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RIDES

DECOLONIZATION OF EUROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE, EMANCIPATION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND TERRITORIALIZATION OF LIFE[i]

Descolonização do conhecimento eurocêntrico, emancipação dos saberes indígenas e territorialização da vida

Enrique Leff[1]
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Cidade do México, México
E-mail: enrique.leff@gmail.com

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Abstract: Five years ago, Maristella Svampa invited four Latin American colleagues to reflect on the "coloniality of knowledge" in Latin America, starting from a premise and two subsequent questions. The premise: "Many authors have insisted that one of the fundamental features of Latin American social theory is its intellectual or epistemic dependence on concepts and theoretical frameworks developed in central countries. Some have given theoretical status to this dependence through the concept of the 'coloniality of knowledge'." The questions: "What does it mean to think about the social sciences from Latin America in the twenty-first century, within the framework of advanced modernity and the current system of domination? Is there a Latin American perspective from which to think about current issues within the framework of social theory?" This article seeks to address some of the answers to these questions.

Keywords: social sciences; decolonization; dialogue of knowledges; political ecology; Indigenous peoples.

Resumo: *Há cinco anos, Maristella Svampa convocou quatro colegas latino-americanos a refletir sobre a "colonialidade do saber" na América Latina, partindo de uma premissa e de duas perguntas subsequentes. A premissa: "Muitos autores têm insistido que uma das características fundamentais da teoria social latino-americana é sua dependência intelectual ou epistêmica em relação aos conceitos e marcos teóricos elaborados nos países centrais. Alguns conferiram estatuto teórico a essa dependência por meio do conceito de 'colonialidade do saber'". As perguntas: "O que significa pensar as ciências sociais a partir da América Latina no século XXI, no contexto da modernidade avançada e do atual sistema de dominação? Existe uma perspectiva latino-americana para pensar as problemáticas atuais a partir do marco da teoria social?". Parte das respostas a essas perguntas será abordada neste artigo.*

Palavras-chave: *ciências sociais; descolonização; diálogo de saberes; ecologia política; povos indígenas.*

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to take advantage of the call for contributions to the dossier "Decolonizing the Social Sciences: Challenges and Possibilities from Latin America," which now brings us together, to revisit these questions and the response I was able to formulate on the occasion of the debate on intellectual colonialism and the dilemmas of Latin American social theory, published in 2016,[1] as well as some of the arguments put forward by colleagues in interviews that did not attain the status of a dialogue, in order to resume the debate on the fundamental problem posed by the environmental question; above all, to construct frameworks of intelligibility and practices – of social imaginaries and the sociological imagination – that allow us to understand and understand ourselves within the conditions of life. Part of this dialogue will be revisited in greater depth throughout the text.

DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND EMANCIPATION OF THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH

Reflection on the domination of logocentric science in the academies of the South and on the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledges, undertaken from the sovereignty of Eurocentric knowledge, is not a new topic in Latin America. A critical perspective on the rationality of modernity, through which the violence of the conquest of the Indies and Indigenous peoples was exercised, has accompanied the struggles for independence, liberation, and anticolonial emancipation that emerged in reaction to the processes of domination and subjugation of the Third World by the political and economic power of imperial countries throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Studies on the coloniality of knowledge seek not only to criticize and make visible the conquest, domination, and extermination of traditional societies and the subjugation of their knowledges by the imperial power of Capital and the Enlightenment of Reason, but also the effect of domination exercised through the legitimacy of science as the supreme mode of knowing the world. At the same time, reflection on the decolonization of knowledge is posited as a condition for legitimizing the existential rights of peoples and for the civilizational transition toward the construction of a sustainable planet and "other possible worlds."

The violence of the history of metaphysics against life, which is incipient in Eurocentric knowledge founded on the human Logos (Derrida: 1964/1978), manifests itself most devastatingly in Latin America and, more generally, in the South – in dependent, dominated, and subjugated countries – through the effects of colonization, which have imposed greater degrees and intensities of poverty, inequality, marginalization, exploitation, and socio-environmental degradation. It is from this perspective that political thinkers and activists of the stature of José Martí (1963), José Carlos Mariátegui (1928/1979), Franz Fanon (1952, 1961), and Aimé Césaire (1955) appear today as precursors and founders of the decolonization of knowledge. Today –

[1] Rivera Cusicanqui, S.; Domíngues, J.; Escobar, A. and Leff, E. (2016), "Debate on intellectual colonialism and the dilemmas of Latin American social theory," in Cuestiones de Sociología, 14, Universidad de La Plata, Argentina, www.cuestionessociologia.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/article/view/CSn14a09.

that is, over the past fifty years, if we dare to date the emergence of "postmodern" thought in this way – theoretical deconstructionism seeks to unravel the "strategies of power in knowledge" (Foucault: 1980) that have unfolded throughout the world through the rationality of modernity, infusing emancipatory thought into dominated territories and into life in general in the face of the domination of reason. From this perspective, studies on the importation and implementation of Positivism in Latin America during the second half of the nineteenth century may be regarded as pioneering studies on the coloniality of knowledge in the social sciences. Indeed, the positivist doctrines inaugurated by Auguste Comte in the social sciences landed like a Trojan horse on American soil at the dawn of nations newly independent from the yoke of European political regimes, establishing the ontological regime of Science, Technology, and Capital, which, driven by "order and progress," continues to rule over life on this continent and throughout the world.

Within this epistemic context and historical perspective, a body of thought on the coloniality of knowledge has gradually taken shape both in academia and in the field of social struggles. Thus, in recent times – notably during the first two decades of the twenty-first century – a critical inquiry into the coloniality of knowledge has emerged (Lander: 2000; Mignolo: 2000, 2011; Mignolo and Escobar: 2009; Quijano: 2000). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has criticized the purported novelty of studies on the coloniality of knowledge, seeking to recover the field's own genealogy from the beginnings of the colonial period through the work of writers such as the Chinchaysuyu Waman Puma (Rivera: 2015), while reclaiming authors such as Franz Tamayo (1879-1956)[2] and Fausto Reinaga, who, between the 1960s and 1990s, analyzed the "intelligentsia of the Bolivian cholaje," developing a sharp critique of intellectual colonialism in Bolivia (Rivera et al.: 2016). In more recent times, and as foundational antecedents of a current of critical thought centered on the problem of the coloniality of knowledge and epistemic dependence, mention should be made of Orlando Fals Borda's pioneering book *Ciencia propia y colonialismo intelectual* (1970), preceded by the emancipatory vision of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968).

The demand for the decolonization of knowledge has deep historical roots in critical thought in Latin America, which encompasses theories of unequal exchange, underdevelopment, and the Third World's dependence on the world economy as the organizing center of the world-system (Amin: 1974; Wallerstein: 1974, 1980, 1989, 2011). The inequality generated by economic rationality at the global level became rooted in regimes of "internal colonialism" (González Casanova: 1965; Stavenhagen: 1965), where hierarchies, inequity, marginality, and social exclusion (Nun: 2001) were progressively internalized within the class structure through the economic, agricultural, and industrial development policies of "underdeveloped" countries.[3]

Theories of economic growth, development, and progress laid the foundations

[2] Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui considers that: "For Franz Tamayo, what was central was an oral-gestural culture that was translated into tacit bodily codes that were nevertheless intelligible on a social scale: codes of communication that also structured hierarchies and veiled forms of contempt [...] Tamayo called for an autonomous and intelligent gesture, inspired by Nietzsche and the German vitalism of his time, in his approach to the multiethnic realities of his surroundings. In bodily gesture and the gaze, in addition to a reflective knowledge of Aymara [...] he scrutinizes the soul of the actually existing mestizo in its space/time, as a schizophrenic, divided, and bipolar being, incapable of creating a nation of its own or inhabiting a territory of its own. This diagnosis, vital in Tamayo, lays the groundwork for turning the mestizo double bind into a creative force, rather than deepening binarism and, with it, the colonial disjunction that prevents us from being ourselves" (Rivera et al.: 2016, pp. 2-3).

[3] For a compendium of Latin American critical social thought, see Marini and dos Santos: 1999 and Svampa: 2016.

for the current discourse of "sustainable development"; dependence and underdevelopment became established as a structural condition of the world-system, in which Third World nations provide undervalued natural resources and cheap labor for capital accumulation and the technological development of "developed" countries – that is, for the construction of the hegemonic world order which, together with the concentration of power and wealth, today generates an unequal "ecological distribution" within the geopolitics of "sustainable development." The currents of dependency theory are situated within this critical spirit that preceded the field of political ecology, notably the works of André Gunder Frank (1966), Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto (1979), Theotonio Dos Santos (1978), and Leonardo Boff's ecotheology of liberation (1996).

The purpose of decolonizing knowledge leads us to ask how Eurocentric ideas – from Greek philosophy to modern science – were introduced into the lifeworlds of Indigenous peoples through conquest, colonization, and globalization, invading their cosmogonies, imaginaries, and cultural practices and generating, in reaction, political resistance: the will to reappropriate their traditional knowledges and their biocultural heritage. The decolonization of the South – the emancipation of subjugated knowledge embodied in cultural identities rooted in the territories of the "South" – requires the deconstruction of the knowledge of the "North," instituted not only in the scientific paradigms of universities but also, and above all, in the economic order and legal systems that govern the lives of countries and peoples, in order to liberate the epistemologies of the South (Sousa Santos: 2008), opening the way to new perspectives for understanding the world capable of guiding the construction of sustainable societies.

THE TERRITORIALIZATION OF LIFE IN THE FIELD OF POLITICAL ECOLOGY: DECOLONIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE, REINVENTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES, AND REAPPROPRIATION OF NATURE

Political ecology is the field in which strategies of power for the social appropriation of nature are manifested and deployed: through the distribution of ecological costs and potentials in the construction of sustainability. At the crossroads of pathways toward a sustainable future, the crucial issue is the controversy among different modes of understanding and the means of achieving their objectives, permeated by economic, political, institutional, and personal interests. The construction of sustainability entails the deconstruction of rationalities – of the theories that sustain them, the discourses that seek to legitimize them, and the institutions that perform the normalizing and regulatory function of the social order – as well as the configuration of rationalities and strategies that open alternative pathways toward the sustainability of other possible worlds. One of the main objectives in building sustainable societies is to reduce inequality in economic and ecological distribution – an effect of a history of conquest and domination – in order to establish a world of environmental justice, of "equality in difference." In this sense, political ecology confronts the domination of established rationality: the institutionalization of hierarchical social structures and dominant powers rooted in modes of thinking, knowing, and producing that have

subjugated and deterritorialized Indigenous cultures.

Modern rationality has constructed an unsustainable world, whose signs are visible in the manifestations of the planet's environmental crisis. The ecological destruction generated by the exploitation and appropriation of nature during the colonial regime and under the current world economic order has been accompanied by social exclusion, the subjugation of traditional practices, and the imposition of Western knowledge in the conquest and domination of Third World territories. Consequently, Indigenous peoples affirm that their struggles for emancipation are both political and epistemic: the decolonization of knowledge becomes a condition for their political-cultural emancipation and for the reconstruction of their territories of life.

The decolonization of knowledge entails the need to deconstruct metaphysical thought and *logocentric* science instituted by the hegemonic power of the scientific-technological-economic rationality of modernity. Beyond the need to investigate the strategies of power in knowledge that, through epistemological foundations and colonial regimes, dominated peoples, subjugated their knowledges, subjected their practices, and dispossessed them of their territories, the construction of sustainable societies rooted in the ecological potentials and cultural identities of Third World peoples requires epistemological strategies to decolonize knowledge and free peoples from exploitation, inequality, and subjugation to the force of dominant reason.

In this sense, alongside the theoretical deconstruction of dominant paradigms of knowledge in the sciences, the decolonization of knowledge leads to the revaluation of traditional knowledge and the liberation of other knowledges – "local knowledge," "popular knowledge," "popular science" – disregarded and denied by scientific institutions, yet recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge by the ethnosciences as "Indigenous science" (De Gortari: 1963), "macro-systems" (López-Luján and López-Austin: 1996), "native sciences" (Cardona: 1986), "popular knowledge" or "people's science" (Fals Borda: 1970, 1981), and "Indigenous knowledge systems" (Argueta *et al*.: 1994). Several authors have studied the functioning of the ecological rationality of productive practices rooted in the "pre-Hispanic development style" (Gligo and Morello: 1980), the "peasant mode of production" (Toledo: 1980), "vertical eco-symbiotic complementarities" (Condarco and Murra: 1987), and the "Andean utopia" (Burgoa and Flores Galindo: 1982). Through their practices and productive experience, pre-Hispanic cultures incorporated the ecological potentials and conditions of their territories into their forms of productive organization for the sustainable use of land and natural resources. These practices took into account the complementarities of ecological diversity and geographic spaces, integrating regions that extended beyond the territories of a particular ethnic group. This strategy made it possible to optimize the ecological supply of diverse geographies, the seasonal use of different productive spaces and ecological cycles and zones, as well as soil fertility and resource regeneration processes, in order to experiment with different polyculture strategies, integrating local production into territorial space through interregional trade and intercommunity exchange of economic surpluses.

The ethnic spaces of Tropical America were, and continue to be, settings for strategies of survival and "ethno-eco-development" through the cultural adaptation and transformation of their ecological environments; important agricultural technologies

and public works were developed there for the sustainable use of water resources and the enhancement of soil fertility through techniques for water conservation and erosion prevention, as well as various agroecological innovations and strategies: *terrazas, chinampas, andenes*, and *camellones* (Murra: 1956; Romanini: 1976; Denevan: 1980a, 1980b; Masuda *et al*.: 1985; CEPAL/PNUMA: 1983; de la Torre and Burga: 1986; San Martín Arzabe: 1990; Altieri and Nicholls: 2000). This vast repertoire of technical knowledge and productive practices guided the coevolution of different cultures with the territories they inhabit in the Andean region and the American tropics.

A "non-Western" understanding of the world grounded in "knowledge of the South" is fundamental to configuring an alternative rationality capable of deconstructing the globalized world-system and "letting be" other possible lifeworlds. The construction of another global order, founded on the differences and specificities of diverse territories, emerges from peoples' knowledge rooted in their ecological conditions of life and embodied in their cultural being. The traditional knowledges and imaginaries of sustainability of the Peoples of the Earth are the roots and sources from which new *logics of meaning* emerge, constituting the material-substantive-cultural order of an *environmental rationality* (Leff: 2004), which opens innovative perspectives for constructing new ways of inhabiting the world.[4][4]

In this field, the dialogue between Marxism and Indigenism embodied in the work of authors who have rethought Marxist categories from the cultural and ecological conditions of Latin America has been particularly relevant. Among them, José Carlos Mariátegui's *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928/1979) stands out, a text in which a "mestizaje" of Marxism with the ethnic question and the cultural context of Latin America is woven, opening onto the agrarian problem and the colonial economy, the latifundium and the community, the Indigenous person and the land.[5][5] Within the perspective of such mestizaje are Darcy Ribeiro's (1972) "historical-cultural configurations of the American peoples" – "testimonial peoples," "new peoples," "transplanted peoples," and "emerging peoples." In the relationship between Marxism and the cultural context of Latin America, Bolívar Echeverría's work stands out for his critique of capitalist modernity and his theory of the *baroque ethos* as a form of cultural resistance that opens thought toward an "alternative non-capitalist modernity." From an environmental perspective, we formulated our contribution to eco-Marxism, grounded in the ecological and cultural conditions of the territories of the South (Leff: 1994).

Sustainability is constructed through the territorialization of alternative lifeworlds. As Foucault stated, "once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, and transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects

[4] Arturo Escobar refere-se a esses saberes e imaginários como "pensamento da terra", como "aquela dimensão que toda comunidade que habita um território sabe ser vital para sua existência: sua conexão indissolúvel com a terra e com todos os seres vivos. Mais do que em conhecimentos teóricos, essa dimensão encontra-se eloquentemente expressa na arte (tecidos), nos mitos, nas práticas econômicas e culturais do lugar e nas lutas territoriais e pela defesa da Pachamama" (Escobar: 2015).

[5] Entre os estudos sobre a assimilação do marxismo na América Latina, cabe destacar El marxismo en América Latina, de Michael Löwy (1980), que percorre a evolução do pensamento e da práxis marxista na América Latina ao longo do século XX; Marx y América Latina, de José Aricó (1980), sobre a relação conflituosa entre Marx e Bolívar e o suposto preconceito eurocêntrico de Marx em relação à América Latina; Una lectura latinoamericana de "El Capital" de Marx, de Alberto Parisi (1988); El último Marx y la liberación latinoamericana, de Enrique Dussel (1990), um estudo a partir da perspectiva de sua filosofia política da libertação; e De Marx al marxismo en América Latina, de Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (1999) (Preciado: 2016).

of power" (Foucault: 1980, p. 69). The reterritorialization of knowledge is a conflictive and complex process that moves from the epistemic-ecological inquiry of a new cartography of knowledge to the realization/incorporation of knowledge into a new social rationality (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987). Strategies of power for the reappropriation of nature and the reterritorialization of knowledge lead toward the restoration of subaltern, subjugated knowledges in order to regenerate alternative cultural rationalities through the encounter among different meanings assigned to nature, new ecological potentials, and new cultural meanings. The territorialization of sustainability entails the critical resignification and reappropriation of knowledge from local identities and the production of new environmental knowledges rooted in the cultural imaginaries of the Peoples of the Earth.

The political philosophy that guides cultural emancipation and social action toward the sustainability of life arises from a radical epistemological conception of the environment. The *environment* is the radical and disjunctive signifier of the exteriority and limit of hegemonic modern rationality that has led humanity to a planetary civilizational crisis; it is the source and potential of an alternative sustainable world. *Environmental knowledge* (Leff: 2002) emerges at the margins of *logocentric* science, from the periphery and margins of central power, in the exteriority of hegemonic scientific rationality and the externalities of the global economic process: it is knowledge forged and rooted in the ecological potentials and cultural creativity of the peoples who inhabit the territories of the South.

The deconstruction of hegemonic globalization – of the oppressive force of universal, unidimensional, and global knowledge under the domination of economic rationality over diversity, difference, and otherness – requires an epistemological decentering of modern rationality. The concept of environment is the anchoring point outside the global economic order that deconstructs knowledge and the unsustainable world order; it is the identity of Latin American Environmental Thought (Leff: 2012). Sustainability, however, is not founded on virgin territory untouched by the institutionalized global rationality that has denied other possible worlds. Environmental rationality is forged at the crossroads of the deconstruction of metaphysical and scientific thought and the territorialization of the principle of an ontology of diversity-difference-otherness.

Opening pathways for the territorialization of environmental rationality entails deconstructing the knowledge that colonizes the sustainable future of humanity and the planet. In contrast to prospective sciences that seek to construct the future by redirecting trends established by techno-economic rationality, environmental rationality constructs the future through the deconstruction of processes of environmental degradation; it decolonizes the future by opening pathways for the knowledges inscribed in the imaginaries and social practices of sustainability; it projects social action from the principles of environmental rationality in order to contain the unsustainable entropic inertia of the global economic order and unleash negentropic potentials for the construction of sustainable lifeworlds.

Environmental rationality opens a new understanding of the world: it questions the metaphysical duality of immutable space and transcendental time. From this perspective, historical time ceases to be a homogeneous flow of events. Sustainability

is not a process conducted through the optimization of the means offered by techno-economic rationality and directed toward a predetermined end, but rather a horizon open to different sustainable ways of life constructed from an ontology of diversity: along the pathways opened through the encounter of rationalities and a dialogue of knowledges; in the encounter between the immanence of life and the rationality of modernity; and in the events generated by the political ontology of difference in the field of political ecology: in the confrontation, convergence, dissent, and alliances of interests and meanings of life. Sustainability is constructed through the encounter between the negentropic potentials of life and the techno-economic rationality that exacerbates processes of entropic degradation. Possible sustainability is the outcome of these conflictive processes: of natural and social forces meeting in the confrontation of rationalities and in the confluence of the synergies of ecological potentials and cultural creativity; in the negotiation of diverse interests and meanings that unleash opposing economic, ecological, and technological processes which, through the fusion of their temporalities and through a dialogue of knowledges, will determine and guide the course of history toward a sustainable future (Leff: 2019b).

The Eurocentric vision of cultural evolution led Indigenous peoples to be understood as backward societies, as a stage in the progress of human development and economic growth, silencing, rendering invisible, subjugating, and exterminating traditional cultures. The decolonization of the lives of peoples and their cultures – of their diverse territorialities – opens a new theoretical perspective on history and space as an "unequal accumulation of times," of the different temporalities that coexist in geographic space (Santos: 1996). This understanding of the world, history, and life challenges both the *a priori* and universal categories of reason and geographic determinism, abandoning the linear, Eurocentric, progressive conception of civilizational time – the stages of development – and incorporating the relativity of the temporalities of the different processes involved in the construction of eco-cultural territories. This conception of historical time and geographic space has important political implications for social movements, including the contemporary relevance of the ancestry invoked by Indigenous peoples, the reversal of internal colonialism through the political construction of plurinationality, the coevolution of peoples-cultures within natures-territories of life, and the legitimization of the existential rights of their social imaginaries of sustainability. Political ecology is thus constructed as a historical geography of conflicts among territorialities (Maier: 2006; Haesbert: 2011).

The decolonization of knowledge thus seeks to dismantle the institutionalized structures that subject the world to an unsustainable rationality. The deconstruction of knowledge reveals the strategies of power concealed behind the veil of the logic of scientific paradigms and their inscription in the rationality that governs the ordering of the globalized world. Deconstructionist thought investigates the points of encounter and rupture, the conjunctures of disjunctions in the folds and planes of immanence where ontological difference unfolds – the disjunction between the Real and the Symbolic, being and beings, *physis* and *logos*, sexual difference, and the nature-culture duality – which instituted the dispositifs of power that generate social inequality, whereby the ways of being of the world in the immanence of life were transformed into an anti-nature rationality that objectified the world; from the abstract idea and the *a priori* judgment of reason that came to govern the world, reducing the value of nature

and human beings to economic calculation and monetary exchange value, generating the *Great Transformation* of modernity (Polanyi: 1944). The deconstruction of knowledge thus becomes an epistemological condition for decolonizing subjugated knowledges, delegitimizing the modes of exploitation of the world economy, and reactivating the ecological and cultural potentials of peoples, thereby giving life to alternative ways of thinking, producing, and inhabiting the world.

The decolonization of knowledge is a condition for the reappropriation of biocultural heritage and the reconstruction of sustainable territories of the Peoples of the Earth. Emancipation from hegemonic powers and from the imposition of modern thought on the worldviews, practices, and ways of life of traditional societies requires new ways of understanding the world that are now emerging from these overexploited territories and from their cultures subjected to the power of an unsustainable rationality. In a globalized world, the social reappropriation of nature takes root in the reinvention of cultural identities. The recovery and reconstruction of traditional knowledge occurs in the conflictive encounter of alternative rationalities, in the confrontation of knowledges inscribed in differentiated ways of understanding the world, with conflicting cognitive interests, conceptual resignifications, and cultural reidentifications, whose outcome is the social construction of sustainability through the dialogue of knowledges.

In this way, the unfolding of the planes of sustainability and the construction of new cultural territories go beyond the purpose of applying scientific paradigms and adapting modern technologies to the ecological and cultural conditions of the South; beyond a structural adjustment of the global economy to the comparative advantages of the resource endowments of Third World countries within the globalized world, following the logic of "sustainable development" in its intention to establish the dominant techno-economic rationality throughout the world. Political ecology deconstructs theory and decolonizes knowledge by politicizing the concepts of diversity, difference, and otherness in order to construct sustainability from the roots of new eco-cultural territories.

In this sense, new rights to cultural diversity and territories of difference (Escobar: 2008) emerge within a political ethics of otherness. These processes open new perspectives for deconstructing hegemonic globality and constructing a world based on the negentropic ecological potentials and cultural creativity of peoples. Beyond tolerance for cultural diversity and the adaptation of the world order to different ecological contexts, the category of *environmental rationality* redirects the destiny of humanity, guided by the heterogenesis of diversity in biological-cultural coevolution and in the construction of a world composed of different cultural projects of sustainability.

Today, various Indigenous, peasant, and Afro-descendant leaders, as well as members of other popular movements, proclaim that their struggles are political and epistemic. This is an unavoidable issue, since every intervention in the world is exercised from an ontological understanding of the world in which we live. Thus, if conquest and colonization, as well as the structures of power that governed Latin American and Third World territories, were subjected from their beginnings to the expansionist needs of nascent mercantile capitalism, and later to the impetus of capital accumulation and

expanded reproduction, their processes of domination and their drives to "know the world" have been sustained by modes of cognitive appropriation of the Real in which science became the instrument and quintessential dispositif of power of *Capital* for its expropriation of the planet in the "ecological" phase of capital through the strategies of the "green economy" and the geopolitics of "sustainable development." If the colonization of Indigenous peoples of the Third World began with their religious beliefs, through the imposition of the Christian creed by evangelizing missions, the conquest of their territories progressively imposed a mode of production alien to the conditions of their ecosystems and to the character of their social imaginaries and traditional practices. The conquest of new territories was possible only through a process of cultural colonization and, therefore, epistemic domination over the imaginaries, worldviews, modes of cognition, and practical knowledges of traditional societies. Scientific knowledge has not escaped this condition of functioning as a dispositif of power and a means of subjugating the existential modes of conquered peoples. The social sciences have followed a complex process of emancipating themselves from the domination of this reason, establishing their own identity vis-à-vis the natural sciences, transcending their function of domination within the "ideological state apparatus," and becoming spaces of critical knowledge capable of allying itself with the *libertarian knowledges of peoples and the knowledges that liberate life*.

The domination of the principle of reason and objective knowledge gradually became established in every sphere of social life: in the scientific field and in the educational field which, from its establishment within the civilizational process of the Third World, followed the patterns and schemes of the institutionalization of scientific knowledge in the central countries, which, since the Enlightenment of Reason, imposed itself as a purportedly universal knowledge and a civilizational principle of humanity. In this way, the frameworks of the social sciences, forged in the mold of scientific rationality, have clothed the social order in the disguise of their absolute truth; they have observed the world through a mirror of self-representation that has distorted the reality of conquered territories. The obstruction of the precolonial civilizational process of conquered peoples opened new pathways for social construction. Modern sciences became a condition for the accreditation and legitimization of professional capacities that, in their articulation with processes of development and globalization, have guided the economic processes of politically independent nations which, nevertheless, have remained subject to the rationality forged within the Eurocentric thought that governs the world.

THE DECONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHER POSSIBLE WORLDS

In the process of constructing scientific knowledge – from the *logocentrism of science* (Derrida), which constitutes the character of "the age of the world picture" and of the "world of *Gestell*" (Heidegger): the objectified, technologized, and capitalized world of modernity – the social sciences followed a process of "emancipation" from the physicalist, mechanistic, and objectivist frameworks in which they had been forged since the seventeenth century – in the image and likeness of the natural sciences, in

which the Cartesian method crystallized as the model for constructing the objective and positive knowledge of modernity (Locke, Bacon, Smith, Ricardo, Rousseau, Comte, Durkheim) – generating critical positions toward the dominant paradigms of science.

The social sciences emerge within the framework of the epistemology of representation. Within this framework, derived from the Cartesian dualistic method and the principle of sufficient reason, the episteme of modernity is configured as a scheme of similarities and differences in which the fields of inquiry into life, labor, and language – biology, economics, and linguistics – are structured, and within which the figure of "man" and the field of the social sciences are designed; a field that is born under the sign of a *mathesis universalis* and evolves toward a structuralism of linguistic lineage (Foucault: 1966). This theoretical framework was transferred to and imposed on Latin America, as well as on the rest of the world, as the hegemonic model of knowledge upon which science establishes its prestige. Within this scheme of understanding, the academic spaces of universities and educational centers were configured, as were dispositifs of power that, through the legitimation of strategies of power in knowledge, imposed the modes of social construction of colonized and dependent countries, as well as their processes of intervention, transformation, and degradation of their ecosystems.

In this context, pioneering theories and critical positions toward doctrines of science as a hegemonic mode of understanding the world emerged in Latin America, including the critical studies on the coloniality of knowledge noted above. In the broader sphere of academia and in the field of the social sciences, the theoretical frameworks and new paradigms of the social sciences formulated in core countries continue to dominate, including new poststructuralist frameworks derived from phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches, such as those of constructivist sociology. The curricula and undergraduate and graduate theses of Latin American universities raise their gaze toward the stars of the constellations of the North. There shine the names of Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze in philosophy; Bourdieu, Habermas, Rawls, Giddens, Beck, and Zizek in sociology; Prigogine, Luhmann, and Morin in complex thought; while the critical approaches of Marx and Foucault concerning schemes of power and power in knowledge prevail as theoretical frameworks for study and research programs.

We should therefore ask whether the problem of the social sciences in Latin America is one of correctly adapting and applying these theoretical frameworks to the social reality of our living territories, or whether what is at stake in the emancipation of life and the construction of sustainability is the inquiry into other modes of understanding socio-environmental processes for which the paradigms and interpretive frameworks coming from the colonizing North are not only insufficient, but also mask reality, render processes of social resistance and re-existence invisible – the reinvention of identities and sustainable life practices – and obstruct the reorientation of historical processes toward the sustainability of life on the basis of other theoretical principles and other existential ontologies.[6]

The critical capacity of the social sciences in the emancipation of peoples acquires

[6] From this perspective, I have proposed a new program of environmental sociology. Cf. Leff, E. (2011), "Sustentabilidad y Racionalidad Ambiental: Hacia 'otro' Programa de Sociología Ambiental," Revista mexicana de sociología, 73, no. 1, pp. 5-46.

exemplary relevance and meaning in the field of political ecology, where the construction of alternative modes of production and the opening of history toward a sustainable future are at stake. Today, neither historical materialism nor the sociology of reflexive modernization allows us to understand the causes, chart the paths, and envision the historical horizons of the civilizational crisis of the globalized world. The processes of emancipation of the Peoples of the Earth, in their demand for existential rights and other possible worlds, likewise do not guarantee the transition toward the sustainability of life. The prevailing frameworks of the social sciences do not allow us to discern the emerging processes in which signs flash forth that open new horizons of life, where the tuning fork of the "vital dialectic of history" vibrates within the magma of meanings in which other possible worlds will have to be forged through a dialogue of knowledges (Leff: 2019b).

The recognition of the historical fact of the coloniality of knowledge, the opening of a thematic space for its analysis, and the valorization of the knowledges subjugated by the colonization of Indigenous peoples do not implicitly and directly lead to the deconstruction and overcoming of that historical process. The coloniality of knowledge opens pathways toward a process of emancipation and reconstruction of knowledge, but it does not automatically establish new social sciences. The subjugating effect of the sciences in general – and of the social sciences in particular – has tended to occlude the lucidity contained in Indigenous knowledges as traces and memories of other possible ways of understanding life, living-in-the-world, and inhabiting the planet. The decolonization of knowledge opens thought to the question of the knowledges that could sustain the life of colonized peoples. At the same time, however, it leads us to question more radically the deconstruction of the knowledge that sowed the seed of the unsustainability of life in every corner of the Planet. Planetary sustainability opens a radical question: which knowledges might sustain life? In this way, the coloniality of knowledge establishes the connection and opens the dialogue between deconstructionist thought concerning the reason that dominates the world and the subjugated knowledges of the Peoples of the Earth.

We should begin by asking whether, beyond being frameworks of intelligibility and modes of understanding each culture's lifeworlds, traditional worldviews and knowledges could be conceived as proto-frameworks for new social sciences. In this sense, contrary to the idea that sciences should be forged by demarcating themselves from the ideological field of a false understanding of their objects of knowledge – within the rationalist framework of Bachelard or Althusser – social science would have to be configured as a reflexive construction on social imaginaries: as a process of reflection on the perception and primary naming of the social fact as it is configured in social imaginaries; as a second-order reflection in relation to the primary stage in the configuration of a self-understanding of life, whether in the form of an imaginary, a worldview, or practical consciousness. The question then arises: how should scientific understanding of social facts be configured so that it may be combined with social actors' own self-understanding of their "internal," "own," and "autonomous" processes of social construction? This is the question Bourdieu sought to answer in his sociology of practical sense (Bourdieu: 2009).

Until now, the social sciences have been constituted within a framework of rationality that, rather than "representing" social facts in their immanently social

condition, as Durkheim intended, constituted schemes of domination and social degradation, processes of subjectivation, colonization, and rationalization of social agents. The theories of structural functionalism and *rational choice* would be their clearest examples. We should therefore think and construct *another* framework of rationality, another sociological paradigm, and other ways of understanding social processes capable of integrating the conditions of life, the determinations of nature, and the cultural processes that guide the social reconstruction of history, without imposing a model of rationality by which to judge and subjugate them. This framework of thought cannot be conceived outside an understanding of the thermodynamic and ecological conditions that sustain symbolic and cultural life. The sociological imagination must resonate with peoples' social imaginaries in order to accompany their emancipatory processes, opening pathways toward sustainable lifeworlds through a dialogue of knowledges between theoretical knowledges and social imaginaries. This would imply that the social sciences abandon their objectivist position in analyzing social realities determined by history in order to open the horizon of other social constructions, other possible worlds (Leff: 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

Such is the challenge faced by the social sciences in view of the imperative of social change marked by the civilizational crisis of our time, particularly the environmental crisis. The social sciences of the South would not simply be a program for applying universal social sciences constructed within the rationality of modernity. Nor could they aspire to be "regional" social sciences. If today we claim the existence of a *Latin American Environmental Thought* that emanates from the socio-environmental struggles and emancipatory processes of this region of the world, strictly local social sciences could not be postulated. The construction of new sciences empathetic with peoples' ways of understanding life implies the deconstruction of the body of science that has been assembled on the basis of the Cartesian method – heir to and mainstay of the history of metaphysics – in disregard of the ontological diversity of nature and cultures. The new social sciences must be born from the matrix of an "ontology of life." From this perspective emerges the construction of an *environmental rationality* as a new framework for understanding the social sciences, founded on an ontology of diversity, a politics of difference, and an ethics of otherness (Leff: 2004/2022, 2010, 2011, 2014).

Environmental rationality is not an ideal or axiomatic model, but a philosophical category that articulates a set of ontological and axiological principles that reorient the imaginaries, experiences, and practices of life within the immanence of life. From this perspective, new reflections for the social sciences are emerging. If the emancipation of life implies the deconstruction of thought – of the knowledge that has constructed an unsustainable world – this acquires its most radical character in the South, where the construction of a world founded on the power of the diversity of life gains meaning and the possibility of realization. This implies a politics of knowledge that reaches the very depths of the deconstruction of the ontology of the One, of the *a priori* knowledge of reason, and of absolute and universal knowledge, in order to reclaim the knowledges born from the conditions and experiences of life of the Peoples of the Earth.

The social sciences in Latin America could not consist solely in applying the critical sciences of the North to the cultural contexts of the South, nor merely in constituting a critical science of the perverse effects of colonizing knowledge. Although every social science in the South must recognize the knowledges subjugated by the coloniality of

knowledge – the knowledges and practices of social and productive organization and the customs and traditions of peoples – the question arises as to the character the social sciences should assume as a critical reflection on these knowledges and practices; whether they could be constructed as an abstraction and generalization of certain critical principles of peoples' modes of being, capable of being reflected as a mode of reflexive understanding, a method of analysis, or a second-order phenomenological reduction of the "raw" imaginaries, practices, and social facts of the life of the Peoples of the Earth, within a critical dialogue between differentiated epistemic rationalities and existential ontologies.

From the critical perspective of "bringing into consonance" scientific knowledge with peoples' knowledges and emancipatory processes – of bringing human knowledges as a whole into attunement and agreement with the conditions of life on the planet – new disjunctive syntagms have emerged which, beyond proposing new research methods for the social sciences, call for combining the approaches of the critical turns in the social sciences – hermeneutic ontology, philosophical deconstruction, poststructuralist and postmodern thought, constructivist sociology, phenomenological anthropology – with the social and environmental imaginaries of peoples and communities. It is in this sense that Arturo Escobar has proposed evocative notions such as "sentipensar" or the "knowledges of the Earth," identifying new emerging areas of inquiry for another social theory within the "contours of a post-episteme-modern-colonial in terms of emerging areas of research," including "decolonial theory (including the coloniality of nature, decolonial feminisms, and decolonial art); studies of alternatives to development (including Buen Vivir, the rights of nature, postdevelopment, alternative economies, and the social and solidarity economy; transitions to postextractivism); civilizational transitions; new approaches to patriarchy, communality, relationality, and the pluriverse (communal systems, community networks, community feminisms, spirituality, and relational ontologies and the pluriverse). The principle of *relationality* emerges forcefully from the so-called 'ontological turn' in social theory" (Escobar: 2014, 2015).[7]

Escobar defines the principle of relationality that characterizes the "ontological turn" demanded by the new social sciences, and that would be immanent to "thinking of the earth," as the "deep interrelationship among everything that exists, the fact that *nothing preexists the relations that constitute it*. Life is interrelation and interdependence, always and at every level. Everything exists because everything else exists, as the South African principle of *Ubuntu* tells us. [...] Everything living is always an integral part of the ever-changing pluriverse. What we call *experience* is always co-emerging with the experiences of many other beings" (Escobar: 2016, p. 12).[8]

If the principle of relationality is incontrovertible from the perspective of an

[7] Cf. Arturo Escobar, "Desde abajo, por la izquierda, y con la Tierra: La diferencia de Abya Yala/Afro/Latino-América." In: *Pueblos en Camino*: http://pueblosencamino.org/?p=2213. Escobar notes that: "This is a brief statement of what is a complex web of research and trends in fields as diverse as phenomenology, complexity sciences, cognitive sciences, ecology, and, more generally, post-dualist, neo-materialist, and post-constructivist critical theory. It should be noted, however, that both Buddhism and many millennia-old cosmologies of many peoples have explored, and lived by, the principle of the inevitable interconnectedness of everything that exists, from the unity of all living beings, including the notion of a living universe in which even so-called 'inanimate' beings have some form of consciousness" (Escobar: 2014).

[8] "Within this purpose and perspective, various spaces for reflection have been opened, such as the biennial gathering *Tramas y Mingas por el Buen Vivir*, organized by activist scholars such as Olver Quijano, Javier Tobar, and Adolfo Albán Achinte. Cf.: https://tramasymingasparaelbuenvivir.wordpress.com/2015/06/24/tramas-y-mingas-para-el-buen-vivir-2015/" (Escobar, *Ibid.*).

ontology of life – if it is the pivot upon which the deconstructive turn from objectivist ontology toward complexity thought revolves – its explicit articulation and implicit experience in the "living well" of the Peoples of the Earth should not exclude some certain or uncertain knowledge of the "non-objective" specificity of the various instances and processes that constitute different social imaginaries, the forces of the cosmos, and the ecosystem dynamics of the territories they inhabit in accordance with their understanding of life. From this perspective, a research agenda centered on the category of the dialogue of knowledges is taking shape (Leff: 2019b).

Clearly, what this research agenda proposes is not merely the imperative that the social sciences understand the social processes emerging in the field of political ecology – peoples' existential rights, ecofeminism, the organization of community autonomies, and their relational ontologies – as new "objects of knowledge" and new topics to be investigated. What this agenda puts at stake is the possibility of articulating, hybridizing, amalgamating, attuning, and harmonizing the knowledge contributed by the social sciences with peoples' social imaginaries as modes of their autonomous knowledge of their conditions of life and their ways of living-in-the-world. Such a purpose opens a question: could social sciences be conceived in which the abstract concept of *Geviert*, through which Heidegger sought to grasp the essence of the modes of Being as the core of a web of relations among earth and world, mortals and gods, might be concretized and transformed into the generic matrix of the lifeworlds of the Peoples of the Earth? Today, philosophical ethics and interpretive sociology are opening the boundaries of rational intellection to welcome the repressed modes of understanding life in bodily perception and the sensitivity of the flesh: through emotions, feelings, intuition, and the inspiration of life.

How should this relational principle of the magma of meanings and senses that pulses in the body of life be translated into the interpretive frameworks of an interpretive sociology that would function as a "second-order reflection" on the modes of peoples' "primary understanding" established in their socio-environmental imaginaries?

This question opens thought to thinking and articulating deconstructionist thought, which seeks to reach the root of originary difference – the *differance* postulated by Derrida – with its effects on the coloniality of knowledges: ultimately, with the domination of nature, the degradation of life, and the extermination of the subjugated knowledges of the Peoples of the Earth. If the forgetting and diversion of the courses of the becoming of life are the effect of a constitutive difference in the order of human life – the originary difference between the Real and the Symbolic – which is not the exclusive legacy of Western history, even in the extreme degree to which it manifests itself in the empire of the hegemonic domination of the rationality of modernity, then the restitution of the order of life goes beyond the decolonization of knowledge understood as disengagement and emancipation from the Eurocentric model. It is not enough to claim the right to other possible worlds as other frameworks of modernization, as alternative modernities that would imply nothing more than a redesign of "development styles" better adapted to the ecological and cultural conditions of the territories of the South and to the opportunities offered by the geopolitics of sustainable development. It will be necessary to venture into a deconstruction of the historical processes through which the social imaginaries of the Peoples of the Earth

have been constructed, in order to unravel the modes of understanding and human intervention in the metabolism of the biosphere and, from there, reinvent other possible sustainable worlds, from the root of originary difference toward the horizons of the sustainability of life, through the dialogue of knowledges.[9]

The spirit and emancipatory will of life could not be satisfied with a critical discourse on the postmodern-colonial-structural-dualist-developmentalist world. The demand for "other possible worlds" calls for the construction of worlds built "otherwise than being," beyond the ontology of Being, within the immanence of Life (Leff: 2018, 2020). The deconstruction of the knowledge that has configured the hegemonic sciences should not lead us, by way of a deconstructionist hermeneutics, to the trace of difference, language, writing, and the originary speech of peoples in which the structures, obstacles, borders, and barriers that today divide North from South would be blurred, only to become subsumed and relativized within the indifference of a globality as ubiquitous as it is omnipresent.[10]

It is precisely at this point that *difference* emerges as the trace of the originary moment of the disjunction between the Real and the Symbolic – which would manifest itself in the history of metaphysics as the irreconcilable duality between nature and culture – and of the unfolding of this difference, which in its historical becoming has generated the differentiated degradation of life across the different territories of the planet. Against the neutralization and relativization of difference in its territorial expressions between North and South, decolonizing thought – political ecology and political ontology emerging from the South – looks to the historical unfolding of *differance* in strategies of power and in the modes of appropriation, transformation, and degradation of territories of life through the hegemonic powers configured in and through the *logocentrism* of science, the power of technology, and the dynamics generated by economic logic, in which difference is instituted as sign-money within market mechanisms and the logic of profit, setting the rhythms and configuring the modes of degradation of nature and oppression of cultures within the geopolitics of economic globalization. It is here that decolonizing thought, by going to the source of oppressive difference, opens the pathways of history toward an "ontology of life," cultural diversity, and a politics of difference.

From the perspective of constructing sustainable societies, the decolonization of

[9] In this sense, Juan Carlos Sánchez-Antonio states that: "Going beyond the decolonization of knowledge, as a disengagement from the Eurocentric model, would invite the reconstruction of the systems of thought of the cultures of the Global South within a five-thousand-year system that was denied by the expansion of Western reason. To overcome the Eurocentric critique of modernity-postmodernity, I must generate the deconstruction of Christian, Hellenic-Cartesian metaphysics from a locus of enunciation unthinkable to the West. Decolonization, then, would not be limited to disengaging from the Eurocentric model of knowledge, but would involve generating dialogues from our proto-history and millennia-old epistemic identity so as not to fall into the modernization of the philosophies and forms of ecological production of the cultures of the South. The question to be answered would therefore be: How can the social sciences be decolonized from the long-duration ethical-ontological cores – five thousand years – of the cultures of the world in order to propose ecological alternatives and overcome capitalism and Western reason?" (Sánchez-Antonio, personal communication).

[10] In his effort to unravel the originary trace of *differance* between the Real and the Symbolic in writing, Derrida relativizes its outcome in the difference that today traverses the major debates of political ecology between two ontological regimes, technology and life, which manifest themselves as two logics of meaning in the territorialization of the planet: "The south and the north are not territories, abstract places that appear only in order to relate to themselves through the other. Language, passion, society, belong neither to the north nor to the south. They are the movement of supplementarity through which the poles alternately substitute for one another: through which accent is inaugurated in articulation, deferred by spacing itself. Local difference is nothing more than the difference between desire and pleasure. It therefore concerns not only the diversity of languages, nor is it merely a criterion of linguistic classification, but the origin of languages [...] That writing is the other name of difference is something we shall never cease to verify" (Derrida, 1971: 335).

knowledge goes beyond shaking off the burden of history, radically criticizing the colonizing process of science, and disengaging from the dominant economic model; it transcends the purpose of returning to the originary moment of language and writing that, within each culture, configured an ethnic style, its processes of coevolution with nature, and the transformative intervention in its ecosystems; the processes of deterritorialization resulting from the colonization of ethnic spaces; their processes of resistance and strategies of survival; their processes of reterritorialization and re-existence.

The decolonization of the knowledge and practices of the Peoples of the Earth entails the deconstruction of a history of domination and extermination, of an originary writing that has remained inscribed in their imaginaries, their *habitus*, and their social practices; but at the same time – and above all – it is a process of reconstructing their living spaces, as practiced today by Zapatista communities in their "caracoles," by rubber tappers of the Amazon forest in their extractive reserves, by Quechua and Aymara peoples in the Andean countries, by the Mapuche in the Southern Cone, and by the Seri in northern Mexico. This reconstruction of ways of life is a process of reinventing their identities that takes shape within the sphere of environmental complexity (Leff: 2000). These are processes of resignifying their relationship with nature, recognizing the environmental potentials of their territories, and renewing their productive and social practices. These processes are by no means an impossible return to an idyllic past – which never existed – or to ecologically pure practices that no culture has ever practiced. As an emancipatory deconstruction of a dominant hegemonic rationality that has penetrated the logics of meaning of "traditional" communities, the reinvention of their ways of being-in-the-world inevitably occurs within a context of cultural hybridization and dialogue of knowledges: an encounter among logics and ways of being as confronting strategies of appropriation and reappropriation of territories within a finite ecosphere. The sustainability of life is constructed in the field of political ecology: a field of forces traversed by strategies of power, controversies and conflicts, alliances and synergies, between the process of capitalization of nature determined by the rationality of modernity and the process of constructing an environmental rationality within the immanence of life.

At this crossroads, Latin American social sciences must do more than perform a critical function toward society: beyond allying themselves with the emancipatory processes of the peoples of the region, they must above all connect with the epistemic frameworks through which peoples understand their ways of living-in-the-world and, from there, project reconstruction on the basis of the reinvention of their collective identities through a renewed understanding of their existential conditions, the ecological potentials of their territories, and their cultural ways of life.

IS THERE A LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE FOR THINKING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL THEORY?

Following this reflection on the political ecology of the coloniality of knowledge, one question remains latent:

Is there a Latin American perspective for thinking about the environmental question within the framework of social theory? This question poses a dilemma concerning the possible emancipation of "Latin American" social sciences from the bloc of science and from the hegemonic blockage exerted by the frameworks of intelligibility of social reality that have been configured in the North.

The question leads us to challenge the very terms of the question: is there a *properly* Latin American perspective?[11] This is not merely a matter of answering whether such a perspective already exists, here and now, or whether what is at stake is the possibility of constructing it. Before answering that possibility, another question arises: would such a perspective be singular or multiple? Is Latin America a homogeneous space, or does it at least possess common features from which an identity and a difference in relation to the North and to the hegemonic bloc of the globalized world might be established? This leads us to ask about the construction of a social theory that we would like to call "Latin American," beyond the pragmatic rationale of applying its knowledge to cases, situations, and problems located within its regional space. The social sciences are not configured and reconstructed from their conceptual abstractions as a logic of scientific discovery within a framework of theoretical falsifications (Popper, 1973), but rather from the practices of social scientists. And these scientists are differentiated by their disciplinary interests, theoretical approaches, and ideological inclinations; by their class alliances and social commitments.

If we have claimed the existence of a Latin American Environmental Thought, then we should conceive the Latin American perspective as a horizon rather than a boundary, as an epistemic territory territorialized in differentiated territories of life, as a path to be constructed in which the social sciences may better understand the modes of social construction that take place amid the tensions among the different rationalities that today conflictively traverse the construction of human life on the planet, in its diverse forms of understanding life and its different ways of being-in-the-world. From this perspective, and looking toward the reconstruction of social sciences oriented toward the construction of a sustainable world from an "ontology of life," it is possible to conceive a new program for the social sciences grounded in the thermodynamic, ecological, and cultural conditions of the South, and particularly of Latin America. This program could unfold across the following themes:

1. In the field of economics, the possibility opens for constructing a new productive paradigm. This goes beyond making economic adjustments and seeking opportunities within the "comparative advantages" offered by economic-ecological globalization within the geopolitics of sustainable development, within an ecological economics oriented toward "internalizing environmental externalities," and within a bioeconomy that posits the entropic condition of the economic process. In contrast to an economic policy of adjustments, opportunities, and regulations of market mechanisms in the capitalization of nature, which inexorably advances the entropic degradation of the planet, the possibility opens for thinking about a "negentropic" economy, a negentropic productive paradigm grounded in the ecological potentials of the continent and in the cultural creativity of its peoples; an

[11] Arturo Escobar reminds us of the famous debate between Leopoldo Zea and Augusto Salazar Bondi over "whether or not a philosophy of our America exists." See: Augusto Salazar Bondy (1968), ¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico; Leopoldo Zea (1969), Filosofía Americana como filosofía sin más, Siglo XXI Editores, Mexico.

eco-technological-cultural paradigm founded on the positive synergies of the conditions of life (Leff: 1994; 2004/2022, Chap. 4).

2. In the field of legal sciences, it is not enough to implement environmental legislation and a normative framework that could scarcely contain the effects of the overexploitation of nature and human beings in order to constitute a paradigm of environmental justice. The legal sciences of sustainability must deconstruct the individualistic principles of positive law, which support economic rationality, in order to provide jurisprudential grounding for common rights to the common goods of humanity. To this end, the rights of the Peoples of the Earth to their Territories of Life must be constructed and legitimized, along with their existential rights to their cultural *ethos* within different communal orders of life, and the right to the peaceful resolution of conflicts that emerge from a politics of difference.
3. In the field of philosophy and ethics, the environmental crisis marks a limit and traces a horizon for transcending the history of metaphysics centered on reflection on being, in order to think an "ontology of life," a form of thought attuned and appropriate to the thermodynamic, ecological, symbolic, and cultural conditions of life in each territory of life and to coexistence among the Peoples of the Earth, founded on a political ethics of difference and otherness.
4. In the field of anthropology and the ethnosciences, an innovative inquiry opens into the modes of internalization and incorporation of life – of thermodynamic, ecological, and symbolic conditions – within the cultural imaginaries of peoples: in the *habitus*, productive practices, and social relations of communities.
5. In the field of environmental sociology and political ecology, a broad program opens, grounded in an "ontology of life." From this perspective, social science is oriented toward understanding and accompanying the processes of reconstruction and reorganization of sustainable lifeworlds. Beyond the analysis of socio-environmental conflicts and strategies of power in the dispute and resolution of conflicts among alternative modes and models of the territorialization of life, political ontology must open the sociological imagination toward a sociology of the emancipation of life and the processes of re-existence of the Peoples of the Earth.

CONCLUSIONS

Certainly, the turn of the social sciences toward the environmental question could not, by itself, provide the knowledges necessary to foster the decolonial turn or provide a foundation for transcending toward the sustainability of life. As Escobar (2016) states, the social sciences "prove at least *insufficient* to provide us with the questions – much less the answers – needed to confront the multiple interrelated crises of food, climate, poverty, and meaning" (p. 10); he further argues that:

> [...] we can assert, with greater boldness and a stronger sense of reality, that the key questions and proposals concerning these crises are not emerging from the social sciences or academia, but from the epistemic space being forged through the multiplication of subaltern *other* knowledges and ways of knowing, and the critical

> tendencies associated with them (2016, p. 10);

And he states that these emerging knowledges:

> [...] maintain a relationship with academia grounded in the autonomy of categories of thought and subaltern experiences [...] where their fundamental objective is to contribute to struggles for the (re)constitution of worlds based on the categories and experiences of actors engaged in struggle and resistance [...] where worlds and knowledges are actively constructed otherwise [...] displacing the categories [of the social sciences] from the center of the interpretation of reality (2016, p. 13).

In an earlier text entitled "Pensamiento Ambiental Latinoamericano: patrimonio de un saber para la sustentabilidad," I pointed out that the greatest outstanding task of this field of reflection, in both theory and practice, was:

> [...] to constitute itself through a plural, direct, and close dialogue with the Indigenous and popular knowledges of the peoples of the region. Only through putting this dialogue into practice can a political ethics of difference emerge that reorients the cultural reappropriation of humanity's common heritage [...] which cannot be reduced to a totalitarian regime of signification: neither to the commodification of nature, nor to an ecological norm, nor to a generic meaning of being and a "species consciousness" that generalizes differentiated visions and interests regarding nature and life; nor to a hegemonic and dominant rationality aimed at resolving and reaching consensus, through an underlying body of knowledge, on the solidarities that must be forged in their differences, without possible amalgamation, within those forms of otherness irreducible to any common meaning other than a civilizational opening toward a future driven by the heterogenesis of biocultural diversity (Leff: 2012, p. 450).

Colonial difference opens thought and action to the field of the political ecology of the dialogue of knowledges.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Enrique LEFF: He is a Senior Researcher at the Institute for Social Research and a professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He is an Emeritus Researcher of Mexico's National System of Researchers. He served as coordinator of the Environmental Training Network for Latin America and the Caribbean within the United Nations Environment Programme (1986–2008). He is a pioneering author in the fields of eco-Marxism, political ecology, environmental sociology, environmental philosophy, and environmental education. He is considered one of the leading exponents of Latin American Environmental Thought. He received the National Award for Socio-Humanistic Research from the Autonomous University of San Luis Potosí in 2015; an Honorary Doctorate from the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico in 2016; and the National University Award for Research in the Social Sciences (UNAM) in 2016.

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