

10 Disputes over capitalism and varieties of development

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In recent decades, Latin America has been noted for its diverse debates on capitalism and development, and for the various political strategies presented as alternatives. While some persisted in defending capitalism others questioned and opposed it, even presenting themselves as socialists. Above all the controversy was superimposed a discussion about *buen vivir*, whose origins can be located on a horizon well beyond any type of development.

This chapter discusses some of the highlights in these experiences that took place in the context of a progressive cycle of regime change in South America—the so-called ‘progressivism’. Some contradictions between their rhetoric and the political practice of these the governments suggest that what finally prevailed was reformism. Departing from the idea of varieties of capitalisms the concept of varieties of development is introduced, and the chapter explains why they could not break with background problems such as the faith in progress, the allocation of values or the separation of society from Nature. Instead, the claims of *buen vivir* in its original sense, proposed alternatives that go beyond development in all of its diverse forms.

Between acceptance and criticism

As of the end of the twentieth century, multiple positions on capitalism ranging from defence to rejection were deployed in South America. Recognising that the concept was understood in many different ways, and setting aside evaluations of each of these interpretations, this diversification is undeniable.

Governments that can be classified as conservative or politically located on the right, and with the support of various actors such as politicians, entrepreneurs and academics, rallied in support of capitalism as necessary for development and to achieve citizen welfare. Examples of these positions are the administrations of J.M. Santos and I. Duque in Colombia and those of Sebastián Piñera in Chile or Mauricio Macri in Argentina.

In other cases, capitalism was questioned from the stance of electoral triumphs of groupings that described themselves as leftist—the new left or ‘progressives’ (see, for example, Philip and Panizza, 2011). This shift resulted from citizen resistance to neoliberal-inspired capitalisms in the 1980s and 1990s.

The importance of this cannot be minimised. Let us remember that, in the 1990s, the idea that ‘there is no alternative’ seemed to be firmly consolidated; history was supposedly at an end, and globalisation spread to all of the planet. Therefore, these political changes allowed us to break with that unanimity, and everything could be discussed.

Rhetoric, such as speeches, plans or program announcements, which focus in particular on the capital–labour relation, or positions taken on the environment, should be considered first. Two trends became apparent in the discourse of progressivism, between two extremes, ranging from criticism with a reluctant acceptance of capitalism to repeated rejection.

As for reluctant acceptance, while capitalism was questioned it was understood that conditions for breaking away from it were not available, and instead critics bet on reforming it. Examples of this position include the so-called proto-socialism of Uruguay’s first *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front) government headed by Tabaré Vázquez, *novo desenvolvimento* (neodevelopmentalism) currents inside the government conducted by the Workers’ Party (PT) government led by ‘Lula’ da Silva in Brazil, and the brief presidency of Fernando Lugo in Paraguay. A more incisive rhetoric took place in Argentina in the form of the so-called national and popular developmentalism (also known as ‘nac and pop’ strategies) advanced by the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

At the other extreme in the critique of capitalism, the position of outright rejection has to do with administrations that repeatedly cited Marx or Lenin, or explicitly invoked socialism. This includes the case of the Citizen’s Revolution in Ecuador under the presidency of Rafael Correa, supported by the Alianza PAIS movement, as well as the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS—Movement Towards Socialism) administration led by Evo Morales in Bolivia, and the ‘21st Century Socialism’ regime led by Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela.

Towards the end of the first decade in the new millennium, South American progressivisms dominated the political landscape; and capitalism was questioned by governments, the academic world, and on the streets, while many others on other continents looked at these experiences with admiration. At issue in this climate of harsh questioning was what was described as neoliberal capitalism, attacking issues such as market reductionism, the privatisation of social policies, and the subordination of the state. These critics conceived of development as, above all, a political issue that had to be arbitrated by the state, with a concern to bring about a more inclusive form of development based on poverty reduction. The concern was to seek the participation of previously marginalised groups such as peasants and indigenous people, returning to the invocations of the people or the nation, and political diversification which created space for ideas such as *buen vivir*.

Rhetoric and practice: politics, economics and justice

The next step in analysis requires examining whether the rhetoric that challenged capitalism resulted in actions that went in the same direction. But we need to make clear that progressive governments and their support bases implemented

heterodox strategies in various sectors and policy innovations that on the whole cannot be classified as conservative or neoliberal. However, it is also necessary to address the question of whether the declared aim and purposes and announcements actually corresponded to concrete alternative actions in regard to capitalism.

To this end, some key elements can be considered without seeking a definitive review but as a contribution to a necessary reflection. These include the permanence of extractivist modes of appropriation such as conventional oil and fracking, mega-mining, or export monocultures such as soybeans. The first point here is that in general terms progressives conceived of these activities as an indispensable source of capital and partly as a generator of employment opportunities, and thus none of them broke with such activities. However, because extractivisms depend on international markets for both physical trade and the flow of capital, they are necessarily embedded in capitalism. Progressives sought to resolve this issue by organising it in other ways, generally with the participation of the state (e.g. through state-owned enterprises), increased capture of economic surpluses in some sectors (especially oil), and to legitimise them as necessary to finance anti-poverty measures (Gudynas, 2020). But its negative social, territorial and environmental impacts were maintained.

Some social movements, especially those involving trade unions and academics, postulated that it was possible to break with capitalism but maintain extractivisms through a change in ownership of the resources or the agents who extracted them. Thus, for example, if mining companies were nationalised it would be a non-capitalist extractivism. However, they did not realise that even state extractivism for a number of reasons impose and implicates a return to capitalism, especially because of its insertion into global markets; nor did they explain that this did not solve its negative socioenvironmental local impacts.

In these and other ways, extractivist practices faces several contradictions with the discourses of progressivisms. As a way out of this, in several cases there was a shift in the debates, abandoning reference to extractivisms as part and parcel of capitalism, to move on to defending them as indispensable for development. For example, Venezuela's then-president, Hugo Chávez, in 2006, stated that oil would serve 'justice, for equality, for the development of our people' (Chávez, 2007).

The progressives did not give up on their own industrialisation, as claimed by the Latin American Left of the twentieth century. Rather, they assumed that industrialisation could serve as a counterweight to extractivisms, or that the extracted natural resources should feed national industries. Governments such as Argentina and Brazil implemented industrial promotion programs, and in Bolivia it was converted into a constitutional mandate. However, these measures had no concrete effects on boosting industrial sectors or stopping deindustrialisation; the most notorious case in this regard was Brazil, as discussed in Azevedo et al. (2013).

Progressives also engaged in an intense rhetoric regarding labour, but with very different practical applications. Some of them, such as those applied in

Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, were successful in strengthening various workers' rights, but others (as could be observed in Bolivia and Ecuador), by supporting allied trade union organisations and punishing opponents ended up with discretionary actions; or, as happened in Venezuela, dismantling some unions (see, for example, Ermida Uriarte, 2007). In parallel, while many trade union organisations could question capitalism, at the same time they defended capitalist development strategies such as extractivisms. Some even participated in them through their pension funds, resulting in what was described as 'unionist conciliation capitalism' in Brazil (Moraes, 2011).

In progressive countries there was an impactful reduction in poverty,¹ which was presented as a success of progressives in reversing one of the contradictions and negative impacts of capitalism. The management of the Lula da Silva administration on more than one occasion was presented as a global example of successful reforms in promoting social welfare and the expansion of the middle class. This is understandable since during these governments an estimated 35 million people ceased to be poor and instruments such as conditional cash transfer programs, which, in the form of *Bolsa Familia*, came to support 13 million people (see Valencia Lomelí, 2008).

Today we have more detailed reviews of this process, including those of Lena Lavinas (e.g. Lavinas, 2017). Their analyses show that while the improvements made were documented, inequalities such as access to safe water or sanitation were not resolved; human rights violations persisted or worsened in cities and in the countryside, and urban violence did not stop. According to Lavinas (2017), the neodevelopmental 'covenant for growth with social inclusion' in the markets became a 'covenant for growth with mass consumption'. These social policies were captured by financialisation in sectors such as health, housing and education, and an expansion of the banking sector. For instance, similar situations occurred in Ecuador and Uruguay. Social justice was monetised and consumption in turn was mediated by market inclusion, reinforcing the commodification of social life, a basic feature of capitalism.

Regarding economic policies, Venezuela explored all sorts of measures in line with its rhetoric of rejection of capitalism and the construction of socialism, including the elaboration of so-called 'socialist development plans' (see also Alvarez, 2009; Dieterich, 2005; Serrano Mancilla, 2014). But it failed to reverse basic conditions such as dependence on oil revenues or management and corruption problems, which in addition to international harassment, became decisive factors for the crisis in the country (Alvarez, 2013).

A different situation is found in Bolivia, where an economic form of 'socialism' was presented as an alternative to capitalism in which the state 'is the engine of the economy, the planner, the investor, the banker', as described by its well-known Minister of the Economy, Luis Arce.² But at the same time orthodox measures, including extractivisms subsidies, foreign investment facilities, bank protection, were implemented (see also Arze Vargas and Gómez, 2013; Wanderley, 2013). Similar situations were repeated in Ecuador, although it is also striking that there was no attempt to abandon the dollar and recover the

national currency as would be expected from the socialism invoked by Rafael Correa (on this see also Cuvi, 2014, and Acosta and Cajas Guijarro, 2018).

These examples show that while there were some attempts towards socialism, in many cases what ended up prevailing were reforms. Economic management sought to ensure conditions such as monetary stability, inflation control, liberalised exchange rates, protection of foreign investment, state subsidies to sectors such as extractivisms, various facilities for banks, and gradual external indebtedness (Carneiro, 2006; Kulfas, 2016; Kerner, 2017; Wainer, 2018).

As for international policies, progressives advocated greater integration within Latin America by prioritising political agreements and rejecting Free Trade Agreements schemes. This explains the attempts to strengthen agreements such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) or to seek closer regional cooperation as encouraged by Venezuela by means of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). The intention was invaluable, and also served to halt the US trade liberalisation project in the region, and made very clear differences with the positions of countries such as Mexico, Colombia, or Peru. However, since all countries competed with each other to export raw materials, they failed to establish productive or economic coordinations, thus adding another dislocation between discourses and real actions. The rhetoric focuses on latinamericanisms, sometimes including invocations to anti-imperialism. But at the same time the countries were very dependent on globalisation, and thus lapsed and fell back into capitalism.

Another flank of tensions involved the performance of the state. During the economic growth phase, the state expanded and strengthened in several countries, and this was seen as an alternative welcome to conventional capitalism. But as the economic bonanza began to lag behind (with the end of the primary commodities boom), complaints about constraints on efficiency grew, clientelistic practices persisted, and, as in the case of Argentina and Brazil, several cases of corruption erupted.

Progressives achieved state power and formed governments by the means of democratic elections, a very valuable attribute. Moreover, even the harshest critics of capitalism insisted on democracy and the defence of human rights. Over the years, however, these qualities deteriorated in several countries. An analysis of this dynamic is beyond the scope of this chapter, as is the economic collapse in Venezuela under conditions of external harassment and what the government (and much of the political Left) sees as the intervention of US imperialism. But it should be noted that in all cases there was a deterioration in the enforcement of rights and the quality of democracy.

These contradictions can be illustrated by the case of Bolivia. Beyond invocations of plurinationality and popular participation, the safeguarding of human rights and democratic quality were affected. In considering the situation in regard to extractivism a recent review found that 20 essential rights listed in the country's constitution, covering the quality of life and the environment, and citizen participation in territorial control and the management of natural

resources, found that all of them without exception were violated by extractivist activities (Campanini et al., 2020).

Violations of rights and violence are increasingly tolerated on the continent, and the democratic delegation and hyper-presidentialism dependent on a leader with messianic qualities were accentuated. This explains that as in the case of Ecuador, local analysts understand that a conservative restoration was underway (Cuvi, 2014). Tensions and contradictions were also evident in other strategies in sectors such as agriculture, health and security, and in all cases there was a political dimension. These dimensions and this situation are discussed and illustrated in several studies cited above, but also in studies such as Webber (2011), Singer (2012), Ospina Peralta (2013), Gervasoni and Peruzzotti (2015), Kulfas (2016), Singer and Loureiro (2016), Kerner (2017), Pucciarelli and Castellani (2017), and Munck (2018).

Contradictions between discourses and actions also occur in conservative administrations but there they are not elaborated in them as criticisms of capitalism. It is therefore essential to analyse this problematic in the case of progressivism.

While this review is schematic, and therefore of necessity incomplete, the diversity of speeches and strategies, and even heterogeneity within the same progressive administration where radical could coexist with orthodox and conservative measures, are immediately apparent. In turn, there are multiple disjunctions between rhetoric and practice. The emerging pattern is that progressives questioned capitalism but in their concrete actions, and partly in their later discourses, they came to accept or come to terms with it and so the emphasis shifted to reforming capitalism.

This was taken for granted by some on the Left, but others were forced to reluctantly accept it because no other option was available or because the attempts to move beyond capitalism did not succeed. Even in countries such as Venezuela or Bolivia, experimentation in the direction of transformative change or postcapitalism were repeated, with steps taken forward but followed by setbacks. It was a back and forth that is partly due to the impossibility in modifying basic internal as external political structures and relationships. Adherence to strategies such as extractivism was minimised, which in turn was conditioned many other public policies. The shift towards reformism in some cases was presented as a long-term response but in others as a temporary measure until there were other conditions for a non-capitalist turn.

The questioning of capitalism dealt with external restrictions and internal conditioning. Among the former were the type of trade and financial integration of the region, the dependence on capital and external technologies, and even the impositions or influences of other nations (such as those of the US on Venezuela or loans granted by China to several countries). But there were also multiple internal conditions in the relationships with social sectors with different agendas, political parties, and the ongoing reorganisation of groups of power like entrepreneurs, latifundistas, and the armed forces. In different ways, progressives insisted on the redistribution of wealth as consistent with the tradition of the Latin American Left, but in conceiving of development as an essentially economic

issue they were forced into promoting economic growth, and thus returned to capitalism. Likewise, as Wainer (2018) warned in the case of Argentina, it is not enough in dependent economies to distribute part of the surplus, as this does not resolve the external constraints or supplant the need for substantive transformation in the productive and political structure of each country.

The possibilities of these changes were in turn narrowed because progressives came to power based on alliances of very different groups, and their willingness to break with capitalism is also diverse. There were sectors that demanded more substantive change but many others were content with a conventional capitalism that would improve their living conditions—and they were never willing to break with structures like private property.

Varieties of capitalism

The diversity of positions and practices in the face of capitalism makes it very useful to rescue the notion of the **varieties of capitalism** advanced by Hall and Soskice (2001). This notion provides tools to address this heterogeneity while allowing for economic considerations and other dimensions such as the role of institutions and corporations. That original study was followed by other contributions, including analysis focused on Latin America, such as Boschi (2011a), Bizberg (2014) and Fernández and Ebenau (2018), that enriched it.

From this perspective it could be proposed that much of the Latin American debate was actually grappling with different types of capitalism, including some varieties that progressives presented as socialists. This was admitted on more than one occasion. For example, then-President Rafael Correa said that ‘we are basically doing things better with the same pattern of accumulation, rather than changing it, because it is not our desire to harm the rich, but it is our intention to have a fairer and more equitable society’.³ It shows that no alternatives to capitalism were sought or achieved, but reforms that could reduce some of its negative effects without putting it at risk were explored. In other words, they were confusing the idea of a more benevolent capitalism as if that were enough for a socialist alternative. Thus, these positions ended in agreeing with policies that promote economic growth and foreign investment (as recognised, for example, by Boschi, 2011b; see also Gaitán and Boschi, 2015), although these policies were implemented differently. There were also clashes over the surplus between those who wanted to secure its benefits, especially economic ones, and those who sought to avoid economic, social and environmental damage.

From the reversal of economic expansion, progressive capitalisms had faced growing questions from much more conservative varieties of capitalism, including the return of neoliberalism. For example, in Brazil, *Lulaists* and proponents of neodevelopmentalism clashed with conservative sectors that no longer seemed willing to support the prior political pact regarding the sharing of power and the surplus (see, for example, Boito Jr., 2018), and so the far-Right extreme of Jair Bolsonaro has come to pass. Similar processes, although in different times and each with their particularity, were also lived in Argentina and Uruguay with the exit of

the progressivists governments through elections; in Ecuador by a break within Alianza PAIS, and in Bolivia with the fall of the MAS government.

Notwithstanding the pendulum swing and turn to the right, it can be postulated that progressivism in its diverse forms is superior to governments and policy regimes of conservative or neoliberal inspiration, and this is important as can be witnessed in the case of Argentina's return to progressivism in 2019 after four years of increasingly neoliberal policies with Mauricio Macri. But there was also an abuse of the positive features under progressivisms when they were depicted as virtually a socialist revolution. The issue is that those administrations in most cases will bet on the Left when compared with political opponents like Ivan Duque in Colombia or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil; the centre as a reference is shifting to the right.

But this fact should not prevent us from understanding that the progressive regimes, including the newly installed regime in Argentina, were and are still engaged in arrangements design to preserve some kind of capitalism, and that in this circumstance words such as socialism, oligarchy, autonomy and sovereignty, have lost the consequences of their original meanings to remain no more than rhetorical slogans. In this context the common sense meaning attached to the idea of alternatives has become increasingly confusing.

Varieties of development

The concept varieties of capitalism still has some limitations as an analytical framework, two of which can be linked to the analysis advanced in this chapter. On the one hand, it provides a perspective on capitalism and not on any other options presented as non-capitalist; and on the other, it has difficulty in considering cases where the controversies over capitalism are supplanted by development disputes. To overcome these problems, and associating it with various contributions of Critical Development Studies, it is possible to advance the concept of **varieties of development** (Gudynas, 2016).

These varieties can be looked at analytically by using criteria derived from different theoretical perspectives, such as classical political economy (capitalism, socialism), or by focusing on particular content or purposes (e.g. human, local, endogenous, sustainable development, etc.), or political philosophy (liberal, conservative, socialist, etc.), and so on.

Applying this perspective view to Latin America there arises at least four situations. First, we see varieties that defend conventional capitalism. Then we see those progressives that sought or seek reforms to achieve a more benevolent capitalism, that sought to reject capitalism with some successes and many failures, and then finally we have the case of state socialism in Cuba. Following this analysis, there are overlaps between these groups, and in turn they are heterogeneous within them. Thus, any classification of varieties of capitalism is limited and can be supplanted by another based on different criteria.

But the concept 'varieties of development' has another analytical utility: it allows us to identify components found in all cases. For instance, it is necessary

to question why political actors such as J.M. Santos in Colombia and José ‘Pepe’ Mujica in Uruguay, who are at opposite extremes in their political ideology, around the same time defended mega-mining in their countries. Similarly, it is shocking how all these regimes, and so many economists and even social movements, time and again, argue the need for more economic growth and an increase in exports, or celebrate the rise in consumerism. The differences here are relevant but so are coincidences, as many of the possibilities and obstacles to thinking about alternatives are played out there. It is astonishing that across and beyond so many different paths almost identical ideas are repeated as to how to understand development.

The constants and similarities between all varieties correspond to concepts and sensibilities that are found in the basement of development thought and practice (defined as the ‘zero’ level in the Critical Development Studies approach referenced in Gudynas, 2018). These foundations of development thought and practice are not entirely rational or objective, but are embedded in affectivity; they have a long history and are thus deeply rooted in different national cultures. The particularity of the Latin American case, and especially in regard to the emergence of progressivism, is that all this was evident in a limited period of time in which despite the variety of experiences some ideas were repeated over and over, and different problems resembled one another.

This basic way of thinking and feeling includes, among other things, conceiving of development as linear progress from situations that are considered inferior to others viewed as superior or advanced. Progress is achieved by the engine of economic growth, an indispensable factor of progressive social change. Society is conceived of as separate from nature, and therefore the intensive appropriation of natural resources is not only accepted but required. Development is understood as essentially linear, universal but in the image and likeness of Western evolution.

Valuations are anthropocentric; only humans are subjects and the rest are objects, and it is also patriarchal. It promotes utilitarian positions that explains the dominance of economic valuation and the proliferation of reductionisms such as human or natural capital, and accepts the idea that issues of justice can be resolved in the market.

With this framework and worldview images are constructed that oppose modernisation to primitivism, advancement to backwardness, civilised to savage, and so on. Progress is achieved through Cartesian-based science and technology with the promise of a total management and control over society and Nature.

Development as it is understood here does not operate as a program obeyed by all actors at the same time; in fact, between groups and sectors there are coincidences such as clashes, certainties and doubts. Development is neither homogeneous nor deterministic but it is a shared belief, and within this realm it is discussed, sometimes fiercely, as to how to organise and bring it about. The previous sections describe these disputes between different ways of organising and instrumentalising development from conservative extremes as in Colombia to invocations of socialist revolution in Venezuela.

Disputes about varieties of development

A focus on varieties of development makes it possible to point out the existence of two types of disputes in the first step. Type I refers to controversies related to varieties in the same tradition, such as capitalism. Type II are discussions between varieties located in different fields, such as socialism versus capitalism (this typology is based on Gudynas, 2016). The Latin American debates of type I in this scheme correspond to discussions about varieties of capitalist development, such as those that engage conservative and reformist progressives. When these capitalisms are opposed to different versions of socialism we classify the debate as Type II. That is, the discussions here take place between perspectives rather than within them. An example would be an exchange or opposition of ideas between proponents of Colombian capitalism and Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution aka twenty-first-century socialism.

Typologies should not be interpreted rigidly as grouping may follow different perspectives, and also because there are always overlaps between different postures even in type II disputes. But this makes clear why calls for reforming or even abandoning capitalism actually reinforced development ideas. What was presented was an alternative but only in the sense of proposing another instrumentalisation of development without altering its foundations.

In the shared field of development (represented by the largest dotted ellipse in Figure 10.1) can be found generally accepted or thinkable rules and arguments that condition all varieties. But beyond those limits there is nothing; there would be no disputes, as they would be unacceptable issues or procedures, and that there might be a world beyond development is even unthinkable. Different discussions and debates about 'development' take place within operative although undefined limits that relate to the search for 'best practice' ideas or different ideas about how to emerge from 'underdevelopment'. But this also raises a consensus regarding the senselessness, for example, of a world without economic growth. Similarly, a discussion about the role of the state in extractivisms is tolerated, but a world without extractivisms is almost unthinkable.

This situation is repeated in Latin American debates, and so it is not surprising that, for example, alternatives to current development practice or processes in Brazil were presented as a 'new' development, or that Bolivia's communitarian socialism is described as a 'integral development'. Essential elements such as economic growth, or, for that matter, capitalism, are taken for granted (as domain assumptions) and not the subject of dispute, inasmuch as the dynamics of capital accumulation and economic growth are sought and will be found in all varieties of capitalism and non-capitalist alternatives. Critics of capitalism might question whether the dynamics of economic growth have been appropriately supported or whether the benefits of growth have been maldistributed, but there is no questioning its need or importance.

During the phase of high commodity prices [2002–2012], progressives were able to deploy policy instruments that could be understood as heterodox attempts at conventional capitalism, with some good results that allowed them to

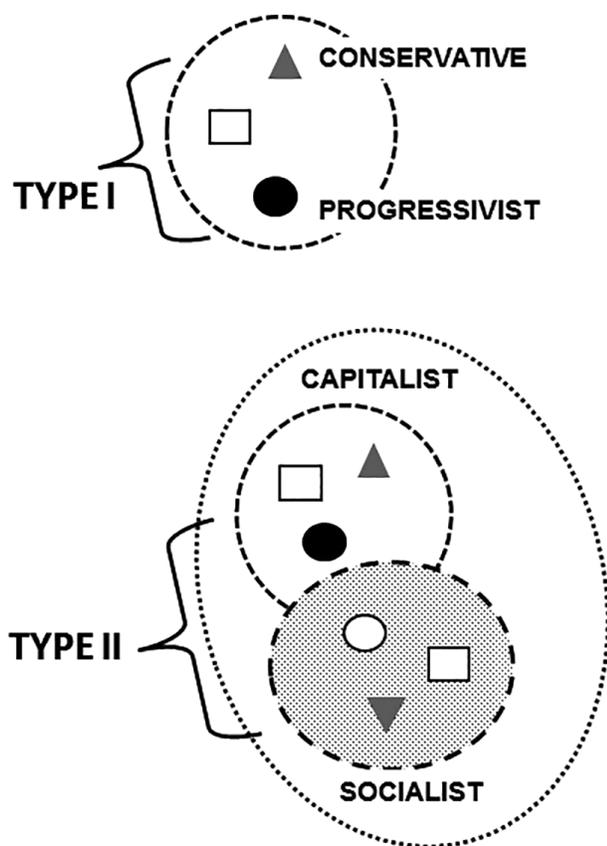


Figure 10.1 Disputes between development varieties. Type I corresponds to clashes within the same group (in the scheme are different types of capitalisms). Type II corresponds to clashes between varieties located in different sets (in the scheme they are socialist or capitalist). The grouping of varieties can follow different criteria but must be applied consistently in all cases. Both types are within the concepts and sensibilities of development (dotted line ellipse).

argue that there are different pathways towards economic growth—different engines, as it were. Under these conditions (in the context of progressive cycle in Latin American politics) the state was particularly active in mediating the dispute over surpluses, managing to use economic compensation as a mechanism for reducing poverty and to pacify the citizenry (Bolivia's communitarian socialism raised this in all sincerity). That is why at the time it seemed that type II disputes were proliferating. But when those prices began to fall, fiscal resources were drastically reduced and compensatory cash transfers to the poor and reparations declined; the state's ability to arbitrate the distribution of the economic surplus was significantly reduced—all conditions that contributed to the exhaustion of progressivism. Second-tier disputes began to wane and began to manifest as type I clashes, especially because of a reorganisation of parties on the political Right that began to attack progressivism (e.g. in Argentina and Brazil).

This brief explanation allows to reconsider some bizarre situations that are not always properly analysed. This is the case with the repeated defence of extractivisms by progressivisms despite the contradictions it implied with its rhetoric and civil society resistance. One of the most striking defences was in Ecuador where the government of Rafael Correa proposed to increase extractivism so as to leave them behind sometime in the future. The justification was that the extraction and appropriation of natural resources was the main source of capital accumulation that would allow the country to move forward to other stages of development—a justification presented without irony as a part of the ‘socialism of *buen vivir*’ (Ecuador, 2009). But behind this defence of extractivism were ideas of conventional capitalism as a dynamic of capital accumulation which would allow the country to move or leap forward into other supposedly more advanced stages (the final phase of that model was to expand tourism, new industries and the exportation of bio-knowledge). These ideas, regarding the accumulation of capital as a means of jumping into more advanced stages of development, were almost identical to those proposed in 1960 by W.W. Rostow. The irony is that Rostow defended the capital accumulation dynamics of economic growth as part of a ‘non-communist manifesto’ while Ecuadorian progressives presented it as a socialist alternative. The same logic can be found in the position taken by the MAS government in Bolivia (on this see García Linera, 2012, in his defence of extractivism in the Amazon).

What was lost sight of here was that the maintenance of extractivist strategies meant that there was no choice but to participate in capitalism. Conservative governments always understood this and defended it, but because some progressives rightly criticised globalisation on this score they faced numerous difficulties and contradictions in sustaining the correspondence between discourse and actions, and were thus forced to appeal to tortuous explanations such as those in the example above.

In this context, many in the debate about development stopped questioning capitalism in general to focus on one of its varieties: neoliberalism. In this way a radical anti-capitalist and ant-imperialist rhetoric could be maintained while remaining within the bounds and parameters of development under the rubric of some sort of reformed or humanised capitalism (inclusive development). For some, this was justified as a transitory stage until a revolution on a planetary scale occurred (see, for example, Borón, 2012). For others, this stance (invisiblising capitalism and its contradictions) allowed them to shift the location of an alternative horizon to more precise issues such as reducing poverty or securing well-being by improving access to consumption. Under these conditions, these alternatives aligned with the goal of a benevolent capitalism that could reduce the most severe impacts of extractivism and the inequalities that are generic to capitalism in all of its varieties. This meant that many type II discussions became type I disputes among varieties of capitalism.

Alternatives to development and *buen vivir*

There are many other perspectives that question capitalism and propose alternatives. For example, beyond the question of how to define capitalism, there is a rich literature in the Marxist tradition that has had a lot of influence in Latin America (for an assessment of these contributions see Wright, 2010). Others, that are more recent and originate in the global north, explore varieties of so-called post-capitalism that turn out to be stronger and more effective in criticism but weaker in determining precise alternatives (for example, Mason, 2016; Rogers, 2014; Harvey, 2014). A more detailed contribution can be found in the ‘real utopias’ described by Wright (2010), although these possible alternatives, like those previously mentioned, are located within the type II disputes and thus still remain within the field of development. Other contributions along the line of ‘alternatives’ appear under the term ‘degrowth’, which is aimed directly against the concept of ‘growth’, one of the basic ideas of development. But there is no consensus on contents and practices among degrowthers and the efforts to link it to some Latin American alternatives, as those facing extractivisms, did not offer specific policy and management programs (Acosta and Brand, 2017). In contrast, a more precise discussion of alternatives to growth is given by Jackson (2009) in his proposal for ‘prosperity in a steady state economics’.

All of this questioning assumes a rational analysis in which the accumulation of evidence is sufficient for understanding the evils of capitalism. But as noted above, this is not the case, and the foundations of development (and thus those of capitalism) also include affectivity and irrational dynamics. A discussion of alternatives should therefore incorporate these aspects as well. An example of this is the notion of post-capitalism advanced by Gibson-Graham (2006), who proposes the need for changes in our ‘modes of thinking and feeling, in the self, and even in the understanding of the world’.

Such a change in perspective has occurred precisely in Latin America with the *uchronia* of *buen vivir* discussed by Ramiréz in the previous chapter. In its original formulation as *sumak kawsay* or *suma qamaña*, promoted more or less simultaneously in Bolivia and Ecuador, and partly in Peru, the notion of *buen vivir* allowed for and led to exploring other ways of understanding and feeling (see for example Chuji et al., 2019). These explorations have resulted in ideas and proposals that mix some contributions of indigenous peoples and elements of certain critical currents of Western knowledge such as those that provided by some ecologies and feminisms. *Buen vivir* is more than the Western idea of living well, as in all its versions defend the integrity and continuity of Society–Nature, and they include a redefinition of communities that are inhabited by both humans and non-humans; and significantly, none of these proposed alternatives endorse the anxiety for progress of both orthodox and heterodox economists, or the widely shared idea that there are universal models that should or must be followed (as an illustration of the diversity of this way of thinking in regards to Bolivia, for example, see Yampara, 2011; Torrez, 2012; Burman, 2017; Ranta, 2018).

This explains the fact that in its original versions, *buen vivir* questioned development in all of its varieties. It was a critique that pointed to shared domain assumptions and basic concepts, promoting alternatives beyond any kind of development. Thus, the concept of living well generated disputes that did not correspond to neither type I nor type II debates. Thus, it is necessary to identify type III disputes in those situations where any of the varieties of development are questioned, bringing into focus both ideas within and beyond development and the possibility of thinking and feeling the possibility of ‘another’ or ‘other worlds’ (Figure 10.2). These disputes at the same time point to various post-capitalist and post-socialist alternatives, something which is not always understood.

Indeed, for believers in development, alternatives that do not accept their domain assumptions and share their basic concepts and their sensibilities are inconceivable. Thus, they generally do not accept or understand type III disputes, and react to them in several ways. In many situations, they reinterpret them as if they were type II debates. Then, when progressives listened to the questionings of *buen vivir* they were labelled as allies of the conservatives or propagators of extreme leftist infantilism, as was heard repeatedly in Bolivia and Ecuador (the then vice-president of Bolivia offered many examples, as in García Linera, 2012). The intellectuals who supported them added arguments such as imperialist domination and the impossibility of an alternative to capitalism until we have a planetary revolution, resulting in shielding development beliefs (in Borón, 2012, for example, such rationalities can be found).

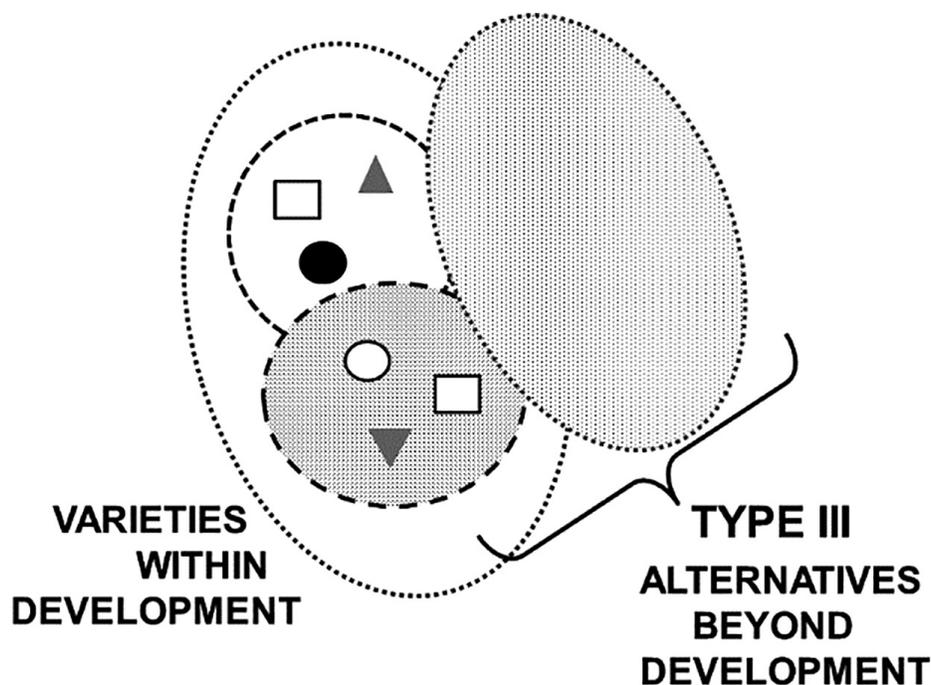


Figure 10.2 Type III disputes that pit any variety of developments against positions that challenge or reject their bases and postulate alternatives beyond them.

These postneoliberal progressives also set about the complex task of redefining *buen vivir* in order to achieve a version that was both socialist in form and functional for development. In Ecuador a ‘socialist *buen vivir*’ was launched while in Bolivia progressives conceived and talked of ‘communitarian socialism’ and integral development’ in order to *vivir bien* (Ecuador, 2009; Bolivia, 2016). For many activists and activist scholars who worked alongside and with the social movements, these new formulations were meaningless because *buen vivir* rejected the contents and practices in these conceptions.

Indeed, *buen vivir*, for example, does not include or accept the goal of economic growth, and strategies such as extractivism violate its essence as it destroys mixed communities of humans and non-humans. In other words, a serious fulfilment of living well would force progressives to abandon all their extractivist projects in mining, oil or monoculture. But adherence to this type of development was so powerful and so deeply entrenched that progressives felt and still feel compelled to reformulate that alternative.

Type III disputes are not new, but have always been around us. What happens is that these disputes depart from shared domain assumption that impose a certain fixed idea of development, and those within this field almost always understand them as type II disputes. This was evident in many encounters between progressive intellectuals and politicians, on the one hand, and indigenous peoples and movement leaders on the other; and, for example, in the face of the demands of indigenous people, peasants or local NGOs, against extractivisms, demands which even the most progressive governments regarded as an expression of political opposition, environmental terrorism, or radical infantilism.

Buen vivir is anti-capitalist, although at times this is understood to be insufficient. Similarly, it incorporates some elements that can be considered socialist, but that on their own can also be considered as insufficient. For example, it does not reject changing the ownership and labour rules proposed by the post-capitalism of Mason or Rogers, or, as proposed by David Harvey, to dismantle the infrastructure and superstructure of financialisation. But these alternatives are partial and in practice do not ensure a process of transformative change, inasmuch as they would inevitably fall back into a form of development that would once again result in social and environmental injustices. The limits of all kinds of developments, from the most reactionary neoliberalism to the most radical socialism, have been experimented with and tested in Latin America over the past several decades. But none of them have managed to solve the demands of social and ecological justice.

Progressives have posed alternatives in reformulating the capital–labour relation, but without changing the ways of assigning values or understanding that the development idea is at the core of this relation. Redistributive policies do not change how value is conceived, nor do they allow for a resolution of disputes over surpluses; at most they can change the actors involved in the struggles over the surplus.

On the other hand, *buen vivir* leaves the field of development as it recognises multiple valuations, including intrinsic values, in the non-human and Nature.

Value is no longer tied to work or human agency; it assumes multiple forms. In this way, the alternatives of *buen vivir* go far beyond seeking a balance between use and exchange values, as in Harvey (2014) or as proposed by ecosocialists such as Lowy (2011), presenting a plurality of values and including the non-human. This would necessarily cross one of the boundaries that encompasses development: anthropocentrism.

The concept of *buen vivir* crosses this boundary and also breaks with the other foundations of development built by modernity, such as adherence to progress or the privileged status of Cartesian knowledge (Yampara, 2011; Torrez, 2012; Burman, 2017). It is always plural, anchored in ecological, historical and cultural contexts, and therefore unable to offer a universal guide.

Beyond all this, unlike other alternatives those associated with *buen vivir* have wide support in some social groups and offer concrete alternatives in both policy and action. This partly explains the enormous effort of progressives to control and marginalise these alternatives. They challenge and put at risk the development programs and projects that they need to sustain their governments and themselves in power.

Buen vivir has had the enormous merit of highlighting the limits of the field of development, fracturing these limits and producing openings to other possible alternatives that were previously unthinkable. It operates as an opening mechanism. In that sense, it has shaped the next step in the transformations initiated by the left and some progressives, although the same progressivism has sought to nullify this potentiality. This was not because these progressives prefer capitalism, but because of the inability of progressivism to escape the closed box of development.

Exhaustions and alternatives

At the beginning of 2020, the Secretary General of ECLAC confessed that the 'economic model has been exhausted'.⁴ Despite the gravity of this diagnosis something was somehow admitted that almost everyone acknowledges but few say openly: none of the development trials were successful; there are several years of stagnation and even setbacks in some countries; and the coronavirus pandemic is accelerating the deterioration in living conditions.

The confession of development depletion must be placed in historical perspective. It cannot be hidden that at the political climax of progressivism, in 2008, they simultaneously ruled in seven of the 12 countries of South America, encompassing just over 300 million people. Wall Street at the time was collapsing under the weight of a severe financial crisis that hit industrialised countries,⁵ and all the political pundits and experts on capitalism were questioned. Marx's works became best sellers and citizen mobilisations demanded changes.

It was a very favourable scenario for change, and even for conditions that many old militants had dreamed of, as, on the one hand, a number of governments with a progressive agenda (inclusive development, poverty reduction) had won power by democratic means, and on the other, the capitalism faltered under the weight of its diverse contradictions. They were ideal conditions for advancing new alternatives,

and the original *buen vivir* options were already available. But the anticipated substantive transformations did not happen. The foundations of development were not changed, and some of these progressive regimes fell and were replaced by far-right governments pursuing a neoliberal policy agenda.⁶

It is necessary to learn from these circumstances. A first lesson is to assume that the classical understanding that alternatives are transitions from capitalist to non-capitalist options (usually described as socialist), may be incomplete or not enough to ensure substantive changes in social and ecological justice.

A second lesson is the need to improve analytical rigour in handling terms or concepts. For example, progressives do not constitute neoliberalisms, but they are not a socialist revolution either. Similarly, labelling any regime that is to be criticised as populist does not improve an understanding of what is happening; concepts like oligarchy deserve to be bailed out because they continue to be meaningful. Words and their meanings remain important.

A third lesson is that we should assume that development ideas and sensibilities precede the dominant currents in political and economic thinking today. They are deeply rooted and explain that the clashes are actually between varieties of development while this thinking persists. Thus, there are two very different perspectives regarding alternatives, some between varieties of development, and others beyond any development. To contest ideas in this area requires expanding the content under discussion; for example, considerations of Capital and Labour in the development process should be expanded by adding, for example, affectivity. It is also crucial to approach different ways of conceiving values in order to break with anthropocentrism.

A fourth lesson is a warning that there are blockages for alternatives beyond development such as those suffered by proposals for *buen vivir*. In many cases these proposals, as embodied for example, in Ecuador's National Plan for *buen vivir* (2009–2013), were not even understood and interpreted as a conventional political party platform, or they were reconfigured so as to make them functional for development.

A fifth lesson is to recognise the enormous importance of these issues that should no longer be restricted to academic encounters or intellectual dreams in the transition of dystopia to utopia; they should be expressed in the political arena involving multiple social actors. Widespread citizen participation is indispensable to further explore alternatives to the current crisis. Indeed, the persistence of problems such as poverty, the worsening ecological collapse on the continent and on the planet, together with the coronavirus pandemic, require new alternatives. We know that trying to solve these and such problems by means of a new variety of development that remains based on material growth is unsustainable. The horizon of alternatives is elsewhere; the discussions about *buen vivir* show it.

Finally, these experiments show that the threshold to be crossed is to overcome development, but at the same time, the direction in that exit is to the left since the commitment to justice is indispensable if the social and ecological crisis is to be resolved. The concept of *buen vivir* prefigures this change in conceiving and feeling the world.

Notes

- 1 For example, in Ecuador, poverty rose from 36.7 per cent in 2007 to a low of 21.5 per cent in 2017, to rise again since 2018; income-based indicator according to the National Institute of Statistics and Census, www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec.
- 2 In the case of Ecuador, poverty went from 36.7 per cent in 2007 to a minimum of 21.5 per cent in 2017, before rising again from 2018 (according to the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses INEC, www.eficienterencifras.gob.ec).
- 3 Interview in *El Telégrafo*, 15 January 2012.
- 4 “América Latina ha perdido el tren de la política industrial y la innovación” I. Fariza interviews A. Bárcena, *El País*, Madrid, 7 February 2020.
- 5 Editor’s note: The crisis was billed as ‘global’ (‘the global financial crisis’) although, unlike the cycle of financial crises in the 1990s that impacted primarily countries on the periphery of the world system, the 2000 crisis primarily hit countries at the centre of the system. This was reflected in an essay by the economist Arturo Porzecanski (2009) that, with reference to Latin America, raised the question ‘Crisis. What Crisis?’.
- 6 Editor’s note: On these dynamics, and the left-right swing of the pendulum of electoral politics, see Veltmeyer and Petras (2019).

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