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CRISIS AS OPPORTUNITY

Finding pluriversal paths

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There is no doubt that after decades of what has been called 'development', the world is in crisis – systemic, multiple, and asymmetrical; long in the making, it now extends across all continents. Never before did so many crucial aspects of life fail simultaneously, and people's expectations for their own and children's futures look so uncertain. Crisis manifestations are felt across all domains: environmental, economic, social, political, ethical, cultural, spiritual, and embodied. We need actions for renewal and re-politicization, where 'the political' means a collaboration among dissenting voices over the kinds of alternative worlds we want to create.[1]

A project concerned with postdevelopment should deepen and widen an agenda for research, dialogue, and action, for scholars, policymakers, and activists. It would offer a variety of worldviews and practices relating to our collective search for an ecologically wise and socially just world. This agenda would investigate the What, How, Who, for Whom, and Why of all that is transformative, as distinct from that which is not.[2] In the transition to 'a postdevelopment world', there may be companions with strategic vision, as well as others with good short-term tactical proposals. Democracy – as a process in permanent radicalization of itself – should speak to all areas of life, starting from the body and moving on to affirm its place in a living Earth Democracy.[3]

The seductive nature of development rhetoric – sometimes known as developmentality or developmentalism[4] – has been internalized across virtually all countries. Even some people who suffer the consequences of industrial growth in the Global North accept a unilinear path of progress. Many nations of the Global South have resisted attempts at environmental regulation with the charge that the North is preventing the South from reaching its own level of development. The international debate then moves on to 'monetary and technology transfers' from Global North to South, which, conveniently for the former, does

not challenge basic premises of the development paradigm. These terms, 'Global North and South', are not geographic designations but have economic and geo-political implications.[5] 'Global North' therefore may describe both historically dominant nations as well as colonized but wealthy ruling elites in the South. Similarly, for new alter-globalization alliances, 'South' can be a metaphor for exploited ethnic minorities or women in affluent countries, as much as the his-torically colonized or 'poorer' countries as a whole.

Decades after the notion of development spread around the world, only a handful of countries called 'underdeveloped', or 'developing', or 'Third World' – to use deprecating Cold War terms – really qualify as 'developed'. Others struggle to emulate the North's economic template, and all at enor-mous ecological and social cost. The problem lies not in lack of implementa-tion, but in the conception of development as linear, unidirectional, material, and financial growth, driven by commodification and capitalist markets. Despite numerous attempts to re-signify development, it continues to be something that 'experts' manage in pursuit of economic growth, and measure by gross domestic product (GDP), a poor and misleading indicator of progress in the sense of well-being. In truth, the world at large experiences 'maldevelopment', not least in the very industrialized countries whose lifestyle was meant to serve as a beacon for the 'backward' ones.

A critical part of our problems lies in the conception of 'modernity' itself – not to suggest that everything modern is destructive or iniquitous, nor that all tradition is positive. Indeed, modern elements such as human rights and feminist principles are proving liberatory for many people. We refer to modernity as the dominant worldview emerging in Europe since the Renaissance transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period, and consolidating towards the end of the eighteenth century. Not least among these cultural practices and institu-tions has been a belief in the individual as independent of the collective, and in private property, free markets, political liberalism, secularism,[6] and representative democracy. Another key feature of modernity is 'universalism' – the idea that we all live in a single, now globalized world, and, critically, the idea of science as the only reliable truth and harbinger of 'progress'.

Among the early causes of this multiple crisis is the ancient monotheistic prem-ise that a father 'God' made the Earth for the benefit of 'His' human children. This attitude is known as anthropocentrism.[7] At least in the West, it evolved into a philosophic habit of pitting humanity against nature, and gave rise to related dualisms such as the divide between subject versus object, mind versus body, masculine versus feminine, civilized versus barbarian. These classic ideological categories legitimize devastation of the natural world, as well as the exploitation of sex–gender, racial, and civilizational differences. Feminists emphasize the 'mas-culinist culture of domination' carried by these artificial pairs; intellectuals in the Global South emphasize their 'coloniality'. The modern colonial capitalist patri-archal world system[8] thus marginalizes and demeans forms of knowing, such as caregiving and non-Western law, science, or economies. This is the prevailing

political pattern globally, yet there have been alternative forms in Europe, as well as 'modernities' in Latin America, China, and so forth.

The global crisis is not conjunctural or manageable within existing institutional frameworks. It is historical and structural, demanding a deep cultural awakening and re-organization of relations both within and between societies across the world, as also between humans and the rest of so-called 'nature'. As humans, our most important lesson is to make peace with the Earth and with each other. Everywhere, people are experimenting with how to meet their needs in ways that assert the rights and dignity of Earth and its threatened inhabitants. The search is a response to ecological collapse, land grabs, oil wars, and forms of extractivism, such as agroindustry and plantations of genetically engineered species. In human terms, this theft brings loss of rural livelihoods and urban poverty. Sometimes Western 'progress' gives way or leads to diseases of affluence, alienation, and rootlessness. But people's resistance movements are now taking place across every continent. *The Environmental Justice Atlas* documents and catalogs over 2000 conflicts,[9] proving the existence of an active global environmental justice movement, even if it is not yet a united one.

There is no guarantee that 'development' will resolve traditional discrimination and violence against women, youth, children, and intersex minorities, landless and unemployed classes, races, castes, and ethnicities.[10] As globalizing capital destabilizes regional economies, turning communities into wasted lives and refugee populations, some people cope by identifying with the macho power of the political Right. This prioritizes national identity and promises to 'take the jobs back' from the migrant scapegoats. At times, an insecure working-class Left can adopt this stance too, not recognizing the culpability of banks and corporations for their predicament. A drift towards authoritarianism is taking place all over the world, from India to the USA and Europe. The illusion of representative democracy is kept alive by a privileged technocratic class with its neoliberal trajectory of innovation for green growth. There is a fuzzy line between the Right and the orthodox Left when it comes to productivism, modernization, and progress. Moreover, each such ideology builds on eurocentric and masculinist values, so reinforcing the status quo.

Karl Marx reminded us that when a new society is born from inside the old, it drags many defects of the old system along with it. Later, Antonio Gramsci would observe of his time that 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.'[11] What these European Left intellectuals did not anticipate was how, today, alternatives are also emerging from the political margins – from both the colonial periphery and the domestic periphery of capitalism. The Marxist analysis remains necessary but it is not sufficient; it needs to be complemented by perspectives such as feminism and ecology, as well as imaginations emanating from the Global South, including Gandhian ideals. In a time of transition such as this, critique and action call for new narratives combined with hands-on material solutions. Doing more of the same, but better, or less of the same is not enough. The

way forward is not simply to make corporations more accountable or to set up regulative bureaucracies; it is not even a matter of recognizing full citizenship for the 'colored', 'elderly', 'disabled', 'women', or 'queer' through liberal pluralist policy. Likewise, the conservation of a few 'pristine' patches of nature at the margins of urban capitalism will have little effect on the collapse of biodiversity.

We write at a time when the great twentieth-century political models – liberal representative democracy and state socialism – have become incoherent and dysfunctional forms of governance, even if achieving welfare and rights for a few.

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Following these critical perspectives, it is important to examine the limits of developmentalism as it shapes reformist solutions to global crises. Here we see the ghost of modernity reincarnated in infinite ways, as short-sighted crisis remedies of those in power keep the North–South status quo in place. These include, amongst other topics, market-mechanisms, geo-engineering and climate-smart agriculture, the population question, green economics, reproductive engineering, and transhumanism. An over-arching theme is the much-celebrated political gesture of 'sustainable development'. Of course, even well-intentioned people may inadvertently promote superficial or false solutions to global problems. Then again, it is not so easy to distinguish mainstream or superficial initiatives from 'radical transformative' ones, in these days when the military-industrial-media complex and greenwashing industry promotions are at their most seductive best.

Criticism of industrialization is not new. Mary Shelley (1797–1851), Karl Marx (1818–1883), and Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), each in their own way, expressed misgivings about it, as have many people's movements throughout the last two centuries. The earlier twentieth-century debate on sustainability was strongly influenced by the Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* argument,[12] and official circles have expressed concern about mass-production technologies and consumption patterns since the 1972 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Stockholm. Regular conferences at a global level would reiterate the mismatch between 'development and environment', with the 1987 report *Our Common Future* bringing it sharply into focus. However, the UN and most nation-state analyses have never included a critique of social structural forces underlying ecological breakdown. The framing has always been on making economic growth and development 'sustainable and inclusive' through appropriate technologies, markets, and institutional policy reform. The problem is that this mantra of sustainability was swallowed up by capitalism early on, and then emptied of ecological content.

In the period from the 1980s on, neoliberal globalization advanced aggressively across the globe. The UN now shifted focus to a program of 'poverty alleviation' in developing countries, without questioning the sources of poverty in the accumulation-driven economy of the affluent Global North. In fact, it was argued that countries needed to achieve a high standard of living before they could deploy resources in protecting the environment.[13] So, economic 'growth' was redefined as a

necessary step.[14] This watering down of earlier debates on limits opened the way for the ecological modernist 'green economy' concept. The new millennium has seen a plethora of such Keynesian proposals – the bio-economy, Green Revolution for Africa, Chinese and European promotion of the Circular Economy, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[15]

At the UN Conference for Sustainable Development in 2012, this hollow sustainability ideology was the guiding framework for multilateral discussions. For some time, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), together with the corporate sector, some even on the political Left,[16] had been talking enthusiastically about the need for a 'green new deal'. In preparation for Rio+20, UNEP published a report on the Green Economy, defining it 'as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities'.[17] In line with the pro-growth policy of sustainable development advocates, the report conceptualized all living natural forms across the planet as 'natural capital' and 'critical economic assets', so intensifying the marketable commodification of Life-on-Earth. However, opposition from alter-globalization activists was fierce.

The official Rio+20 final declaration advocates economic growth in more than twenty of its articles. This approach is based on a supposed greening of neoclassical economic theory called 'environmental economics', a belief that growth can de-link or decouple itself from nature through dematerialization and de-pollution by what is called 'eco-efficiency'. However, empirical cradle-to-grave and social metabolism studies from ecological economics show that such production has 'dematerialized' in relative terms – using less energy and materials per unit of GDP – but it has not reduced overall or absolute amounts of materials and energy, which is what matters for sustainability. Historically, the only periods of absolute dematerialization coincide with economic recession.[18] The popular idea of 'economic efficiency' falls far short of respecting biophysical limits – in nature and natural resources, in ecosystem assimilative capacity, or in planetary boundaries.

The international model of green capitalism carried forward in the declaration *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*[19] reveals the following flaws in what have become known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[20]:

- no analysis of how the structural roots of poverty, unsustainability, and multi-dimensional violence are historically grounded in state power, corporate monopolies, neocolonialism, and patriarchal institutions;
- inadequate focus on direct democratic governance with accountable decision-making by citizens and self-aware communities in face-to-face settings;
- continued emphasis on economic growth as the driver of development, contradicting biophysical limits, with arbitrary adoption of GDP as the indicator of progress;
- continued reliance on economic globalization as the key economic strategy, undermining people's attempts at self-reliance and autonomy;

- continued subservience to private capital, and unwillingness to democratize the market through worker–producer and community control;
- modern science and technology held up as social panaceas, ignoring their limits and impacts, and marginalizing 'other' knowledges;
- culture, ethics, and spirituality sidelined and made subservient to economic forces;
- unregulated consumerism without strategies to reverse the Global North's disproportionate contamination of the globe through waste, toxicity, and climate emissions;
- neoliberal architectures of global governance becoming increasingly reliant on technocratic managerial values by state and multi-lateral bureaucracies.

This 2015 framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), now global in its reach, is a false consensus.[21] For instance, SDG 8 calls for 'sustained economic growth', which enters into contradictions with the majority of the other SDGs. If 'development' is seen as a toxic term to be rejected,[22] then 'sustainable development' becomes an oxymoron. More specifically, the degrowth theorist Giorgios Kallis has commented: 'Sustainable development and its more recent reincarnation "green growth" depoliticise genuine political antagonisms between alternative visions for the future. They render environmental problems technical, promising win-win solutions and the impossible goal of perpetuating economic growth without harming the environment.'[23] This is what happens with reformist solutions.

We do not mean to belittle the work of people who are finding new technological solutions to reduce problems, for instance, in renewable energy, nor do we mean to diminish the many positive elements contained in the SDG framework.[24] Rather, our aim is to stress that in the absence of fundamental socio-cultural transformation, technological and managerial innovation will not lead us out of the crises.[25] As nation-states and civil society gear up for the SDGs, it is imperative to lay out criteria to help people make such a distinction.

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In counterpoint to the blinders of conventional political reason, a range of complementary notions and practices that form radical and systemic alternatives have been put forward.[26] Some of these revive or creatively re-interpret long-standing Indigenous worldviews; others come from recent social movements; yet others revisit older philosophies and religious traditions. All of them ask: what is so badly wrong with everyday life today? Who is responsible for it? What would a better life look like? And, how do we get there? As feminists for the '*sostenibilidad de la vida*' ask: 'What is a life worth living? And, how can conditions that allow it to happen be met?'[27]

Together, these perspectives compose a 'pluriverse': a world where many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas of Chiapas put it. All people's worlds should co-exist

with dignity and peace without being subjected to diminishment, exploitation, and misery. A pluriversal world overcomes patriarchal attitudes, racism, casteism, and other forms of discrimination. Here, people re-learn what it means to be a humble part of 'nature', leaving behind narrow anthropocentric notions of progress based on economic growth. While many pluriversal articulations synergize with each other, unlike the universalizing ideology of sustainable development, they cannot be reduced to an overarching policy for administration by a UN or some other global governance regime, nor by regional or state regimes. We envision a world confluence of alternatives, provoking strategies for transition, including small everyday actions, towards a great transformation.

The project of deconstructing development opens into a matrix of alternatives, from universe to pluriverse. Some visions and practices are already well-known in activist and academic circles. For instance, *buen vivir*, 'a culture of life' with various names throughout South America; *ubuntu*, emphasizing the southern African value of human mutuality; s*waraj* from India, centred on self-reliance and self-governance.[28] There are thousands of such transformative alternatives around the world. Others, less well known but equally relevant, would be *kyosei, minobimaati-siiwin, nayakrishi*, as well as critically reflective versions of major religions including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism. So, too, political visions such as eco-socialism and deep ecology share points of convergence with earlier communal ideals. While many terms have a long history, they reappear in the narrative of movements for well-being and, again, co-exist comfortably with contemporary concepts such as degrowth and ecofeminism.[29]

From North, South, East, or West, each strand in the postdevelopment rainbow symbolizes human emancipation 'within nature'.[30] It is the latter bond that distinguishes a pluriversal project from cultural relativism. As Aldo Leopold would say: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the *biotic community*. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.'[31] While making peace with the Earth, another peacemaking goal is linking ancestral and contemporary knowledges together in a process that will demand horizontal and respectful dialogue. That said, there are no blueprints valid for all times and places, just as no theory is immune to questioning. Indeed, this kind of historical reflexivity is only now becoming recognized as a terrain of politics. The response to macro–power structures like capital and empire is a well-travelled landscape; what is still largely unexplored is the field of micro- or capillary power that feeds everyday violence. Honorable rhetorics of abstract justice, even spiritual paeans to Mother Earth, will not suffice to bring about the changes we want. Building a pluriversal house means digging a new foundation.

Transformative alternatives differ from mainstream or reformist solutions in a number of ways. Ideally, they will go to the roots of a problem. They will question what we have already identified as core features of the development discourse – economic growth, productivism, the rhetoric of progress, instrumental rationality, markets, universality, anthropocentrism, and sexism. These transformative alternatives will encompass an ethic that is radically different

from the one underpinning the current system. Transformative alternatives reflect values grounded in a relational logic; a world where everything is connected to everything else.

There are many paths towards a bio-civilization, but we may envisage societies that encompass the following values and more:

- diversity and pluriversality
- autonomy and self-reliance
- solidarity and reciprocity
- commons and collective ethics
- oneness with and rights of nature
- interdependence
- simplicity and enoughness
- inclusiveness and dignity
- justice and equity
- non-hierarchy
- dignity of labor
- rights and responsibilities
- ecological sustainability
- non-violence and peace[32]

Political agency will belong to the marginalized, exploited, and oppressed. And transformations will integrate and mobilize multiple dimensions, though not necessarily all at once. One exemplar of that vision might be the set of confluences called Vikalp Sangam taking place in India since 2014.[33] The values advanced by this movement are the following.

- *Ecological wisdom, integrity and resilience*: where primacy is given to maintaining eco-regenerative processes that conserve ecosystems, species, functions, and cycles; respecting ecological limits from local to global; and where there is an infusion of ecological ethics into all human activities.
- *Social well-being and justice*: where fulfilment is physical, social, cultural, and spiritual; there is equity in socio-economic and political entitlements and responsibilities; non-discriminatory relations and communal harmony replace hierarchies based on faith, gender, caste, class, ethnicity, ability, and age; and where collective and individual human rights are ensured.
- *Direct and delegated democracy*: where consensus decision-making occurs at the smallest unit of settlement, in which every human has the right, capacity, and opportunity to take part; establishing democratic governance by directly accountable delegates in ways that are consensual, respectful, and supportive of the needs and rights of those currently marginalized, for example, young people or religious minorities.
- *Economic democratization*: where private property gives way to the commons, removing the distinction between owner and worker; where communities

and individuals – ideally 'prosumers' – have autonomy over local produc-
tion, distribution, and markets; where localization is a key principle, with
trade built on the principle of equal exchange.

- *Cultural diversity and knowledge democracy*: where a plurality of ways of living,
  ideas, and ideologies is respected; creativity and innovation are encouraged;
  and the generation, transmission and use of knowledge – traditional or
  modern, including science and technology – is accessible to all.

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So where are women – 'the other half' of humanity – in all this? How do we
ensure that a postdevelopment pluriverse does not dissolve coloniality while keeping
women 'in their place' as the material bearers of everyday life activities? A first step
in the anticipation of deep systemic change is to question how both traditional and
modern practices and knowledges privilege 'masculinity' and the opportunities that
go with it. Originally, the two words 'economy' and 'ecology' shared the one
Greek root – *oikos*, meaning 'care for our home'. But soon enough, this unity was
broken apart as men's self-appointed domination over nature came to include the
exploitation of women's energies. Whole civilizations have been built on the sex-
gendered control of women's fertility – the quintessential resource for continuance
of any political regime. This turned women into 'means' not 'ends', mere chattels,
so taking away their standing as full human individuals in their own right.

Ironically, the economy or productive sector, as it is known in the Global
North, now destroys its very own social and ecological foundations in the repro-
ductive sector. Women across the world, and especially in the Global South,
have challenged this irrational development ethos – Latin American and Pacific
feminisms; PeaceWomen; matriarchies; wages for housework; body politics; gift
economies; and ecofeminism. Most of these initiatives are grounded in women's
struggles for survival. They link political emancipation with environmental just-
ice, local problems with global structures, usually arguing for sustainable subsist-
ence against linear progress and 'catch-up development'.[34] Conversely,
mainstream Western feminism tends to be anthropocentric, such that liberal and
even socialist feminists may be pacified with the goal of 'equality'. In this way,
their politics unwittingly band-aids existing masculinist institutions.

Official UN and government analyses have never included a thorough critique of
structural forces underlying ecological breakdown. Similarly, the deep structure of
ancient patriarchal values carried forward by global development remains unexam-
ined. Known as 'the longest revolution', the liberation of women from social dom-
ination by men will be no easy matter. Even policy experts too often conflate the
well-being of household or community with the well-being of the breadwinner,
ignoring a domestic power hierarchy. In academia, the postmodern tendency to
reduce embodied sexual identity to the construct of 'gender' is another unhelpful
convention. In the same way, treating 'class, race, and gender' as abstract 'intersec-
tional structures' can deflect attention from the raw materiality of lived experience.

Formal democratic gestures – the vote or wage equality for women – barely scratch the surface of centuries-old habits of sex-gender oppression.[35] An adherence to spiritual virtues, or strong secular principles such as diversity and solidarity, can help, but do not guarantee an end to the biophysical impacts of sex-gender violence.

Activists seeking just and sustainable alternatives need to acknowledge this unspoken level of political materiality. To varying degrees, women both in the North and the South face silencing and harassment; they lack not only resources, but often freedom of movement. They live with issues such as culturally sanctioned indignities over menstruation, clitoral excision, polygamy, dowry murder, honor killing, suttee, pinching, groping, and now digitized revenge porn. They endure enforced child bearing, domestic violence, marital rape, youth gang rape, genocidal rape as a weapon of war, stigmatization as widows and persecution as 'witches' in old age. In the twenty-first century, a combination of female foeticide, privatized violence, and militarized collateral damage on civilian populations is resulting in a falling demographic ratio of women to men globally. In Asia alone, one-and-a-half million women have lost their lives in the last decade due to such factors.

The abuse of children and cruelty to animals are further aspects of the ancient yet widespread patriarchal prerogative over 'lesser' life forms. These activities are a form of extractivism; a gratification through energies drawn from other kinds of bodies, those deemed 'closer to nature'. Following Elizabeth Dodson Gray's pioneering analysis, ecofeminist scholars have offered a deep historical critique of the global capitalist patriarchal order – its religions, economics, and science. In deconstructing the continuing potency of ancient ideological dualisms – humanity over nature, man over woman, boss over worker, white over black, they have shown different forms of social domination to be interrelated.[36] Thus, a 'politics of care' enacted by women from Global North and South converges with the mores of *buen vivir, ubuntu*, and *swaraj*, because across the hemispheres women's everyday labors teach 'another logic', not controlling and instrumental but 'relational' – like the rationality of ecological processes.[37] In its deepest articulation, these pluriversal voices contest both modernity and traditionalism by locating the material embodiment of class, race, sex-gender, and species inside an eco-centric frame. There can be no pluriverse until the historical underpinnings of masculine entitlement are part of the political conversation.

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Readers will rightly question the confidence that we, and numerous other critical scholars and activists, invest in the idea of 'community'. True, it is a contested term, one that can readily hide oppressions based on sex-gender, age, class, caste, ethnicity, race, or ability. We recognize, too, that 'localized' governance or economies are often xenophobic – a parochialism seen currently in the nationalist opposition to refugees in many parts of the world. Beset by intolerance on the Right, and a defensive 'identity politics' on the Left, our compendium of alternatives reaches for

integrative and inclusive practices. Hopefully, life-affirming elements can be discovered even in some of the world's patriarchal religions, and we hope to cultivate that potential.

The ideal of communality envisaged here carries the paradigmatic sense of today's movements towards 'commoning' or *la comunalidad*. As in the case of the initiatives networked by Vikalp Sangam, these collectives are based on autonomous decision-making via face-to-face relations and economic exchange directed at meeting basic needs through self-reliance.[38] Our understanding of community is a critical one: 'in process' and always questioning the modern capitalist patriarchal hegemony of the 'individual' as kernel of society. We hope this book inspires counter-movements to that globally colonizing pressure, just as we are inspired, in turn, by cultural groups across the world that still enjoy a collective existence.[39] In this context, Mexican sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar proposes a concept of *entramados comunitarios* or communitarian entanglements.

> [T]he multiplicity of human worlds that populate and engender the world under diverse norms of respect, collaboration, dignity, love, and reciprocity, that are not completely subjected to the logic of capital accumulation even if often under attack and overwhelmed by it […] such community entanglements […] are found under diverse formats and designs. […] They include the diverse and immensely varied collective human configurations, some long-standing, others younger, that confer meaning and 'furnish' what in classical political philosophy is known as 'socio-natural space'.
>
> (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2013: 33)

Many radical worldviews and practices make the pluriverse visible. In speaking about them, we enhance their existence and viability. In fact, the very proliferation of assertions coming from these 'other' worlds makes alternatives possible. Conversely, it is in this sense that mainstream or reformist development solutions can said to be proven false. In responding to the ecological crisis, 'experts' in the Global North take the categories of One World responsible for devastation of the planet as the very point of departure for their alleged solutions! However, their commitment to *la dolce vita* cannot enlighten us on the fundamental task of making the pluriverse sustainable. To repeat: the notion of the pluriverse questions the very concept of universality that is central to eurocentric modernity. With their phrase 'A world where many worlds fit', the Zapatistas give us the most succinct and apt definition of the pluriverse.

Whereas the West managed to sell its own idea of One World – known only by modern science and ruled by its own cosmovision – the alter-globalization movements propose pluriversality as a shared project based on the multiplicity of 'ways of worlding'. Under conditions of asymmetric power, Indigenous peoples have had to alienate their own common-sense experience of the world and learn how to live with the eurocentric masculinist dualism between humans and

non–humans, which led to the treatment of Indigenous peoples as non–human and 'natural resources'. They resist this separation when they mobilize on behalf of mountains, lakes, or rivers, arguing that these are sentient beings with 'rights', not mere objects or resources. Conversely, many thinking people in the industrialized world are demanding rights for the rest of nature to be expressed in law and policy. In so doing they are taking a step toward incorporating something that Indigenous peoples have always integrated into their worldview, but they are doing so in the formal ways that they are familiar with.[40] There is a long way to go for the multiplicity of worlds to become fully complementary with each other, but movements for justice and ecology are finding increasing common ground. So, too, women's political struggles converge upon this same point.

In both the Global North and South, it is most often ordinary care-giving mothers and grandmothers who join this entanglement – defending and reconstituting communal ways of being and place-based forms of autonomy. In doing so, they, like the Indigenous Others described earlier, draw on non-patriarchal ways of doing, being, and knowing.[41] They invite participation, collaboration, respect, and mutual acceptance and horizontality; they honour sacredness in the cyclic renewal of life. Their tacitly matriarchal cultures resist ontologies, founded on domination, hierarchy, control, power, the negation of others, violence, and war. From the worldwide movement of Peace Women to African anti-extractivist networks, women are defending nature and humanity with the clear message that there can be no decolonization without de-patriarchalization.

Such initiatives resonate powerfully with the postdevelopment concepts profiled here.[42] For the pluriverse is not just a fashionable concept, it is a *practice*. Societal imaginaries based on human rights and the rights of nature are impossible to arrive at through top-down intervention. Initiatives such as the Transition Movement or Ecovillages can contain a mix of reformist and broader systemic changes. Emancipatory projects will rely on solidarity across continents and they can work hand-in-hand with resistance movements. This is exemplified by the Yasuní–ITT initiative in Ecuador, which urges: 'leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, and the tar sands in the land'.[43] To live according to the insights of multiple partially connected, if radically different, worlds may mean holding traditional and modern certainties and universals at bay in our personal and collective lives. We are striving to provide some concept-tools and practices for honoring a pluriverse, fostering a bio–civilization that is eco-centric, diverse, and multidimensional, and one that is able to find a balance between individual and communal needs. This living, pre-figurative politics is based on the principle of creating right now the foundations of the worlds we want to see come to fruition in the future; it implies a contiguity of means and ends.

How do we get from here to there? We are, after all, talking about profound shifts in the spheres of economy, politics, society, culture, and lived sexuality! Transitioning implies accepting an ensemble of measures and changes in different domains of life and at different geographic scales. Transitions can be messy and not fully radical, but can be considered 'alternative' if they at least hold a potential

for living change. Given the diversity of imaginative visions across the globe, the question of how to build synergies among them remains open. There will be setbacks; strategies will fade along the way and others will emerge. Differences, tensions, even contradictions, will exist, but these can become a basis for constructive exchange. The ways towards the pluriverse are multiple, open, and in continuous evolution.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on the introduction to the recently edited volume by Kothari, A., Salleh, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F. & Acosta, A. (2018) *The Post-Development Dictionary*. Delhi: Authors Upfront and Tulika.
2 For initial thoughts on the *Post-Development Dictionary* agenda, see Demaria & Kothari (2017). For an early attempt to articulate different alternatives to development, see Kothari, Demaria & Acosta (2015) and Beling, Vanhulst, Demaria, Rabid, Carballo & Pelenc (2018). The latter discusses discursive synergies for a 'great transformation' towards sustainability among human development, degrowth and *buen vivir* advocates.
3 Shiva: www.navdanya.org/earth-democracy.
4 Nandy (2003: 164–175); Mies (1986); Deb (2009); Shrivastava & Kothari (2012).
5 Salleh (2006).
6 Used here in the sense of an anti- or non-spiritual and religious orientation, not in the sense of an orientation that equally respects all faiths and non-faith belief systems.
7 Or, as Dobson (1995) argues, 'human instrumentalism', since we may all inevitably be a bit human-centered in a neutral way. However, the analysis of ideological dualism, as such, is owed to ecofeminist thinker Elizabeth Dodson Gray (1979).
8 Grosfoguel & Mielants (2006).
9 The Environmental Justice Atlas (EJ Atlas) collects the stories of struggling communities and is the largest worldwide inventory of such conflicts. It aims to make these mobilizations more visible, highlight claims and testimonies, and make a case for true corporate and state accountability for injustices inflicted through their activities (Martinez-Alier, Temper, Del Bene & Scheidel 2016; Scheidel, Temper, Demaria & Martínez-Alier 2018): https://ejatlas.org/.
10 Navas, Mingorria & Aguilar (2018).
11 Gramsci (1971 [1930]: 275–276).
12 Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens (1972).
13 See, for instance, a presentation by former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (1992), and a critique of this in Shrivastava & Kothari (2012: 121–122).
14 Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo (2015).
15 Salleh (2016).
16 For example, the New Economics Foundation, London, and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Berlin.
17 UNEP (2011); Salleh (2012).
18 Ecological economists have provided significant empirical evidence with their sociometabolic analyses, which measure the energy and material flows of the economy. For an example, see Krausmann, Gingrich, Eisenmenger, Erb, Haberl & Fischer-Kowalski (2009) and Jorgenson & Clark (2012). For a discussion of method, see Gerber & Scheidel (2018).
19 SDSN (2013); UNEP (2011); UN Secretary General Panel (2012); United Nations (2013); United Nations (2015).
20 Adapted from Kothari (2013).
21 This phenomenon was anticipated in pioneering work by Shiva (1989) and Hornborg (2009).

22 Dearden (2014).
23 Kallis (2015).
24 For a critical but appreciative view of the potential of the SDG framework, see Club de
   Madrid (2017), *A New Paradigm for Sustainable Development?* Summary of the deliber-
   ations of the Club de Madrid Working Group on Environmental Sustainability and
   Shared Societies. www.clubmadrid.org/en/publicacion/a_new_paradigm_for_
   sustainable_development.
25 See also www.lowtechmagazine.com/about.html.
26 For earlier contributions: Salleh (2017 [1997]); Kothari, Demaria & Acosta (2015);
   Escobar (2015); Beling, Vanhulst, Demaria, Rabid, Carballo & Pelenc (2018).
27 The phrase is Spanish for 'sustainability of life': Pérez Orozco (2014).
28 Gudynas (2011); Metz (2011); Kothari (2014).
29 Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova & Martinez-Alier (2013); D'Alisa, Demaria & Kallis
   (2014); Bennholdt-Thomsen & Mies (1999); Salleh (2017 [1997]).
30 Salleh (2017/1997); Sousa Santos (2009).
31 Leopold (1994: 224).
32 For an extensive and intensive process of visioning the elements and values of radical
   alternatives, see the Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluences) process in India, ongoing
   since 2014: www.kalpavriksh.org/index.php/alternatives/alternatives-knowledge-
   center/353-vikalp-sangam-coverage; and the vision note emerging from this at www.
   vikalpsangam.org/about/the-search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/.
33 Adapted from the Vikalp Sangam vision note, at www.vikalpsangam.org/about/the-
   search-for-alternatives-key-aspects-and-principles/.
34 Bennholdt-Thomsen & Mies (1999).
35 Wages for women in developed economies stand at approximately seventy per cent
   of the male wage for equivalent work. Men in developed economies spend less than
   twenty minutes a day with their children. In modern India, only fifteen percent of
   women are in the paid workforce.
36 Dodson-Gray (1979), Merchant (1980), Waring (1987).
37 Salleh (2017 [1997], 2011, 2012).
38 For a detailed narrative on the legitimacy of using 'community' and its various
   derivatives, one acknowledging the contestations, see Escobar (2010, 2014).
39 See www.congresocomunalidad2015.org/ for details of the First International Con-
   gress on Comunalidad, 2015, convened at Puebla, Mexico, where these issues were
   discussed at length.
40 See, for instance, Kauffman & Sheehan (2018); and https://therightsofnature.org.
41 This ethic should not be read through the lens of liberal ideology; that is, as
   women's 'essential nature'. It is a learned outcome of the experience of care-giving
   labors, historically assigned to women across most cultures.
42 Acosta & Brand (2017).
43 Acosta (2014).

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