



| OURECONOMY

'Development' is colonialism in disguise

Other worlds are possible - the Pluriverse is breathing. [Arturo Escobar](#)

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The current planetary crisis has taken on a civilizational dimension. Never before have so many crucial aspects of life failed simultaneously, and never before have expectations about the future been so uncertain. Environmental problems can no longer be concealed, no matter how powerful the deniers. It is also impossible to hide the huge global socio-economic inequalities which grow as "development" sweeps across the world like a mutant virus. This crisis can be seen and felt in all domains: environmental, economic, social, political, ethical, cultural, and spiritual. Ironically, these crises are fed on by right-wing forces to gain support from the marginalized, with false but alluring images of how 'the other' is stealing away 'our' jobs and resources and happiness. As a consequence, violence and repression engulfs the democratic process.

Ending the pursuit of "development" isn't easy; its seductive logic is widely internalized. Societies of the Global North, now suffering the effects of industrial growth, were the first to accept the gospel of a single path to progress. The South emulates the North, captivated by its dazzling lifestyles in a seemingly unstoppable course that brings ever more social and environmental problems. Seven decades after the concept of "development" erupted on to the scene, the entire world is mired in "maldevelopment."

What is happening to life itself? Paradoxical as it sounds, the discourse of “development” only consolidates the global crisis. This crisis is neither conjunctural nor manageable within existing institutions; rather, it is structural and historical. As such, it demands a profound reorganization of relations within and among societies, and relations between Humanity and Nature, of which we are a part. A remake of institutions at global, national, and local levels is called for, but this goal is beyond the capacities of either would-be planetary administrators or nation-state politicians. Instead, the re-make has to be, and is being, driven from diverse grassroots communitarian spaces.

These reflections are the essence of a new book, *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary**. The idea for such a book was born during the Fourth International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig. After four and half years of intense work, *Pluriverse* sees the light of day. It is made up of about 110 succinct thematic entries by authors from all continents.

The book is introduced by Wolfgang Sachs, editor of the seminal *Development Dictionary*, 25 years ago. In the first section: “Development and its Crises: Global Experiences”, an author from each continent provides a critical analysis of development impacts in their region. This opens the door to section two: “Universalizing the Earth: Reformist Solutions”, reviewing conventional technofix, managerial, or market-fix solutions to the global crisis ranging from “Climate-Smart Agriculture” to “Earth System Governance” and “Transhumanism”. These entries demonstrate why mainstream reformist proposals do not solve today's socio-ecological problems but exacerbate them in many cases, or at best slightly delay the collapses that are coming.

Section three: “A People's Pluriverse: Transformative Initiatives” is the main body of the *Dictionary* offering accounts of radical theoretical alternatives, spiritual visions, and sustainable everyday practical 'ways of worlding' already going on all over the planet.

This plurality of alternatives speaks out from the margins of highly masculinist, capitalist modernity – from both colonial and metropolitan peripheries. From the Global North, come Eco-socialists, Ecofeminists, and academic Degrowth proponents, each helping to configure a vigorous movement of movements. From the Global South, we highlight inspirational notions such as Sumak Kawsay, or Buen Vivir, Swaraj, Ubuntu, Commoning, Communality, Agaciro, Agdals, Hurai, Ibadism, Shohoj, and more. The book includes socially critical versions of the main world religions, as well.

The concept of "conviviality", pioneered by Ivan Illich, is central to building communities that enable every person to live creatively - and autonomously - with technologies and institutions that they, themselves, control. Other transformative initiatives involve proposals with global reach, like the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature; or another for Debt Arbitration. These imaginative narratives join critique and purposeful action. Taken as a whole, the *Post-Development Dictionary* suggests that peaceful democratic transitions will be discovered as people weave old practices and new ideas together in a global tapestry of alternatives.

More of the same political promises are no longer viable. Nor can we continue to place trust in "corporate social responsibility," "efficient bureaucracies," and the liberal pluralist extension of rights to all subjects - "people of color," the elderly, the differently abled, women, or queers - though necessary, is highly inadequate where legalistic and not socially transformative. Similarly, we need to go beyond the preservation of a few "pristine" patches of nature, this having no effect on the worldwide collapse of biodiversity. Action must go to the core of today's systemic crisis - the toxic mix of heteropatriarchal capitalism, racism, and unidirectional modernity with its infinite penchant for power and predatory accumulation at cost to all life on Earth.

Academics, activists, politicians, journalists, youth, and all others who fail to question the currently dominant system, simply open the door to more

reincarnations of the ghost of “development”. Short-term measures conceived from the halls of power only entrench the North-South status quo, patriarchy, coloniality, and the destructive instrumental separation of Humanity and Nature. Well intentioned but superficial solutions will not address the global crisis unless endowed with a post-capitalist, post-development horizon and strong sense of cultural reflexivity.

An adequate political strategy will go to the roots, questioning core assumptions of the "development" discourse, such as growth, the rhetoric of progress, instrumental rationality, so-called free markets, universalism, anthropocentrism, sexism, and so forth.

An adequate strategy will enact an ethic grounded on the relational interdependence of everything that exists. It will embrace diversity and pluriversality; autonomy and sufficiency; solidarity and reciprocity; commons and care; the integration with Nature and Nature's rights; simplicity and sufficiency; rights and responsibilities; ecological sustainability; and non-violence and peace. An adequate strategy will tilt towards the marginal, the exploited, and the oppressed. Transformations and transitions will give time to integrating the multiplicity of dimensions: political, economic, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual.

The paths to a bio-civilization are multiple - and the pluriverse is already visible in the cosmovisions and radical practices of many groups worldwide. The notion of a pluriverse questions the alleged universality of Euro-Americacentric modernity. As the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, put it so wisely, the pluriverse constitutes “a world where many worlds fit”. We are exploring and innovating towards a future where all the worlds (human and non-human) that inhabit the Planet can co-exist and thrive in mutual dignity and respect, without a single so called "developed" world living at the expense of others, as happens so cruelly in our time.

The path to this complementarity is long, but we are on our way, as the international alliancing of movements for social justice and ecology suggests. It is possible to glean, from the actions of many women's, ethnic, indigenous, worker and peasant movements, a growing convergence among them. The book's Postscript describes one such attempt as a "Global Tapestry of Alternatives", slowly coming into being, a self-organizing potential, a myriad of mobilizations and emergent practices from many regions of the world.

As Arundhati Roy so presciently announced, well over a decade ago: "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way; on a quiet day, I can hear her breathing".

*Pluriverse will be launched tomorrow at the Post-development conference, University of Kassel.

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