



Ecological Crisis, Development and Capital Contradictions in Latin America¹

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Introduction

This article is about the social and ecological crisis in Latin America which is closely related to the social and economic development process. The underdeveloped economy has determined the general features of the rural and urban regions. Poverty, social exclusion and environmental conflicts are some of the general consequences of the capital contradictions which define an underdeveloped process of growth.

To analyse the social and environmental conditions of Latin-American urban and rural regions it is necessary to take into account three main factors: the contradiction between capital and production conditions (nature, space and labourpower), the underdeveloped economy which has determined high levels of inequality and social exploitation, and the exploitation process of natural resources based on a pillage economy.

The imported market economy in Latin America, as a bad copy of the growth economy in the North, has generated a highly unequal development. The acceleration of the economic growth has gone hand in hand with the deceleration of the development. Whereas the macro-economic rates improve, the indicators that measure qualitative evolution among sectors, territories and people have deteriorated.

So, to explain the ecological crisis in Latin America, it is important to consider not only the different forms of environmental impacts, but also the socio-economic factors and the contradictions in capitalistic development. Therefore, this article is aimed to describe the general social and economic development process in Latin America, and also to examine the relationship among industrialization, natural resources exploitation and urbanization related to the social and ecological conditions in urban and rural areas.

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In order to analyze the above mentioned relation between development and ecological crisis it is important to pay attention to new theories that can give us a better idea on the relationship between society and nature. The traditional interpretations on Latin American development have not taken into account the complexity of existing relations among socio-economic, political and environmental aspects since these interpretations mainly conceive society "disconnected" from its natural surroundings. Therefore, these lines of thought are not capable of considering the interrelations, influences and conditioning that define the historical processes, which are always (directly or indirectly) constructed from an articulation of social and natural processes.

Thus, to study the relationship among society, nature and development it is necessary to consider one of the basic tendencies of capital: to debilitate and to destroy its own production conditions. Production conditions refer to external physical conditions or environment, communal conditions like regional or urban infrastructure and personal conditions of labourpower. The basic tendency of capital mentioned above is precisely explained by the theory of second contradiction of Capitalism (O'Connor, 1988). The first contradiction of Capitalism (between forces and relations of production - capital against work-) is internal to the system; it has nothing to do with the conditions of production. The second contradiction of Capitalism "focuses on the way that the combined power of capitalist production relations and productive forces self-destruct by impairing or destroying rather than reproducing their own conditions ("conditions" defined in terms of both their social and material dimensions)" -i.e. capital against nature, labourpower and space-. An intense and continuous exploitation of natural resources as well as spatial and labourpower general conditions is needed for Capital to valorise itself. "The basic cause of the second contradiction is capitalism's economically self-destructive appropriation and use of laborpower, urban infrastructure and space, and external nature or environment -- 'self-destructive' because costs of health and education, urban transport, home and commercial rents, and the costs of extracting the elements of capital from nature will rise when private costs are turned into <social costs>".

In the first contradiction the rate of work exploitation as a clearly remarkable element that assumes an excluding theoretical importance is identified, while in the second contradiction a unique term that summarizes the totality does not exist. That is why it is possible today to find a multiplicity of social movements with diverse vindications. So, new social movements -together with the historical labourpower movement- are the agencies of current social transformation, which represent new social struggles including, among others, struggles within production over workplace health and safety, toxic waste production and disposal, natural resources exploitation, urban conditions of life, radical democracy patterns to solve problems and to take social and political decisions.

General characteristics of the Development in Latin America

In order to start to characterise the historical process of development in Latin America, we can take into account the following periods: the "mercantilist" colonial period (1500-1750), the period of "outward growth" dependent on primary exports (1750-1914), the crisis of the "liberal model" period (1914-1950), and the current period of "transnational capitalism".

The peripheral, underdeveloped and dependent Latin American economy³ started in the colonial period. Then the "...production was not directed by the needs of national consumers, and not even by the interests of local producers. The lines of production were structured and transformed to conform to an order determined by the imperial metropolis. The colonial economy was consequently shaped by its complementary character" (Bagú, 1949). Then, during the nineteenth century, the politically dominant groups, who led the independence movements, continued with the primary exports economy. They did not attempt to transform internal productive structures, they only eliminated Iberian interference in the commercialization of products to and from England and northern Europe. It implies that the logic of the productive system in this period of "outwardly directed development", was not conducive to the creation of a large industrial sector (Valenzuela & Valenzuela, 1998).

This situation changed in the first decades of the twentieth century. The World Wars and the depression produced a crisis in the export-oriented economies through the collapse of external demand, and therefore of the capacity to import. Fiscal and monetary policies were adopted to try to promote the internal market and to try to avoid the negative effects of the external disequilibrium. In this context, a favourable climate was created for the growth of an industrial sector under national auspices. This "import substitution industrialization policies" employed the available foreign exchange to acquire capital goods to substitute imports of consuming articles.

This industrialization programme started to decline after World War II. The transformation in the centre of the world system generated the "transnational capitalism" period. Dependency acquired a new character where the growing multinational corporations sought new markets and cheaper production sites for their increasingly technological manufacturing processes. It implies that these corporations invested into the periphery for sales in their internal market or, as Cardoso and Faletto (1969) noted, the "internationalization of the internal market". Besides, two other processes can be mentioned: 1) "a new international division of labour in which the periphery acquires capital goods, technology, and raw materials from the central nations, and exports profits, along with its traditional raw materials and a few manufactured items produced by multinational subsidiaries, and 2) a denationalization of the older import substituting industries established originally (Valenzuela & Valenzuela, 1998).

At this point it is important to remember that different thinkers have criticized the different Latin-American development theories⁴. Most of this criticism, from a sustainable development approach, has some characteristics in common (Mansilla, 1991; Tudela, 1990; Gudynas, 1999; Leff, 1999; Guimaraes, 1999).

First, it can be seen an important adhesion to the progress ideology and to the mechanistic view of society that necessarily has to go forward in order to get a superior achievement every time. The capital accumulation and the rise of material goods, productivity and efficiency would be the indicators of those advances. In this context, all the tendencies, liberal, neoliberal, Marxists left and non Marxists left, consider the economic growth as necessary. The differences among the paradigms are only related to the role of the

³ As Sunkel and Paz (1970) quoted: "Both underdevelopment and development are aspects of the same phenomenon, both are historically simultaneous, both are linked functionally and, therefore, interact and condition each other mutually. This results... in the division of the world between industrial, advanced or "central" countries, and underdeveloped, backward or "peripheral" countries..."

⁴ An interesting critical reflection on the ideology of 'developmentalism' and 'globalization' can be found in Wallerstein (2005)

state, the market, the social classes, etc., but not around the sustainability of the economic model.

Second, nature does not appear in these theories, and when it appears it is only in a subsidiary form. The environmental restrictions to the development have been minimized and in some cases have been denied. Nature has been replaced by the concept of natural resources, considering each one in a separate way. Besides, these natural resources are considered as infinity, and with the capacity to support an unlimited exploitation rate. In this way, nature does not generate limitation to material progress.

In this context, the concept of sustainable development has acquired some importance in the last decades in Latin America, taking into account that the concept sustainability does not mean the same thing for everybody. For a lot of Latin-American thinkers (Sanchez, 1983; Gallopín, 1987; CEPAL, 1992; E. Leff, 1994; Sejenovich, H & D. Panario, 1996; Guimaraes, 2001) the main objective of the sustainable development is to improve the quality of life. This improvement is possible through the maximum utilization of the productive potential of the ecosystem in the long term; through the use of social as well as environmental appropriate technology and through the active participation of all the people in the fundamental decisions about development.

Although in all these sustainable development approaches, the underdeveloped conditions and the ecological crisis are present, the use of the concept of sustainability generates serious doubts on the possibility of an effective solution to the social and environmental problems which are the consequences of the growth economy in the South. Taking into account the process of boundless accumulation and competition in the present globalized process of society, Serge Latouche has argued that “the concept of sustainable development is but the latest attempt to allay the bad sides of economic growth” (Latouche, 1999). In this context, as Latouche continues, any true kind of care of the oikos or environmental or cultural consideration is not possible because the sustainable development integrates the environmental elements into economic calculating in a way that it does not modify the root causes of ecological crisis. Otherwise, to reduce the environmental and social degradation process it is necessary to modify not only the nature of market economy but also the logic of modernity. From a Marxist approach, the above mentioned James O’Connor strongly criticises the concept of sustainability due to the fact that the two contradictions of capitalism generate renewed global crisis with a reduction in profits. O’Connor maintains that a sustainable capitalism is impossible since the capitalism tends to self-destruction, and the market economy increases the poverty, starvation and ecological conflicts (O’Connor, 1998).

Industrialization, Deindustrialization and Ecological Crisis

The modern development models present in the different Latin American regions during the last century have produced a high social and environmental impact. The economic development in the South is a bad copy of the development in the North. Most of the social, economic and ecological crisis in the South has to do with the spreading of the “growth economy” (Fotopoulos, 1997). Whereas the market economy led to improve the economic situation of most of the society in the North, “the imported market economy in the South led to a much more uneven development than in the North and to a bad copy of the latter’s growth economy”.

The industrialization process which began in the thirties and forties was one of the most important causes of the social and territorial transformation as well as the origin of the rural and specially the urban ecological crisis in Latin America.

The request of labour force for this industrialization process, accelerated the migration from the countryside to the city, determining an exponential growth of the Latin-American cities. The urban population which was 40% of the total population in 1950, grew to 56% in 1970 and reached 67% by mid eighties. Obviously, there are differences among the countries: Chile, Argentina and Uruguay have more than 80% of urban population; and Haití, Honduras, Guatemala, Bolivia have only approximately 50% of urban population. But the tendency is that this urban growth continues. So this means that the countries in South America have been transformed from agrarian countries to urban countries as from the second half of the twentieth century.

It is necessary to distinguish between industrialization and urbanization. The industrialization process was the main cause of the urban growth from 1930 to 1950. But whereas in the last decades of the twentieth century the urban population has continued to grow, the number of industrial workers first stopped growing and then started to decrease.

The urbanization process determined an increase of the commercial, financial and construction activities, generating serious communication and transport problems. Thus, the Latin-American cities started a deep process of degradation of physical environment in which noise, rubbish and pollution were the most common expressions. The massive industrialization and urbanization process have provoked a very high energy consumption. This increase of the production and the new consumption policies were based only in an industrial growth conception rather than in a social and economic integral development (Vitale, 1983).

To promote this industrial growth, Latin-American governments fomented the arrival of transnational capitals to control the industries. These transnational capitals brought new technology which could not be reproduced in these local regions. This technological difficulty has also increased the dependency level. One of the consequence of this industrialization growth was the generation of new forms of pollution, which in several cases were not allowed in developed central countries. But, to favour the industrial development, Latin-American governments did not pay attention to the environmental impact that these processes generated.

The crisis of the industrialization process started in the seventies. Strong structural reforms and the opening of the economy have conformed the line of the new policies. "Market rules" have led Latin America to a deep privatization, deindustrialization and economy concentration process. As a result, there has been an increase in unemployment, poverty, inequality, social exclusion and looting of natural resources.

The renewed specialization of Latin America as a region which exports raw material, has turned into strong pressure on the natural environment taking into account the severe increment in the rates of nature exploitation without considering its reproduction. The basic characteristic of a "pillage economy" whose unique logic is to extract resources as quick as possible and then abandon the place when nature can not provide anything else, leads to an exploitation process of the natural resources without considering the mechanisms of regeneration (in the cases of renewable resources) or of a rational use in the medium or long term (in the case of the non renewable resources). Some historical examples of this modality were the exploitation of quebracho in the Argentinian Chaco, guano and tin in the Chilean north, silver in Bolivia, etc.

A remarkable contradiction is present in this exploitation process, since the logic to extract resources as quick as possible foment an undermine process of the production means, showing evidence of the contradiction between nature and capital.

This exploitation process can be easily characterized as irrational in those cases of small and medium producers that do not possess any alternative of change in their economic strategies. However, it is clearly rational and functional in those big mobile capitals that move activity once the resources have exhausted. This strategy of big mobile capitals is much more evident due to the increment of foreign investments in the last decades. Maybe the most eloquent example is that of the mining activity that in the context of the new open market policies represents an exclusively extractive activity (in which the rational social use of the resource is not considered at all) managed by big multinational capitals whose productive and investment territory is the whole world. Thus, the method is a swift exploitation of resources, minimizing costs and maximizing profits, and then a move to another region to repeat the process.

Trying to build bonds between the dominant development style and the environment it is possible to establish a series of relevant and significant features that have persisted in the Latin-American contemporary history⁵. This way, a close panorama of the relationships among society, nature and models of exploitation together with the consequences on the natural environment can be summed up as follows:

- The natural offer has a preponderant role in the economic development style, which is based on agricultural and mining production, destined mainly to exportation. That is to say, Latin America is a region specialized in the production and export of primary products⁶. Hence, the importance of considering the contradiction between capital and nature to understand the development process.
- Land, in spite of being one of the most abundant resources, it represents a limited means of production for most of the population due to structural causes. Latin America has developed under a strong monopolization of land. Most of the productive land belongs to a reduced elite representing their main source of wealth and power. Although this concentration of land suffered some modifications in the XX century through diverse agrarian reforms, still today some consequences such as the persistence of the latifundium, the particular urban structures as well as urban location of the European immigration and the scarce populated areas are present.
- The high natural productivity of certain ecosystems has led to a concentration of primary production in certain regions for a long time. A growing level of nature exploitation was mainly based on a relative capacity of environmental resistance instead of on a high technological innovation. As a result, there have been signs of soil exhaustion in the last decades that show once again the contradiction between capital and nature.
- A notorious contrast between the urban plain systems and urban systems of mountainous areas, generating marked differences in terms of congestion problems, access to the reservoirs of fresh water, self-purification capacity of water and air, flood problems, etc. Buenos Aires for example, located in a vast plain surrounded by important courses of water –flood problems- and with a great air circulation, contrasts notably with Santiago de Chile or the city of Mexico, located in mountainous areas with water provision problems and high level of air contamination due to the reduced air circulation.

⁵ For specific information about Argentina see: Galafassi (2004)

⁶ A new version of this specialization in the production is represented by the deep integration into the global economy of “Genetically Modified Organisms” (Dimitriu et al, 2002; Kneen, 2002)

- The dominant style of development has always considered everything on the surface as an obstacle that must be removed (forests, fauna, biodiversity) to use the soil for farming, mining or urban purposes, being the soil overvalued respect to the rest of the natural resources. From mid XIX century the elite in power have privatized the public lands and all their natural resources, which were previously snatched to the native inhabitants. Thus the soil constitutes the fundamental resource for the present and future usufruct.
- The supposition of an unlimited offer of resources has resulted in a slow, but in some cases deep process of edaphic, landscape and biodiversity deterioration. The high natural fertility of certain regions has many times hidden this deterioration process. The production strategy is to occupy new spaces instead of investing in nature conservation. The capitalistic logic to minimize cost and maximize profits leads to solve the problem or resource exhaustion through the geographic mobilization of investments. Needless to say, vast virgin lands of Latin America constitute an incomparable natural offer.
- The dominant style of development characterized by a unimodal pattern assumes that all regional ecosystems have an equal stability and resistance. This assumption has redounded to depletion and deterioration of the weakest regional ecosystems. In addition, the productive practice has acquired uniformity and homogeneity resulting not only in biodiversity elimination but also in nullifying native and peasant cultural differences. The present advance of the soya with its complex and dependent technological package represents a renewed phenomenon in this same sense.

Urban and Regional Socio-ecological Conditions

It is necessary to analyse the social and environmental conditions of Latin-American urban regions taking into account two main factors: the high population and territorial growth of Latin American urban regions during the second half of the twentieth century, and the non-existence of an integral development which would have improved the quality of life (Galafassi, 2002b).

Some different forms of pollution, non-availability of infrastructure and poverty are the consequences of capital contradictions and the lack of an integral development.

Poor housing conditions, health problems, inadequate feeding and absence of basic utilities among others, are mainly determined by a low income of an important part of the population (Hardoy, & Satterthwaite, 1987; Di Pace et al, 1990; Hardoy et al, 2001).

Considering this context, it is easy to see the existence of a real social and ecological crisis in the urban regions in Latin America. This crisis has been made worse since the implementation of neoliberalism policies in the last decades.

The “home internal environment” of poor families in South America is characterized by insanitary conditions. Approximately 20% to 50% of the inhabitants in most urban areas live in inadequate homes closely related to the poverty condition of the population (Killen & Rahamn, 2001; Hardoy et al, 2001); up to 15 people can live in the same house. In addition, a great part of the fast increase of the population in the cities has resulted in illegal communities built over swamp zones with contaminated waters. These “suburbs” have grown more quickly than the rest of the city and in most of them there is a lack of current water, drainage, rubbish recollection system and paved streets (Hardoy & Satterthwaite, 1987; Hordijk, 1999; Daneke & Silve, 1982; Moser, 1982; Connolly, 1982; Hardoy et al, 2001).

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Environmental quality is very frequently sacrificed in detriment of other more important factors for people's survival.

It is possible to establish a difference between the people who live in precarious houses built in illegal conditions and the people who live in bad conditions too, but in houses or departments built in legal conditions. The first kind of accommodation is called "shanty towns" in English, and "favelas", "callampas", "cantegriles", "pueblos jóvenes" or "villas de emergencia" in the different countries of Latin American. And the second kind of accommodation is the "slums" or "tenement houses" in English, which are called "asentamientos" or "conventillos" in Latin America.

Most of the shanty towns appear and develop in different inadequate places to live. Thus, there are shanty towns in the sides of mountains where the avalanches occasionally happen, for example Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the city of Guatemala, La Paz (Bolivia) and Caracas (Venezuela). There are also shanty towns in some sandy deserts as in Lima (Perú) and in some flooding lands as in Guayaquil (Ecuador), Recife (Brazil), Resistencia and Buenos Aires (Argentina). In Mexico City approximately a million and a half of its inhabitants live over the dry bed of Texcoco Lake. This place is exposed to dust storms in the dry season and turned into a muddy place when it rains.

The industrialization process has led some cities of Latin America to have an important concentration of industries. These cities have serious problems of pollution compared to the pollution problems that exist in developed countries (Cherni, 2001). Actually the problems can sometimes be more serious due to two reasons. Firstly, the fast growth of the industrial production in some countries of Latin America in the last decades in a context without an efficient system of planning and regulations. The more quickly the increase of the industrial production is, the more the probability that the problem becomes worse since the control of industrial pollution is neither an important concern to the government nor to most of the people. Secondly, the industrial production is commonly concentrated in one or two regions in the countries. And the little government efforts to decentralize the industrial development could only achieve that the new industries are located in the periphery of the cities still within the vast metropolitan area.

As it is known the low level of control in the peripheral countries has made it possible for the highly contaminating industries to relocate. Multinational corporations, originally located in developed countries had to "export" their pollution production processes to avoid paying the costs of the more strict contamination controls and the more strict workers safety and health rules⁷.

The "regional impacts" is an important factor to consider in Latin America since the disordered growth of the big cities affects the nearby territories in different ways. These big cities as big production and consumption centres, demand a great quantity of resources like water, fossil oil, land and all the material that urban activities require. But the cities are also great resource degradation centres. So, "regional impacts" can be divided into two subcategories: those originated by the extraction of natural resources required by the urban activities; and those derived by the urban activities themselves that somehow affect the region surrounding the city. Obviously both subcategories are closely connected, since the type of urban production and consumption defines the natural resources which are needed as well as the kind of waste thrown to the nearby territories. Furthermore, this permanent exchange makes it difficult to separate the rural areas from the urban areas. This situation is

⁷ See recent historic examples of amianthus manufacturing relocation in Hardoy, J.E. & D. Satterthwaite (1987) and mercury contamination in Street (1981).

more evident in the metropolitan cities where the transition from one system to another is extremely gradual and almost imperceptible.

So, a permanent relation between urban and rural activity is seen. The impoverishment of the rural population leads to the migration from the countryside to the cities. The cities grow and expand expelling the agriculture producers from their lands. These lands are occupied by new urbanizations generally without considering the provision of urban services and the after impact of the natural phenomenon which could turn into disaster. Likewise the growing population pressure forces to bigger demands of water that can result counter-productive due to the increase of the rural areas with salty grounds and the growth of desert areas.

According to some authors, it is possible to consider as a parasitary relationship that established between the city and its nearby lands. This parasitary relationship is based on the evolution of the economic value of the natural resources, particularly the soil, the subsoil, the vegetation and the different geographical features. The growth of cities decreases or eliminates the diversity of natural ecosystems, species and geographical features, and the food productive potential of its soils (Rees; 1999, 2001).⁸

Modernization and socio-ecological mobilization

The doctrine of modernization has led all development processes in Latin America. As a consequence, the regional socio-ecological evolution and the social mobilization processes have been closely related to this dominant pattern. This doctrine of modernization, as a subsidiary of the ideology of modern progress, is sustained chiefly on vast human capacities to transform material reality aiming at developing productive forces to increase comfort conditions. Economic growth, technological innovation, exploitation of labour force and nature are the main axes of modern progress ideology. This pattern of progress and modernization, even presenting certain temporal and spatial changes, maintains an essential continuity throughout the Latin-American history of XX century. Economic growth and technological development have always been at the core of Latin-American politics, from the populism of the forties and the developmentalism of post-war, until the increasing authoritarian liberalism of the seventies and the democratic neoliberalism of the end of the century. The way in which wealth is distributed, the specific model of industrialization and urbanization, the farming and regional development as well as the level of exploitation of nature and labour force is what differs.

In this context a diverse range of organizations and social movements have indicated disagreement to this dominant model of society, both in its socio-political and economic aspects and in its ecological aspects: from those that criticize capitalism to the ones that intensely point out the faults of modern progress itself. On the one hand, criticism to capitalism does not imply criticising the modern development process and on the other hand in judging modernity from an ecologicistic perspective the idea of economic growth is involved including capitalist and socialist productivism.

The present theoretical frameworks with which social movements are researched (identified with the functionalistic and post-modern ideology of the methodological individualism) prefer to differentiate between old and new social movements as well as between old and new political paradigms (Offe, 1985; Melucci, 1980, 1996; Tarrow, 1994; McAdam et al, 1996). The old movements were enrolled in the classic classes' struggle in which the dominant social subjects were both the institutionalized groups and the political

⁸ Some studies on this topic in Argentina: see Rodríguez et al (1996); Morello and Rodriguez (2001).

parties that promoted the values of social mobility. Whereas the new movements are guided by open and flexible networks responding to non-institutionalized politics, in a context in which the classes' struggle is not present. Instead of following this theoretical argument, it is preferred to think the Latin American social reality in terms of complex processes in which the mechanical divisions (between, for example, old and new social movements) do not correspond to the historical present and where, the social movements diverse manifestations interrelate and interact in different ways, always expressing opposition between classes or fractions of classes (Galafassi, 2006).

Even when in the sixties and the seventies the differences were more marked, at present a paradigms confluence process is observed. The counterculture and ecologicistic movements of the sixties and seventies directed their criticism against the above mentioned ideology of the modern progress, trying to achieve the goal of "return to nature", initiating a new communal life related with a "radical democratic philosophy", breaking down the modern concept of private and individualistic life. It means that they tried to generate a new social model without industries and cities, despising the modernization course and contravening several essential principles of the idea of modern progress. This model also included a certain criticism to Capitalism which was not too explicit.

However, those movements identified with left-wing tendencies and classist organizations (labour movement, urban guerrilla, peasant movements, etc.) considered Capitalism as the main or exclusive cause of social alienation paying little or null attention to socio-ecological and "radical democratic" issues. The mainstream was the so-called "strategy of two steps": first, gain state power; second, transform the world (Wallerstein, 2002). For this objective a rigid political organization was necessary (Leninist strategy).

Nevertheless, in the last decades a confluence process among tendencies and movements in Latinamerica is emerging (in agreement with the international trend). Although the differences continue existing, they are not already so marked. The environmental problems, the criticism to the state concentration of power and the related interest in the participative democracy as well as the respect to the cultural and biological diversity (supposed features of the new social movements) in addition with the classist criticism to Capitalism and the necessity to construct a political organization (supposed features of the old social movements) are closely related as topics of reference in many movements.

Petras (2002), for example, identified three waves of overlapping and interrelated social movements since the end of the seventies. A first wave, which is composed by the so-called "new social movements", included human rights, ecology, feminist, and ethnic movements as well as Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). These "new social movements" have developed since the late seventies and the military and civilian authoritarian regimes of that time were the main focus of their protest.

A new version of this kind of movements is the popular assemblies which appeared in Argentina in recent years. Some of them have focused their action on specific environmental problems, for example the "Self-assembled Neighbours of Gualeguaychu" (Vecinos Autoconvocados de Gualeguaychú) protesting against the papermills in Uruguay and different assemblies in the Patagonian and the Andes opposing to gold mining projects (being Perú an antecedent of these popular fights). Esquel assembly in Patagonian Andes was the most prominent popular mobilization. Meridian Gold Inc., headquartered in Reno, NV, has proposed to develop an open-pit gold mine 7 kilometers upstream from the town of Esquel (population of approximately 30,000). Once this popular organization started in 2001 the protests were gradually growing. Finally, in March 2003, residents of Esquel region

declared a resounding "no" to gold mining by a referendum. More than 80 percent of the citizens of Esquel region voted against the project and against all policy that implied any kind of natural resources devastation. Esquel experience has been replicated in other places and also a Patagonian Coordinator Assembly against Resource Pillaging was created. This Patagonian Assembly is working in close relation with other Andes "no mining" local assemblies and also with Gualeguaychu assembly.

A second wave which emerged in the mid-eighties and is composed by peasants and rural workers is engaged in direct action to promote and defend a comunitarian style of production and political organization. Zapatistas of Mexico (EZLN), the Rural Landless Workers of Brazil (MST), the *Cocaleros* and peasants of Bolivia, the National Peasant Federation in Paraguay, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in Colombia, and the peasant-Indian CONAIE in Ecuador are the most prominent movements included in this second wave. Even when their local demands and tactics have varied, in all cases neoliberalism and imperialism are the enemies⁹. These organizations have developed actions and strategies opposing the neoliberal economic regime and the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of local and foreign elites. Specifically, they have struggled for land redistribution, national and comunitarian autonomy and fundamentally for the conservation of the natural resources needed for their subsistence. They have fought "against U.S. intervention in the form of coca eradication programmes, colonization of territory by military bases, penetration of national police/military institutions, and the militarization of social conflicts, such as Plan Colombia and the Andean Initiative".

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional - EZLN) represents the rights of the indigenous population, but also sees itself and is seen as part of a wider anti-capitalist movement. The neozapatistas oppose corporate globalization, or neoliberalism, and include a comunitarian life perspective in which a harmonic and sustainable interrelation between society and nature is a fundamental principle. They see themselves as Emiliano Zapata ideological heirs, and heirs to 500 years of indigenous resistance against imperialism. The EZLN has been mainly fighting for autonomy of the indigenous population as a solution to poverty; they promote a kind of state within a state where people can retain their ways of government and communal way of life yet receive outside support in needed areas. The Zapatistas have gradually formed several autonomous municipalities, independent of the Mexican government. These municipalities have evolved into local government "juntas", implementing comunitarian food-producing programmes, health and school systems, which are supported partly by NGOs. Zapatistas do not tax the inhabitants and they decide, through assemblies, to work in comunitarian projects. Members in the Juntas rotate continuously, so that everybody in the community can have an opportunity to serve and also to prevent people in power to become addicted to it or become corrupted.

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement - Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra -(MST), is the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless members organized in 23 out of 27 states. The MST carries out long-overdue land reform in a country mired by unjust land distribution. In Brazil, 1.6% of the landowners control roughly half (46.8%) of the land. Just 3% of the population owns two-thirds of all arable lands.

Since 1985, the MST has peacefully occupied unused land where they have established cooperative farms, constructed houses, schools for children and adults and

⁹ Specific information about popular mobilization versus neoliberal democracy in, for example, Mexico see: Stolle McAllister (2005), McLeod (2005), Wise & Mendoza (2005) and Labrecque (2005).

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clinics, promoting indigenous cultures, a healthy sustainable environment and gender equality. The MST has won land titles for more than 350,000 families in 2,000 settlements as a result of their actions, while 180,000 encamped families currently await government recognition. Land occupations are recognized in the Brazilian Constitution, which says land that remains unproductive should be used for a "larger social function".

The MST's success lies in its ability to organize and educate. Members have not only managed to secure land, which means food security for their families, but also continue to develop a sustainable socio-economic model that offers a concrete alternative to today's globalization that puts profits before people and humanity.

More recently, new multi-sectorial movements, engaged in mass struggles that integrate farm workers and small and medium-sized farmers, have emerged in Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, and Paraguay. Their actions and protests are about to improve the production and commercialization condition. Mostly, the environmental aspects are not present.

Urban areas are the social-space in which the third and newest wave of social movements is centered. It includes the dynamic barrio-based mass movements of unemployed workers in Argentina –picketers- (piqueteros), and others unemployed and poor organizations in Caribbean countries such as Venezuela and Dominican Republic. In some of them, the communitarian, democratic and sustainable development aspects are present.

One of the mainstream is the rejection of the patron-client politics of the electoral party bosses and trade union bureaucrats and its reliance on self-organization and direct action. The Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD) and the Unemployed Workers Union (UTD) are text book examples of these movements, which are organized with a very decentralized structure. Each barrio or local movement is organized by its general assembly where all active members participate. Political and economic autonomy is very important for these organizations. All of them developing diverse autonomous productive enterprises, and a lot of them having a deep relationship with peasants movements (goods exchange, for example). So, human and natural resources and communitarian development are very important issues in the social and political strategies of these movements of the unemployed.

Lastly, it is important to stress the re-emergency of movements of workers such as the Inter-sindical Classist Movement (MIC) in Argentina in which the explicit opposition to union bureaucracy and to capitalism represents its political agenda. In this case, the relation between nature and society is not an important concern.

Therefore, the "present scene" speaks to us of a coexistence among the supposed features of the old and new social movements. The different profiles of these social movements represent the diverse manifestations of antagonisms and conflicts in common. The inequitable distribution of power, wealth and resources among classes and social subjects is the structural condition that underlies all social conflicts. A historical rupture as a consequence of different situations that are related to the above mentioned emergency of old and new social movements would not exist. On the contrary, a process which has obviously undergone changes and transformations based on the classic contradiction between exploiting and exploited classes and between capital and nature is what continues to the present.

Conclusion

The Latin America region represents undoubtedly one of the highest exponents of the so called Washington's consent that proposed a post-dictatorship military era based on democracy (strictly representative) and on the empowerment of the market economy¹⁰. These policies have only led to a gradual privatization of the state and the consequent loss of its responsibilities; to the destruction of the incipient and non integrated industrial productive process generated in the time of "import substitution industrialization policies"; to an increase of natural resources devastation (deepening the contradictions between capital and nature); and to a high process of economic concentration which greatly increased the differences between the rich and the poor, and created high levels of unemployment. So, the neoliberal policies are too far from promoting a social and ecological integrated and democratic development. On the contrary, there is evidence of an intensification of the two contradictions of capitalism.

During the time of "import substitution industrialization policies" the main objective was to generate basic industries to produce consuming goods for the internal market. At that time the ecological crisis was not yet considered relevant and the environmental consequences of these policies were many. But the promotion of internal market improved the living standards of a great part of the population. Then, in the last two decades, when the ecological and social integrated and democratic development started to take part in the debates in the North, neoliberal policies started to be applied in Latin America, and the governments have not been interested in that alternative type of development at all. Thus, the ecological crisis concept and the ecological and social integrated and democratic development have been taken by social movements, non governmental organizations and a few academics. These new social movements have developed in rural areas as well as in urban areas as expression not only of the traditional contradiction "capital against work", but also of the contradiction "capital against production conditions". In rural areas the most important problems related to the action of these new social movements are those connected with the peasant conditions, the property of land, poverty, the bad conditions of production together with ecological agriculture and environmental conflicts. In urban areas there are some new social movements interested in ecological crisis (different ecologist organizations which mainly represent the worries of the middle class: air, water and food pollution, traffic conflicts and biodiversity) and many more social movements interested in more traditional issues as unemployment, urban poverty and other social and economic problems.

Together with ecological and socio-political demands, the same notion of democracy and in fact of representative democracy has reached crisis point in this last decade in relatively massive form. Besides the discredit that the democracy notion in a strictly political sense has sustained in the last decades, is the deepest notion of democratic representation together with the capitalist regime that began to be questioned since different popular rebellions in the nineties. This way, from the discredit of an individualistic sense of the political system, an attempt of critical reflection to revalue the community notions of democracy in agreement with a participative democracy started to emerge.

In this context, new social movements as a manifestation of traditional and new capital contradictions have emerged with the intention to resist market expansion (Luke, 2001; Gezerlis, 2002). These new social movements focus their work on the practice of direct and participative democracy in political, economic, ecological and social terms. This means that the community notion (ecumenicity, autonomy and democracy) has a crucial importance in these groupings. Moreover, an incipient development of the idea of

¹⁰ An Argentinian case study: Galafassi (2002, 2002b).

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confederated communities can be observed, since in some few cases diverse solidarity mechanisms among different popular organizations started to develop. As a result, a new form of democracy is emerging as networks of movements organized on a regional scale. Some examples of this process are the diverse networks of the Popular Assemblies against Mining Projects along Andes region and the peasants organizations together with unemployed workers and rural workers (unemployed workers Popular Front Dario Santillán in Argentina, Felipe Zamora Peasant Front in Venezuela, MST in Brazil and some peasants movements in Bolivia). In all of these cases ecological crisis and natural resource devastation are topics of high importance since these popular organizations have developed resistance strategies against neoliberal natural and human exploitation policies.

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