



Discussions and interventions

Seeking common ground: On possible dialogues between Marxisms and Political Ontology

Carlos Tornel^a

Introduction

This commentary seeks to flesh out a series of ongoing debates regarding Marxism, Latin American decolonial thought and the rise of political ontology. I deal with several issues that emerged in conversations with Arturo Escobar, Jason W. Moore, and the commentaries in this theme issue. I identify three main points of entry. The first one comes from engaging with Marx's writings in the second part of his life. As Marx moved away from a teleological understanding of history, he saw capitalism as a totality, which allowed him to look beyond the rise of the bourgeoisie toward the possibility of emancipation beyond capitalism. The second entry comes from analyzing the history of the social movements emerging in Latin America, 500 years after colonization began. I argue that the genealogy of emancipatory struggles can guide the emergence of a pluriverse of alternatives. The last point of entry comes from the critiques formulated against political ontology. These points of entry open new avenues for discussion to listen and learn with and from the subaltern and provides some examples of bringing political ontology into a dialogue with other forms of Latin American Indigenous resistance and struggles for re-existence.

The late Marx and the dialogue with post/decolonial thought and praxis

In the decolonial school of Latin America, the criticism of Marx's thought emerges from Marx's conception of history and his teleological or mechanistic argument about the stages of development necessary for an actual proletarian revolution to take place. Santiago Castro Gomez has perhaps articulated one of the most complete formulations

^a Department of Geography, Durham University, United Kingdom, carlos.a.tornel@durham.ac.uk



of this argument. Drawing from other Latin American thinkers in the 80s and 90s – such as José Arrico (1980) and Leopoldo Zea (1988) –, Castro-Gómez argues that Marx inherited this teleological argument from his reading of Hegel, who thought that because Latin Americans had not yet developed political institutions and philosophical thought they were ‘*outside*’ universal history.

For Marx, Latin America and other parts of the world (aside from Europe and the United States) had not developed sufficiently and thus, were closer to semi-feudal societies. His argument was that these revolutionary societies were closer to monarchists with reactionary creoles (Castro-Gomez 2008: 262), and thus, no bourgeoisie would be able to emerge and no proletarian revolution could eventually follow. This is why Engels celebrated the annexation of Texas to the United States (de Toledo 1939: 99–100) and why Marx disregarded Simon Bolívar as an aristocrat (in his 1857 article for the *New York Daily Tribune*). Marx reproduces a stagiest conception of history, looking at Britain as his point of departure (Castro-Gomez 2011). Thus, for Marx, colonialism was nothing more than a side effect or an unintended consequence of global capitalism, necessary in his view to enable the emergence of a bourgeoisie and then the possibility of seizing the means of production by the proletariat.

Postcolonial thinkers argue that Marx was preconditioned by his Eurocentrism and his conception of modernity. The postcolonial dialogue with Marx debates back to the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). In his text, Said argued that Marx had adopted prefigurative politics based on what he called an Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) or oriental despotism. This thesis, later developed by Spivak (1999), was based on the fact that Marx had implicitly reproduced two problems that originated in the Eurocentric and colonial context in which he was thinking: he had reproduced Smith and Ricardo’s theory of value, restricting his analysis to a national level, thus excluding an analysis of colonialism and imperialism in his critique of Political Economy. Secondly, he had adopted the Notions of AMP and oriental despotism, which implicitly signaled the inferiority of Asia (Pradella 2017b: 582–583).

Similarly, Castro-Gomez (2008: 263) argues that Marx saw racial discrimination as a phenomenon limited to precapitalist societies, whereas

colonialism would be simply the past of modernity and would disappear altogether with the global crisis that would give rise to communism.

In other words, colonialism is just an additive to modernity and not a constituent of it. For postcolonial thinkers, the main problem in Marxist thinking is in the universal categories he elaborated in the light of the European model, erasing historical difference (Chakrabarty 2008: 48) and reproducing geopolitics of knowledge with an economic reductionism (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). Colonialism created an imaginary for the social world of the subaltern that only served to legitimize imperial dominance on a political and economic level and fostered epistemological paradigms within these sciences. Moreover, the outcome of personal and collective identities of the colonizers and the colonized were created, making coloniality, not a collateral phenomenon but a central piece of modernity (Quijano & Wallerstein 1992).

The teleological argument that Marx developed in his critique of political economy in the *Communist Manifesto* was on point, but not necessarily in *Das Kapital*. As several authors have shown (Shanin 1983; Anderson 2010; Pradella 2017a, 2017b; Arboleda 2020), during Marx’s later years of his life, he seems to have moved away from this mechanistic argument in favor of a universal theory of value. Pradella (2017a, 2017b)

argues that Marx's attention to the question of class revolution without capitalism signals a substantial destabilization in his thinking. Similarly, Arboleda (2020) suggests that Marx's turn toward India, China, Russia, and to a lesser degree, Latin America in his work, reveals a shift in his thinking and places Marx's analysis of class and colonialism closer to each other.

In 1853, Marx revisited his original arguments in the Communist Manifesto. In his unpublished notebooks of that same year, Marx's study on India, he questioned the notion of oriental despotism developed by Francois Bernier.¹ Focusing on the existence of communal property mainly in South India enabled him to reason that it was colonialism, through taxes on land, salt, and opium what had impoverished peasant communities. This awareness marked a turning point in his understanding of history which he later articulated in *The Future results of British Rule in India*, where Marx supported an independence movement based on anti-colonial principles (Pradella 2017a: 581).

Later, in his support of the Taiping Revolution (1850–1864), Marx saw the importance of anti-colonial struggles and the 'living potential for international solidarities' (Pradella 2017a: 157). Here, Marx recognized the agency of the peoples in the South, arguing that the South did make a difference in his understanding of global development and global history (Anderson 2010). This explains why, in *Capital* (particularly in Chapters 26–33), Marx had already incorporated the notion of primitive accumulation, understanding both colonialism and imperialism as constitutive elements of the development of capitalism (Coulthard 2014).

As Kevin Anderson (2010) and Lucia Pradella (2017a) have brilliantly argued, Marx's writings in the later parts of his life show that he went on to challenge Adam Smith's and David Ricardo's unilinear model of development and started to see capitalism as a globalized project, a system "historically determined and surpassable mode of production that precisely for these reasons, can be conceived as a totality" (Pradella 2017b: 583). Arboleda (2020: 214) expands on this notion arguing that the fact that Marx explored different paths towards social development, reveals how he insisted on "site-specific multilinear view of history that ... is positioned to offer elements for an alternative path toward socialism".

Later, in the 1870s, Marx turned to Russia to drive a final nail to the teleological argument of history. In Marx's view, Russia was different from India or China in that no foreign colonial powers had taken hold or interfered. Instead, he saw the seeds in Russian populism of achieving socialism without capitalism (Anderson 2010). This line of thinking can be noticed in Marx's letter in 1881 to Vera Zasulich and in his letter to the editorial board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, as well as in the preface to the second Russian edition of the Manifesto of the Communist Party in 1882 prepared by Marx and Engels (Shanin 1983). Unfortunately, as Gustavo Esteva argues, these writings are often ignored or disregarded as minor contributions in front of Marx's towering figure in *the Communist Manifesto*. However, already in *The Civil War in France*, Marx (1871) adopted a position about the State and the tasks of the proletarian revolution that very few Marxists seem to know, where he contradicts their obsession with seizing power and using the State apparatuses for the revolution (Esteva 2015: 71).

It is no surprise that at this point in his life, "some Marxist were more Marxist's than Marx himself" (Esteva 2015), showing how Marx effectively broke away from this paradigm. As Arboleda (2020: 212) argues, for postcolonial thinkers, the Marxian notion of class

obfuscates the modalities of social domination that underpin modern society and are understood as transcending the economic focus of labor exploitation.

From this perspective, the subalterns and their interaction with other ecologies and technologies point towards a different kind of interdependence or a “third space where the disparate domains of the local and the planetary can become interwoven” (Arboleda 2020: 28).

Luisetti, Pickles and Kaiser (2015: 9) argue, regarding the relationship between decolonial and Italian Marxism, that

strategies do not always converge, but their latitude demonstrates the vitality of the current alternatives to the paradigm of the homo economicus.

Similarly, Arboleda (2020: 214) argues that Marxist thought in Latin America offers powerful tools to rethink the idea of a global working class beyond the Eurocentric bias conceptualizing class relations beyond those existing in Western Capitalism. Here, Latin American Marxism and the emergence of critiques and alternatives from activists and scholars in the region enable us to see some of the main limitations of the traditional critique of the Marxian political economy. As Pradella (2017: 575) argues, one of the main limitations is that the nation state is seen as the de-facto starting point for social, political and economic transformations (see the following section). This is problematic because the State is in essence a modern institution, one that emerged from the rise of European modernity and that has systematically failed to recognize difference (Segato 2007) and to have now become subordinated to the new central actors of globalization shattering the illusion of representing the general interest of a nation in order to promote a transnational ideal based on ideas like progress or development (Ansótegui 2021: 126).

The conceptual merging of the State and the society downplays the importance of colonialism and imperialism in capitalist development. Instead, international inequities, products of this process of development, are naturalized and “the West is portrayed as a model for the rest of the World” (Pradella 2017a: 576). This is the core of the stagiest development argument: eliminating the collective agency of subaltern peoples and justifying, directly or indirectly, European and Western domination over the rest of the world (Dinerstein 2015). In other words, Marx began to see, in non-Western forms of land ownership and social reproduction, some of the embryonic and unrealized forms of the universalized political community of the future (Arboleda 2020: 214; see also Esteva 2015; Jappe 2017).

Learning from the subaltern

During the 1990s, two trends of thought emerged in Latin America among Indigenous thinkers. The first one came from Indigenous movements themselves. In 1992, almost everywhere in the Americas, the 500th anniversary of the “discovery” of America was being commemorated. The Indigenous peoples of Abya Yala in Latin America raised their voices to clarify that what had happened half a millennia ago was not a discovery to be celebrated. Instead, it was as a moment of “inward” reflection on

the systematic attempt to exterminate Indigenous cultures and ways of life. Here, the moment of commemoration was seen as an opportunity to reaffirm their identities and remember the ways in which they as peoples and communities had resisted. At the beginning of a decade that proclaimed the “*end of history*”, positioning modernity and neoliberal capitalism as *the only alternative*, “modernity” implied an even sharper descent into barbarism where the “others”, or the victims of modernity and of the industrial civilizational project refused to be made invisible any longer (Dussel 2015).

This trend was affirmed two years later, on January 1st, 1994, when the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, rose in arms, denouncing their 500 years of oppression and being silenced by the structural forces of colonialism and capitalism. The Zapatista declaration is much in line with David Graeber’s and David Wengrow’s (2021) argument that the default position that emerged through the conquest of the Americas was that Indigenous and local people were incapable of producing their own philosophies, of formulating complex thoughts and of practicing their own ideas. Instead, their thought was considered romanticized, non-existent, essentialized (Graeber & Wengrow 2021: 55, 78; see also López Bárcenas 2019).

As Dussel (2015: 84) argues, European modernity became the first culture to transcend its ethnocentric character and to be established as a universal notion under a world-system:

The emergence of modern philosophy attributed itself the position of being the only deployment of human reason, while simultaneously presuming to be universal and planetary, a process that necessarily (de)values other philosophies, mainly from the south as ‘backward’, naive or particular.

For Dussel, it is the possibility of recognizing these other forms of thought, that have been traditionally oppressed, or actively produced as non-existent (Santos 2014), that enables members of other philosophic and cultural traditions to interrupt the world-system pretension of universality as they become aware of their philosophical history and the value situated within them (Dussel 2015: 24).

Dussel explains how postcolonial thought fits somewhat uncomfortably with the debate emerging in Latin America. The region’s occidentalization is much more evident than in Africa or Asia, and thus, the emergence of a transmodernity or a critique of occidentalism becomes essential for transformation. Therefore, occidentalism presents

the expression of a constitutive relationship between Western representations of cultural difference and worldwide Western dominance. Challenging occidentalism requires that it be unsettled as a mode of representation that produces polarized and hierarchical conceptions of the West and others. (Coronil 1977: 14–15, cited in Dussel 2015: 46)

Dussel calls this *the Philosophy of Liberation*, a process that groups together the ‘victims’ of modernity, of late transnational capitalism, through their possibility of engaging in philosophical dialogue. Instead of discounting the other, it is preoccupied with otherness. Transmodernity, for Dussel, is then the possibility of enabling a “universality in difference and difference in universality” (Dussel 2015: 48). This constitutes the second trend of decolonial thought, a project anchored not on whether subalterns can speak, but on whether we can learn to listen, and learn to come into dialogue with other forms of thought (Santos 2014; Leff 2017; Esteva 2019; Mendoza 2019).

As Luisetti, Pickles, and Kaiser (2015: 4) argue,

the current geopolitical shift – the bipolar political reconfiguration of power within capitalist societies, the progressive erosion of the centrality of the Euro-North Atlantic space, the autonomization of the Southern and Eastern blocs – is not just a systemic rearrangement of global capitalism (...) but can be seen as a mutation making room for alternative political and micropolitical practices and imaginaries, requiring different conceptual vocabularies and a shift in the understanding of autonomy.

While the emergence of these alternative political practices and imaginaries is by no means homogenous, it is nonetheless anchored in the need to reformulate and rethink the universalizing concepts of Eurocentric political theory.

On the one hand, these concepts emerge simultaneously from opposition to certain forms of exploitation and extraction associated with capitalism. But on the other hand, they are also grounded on particular histories, spatial relations and decolonial practices from each particular place. This latter point is essential in analyzing and articulating subaltern strategies toward emancipation. Particularities cannot be universalized or simply adopted or reproduced as some scholars have attempted to do, in their effort to “become Indigenous”, as they tend either to overlook this character or to dismiss it as a simple universalizing condition (see Chandler & Reed 2019 for a critique).

In other words, the multiple movements, philosophies and praxes emerging from Latin America are constituted within particular territories and under a particular set of characteristics. As Barkin and Sanchez (2020: 1422) argue:

their defining characteristics are the relationship to the land, the historical emphasis on the class nature of their struggle and the political identity of their mobilizations.

Raúl Zibechi (2012) echoes these defining characteristics by proposing that these groups, despite their different ontological perspectives, display recurring features as they are concerned with the re-appropriation of land and their struggles are seeking autonomy from and beyond the State. This not only includes a struggle to reinvent the processes of production (i.e. through solidarity), but they are radically at odds with heteropatriarchal form of capitalism, where communities embark on a series of pedagogical projects producing their own vernacular knowledge about the world and where women are at the center of the reconceptualization.

Mendoza, for example, argues that the coloniality of power and knowledge that emerged in Latin America in the nineties was shaped around the outside and the lived experience of the colonized, which required ‘tapping into’ Indigenous epistemological insights, a process that enabled non-Indigenous, Mestizo, Criollo, and European descendants to ‘think with and not against them’ (Mendoza 2019: 115–116). The prominent examples of this are perhaps Bolivia and Ecuador, where a bricolage of identities became encoded into the modern/liberal political code (i.e., constitutionalising the rights of nature and the notion of *Buen Vivir*). However, as Mendoza argues, the manner in which the discourses of plurinationality and interculturality are incorporated into the State, complicates the possibility of emancipation beyond ‘existing political structures’ (Mendoza 2019: 115–116).

In the next section, I delve into some of these contradictions, claiming that, as decolonial thinkers argue, there are no modern solutions for modern problems. Hence, Indigenous peoples’ ways of being need to be emphasized as an example that challenges

the status quo and the social and ecological unsustainability caused by modernity and development. As Santos (2014) argues, modernity created a *sociology of absences*, that is, ways of knowing, being and doing that were hidden but not eliminated through the imposition of a modern ontology. Thus, the task becomes how to listen to these other worlds and interact with them without recurring to essentialist, ahistorical or romantic positions (i.e., eliminating Western modernity in favor of the absent other), nor by discounting the histories of oppression and domination produced by the emergence of European modernity and capitalism.

Political ontology and class politics

As Mendoza (2019: 118) argues, it is not a matter of romanticizing, exoticising, or downplaying other epistemological arguments but understanding how the subaltern *Other* “continues to inhabit the Western theoretical imagination”. This leads to a paradoxical situation where those who invoke the *Other’s* discourse end up erasing the *Other* in the process (Chandler & Reed 2019). This presents a “new” form of coloniality, extraction, or alienation: a process that renders the knowledge useful without including those that put the knowledge forward.

The emergence of political ontology in Latin America comes from an insistence by some thinkers to take the *Other* and their ways of being and doing seriously (Blaser 2009, 2014). To do so, it draws on a diversity of frameworks. The first is the decolonial turn in Latin America and Quijano’s (2000) Colonial Matrix of Power (CMP). This perspective argues that coloniality creates three forms of structural oppression between power, knowledge, and the self. Moreover, these three aspects interact by devaluing non-European forms of knowledge and symbolic systems, considered practical or local and with limited theoretical value.

The forms of coloniality of power and being are experienced through the codification of racial differences between Europeans and non-Europeans, aimed at making the latter appear naturally inferior, and by the use of Western/modern institutional forms of power (like the nation state) in non-Western societies to organize and control labor, its resources, and its products (Quijano 2000). As Leff (2017) argues, the experiences in Latin America in resisting colonialism and the multiple manifestations of global capitalism during the last five centuries have developed into an interrelated framework of knowledge, theories, and practices, what he refers to as Latin American environmental thought. This form of environmental thought draws on

theories of dependence and internal colonialism, liberation eco-theology, decolonisation and liberation ethics, as well as agro-ecological theories and practices (...) which, from the perspective of the ecology of difference and the conflict of territorialities, puts its stamp on political ecology in Latin America. (Leff 2017: 243)

I do not seek to reproduce a detailed genealogy here (see Leff 2017; Escobar 2020). However, it does seem important to highlight a few considerations. The first is the tendency of political ontology and decolonial praxis to focus on contestations over the appropriation of nature and the ontological character these conflicts usually have. For political ontologists, the framework developed by political ecology – focusing on the redistribution and access to resources and ‘nature’ – becomes insufficient, as it tends

to reduce the definition of nature into a form of coloniality of knowledge. As Blaser (2009: 891) argues,

conflicts are becoming (...) visible as ontological conflicts precisely because they hinge upon contestations of the two great divides of the Euro-modern constitution and its associated notion of progress.

In Latin America, socio-ecological struggles emerge from a multiplicity of sources: by seeking emancipation from the coloniality of knowledge, reconstituting a connection with the forms of being, doing, and understanding of Indigenous people and the historical understandings of how these conflicts are experienced presently. Moreover, these struggles show that environmental conflicts and ecological distribution struggles are much more than mere demands for recognition, distribution of resources, or participatory demands in decision-making processes (the core tenets of the environmental justice movement).

For Escobar (2020: xxxi), political ontology enables the possibility to “unlearn the ontologies of separation that shape our bodies and worlds” and provides a set of tools to understand that “most worlds live under ontological occupation”. Thus, political ontology enables the possibility of challenging the categories and hierarchical classifications historically deployed by governments, corporations, and the academy to impose a dominant onto-epistemic structure. From this perspective, environmental conflicts in Latin America are not only movements for the defense of the territory, the demand for rights to be recognised, or the possibility of emancipation, but struggles to continue the existence of other worlding practices. Indeed, these are not only resistance movements but movements for re-existence (Porto-Gonçalves 2001).

The formulations of political ontology are useful in trying to “relate with radical difference without taming it” (Blaser 2009: 892), something in line with other decolonial practices such as the configuration of the pluriverse (Escobar 2018), a Universal Ayul (García Linera 1995), or a Ch’ixi modernity (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010). Thus, the diversity of worlding practices seeks to challenge the traditional colonial binaries while arguing that all existence is radically interdependent. Indeed, it challenges the assumption and insistence of the Modern worldview that only one-world, one real, and one possible world are possible (Escobar 2020: xx). Notions like *Ch’ixi modernity*, which combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010: 105), recognizes the existence a bricolage of identities, knowledges, and practices and, hence, proposes the construction of identity based on differences that complement and antagonize each other. In other words, it enables a way of reinterpreting the working class as a revolutionary subject, doing away with the teleological and Eurocentric readings where subaltern struggles are deemed inferior to those of the white proletariat (Tornel & Lunden 2020). This does not mean that the possibilities emerging for the subalterns should become romanticized, but that in their struggles towards emancipation and liberation, there are vibrant opportunities for radical change, especially in Latin America, where Indigenous, campesino, women, and other subaltern struggles are reproducing a notion of the *Ch’ixi* and enabling the construction, design, and emergence of a pluriverse (Escobar 2020).

Jason W. Moore argues in his commentary piece that political ontology risks producing a class denialist or an anti-dialectical reading of history. For Moore, any ahistorical understanding might end up reaffirming or erasing previous injustices or not questioning the ruling ideas that created and sustained the violent enterprise of cheap nature that gave birth to and reproduces capitalism. As Moore argues, by placing

Western cosmology as part of the many cosmologies that come into view, we risk erasing the history of domination, subjugation, violence, and extraction that has shaped this particular worldview from which we cannot disassociate capitalism.

Perhaps some of these limitations can be addressed by briefly analyzing the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia.² The leftist and Indigenous supported governments of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales, respectively, attempted to incorporate the *Other's* world views by recognizing other forms of well-being beyond development (such as *Buen Vivir*) and the rights of nature into their constitutions. This process effectively challenged the colonial ontology of separation by encoding a pluriversal ontology into their political codes (i.e., the constitution) and existing political structures (i.e., the State). The result arguably questioned neoliberal capitalism but without altering the dynamics of extraction, violence, and the colonial hierarchies that underpin global capitalism (Dinerstein 2015; Mendoza 2019; Riofrancos 2020).

On the one hand, these examples show the impossibility of producing a national, state centered alternative to our predicament as a civilizatory crisis (Esteva 2020). While on the other hand, they have sparked essential criticisms over the actually existing possibility of emancipation by questioning the role of coloniality in power, knowledge, ways of being, and calling for the recognition of the *Other* in political frameworks. Hence, the idea is no longer whether the subaltern can speak but of how can *we* listen to those created absences (Santos 2014) or enable a dialogue of philosophies (Dussel 2015), knowledges (Leff 2017) and *livings* in relation to them (Esteva 2019) beyond the existing structures of domination.

For example, Indigenous scholar Glen Sean Coulthard brings Marxian class analysis into the debate over recognition and Indigenous politics. Drawing on the work of Fanon (1967), he argues that the politics of recognition serve the interests of colonial powers. This happens by shifting the State's reliance on repressive violence to the ability to

entice Indigenous peoples to identify, either imperfectly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and nonreciprocal forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler State and society (Coulthard 2014: 25).

Recognition acts as a form of 'condescending hospitality' where the settler State can continue to gain access to land (resources) with apparent Indigenous support. Coulthard hinges on the Marxian notion of primitive accumulation, arguing that settler colonialism operates by deploying primitive accumulation in a cyclical form to provide continued access to Indigenous land for the colonial settlers. This interpretation is neither ahistorical nor romantic. Coulthard shows how Marx himself understood colonialism not as an afterthought of capital relations but as a direct source of its operation. Here the fight for Indigenous self-determination and liberation needs to go beyond the State and capitalism. It is a process that necessarily confronts the politics of recognition and the cycles of primitive accumulation. For this, Coulthard develops a framework based on the relations to land, what he calls *grounded normativity and place-based solidarity* (Coulthard 2014: 63).

This framework sees Indigenous struggles against capitalism as struggles oriented around the question of land, that is,

struggles not only for land, but also deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship, [which] ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our

surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way (Coulthard 2014: 60, emphasis in original).

Coulthard hinges on this definition by contrasting how Western narratives focus on time (i.e., in world-historical developmental terms) instead of Indigenous ontologies in which place and land are the departing points of reference. This distinction between space and time is key to producing resistance to the occupation of land by building a sense of place, that is,

a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others; and sometimes these relational practices and forms of knowledge guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our sense of place (Coulthard 2014: 61).

Coming back to the work of thinkers proposing a resurgence of political subjectivity (see Hardt & Negri 2009; Zibechi 2012; Barkin & Sanchez 2020; Arboleda 2020), the struggles of Indigenous people in Latin America for survival and re-existence enable a possible opening for political ontology. Political ontology provides the possibility to look beyond the traditional notions and the ‘toolkits’ developed from orthodox Marxism (i.e., strikes, sabotages and labor disputes), class politics and other forms of revolutionary subjectivities that became relevant to the constitution of capitalism in the last two centuries. From this perspective, the challenge is to enable a dialogue of knowledges, understood as the encounter of cultural beings constituted by their knowledge and their ways of being-in-the-world and a dialogue of livings (i.e. interculturality in practice) where identities do not collapse in one another, but where actual understandings are produced recognizing the limits of our possibility of understanding *the Other* (Leff 2017; Esteva 2019). These dialogues could provide a platform to support emancipatory struggles that move beyond the categories of capitalist societies (money, abstract labor, commodity fetishism and value) and open a possibility to imagine politics beyond the State and capitalism (Postone 2003; Holloway, 2010; Jappe 2017; Esteva 2020).

Following the Caribbean feminist poet Audre Lorde (1985), we cannot continue to rely on *the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house*. Political ontology, pluriversal politics and the genealogy of Latin-American environmentalism offer the possibility of learning from these historical struggles against capitalism while also placing the historical constitution of Latin America as part of the Modern world-system. As Enrique Leff (2017: 248) argues,

Political ontology is not reduced to a politics of cultural difference; it brings into play the existential ontologies of peoples linked to the environmental conditions of their territories, i.e., the cultural meanings associated with ecological potentials and geographical conditions for the reconstruction of their sustainable ways of life.

Endnotes

1. For a detailed account of Bernier’s thesis see: Tambiah (1992) What did Bernier actually say? Profiling the Mughal empire. *Indian Sociology* 32(2): 361–386.

2. We could add to these other experiences in Latin America and other parts of the global south as well. The current experience of México being a case in point (see Ansótegui 2021; Tornel 2020).

References

- Anderson K (2010) *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Ansótegui E (2021) Tren Maya o Barbarie: Comunidades Indígenas en el Contexto de la Globalización [Mayan Train or Barbarism: Indigenous Communities in the Context of Globalization?]. In Edjesgaard Jeppesen AM, Palomares Rodríguez EG & Wink G (eds.) *Pensamiento Social Dánes sobre América Latina*, 113–130. CLACSO, Buenos Aires.
- Arboleda M (2020) *Planetary Mine. Territories of Extraction under Late Capitalism*. Verso Books, London.
- Barkin D & Sánchez A (2020) The communitarian revolutionary subject: new forms of social transformation. *Third World Quarterly* 41(8): 1421–1441.
- Blaser M (2009) Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without ‘cultures’? *Cultural Studies* 23(5-6): 873–896.
- Blaser M (2014) Ontology and indigeneity: On the political ontology of heterogeneous assemblages. *Cultural Geographies* 21(1): 49–58.
- Castro-Gomez S (2008) (Post)coloniality for dummies: Latin American perspectives on modernity, coloniality, and the geopolitics of knowledge. In Moraña M, Dussel E & Jáuregui C (eds.) *Coloniality at large: Latin America and the postcolonial debate*, 259–286. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Cayley D (2021) *Ivan Illich and Intellectual Journey*. Penn State University Press, Pennsylvania.
- Chakrabarty D (2008) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Chandler D & Reed J (2019) *Becoming Indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene*. Rowman & Littlefield International, Maryland.
- Coulthard GS (2014) *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minnesota University Press, Minnesota.
- de Toledo DP (1939) México en la obra de Marx y Engels [Mexico in the works of Marx and Engels]. *El Trimestre Económico. Fondo de Cultura Económica (México)* 6(21-1): 84–140.
- Dinerstein AC (2015) *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire.
- Dussel E (2015) *Filosofías del Sur. Decolonización y transmodernidad [Philosophies of the South. Decolonisation and transmodernity]*. Akal/Inter Pares, México.
- Echeverría B (1989) Quince tesis sobre modernidad y capitalismo [Fifteen theses on modernity and capitalism]. *Cuadernos Políticos* 58: 41–62.
- Escobar A (2018) *Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence and the Making of Worlds*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Escobar A (2020) *Pluriversal Politics. The Real and the Possible: Durham and London*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Esteva G (2015) Time to enclose the enclosers: A dialogue between Ivan Illich and Marx. *The International Journal of Illich Studies* 4(1): 70–96.
- Esteva G (2019) El camino hacia el diálogo de viveres [The road towards a dialogue of livings]. In Stefano Sartorello (eds.) *Diálogo y conflicto interepistémico en la construcción de una casa común*, 133–168. Universidad Iberoamericana e INIDE, Ciudad de México.
- Esteva G (2020) Protegiendo la autonomía de la democracia [Protecting the autonomy of democracy]. *Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana* 25(91): 253–265.
- García Linera Á (1995) *Forma valor y forma comunidad: aproximación teórica-abstracta a los fundamentos civilizatorios que preceden el ayllu universal* [Value form and community form: Theoretical-abstract approaches to the civilizational foundations that precede the universal ayllu]. Muela del Diablo, Buenos Aires.
- Graeber D & Wengrow D (2021) *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York.
- Hardt M & Negri T (2009) *Commonwealth*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.
- Holloway J (2010) *Crack Capitalism*. Pluto Press, London.
- Jappe A (2017) *The Writing on the Wall. On the Decomposition of Capitalism and its Critics*. Zero Books, New York.
- Leff E (2017) Las relaciones de poder del conocimiento en el campo de la ecología política. *Ambiente & Sociedade* 20(3): 229–262.

- Lopez Bárcenas F (2019) La descolonización del pensamiento en clave indígena [Decolonization of thinking from an indigenous perspective]. *El Cotidiano* 213: 123–133.
- Luisetti F, Pickles J & Kaiser W (2017) Introduction. Autonomy: Political Theory/Political Anthropology. In Luisetti F, Pickles J & Kaiser W (eds.) *The Anomie of the Earth: Philosophy, Politics, and Autonomy in Europe and the Americas*, 1–21. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Mendoza B (2019) Can the subaltern save us? *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society* 1(1):109–122.
- Mignolo W & Walsh C (2018) *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Porto-Gonçalves CW (2001) *Geo-grafías: movimientos sociales, nuevas territorialidades y sustentabilidad* [Geographies: social movements, new territorialities and sustainability]. Siglo XXI Editores, México.
- Postone M (2003) *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Pradella L (2017a) Postcolonial theory and the making of the world working class. *Critical Sociology* 43(4-5): 573–586.
- Pradella L (2017b) Marx and the Global South: Connecting history and value theory. *Sociology* 51(1): 146–161.
- Quijano A (2000) [2008] Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America. In Morón M, Dussel E & Jauregui CA (eds.) *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, 181–225. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Quijano A & Wallerstein I (1992) La americanidad como concepto, o América en el moderno sistema mundial. *UNESCO. Revista Internacional de Ciencia Sociales* 134: 583–591.
- Riofrancos T (2020) *Resource Radicals: From Petro-Nationalism to Post-Extractivism in Ecuador*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Rivera Cusicanqui S (2010) *Un mundo Chi'xi es posible. Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*. [A Chi'xi world is possible. Essays from a present in crisis] Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid.
- Santos B de S (2014) *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Routledge, New York.
- Segato R (2007) *La nación y sus otros* [The nation and its others] Prometeo, Buenos Aires.
- Shanin T (1983; ed.) *Late Marx and the Russian Road. Marx and the Peripheries of Capitalism*. Verso Books, London.
- Tornel C (2021) Petro-populism and infrastructural energy landscapes: The case of Mexico's Dos Bocas Refinery. *Nordia Geographical Publications* 49(5): 6–31.
- Tornel C & Lunden A (2020) Do not go gentle into that good night: Contested narratives and political subjectivities in the Anthropocene. In Harper ET & Specht D (eds.) *Imagining Apocalyptic Politics in the Anthropocene*, 34–57. Routledge, New York.
- Zibechi R (2012) *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*. AK Press, Oakland.