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ARTICLE



Rethinking the left: a view from Latin America

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ABSTRACT

The images of revolution in Latin America have long been part of the metropolitan left imagination. Yet there is not much input from the complex and grounded Latin American debates rethinking the left into the global discourse. I will develop an argument/analysis addressing that gap in three phases. First in *Theory* I will seek to place the Latin American debates from a postcolonial perspective focusing on the reception of key debates in the global North. I then move on to the 'left decade' itself in *Practice* laying out some of the basic parameters, its complexity and contradictions. Post 2000, Latin America became a laboratory of left experimentalism that deserves closer attention. Finally, in *Futures* I cast a cold eye on alternative scenarios for the left with a view to going beyond the simplifications current in Northern left coverage. Any global rethinking on 'augmenting the left' would benefit from the various views from (not just on) Latin America. There is much to learn from debates which might help rethink a left strategy that is fit for purpose in the 21st century, learning from the mistakes of the past and from the now seemingly ebbing left decade or 'pink tide' in Latin America.

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Introduction

The international left is reconsidering many of its tenets, not least after the setbacks in Latin America and in Southern Europe. The rapidly changing political terrain in the North Atlantic with the rise of Brexit and Trumpism makes even more urgent a credible and sustainable left alternative. In practice, the left seems quite disorientated, catching up with events quite often. A common response is a retreat into accepted truths and rather dogmatic and defensive postures faced with the unknown. In the new era the right is appearing as radical, thinking outside the box and making potent appeals to sections of the working class and popular masses. The challenge posed is to both rebuild the left and extend its reach, thus the mission of this special issue on 'augmenting the left'. Does the logic of class still prevail or have the new social movements created a new terrain of struggle? Is a political economy approach still relevant or should we be thinking more in terms of a new cultural political economy? Do the 'classical' concerns of Marxism suffice in the current era that is not only globalized but also, for many analysts in some way postmodern?

A Latin American take on these issues can provide valuable input to the global debate on augmenting the left. Not only does the continent have a long and creative

Marxist engagement with politics (see Munck 2007) but it is also coming out of a long decade of left-of-centre governments that merit a more detailed and objective analysis than we have seen hitherto. It also brings to bear a very different perspective, for example, around populism viewed simply as a right wing phenomenon in the North whereas in Latin America it has had a progressive connotation. Issues such as race, class, gender, migration, indigeneity and culture all 'look' different from a Latin American perspective (see Svampa 2016). To avoid ethnocentrism in the debate around augmenting the left, we need to take into account the Latin American and other 'differences' from the global South.

Theory

Latin America has never been as central to postcolonial theory as Africa or the Indian sub-continent (see Chaturvedi 2012). The nature of colonisation and the achievement of political independence early in the 19th century set up very different political and cultural terms of reference. Latin America sits somewhat or uncomfortably in the postcolonial paradigm and can serve both to vindicate it and to destabilize it (Munck 2015). We could argue that 'modernity' as we know it in the social sciences springs from the colonial encounter between Europe and the Americas. What we now call the coloniality of knowledge/power was consolidated from the 16th century onwards as local European knowledge became hegemonic or global. The rest of the world was classified or, rather, re-classified through a racialised and gendered grammar. Modernity and rationality were defined as a European preserve while the rest of the world was deemed to be primitive and irrational. For Anibal Quijano this binary perspective on knowledge was 'imposed as globally hegemonic in the same course as the expansion of European colonial dominance over the world' (Quijano 2008, 190).

Given that postcolonial studies and Latin American studies both focus on the knowledge-power dimension of modernity and colonialism we could expect both fields to be in productive interaction. Latin America could act as a lever to broaden the postcolonial paradigm from the perspective of a region that was always-already modern. Latin America's economic, political, social and cultural hybridity can help take us beyond the binary First World/Third World or modern/traditional oppositions. The transnational cultural political economy of contemporary Latin America with its flows of migrants and money, and the dense networks of images and information that shapes our understanding of the region is just not amendable to understanding and transformation through simplistic models (see Canclini 2005). What I would retain from the postcolonial take on a 'divided world' would be the radical epistemological stance towards all forms of Eurocentric knowledge. Subaltern knowledges from Latin America – not least from the left-leaning countries since 2000 – have challenged neoliberal world-views and encouraged global discourses around the notion that 'another world is possible' (see Barret, Chavez, and Rodriguez- Garavito 2012).

A focus on the 'coloniality of knowledge' would lead us to situate our analyses within the 'decolonial option' (Mignolo and Escobar 2009). This allows us to break with Eurocentrism and foreground the colonial difference as a privileged epistemological and political space. Critical knowledge – and that includes Marxism – needs to be in this space if it is to remain or regain critical relevance. Marxism needs to question its embeddedness in the universal metanarratives of modernity, progress and liberation.

Many other critical and revolutionary currents – from feminism to ecology and from indigenous to post-structuralist thinking – have enriched the theory and practice of social transformation, nowhere more so than in Latin America.

My own emphasis here will be on the limitations of the international left when dealing with Latin America. I hesitate to use the epithet of Eurocentrism, but there is definitely a problem in the way it has related to the region. From Marx, through the Second International and up to the Comintern, Marxism has struggled to locate Latin America, not quite colonial and not quite modern. The Marxisms of the region – with the signal exception of Jose Carlos Mariátegui who died in 1930 (belatedly accessible in English in Vanden and Becker 2011) – have tended to align with international tendencies and been unable to deal creatively with a recalcitrant local reality. This all changed with the Cuban revolution which from the 1960s onwards, promoted what it saw as a Latin American Marxism although many would question its effectiveness. I would argue – and I am aware that this view will be seen as controversial – that it is the limitations of the Cuban ‘model’ and its innate inability to transfer meaningfully to the rest of Latin America which has created the condition for the undue influence of international left theorizing in the region.

I propose to take three themes to illustrate the pertinence of the postcolonial frame in understanding the problematic positioning of Latin America in metropolitan progressive thinking. The first of these is the ‘dependency theory’ or paradigm, developed in the late 1960s in Latin America to account for the particular postcolonial order of the continent (Cardoso and Faletto 1969, 1979). This was one of the most original responses to the classic Marxist theory of imperialism and one coming from the postcolonial world. Its largely Brazilian creators were forced into exile in Chile after the 1964 coup where they worked with other Latin American activist-thinkers until the Chilean coup of 1973. Embracing a wide range of political and theoretical perspectives and covering a wide range of topics from land reform to industrialization, the role of the state and of culture, dependency theory became codified internationally through the writings of a US trained German economist Andre Gunder Frank (1969). The Latin American thinkers were not translated into English for over a decade and, in many cases, not at all.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, co-author of the classic *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (1969, 1979) did write excoriating the ‘reception’ of dependency theory in the North (Cardoso 1977) but by and large Gunder Frank, to this day is widely seen as the exemplar of Latin American dependency thinking. There are many reasons why that might have been the case. Frank wrote in a simple, accessible and engaging style taking dependency to a wider audience. However, this was at the cost of greatly simplifying what was originally a nuanced, comparative, politico-economic reading of Latin American development. It was also more self-consciously ‘radical’ than some of the Latin American analysis and tied in nicely with Regis Debray’s portrayal of the Cuban Revolution. It ultimately served to marginalize the Latin American debates from the English reading world and codified complex thinking into catchy slogans such as ‘development of underdevelopment’ which were easily rebutted by mainstream Northern analysts.

In terms of the study of social movements, we can also locate key figures of the North who have dominated the debate to the detriment of complexity and indigenous knowledge. One of the most influential analysts of Latin American social movements has been French sociologist Alain Touraine (1971). His influence has been felt across the social

sciences since the late 1970s but not least in Brazilian social movement studies. While rich and empowering, representing a clear improvement of the hitherto dominant rational-choice inspired Resource Mobilization Theory, there is a sense that he views the world from a Paris 1968 vantage point. The 'new social movement' theories he inspired – which took root in Latin America – wrote off the labour and nationalist movements and elevated peace, ecology and women's movements that had no direct counterpart in Latin America at the time. So, even when the influence is relatively benign, the influence of the metropolitan left in Latin America does tend to stifle the growth of indigenous theorizing and original and grounded political practice.

Latin American social movements have been reified and taken on a life of their own in international left debates. We have already mentioned the Cuban Revolution and the Zapatista revolt of 1994, both subject to a simplified romantic dissemination. We should also mention the Workers Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) and Landless Peasant Movements (*Movimento dos Sem Terra*) in Brazil. Since the 1980s, these have been by turn criticized and lionized by the international left. It is almost as though internecine metropolitan left debates were being played out in Latin America. Behind the language of 'international solidarity' sometimes lay a somewhat patronising attitude. In Argentina this problem reached a peak in international coverage of the 2001–2 events as neoliberalism imploded. Community-based movements against conventional politics (*¡Que se vayan todos!*; let them all go), unemployed movements (the famous *piqueteros*) and the occupied factories were vastly inflated in this global discourse that showed little understanding of political nuances on the ground and the time-limited nature of these indeed dramatic episodes of the popular class struggle.

In terms of left political strategy, we have also seen a global predominance being given to non-Latin American figures. So, for example, the most influential 'theorizing' of the Cuban revolution was that carried out by French political philosopher Régis Debray (1970) and of the Zapatista revolt, by Irish political philosopher John Holloway (2002). Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution* first published in 1967 with the enthusiastic backing of the Cuban political leadership. It created an elegant but ultimately simplistic and even erroneous reading of the Cuban Revolution in an attempt to generalize the model across Latin America. Given Régis Debray's international celebrity status – and seeming closeness to events on the ground given his arrest in Bolivia in 1967 while supporting Guevara's mission – his account and blueprint for revolution was hugely influential. Our main point is that it was taken in the English speaking North Atlantic as an authorized statement on what were, in reality, much more complex and conflictual political realities.

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 was a Latin American event of global import because of the impetus it gave to the rising alter-globalization movement. As Debray did for the Cuban Revolution so John Holloway did for Zapatismo in his book *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (Holloway 2002). It was seen as a semi-authorized theoretical statement of Zapatismo and achieved widespread circulation. While other commentators questioned the simplification inherent in the online globalization of Zapatismo (see Hellman 2000), Holloway gave full rein to romantic inflation and messianic dissemination of the movement and its ideology. Of course everyone is entitled to enter debates on the left anywhere in the world. But local voices of dissent with these interpretations of Zapatismo were often lost, particularly in the English-speaking world where Holloway had a built-in advantage. As with dependency theory and social movement theorizing, the metropolitan English-speaking

commentator carries more weight globally and reaches a wider audience which clearly impacts on the autonomy of indigenous debate on the ground.

In terms of a Latin American perspective on the broadening of the left internationally several conclusions follow. The dominance of Northern paradigms and personnel in these debates is troubling if what is truly sought is a new global discourse and not just the co-option of the struggles and theories of Others. It is not a nativist reaction to problematize the dominance of the external all-knowing gaze and the blanking out of the subaltern perspective, which is always spatial as well as social. In an era characterized by global complexity and a concern to develop a new progressive paradigm for social transformation, we clearly need to start with these issues of placing and perspective. With that proviso we now move on to a thumbnail sketch of some of the left debates in *Practice* in Latin America during the 'progressive wave' lasting from around 2000 to 2015. That will provide us with the raw material for a consideration of alternative *Futures* for Latin America and the left, conscious that it is the left since its inception that has always looked towards a better future for humanity.

Practice

Latin America's left turn began in 1998 with the electoral victory of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. A turning point came in the new millennium, when popular mobilization and rejection of the neoliberal project crystallized into the electoral victory of left-of-centre governments in a number of Latin American countries including Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Uruguay. The rise of these governments represented a new era of rejection of the 'made-in-US' economic policies, as well as a re-engagement with the classic problems of development and dependency for Latin America, including the potential and limits of economic growth, the role of the state, as well as the prospects for social transformation. The dilemma facing these governments might be seen as one of re-subordinating the economy to society through measures such as protective regulation and social norms in order to promote human development and values of solidarity. From this perspective, the conjuncture opened the doors for a rethinking of democracy and new types of development alternatives that could be pursued as a post-neoliberal solution for the dilemmas of the 21st century.

Latin America has long been a central focal point for disillusionment and criticism, debate and reorientation in regard to development and democracy from a left perspective. The rise in social movement activism and left-wing governments in Latin America has brought a renewed interest in finding alternative means of subordinating the economy to society through rethinking development, which has opened the possibility of 'disputing the historical meaning of development' (Acosta 2009). The challenge has been not only to address issues of growth, state intervention and poverty, but also to bring to the development debate new types of experience and knowledge, for example, from indigenous and peasant movements, feminism and ecology. In Latin America that search for an alternative to neoliberalism has taken many forms, all of which have brought the question of development to the fore as the site of contestation and struggle amongst activists, policymakers and academics alike.

For Latin America we may assert, with Boa Santos, that ours is 'a time of paradigmatic transition' (Sousa Santos 1995, ix) which has inspired academics, policymakers and social activists alike to use their imaginative powers to develop a new paradigm offering

renewed emancipatory horizons. Debates that once stood at the sidelines have now come centre-stage and the left has had a huge opportunity to put theory into practice. An example is provided by Ecuador's ex-President Correa's argument that 'we need to construct alternatives to development rather than alternative development'. At issue here is not only the traditional problem concerning the place of Latin American countries in the world economy, structural reform and economic growth, but also new questions including democratic participation, the diversity of markets including the economy of care, as well as markets based on other logics or cosmovisions such as reciprocity.

The governments of the left and centre-left were all elected on an anti-neoliberal platform. What unites these governments is their rejection of free-market policies, the emphasis on the strengthening of the state, political democratization, reducing social inequality and the search for regional integration. Nonetheless, there is a significant degree of diversity between the governments, in terms of the measures they have introduced, but also, at a deeper level, their approach to the development question as a whole. On the one hand, some countries, while rejecting neoliberalism, continue to operate within the traditional framework of development, accepting the basic tenets of development as economic growth, modernization, export-led growth, macroeconomic stability and the appropriation of nature. These governments, often referred to as 'neo-developmentalists' (Bresser Pereira 2009) or 'pragmatic neoliberal' (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 152), include the developmentalist projects of Lula and Rousseff in Brazil, and the national-popular projects of the Kirchners in Argentina, as well as Chile and Uruguay. The new developmentalist model espoused by these governments has received praise through various development bodies as a new 'third way' for developing economies. In contrast to the developmental states of the post-war period, and the market-orientated orthodoxy of neoliberalism, the model aims towards a state-led insertion into the world market.

On the other hand, in the regimes claiming to be socialist in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, the critique of neoliberalism has been extended to a critique of actually existing capitalism itself. In these countries, the anti-neoliberal campaign has been developed towards a more fundamental transformation, seeking not only a reversal of the free market neoliberal regime but also, at least in theory, a new version of socialism for the 21st century. For these countries, the search for an alternative has gone beyond the traditional debate on 'development' as economic growth and institutional reform to include proposals for a radically different way of organising society and the economy. To varying degrees, the governments shared the goal of not only reversing neoliberal policies, but also the search for 'another development', based on a radical transformation of social relations, property structures, state-civil society relations, as well as new approaches to questions of the environment, gender, indigenous people (see Martínez 2009) and cultural rights, often articulated through new constitutions. What is at stake here is a new way of imagining life and an ambitious cultural-political project for social transformation.

While all governments of the left have made attempts to implement neo-developmental policies, the clearest examples of neo-developmental regimes have come from the governments of Lula and Rousseff in Brazil and the Kirchners in Argentina. For these governments, the implementation of neo-developmental policies are conceived as a way of challenging the hegemony of national oligarchs and the new imperial world order under neoliberalism by reclaiming national sovereignty. This translated into a neo-Keynesian economic program based on rejecting neoliberal reforms and regulations, reversing privatizations and

implementing stronger regulations, together with the creation of a competitive environment for business and dynamic economic growth based on technological progress and increased international competitiveness of nationally based firms, competitive exchange rate management as well as a massive new infrastructure investment programmes and, finally, a more equitable distribution of the surplus, with a greater focus on social welfare programs.

While they share a progressive rhetoric drawing on so-called 'populist' or 'national developmentalist' traditions, there are significant differences in terms of their relationship with market relations and social forces (see Castañeda and Morales 2009). Both Argentina and Brazil for example have attempted to form a strategic 'neo-developmental alliance' with domestic and some fractions of transnational capital, as well as the organized workers movement and parts of the marginal population which are being integrated by means of mild forms of redistribution. However, the weight of the rural elite in Argentina meant this process was more restricted than in Brazil, and the relative autonomy of the state elites vis-a-vis capital has been dependent on the state's ability to mobilize popular forces, and greater degrees of contestation between political forces. Both Brazil and Argentina attempted to expand their support base in the formal and informal working classes with social and labour policies; in Brazil, these included the Bolsa Familia an influential conditional income support programme and an increase in statutory minimum wage increase, while in Argentina, measures included the Asignación Universal por Hijo, denationalization of pensions systems and minimum wage increases.

The radical left governments of Chávez and Maduro in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia and Correa in Ecuador have attempted a more radical project of social transformation, seeking to implement '21st century socialism' or, as Bolivian Vice-President García Linera has described it, 'communitarian socialism'. The central challenge posed by those governments has been to forge a path that not only breaks from neoliberalism, but also moves towards a more profound transition towards post-capitalist societies. A central component of this task has been the search for an alternative development model, which emerged from a critique and reappraisal of social democratic and socialist strategies of the past, recognizing the mistakes of the left, and the incorporation of new issues including political participation, the environment, culture and women. This new version of Latin American socialism recognized the limitations of previous socialist models such as the Soviet Union or China and proposed a socialism that might be understood as more 'embedded' and more relevant to the particularities of Latin American societies (Harnecker 2012).

As opposed to a top-down homogenous model of development, whether capitalist or socialist, the new radical left emphasized the historical diversity of each country, in racial, ethnic, geographic and cultural terms. It had a strong nationalist element but also draws on elements of Marxism, though mostly from the history, political practices and sociocultural experiences of Latin America inspired by the ideas of Mariátegui and other pioneers of Marxism in the region including theology of liberation thinkers. Like the radical populisms of the past they celebrated the national will of the people, but also promoted a new understanding of national identity, history, race and citizenship that challenges the conventional wisdom legitimising the old social order. Following Mariátegui, they have sought to 'Latinamericanise' Marxism, giving it a new relevance for contemporary left-wing thought based on the particular dynamics of economic exploitation and repression of the Amerindian peoples. The class struggle would need to be based not only on the centrality of the working

class, but also the incorporation of indigenous and rural communities. This re-envisioning of the past seeks to incorporate previously marginalised peoples, including not only workers and peasants, but also indigenous, Afro-descendants and women who have often been at the forefront of struggles in countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela. A key idea has been a new approach to the relation between the state and civil society. They rejected the old models of undemocratic rule and denial of civil rights associated with past socialisms, as well as the corporatism associated with the developmental state and the individualist concept of state and society that prevails under neoliberalism. In contrast to capitalism's emphasis on the individual, Latin American 21st-century socialism has a strong moral and ethical component that promotes social well-being, fraternity and social solidarity.

In this vein, the new left governments have created new types of political space allying forces between political and social movements, and advocating a revitalized approach to democracy, based on radical constitutional processes and a new configuration of the relation between states and social movements, thus promoting a range of democratic innovations. In the case of Bolivia, for example, a central aspect of this approach, as Vice President García Linera often states, has been the 'project of self-representation of the social movements of plebeian society'. According to this idea, the political participation of marginalised communities is no longer a question of gathering support for political parties, whether led by the liberals, conservatives or 'vanguard' proletariat; rather, they were now the protagonists in a new form of power that involved shifting relationships between the social movements and the state. The new constitutions of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia all introduced mechanisms for popular participation based on the principles of humanism, indigenous rights, endogenous development and the popular economy often based on cooperative models, including citizen's assemblies and community councils.

The concept of *Buen Vivir* (literally Living Well) expresses a critical approach to the ideology of progress and the search for alternatives to contemporary development as economic growth, the exploitation of nature and the shift to a society of materialism and consumerism (Gudynas 2009). It rejects the notion that indigenous peoples are at some prior stage of 'underdevelopment' to be overcome, given that it refers to a different way of life. It offers a rupture with former ideologies and practices of development, offering 'an opportunity to construct collectively a new development regime' (Acosta 2009). Development in this sense is embedded relationally in the interactions between diverse peoples, nature and communities. As a result of demands by the indigenous struggles in Bolivia, it has been defined as Bolivia's national ethos with *Buen Vivir* legislation aimed at 'the satisfaction of needs, the achievement of a dignified quality-of-life and death, to love and be loved, the healthy flourishing of all in peace and harmony with nature, the indefinite prolongation of cultures, free time for contemplation and emancipation, and the expansion and flourishing of liberties, opportunities, capacities and potentials'. *Buen Vivir* recognises the existence of a logic different to that of the market and seeks to incorporate the values inherent in nature and the expression of oppressed or subordinated indigenous knowledges and cultures.

The philosophy of *Buen Vivir* was incorporated into the constitutions of Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009) including policy goals that stress the need for recognition of and support for the diversity and non-fully-capitalist social forms that coexist in Bolivian and

Ecuadorian societies. In the case Ecuador, *Buen Vivir* is seen as a set of rights which include those of health, shelter, education, food and environment, while in Bolivia it is an ethical-cultural principle alongside others including dignity, freedom, solidarity and reciprocity. Development conceived as *Buen Vivir* seeks to articulate economic with ecological criteria, making possible an ethics of development which subordinates economic objectives to environmental needs (Gudynas 2011). The economy is seen as embedded in larger social and natural systems, following the principles of ecologists. It acknowledges cultural and gender differences, positioning interculturalism as a guiding principle. It promotes new strategies for food sovereignty, control of natural resources and sees water as a human right, for example. But it is of course a living and conflicted political ideology with many fierce internal debates (see Oviedo Freire 2014).

Futures

For the traditional or modernist left, the future is something more or less ordained. We know the laws of motion of capitalist development (forces and relations of production etc.) and we are certain the dynamics of the class struggle will deliver some form of socialism at some point. If it does not it is because the enemy is strong – imperialism is used to explain too much sometimes- or our own side is weak, it simply needs to become ‘more radical’ and stop ‘selling out’ to neo-liberalism. There is a strong sense of ‘necessitarianism’ (see Unger 2004 for a critique) running through much left discourse, as though inexorable laws dominate history and determine the outcomes. Now with the left tide receding there are many coming forward to say the state should never have been the objective of the struggle anyway, and if only the left governments had gone straight into building socialism instead of compromising with the powers that be, the outcome would have been different. But the world is not that simple.

The future is complex and not susceptible to crude Manichean manipulation. John Urry has recently made a radical call for complexity-guided future studies with the objective to both ‘mainstream’ and ‘democratize’ the future (Urry 2016, 192). Critical thinking needs to reclaim the future, he argues, debating and delivering on desirable social futures. While the future is murky we need to interrogate and hopefully reshape it. An ostrich-like approach would hardly be helpful, nor is blaming others for one’s own weaknesses a helpful way forward. While the future is complex it is not impossible to discern, at least in its broad parameters, using foresight and other critical techniques. We certainly cannot afford to cede this terrain to those rapidly colonizing the future in the interests of capital, the Googles and Apples of this world. We need to understand that the future is saturated with vested state and corporate interests but that it can also be contested. If the future is not going to simply be owned by the powerful, the subaltern need to reclaim the future, work through the social aspect always contesting the unregulated market and articulate viable but also visionary political alternatives.

Looking to the future of Latin America now we need to bear in mind some basic politico-methodological precepts. Taking Latin American futures as our object of research we need to start by recognising that social enquiry is not naïve or innocent and that social facts are not just a given but socially constructed. Rather social enquiry creates its own social reality and social facts are always constructed. Our research methods do not simply describe the social world but rather, they enact or perform it. What follows, as Law and Urry argue, is that ‘if social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think

about the worlds it wants to *help* to make' (Law and Urry 2004, 391). This opens up the radical potential of the foresight/futures research programme that goes beyond simple description of the world as it is. While social science most often works with power to enact the dominant social realities it can – and arguably should – work towards the posing and enactment of alternative social realities.

A basic methodological precept which needs to be followed in that task is to acknowledge the complexity of today's social world. Against reductionist linear thinking we need to be conscious of side-effects and externalities in all political strategies. Rather than seek instrumental interventions to shape reality according to rationalist readings of development we need to foreground open systems and social agency. It follows then that our political readings cannot be simplistic or Manichean. Rather, following the methodological advances of the intersectionality approach we need to focus on intersecting social identities and complex interlocking systems of domination and oppression. It then follows that resistance and the construction of political alternatives will not be based on singular experiences, identities or projects. Deploying Ernesto Laclau's notion of 'articulation' (Howard 2015), we need to explore the plurality of political demands and the way they constitute a broader social subjectivity through equivalential articulation. The development of an alternative politics cannot be a simplistic choice but, rather, involves a difficult (and never completed) construction of hegemonic articulations. This process inevitably involves antagonistic efforts to articulate non-class contradictions and the unification of demands through a process of equivalence leading to a stable system of signification.

The foresight approach to thinking alternative futures I am now proposing is often seen as a Northern tool, developed as part and parcel of the technological revolution of the 1960s and very much a child of positivism (prediction) but it has, more recently, come under the influence of post-structuralism (see Sardar 2010) which foregrounds complexity and problematizes the units of analysis we use. The postcolonial variant also looks very much for what is missing in current images of the future. The alternative futures approach has been developed successfully in a Southern context, most notably in the influential Mont Fleur scenarios which played an important role in South Africa's transition beyond apartheid in the early to mid-1990s (see Kahane 2000) in ensuring a democratic outcome. There are a number of tools which have been deployed in a foresight sense such as environmental or horizon scanning, scenario planning, road-mapping and the Delphi model. In a period of complexity and uncertainty such a scenario setting exercise can, at the very least help the participants – through honest and open political dialogue – to establish what the main parameters for the future of development and democracy are, even if we might disagree on the best path forward. Whether or not we agree with the particular scenarios we can think of whether the parameters are posed correctly. As is often the case agreeing what a problem is gets us half way to resolving it. Sometimes it seems some of the far-left discourses posit their own reality not even conscious how far it is from reality as seen by the rest of the world, for example, thinking economic growth is only a problem for the hegemonic classes.

Moving forward with my own foresight analysis I posit the following very provisional (that is to say, open to deconstruction and critique) matrix for exploring the alternative futures of Latin America (see Figure 1). We start by positing two main axes against which to 'place' alternative strategies: a horizontal one based on a greater or lesser degree of economic growth and a vertical one based on a greater or lesser degree of sustainability.

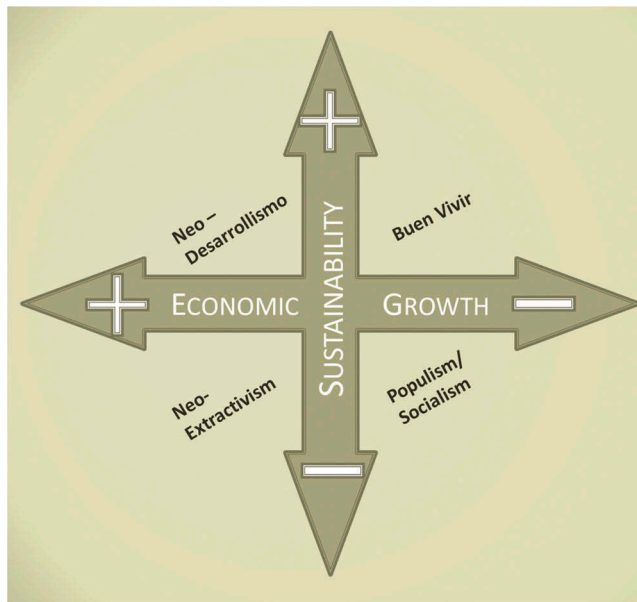


Figure 1. Alternative Futures.

There should be wide agreement that these are indeed key tensions and we can see this agreement across the political spectrum even if those of us on the left may draw different political conclusions. We should be able to agree that if sustainable economic growth is not achieved then there is no progressive future possible. Sustainability can also be read in terms of political sustainability and social sustainability for example in terms of citizen security. These two axes should be seen as force fields and are not meant to be seen as binary oppositions. They simply serve to create a mental map of how the various political-economic strategies might be seen to match up to one another in terms of the global challenges faced by Latin America. It is a matrix against which we can start to plot the relative strengths and weaknesses of the alternative scenarios outlined above. To be clear these scenarios are like ideal types and should not be associated directly with actual countries or governments. Nor does this placing imply judgement.

The *Neo-Desarrollismo* scenario in the top left quadrant which posits 'growth with equity', has made some concessions to the previous market-based model but has shown considerable degrees of sustainability, certainly in political terms and can create strong economic growth. One can think of Lula's Brazil and even Chile under the Socialists (albeit in very different ways) as aspiring to this model. It is the strategy most likely to recruit the support of local industrialists and can generate strong nationalist interpellations. It is worth noting that the analysis of Fernando Fajnzylber who presented a progressive reading of the ECLA approach in the 1990s is now making a comeback (see Fajnzylber 2006). To reject this seemingly positive placing of *neo-desarrollismo* in our exercise one would have to show that it does not in fact lead to economic growth and is not sustainable; it is not sufficient to deem it 'reformist' or not 'green' enough, even though both critiques might well be accurate.

Neo-extractivismo in the bottom left quadrant is not usually posed as a progressive strategy for social transformation but some progressive governments (e.g. Bolivia and Venezuela) have practised elements of this model and argued for its short-term benefits for progressive transformation. While it can certainly produce high rates of economic growth it is self-evidently not sustainable in environmental terms. There is a debate as to whether natural resource extraction and reliance on foreign investment can actually be used as part of a strategy of progressive social transformation. There is evidence that the commodities boom has resulted in some degree of social redistribution in some countries but, again, this is not really a sustainable strategy either in ecological terms or economic terms as commodity booms always collapse at some point as they did in Latin America around 2014. I would say, as was the case above, that it is not sufficient to simply denounce *neo extractivismo* (see Veltmeyer and Petras 2014) without showing why it has emerged, what are the path dependency issues involved and what concretely the alternatives are such as the various trade union 'green' strategies being articulated at an international level.

Populism/Socialism in the bottom right quadrant is an amalgam of two distinct though interrelated discourses and strategies. *Socialismo Siglo XXI* can best be exemplified as the model advocated in Venezuela under Chávez. There are of course many other socialisms in Latin America including an orthodox left still wedded to classical Marxist/Trotskyist tropes and a new autonomist left inspired by the Zapatistas. But in terms of government power and discursive impact the Venezuela case is a test case. Populism can perhaps be best exemplified by the de facto mode of governance in the Kirchner's Argentina, for example, following the classic Peronist model. Arguably we are being too negative in saying that economic growth will necessarily be low under this model but the overall trajectory of *Chavismo sin Chavez* in Venezuela has been, in practice, even more unable than that of *Peronismo sin Perón* in Argentina to deliver on its early promises. The recent history of both countries indicates that this model is not economically robust in terms of delivering what might be expected from a socialist-populist government over and above governmental social assistance measures that cannot really be called socialist. The fall of the Kirchner model in 2015 at the hands of an intelligent pro-market political campaign by all the opposition parties (including Kirchner defectors) showed most clearly the political instability of the populist model. This model is certainly not politically sustainable for the simple reason that it depends on *caudillos* or charismatic leaders. Furthermore, any government inevitably needs to be elected with support from the growing 'middle class' as 'Cristina', 'Dilma' and *Chavismo* learnt to their cost from 2015 onwards.

Buen Vivir in the top right quadrant is arguably a quite different type of scenario to all the others (except for socialism that it shares some features with) having a strong utopian streak to it. In terms of our grid or force fields it will, inevitably score high in terms of sustainability given that this element is at its very core. However, even in terms of its own discourse it will not score high in terms of economic growth given that it explicitly criticizes what it sees as the current obsession with growth and even advocates de-growth. As a political philosophy, it is extremely attractive for many as is the socialism model for that matter. But in terms of mobilizing popular support its denial of the need for economic growth as prerequisite for greater equality is quite disabling. As a discourse with deep roots in Amerindian identity it can achieve some purchase in

the Andean countries for example but there is little to indicate it would ‘take’ in the big urban industrial centres of the Southern Cone and Mexico. It is attractive to younger social layers and some of those alienated by the progressive governments that it can show have not been radical enough in its sense of the word.

The debate around progressive outcomes from this foresight exercise is set today in the context of the rise of the new right in Argentina since 2016 with Macri and his CEOcracy (which can be seen as a pivotal point regionally) shows what is coming next maybe, as we see in Colombia, Brazil, for a time in Chile, and what the right hopes will happen in Venezuela. This new ‘post political’ right has not, however, recomposed bourgeois hegemony even though a Gramscian *transformismo* operation has, to some extent, stolen many of the clothes of the left. It does not openly challenge ‘growth with equity’ or the reformist social measures of the last decade. The mainstream left and anything smacking of populism, however, finds itself with little appeal amongst the young or the new social layers created during the boom years. The forces of left and right are more or less evenly balanced and we only see the left remaining hegemonic when, as in Chile and Uruguay, it adopts a firmly constitutionalist and reformist path with ‘growth and equity’ at its core and an openly liberal social voice. Venezuela at the other extreme, with Bolivia also possibly in that camp, shows the polarizing effects of more radical discourses. The question is whether these discourses are matched by a real accumulation of social forces. I cannot help being reminded of Chile in 1972–73 when the extra-parliamentary left responded to a rapidly deteriorating economic situation, social polarization and political crisis by calling for the government to ‘arm the workers’ without a clear perspective of what that might mean in practice.

Final reflections

Latin America is now at a cross-roads as it has been often in the past. The question, for Escobar is whether ‘the emergent cultural-political subjects in Latin America [can] reach an activated and stable condition of alterity capable of re-constituting socio-natural structures from within, along the lines of decoloniality, relationality and pluriversity?’ (Escobar 2010, 47–48). We are at the end of a period of left upsurge but what comes next is not clear. For now there seems to be a fine balance between the right and the left and whichever can best construct a new hegemony answering all the challenges outlined above will succeed (Sader 2016). We are now in a period akin to that of the 1980s when the left in Latin America began a systematic, if painful, reappraisal of its previous strategies with the *renovador* (renewal) tendencies operating a successful turn that led eventually to the progressive decade. It is important that we end on a reflexive and not a proclamatory note given that already in 2015 we could discern a clear high mark for the progressive wave as Kirchnerism lost presidential elections in Argentina, the opponents of Chavismo gained a ‘super majority’ in parliamentary elections in Venezuela, and Lula’s chosen successor in Brazil ‘Dilma’ was impeached by parliament. This set of events reflected a growing sense of disenchantment (*desencanto*), demobilization and even depoliticisation in regard to the progressive governments not unlike that suffered by the first wave of post-dictatorship governments in the 1980s. Clearly there was a widely perceived sense that corruption was back, there was little faith in the economic management skills of the governments and their personalist style alienated as

many as it gathered support from (one only needs to think of Chávez). It is time to engage in a sober balance sheet of what has been gained – such as a widespread acceptance of social reforms and a basic anti-imperialism – and what has been lost, such as a massive ‘depoliticisation’ of politics and the reduction of socialism to empty rhetoric (see Gudynas 2015) to then, maybe, start back on ‘what is to be done’ which some less reflexive analysts tend to start with as though the masses are just waiting to be mobilized by new, more progressive leaders. In reality, as we have seen above and as ex-President of Uruguay Pepe Mujica puts it: *‘Tenemos mucho que hacer antes del socialismo’* (‘We have plenty to be doing before socialism’).

The context of these scenarios is the post-neoliberal era we are now in, even if certain neo-liberal tenets – such as the opening up of trade and investment to the world market – continue in force. The post-neoliberal (yet still neoliberal?) economic policies are now seeking to reconnect or re-embed the market with/within the social domain. The overarching influence of the 2008–2009 global capitalist crisis and the subsequent crisis of Euroland from 2011 onward, form the backdrop to this rethinking of political options in Latin America. In Latin America, it was the combined impact of about 13 left-of-centre governments and a vibrant – sometimes rebellious – civil society that encouraged new ways of thinking about development and democracy. The movement towards an alternative to neoliberalism has been most advanced in Latin America, according to Perry Anderson, because ‘here, and only here, the resistance to neo-liberalism and to neo-imperialism melds the cultural with the social and national. That is to say, it implies the emerging vision of another type of organization of society and another model of relations among states’ (Anderson 2004, 42).

What our foresight exercise points to is the need for the socialist alternative to address the issues of economic growth and governance in a more proactive way if it is to regain purchase on a future aimed at social transformation. Where the left or progressive forces have lost ground (e.g. Argentina, Brazil and Colombia) it has been largely due to economic failures and the sense that good governance (and democracy at the end of the day) was not high on their agendas. Socialism cannot be the end station of an authoritarian project that, for example, seeks to change the law to allow for continual re-election of a charismatic president. The left has made progress and achieved some degree of sustainability precisely where it has been able to ensure sustained economic growth and striven towards democratic governance (e.g. Chile, Uruguay and Ecuador). But these are precisely the experiences criticized by the international left for not being socialist enough or for not moving directly from anti-neoliberalism to anti-capitalism. These criticisms are seen in Latin America as somewhat abstract and not grounded in concrete realities or the balance of forces for that matter. While Latin America has an important role to play in the global debate on the future of the left it cannot be on the basis of a morality tale of good and bad lefts which has tended to simplify a complex story and prevent more nuanced, and ultimately more useful, analysis and lessons learned.

The impact of the Trump regime in the United States since 2017 may yet create the conditions for a re-emergence of national/popular/regionalist governments in Latin America. The new right regimes in Latin America were confident of a Clinton victory and the consolidation of a free trade block in the Americas. That will not now happen. Mexico is being forced to look South once again as the NAFTA deal crumbles. The conservative coup

in Brazil has not served to regenerate growth and a Lula comeback in the 2018 elections looms large. Legislative elections in Argentina in 2018 have seen a marked disillusionment with Macri who has not delivered on his promises of prosperity and greater democracy. There is a very real prospect of the three dominant economies – Brazil, Mexico and Argentina – returning to the *desarrollista* model and thus providing openings once again to an imaginative left based on the social movements.

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