes, even dedicating 10 per cent of the national budget to them and which increase the collecting of taxes. However, they do not seek a new development programme. They continue, either through conviction or obligation, the extraction model for wealth creation, technological and financial dependency on the multinational corporations, promoting monoculture, especially for the production of agrofuels, and carrying out policies that are advantageous for certain social groups possessing banks as well as internal and external businesses. Many decisions are taken through sheer pragmatism. Sometimes, as has been said by Bolivia's Vice President Álvaro García Linera, it is because capitalism still has at least another 100 years of life.

In fact, the move is towards a post-neoliberal adaptation of capitalism, confronted as it is with new demands, through a reconstructed State and with varying grades of peoples' participation (in Ecuador and Bolivia, and partially in Venezuela). Compared with the past or with countries that are clearly pro-capitalist (Mexico, Chile, Columbia), there has evidently been considerable progress and, confronted as they are by rightwing options, such policies are in no way mistaken.

The results achieved, partly thanks to the international economic situation (the [higher] prices for natural resources which nevertheless increases the position of the continent in the international division of labour) and partly due to daring social and cultural policies, cannot be denied. The fact that millions of people have emerged from poverty is a positive result: the hungry do not suffer or die in the medium or long term, but at this very moment. However, this does not necessarily mean the adoption of a new paradigm. Such policies can be accommodated within the logic of capitalism, like neo-Keynesian anti-cyclical actions.

Another approach would to link social policies to effective post-capitalist structural transformations such as agrarian reform, respect for nature, peoples participation and participatory democracy, recovery of

sovereignty over natural resources, support for family agriculture, popular control over the principal means of production, food sovereignty, effective recognition of indigenous cultures and identities, regionalization of the economies, etc. In this case, transition takes on another meaning.

It is obvious that Venezuela cannot be expected to close its oil wells immediately, even though this activity contributes to more greenhouse gases. Neither can Indonesia be expected to destroy all its oil-palm plantations tomorrow, nor Bolivia to close its mines. And can Ecuador, in the belief that by developing its mines, offset the rapid diminution of oil production as a source of income for social policies?

However it is necessary to demand the definition of a transition, including an economy based on use value rather than exchange value, radical measures to protect nature, such as the banning of extractive activities in certain regions (the philosophy underlying Yasuni, a national park of high bio-diversity) is a step in that direction), respect for the rights of local communities, particularly the indigenous peoples and a constructive dialogue with them. The complement of such policies would be accelerating continental regionalization so as to constitute stronger alliances to confront the multinationals, now linked in a system that is increasingly integrated. They have no respect for national legislation, never fulfil their agreements and impose their logic on governments that are incapable of taking appropriate action.

The experience of the Philippines over the last ten years, is conclusive: in spite of a law on mining, ecological destruction has been horrific, entire communities have been expelled from their land, the number of jobs promised has not materialized and in the first eight years the State received only 11 per cent of the royalties due to it during the decade.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *A Legacy of Disasters – the Mining Situation in the Philippines*, Alyansa Tigil Mina, 2011

The Asian movement that talks of 'transformative' social protection advocates linking social policies to a transition towards another paradigm. In other words it is not considered as a mere re-distribution policy, which creates clients and not actors, but as a project that forms part of another kind of development.

Several of these elements are included in the new Latin American constitutions and in some genuine policies which, according to Samir Amin, can be considered as 'revolutionary advances', for example in Venezuela. However, up until now there does not seem to be a real change of paradigm. And one might wonder whether there is, subjectively, another perspective among the progressive countries of the continent, the first in the world to have had new anti-neoliberal orientations.

In fact, the definition of development has not changed much: it continues to promote the growth of productive forces, production and consumption through traditional means. Many politicians still stick to the capitalist development culture, even if they want to combat its most negative effects and integrate social and cultural perspectives on a large scale. They share the view that productive forces cannot be developed without using the logic of the capitalist market. This is also the view also of the leaders of the Chinese and Vietnamese communist parties, who have a very special theory of the transition towards socialism. In various parts of the world, from Indonesia to Sri Lanka, from Angola to Mozambique, experiences with a socialist orientation have ended with the adoption of neo-liberalism. This was probably in large measure due to the international strength of the system. The socialist countries of Europe lost the Cold War and adopted the worst form of development of the capitalist model, the effects of which were rapid but unequal.

At first sight, the Cuban experience also seemed to confirm doubts about socialism, as it was a rigid system of the Soviet type adopted or imposed from the end of the 1960s, preventing a full socialist development of the productive forces. There were social and cultural achievements that were genuinely revolutionary and solid enough to persist

over time, but unsustainable in the long term without the parallel development of the forces of production with the participation of the workers that Che Guevara had in mind.<sup>185</sup> It is very difficult to correct such a situation, as is indicated in the measures to bring about change that were adopted in 2011. Such difficulties are not only in the economic field, but also political and cultural. Nevertheless, the partial failure of this experience, is obviously not an argument for following a model that is increasingly destructive of the planet and of the lives of a large part of humanity, as is being carried out by rightwing forces.

Understanding that it is possible to achieve another approach to human development is evidently the main task of a socialist project and a new paradigm for the collective life of humanity on the planet. Giving its basic elements a practical orientation seems to be the right path to follow. This is not an illusion because there are numerous partially successful attempts and many struggles to broaden them. In various social movements and within progressive Latin American governments there are individuals and groups that are struggling to make this new paradigm the objective.

The economic growth culture and the absence of a sufficiently clear socialist prospect for developing productive forces were two of the first obstacles for making a transition towards a new paradigm by the progressive countries of Latin America. But there was a third factor: the relationships between these countries and a monopoly capitalism that is increasingly concentrated in the multinational corporations, which possess technical superiority and considerable financial power. They have juridical instruments that they can impose without consideration of local legislation. The support that they receive from their respective political centres, especially the United States and the European Union, as well as the dominant logic of the international organizations like the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, puts these countries, particularly the small

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<sup>185</sup> Carlos Tablada, *El Marxismo del Che y el Socialismo del Siglo XXI*, Ruth Casa Editorial, Panama, 2007



ones, in an inferior position. Only a process of regional integration will make it possible to constitute a real counterweight.

Nevertheless, in Latin America, there is one initiative that has escaped from the logic of capital, which is ALBA (Bolivian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America). Its principles of complementarity and solidarity rather than competitiveness are applied to concrete economic and social relationships. Although this achievement remains limited to fewer than ten countries, it is of prime importance, because it is in line with the new paradigm. The potential role of the social movements, which are recognized as an integral part of the process, can help it to continue in this basic orientation. Progress towards the new paradigm has greater chances of being achieved if it is carried out on a regional level, and ALBA has this possibility.

The other initiatives for the integration of the sub-continent that are being promoted by the progressive regimes, although they do not share the ALBA philosophy, are making good progress toward 'delinking', according to the concept of Samir Amin. Whether they be Mercosur, with sucre as the exchange currency, UNASUR, as a coordination body of South America and recently CELAC that also brings in Central America and the Caribbean – without the United States and Canada – all these efforts show the desire to dissociate [the region] from the economic and political influence of the north. It has not left behind the logic of the capitalist market, but it is an important step towards breaking with monopolistic concentration and in this sense it is a stage that could signify a transition towards a new model.

Similar ideas exist in Asia (the Shanghai Group, the Chiang Mai Initiative) and in Africa, indicating that there is a new dynamic. However, they will only represent a fundamental step forward if they culminate in a new paradigm. This cannot happen unless there is a new consciousness, which has fortunately been accentuated by the crisis, organized and sustained social struggles and courageous political initiatives. These are the conditions for the survival of Mother Earth and Humanity.

It is in function of these realities and perspectives for the future that a Universal Declaration for the Common Good of Humanity is being prepared, sketching out the principles of a new paradigm, capable of guiding the post-capitalist era. It can serve as a collective memory for a change of paradigm, not as a false consensus between opponents, but rather as an instrument for struggle.

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Rethinking the reproduction of life and the continuity on our planet from the perspective of the paradigm of the Common Good of Humanity is an urgent necessity in the current situation. There is need to analyze in depth both the concept at the basis of the paradigm and its implications, to increase the range of its applications, to enable various social actors to strategize around it, and to reflect on the transition from a logic based on capital accumulation to a post-capitalist society based on the acknowledgement of the Common Good of Humanity, seen as the realization of a socialism with the fullness of meaning this word conveys. This book presents analytical and theoretical reflections and comments on the various aspects of the notion of Common Good of Humanity and its social and political functions which can be useful to find a sense of direction in the collective action of social movements.