# PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

EDITED BY

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# Latin American Perspectives on Global Development

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Mahmoud Masaeli, Germán Bula and Samuel Ernest Harrington Latin American Perspectives on Global Development

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#### CHAPTER EIGHT

WHY DO WE NEED POETS
WHEN LIFE IS IN CRISIS?
THE URGENT NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL
SHIFT IN THE CREATION OF CULTURE
IN AMERICA-ABYA YALA

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#### **Executive Summary**

The Environmental Crisis is a profound expression of the crisis of our civilization, a product of our modern rationality centered on production. Recognizing the deep roots of the crisis, environmentalist thought has shifted from technological and scientific concerns to cultural and aesthetic questions: "What do we learn when we learn?" "Is our way of learning aligned with ways of inhabiting cultures?" "Does inhabiting mean that one lives ethics?" The question "why do we need poets in times of crisis?" announces the urgent transition of cultural creation through a "poetic inhabiting", a proposal that has been developed in the Southern Environmental Thought research group. This has been achieved through thinking of the environment as where dense, complex, ethical, aesthetic, epistemic and political relations emerge between ecosystems and cultures. This radical change was called "the environmental shift of culture" by the Southern Environmental Group, a shift that implies unadapting ourselves from the West and Modernity, abandoning the project of Absolute Reason which is evident in the figures of the subject and the object. This chapter outlines the proposal of the America-Abya Yalan form of inhabiting as a

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**Keywords:** Environmental crisis, ethos-house-home, environmental shift, the creation of cultures of resistance, globalization, dissolution, return to earth, Southern Poetic Inhabiting.

#### 1. Introduction: Cry from the earth, cry from the humans

In his book, "Reto de Vida" (Challenge of Life - 1996), Carlos Augusto Angel Maya, the Colombian philosopher and environmental thinker, discusses for the first time the construction of alternative ways of thinking. These other ways of thinking allow us to understand ourselves as belonging to a nature that is both diverse and singular in each place that it exists. Angel Mava observes the urgent need to return to environmental thought, based on the profound and origins-based relation between two events that we have believed to be separate and even diametric: the emergence of life on earth and the emergence of cultural symbols that are specifically human. Environmental thought, as developed in the philosophical proposal of Angel Maya, emerges from the relations between ecosystems and cultures, with both being events that have emerged from nature. This return to environmental thought places ethics and aesthetics not just as cultural constructions developed by humans and exclusively for humans, but to place these two concepts in the profound and necessary relation, a priori of all other relations, between eco-systems and culture. The ethical dimension of ecosystems-culture is the geo-poetic singularity that this relation implies, the place where it is configured, the habitat, the home. The aesthetic dimension refers to the diverse and singular manners of how this place, this home, this habitat, is configured and configures ways of inhabiting. As a result, both ethics and aesthetics no longer form part of universal rationality. From this perspective, Ángel Maya opens the door to the notion of ethical-environmental thought, which is related to the different ways of thinking the world and geographic and temporal particularities. No time and space will be absolute anymore. Each geography contains diverse moments in time, a weaving of complex and singular moments, and each of these moments and periods of time configure distinct and specific geographies.

Difference, singularity, diversity, multiplicity: an expansion of ethics thought of in these event-based terms will accompany our environmental thought. Ethics, in this context, will refer to *ethos*: "a stable for the animals, a house for the people" (Boff, 2001). It will be present in the existing relations that configure and define inhabiting, which above all are aesthetic: it is not possible to think of a form of inhabiting that is unaesthetic.

Feeling, contact between bodies, the permanent emerging of bodiesbetween-bodies is always singular. Our geographies propose geo-poetry, which is constructed as different ways of inhabiting in the different forms of Earth's writing (Pardo, 1991).

Poetic inhabiting emerges from an understanding of the earth's shouts, whispers, pain and love. It demands a reconciliation with the nature that we are, with the Mother Earth that we have denied during the Icarus-like flight path of human civilization (Angel-Maya, 2001), which began more than 2,500 years ago. The paradox of all of the possible paradoxes is the arrogance displayed by modern culture to Mother Earth. To deny that we are nature is to deny the mother, the father, the siblings, the ancestors, and leads us to deny ourselves. Despite global capitalism, which aims to negate all differences of place and singularities, we are made of the place that we inhabit.

René Magritte expresses this artistic relation with ancestral geographies in his painting titled *El Seductor (The Seducer)*, painted in 1953:



1953. Oil on Canvas. 38.2 x 46.3 cm. Courtesy of the Galerie Isy Brachot. Brussels-Paris.

"The Seducer" invites us to think about this key event in the creation of a geo-culture: "We are made of the place that we inhabit". By contrast, the creation and perpetuation of modern culture is far removed from this poetic image. The global capitalization of culture, its industrialization and commercialization, and the reduction of culture to the production and consumption of objects that are called "cultural" has become stronger and stronger in the last 70 years following the Second World War. This era was when the United Nations was created and the United States of North America, in the words of Truman, invited all of the countries of the world to enter into the circuit — which is paradoxical in our concept — of Development. This notion, which has a linear, ascending and excluding structure, was established as the model to follow for the rest of the cultures of the world. The cultures that didn't enter into this circuit would suffer hunger, collective death, displacement and the dispossession of land.

Truman's prediction was completely correct because, evidently, Development goes along a straight line, to the right and upwards, while cultures exist in

different times and geographies, times that cannot be reduced to the chronological time of Development and the exuberant geographies that overcome the processes of global flattening.

In his men and women made of earth, Oswaldo Guayasamín expresses the logging of the Amazon jungle, the "tears of blood" that have fallen over centuries from the original cultures of our South for the atrocious imposition of a culture, the European culture, that defined itself as the culture in the expansion-domination processes of western civilization.

The cries of the earth, of nature, of life (including human life), have been expressed by the works of the Ecuadorian painter Oswaldo Guayasamín. In 1983, he painted onto the skin of a canvas the pain of the man-tree, the man-earth, felt from the moment that Europe began its colonizing project (the 14th and 15th Centuries) through the imposition of their cultural symbols on abyaylan, African and Asian land, which continues today. The name has changed, but the intention remains the same. To colonize and to globalize have something in common: reduction. One identity, one religion, one language, one way of thinking. His oil paintings "The Scream #1", "The Scream #2" and "The Scream #3" were painted 90 years after the four famous versions of "The Scream" painted by Edvard Munch (1893). These screams express the vast paradoxes of a culture that has a seductive side, including economic growth, luxury, technological and scientific success, the unstoppable accumulation of capital, globalization through the media, and the speculation and sale of land and nature. At the same time, another side of these screams emerges, expressing the ever more miserable framework of life, the exploitation and devastation of the earth, pain and cultural desolation.

Today, we are experiencing the most profound expression of the crisis of civilization: the environmental crisis, a crisis of everything that is contained within the framework of life on earth. So we return to the question that has driven Southern Environmental Thought: why do we need poets when life is in crisis?

The responses that have emerged throughout these years have opened up paths to developing a culture that removes itself from the global production-consumption circuit, providing resistance to the fundamentalist idea that Europe originally brought culture to America, because Cultures already existed, Cultures with a capital C, which have been reduced to the condition of sub-cultures, infra-cultures and even countercultures. Southern Environmental Thought, which is in permanent construction, has

facilitated the thinking of how to create and maintain cultures, as well as how to manage the care and cultivation of the earth and the life that we are. This approach has put us in places of annunciation that are different to the places of the annunciation of politically correct cultural management, and this work has strengthened the way of thinking related to how to create and maintain cultures based on the earth-bodies that we are.

The surrealist painters, creators of other possible worlds, proposed thinking-about-ourselves as a radical otherness. Latin American artists have proposed a radical rupture with Euro-centrism. If as humans we are made of the earth and the earth is made of humans, if we are the "Salt of the Earth" (Sebastiâo Salgado in Wenders and Ribeiro, 2014), then this urges us to dissolve the center of our existence, the zero point, that we came from nothing, that there is only one universal origin. This has the purpose of dissolving ourselves in the places that we inhabit, to understand the earth that we inhabit and that inhabits us and to create geo-cultures. These are cultures that emerge from the earth, which was beautifully stated by the Argentinian philosopher Rodolfo Kusch (1976) who noted that this allows us to descend from the heavens of the metaphysics of the South to place ourselves in Being as such, in the living and the permanence that we are.

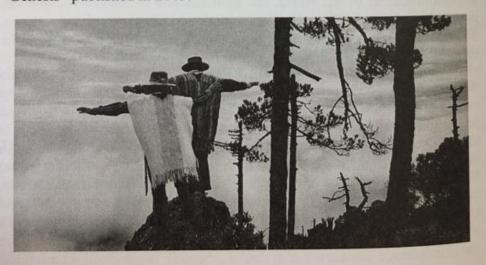
The metamorphic transformation of life allows for the creation of culture outside of the concept of cultural management that is based on bureaucratic models and global policies. Southern Environmental Thought is focused on thinking outside of the box, breaking the chains of previous models used to think the earth, breaking with the globalizing intention of the quantification of the world, the globalization of differences and the conversion of these differences into attractive products for global tourism. Southern Environmental Thought thinks of cultures as emerging from the earth.

As work that involves art, culture is diverse, it is singular; it is a sculpture emerging from the exuberant geographies of the earth. For this reason, a permanent comprehension of the metamorphic languages of the earth is the first step in creating a culture that cultivates, that cares for the earth that it emerges from. We are rooted in the earth.



Frida Kalho. "Raíces" (Roots) 1943. Oil on sheet metal. 11 7/8 x 19 3/8 in. Collection of Marilyn O. Lubetkin.

If we are roots of the earth, as expressed by Frida Kahlo in a myriad of ways, then why are we, the South, submissive to the North? What does the South stand for as a place of annunciation in a time of civilization crisis? What has been revealed in the crucial weakening of the global North and Euro-centrism? A beautiful world hidden for more than 500 years. Abya Yala, a generous, blossoming land that facilitates Good Living and is Good Living. The Brazilian photographer Sebastiâo Salgado expresses this fecundity in his research on the "Other America" published in 1980 and "Genesis" published in 2013.



From "Other America" 1980. Photo: Sebastiâo Salgado, Brazil

In these two research studies, this Brazilian artist, born in 1944, shows how globalization is impossible from the epistemic-ethical-aesthetic point of view. This impossibility is due to the diversity of geographies, the singularity of each culture, and the plethora of knowledge and differences that exist. These alterities form planet Earth and present us with an undoubtedly powerful resistance to global development.



From "Genesis" 2013. Photo: Sebastiâo Salgado, Brazil

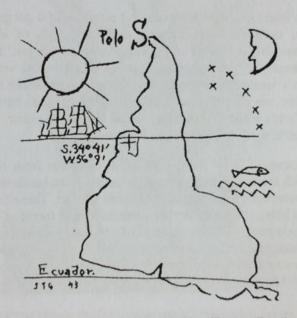
When Europe reached Abya Yala in the year 1492 of the Gregorian calendar, it sought to expand its empire through the imposition of its cultural symbols in the strange and distant world that was found in these generous, fertile and blossoming lands. At first, they began with the project of globalizing the European empire, which took another definitive step in the 20th century with the move towards globalization. The precision of the mathematical and geometric calculations related to the earth's natural processes, when they are reduced to mere data, allows for the popularity of the idea of the earth as a world that is constantly expanding, in a manner that was never considered by the geographers of the Renaissance. Now, the entire world does not just understand each other, but can also connect with each other at a velocity that is close to the speed of light. Prometheus continues to have his wish granted: to make

demigods through the domination of fire and dictate the earth. Electromagnetic waves are the ultra-modern way of using fire as a powerful technique for dominating nature. As a way of spreading light, the electromagnetic waves will not just provide opportunities to the earth for self-reflection, but allow us to become more connected.

However, this total technological connection uses just one logic and gives a distinct density to the word universe. This concentration includes the singularity of the meaning of the word. It is spoken in one language. English, with a meaning that dominates all other meanings, the meaning of Development, just like the Abrahamic God who declares that there is only one faith, only one religion. This omnipresent technology forms Western civilization, a single, omnipotent being, the only existent. Techno-theology leads to the construction of one type of knowledge which today, amidst this ancient and painful decline, is the self-proclaimed "truth" and brings together all of the types of knowledge under its umbrella. At the same time, it denies, hides or kills these different types of knowledge, resulting in only one form of knowledge that is known as The Knowledge. This ends up being just one way of seeing the world, the eye of Big Brother, announcing the arrival of Modern Times, where everything is controlled. George Orwell's "1984", written between 1947 and 1948, describes this uniform point of view, just one eye observing the lives of people who have become mechanized and reduced to the production and consumption of objects.

The industrialization of the Earth begins with the mechanization of the traditional ways of inhabiting the planet, which were characterized by their sacred nature. Place, home, these configured this sacred space, where the rituals of love, fraternity, solidarity and friendship strengthened the bonds between humans and the earth, the sowing of plants, the harvest, hunting, fishing and all the other ways of inhabiting that involved rituals. These ways of inhabiting implied relations between diverse divinities in which humans were intermediary shamans that connected every form of life around them. These forms of inhabiting have prevailed in many places on earth including communities of resistance, cultures and other groups that today acquire unexpected strength in relation to the crisis of civilization that we are experiencing. However, during the short but dense and cruel process of worldization and globalization, many cultures succumbed to the desire of other cultures to impose on them their ways of inhabiting, their Gods, their knowledge and their cultures. This resulted in wars or other forms of domination, as well as the attacking of other nations. This submission generated ecocides, genocides and ethnocides that have had incalculable consequences to the present day. These events demonstrate a crisis that is not just the climate change crisis, but a crisis that cuts across the heart of the earth and people's lives, giving the crisis multiple and unthinkable meanings.

The Southern Environmental Thought group (PAS for its initials in Spanish) has emerged slowly but stronger each time in its aim of subverting, perverting and inverting the order established by the dominating North-Eurocentrist culture. To think of ourselves as South, made of South, from the South and making South, is wonderfully expressed by Joaquín Torres García's *América Invertida (Inverted America)* from 1943.



In this beautiful map, in this poetic cartography, Torres García proposes a geographical, geopoetical, spatial, temporal, epochal, cultural and civilization-based shift. This map represents the environmental shift of culture, and 53 years following the publication of this map it helped configure the work of Carlos Augusto Ángel Maya's book "El Reto de la Vida" (The Challenge of Life - 1996), a text that is also a poetic composition. The political aesthetic developed by Ángel Maya is also a proposal for other ways of inhabiting the earth. He shares his ideas so that we can understand the language, different logics and poetries of the earth itself. Moreover, the response is rapid. The people who have understood

how to poetically inhabit the earth have been those cultures that have achieved this for thousands of years, they have remained on the earth without devastating it, respecting it as the mother, the matrix, the teacher, the primordial material from where we have all come: the Earth that we

In our America, or better to call it *Amerrique*, a word from the Lença-Maya language that means "land where the wind blows", sacred words such as *Abya Yala*, *Sumak Kawsay*, *Sumak Iquiña*, *Sumak Samqasiña* emerge from the darkness, the hiding, the concealment suffered for more than 500 years to express the density of inhabiting the earth in a plethora of poetry.

"The Earth is not just a point in space, it is a bountiful geography of secret knowledge, unfinished enneagrams, different ways of inhabiting that emerge from the voices of Abya Yala, Sumac Kawsay, Sumak Iquiña, Sumak Samqasiña, providing an opening to unknown worlds – for us Westerners – worlds where inhabiting through good living has a complex meaning that can be understood as inhabiting the earth through dancing, living one's life as poetry, thinking of the earth as a guitar, a flute, a love poem that is in a permanent state of blossoming.

The landscapes of *good living* also exist: in words from rituals that are charged with meaning; in the terrestrial realm, in the hands of those that do the work, who have transfigured their work into art. These landscapes also include the beings that care for the earth, and their forms of inhabiting the earth that celebrate the blossoming of life. "I have fallen in love with these hopeful landscapes, these forms of re-enchanting ourselves with the world through remembrance, commemoration, innovation and advocacy: through these I have learnt to feel." (Noguera, 2016: 12)

#### 2. Bodies from the Discovery of America

The human being is – also – a geographical being, with everything that this implies. In his engraving, Blake depicted the differences in what we have named Geographic Bodies, landscapes of symbols, meanings, perceptions, representations and emotions of the Discovery of America. These are Geographic Bodies of the Discovery of America that represent heterogeneous values from areas that have social imaginaries resulting from the foundational act of the colonization of America, the notion of superiority by some humans over others and the superiority of some forms of knowledge over others, which is the way that the West inhabits the

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earth. These relations defined a colonizing geography. Through identifying the inscriptions of the earth on humans and the inscriptions of humans on the earth, Geographic Bodies are only accessible in the experience of the "discovery" of America. This relation affects flesh and blood, invaded by the fundamental color of races, until these are converted into the drive and rhythm of their re-existence on earth.



William Blake. "The Ethnic Bridge". Engraving representing Europe held up by Africa and America.

Being-in-the-world is a constitutive determination of *Dasein*. For Heidegger (1997), the world is relative to *Dasein*, which is the world as a concrete reality. This is a global horizon with a presupposition of meanings – that objects and beings occupy *a place* because they adopt a meaning from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 'Europe held up by Africa and America', William Blake, taken from *The Narrative of a Five-Years' Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1772-1777), John Gabriel Stedman, London, John Hopkins University Press, 1796.

beginning. "Being-in is, consequently, the formal existential expression of the being of the Dasein, which has the essential constitution of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1997, p. 64).

Beings find other beings in their work and their faces: this is the constructed space, a product of history, the system of anchors and human locations that provide the earth with its artifices. These give the appearance of a face, of a body, and with that the presence of a landscape – a human footprint in the earth that discovers a set of values.

These bodies signal a geography and in turn a phenomenology of space. Because here space is constructed, it offers a meaning for the existence of three continents, three relations and with these three races. This is the space of conquest and colonization. This is an abstract space, experienced in the distance and in an abstract manner, and describes an effort to colonize these peoples from the beginning. "Seen from this perspective, the discourse of the Enlightenment does not just propose the superiority of some people over others, but also the superiority of some forms of knowledge over others. For this reason, it acted as a mechanism of epistemic expropriation and led to the construction of the cognitive hegemony of Colombians regarding the newly founded country of Nueva Granada" (Castro-Gómez, 2010, p. 186). Historicity and geographicity have determined the profound unity of the earth and the paths taken by humans in assuming their destiny.

The earth is the fundamental soil, the origin through which any knowledge and any existence can elevate itself and gain meaning. The earth is, for each of us, the possibility of ourselves.

To inhabit is the form of personal development for the mortals on earth. Alternatively, said in another way: inhabiting implies the generation of habits. These habits, both real and truly anthropogenic, are in part the result of genetic conditions, but also and above all, are the result of the techno-historic collaboration of a group of humans within their setting. People do not live in a world that is ready to be "used" or "ready to wear", instead they transform it and transform themselves through their use (Duque, 2008, pp. 143- 145).

Geographic Bodies of the "Discovery" of America is the violent installation of a relation or situation of place that inundated the most varied environments of experience of the world. Here, "the situation" faced by humans depends on the space where they "move". These

movements involve a group of relations and exchanges, directions and distances that, in some way, define the place of existence of each *Geographic Body*. To lose their "situation" is the equivalent of being evicted from a place, to lose relations with others, to be without direction, to be reduced to immobility.

#### 3. The Calibans continue

The power relations that establish the colonizing attitude of Europe can be found in the wild image that Europe has of Caliban. Shakespeare, in his play "The Tempest" (1611), includes in his characters some of the characteristics of the image of the wild savage that Europe has in relation to Africa and America. Ariel, native of the dominated island in the play, is submissive to Prospero (the invading master) because he believes that this will help him obtain his freedom, which was lost due to a curse placed by Prospero. Ariel, the son of the air, obeys everything that Prospero orders him to do but fear motivates him. Caliban is open to being submissive (like Ariel) to the first Prospero that appears, with the idea that this first Prospero will wage war on the other Prospero, whom he detests. Caliban is also the person responsible for manual labor and is painted by Prospero as someone who is deformed and abject, as well as servile. This is brought to light when he falls victim to the fear and intimidation that Prospero inspires in him.

Caliban, the incarnation of the monstrous savage, is also the symbol of the people that have been oppressed by the "civilizing race". Caliban maintains the force of a divine darkness that the wizard Prospero – who represents civilization – isn't capable of detecting. Caliban projects a dramatic tension to the future that is expressed in terms of oppression and liberation.

A process of acculturation accompanies the relation based on domination that Prospero establishes with Caliban. After learning the conceptual instruments from Prospero, Caliban reverts to questioning his condition as a dominated and enslaved subject:

Caliban. Act I, Scene II:

You taught me language; and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you For learning me your language!

(SHAKESPEARE, 1962, p. 305)

Caliban. Act II, Scene II:

Thou dost me yet but little hurt; thou wilt anon, I know it by thy trembling: now Prospero works upon thee. (352)

Our America has been for some time the scene of a confrontation between the view expressed by Prospero and the perspective of Caliban. To interpret the figure of Caliban takes us to terrain that is complex and dense, in which there is no possibility of taking a step back because the link with the colonialist West is inevitable. An America that stopped being our *Amerrique*, our Abya Yala, denying it the possibility of fulfilling its condition as a utopia, which is inherent.

The domination of Prospero is based on a vision of the world that privileges the human-European over nature through technical domination and the illusion of superiority. It favors what is rational over what is emotional, and prefers the individual over the community, given that this is the maximum expression of autonomy. It imposes the objective over the subjective, in which knowledge is an operation that is representative of reality. Science is elevated to a more privileged position than other knowledge because science is based on a mathematical logic that "guarantees" its reliability. Moreover and finally, it favors an economic way of life that is reduced to the growth of an individual's money-capital over other ways of living.

The three characters of Caliban, Prospero and Ariel, are a reflection of the power of domination and in a certain way provide a portrait of what happens in the colonization and domination processes, how dominant cultures behave towards the dominated culture. However, the Caliban's are always disposed to face what challenges us — "the Caliban's, we continue to be here". The body that contains this culture is that of the people, and it cannot be any other. Their wisdom is the "absorption" of the being in the being-there. Their time is that of the "big" history—which encompasses all forms of being—and not that of the "small" and anecdotal history, in which these individuals are noticeable for their desire to be someone (important). Their thought process—which is strategic—is negativity, because they have to deny the coding that comes from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Cfr. R. Kusch, Geocultura del Hombre Americano, ob. Cit., "La cultura como entidad", pp. 114-120. This topic is fundamental. See also. Fenomenología de la sabiduría popular, Ediciones Castañeda, 1978

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Cfr. América profunda, ob. Cit., pp. 158-188.

"patio of the objects" and the "pulchritude" of Western culture. Their universality is that of life and death, and the determined historical project.

"In reality, all culture is aeroculture, and its main reference is the soil"<sup>5</sup>, resulting in the feeling of having roots and of inhabiting the earth. The "event" can be read in its own provisionality and refers to being. Because this "big history", that of being and not the effort of being "someone", implies that culture, the interpretation of human activity, is not determined by an ontological horizon but just by merely being, in which chaos isn't something that people seek out or want to disappear, and there is no fear that not-being implies annihilation, simply because they are there" (Kusch, 1976, p. 45).

These are the cultures of original peoples that Rodolfo Kusch geo-thinks...

"...when we try, then, to define what is Latin American through an "ethos", we refer to the historical configuration that assumes the original experience of the people, which means the intentional spirit or 'us' as communality – plural and transcendental, and therefore ethical. It is the form of their own popular wisdom of the us as "we are", when the 'being' is interpreted as earth. What is American began to be defined from these roots, from being on the earth" (p. 120).

#### 4. Umbilically connected to the earth

The "Main Ritual" is the Nasa indigenous people of the Department of Cauca that Colombia uses to group four of their rituals. It is grouped in this way, not just because hundreds of people attend, but also because the rituals are focused on the well-being of the entire community. The Nasa people have four main rituals: the renewal of walking sticks, Ipx fxìçxha,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The expression "patio of the objects" is from N. Hartmann. The opposition "stench" and "pulchritude" is one of the fundamental areas of the thought of Kusch: "The opposition between pulchritude and stench is irremediable, in such a way that if you wished to rehabilitate the stench, you would have to revalidate far away things such as development, God or the saints", p. 13 de *América profunda*, ob. Cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "Behind all cultures there is always the soil..." "Culture supposes a soil that is compulsorily inhabited...", R. Kusch, Geocultura del hombre americano, ob. Cit.,

p. 74 and 115.

6 "From this recent point of view we will have our own history, which is the big history, the one from every day, which encloses the misery of being, no more, with a rush of sacrifice that we don't know where it came from" R. Kusch, Geocultura del hombre americano, ob. Cit., p. 45.

the putting out of the fire or Cerca, offerings to the dead or El Çxhapuç, and the waking up of the seeds or El Saakhelu. These rituals are carried out as part of the concern for recovering what has been lost and for revitalizing what exists.

El Saakhelu is a ritual that involves making an offering to Uma Kiwe (Mother earth), to the a te (the moon), to the sek (the sun) and the spirits that always accompany each Nasa from their birth onwards. The Nasa connect with the kiwe (earth) through the ritual of burying their umbilical cords in the soil, usually under a tree. El Saakhelu is also a ritual for fertility and the growth of seeds so that they can germinate in territories that have been freed from the mono-crop of sugarcane.

A tree chosen by the elders (*Thë' Wala*) is cut down. This is a young tree, and initially, the women start to chop it down, and then the men continue with the task. On this trunk, members of the community place the offerings to the spirits and dance around the tree for three days. They receive voluntary help from members of the community (known as a minga) to carry the trunk from where they cut it down to the site of the ritual. The majority of people that carry the trunk are women who are involved in the liberation of Mother Earth. "A young tree is chosen for the *Saakhelu* because the elders accompany young people. Our young people defend our community from the attacks of the ESMAD (Colombian riot police), they are the first to lead the defense of our territory", says an elder.

In the Saakhelu, the main purpose is to make an offering to all of the spiritual beings through the trunk of the young tree that has been cut down. By making the offering, accompanied by the work of Thë' Wala, this establishes harmony with the cosmic authorities and with the general spirits, the owners of everything that exists. The community is aware that by engaging the Saakhelu, there is a reciprocal relationship in which the spirits provide everything that is necessary for living, the Nasa people recognize this, are grateful for it and praise it and show their gratitude by returning a small part of the earth to the spirits. This gift guarantees that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Yat Wala, means big house, territory, a place inhabited by the Nasa. The big house or territory is nature, the cosmos, with corporal and non-corporal elements, a universe that needs equilibrium and harmony for its maintenance. This equilibrium is obtained with the help of *Thë' Wala*, or traditional healers, and with the practice of certain norms that they have to follow so they don't cause any harm to the *Yat Wala*.

the spirits are satisfied and do not get angry, they do not send strong rains, intense droughts or any other difficulty that generates risks for the growing of their crops – on the contrary, the spirits reward the people with growth.



Carrying the Saakhelu in Corinto, Department of Cauca, Colombia. 27th to the 30th of August, 2015. Photo: Gladys Giraldo Montoya

The etymology of the word *Shaakhelu* in Nasa Yuwe, the original language of the Nasa people, has the following meaning: **SAA** - spirit from above that comes to earth in the form of the condor and the hummingbird – skillful and pure. **KHE** - to rise from the deep within Mother Earth, meaning to come up from the sub-world; they come to watch us and talk to us. **LUL** - the spirits are children, they are us, small creatures that walk on top of Mother Earth – thought and healthy bodies. **USA** - is the female that sends us water, that gives us life.

In this way, the ritual acts as a means to symbolically care for determined spaces and periods of time, to make the cycles of nature sacred, encouraging fertility and establishing harmony through their offering, achieving interaction between humans and spiritual beings as well as with nature and its cycles. The ritual ensures that during this period there is stability in the food supply and stability for the group's economic and

spiritual aspects.

The first ritual act that contributes to the balance between the Nasa people and their spiritual beings is the cleaning or refreshing of the territory. Once this has been done, the earth has been made sacred and is ready for the Nasa to carry out other actions. Before this, the *Thë' Wala* also refreshes the men. Now that they have been cleaned of their "dirtiness", there will no longer be any obstacles for carrying out the *Saakhelu* rite.

The waking up of the seeds and making them sacred is an act that promotes, drives and encourages nutritional autonomy. In this way, it contributes to the cultural recovery and strengthening process, given that one of the group's objectives is to achieve food self-sufficiency with the products that are grown in each zone.

Two different but complementary forces, the moon and the earth, are seen as mothers, as uterine receptacles, the sun as a depositor of seeds, a carrier of energy. This is the union between the feminine and masculine, which gives birth to all life, and it is the same for humans, animals, plants and the Nasa people, the spirits. In this way, when humans unite a'te and Sek, it generates the maximum point of fertility during the ritual, and each participant receives, is exposed, to this fertility. In the Saakhelu, there are a whole range of symbolic relations, each one being minutely detailed to serve a specific purpose, but at the same time they all contribute to the same goal, which is to harmonize and balance both the territory as well as the people, to obtain in this way a good relationship with the Nehwe and the other spirits from the cosmos and the earth. As a result, this ritual requests abundance and fertility, which the spirits provide when they are happy and not angry.

The earth is like the fundamental soil, the foundation on which any knowledge and any existence can be elevated and have meaning. It is not a mobile mass that crosses the empty and infinite space of astronomy. It is the foundation, says Eric Dardel (2013), quoting E. Lévinas, in which a secret and silent pact joins us together definitively. The earth is for each of us the possibility of us-ourselves.

In this sense, these bodies-others, the Geographic-South bodies, the Being of the indigenous peoples from the landscapes of Abya Yala, these forms of being represent a questioning of the political and intellectual hegemonies of this time, questions that emerge from our cultural and territorial particularities (South), an examination of epistemic forms that

come from other culturally accumulated processes and are different to Eurocentrism – the forms of knowledge and of constructing knowledge that arise from other cosmogonies and other ethical understandings.

Freeing the saakhelu, Mother Earth, and weaving ourselves into her, these things continue to strengthen our collective work for freedom.

#### Everything is said.

I don't have anything to say about the time and the space that is on top of us. Everything is said. I want the rivers talk about their agony. I want to hear the snakes that pull along cities and towns, I want to hear the pigeons talk from their bloodstained nests. Me, the son of ancestral lands, I don't have anything to say. Everything is said. These suns that have set will also have something in their memory, these moons that cry with the rain will have something bitter in their memories, the trees, the fish, the last venerated rainbow will have some complaints. Me, the son of pain and hope, I have nothing to say. Everything is said. (Chicangaña, in Voces Originarias de Abya Yala, 2014, p. 109)

We know that in a rush to exploit life and the tireless focus on extracting wealth to accumulate limitless capital, structures and relations emerge from the society that we live in. These have been imposed on these lands and used against our people since the arrival of the conquistadors.

The indigenous people know, based on their deep memory, their oldest stories, their most diverse experiences, from the memories and precepts that are inscribed in their languages, uses and customs and above all based on the pain, mistreatment and incomprehension that has been their history since the arrival of the conquistador, the history of capital and those who accumulate it. This is a project of death that will end by destroying all of nature, including the lives of human beings.

#### From the void

Now nothing will be like it was before.

Just a void
in our bodies
like a desolate wind,
like angry waves in pain.

Like dormant volcanos
(maybe)
like rocks or like stains
in an unstoppable flow of bones (Chicangaña, 2010, p. 65)

In this perspective, we find ourselves with a view that recognizes that the world is organized based on the principle of complementarity, guaranteeing its unity based on differences and singularity. The vision of these statements questions the Eurocentric ways of understanding development and the relationship between human beings and nature. These provide another way of organizing life created by the American people.

#### The profound and harmonic relationship with nature

The care for Mother Earth, our home – the connection with the universe. Belong to everything and honor that. Respect for every living thing – the feeling of equality with all living beings. To always have present the message of the ancestors. Value and respect the memory and wisdom of the ancestors. Respect for the elderly and children – not to forget the importance of each life cycle. The community sense of life – not losing sight of the collective dimension.

In this vision, "crisis" is an inheritance from Development that questions the idea of what is sustainable, given that these are forms of living that do not radically and profoundly question capitalism and its twin sibling, Development: the injustice for all of the living beings that inhabit the earth, the opulence that is a product of accumulation and the misery that is a product of the exploitation and devastation required by capital to sustain and feed itself. Over four decades, the environmental, in all of its complexity and depth, has been abandoned to provide a shift to the concern for what is "green", which is the focus of Sustainable Development. Nature disappears with all of its enigmas and ways of being, to be replaced by categories such as "natural capital", "green capital", categories created and imposed by the anthropocentric world.

It is based on these fallacious concepts that the modern-centrist discourses have constructed the global environmental policy. *Good Living* (Buen Vivir in Spanish) raises the alarm and proposes that we do not trust the interests of science and technology – at the moment – in the construction of environmental discourse because these interests continue to be based on the idea of development.

### 5. Abya Yala: Good Living – Generous earth – Fertile earth – Flowering earth

The concept of good living cannot be possible if Mother Earth is not respected, loved and cared for. For this reason, Good Living cannot be another euphemism for Development but instead describes an enormous

alternate world from which Environmental Thought learns. Good Living brings together post-development theories based on our own thought, showing how the environmental crisis is not solvable through the tool of the "market", understood as the accumulation of assets and the monetization of life. Good Living proposes the need to safeguard nature for the ethical-aesthetic value that it has, which is not possible without an anti-capitalist project that tackles individualism, dehumanization and the private interest in profits at the cost of the commercialization of earth, nature and life.

This critical view proposes that it is necessary to identify alternatives that already exist in the cosmovision of our Amerindian people. From the beginning, these people have lived their lives based on the unity of the universe and the subsequent unity between humans and nature. This unit provides a foundation for equality among living beings, showing us a world that is not based on the human control of nature but the holistic nature of the diverse forms of life.

Also, Good Living includes systems of sociability and education based on the complex relation, *identity-difference*, which has allowed resisting communities to maintain themselves and continue their practice of Good Living.

In the perspective of Good Living, otherness is contrasted with the global. The fundamental basis of Good Living is place, territory, where you live and from where you build an identity as members of communities based on relational systems. In Good Living, the center of this approach to life is the recognition of multiple diversities, differences and singularities as the foundation of any action.

In this emergence of our own systems and thinking, the fissures of the globe become apparent. These fissures occur when the different orders organize the world based on its response to other events. For example, the "community" acts as a fundamental element for making decisions and developing the meanings that guide their lives, questioning the organization of a world focused on the individual that belongs to a "society", which is seen as a group of individuals ruled by universal laws such as freedom in the Kantian and bourgeois sense, implying a rupture with nature that prizes the global above all else.

However, other singular forms surge into this scenario, not with the pretension of becoming universal or belonging to the global world, but to

show that this singularity is also the expression of worlds that are not submissive to hegemonic logic. Human beings live these worlds and they give form to social relations and structures that show other forms and ways of relating.

The spirit of modernity continues to be the relationship between Prospero and Caliban; a world organized according to universal and absolute rationality, which came to replace "other" views that emerge from the sensitive and emotive. This organization is based on an "order" with logical-mathematical explanations of any event, situation or object of the world. At the same time, through "accumulated knowledge", this organization predicts, dominates and controls each of the elements of that "reality".

This rationality establishes the predominance of modern humans over nature and all other beings that inhabit nature. It is a rationality based on organization that converts the individual into the central actor of the domain, whose ways of knowing and representing the phenomena that occur in nature are based on the laws of physics and are instrumental and quantitative.

From this perspective, the concepts of subjectivity and objectivity rule the way in which the world is known. This manner of ordering reality leads to the ideas of progress and development, which guarantee "methodological control" through the use of the method, which in turn guarantees its truth.

In Abya Yala, other-visions of knowledge are present and are manifested in multiple ways. This is a holistic system of relating that makes the existence of the world possible, and in this world, we participate in spacetime that is self-constituted through the unity of being in and inhabiting the earth: the emergence of territories as alive, lived and inter-cultural places.

The hypothesis developed by Vattimo (2002) regarding the possibility of creating this utopia in Latin America is apt because this is one of the zones of the world where modernity did not happen. Modernity is considered as the predominance of instrumental reason, the tyranny of consensus and the world converted into machinery at the service of the cost-benefit ratio. Regarding the colonization of the lifeworld by positivism, these "Geographic-South Bodies" are the bodies that live the "being (in a place)-being (oneself)-in this way", which is how the Nasa indigenous people live in the north of Cauca: "being (in a place)-being (oneself)-in

this way" in the landscapes of Abya Yala.

The earth and its language is the *ethos*, the intimate nucleus of abyayaan cultures. It is the physiognomy of a phenomenon, its "face", and this can only be accessed in the framework of an epistemic-aesthetic-ethical-political union. It is primarily a sensibility towards diverse worlds. It is a feeling of profound affinity that unites people to these other forms of being (in a place)-being (oneself). Here, the earth has a "face" and each face is a sign. In this way, the face of the presence of a "spirit" can be recognized. This is the embrace of testimony, an attitude that is based on listening and dialogue more than schematic abstraction. Here, the geographic reality, the earth-based space, is a body that carries meaning with it, and not an object ruled by a system of laws known by a subject who seeks to dominate the earth.

#### Quechua is my heart

I have in my body

The song of the birds announcing the rain

The well of water in the farm

And the man that goes around caressing the fog.

Quechua is my heart

Because yesterday the night called me

Because today the gray of the heavens asks me

Why tomorrow I will keep singing

About the ashes.

Quechua is the wind that weaves the threads of the fabric

In the mysterious night of candles and mecheros (homemade lighters).

Quechua is the silence of the woman

While she thinks about the absence of her loved one

On the banks of the tulpa (a spiritual entity created by thought) ... on the banks of the earth.

On the bank of a path.

Quechua is the dew of the morning and the voice

Of our dead.

Ouechua is the heart

That beats between flutes and drums and the ecstatic shout of millenary time with the smell of roasted quinoa and corn, where we still say: our hands, our bodies, our voice, our music, our resistance.

Quechua is the Mother Earth

Who we belong to
Who shelters the placenta
And stops the world for us
In the collective work of permanent fights and permanent moons.
(Chikangaña, 2010, p. 97).

This poem demonstrates how the geo-poetry of inhabiting the South configures place. The *ethos* that is constructed and consolidated in the earth and in our ways of inhabiting it. The poetry of places in commemorative and rememorative maps and landscapes help elaborate worlds as a primal event of inhabiting by humans. It describes a corporal way of placing oneself in the world, holding on to it internally and expressing it externally, showing how it is intimately known and lived. It is a world of local knowledge that is expressed as poetic knowledge, a plethora of space-times, places, interconnections, exchanges, trips, memories, fears, nostalgias and possibilities. It shows worlds in a continuous poetic dialogue that displaces the incarnations of the geographies of difference that we undoubtedly are.

## 6. Conclusion: To walk the word, to climb and cross the barbed wire of Development, to embrace and be embraced by Mother Earth

Have we walked the word? What word is the basis of all other words, all of the languages, all of the worlds? Isn't it Mother Earth, as the being (oneself)-being (in a place) of all of the beings and ways of being? These are worlds that others have walked for many years, and they continue to walk the word. One of these worlds is configured in the human-nature split, the frenetic work of a world that is the current state of the Earth, the western-modern, Eurocentric Earth. This world has walked words, it has made agreements but hasn't fulfilled them. Its bodies, spirits and deities demand other actions.

Other worlds, such as the world of the Nasa, include actions that honor the Earth, such as the Mother Word. For this reason, they continue to be there to embrace the Mother Earth, because they are part of the earth. These people belong to her and owe her their existence, and before they are Colombians they are the original inhabitants of these territories, and that is their reason for being and existing. They are the ones who care for and protect the lakes, the paramours, the river forests, the biodiversity and the other resources that are necessary for the lives of the people in this

generation and in the future. These worldviews are necessary because governments have repeatedly reneged on the agreements signed with the indigenous, rural and Afro-descendent communities of America. They need suitable land to guarantee their existence and create solidarity-based markets that allow them to achieve nutritional sovereignty and the overcoming of the violence that their communities have to deal with. Life, history and people work to recuperate what is their own and what has been taken away from them.

#### **Bird Spirit**

These are the songs of the Earth Mother in the best tone,

They are whispers that come from faraway forests,

These wonky words that seek to be a drop in the human heart.

These are soft tones, as if we were to say "let's go in silence along the wet paths of life, the herb of hope greets us between the night and its shadows, our footprints hug the earth and the hail sings between the leaves of the tree."

We are a star shower that begins with the blue celestial sphere, announcing the new time,

Here we are weaving the circle of the yellow butterfly,

Sowing water in the places where there are deserts,

In the end we are the bird spirit in the wells of our dreams.

(Chicangaña, in Voces Originarias de Abya Yala. 2014, p. 63)

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Although as a vast subcontinent, Latin America reflects diverse perspectives of life, senses of identity, cultural and spiritual outlooks, its constituting countries share a specific history of resistance against the prevalent patterns of global development. However, Latin America presents newer accounts of development understood as genuine views on human well-being derived from a sense of its own specific identity. In an emerging renaissance emphasizing human flourishing as the ultimate goal, Latin America is shifting gears towards an ethical perspective on global development. Distinct here is an emphasis on philosophy, theology, literature, arts, music, and cinema as fertile terrains depicting how the subcontinent must draw its own unique picture of development. Today, it is undergoing a diverse cultural, philosophical and spiritual growth, and holds exciting potential to be aligned with, and contribute to, the contemporary debates around the ethics of global development.

This book discusses Latin American perspectives against the backdrop of the mainstream view of development, which portrays economic growth as development. It also looks at historical context, cultural diversity, cultural richness and the complex philosophy of life in the Latin American perspective to address the subcontinent's deep cultural heritage, the depiction of its identity, and its philosophy of life. Additionally, this book discusses how the causes of inequality and malaises such as social crime can be eliminated, and more importantly, how the prosperity and economic, social, and human development of the subcontinent (and the world in general) may be improved.

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