

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT AND POST-DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

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“Do not misunderstand us. Our people do not look to the past. Like the rest of the world, we want to advance, improve our lives and the lives of future generations, but we also want to control this development, our lands and our lives. We demand participation, both in decision-making and in the benefits of development.”

Anonymous member of a Philippine tribe

The notion of development

The notion of development was incorporated into social theory in 1945, at the end of the Second World War as a way of responding to the challenges of reconstructing the countries that had been either directly or indirectly affected by the world war. Thus, the allied countries put forward a new world order in which the calamities that afflicted the planet during the first four decades of the 20th century would be purged from the face of the earth: war, totalitarianism, prejudice, racial discrimination, unemployment and poverty. Still during the war, in 1941, the allied forces drafted the Atlantic Charter which stated that signatory countries were committed to seeking ways for all the free inhabitants of the planet to enjoy better economic and social well-being. These objectives were re-affirmed in the founding Principles, the Charter of the United Nations, signed by 51 countries at the San Francisco Conference in June 1945. The UN Charter clearly sets out the objectives of economic and social development in one of its paragraphs which proclaims that the peoples of the United Nations are determined to promote progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, employ international organizations to promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples and achieve international cooperation in solving problems of an economic, social, cultural and humanitarian character and in promoting

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and encouraging respect for human rights and the fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion (UNITED NATIONS, 2013).

Subsequently, within the framework of the United Nations' activities, a Commission was formed to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Stéphane Hessel (2011), in his manifesto "*Time for Outrage!*", reminds us that one of the main objectives of the above Declaration is to enshrine the basic rights which would enable people to free themselves from the threats totalitarianism poses to society and move toward a future of development and civilized, harmonious coexistence between all the countries of the world.

Within this context, the issue of development was an essential component on the agenda to be drafted and implemented by the international organizations re-founded after the end of World War II. In Latin America, given the difficulties in obtaining external supplies during the war, concepts to overcome dependency on imported industrialized goods gained increasing importance among the region's economists and policy makers, particularly in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Uruguay.

This becomes more evident at the end of the 1940s when a group of experts at the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), under the leadership of Raúl Prebisch, drafted a set of recommendations to governments emphasizing the urgent need to set up robust import substitution industrialization programs - in particular those involving capital assets - and carry out vast infrastructure (roads, ports, railways, airports, water ways, telecommunications, dams, irrigation systems, hydro and/or thermal power plants, schools, hospitals and so on) investment plans.

When ECLAC was established in 1948, explicit references were made to the fact that, in addition to resolving the economic problems which resulted from the war, the "commission will dedicate itself to studying and seeking solutions to the problems caused to Latin America by the global economic imbalance" (CEPAL, 1969).ⁱ Solutions involving these propositions were mainly based on stimulating industrialization processes and economic growth. It is clear that this conception of development was strongly underpinned by a teleological vision which supposed that the idea of economic and social progress is associated to growth. Thus, most of ECLAC's researchers and economists adhered to evolutionist currents of thought which conceived social dynamics as a chain of progressive changes leading to a higher level of material, social and cultural well-being.ⁱⁱ

These concepts are closely associated to a fundamental current in the Latin American social thinking: the theory of modernization. Gino Germani and other modernization theorists follow an interpretation which sees the evolution-modernization of society as an institutionalization process of transformations and argue that societies always move from a traditional state - where agricultural and non-industrialized processes predominate - to a modern, urban and industrial society. This transformation comes about not only through changes in a society's scientific-technological structures and artefacts, but mainly through acquiring the values of modernity. That is, by adhering to concepts of progress and change which are ultimately expressed in the behavioural patterns which governs relationships in modern society.

This model reaches its peak and has a huge influence on ECLAC's thinkers, in particular through the work of José Medina Echevarría who, from an essentially sociolo-

gical point of view, manages to associate this set of concepts with the notion of growth, with emphasis on topics such as economic stagnation, full employment and the role of the State in stimulating the private sector and in creating productive capacity for the countries of the region. Thus, modernization and growth are fused together into developmentist theories which explain the causes of Latin American underdevelopment based on a lack of public and private investment, the absence of endogenous technological development, and conservative and traditional practices and beliefs which continued to be held by a significant part of society.

Thus, at the heart of ECLAC's thinking we find, to a varying degree of emphasis (depending of the level of adherence to the theory), the notion that Latin America is, broadly speaking, underdeveloped and 'backwards' compared to industrialized countries. On this basis, a situation emerges where step-by-step or sequential advancement is possible, starting from underdevelopment to achieve full development and industrialization. This presupposes that for countries to develop they need to meet a number of structural (economic) and cultural requirements so that they can be considered to be moving toward a higher state, that is, a modern industrial society. Thus, it is possible to talk about developing countries, because, as well as setting out an evolutionary route to become a conceptually more superior society, this trajectory also presupposes that the stages necessary to reach development are the very same stages followed by developed countries.

This resulted in numerous policies which tended to increase the rationalization of public administration and also affect various aspects of social life, inculcating values and attitudes, and creating institutions and organizations in conformity with modernity, that is, worthy of developed societies. In this way, in both evolutionist and historical-dialectic versions, development and progress presuppose a change toward a higher end. That is, toward the improvement of the human condition. Both versions of development, with some alterations and additions, remain part of contemporary thinking and form the very epistemological foundations (which often remains latent and unquestioned) of economic, sociological and historical theories.

Just as the concept of development is inseparable from the modern discourse, it is also intimately associated to capitalism as the hegemonic means of production and all its various historical forms. In the so-called Third World, the problem of development emerges with the fall of colonialism and the gradual process of the consolidation of independent Nation-States. However, new States have remained linked to their old Metropolises through international trade. Therefore, the problem of development in the Third World takes the following form: how to transform productively and culturally backwards (underdeveloped) societies so they can catch up with those at a more advanced stage of development. The aim of transformations proposed by development theories is to enable Third World countries to successfully participate in the global capitalist dynamics.

Some countries were able to develop certain sectors or regions whilst keeping other areas underdeveloped. This is called structural dualism, that is, the simultaneous existence of dichotomous structures, often conceived as autonomous zones which are poorly connected, when not totally disconnected.ⁱⁱⁱ Other analyses subsequently emerged which tended to complement and transform this point of view. In a version of the so-called dependency

theory, underdevelopment is not conceived as a stage or period prior to development, but rather as part of a broader historical process. In this sense, as André Gunder Frank argues, underdevelopment and development are “two sides of the same coin” or part of the same universal historical process in which the roots of underdevelopment are found in the links between external dependency and the internal subordination of exploitation enclaves. In other words, both processes are simultaneous in historical terms and functionally linked. Here dualism, therefore, is only revealing the existence of two interacting worlds which mutually influence one another, permanently reproducing and fuelling the development of some (advanced industrialized states) and the underdevelopment of others (peripheral, backward and dependent states). Therefore, underdevelopment is not the direct outcome of a lack of capital, technological backwardness or the endurance of pre-modern values. Rather it is a concomitant condition of an unequal and combined dynamics created by capitalism (LÖWY, 1998).

The logical consequence of this conception is that within each country, forms of structural dualism are more an expression of internal colonialism, where more developed areas have an ongoing relationship of effective domination - the extraction and exploitation of raw materials and the workforce - with *hinterland* regions which remained underdeveloped precisely because of this unequal type of relationship (STAVENHAGEN, 1967).

The consequences of this development conception

Although, at the time, other theories emerged which dispute this conception - such as the dependency theory of unequal and combined development or internal colonialism - we argue that this notion of development persists to this day in that it is associated to the progress of nations through modernization, economic growth and a cultural model inspired by the West.

Furthermore, this notion of development is linked to a Eurocentric and linear narrative of human history, in particular a mode of construction of the modern world which establishes specific colonial/imperial power relations and is closely associated to a model of anthropocentric thinking whose basis is the so-called Judeo-Cristian “original myth”. Within this conception, human beings have absolute power over nature. According to the Book of Genesis, after creating man and woman God commands: “Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth and have dominion over it”. The first thing to consider is that this command is arrogant, in terms of subjecting not only nature, but also all human beings considered “weaker and less inclined to get involved in games of power and domination” (MAX-NEEF, 1986, p. 43).

Second, this command refers to the schism between humanity and nature, a break away from what Fromm called the human-nature symbiosis. When God created man in his image and likeness, He raised him to a higher level than all other inhabitants of the planet. The supposition, therefore, implies that there are no limits to man’s exploitation of his environment. The rational character of human beings and the rationalization of economic life present in Protestant asceticism have allowed the human mind to separate itself from the world of things and to place man at a higher plane, representing an onto-

logical rupture. This rupture is the distinctive mark of the modernity project formulated by the enlightenment philosophers which eventually became the hegemonic narrative for understanding the fate of humanity in its entirety. In Edgardo Lander's words:

"According to the European consciousness of modernity, these successive separations became intertwined with others which provided the basis for the essential contrast established - with the configuration of the colonial world - between Western and European man (conceived as modern and advanced) and the 'Others' - the rest of the world's cultures and peoples" (LANDER, 2005, p. 26).

This foundational origin of modernity and capitalism are responsible for the type of relationship established between the "developed" world and nature and the so-called uncivilized or backward lands. It not only justifies a productivist model based on the supposition that resources are infinite, or endless, but also naturalizes various forms of dispossession, plundering and domination to which nature and indigenous communities or peoples inhabiting specific territories are subjected.

The current environmental crisis leads us precisely to question this epistemological perspective and its resulting model which provides the basis for the deeply-rooted belief in the supremacy of human beings over the rest of the species and nature - which human beings can exploit without restrictions. Thus, this environmental crisis represents, above all, a crisis in the Western way of thinking, a particular way of conceiving the world which divides the mind from the body and knowledge from the traditional, sacred and magical wisdom of the "primitive" peoples. It is precisely this knowledge, validated by science, which produced a fragmented and reified world through the control and domination of nature. The accumulated evidence of the last three decades provides compelling testimony of a phenomenon which has been revealed and discussed for many decades: the exhaustion of the productive and predatory model that increasingly threatens the material foundations of life on the planet. Indeed, given the successive environmental and "climate" catastrophes the planet has experienced since Chernobyl and the Fukushima plant tragedy, it is no exaggeration to argue that we are at an advanced stage of a structural crisis - a hazardous situation fabricated by man - affecting not only the capitalist system but the sustainability of our species. The 21st century began marked by catastrophes, an unprecedented number of ecological and natural disasters in the history of the world.^{iv}

Nevertheless, notions of the ecological limits to economic growth and the inter-relationships between development and the environment were reintroduced into Western thinking^v in the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s by an important group of theorists, amongst whom Georgescu-Roegen, Kapp, Naess, Sachs and Schumacher. For example, in his pioneering work "Small is Beautiful", first published in 1973, the German-British economist, Ernst F. Schumacher, offers a resounding critique of the productive model prevalent in Western societies which could result in environmental degradation and the destruction of life itself. His objective was to understand the problem in its entirety and seek ways to develop new production methods and new consumer agendas in accordance with a life-style

projected to be permanent and sustainable. Despite a difference in focus and the somewhat militant positions of each of these thinkers, they all have in common the fact that they vehemently criticize the production and consumption model inherent to capitalist development.

This model, which generated the exponential growth in the exploitation of natural resources and stimulated unbridled consumerism, particularly in the Northern Hemisphere countries, is responsible both for provoking the depletion of resources and producing tonnes of waste, causing water, air and earth pollution on a daily basis.^{vi} Every year million hectares of woods and thousands of species are lost, irreversibly reducing and eroding biological diversity. Rainforests continue to be destroyed and the world loses approximately 17 million hectares, equivalent to the size of four Switzerlands. As there are not enough trees to absorb excess CO₂, the greenhouse gas effect and global warming increase. Despite the Montreal Protocol, the ozone layer will not recover until the middle of the 21st century. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (370 parts per million) has increased by 32% since the 19th century, reaching the highest concentration levels in the last 20 million years. Today over 23,000 million tonnes of CO₂ a year are released into the atmosphere, accelerating climate change. According to the forecasts, carbon dioxide emissions will have increased by 75% between 1997 and 2020. Every year we emit approximately 100 million tonnes of sulphur dioxide, 70 million tonnes of nitrogen oxide and 200 million tonnes of carbon monoxide, as well as 60 million tonnes of suspended particulates, aggravating the problems caused by acid rain, tropospheric ozone and local air pollution.

There is no doubt that the set of environmental indicators studied in the last decades increasingly show that if humanity does not change its model of development, in less than a century the survival of the planet and the human species will be put at serious risk. Mészáros (2011) reminds us that with each new phase of forced postponement, the contradictions of the capitalist system can only increase, bringing ever greater dangers to our own survival.

One of the greatest changes observed by scientists is climate change, a phenomenon we can no longer ignore. Although today it is undeniable, climate change has been occurring for a long time, systematically transforming the Earth. This is what is understood by Global Environmental Change, namely, changes taking place in the earth, atmosphere, ocean and biosphere systems which are considerably more extensive and complex than climate change. Together, Global Environmental Change and climate change form a destructive mix caused by a number of human activities (of anthropogenic origin)^{vii} and dependent on various factors such as the size of the earth's population, its level of energy consumption, specific technological mixes and the predatory use of natural resources.

This constellation of factors have resulted in, amongst other things, the greenhouse gas effect and global warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, changes in biodiversity, desertification, acid rain and both underground and surface water pollution. Though almost all scientists agree about the reality of climate change, there is still considerable uncertainty about the actual consequences of this phenomenon. Scientific forecasts have improved over time and a recent study estimates that by 2100 10% of the planet will be affected by climate change.^{viii} In Latin America it is expected that the major impacts of these changes will affect specifically agriculture, fishing and access to clean water.

Peasant and indigenous communities, in particular, will be harmed, as well as small and medium-sized producers.

Therefore, one of the first considerations to be made regarding climate change is that it affects populations and countries unevenly, reproducing in this way pre-existing inequalities in other spheres of the economic, political and social reality. Indeed, studies carried out by ECLAC and the World Bank show that developing countries are more exposed to the negative consequences of climate change. It is expected that they will bear the brunt - between 75% and 80% - of the negative climatic effects: hurricanes, floods, droughts, desertification, increases in sea level, and changes in agricultural cycles and the rainfall pattern.

Another finding is that the accumulated effects of greenhouse gas emissions (GHE), one of the main causes of climate change, cannot be addressed exclusively through mitigation policies. The problem is even more serious: although a drastic and immediate reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is possible, it will not have a significant impact on the climate. Policies for adapting to these changes are now required. They include measures such as a more egalitarian and universal provision of drinking water, sanitation, food security, access to better health services and decent education.

This is precisely because, as we have previously pointed out - in addition to the existing vulnerabilities which affect the world's poor, these populations are also vulnerable to climate catastrophes. Their vulnerability is linked to inequality and exclusion which place certain social groups at greater risk than others. Furthermore, given that climate change impacts are unevenly spread, both extreme weather events and the gradual transformation of the environment disproportionately affect more vulnerable human groups living in rural or urban poverty, indigenous people, the elderly, women, children and the sick. These social sectors are subjected to a "double exposure", that is, to the disastrous effects of climate change and a constellation of problems associated to their precarious condition, understood as the result of socio-economic deficits or needs (LAMPIS, 2013).

We can, therefore, conclude that climate change is not only linked to the behaviour pattern of nature, but is essentially based on the close interrelations between environmental dynamics and social processes. Thus, it is essential to consider the connection between the changing state of the ecosystems with the development model implemented by the governments of Latin America, both in history and now. Within this context, the impact climate change will have in the continent and adaptation efforts to overcome the disastrous consequences of global warming, as well as water and soil pollution are a concern and represent a challenge, not only in terms of democratizing the use of resources, but also in terms of a response to guarantee the conditions for the survival of the region's inhabitants. Ensuring that ecosystems and communities who live therein can overcome the damaging effects of extreme weather events (environmental resilience) is also a challenge.

Socio-environmental conflicts

Socio-environmental conflicts can be defined as disputes involving the use, access and ownership of natural resources and environmental services by groups of actors

who have different power and interests, and defend different conceptions regarding the management of public goods. As can be observed, in this definition the material aspects of these resources are emphasized. Other conceptions show that even when conflicts between groups and actors are originally based on material and tangible aspects, they also involve different discourses in terms of the values and meanings these actors attribute to resources within a particular ecological context.

Therefore, environmental conflicts can be due to the purposes different actors and economic agents (individuals or companies) assign to land use and natural resources. On the one hand, they are sustained by the cultural value systems which different societies or communities have built around particular resources and, on the other, the different uses these resources acquire due to multiple productive activities. These values are based on a particular construction of modernity which values Western scientific knowledge above all other types of knowledge and understands progress as an essential mark based on the idea of growth and the exploitation of human and natural resources. It is clear, therefore, as pointed out earlier, that this notion is founded upon an ontology and epistemology which became the civilization model for the entire human race.

In order to elucidate this situation a number of organizations and study centres have mapped numerous cases of conflicts between indigenous populations, transnational companies and/or governments.^{ix} Nevertheless, two of these conflicts seem particularly emblematic, considering that they occur in countries described as progressive and which have policies differentiated by region with regard to indigenous populations. These are the cases of Bolivia and Peru, countries governed by presidents who descend from the indigenous populations of their own countries: Evo Morales Ayma of *Aymara* descent and Ollanta Humala who is a descendent of the *Incas*. Both cases are expounded below.

3.1. Bolivia. The TIPNIS Case

The Plurinational State of Bolivia was officially instituted on 9th February 2009, when the new “Plurinational” Constitution was promulgated during Bolivia’s re-founding process. The Constitution enshrines 35 nationalities as forming the Bolivian Nation.

When Morales reassumed as President, he devolved all the old Republican symbols to the Legislative Assembly and substituted them by others representing the new Plurinational State and the multi-coloured indigenous flag *Wiphala* was raised alongside the national flag. Meanwhile, Morales announced that the enforcement of the new State was essentially a movement of the people which re-founded the Bolivian homeland.

The Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South American (IIRSA) is a forum aiming to promote common policies in the areas of transport, infrastructure, energy and communication in order to support the regional integration process. One of IIRSA’s main projects is the building of a transoceanic road to serve as a production corridor, increasing the efficient flow of international trade and exports. This road crosses the Bolivian territory from Puerto Suarez in the border with Mato Grosso do Sul (Corumbá, Brazil) to the Chilean border. It has kept to its original trajectory in Bolivia integrating the departments of Cochabamba in the centre of the country with the eastern region of Beni.

The Bolivian government argues that Beni is a region with high agro-industrial potential. However, it has remained outside the developing axis and dependent on the department of Santa Cruz, an important industrial development zone and a significant stronghold for the opposition against President Morales' administration (RIVERO, 2011).

One of the main arguments in favour of the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South American IIRSA project is that, historically, the regions of Beni and Pando have been isolated from the rest of the country and that this road would enable both provinces and the North of Bolivia to have better access to important cities such as Cochabamba and La Paz. "Bolivia and Beni need roads to attain economic and social development and these roads must be built through areas which are economically viable and bring greater social benefits." Therefore, the Bolivian government project aims to integrate a sector of the territory which, according to the assessment of authorities, has so far been excluded from the progress experienced by the rest of the country. In this spirit, the vice-president of Bolivia, Álvaro García Linera, stated in an interview, that "our fellow citizens are extremely right to be concerned about the future of the forest, but it is equally legitimate to ask for a road to link different regions". He afterwards suggested that the indigenous demonstrations were instigated by the right in order to destabilize the government in an attempt to restore the conservatives to power.

However, the conflicts which emerged with the project have many facets. The first problem observed, relates to the road's projected trajectory which cuts, or literally divides in half, the Isiboro Sécuré Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS), a 12,000 km² environmental reserve, very rich in biodiversity. The park is home to four indigenous ethnicities who have ownership of this territory through a constitutional mandate. They are the Mojeños, Yuracarés, Chimanés and Trinitarios. The 306-kilometre stretch between Villa Tunari (Cochabamba) and San Ignacio de Moxos (Beni) cuts across TIPNIS, affecting the livelihood of over 50,000 people who are members of the four ethnicities settled in the region. This means the destruction of an area which is doubly protected by the Constitution - as a national park and an indigenous territory - and has a direct impact on the daily lives of the local communities. Furthermore, there is opposition to activities causing irreversible damage to the natural biodiversity and the environment. In particular the activities of logging and oil groups who are interested in accessing the park's resources (LEÓN y ARZE, 2013).

In addition to these objections, local communities have denounced the lack of consultation on the part of the authorities regarding road building activities, in compliance with the ILO resolution 169 which determines that indigenous communities living in territories where any type of venture or project is to take place must be consulted by the relevant authorities.

It is precisely due to this situation that, from the beginning, the organizations of which these indigenous nations are members have expressed their opposition to the planned route by holding various types of demonstrations such as marches, occupations, road blocks and vigils. The moment of greatest tension occurred when the Bolivian Foreign Minister, David Choquehuanca, decided to meet the protesters who intended to march to La Paz and found themselves blocked by peasant-settlers of a different ethnicity, with

the support of the police.* Forced by a group of women to head a front line column to break the military barricade, the Foreign Minister was “rescued” by the police. Violent confrontation ensued and many protesters were hurt, including women and children. After this incident, the Defence Minister announced his irrevocable resignation and forced president Morales to suspend the road project. Morales also announced that a draft bill would be sent to the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, making the TIPNIS territory “inviolable”. “This is governing by obeying the people”, remarked Morales when he announced the measure.

In addition, the Bolivian president declared that the suspension of the road project would be maintained until the TIPNIS communities were consulted on this matter. An ad hoc Commission was formed which included representatives of the Catholic Church and the Human Rights Commission. These institutions must produce a report based on a consultation involving all 64 communities living in the indigenous territory, containing information on the positive or negative response of the population toward the road project, as well as information on whether the regulation on Protected Areas was applied.

Within this context, the Commission’s starting point is the pre-existing definition included in the Plurinational State of Bolivia Constitution in one of its articles: “Where there is overlap between protected areas and indigenous peasant territories, management will be shared and subjected to the norms and procedures of the nations themselves and the original peasant indigenous people, respecting the objectives which underpin the creation of these areas”.

However, once the consultation with 36 communities was completed, the Commission denounced that the process had been conducted under considerable local authority pressure and without the necessary information for the main actors to be able understand the aforementioned project in detail.

The transoceanic road project is currently being re-assessed due to a new route proposal from Villa Turari to Trinidad following TIPNIS’ external borders. Nevertheless, Isiboro Sécore Indigenous Sub-central (SCIIS) group members are still opposed to the project and consider the new route a threat to their territory because it would drive the expansion of the settling process in the northern part of the territory. The settlers, on the other hand, see the project as an opportunity to have access to new lands, natural resources and markets. Furthermore, the indigenous organizations themselves are also divided. In recent months this resulted in new clashes involving physical violence between the different conflicting parties (LA JORNADA, 2013).

Therefore, despite the temporary suspension of the road building project, the tendency is for the conflict to continue and be further aggravated by the fact that the indigenous organization itself is divided into two irreconcilable groups, as reported by human rights organizations and exposed in the Bolivian and international press.

3.2. The Camisea Case in Peru

The second emblematic case considered regarding conflicts between indigenous people and development is the case of the Camisea gas project. The aim of this program

is to expand the exploration of natural gas underground deposits in the Kugapakori-Nahua-Nanti (KNN) Reserve, 500 kilometres east of Lima, in Cuenca Ucayali, Cusco Department, Convención Province, Southeastern Peru. The reserve, known by its acronym KNN was established in 1990 to protect the territorial rights of the nahuas, natis, machiguegas, as well as other peoples living inside the reserve who have had limited relations with the rest of society, including contact with other indigenous communities. A fundamental factor in its creation was “the tragic experience of contact some nahua communities had with a group of loggers in 1984, resulting in the death of half the nahua population through illnesses contracted via this contact” (CODPI, 2013). During the following decades, both illegal loggers and missionaries persevered with their incursions into these territories, the latter in order to evangelize the indigenous communities, thus continuing to threaten the lives of the nahuas and other groups settled in the region.

In 1987, oil prospecting led the transnational company Shell to find large gas deposits in the Camisea sector which became subsequently known as the San Martín and Cashirani gas fields. Extraction operations only started in 2004, when the Peruvian authorities formally initiated the Camisea Consortium Project. The main objective of this new mega project is to capture and transport natural gas from the above-mentioned deposits to a liquid separation plant in Malvinas, on the banks of the Urubamba River from where the gas can be subsequently transported via a pipeline to Lima and eventually exported. Since 2002, the exploration of these deposits has been overseen by the Peruvian government. It has expanded extraction operations in the Camisea region by creating a corporate consortium involving a number of transnational companies such as Repsol, Pluspetrol, Hunt Oil, SK Energy and Sonatrach.

The Peruvian government has, through a number of communiqués and press conferences, reiterated the benefits of exploring these gas deposits to the country. Amongst the reasons highlighted is that Peru will have an abundant supply of gas to replace other fuels (in particular hydrocarbons) which have to be imported. Therefore, it is expected that with these deposits the hydrocarbon trade balance will revert negative trends and improve the country’s revenues and balance of payments. Another recurring argument relates to job creation and economic growth in the gas reserve region, where the gas processing or fractionation plants and the export terminal (Pisco) are found. Finally, it is argued that the project will also contribute to improve the environment through the use of a less polluting source of energy.

By contrast, those opposing the project’s expansion argue that the peoples inhabiting the area are threatened with extinction. They claim that the indigenous territories will become the site for conducting a number of seismic studies and for constructing 21 wells, a liquid gas pipeline and other infrastructure works associated to the extraction projects (roads, machine rooms, etc.). For these opponents:

“In practice, this will mean sentencing to death a number of communities and the likely disappearance of a whole system of thinking which is borne out of and founded on their land. These are communities which have for many years safeguarded the biodiversity of the Peruvian forest in this

region. All this, of course, in the name of progress and the common good”
(CODPI, op. cit.: p. 2).

Thus, different indigenous organizations in the region and across Peru have requested the intervention of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). A recent letter addressed to President Ollanta Humala, signed by 58 organizations demanded that the project be immediately stopped and that the Peruvian government issue a public statement recognizing the inviolability of the KNN Reserve and adjacent territories “to guarantee the survival and the rights of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation and to meet Peru’s obligations in terms of human rights and the environment”. The letter finished by concluding that if this does not happen and the expansion goes ahead the government “will not only be violating national and international laws, but will also be overseeing a development project whose consequences may be lethal to one of the most vulnerable indigenous groups in the country”. Thus, injustice to unprecedented proportions will be countenanced “threatening the existence of a whole world, an entire system of thought and social organization: those of the indigenous peoples who live in the territories which are now threatened”.

Final considerations

A first consideration to emerge from the exposition above relates to the fact that the aim of questioning the evolutionist, Western and Eurocentric conception of development is not to improve the definition of this concept, but to radically question the way which is has been employed in Latin America and other “underdeveloped” countries. Moreover, it leads us to reflect on fact that if there is a single roadmap that leads us to development, the indigenous people must necessarily follow this route, thus abdicating other types of knowledge and Cosmo visions which - according to this premise - turn them into pre-modern or backwards societies. Such a development model would exclude precisely the interests, the words, visions, and wisdom of those who should apparently most benefit from development, namely, the continent’s poorer populations and indigenous peoples.

A recent study pertinently argues that “the demands of indigenous populations for land emerges from their need to conserve and/or defend their systems of production and traditional ways of life in face of the growing pressure from the capitalist system and the expansion of the institutional State”. There is no doubt that this pressure also carries with it an ideological-civilizing component which - in addition to transforming the space occupied by indigenous populations - also disrupts, in the medium-term, their vernacular identitary associations. Indeed, the main object of many of these communities is not the acquisition of material goods. They tend to give preference to their social associations, cultural identities, the precursors of reciprocity within a different economic system, where alternative forms of exchange and mutual help prevail.

Refuting the above discourse means believing that the development concept was built upon an inevitable historical narrative, a naturalized product, that can be applied to all peoples. For this reason, we usually end up confronting the forcefulness of an ethno-

centric vision which constructs its modernizing project based on the notion of unlimited growth and exploitation of natural and human resources. Thus, financial criteria are imposed which go against the objectives of sustainability, the preservation of the ecosystem and the cultural values of the peoples who inhabit these ecosystems. As Escobar reminds us, "It is not only ecological factors and conditions define the practices which determine how nature is appropriated and used, but also cultural values". This Colombian anthropologist warns us that "the struggles for cultural difference, ethnic identity and local autonomy of a particular territory contribute to redefine the environmental conflicts agenda beyond economics and ecology" (ESCOBAR, 2010, p. 103).

The two cases here described reveal a permanent and inextricable tension between the development objectives of nations, founded upon concepts such as progress and growth and a broader conception which sees humanity as essentially integrated within its environment and supported by the notion of the good life. In his classic study on alterity, Tzvetan Todorov (1991) asks: how can we accept the other, someone who is distinct from us, as both equal and different? This question becomes even more incisive when reflecting on the occurrence of ethnocentrism, that is, the tendency to bring the values of the society to which I belong to the level of a universal category. Since the conquest of America, this Eurocentric vision has built an interpretation of the world by ignoring other languages, other knowledge and other hermeneutics. That is why the indigenous people's struggle also comprises a struggle for achieving equality within difference, for having the same rights as the rest of "civilized" citizens, within a framework of respect for what is distinct and different. Recognition of difference within equality is an arduous and ongoing task to which the communities of the American continent are committed.

For this reason, treating conflicts of ownership and use of natural resources within a broader context means to consider the different interests at hand, in particular, meeting the specific needs of communities living in these territories. It also means considering the effects of conflicts on the most vulnerable segments of society. This involves not only solving the biophysical risks associated to entrepreneurial or other types of activities which often lead to "natural catastrophes", but above all, to take into account the social and cultural impacts of applying specific development models which prioritize the concept of growth and the generation of material wealth and, as a result, lead to environmentally unsustainable, socially unequal and culturally uniform solutions. Therefore, it is essential to counteract the unilateral narrative of modernity, development and globalization which reinforces a utilitarian and productivist attitude toward nature and the rest of humanity. The task, therefore, is to conceive a model which can overcome this westernizing epistemology and its consequent narrow vision of development to build a new type of thinking based on the certainty that across the world knowledge is diverse and that this diversity constantly enriches our human experience.

Notes

- i Discussions prior to ECLAC's foundation already pointed out that it was essential to focus on the need for international action in terms of economic development and there was a "tendency to see the problems of the underdeveloped countries from the perspective of the highly developed European countries and the USA" (SUNKEL y PAZ, 2004, p. 21).
- ii The concepts of evolution, progress and growth are similar in that they all assume that there is gradual and continuous change supported by scientific and technical advances which inevitably lead to improvements in human welfare.
- iii According to Jacques Lambert, a French sociologist and demographer, Brazil comprised two different countries. In his classic study entitled *Two Brazils*, Lambert compares and contrasts the urban, industrial and prosperous South with better living conditions, with the rural, poor, archaic and undernourished Northeast (LAMBERT, 1963).
- iv A report from the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), a United Nations agency, stated that 2010 saw the greatest number of natural disasters recorded in the last three decades. The number of people who lost their lives in such incidents during this year reached 300,000.
- v We call this a re-introduction because we argue that the origin of these concerns are found in the visionary work of one of Marx's contemporaries, William Morris, who had already introduced elements of an eco-socialist vision into his writings, in particular in his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*.
- vi For example, it is estimated that if the average energy consumption in the United States was to become the norm of the entire global population, known oil reserves would be exhausted in just 19 days.
- vii In 2007 an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report stated that: "There is new and compelling evidence that most of the global warming observed over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities" (IPCC, 2007).
- viii The study, published by the US's National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), claims that among the regions which could be most severely affected by climate change are South of the Amazon, Southern Europe, Central America and some tropical regions in Africa (EL MERCURIO, 01/07/2013).
- ix For example, a Map of conflicts between indigenous people and transnational companies was drawn up by the Coordination for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with headquarters in Spain. Monitoring is also conducted by the Monitoring Network of Amazon Socio-Environmental Conflicts, based in Peru and the Latin American Observatory for Environmental Conflicts (OLCA) with headquarters in Santiago de Chile.
- x The settlers, mainly of Aymara and Quechua descent, started to arrive in the 1960s. However, the large migratory flux only began in the 1980s. Reasons included the relocation of miners from Oruro and Potosí. Another reason was the expansion of coca production - and according to some - the peak of drug-trafficking activities which influenced t

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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT AND POST-DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

FERNANDO DE LA CUADRA

Resumo: O presente artigo pretende refletir a respeito das contradições existentes entre uma concepção do desenvolvimento que se encontra ancorada na ideia de progresso, industrialização e crescimento econômico e as cosmovisões dos povos originários, para os quais os laços simbióticos mantidos entre o homem e a natureza supõem necessariamente a intangibilidade e irredutibilidade dos recursos naturais como fonte de desenvolvimento econômico e social. Pelo mesmo, se sustenta que uma visão adequada do desenvolvimento tem que contemplar um giro epistémico no qual as concepções e saberes das comunidades indígenas sejam incorporados para alterar radicalmente a relação sociedade/natureza e a lógica altamente predatória do meio-ambiente e da vida humana que vem imperando até nossos dias. Esta nova perspectiva que implica uma mudança no discurso e nas práticas cotidianas do “saber” e do “fazer” é aquilo que alguns autores têm convencionado em denominar como *pós-desenvolvimento*.

Palavras-Chave: Desenvolvimento; Povos originários; Conflitos socioambientais; Epistemologia Ambiental.

Resumen: El presente artículo pretende reflexionar sobre las contradicciones existentes entre una concepción del desarrollo que se encuentra anclada en la idea de progreso, industrialización y crecimiento económico y las cosmovisiones de los pueblos originarios, para quienes el vínculo simbiótico prevalecientes entre el hombre con la naturaleza supone necesariamente la intangibilidad e irreductibilidad de los recursos naturales como fuente de desarrollo económico y social. Por lo mismo, se sustenta que una visión adecuada del desarrollo debe contemplar un giro epistémico en el cual las concepciones y saberes de las comunidades indígenas sean incorporados para alterar radicalmente la relación sociedad/naturaleza y la lógica altamente predatoria del medioambiente y de la vida humana que viene imperando hasta nuestros días. Esta nueva perspectiva que implica un cambio en el discurso y en las prácticas cotidianas del “saber” y del “hacer” es lo que algunos autores han consentido en denominar como *postdesarrollo*.

Palabras Clave: Desarrollo; Pueblos originarios; Conflictos Socio-ambientales; Epistemología ambiental.

Abstract: The aims of this article is to reflect on the contradictions between a conception of development that is anchored in the idea of progress, industrialization and economic growth and worldviews of indigenous peoples, for whom the existing symbiotic bond between man and nature necessarily involves intangibility and irreducibility of natural resources as a source of economic and social development. For this reason, it is argued that a proper view of development must include an epistemic shift in which the ideas and knowledge of indigenous communities are built to radically alter society/nature and highly predatory logic environment relationship and life human that comes currently prevail. This new perspective implies a change in the discourse and everyday practices of “knowing” and “doing” in what some authors have referred to as post-development.

Keywords: Development; Indigenous Peoples; Socio-environmental Conflict; Environmental Epistemology.
