

SYSTEMIC ALTERNATIVES AND THE BUEN VIVIR: Recognizing Confluences

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to contextualize the *buen vivir* in the universe of systemic alternatives under debate in the world and to point out confluences and complementarities between them, through a narrative literature review. To do so, initially, it presents the elements and foundations of the *buen vivir*, built from epistemology and ontology anchored in the “anti-imperial South” and based on the axes of coloniality – which is opposed to eurocentrism and racism – of the rights of nature – raised to the level of human rights – and State Reform – conducted from the emancipatory perspective of social movements and traditional peoples – and indicates the incidence of these axes in the debate on development. It then demonstrates how the practices instituted by coloniality organized the planet, structured global power, and constituted the crises we are experiencing – environmental, economic, social, geopolitical, institutional, and civilizational. Finally, it lists and characterizes political and economic movements – degrowth, ecofeminism, Mother Earth’s rights, commons, deglobalization, ecosocialism, food sovereignty, solidarity economy, and ubuntu – alternatives to the hegemonic development model, to sensitize those interested in a new world order, inclusive, egalitarian and respectful of human rights and nature, for the necessary articulation and integration of theories and practices contrary to the methods and objectives of extractivism, financism, patriarchy, racism, consumerism, and warmongering.

Keywords: coloniality; racism; patriarchy; buen vivir; systemic alternatives.

ALTERNATIVAS SISTÊMICAS E BEM VIVER: RECONHECENDO CONFLUÊNCIAS

RESUMO

Este artigo pretende contextualizar o *bem viver* no universo das alternativas sistêmicas em debate no mundo e apontar confluências e complementaridades entre elas, por via de revisão de literatura do tipo narrativa. Para tanto, inicialmente, apresenta os elementos e fundamentos do *bem viver*, construídos a partir de epistemologia e ontologia ancoradas no “sul anti-imperial” e assentados nos eixos da colonialidade – que se contrapõe ao eurocentrismo e ao racismo – dos direitos da natureza – elevados ao patamar dos direitos humanos – e da Reforma do Estado – conduzida a partir da ótica emancipatória dos movimentos sociais e dos povos tradicionais – e indica a incidência desses eixos no debate sobre desenvolvimento. Em seguida demonstra de que maneira as práticas instituídas pela colonialidade organizaram o planeta, estruturaram o poder global e constituíram as crises que vivemos – ambiental, econômica, social, geopolítica, institucional e civilizatória. Por fim, elenca e caracteriza movimentos políticos e econômicos – decrescimento, ecofeminismo, direitos da Mãe Terra, comuns, desglobalização, ecosocialismo, soberania alimentar, economia solidária e ubuntu – alternativos ao modelo de desenvolvimento hegemônico, com a intenção de sensibilizar os que se interessam por uma nova ordem mundial, inclusiva, igualitária e respeitosa dos direitos humanos e da natureza, para a necessária articulação e integração de teorias e práticas contrárias aos métodos e objetivos do extrativismo, financismo, patriarcado, racismo, consumismo e belicismo.

Palavras-chave: colonialidade; racismo; patriarcalismo; bem viver; alternativas sistêmicas.

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BUEN VIVIR

In the book ‘Systemic Alternatives’, the Bolivian environmental activist Pablo Solón proposes *Buen Vivir* as “a concept under construction that has gone through different moments throughout history” (Solón, 2019, p. 19). For him, the strength of this concept, “in comparison with other alternatives, lies in the following elements: its vision of the whole, or *Pacha*; coexistence in multipolarity; the search for balance; the complementarity of diversity; (and) decolonization” (Solón, 2019, p. 23). Intending to make these elements understandable, he initially states that in the notion of *Buen Vivir* “the ‘whole’ is *Pacha*, an Andean concept that is often translated simply as Earth – hence the reference to *Pacha Mama* as Mother Earth. However, *Pacha* has a much broader sense, with an indissoluble comprehension of space and time”, where the cyclical contests the linear; the immaterial and the material are interconnected; the cosmos remains in an infinite mutating and evolutionary process (Solón, 2019, p. 24). In this way, there is no separation between humanity and nature, just as it should not exist between the North and the South of the planet, nor between the elite and its subordinates.

Continuing with the definition of the elements of *Buen Vivir*, Solón (2019, p. 26) presents the coexistence in multipolarity as a consequence of the dual understanding of life: “Everything is and is not. The individual and the community are poles of the same unit, and a person only exists while acting for the common good of the community to which he/she belongs. Without community, there is no individual, and without singular beings, there is no community.”

Moreover, it demonstrates how the permanent search for harmony takes place in the environments of those who are guided by this paradigm: “The objective of *Buen Vivir* is the search for balance between the different elements that make up the whole” (Solón, 2019, p. 28). This is how relationships are perceived between human beings and nature; the material and the spiritual; knowledge and wisdom; the different cultures, and the different identities and realities. Once the importance of balance is defined, the need for relationships within the diversity naturally arises. “The balance between opposites [...] is only possible through complementarity, without canceling out the other. To complement means seeing the difference as part of the whole, because alterity and particularity are intrinsic to nature and life” (Solón, 2019, p. 30).

As the issues of colonialism/coloniality will be addressed later, we present here the importance the Bolivian author gives to decolonization – of territory and of being – in the construction process of *Buen Vivir*: “The decolonization of the territory implies self-management and self-determination at all levels. And it must go further in complexity, overcoming many beliefs and values that prevent our reunification with *Pacha*” (Solón, 2019, p. 32).

The Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta (2016, p. 40) defines the paradigm referred to in the book ‘*Buen Vivir: an opportunity to imagine other worlds*’, as “[...] a philosophy of life that opens the doors for the construction of an emancipatory project”. In this work, Celio Turino manages, in the very brief ‘Preface to the Brazilian edition’, to present, in two moments, clarifying questions for the understanding of this ‘philosophy’.

Initially, Turino sounds the alert:

Some hasty readers might think that this is a principle restricted to the Andean or Amazonian environment, but not: *Buen Vivir* is a philosophy under construction, and universal, which starts from the Amerindian cosmology and way of life, but which is present in most diverse

cultures. It is among us, in Brazil, with the *tekoporã* of the Guarani. It is also present in the African ethics and philosophy of *ubuntu* – “I am because we are”. It is in ecosocialism, in its quest to reframe the centralist and productivist socialism of the 20th century. It is in the solidarity of the people, in collective efforts in villages, slums, or rural communities, and in the Andean *Minga* or *Mika*. It is present in the *roda de samba*, the *roda de capoeira*, *jongo*, *cirandas* and *candomblé*. It is in the *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis on the Care of the Common Home* (Acosta, 2016, p. 14).

Soon after it, Turino states that *Buen Vivir* “has a strong significance in the present moment, in opposition to the inequity of capitalism, in which few live well at the expense of the vast majority” and, in this way, he qualifies the elements and concepts present in the works of Solón and Acosta.

As Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves analyzes, on the back cover of the book *Descolonizar o imaginário* (2016), the debate proposed by Solón, Acosta, Turino, and Quijano:

[...] is part of the theoretical-practical density of this continent that has already given us so many cutting-edge theoretical contributions – such as dependency theory, the pedagogy of the oppressed, the philosophy of liberation, political ecology *from the territories (from below)*, internal colonialism theory, autopoiesis theory, the theory of participatory action-research – and, today, it offers us the “struggle for life, dignity, and territory”, which points us to the Plurinational State, to *Buen Vivir*, to interculturality, to nature as a common good (Porto-Gonçalves, 2016, back cover).

From the understanding of the foundations of *Buen Vivir* – which has political, economic, and cultural components – and the interrelation among them, we can briefly describe their antagonisms as follows: axis (1) deals with Coloniality, opposes the Eurocentric epistemology and puts on the agenda the racial issue in an innovative manner; axis (2) deals with the Rights of Nature,³ describing environmental exploitation – observed from the process of the industrial revolution – as a conductor of humanity towards a situation that points not only to the extinction of some species but, ultimately, to the extinction of humanity itself.

A third foundation is State Reform (axis 3).⁴ For the followers of *Buen Vivir*, this is about thinking of public administration as beyond authoritarianism, patriarchalism, and racism, from the perspective of emancipatory social movements. As Lang states, “The challenge is not only to use but also to profoundly transform the state apparatuses themselves and the relations between State and society [...]” (Lang, 2016, p. 41).

In this sense, after decharacterizing the State as the only field of political action capable of promoting structural changes, Acosta proposes the need to rethink it in “plurinational and intercultural terms”. According to him, in this process driven by new utopias, another world will only “[...] be possible if it is thought of and organized by the community based on Human Rights

³ Debates about the Rights of Nature are guided by the cosmovision of the original peoples of America. Thus, *Buen Vivir* is an attempt to translate, initially, into Spanish, the traditional practices denominated as *KimeMogen*, by the Mapuche, as *Suma Qamaña*, by the Aymara, as *Sumak Kawsay*, by the Quechua, as *Teko Porã*, by the Guarani, and also found in the Kolla and Maya cultures, among others.

⁴ The authors of the article indicate, as a paradigm to be associated to the debate of systemic alternatives, in the field of public administration, the concept of Social Management, as developed by Fernando Guilherme Tenório, Aírton Cardoso Cançado and José Roberto Pereira, among others.

– political, economic, social, cultural and environmental; of individuals, families, and peoples – and the Rights of Nature” (Acosta, 2016, p. 26).

As can be deduced, the axes of Coloniality, the Rights of Nature, and State Reform converge to reorganize the economy and, at the same pace procedurally and cyclically, reorganize society on a non-capitalist basis – as they fight the theses and productivist (‘developmentalism’ and ‘progress’), extractivist and excluding behaviors, enate to neoliberalism.⁵

For this article, issues relating to the Rights of Nature will not be discussed in depth. Hereafter, Coloniality will be debated – its construction in America and the world, as contextualized by Quijano:

“Bien Vivir” or *“Buen Vivir”* is the most widespread term in the debate of this new social movement, especially that of the native population in Latin America, in the sense of offering a different social existence from the one imposed on us by the Coloniality of Power. *“Buen Vivir”* is probably the oldest formulation of “indigenous” resistance against the Coloniality of Power. It was notably created in the viceroyalty of Peru, by none other than Guamán Poma de Ayala, circa 1615, in his ‘New chronicle and good government’ (Quijano, 2014a, p. 847; free trans.).

THE CONCEPT OF COLONIALITY

The concept of Coloniality, from the perspective of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano Obregón, defines, from the ontology and epistemology of the South,⁶ the maintenance of political, economic, and cultural relations of the colonial period, even after the extinction of the colonies.

Coloniality is a different concept, although linked to the concept of colonialism. The latter refers strictly to a structure of domination and exploitation, where the control of political authority, production resources, and the labor of a given population was taken over by another with a different identity, and whose headquarters are in another territorial jurisdiction. But it does not always, nor necessarily, imply racist power relations. Colonialism is obviously older than coloniality which is deeper and more enduring than colonialism. However, without a doubt, it was engendered within it, and without it, it could not be imposed on the intersubjectivity of the world in such a rooted and prolonged manner (Quijano, 2014a, p. 285; free trans.).

A fundamental point for understanding the concept of Coloniality is the racial issue, which does not start on our continent, but acquires from this point onwards a differentiated formulation that is later adopted on a planetary scale.

⁵ “[...] extractivism is synonymous with the unrestrained extraction of natural resources, [...] removal of large volumes of natural resources destined for export, not limited to mineral products or petroleum. It is an emphasis on the reprimarization of the economy, which, to be effective, almost always requires an undemocratic political system” (Lang, 2016, p. 20). Also according to Lang, the criticism of extractivism is also found in other authors, who problematize, “[...] in different approaches, the negative impacts of a predatory relationship with the environment, the subordination to the international market, the financialization of environmental issues, and violations resulting from mega-enterprises” (Lang, 2016, p. 20).

⁶ Also for Santos and Mendes (2018), the “Southern Epistemologies constitute a demand for new production processes, for valuing valid scientific and non-scientific knowledge, and for new relationships between different types of knowledge, based on class practices and social groups that have systematically suffered destruction, oppression, and discrimination caused by capitalism, colonialism, and the patriarchy. [...] In this sense, the South of the Southern Epistemologies is not geographic, it is epistemic and political: the anti-imperial South. It is a South that also exists in the geographic North, what we previously called the inner third world or fourth world: the oppressed, marginalized groups of Europe and North America” (Santos; Mendes, 2018, p. 10).

[...] the colonial power structure produced social discriminations that were later coded as “racial”, ethnic, “anthropological” or “national”, according to the moments, agents, and populations involved. These intersubjective constructions, a product of colonial domination by the Europeans, were even assumed as categories (of “scientific” and “objective” pretensions) of ahistorical meaning, that is, as natural phenomena and not just from a certain perceived history of power. This power structure was and still is the framework within which other social relations, of the classist or state type, operate. In this sense, if we observe the main lines of exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the matrix lines of current world power, and the distribution of resources and labor amongst the world population, it is impossible not to observe that the majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated, are exactly the members of “races”, “ethnicities”, or “nations” that were categorized as colonized populations, in the process of formation of this world power, since the conquest of America and onwards (Quijano, 1991, p. 12; free trans.).

The result of this expropriating and violent process includes complementary aspects in the cultural realm. The ‘colonization of the imaginary’ has consequences both in the hearts of those who subordinate themselves to this condition and in the minds of those who try to break away from this condition of being dominated. It is a fact that

Repression fell firstly on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and image systems, symbols, and modes of meaning; on the resources, standards, and instruments of formalized and objectified expression, intellectual or visual. This was followed by the imposition of the use of the expression patterns of the dominant, as well as their beliefs and images related to the supernatural, which served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated but also as a very effective means of social and cultural control when the more immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic (Quijano, 1991, p. 12; free trans.).

To close this cycle – repression, and acculturation – the colonizers promoted a massacre of the original peoples. Approximately 35 million natives were killed, an amount about six times greater than the estimated number of Jews killed by the Nazis, which implied “not only a major demographic catastrophe but also the destruction of society and culture” (Quijano, 1991, p. 13; free trans.).

The Peruvian sociologist also highlights that parallel with the consolidation movement of the Conquest, European rationality/modernity is structured as a universal paradigm, adding that to better analyze and criticize modern rationality, it is necessary to recognize that in all known cultures, with their respective cosmology and knowledge production, there is the perspective of totality. However,

[...] in these cultures, the perspective of totality in the knowledge system includes the recognition of the heterogeneity of all reality; of its irreducible contradictory character; of legitimacy, that is, of desirability, of the diverse character of the components of all reality, and society as a result. Therefore, the idea of social totality in particular, not only does not deny but is based on the historical diversity and heterogeneity of society, of every society (Quijano, 1991, p. 19; free trans.).

Therefore, what characterizes the cultural construction that started in 1492, is the fact that, unlike the experiences where the existence of the other and the acceptance of the diverse were admitted, the opposite occurred. Previous to the European influence, the differences did not make the other, hierarchically, neither unequal or inferior. The differences did not necessarily substantiate domination. And, “at the same time, the historical-structural heterogeneity implies

the simultaneous presence and articulation of various historical “logics” around one of them, hegemonic, but in no way singular” (Quijano, 1991, p. 19; free trans.).

To facilitate the understanding of the historical behaviors of colonizers and colonized, mentioned above, Quijano (1997) points out the procedures that formatted and regulated Coloniality in our continent. For him, 1) it is the idea of inferior and superior ‘races’ that organizes modern human, social, political, and economic relations and the conflicts in labor relations; 2) from this definition, the term “Indians” enters the historical scene, and the terms Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, Aymaras, etc., leave – physically and/or culturally. The ‘Indians’ are the bad, savage and backward, and the ‘white’ the good, civilized and modern; 3) over this social identity – white and non-white – the various forms of labor and gender exploitation were organized since then, and until today; 4) this new pattern of power is based on: a) the reproduction of these new identities; b) the hierarchical relationship between “races” in all instances of power – economic, social, cultural, intersubjective and political; c) the reproduction of this hierarchical relationship model for the world, underpinning the expansion of eurocentric colonial capitalism; 5) the submission of original societies to the condition of ‘peasant subcultures’ (versus urban) and ‘illiterate’ (versus literate); 6) the impossibility of these ‘subcultures’ to manifest their visual and plastic expression patterns; 7) the esthetic standards of the colonizers are imposed; 8) the manifestation of the native sacredness is repressed; 9) the imaginary and the universe of subjectivities of non-whites are humiliated; 10) the traditional values are preserved, with adaptation to the standards of Coloniality; 11) Coloniality, based on the characteristics defined in the above points, and on historical circumstances, finds resistance in the ‘indigenous’ rebellions and, later, of blacks and mestizos, in the emancipatory struggles; 12) Coloniality implied, and implies, a historical-structural dependence, where the local dominant groups associate their interests to the dominant colonizing groups; 13) Coloniality and historical-structural dependence imply the hegemony of Eurocentrism as a perspective of knowledge; and 14) last but not least, Coloniality makes dominated populations adopt the epistemological patterns of the dominators.

To conclude this point, it could be said, agreeing with Quijano, that

Coloniality is one of the constitutive and specific elements of the world structure of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition and racial/ethnic classification of the world’s population as the cornerstone of this pattern of power and operates in each of the planes, scopes, and dimensions, material and subjective, of everyday life and the social scale. It originates and globalizes from America. With the constitution of America [...], in the same period and the same historical movement, the emerging capitalist power becomes global, its hegemonic centers are located in areas beyond the Atlantic – which will later be identified as Europe –, and as central axes of this new pattern of domination, they also establish coloniality and modernity. In other words: with America [...] capitalism becoming global, Euro-centered, and coloniality and modernity are installed, until today, as the constitutive axes of this specific structure of power (Quijano, 2014a, p. 285; free trans.).

FROM AMERICA TO THE WORLD

Having so far defined the political/economic/social relationships that Coloniality has produced in the American continent, we now present the effects of these relationships throughout the world, that is, how Coloniality has marked the planet, as a fundamental axis of hegemonic global power.

America was constituted as the first space/time of a new structure of power with a worldwide vocation and, in this way and for that reason, as the first identity of modernity. Two historical processes converged and were associated with the production of such space/time, and established themselves as the two fundamental axes of this new structure of power. On the one hand, the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of race, that is, a supposed biological structural difference that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority concerning others. This idea was taken on by the conquerors as the main constitutive founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed. On this basis, the population of America and then the world was consequently ranked in a new structure of power. On the other hand, there is the articulation of all historical forms of labor control, of resources and products, within the realm of capital and the world market (Quijano, 2014b, p. 778; free trans.).

Other consequences of the entry of the Americas on the map of the world economy were the reconfiguration of trade routes and their commands, the construction of new urban spaces, and the incorporation of new foods such as corn and potatoes, without which there would be no industrial revolution, the concentration of commercial capital and the constitution of a new geocultural identity – Europe – that controls the world market, and that adopts salaried work relationships from there. It is in this way that Europe is constituted at the center of Capitalism, placing other countries at the periphery, articulated within this new world system and based on the construction of new continental identities, defined by Coloniality.

Consequently, the colonizers were asked to produce an intersubjectivity that would explain, justify and maintain the new order. As this process was described above, the conclusion presented by Quijano is presented here:

This binary, dualistic knowledge perspective, peculiar to Eurocentrism, imposed itself as globally hegemonic in the same course as the expansion of European colonial rule over the world. It is not possible to explain otherwise, satisfactorily in any case, the elaboration of Eurocentrism as a hegemonic perspective of knowledge, of the Eurocentric version of modernity and its two main founding myths: one, the idea of the image of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that starts from a state of nature and culminates in Europe. And two, to make sense of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as differences of (racial) nature and not of the history of power. Both myths can be recognized unequivocally at the foundation of evolutionism and dualism, two of the core elements of Eurocentrism⁷ (Quijano, 2014b, p. 789; free trans.).

It is no coincidence that the economic center of the world coincides with the intellectual center that will elaborate the systemic vision – political, economic, and social – that will hegemonize it, based on a concept that is ambiguous and contradictory (Quijano, 2014b, p.

⁷ “Here, Eurocentrism is the name of a perspective of knowledge whose systematic elaboration began in Western Europe in the first half of the 17th century, although some of its roots are undoubtedly older, and which in the following centuries became globally hegemonic, traversing the same course as the rule of bourgeois Europe. Its constitution was associated with the specific bourgeois secularization of European thought and with the experience and needs of the world pattern of capitalist, colonial/modern, Eurocentered power established from America. It is not, therefore, a category that involves the entire cognitive history of Europe, nor of Western Europe in particular. In other words, it does not refer to all the ways of knowing of all Europeans and at all times, but to a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that becomes globally hegemonic colonizing and overlapping all others, previous or different, and their respective concrete knowledge, both in Europe and in the rest of the world. In the framework of this study what I propose is to discuss some of its questions more directly linked to the historical experience of Latin America, but which, obviously, do not refer only to it” (Quijano, 2014b, p. 798; free trans.).

798). The Eurocentric logic imposed on the world, sometimes subtly, sometimes aggressively, is based on the ‘founding myths’, as stated in the above quote, which establish the belief in the evolution of man, from his uncivilized state – homo-sapiens, a condition in which non-European peoples would be found until today – up to the state of those who have already reached the condition of civilized people. These, of course, are represented by the ‘Homo Europaeus’.

This result of the history of colonial power had two decisive implications. The first is obvious: all those peoples were stripped of their own unique historical identities. The second is perhaps less obvious, but it is no less decisive: their new racial identity, colonial and negative, implied the dispossession of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity. From then on they were nothing but inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures (Quijano, 2014b, p. 801; free trans.).

The aforementioned author considers that “[...] the first modern and global geocultural identity was America. Europe was the second and was constituted as a consequence of America, not the other way around.” (Quijano, 2014b, p. 801). Thus, it was a new European identity formed from the historical conditions already described, from the labor appropriation of the Indians, blacks, and mestizos, of their mining and agricultural technologies, and their mineral and vegetable products. By opposing the ‘official version’, the author claims that the European elite persuaded the world, including the rest of Europeans, “[...] that somehow they had self-produced themselves as a civilization, on the margin of history initiated with America, culminating an independent line that began with Greece as the only original source” (Quijano, 2014b, p. 802; free trans.).

To exemplify the problems this Eurocentric rationality brings us, the Peruvian sociologist presents the following metaphor:

Hence, when we look into our Eurocentric mirror, the image we see is necessarily partial and distorted. [...] Here the tragedy is that we are all led, knowingly or not, willingly or not, to see and accept that image as ours and as belonging to us. In this way, we continue to be what we are not. And as a result, we can never identify our real problems, much less solve them, except in a partial and distorted manner (Quijano, 2014b, p. 807; free trans.).

In this sense, he postulates that “it is time to learn to free ourselves from the Eurocentric mirror where our image is always, necessarily, distorted. It is time, finally, to stop being what we are not” (Quijano, 2014b, p. 828; free trans.) and consider that

(...) in the historical “indigeneity” of the populations, victims of the Global Coloniality of Power, not only does the legacy of the past encourage us, but also all the learning from such long-term historical resistance. We are, therefore, moving towards the emergence of a new historical identity, historically/structurally heterogeneous, whose development can produce a new social existence freed from domination/exploitation/violence, which is the very heart of the World Social Forum’s demand: *Another World is Possible* (Quijano, 2014b, p. 859; free trans.).

Before starting the debate on systemic alternatives to the hegemonic political, social and economic assumptions, a guiding quote is in order:

Getting rooted in the present requires an image of the future. It is not possible to act here and now, in the present, without having an image of the next instance, a later moment in the timeline. This image of the future offers guidance, encouragement, orientation, and hope. In exchange for culturally established images, constructed by concrete men and

women in their local spaces, and in the place of concrete truly real myths, the modern man received an illusory expectation, implicit in the connotation of development and the semantics in use: growth, evolution, maturation, modernization. He was also given an image of the future as a mere continuation of the past: that is, development, a conservative, if not reactionary myth (Esteve, 1996, p. 74; free trans.).

SYSTEMIC ALTERNATIVES

In the context described above, which alternatives present themselves? According to Lang,

first, it is worth mentioning the numerous processes of resistance to extractivist projects, or to megaprojects that are functional to them. In many cases, defending a relatively self-sufficient way of life and resisting being deprived of the material conditions that make it possible is in itself an *alternative to development*.

In these more popular strategies, production, control, and defense of territory became central. Instead of obediently participating in the institutional elaboration of “development plans”, many Colombian territories, for example, decided to elaborate *life plans* from below, that is, to think of different ways of producing, distributing, and establishing social, organizational, and commercial relations (Lang, 2016, p. 42).

While sharing Lang’s understanding, Acosta argues that *Buen Vivir* is the opposite, the antagonist of traditional and more recent developmental conceptions – sustainable, local, for example – and that it stands as an alternative to development.

It is an option that is radically different from all ideas of development – which even dissolves the concept of progress in its productivist version. Therefore, *Buen Vivir* synthesizes an opportunity to build another society, supported by the coexistence of human beings, living with diversity and in harmony with nature, based on the recognition of the different cultural values existing in each country and the world. The intrinsic part of this proposal, which even has a global projection, is taking this great revolutionary step that inspires us to move from an anthropocentric to a socio-biocentric vision, with its resulting political, economic, and social consequences (Acosta, 2016, p. 84).

For reasons that become evident throughout the text, the concept concentrates on a critique of Capitalism, a system with a great capacity to resignify itself, as can be seen in the debate on Developmentalism, its adjectives, and anchors – productivism and progress;⁸ also mentioning the legacy from the times of formal Colonialism – extractivism, patriarchy, and racism. Even today Capitalism imposes on countries a modality of accumulation that has been metamorphosing for 500 years, always based on a primary-export bias or what is temporarily denominated as *commodities*, which may include some industrial segments that are intensive in energy and/or cheap labor.

In a text from 2019, Pablo Solón characterizes the moment he writes about with the perception that

⁸ “Productivism makes the work of reproduction and care invisible. Home and family, food, cleaning, effective support, maintenance of community aspects are reproductive jobs, fundamentally carried out by women and ignored by productivism, interested only in goods or services that can be marketed (Solón, 2019, p. 211).

[...] we are experiencing a systemic crisis that can only be resolved with systemic alternatives. What humanity is facing is not just an environmental, economic, social, geopolitical, institutional, and civilizing crisis. These crises are part of a whole. It is impossible to resolve any one of them without addressing all the others together. They feed back on each other. One-dimensional strategies will not resolve this systemic crisis. On the contrary, they can aggravate it (Solón, 2019, p. 13).

Contemporaneously to this analysis, there is a new and promising fact about the reality of the world, which must be pointed out: the emergence and propagation of new theories that seek to rethink the world and identify the reasons for the indicated above crises, from the point of view of the public interest. In this universe, we can find the concept of *Buen Vivir*. But, also, other theories add visions and amplify the possibility of structuring new paradigms capable of supporting emancipating political and social interventions. According to Solon,

alternatives do not arise from anything. They emerge from struggles, experiences, initiatives, victories, defeats, and the resurgence of social movements, and appear in an often contradictory process of analyses, practices, and proposals that are validated in reality.

There is not just one alternative. There are many. Some come from native peoples, such as *Buen Vivir*. Others, like degrowth, surface in industrialized societies that have already surpassed the limits of the planet. Ecofeminism provides an essential dimension to overcome patriarchy and anthropocentrism. The rights of Mother Earth seek to build new ways of relating to nature. The “commons” emphasize self-management of human capabilities. Deglobalization focuses on the analysis of the globalizing process and on the development of new ways of global integration that guarantee the centrality of peoples and nature.

Ecosocialism, food sovereignty, solidarity economy, *ubuntu*, and many other visions contribute from different perspectives. All have strengths, limitations, contradictions, and similarities. All are proposals under construction, pieces of a puzzle with multiple answers, and that change as the systemic crisis worsens (Solón, 2019, p. 15).

And he points out the diversity of realities, contexts, and world situations, in systemic interaction, as the source of the indicated alternatives. But warns that

None of these proposals is capable of facing this crisis alone. All of them – and many others may still emerge – need to complement each other to forge alternatives.

Complementing each other means completing oneself: articulating to create a whole that offers answers to the complexity of the problem. It is learning with the other, seeing yourself through the other, discovering the strength of others, and exploring common weaknesses and faults. And, above all, thinking about how to link forces to result in something greater (Solón, 2019, p. 16).

Thus, it is opportune here to bring up the question that names the last chapter of the book ‘Post-extraction and degrowth’ (Acosta; Brand, 2018): ‘How to get out of the labyrinth? For the authors,

In a time of crisis of utopias, in which, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, according to Fredric Jameson, “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”, the objective of rethinking an emancipatory horizon – without giving in to blind repetitions of the past or new dogmatisms, nor fall into the trap of disenchantment and the paralyzing melancholy of certain lefts, or into a dialogue between North and South – is not a minor challenge (Acosta; Brand, 2018, p. 12).

These authors also express their concern about seeking concepts that have symbolic value and thus “dialogue with broad segments of the world population, to garner their support”. By presenting the first questions, posed with the postulated intention of updating concepts and practices that are easy to discuss with the different social groups, Acosta and Brand state that not having a pre-determined path frees individuals from dogmatic views, requires clarity of where one wants to go and values the trajectory as much as the goals. For the case in question, for these objectives to be achieved it is important to underscore the importance of the international dimension – market and geopolitics – and its consequences in the daily lives of communities, individuals, and nature. The regional alternatives observed, they say, still disregard “the diverse experiences and discussions about imperialism – so dear to the critical tradition of Latin America – as the true backdrop for the globalization of capitalism.” (Acosta; Brand, 2018, p. 178).

Finally, a fundamental issue to establish dialogues: the other. Knowing whom you are talking to. To recognize, on the other, the subject of the intended action, based on the assumptions outlined here, but which also have contradictions with the oppression and exclusion that define the primary-export accumulation model and its recent rentier facet. To realize the complexity of this model – “which structures various social relations of production and reproduction, work and division of labor, forms of political organization and state realms, subjectivities and social imaginaries” (Acosta; Brand, 2018, p. 178) – built along many centuries, established direct and indirect relationships with large segments of the population, who believe in its promises (incorporating its norms, values and social conduct) or who indulge in its fallacies. Also according to Acosta and Brand (2018), this generates a situation that needs to be faced – the cultural dimension – to be successful in the initial questioning: how to get out of the labyrinth? For them, it is also indispensable

[...] to review the essence of economic growth, questioning whether there are forms of development of the productive forces that can move in the other direction. It is clear that the destruction produced by economic growth, in its form of capitalist accumulation, is effectively what leads to a dead end. An alternative evolution should undoubtedly involve other economic rationales. This new economy will have to be rethought based on the search and construction of options designed and applied by a holistic and systemic view, shaped by Human Rights and the Rights of Nature, which must be considered simultaneously, as starting and ending points in any alternative pathway (Acosta; Brand, 2018, p. 183).

Pablo Solón contributes to this debate by presenting an analysis of power and its transformation, based on the various systemic alternatives listed above. For him, the followers of *Buen Vivir*, approach “[...] the issue from a colonization and decolonization perspective”. As for the Commons, “the real choice is not between State and Market”, but “in potentializing self-management”. Next, he mentions that for Ecofeminism the question in debate is between the “state and patriarchal power structures”, while in the scope of the debate on Degrowth the emphasis is “that everything has limits and that the logic of power does not escape this principle”. Finally, those guided by Deglobalization emphasize “the capture of the power structures, national and supranational, by big business”. To Solón (2019), “all views shed light on the transformation of the state power structures, but they do not exhaust the discussion on the subject”.

The relationship of the aforementioned analysis with the recent experiences that took place in South America, within the scope of Progressive Governments, is notorious. What gives

Solón a special identity with the debate at hand is the fact that he participated in one of them,⁹ which renders him the authority to present the following prognosis:

Every political movement that enters into the power structures to transform them must be fully aware that it is stepping onto quicksand. There will always be negative impacts and collateral effects, such as the development of privileges, temptations for corruption, pragmatic alliances, and the mirage that permanence in power is the key to the social “revolution”. The only way to avoid it is to encourage the strengthening of autonomous counterpowers, not under a clientelistic logic, but so that they are truly self-managed and capable of counterbalancing the conservative and reactionary forces that will inevitably develop within the new structures of power – and, above all, so that they radiate the will of the commons to all of society (Solón, 2019, p. 215).

Quijano joins this controversy, with the hope of overcoming economic, political, social, environmental, and cultural dominations, pointing out six suggestions that should guide the practices of *Buen Vivir*, as a continuous democratic production of the social existence. He says:

The development and consolidation of the Dis/Coloniality of power would implicate social practices configured by: a. social equality of heterogeneous and diverse individuals, against an unequal racial/sexual/social classification and identification of the world population; b. consequently, neither the differences nor the identities would be the source or argument of individuals’ social inequality any longer; c. groupings, belongings, and/or identities would be the product of free and autonomous decisions made by free and autonomous individuals; d. reciprocity between socially equal groups and/or individuals, in the organization of labor and the distribution of products; e. equitable redistribution of the world’s resources and products, tangible and intangible, among the world’s population; f. the trend towards community association of the world population, locally, regionally or globally, as a mode of direct production and management of the collective authority; and, in this sense, as the most effective mechanism for distributing and redistributing rights, obligations, responsibilities, resources, products, between groups and their individuals, in each sphere of social, sexual, productive and subjective existence. This would function based on the collective authority and co-responsibility in the relationships with other living beings and other entities on the planet or in the entire universe (Quijano, 2014b, p. 857; free trans.).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The debate carried out, based on the *Buen Vivir* paradigm, demonstrates the need to build new epistemologies and ontologies. To begin to see gains in this theoretical endeavor, and its practical results, it is necessary to promote the disconnection from the thought defined as Eurocentric, which leads to the analyses of reality (from the micro to the macro, in the various fields of knowledge and society) referenced to in the structures of values, knowledge, and processes elaborated, structured and signified by the same people who constituted and maintain the world that we are intending to change.

Despite the efforts and successes achieved in the recent history of the Americas, and also in the emblematic libertarian struggles of the past, there is an absence of a political, economic,

⁹ The aforementioned Progressive Governments took place in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela and Ecuador. In the latter country, Alberto Acosta also participated in the government of Rafael Correa - Ministry of Energy and Mines - and in the presidency of the Constituent Assembly.

social, and administrative theory, with regional characteristics, continental scope, and global articulations, that can bring the anti-rentist, anti-extractivist, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal practices up to date. Both the experiences of South American Progressive Governments and the responses to current world crises, reinforce the need for a new international political configuration. Here, at the crossroads of history, the colonial heritage, associated with neoliberal ideology and its supporting pillars, managed to impose defeats on traditional organizations (which operate based on cooperation/community) and more recent philosophies (which operate based on equality/fraternity/freedom), reinforcing elitist public and private structures, which merge their interests and become impervious to the needs of the majority of the local population, and of the planet, where adherents of humanist, pacifist, and ecological postures can foresee a long journey in the construction of a hegemonic common ground.

There is nothing more symbolic of the above observation than the Brazilian case, from which the authors speak, where the defeat of progressive forces has meant the dismantling of the embryonic social and environmental protection system, the sharing of power by militias (urban and rural paramilitary groups), the growing threat to democracy and the tragic conduct in confronting Covid-19.

Hence, there is an important mutual relevance in the dialogues shared amongst supporters of *Buen Vivir*, Degrowth, Ecofeminism, Rights of Mother Earth, the Commons, Deglobalization, Ecosocialism, Food Sovereignty, Solidarity Economy and Ubuntu; but also with those who had their interests contradicted by neoliberalism, or even with those who can contribute to the emancipatory goals included in systemic alternatives, such as, for example, representatives of the aforementioned centralist socialism and the ideas of Pope Francis.

Therefore, the complementarity between these paradigms must be sought from the perspective of “increasingly complex interactions that help in the process of building systemic alternatives. The objective is not to present a totalizing alternative, but to develop multiple holistic alternatives that intertwine and articulate” (Solón, 2019, p. 197).

On a careful reading, it may seem strange that we have focused only on the debate in the field of systemic alternatives and have not advanced into more specific issues and dialogues related to hegemonic thinking in the field of development and organizational studies. The option for this path derives from the objective of the article that turned to the literature review of the systemic alternatives specified in the title so that the lines of elaboration emphasizing the confluences of this debate where we understand that some cross-fertilization is possible as a result can be recognized. Certainly, the theoretical discussion with the mainstream, as well as contextualized research and case studies, will take the next step in a more substantive dimension of the problems and possibilities opened.

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