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## 4. The politics of decolonizing development<sup>1</sup>

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This chapter is concerned with a politics of decolonizing development that foregrounds knowing and delinking as central, but not unique to this task. The question of decolonizing development is oriented towards a decolonial politics of dignity that does not recognize development as its horizon of realization. Our point of departure is that the notion of development cannot be separated from the history of Western modernity. Development has functioned at one and the same time as representation and articulation of the modern/colonial divide. The division between the human and the savage, between civilization and nature, lingers behind the notion of development.

From our point of view, development belongs to the epistemic tradition of the West that has arrogated to itself the authority to classify the diversity of the Earth as nature and the diversity of peoples of the world as “others.” In other words: development belongs to a Eurocentric and anthropocentric epistemology whose identity as the geographical center and historical now of humanity depended on the externalization of the Earth and the peoples of the world as otherness.

Development as an expression of this genealogy of an anthropocentric Eurocentrism has functioned as a mediation that marks the border between today’s standard of humanity: the consumer and alterity; the poor, the dispossessed and the Earth. We want to explore the notion of development precisely in its function in articulating the separation between the consumer and the lives of the peoples and Earth that are being incorporated, dispossessed, extracted and consumed. In doing so, we ask the following: Can the notion of development respond to the possibility of an ethical life that is not structurally implicated with the suffering and the consumption of life of the Earth and others? What does it mean to decolonize development?

This chapter seeks to advance some reflections around these questions inspired by decolonial thinking.<sup>2</sup> Decolonial thought acknowledges that there is “no modernity without coloniality,” hence there is no narrative of development, without its coloniality (Icaza and Vázquez, 2016; Icaza, 2018; Lugones, 2010a, 2010b; Mignolo, 2003, 2013; Quijano, 2000; Vázquez, 2009, 2011, 2014; Walsh, 2007, 2010, 2011). In a nutshell, modern development cannot be thought, sensed and experienced without its underside, without the processes of exclusion, destitution and extraction that accompany it. From this perspective, the analysis of development (human,

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<sup>2</sup> Decolonial thinking partakes in this critical endeavor of decolonizing development (see Icaza, 2015; Icaza and Vázquez, 2016).

sustainable, “green” or alternative) cannot be done without unpacking its ethno-centrism, its epistemic violence as a mono-cultural and hegemonic project (Icaza, 2021; Walsh, 2011).

We want to acknowledge and build on previous efforts in critical development studies, informed by critical feminisms, post-development, and post-colonial analytical frameworks, dealing with the task of deconstructing and unsettling development narratives (e.g. Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, 1996; Bendix et al., 2020; Escobar, 1992, 1995; Radcliffe, 2012; Saunders, 2004; Simon, 2006; Wainwright, 2008; Ziai, 2004). In so doing, we recognize the contributions of these interventions for an understanding of development as a dominant discourse (Escobar, 1995; Bergeron, 2006; Griffin, 2007) that produces idea of the so called “Third World” as “always lacking” and in need, and that concurrently produces the other as “subaltern” or “backward” (Mohanty, 2003). This perspective has allowed critical scholars to identify development as a mediation between the Global North and the Global South.

Our decolonial approach to development focuses on development as a mediation that instruments the colonial difference, that is the imposition of modernity over other worlds of meaning. In so doing, it reveals the connection between the representation (discursive) and the materiality (political economy) of development not only as problematic but as corresponding to the Western project of civilization.

These two movements – representation and appropriation – allow us to address the task of decolonizing development by analyzing how it functions as an articulation of the modern/colonial divide along two axes: (i) the mediation towards the social majorities of the world, and (ii) the mediation towards Earth. By the modern/colonial divide we mean the separation that has been produced by the Western project of civilization between civilization and colonialism, between the human that classifies and the people that are/were classified, racialized, and impoverished. The colonial difference marks the line between those that could enjoy the privileges of “progress” and those whose lives are/were made dispensable. Where Western thought sees a development gap between the advanced societies and those that need to catch up, decolonial thought listens to the colonial wound of those lives that are being consumed.

In this same vein, we consider that the project of *development* is conceptualized in a radically different way by those who have suffered its force and who have seen the denigration and even extinction of their ways of living and of their possibilities to inhabit the world. A view from the “epistemic South” reveals a crude image of development that does not correspond to its self-representation as progress and salvation. The coloniality of development is evident for those whose livelihoods have been disabled by development projects.

From a decolonial perspective we suggest approaching the question of development along two intermeshed axes of differentiation: the relation to Earth as the “other” of the human and the relation to “others.” Development is demarcated by a negative relation to Earth which is reduced to “nature” as an alterity, and in negative relation to the “social majorities” of the world reduced to the category of poor as alterity. These two axes allow us to see development as an articulation of the western project of Civilization’s specific relation to Earth and to the so-called Global South/Third World. These two axes of differentiation and domination are suggested as questioning guides towards a decolonial critique of development.

The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, a brief introduction to decolonial thinking in development studies is provided. The second section introduces elements of what we call a decolonial method of research. The third section provides clues as to what a decolonial analysis of development might look like.

## 1. ON DECOLONIAL THINKING AND DEVELOPMENT

In his seminal article of 2007, “World and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program,” Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar links for the first time the emerging decolonial agenda mainly developed by academics and activists from/based in Latin America to the post-development critique in development studies. In the article Escobar starts a discussion on the ontology of development from a decolonial perspective. Escobar shows the importance of the irruption of non-Western “cultural archives” to better understand the question of development and of modernity at large.

Escobar’s article revisited the international financial institutions’ (IMF, World Bank) “there is no alternative” (TINA) mentality after two decades of neoliberal structural programs in Latin America, Africa and Asia. For Escobar, the context was of a “paradigm crisis” of the Western project of civilization that proved to be insufficient to address contemporary problems. This crisis coincided with the emergence of the decolonial current of thought that he then called the modernity/coloniality and decoloniality (MCD) research group/agenda.

The point of departure of the MCD’s collective effort of research was the acknowledgment that there is “no modernity without coloniality” (Quijano, 2000). The relevance of this affirmation is that on the one hand the history of modernity cannot be disassociated from the violence of coloniality, from enslavement, extraction, disposition and disdain. Coloniality is a co-constitutive element of the Western model of civilization. Most importantly the realization that there is no modernity without coloniality allows for an epistemic shift. It enables a decolonial critique of modernity that is not grounded on modernity’s own narrative but on the thinking and experiencing of coloniality. Modernity could be thought from the experiences of oppression that enabled it and crucially from an epistemic outside (Vázquez, 2011).

The question of coloniality opened a field of investigation not simply focused on how modernity established itself but also on the processes of negation that it implied. To foreground what is negated distinguishes the contribution of decolonial thinking from established critical theories in much of the Anglo-American and French academies.

Furthermore, the question of coloniality points towards what has been denied the right to exist, to become world. The experience of coloniality becomes an epistemic location from which to think our world’s historical reality. Decoloniality allows for a shift in the geography of reason, as explained by Walter Dignolo (2013) that challenges the self-representation of modernity. Decolonial thought is grounded in the historically lived experiences of coloniality and challenges the universality of the narrative of Western modernity moving towards the humbling of modernity (Vázquez, 2012). Precisely in seeking to avoid becoming just another hegemonic project, decolonial thinking is also understood as an option – in contrast to a paradigm, grand theory or imperative – among a plurality of options (Icaza, 2021).<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to note that the view of a plurality of options is not grounded in relativism but in the recognition of the wide diversity of particular geo-genealogical positionalities. The various positionalities of the destituted majorities of the world are the source of grounded critiques of modernity and its notion of development.

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<sup>3</sup> Argentinian cultural historian Zulma Palermo identifies the relevance of understanding decolonial thinking as an “option” to a border epistemology. See Palermo (2008).

We see the decolonial humbling of modernity as a precondition for an intercultural understanding of the world. The recognition of the radical diversity of the world does not mean to render modernity as monolithic; on the contrary the humbling of modernity includes a recognition of the wide diversity within the West that has been subsumed also under a dominant anthropocentric and individualizing project.

From the perspective of coloniality, “Western modernity,” in spite of its internal plurality and its internal tensions, constitutes a dominant project of civilization that claimed “universality,” or the totality of world historical reality for itself at the moment of the violent encounter with “the Other” and the subsequent concealment of this violence. The colonial encounter can be symbolically marked in 1492 as the beginning of the conquest of *Abya Yala* (the Americas), the beginning of a genocide of millions of indigenous peoples, and the enslavement of millions of African peoples. This has been understood also as an epistemicide and as the defuturing of their worlds (Mignolo, 2003; Quijano, 2000; Sousa Santos, 2014; Vázquez, 2017b).

Decolonial thinking gravitates around the binomial modernity/coloniality, while acknowledging the margins and the genealogical exteriority of modernity (Vázquez, 2014, p. 173). This is in marked contrast with the thinking centered in the Western philosophical tradition (including critical social theory), in which modernity in its different facets (i.e. unfinished modernity, plural and hybrid modernities, post-modernities, globalization, capitalisms, and so on) is assumed as the total horizon of intelligibility. “For decolonial thinking modernity (with its modernities) cannot claim to cover all the historical reality. There is an outside, something beyond modernity, because there are ways of relating to the world, ways of feeling, acting and thinking, ways of living and inhabiting the world that come from other geo-genealogies, non-Western and non-modern” (Vázquez, 2014, p. 173).

Early writings on modernity/coloniality understood it as a co-constitutive duality and a matrix of power that operates by controlling the economy and authority (government, politics); knowledge and subjectivities; gender and sexuality (Mignolo, 2013; Quijano, 2000). From this perspective the “coloniality of power” explains that “the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of ‘race’ is introduced for the first time” with the conquest of the Americas (Lugones, 2010a, p. 371). This analysis “has displayed the heterogeneous and transversal character of the modern/colonial system” (Vázquez, 2014, p. 176).

More recently, modernity and coloniality have been understood as co-implicated or inter-meshed but also as designating two different movements towards world historical reality. Modernity on the one hand expresses the movement towards the control of historical presence, of what is claimed as “reality.” It determines the mechanisms of appropriation and representation that enable it to claim its monopoly over worlding the world. It refers to the appropriation and incorporation of human and non-human life, of Earth and all its heritage into the modern project of reality, the turning of lives and Earth into resources for the project of civilization. Such control over presence, or the attempt to monopolize world making, required the control over representation, the control of the naming and picture of the world. A case in point is the classification and racialization of the other as “indigenous,” “black,” etc., and in the case of the development discourse naming the other as “poor” or in need of “empowerment.”

While modernity defines what has been produced as reality, coloniality denotes a historical movement of erasure, of the negation of other worlds of meaning and the occlusion of the plurality of the world, for example the systematic destruction of worlds of meaning through the extinction of languages and the dignity of other worlds of sense through the national school

systems. First nations' people theorizing on the national school system as a form of oppression, brings to legibility the coloniality of modernity, the processes of denigration, the violence that is implicated with many development process and that remains invisible and unintelligible when seen from within the discursive realm of modernity and development (e.g. Fregoso and Rueda, 2018; Tuck and Tuck, 2013).

From this perspective, modernity is "the name and narrative that the western civilization project with totalizing pretensions gives to herself and to the representation of the world" while coloniality is "not a mere abstraction ... is the group of historically concrete practices and forms of exclusion exercised by the modern/colonial project" (Vázquez, 2014, pp. 175–179). Thinking from coloniality implies a grounded thinking that is contextual, historical, situated practice.

The decolonial critique of development brings to the fore the ways of worlding the world that have been annulled by the imposition of the dominant project of civilization and the reduction and consumption of life. For example, decolonial feminism teaches us how the enterprise of development is not just a geopolitical economic power that circulates at the level of institutions, but how it is a power that circulates through bodies (Icaza and Vázquez, 2016; Lugones, 2010a, 2010b) and that bodies are not only individual bodies but are territories-Earth. The transmogrification of the relational subject into the hollow body of the individualized *homo economicus* is a process that is vividly resisted by women and communities that are struggling for the radical freedom of living in autonomy and dignity.

In our cosmovisions, we are beings coming from Earth, Water and Corn. We Lenca people are the ancestral guardians of rivers protected by the spirits of girls who teach us that giving our lives in multiple ways to defend the rivers is to give life for the well-being of humanity and this planet. Wake up, Wake up humanity! There is no more time! Our conscience will be shaken by the fact that we are only contemplating our own destruction by capitalist, racist and patriarchal predation. The Rio Gualcarque has called us, as well as the others rivers that are being seriously threatened around the world. We must go. The Mother Earth, militarized, enclosed, poisoned, where the elementary rights are systematically violated, requires us to act. (Berta Cáceres, COPINH, Goldman Environmental Award Ceremony, 2015)

These are the words of Lenca indigenous leader Berta Cáceres' acceptance speech at the Goldman Environmental Award Ceremony of 2015.<sup>4</sup> Berta led COPINH's struggle – the Honduras based Consejo Civico de Organizaciones Populares e Indigenas<sup>5</sup> – against the world's largest dam construction "Agua Zarca Dam" in the Gualcarque River. Sadly, a few months after her speech at the Award Ceremony, Berta Cáceres was assassinated by members of the private security forces of DESA, the local owner and developer of the project. For some of us, Berta Cáceres' struggle, together with many other people's experiences of resistance to coloniality's violence over racialized and dehumanized bodies-territories-Earth, through their lives and memories are vivid realizations of plural beings resisting and of their enflashed knowledges challenging modern development agendas (Icaza, 2018; Suárez-Krabbe, 2016; Walsh, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> This is the authors' translation from Spanish to English. Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARIkwx8b0ms>.

<sup>5</sup> COPINH is an indigenous Lenca organization made up of 200 Lenca communities in the western Honduran states of Intibuca, Lempira, La Paz, and Santa Barbara. See <http://copinhenglish.blogspot.nl/p/who-we-are.html>.

Inspired by Berta Cáceres' struggle, in what follows we formulate an invitation for a decolonial reading of development as a discourse belonging to modernity, hence to the geo-genealogy of the dominant West. Our aim is to present some elements in an effort to better understand development as an articulation of the modern/colonial divide.

## 2. ELEMENTS FOR A DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT

Before introducing some elements for a decolonial critique of development, it is important to first revisit the productive tensions between post-development and decoloniality. In the work of Arturo Escobar, we find the encounter between these two currents. In his book *Designs for the Pluriverse* Escobar surveys the whole trajectory of post-development with a critique of fundamental assumptions such as growth, progress and instrumental rationality (2018, p. 147). He shows that post-development and degrowth lead in their own way to the need for transitions, the need to go beyond the paradigm of development. When confronted with the need of overcoming the paradigm of development and more generally to go beyond modernity, decoloniality takes on a great importance. Decoloniality provides a radical critique of modernity, by affirming that there is no modernity without coloniality, thus the alternatives to development should not lead to a renewed configuration of modernity. Decoloniality reveals that to overcome the paradigm of development we also need to overcome the epistemic and aesthetic territory of modernity. Decoloniality signals a delinking grounded on the relational ontologies that have been dismissed or suppressed under the Western project of civilization. The decolonial horizons are non-anthropocentric, non-monocultural; they engage in recognizing and fostering relational worlds.

Once we have briefly identified this key productive divergence in this section we introduce a decolonial method of research that has allowed us to understand both development as an articulation of the modern/colonial divide and the task of its decolonization. Our point of departure is that development as modernity has meant the imposition of a worldview and a reality making principle and processes that belong to the epistemology of the West and its ontology. More concretely, this worldview is built on three main assumptions:

1. The paradigm of economic growth assumed as the horizon for a good life (see Chapter 1 by Ocampo, and Chapter 26 by Rivarola Puntigliano in this volume) in contrast with *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña* which according to Fernando Huanacuni Mamani (2010, p. 7) translates as "vida en plenitud." However, these Quechua and Aymara philosophies have been often (mis)translated as *Buen Vivir* especially in relation to recent constitutional reforms in Bolivia and Ecuador. In this chapter, we want to emphasize its provenance from the outside of both colonial languages, Spanish and English, to challenge our parameters of understanding and modernity's semblance of totality while stressing *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña* as two horizons for good life that are not grounded on the separation of human and nature but on their relationality (Vázquez, 2012).
2. Anthropocentrism, that places the *anthropos*, the human, in a position of privilege and ownership over other living beings and over Earth. Anthropocentrism is enacted as an epistemology, economy and politics that bestow the human with the rights and the possibility

to consume Earth. Anthropocentrism is realized through individuality and instrumental and networked systems in contradistinction with relational forms of living.

3. Nature is concurrently reduced to an object for the consumption of the human. Nature is classified as an object of science, is commodified as property of the economy, and defined as a resource under the logic of scarcity.

Elsewhere we have conceptualized these three assumptions as the implementation of a relation to nature in which development comes to mean earthlessness, as the loss of the relation to Earth, the loss of the relation to others and the loss of the notion of the plenitude of life (Vázquez, 2017b). These are principles that are found in the philosophies of *sumak kawsay*, *suma qamaña*, *jlekilaltik* and *buen vivir* (among others) which are silenced in favor of an anthropocentric model of development. We could name this loss the coloniality of development.

In a nutshell, considering development as articulating the modern/colonial divide, means considering the question of anthropocentrism, the imposition of Western epistemologies, and the question of earthlessness. The third moment, the decolonizing of development, calls for an intercultural humbling of development. As Escobar has already argued, this is not a call for alternative development but for alternatives to development.

We understand that at one and the same time, development functions as a discourse through which it represents itself as economic growth and humanization, while it unleashes material processes of appropriation through destitution of natural and cultural spaces from the world's social majorities. Next to development as a concrete historical expression of modernity's control of historical presence through the movements of appropriation and representation, we need to understand development as a reality making process that has had effects not only in institutional arrangements and productive processes but also in the formation of subjectivities.

A decolonial feminist engagement with thinking development critically would need to address development as a force of subjective formation, hence as a power that gains access to bodies-territories-Earth and that over-determines subjectivities. Building on critical feminist scholars in development studies, allows an understanding of development as a force of gendered subjective formation, hence as a power that gains access to feminized bodies and gendered subjectivities (Harcourt, 2009; Bergeron, 2006; Griffin, 2007). However, decolonial feminism (Lugones, 2010a, 2010b; Icaza and Vázquez, 2016) is concerned with the coloniality of gender, that is with how people are reduced to bodies for labor and subsumed under a gender structure that guards the access to socialization.

Development's access to bodies and their harnessing to economic processes cannot be separated from its implication with the coloniality of neoliberalism and the disposability of life for accumulation. Development has been implicated in placing people's bodies, lives and habitats at the disposal of productivity and rendering them disposable, for example women working in maquiladoras (in-bond processing plants), rainforests for plantations, the mountains and rivers for mining and neo-extractivist economic drives. Ivan Illich shows us that Western modernity can be seen as a historical period dominated by the reduction of experience and the confinement of the subject into the *homo economicus* (Illich, 1992).

We would like to indicate three levels of analysis that could contribute to the effort of decolonizing development:

- Development's regulation of the relation between the consumer world and the world of work and exploitation, the so-called "North–South" divide, which is in fact a renewed expression of the colonial divide.
- Development's power of anthropological transformation, its circulation through identity formation, libidinal structures and the disposition of bodies that it implies.
- Development's regulation of the relation to Earth through the idea of sustainability that belongs to the genealogy of anthropocentric thinking.

Furthermore, we see these three levels of analysis as a very much-needed route map for a critical dialogue with the post-development agenda. Furthermore, these three levels are also for us a much-needed diversion or rerouting towards an epistemic outside in which the realm of Earth and contextual historical experiences are recognized. We are also aware that these three levels constitute just as a first step into a larger path that includes the possibility of envisaging alternatives beyond critique and into decolonial movements.

### 3. SEEING BEYOND THE CRITIQUE

From a decolonial perspective, the alternatives to development are not coming from a better adaptation of its discourse of prosperity and humanity, but from a delinking from its notion of humanity, from its articulation of modern-colonial divides and from its anthropocentric disposition of Earth. Social struggles are already delinking from the paradigm of development.

The ongoing social and political struggles for autonomy, justice, dignity and Earth of the social majorities of the world cannot be seen only as struggles to access development or to become developed. The methodological elements that we schematically presented before allow us to also see these struggles as struggles to recover the freedom to live in plenitude, to assert relational worlds; these are the struggles of the social majorities for the freedom to become world, and, as the Zapatistas say, to belong to "a world in which many worlds fit." Intercultural philosophy presents itself as a philosophy committed to the right of the different cultures to become worlds: in order to be a living place of identity for living beings, the culture of the other needs to become world to be world.

The alternatives to development and not "alternative development" as stated by Escobar, mark a veritable anthropological, epistemological and ontological shift away from modern/colonial monopoly over the real, over reality making processes such as subject formations, economic extraction, life disposition, etc. This shift is not a shift towards utopia, it is not a shift towards an "alternative modernity," but rather, it is the outcome of the struggle for re-existence (Albán Achinte, 2009) of the worlds of meaning that have been and are being suppressed, consumed, disposed off by the dominant model of civilization.

Positionality and contextual practices are articulating the responses that do not come from utopia, from projections into the future as transcendental ideals, but from situated knowledges, and most importantly from deep temporalities, they are enacting the mode of precedence as in the formation of pathways to overcome development (Vázquez, 2017a). The dignifying of the alternatives that have been suppressed comes with the struggle of communal histories that have been denied the possibility of making world of being world under the weight of domination.



The notion of positionality of black, chicana, first nations and decolonial feminism (e.g. Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Lugones, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson), as well as the notion of contextual histories of liberation, womanist, black and first nations' theologies belong to an ongoing epistemic struggle to overcome the monocultural framework of the West and its position of "universal" abstraction by asserting complexity and truthfulness of located knowledges. The epistemic struggle brought to legibility and recognition the alternatives to development. Contextual theologies give a history, a place, a face and a name to the emptied neoliberal subject. They perform a parallel move to that of feminist thought that has been thinking the world from positionality. These epistemic moves regard the subject, her body, her community, her cosmogony as a *locus* of struggle facing the emptying of the present, the reduction of experience under the expansion of the hegemony of modernity and its world-system.

Allow us to dwell on a fragment of the final message of the 5th Latin-American encounter of "Indian Theology" in 2006, as a token of the worlds of meaning that cannot be reduced to development alternatives but that are enacting modes of precedence that do not belong to the geo-genealogy of the West.

Facing the neoliberal system that razes and destroys life, we, indigenous women and men, offer to the peoples of the world, as alternative, the wisdom with which we cultivate and care for nature, the traditional way of integral healing, the spiritual strength that will help us flourish in history.

We call on all indigenous peoples to continue being the guardians and defenders of the seas and the wind, fish and birds, of seeds and fruits, of trees and animal, of rivers and mountains, of the pampas and fields, because the heart of the sky and the Earth have sown us in history to give joy and plenitude to the world and not to deaden it and destroy it. (Quoted in Estermann, 2014, pp. 148–149)

The resource war we are facing today is one in which first nations are struggling to preserve their lands, their water and mountains, their dignity, and their right to self-determination. The ecological frontier coincides with the epistemic human frontier, as the last resources are in first nation peoples' land. COPINH and Berta Cáceres struggle to defend the Gualcarque River, Standing Rock Sioux people resist the Dakota Access Pipeline: their struggles cannot be only understood as struggles for the preservation of resources, but invite us to also see them as struggles for the preservation of the possibilities of plenitude of life, of being relational forms of worlding the world, of living in dignity and plenitude.

These struggles bring to light the frontier between modernity and the communal, between development and non-anthropocentric forms of life, between the human as *homo economicus* and non-anthropocentric communal forms of life (Martínez Luna, 2010). In thinking the relation to the Earth and to others, we understand that development imposes a notion of nature as separated from the human, of the planet as an object, and nature as a mechanism.

When environmental problems emerged diagnosing economic growth as one of its main causes, when the economic system and economic rationality were questioned for their impact on a responsibility for environmental degradation, the economic establishment responded asserting that "the environment is an externality of the economic system". ... [I]t was possible to begin an epistemological reflection in which the environment was defined as the true externality of economic rationality, as otherness to dominant scientific rationality. (Leff, 2012, p. 439)

Modernity, the Western project of civilization, is revealed as a Eurocentric and anthropocentric way of worlding the world. Anthropocentrism characterizes modernity as being based on the othering of nature and the formation of the human as an individual sovereign self.

Eurocentrism characterizes modernity as being based on the othering of peoples and worlds as belonging to the past of Western world-history and its present stage of progress and as being at the margins of world-geography. The Western consumer becomes the standard of humanity, it is the human that is in the now of novelty and whose standing is structurally dependent in the anthropocentric consumption of Earth and the exploitation and consumption of the life of others, of the “social majorities.” The constitution of the consumer as a world-class of privilege is sustained in the negation of alterity, in the negation of Earth and other worlds of meaning. “From an epistemic and ontological perspective, globalization has taken place at the expense of relational and nondualist worlds, world-wide” (Escobar, 2015, p. 23).

Therefore, a decolonial analysis of the development agenda, in its current form as the Sustainable Development Goals (see Chapter 20 by Currie-Alder in this volume), reveals that it cannot be seen in separation from modernity’s Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism. It is complicit with the expansion and the reduction of Earth to resource and the negation of relational forms of worlding the world.

Let us hear the words of Floriberto Díaz in relation to Earth, to see how relational worlds of meaning harbor alternative ontologies to that of modernity:

In face of a common mother, the Mixe people feels like just one more next to the other living beings. ... For the indigenous, Earth as territory has no relation whatsoever with the modern notion of the western nation-state. (Díaz, 2007, pp. 42–43)<sup>6</sup>

Western modernity’s transmogrification of Earth into an object of classification and trade, into a resource and commodity is not only putting at risk the material survival of Earth and its peoples, but also the spiritual survival of non-anthropocentric worlds of meaning. Manifold relational ontologies cannot understand human life in separation from Earth.

Development as a powerful representation and world-making force is not a novel idea, but one that has been carefully advanced by post-development contributors. The coloniality of development brings forth the question of how it has functioned to further the erasure of worlds of meaning and the consumption of human and Earth life. A decolonial analysis of development has to look at its power effects, its world-making processes, at its coloniality, that is its implication in worldlessness, or the erasure of other worlds, and in earthlessness, that is in the anthropocentric consumption of Earth and the loss of the capacity of a contextual and en fleshed knowing (enfleshlessness).

Finally, such an analysis has the task to listen to other geo-genealogies that can in their alternative ontologies and temporalities indicate radical alternatives to development and Western modernity. Decolonial thought is oriented towards contextual and grounded alternative worlds of meaning, towards the possibility of hope in the mode of precedence, through listening and hosting anew the temporalities that have been negated along the road into the future.

The fundamental question is this: Can we envisage a way out of development to cultivate the possibility of a life in plenitude, of an ethical life that is not implicated in the consumption and suffering of Earth and proximate and distant others?

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<sup>6</sup> Our translation: “Frente a una madre común la gente mixe se siente como alguien más al lado de los seres vivos. ... Para los indígenas, la Tierra como territorio no tiene relación alguna con la noción moderna de Estado-nación occidental.”

We encounter development as a notion that articulates the modern/colonial divide, in other words, development functions to articulate the separation between those who consume the lives of others and of Earth and those who are consumed. From that perspective, development comes to mean the loss of worlds of meaning (worldlessness), the loss of the relation with Earth (earthlessness), the loss of the capacity of a contextual and enfleshed knowing (enfleshlessness) and the loss of our relations in time, of ancestry, of communal memories (empty-timelessness). We see these losses as the coloniality of development.

Therefore, to provide tentative decolonial orientations to the question above, it is necessary to foreground these losses in the analyses of development. In that sense, our politics of decolonizing development foregrounds the task of undoing the coloniality of development by engaging intellectually, epistemologically, affectively and politically with these losses. Engaging with the losses carries also the possibility of healing and delinking. From a decolonial perspective the alternatives to development have to overcome the relation between oppression and resistance and move towards coalitions (Lugones, 2003, p. 84) where other epistemologies and worlds can flourish.

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