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Climate Change, the Quadrilemma of Globalization, and Other Politically Incorrect Reactions

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ABSTRACT *Current global climate change negotiations face some contradictions that are not always addressed as they are considered politically incorrect. These include, first, the decoupling of commitments for planetary environmental policies with the actual national strategies. A relevant example is the Bolivian administration, which presents a strong rhetoric for biospheric Mother Earth Rights, but its national development strategies generate more environmental impacts and weaken enforcement at the local level. Second, the core ideas and beliefs that explain development varieties that generate climate change are deeply rooted, so changes in political ideologies, either from traditional 'left' or 'right', do not determine policies to effectively overcome climate change. Third, accumulation of scientific information is not enough to promote the necessary changes, because these deep roots conditioned perceived and acceptable alternatives. Fourth, this lead to tensions among the pursuit of economic financial globalization, the sovereignty of the nations-states, democracy, and the basement of global environmental conservation. This is a quadrilemma, because if one or two of these objectives are pursued, at least one other is violated. Nevertheless, international negotiations rest on wishful thinking that this is possible. Uncovering these contradictions is politically incorrect for many realms.*

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Heads of states, Ministers, high UN officials, and some members of civil society organizations presented the results of the Paris negotiations on climate change as a huge success. Conventional media replicated the congratulations, hugs and toasts, the emotion of closing speeches, and the hopes of many that, at last, these are concrete and effective measures to sufficiently reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

At the same time, on the other side of the planet, in the South, in small localities in the highlands of the Andes, there were local communities dealing with almost the opposite kind of

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emissions crisis. Peasant and small farmers in the highlands of Bolivia witnessed the drying up of one of the largest inland lakes in South America, Lake Poopo. A few weeks later, it was confirmed that the 3192 km² lake (second in the surface area in Bolivia, after Lake Titicaca), has lost its water; its aquatic life has disappeared in the recent past; its wetlands have dried up, and its birds have left the area (Howard, 2016).

These two situations, which to some extent are in contradiction, offer an appropriate introduction to move beyond traditional analysis on political ecology in climate change, and enter the field of some *politically incorrect* thoughts.

1. The Decoupling of Global Environmental Commitments and Actual National Environmental Policies is Increasing

I introduce the case of the Poopo Lake in Bolivia because it is a good example of the contradictions between the international and national scales of environmental policies. I am not presenting this example to explore possible relations between climate change and the drying up of Lake Poopo in Bolivia. On the basis of the available information, the lake disappeared due to a long process that involved diverse factors (e.g. intensive use of water by agriculture and mining in the area, and changes in rainfall and temperature in the region, which may be linked to climate change). But whatever the reasons, this is the result of ineffective environmental policies, weak enforcement, lack of political leadership, and the disinterest of urban majorities toward the ecological situation in remote corners of the country.

This example is so revealing because it took place in Bolivia under Evo Morale's government, which is well known for its radical posture on the rights of planetary Mother Earth and for its criticism of global capitalism as a primary factor in climate change. Thus, even the government with one of the most strong environmental discourses on climate change, fails in domestic policies within classical development, and hence, contributing to climate change.

It is important to realize that Evo Morales' call for the rights of Mother Earth (such as in his speeches at climate change COPs or G77 meetings) is framed on a planetary scale. The reference is the biosphere. Nevertheless, at the national scale, government policies do not endorse Nature's rights, and actual national development strategies are far removed from those required to face climate change. The present administration is promoting diverse *extractivisms*, including an increase of oil extraction, major changes in the use of soil and deforestation, new large dams to export electricity, etc. (an early report in this in Gudynas, 2013). It is noteworthy that in the Andean *quechua* and *aymara* traditions, Pacha Mama is always local, rooted in places and communities. It is not possible to defend Mother Earth at the planetary scale if it is not protected in each community at the local scale; that is, *biospheric conservation is a consequence of local conservation*. The disappearance of Poopo Lake is just one among many examples of the failure to protect Pacha Mama within Bolivia today.

This is another case of the decoupling between global and national policies and strategies, a problem that is quite common. While governments cheer for new global commitments to address climate change, their national policies are still trapped in traditional strategies that promote climate change. And, if even the government of Bolivia, with all its tradition, has been trapped in this decoupling, then not much can be expected from other countries. Agreements like the one reached in Paris are still very weak to solve this decoupling, because it rests on voluntary measures at the national level, and does not impose fundamental questioning on the core ideas of development.

2. Despite Diversity in Political Ideologies and Varieties of Development, the Basic Causes of Climate Change Persist

Climate change is a consequence of a wide diversity of varieties of development and political ideologies. Contributors to greenhouse emissions are found under quite different political ideologies and diverse development strategies. It ranges from the Middle East oil monarchies, to the European Union liberal democracies, from the endorsement by the Communist Party of China, to the new left governments in South America, like Bolivia. However, beneath the heterogeneity in their politics and economics, they all share core ideas of development, such as oil addiction to sustain progress.

Even the most recent political novelties have not resulted in strong environmental policies for climate change. The former President of Uruguay, José ‘Pepe’ Mujica, gave an impressive speech during the Rio+20 gathering (2012) and he follows an austere lifestyle. But the development strategies followed by his administration resulted in weakening environmental policies, conceived climate change negotiations as a major threat to agri-food exports, while trying to increase even more its extractive sectors.

So, even if we can dream of a parallel world, where all presidents were like Evo Morales (Bolivia), defending Mother Earth, or ‘Pepe’ Mujica (Uruguay) promoting austerity, we will still be trapped with climate change, because they are all based on the core components of development, such as economic growth based upon the export of natural resources.

The lesson of these cases is that political changes do not predetermine policies to overcome climate change. It is necessary to operate at a deeper level, one that is at the base that sustains these different ideological postures and development strategies. Of course, the development strategies of the recent South America progressivism are different, for example, to the austerity policies of conservative governments in western Europe. But all share some basic components of development, such as intensive appropriation of natural resources, oil dependency.

Climate change international negotiations wrongly presuppose that changes in either political ideologies or development strategies will result in solutions, but does not recognize that all share the same or similar postures, like the separation between nature and society, or ‘progress’ as a major goal, which ends in all cases in unsustainable strategies. On the contrary, a real debate on climate change requires discussions on negotiations that open for alternatives to all these varieties of development. In other words, instead of discussing how to agree on an ‘ecologic fix’ to development, the negotiations should discuss how to leave the development realm.

3. The Accumulation of Scientific Information is Not Enough to Trigger Political Changes

The core ideas of development are so deeply rooted that the accumulation of scientific information on the seriousness of climate change is not capable of resulting in strong measures. The measures needed, such as restrictions and even moratoria on new oil extractions, to remain within the allowed carbon budget for a safe climate, are not acceptable for governments, as this collides with their ideas of development.

Furthermore, accumulation of scientific evidence does not necessarily result in changes in public opinion or cultural frameworks, and thus, in public policies and political postures.

In other words, those presidents, prime ministers, and government delegations in Paris are not necessarily reacting to the scientific information.

Scientific papers, as they are not read by the public at large, have little direct effect on the level of public concern (after Brulle, Carmichael, & Jenkins, 2012, for the US). But those articles feed, as an example, reports in popular science magazines, newspapers, or other media, which do have significantly important effects, along with other factors, such as the debate among political parties (Cook et al., 2013).

Present-day dominant academic life results in several limitations to overcome these shortcomings. International climate change negotiations give little opportunity for a radical change, as it is still based in more or less separate compartments (such as expert panels that present their results, supposed to be objective). New and more detailed IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) reports are extremely important, but they are not enough to change by themselves the beliefs on development within the public at large.

So, we need to shift to a new generation of debates and discussion, linking classical scholarly approaches with the old tradition of the political essays, the relevance of the scientific publications with the accessibility of social networks and media. Furthermore, considering the issues mentioned above, this effort is certainly transdisciplinary (mixing, for example, climate science and political sciences), but also we should address those cultural backbones that sustain conventional development ideas.

4. The Impossibility Quadrilemma of Climate Change Facing Economic Globalization

The points briefly examined above show some features of the contradictions of environmental negotiations in the global arena, and several conditions imposed by development. Facing it, it is useful to recall the so-called trilemma of globalization, introduced by Harvard political economist Dan Rodrik (2007). He argues that it is not possible to achieve at the same time the objectives of democracy, nation-state sovereignty, and globalization. If any two of these objectives are pursued, it always results in violating a third one. For example, the pursuit of globalization implies either restrictions on the sovereignty of states or over democracy (see also Rodrik, 2011).

I would like to extend the argument further to say that the trilemma could be expanded to consider an environmental dimension, all framed in a development perspective. This move results in a 'quadrilemma' with the following components: globalization (economic and financial), global environmental conservation, the sovereignty of states in the international arena, and democracy within each state (Figure 1). All these components are at the base of the Paris Agreement.

A strict agenda to tackle climate change should therefore include measures like moratoria on the exploration and extraction of oil and gas, so as to maintain emissions levels within the carbon budget. But this immediately generates collisions with other components; oil-exporting countries could invoke their sovereignty to continue their exportations, while many industrialized nations would like to continue their high consumption lifestyles, rejecting restrictions on importing fossil fuels. Undoubtedly, pairs of these contradictions have been identified for a long time, and some of them are intensively discussed (such as the restrictions that economic globalization imposes on democracy) (see Gills, Rocamora, & Wilson, 1993).

The problem with international negotiations, like those on climate change, or in the Paris Agreement, is that this expresses wishful thinking that all four objectives could be achieved at the same time. The core ideas of contemporary development provided the structure of belief and feelings supporting objectives like economic growth, material well-being, and democracy, but also the idea that all of them are complementary and can be achieved at the same time. It is a posture that conceals its contradictions, or if these occur, it is said that they are the result of inadequate action plans. Criticism of these assertions is always resisted and considered

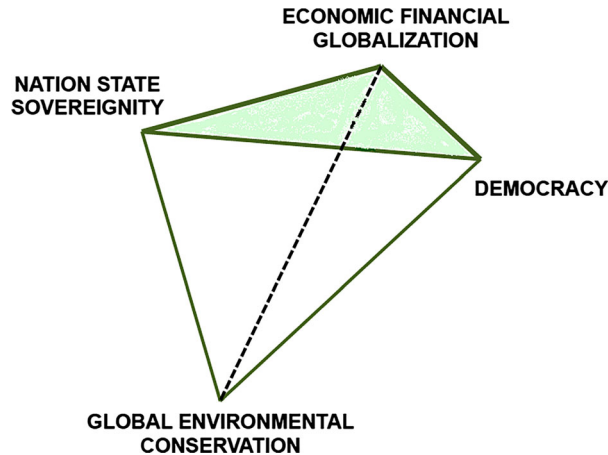


Figure 1. Diagram of the quadrilemma in climate change international negotiations. Inverted pyramid where global environmental conservation is at the base that sustains all other components.

politically incorrect. This is one of the reasons that some of the points suggested in this paper are *politically incorrect.* To really address climate change, it is necessary to recognize *the impossibility of that quadrilemma,* and the alternative to it is to move beyond any development variety.

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