Alternautas

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter

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Alternautas is a peer reviewed academic blog that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development thinking.

It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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Preface

Welcome to the eighth volume of Alternautas!

We are glad to present to readers this new volume of Alternautas, with a special issue on critical perspectives on Covid19 in Latin America, an interview with Maristella Svampa and a thought-provoking article on Nahuas saberes.

As always, we continue publishing critical research and alternative intellectual perspectives about Latin American development processes. In the second year of the global pandemic, adopting this critical lens is of utmost importance for us to unveil the challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 on the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

Most of the measures adopted during the pandemic seem to respond to a segmented logic benefiting a small group of the population while leaving most of the population to their fate. Countries have responded with emergency cash transfer programs for households with economic deprivations.

Emergency transfers have materialized through temporary increases in the number of extraordinary payments to beneficiaries of existing social assistance programs (for example, extraordinary payments in the Universal Child Allowance program in Argentina or the doubling of the amount of the Uruguay Social Card). We can also highlight the creation of new temporary benefits that complement existing transfer programs (e.g., Bono Familia in Bolivia or Bono de Emergencia COVID-19 in Chile).

Initial social protection and employment responses by Latin American governments have also included suspensions of cut-offs of basic services (electricity, water and housing), basic service subsidies for the poor, and special pandemic work furloughs. While subsidy policies have continued the targeting route, the prohibition of service cut-offs has in most cases been universal. Special work furloughs due to the pandemic have been implemented in only a quarter of the countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Peru) and the prohibition of layoffs only in Argentina and Mexico.

The special issue on Critical Perspectives on COVID-19 in Latin America opens a critical dialogue on the effects of the pandemic, how states and markets have responded to it, and how different actors, groups, and organisations have attempted to advance more progressive agendas. In the Introduction to the special issue, Angus McNelly situates the Latin American experience inside the wider global dynamics of the pandemic. He argues the pandemic has intensified the contours of the existing class, gender and racial inequalities, with the 'vaccine apartheid' being one of the clearest examples. In addition, the pandemic has intensified the existing crises of extractivism, and the abandonment of entire populations marked as disposable bodies.

The first group of articles in the special issue addresses gender and indigenous peoples. Maria Belén Villegas Plá in Fiscal adjustment and gender inequalities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: what is the "new normal" about? shows how 'socioeconomic and health crises are not gender blind' and argues for progressive reforms which allow increasing revenues and social investments with a gender perspective. Maria Paula Andrade in Saving the Mother of Brazil: Indigenous Peoples and Active Citizenship amid COVID-19, shows how indigenous groups have strengthened democratic values by developing strategies of active citizenship in Brazil, without abandoning their opposition to extractivist practices in their territories.

The third article by Carolina Sotéiro, The provisional nature of science evidenced in times of pandemic, critically assess the attacks to the World Health Organization by sectors of the Brazilian society with a lens on post-truth, fake news, science knowledge production and knowledge circulation. She illustrates how social media can serve as a platform for scientific knowledge distribution of COVID-19, but also a tool to discredit science by non-experts.

César Pérez-Lizasuain in Oedipus before COVID-19: An essay on the corporatization of political sovereignty and openings in the pandemic, provides a new re-reading of the tragedy of Oedipus by questioning the 'going back to normality' position praised by many in the current post-pandemic world. Following the status-quo position of returning to normality, he argues, means returning to precarity and austerity.

In Communal struggles for water through coproduction: Pandemic experiences in Highland Ecuador in historical perspective, Geoff Goodwin shows how existing inequalities in access to clean water facilitated the spread of the virus by preventing vulnerable groups to practice recurrent handwashing. Based on the Andean practice of communal labour (mingas), he argues that co-produced communal water service is a viable alternative to guarantee universal access to clean drinking water in Ecuador.

The final article in the special issue by Francisco Hidalgo, In the face of the pandemic: The potential of rurality and peasant agriculture was translated by Pilar Ramírez-Gröbli & Angus McNelly. The author joins the critical call to the return to normalcy in Ecuador because the neoliberal reforms during the pandemic would only exacerbate the precarity of the working population. By focusing on food production, he argues that 'peasant and family farming significantly contributes to mitigating global warming, consolidate rural territories and preserve life'. Thus, he calls for a re-evaluation of food sovereignty.

Last, but not least, this issue also includes an interview with Maristella Svampa and an article on Nahuas saberes by Fernando David Marquez Duarte. The interview with Maristella Svampa was conducted and translated by Johannes Waldmüeller. They discuss the ecoterritorial and ecosocial conflicts in Latin America, the exacerbation of extractivism, and the repression against environmental activists. Finally, they highlighted the importance of academics in giving visibility to the ecoterritorial conflicts and the alternatives to the hegemonic vision of development. In the article Rethinking development with Nahuas saberes, Fernando Marquez showcases the cosmovision, experiences and knowledge produced by the Nahuas people. The author focuses on the creation and socialization of two saberes: the 'taking face' by the tlamatinimeh and the saberes of the Tonalámatl.

This issue marks the end of what could be called Alternautas 1.0. In our goal to continue amplifying the voice of the Alternautas community, we are officially moving to Warwick University Press as an Open Access Journal. We will not launch the second issue in Volume 8, as we will focus all our energies on the transition to Alternautas 2.0. We aim that this move facilitates the indexation process, which will provide improved capacity and visibility for critical voices,

crucial to academic, activist, and policy-making debates on development across Latin America and globally.

We invite readers and contributors from across the Alternautas community to suggest other ways in which we may advance the enormous work ahead of us. If you are interested in collaborating, please, do not hesitate to contact us.

Stay safe and healthy.

The Alternautas Editorial Team,

Ana Estefanía Carballo, Michela Coletta, Gibrán Cruz-Martínez, Emilie Dupuits, María Eugenia Giraudo, Angus McNelly, María del Pilar Ramírez Gröbli, Philip Roberts, Diego Silva, Johannes M. Waldmüller

From a virtual Abya Yala, July 2021.

FERNANDO DAVID MÁRQUEZ DUARTE[1]

Rethinking development with Nahuas saberes[2]

Introduction

The Nahuas have an impressive tradition of saberes, which can be considered as knowledge that is rooted in the experiences, cosmovision and way of life as a group. Due to the length of the existence of Nahuas and the different indigenous group that constitute this broader group, it is relevant to analyze their saberes throughout their existence.

For this paper I study the different processes that Nahuas used to create and socialize their saberes with a decolonial and intercultural approach. The saberes that I will analyze in this paper are the use of the process of "taking face"[3] by the *tlamatinimeh*[4], and the saberes of the *Tonalámatl*[5].

It is relevant to understand and promote indigenous saberes to rethink western dominant conceptions of knowledge and development. By doing this we could advance to societies and realities with more social justice, inclusion and equality, considering that knowledge production is based on the relations between different actors, including power relations (Bell, 1992, p. 14). As Astor Aguilera argues

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[2] This article was originally published in: http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/3/17/rethinking-development-with-nahuas-saberes

[3] "Taking face" is the dialectical and horizontal process of saberes and knowledge production and socialization for Nahuas that will be explained further in the text.

[4] The *Tlamatinimeh* were the sages or wise people in Nahuas ancient societies.

[5] The *Tonalámatl* is the ritual calendar and cosmogram that Nahuas used.

(2010, p. 5), different societies have to be understood by their specific cosmovision and conceptions, because if not everything could seem "irrational" under western terms that have been mistakenly taken as general and universalistic concepts that are inadequate for understanding alternative societies. Thus, I will discuss the dominant conceptions of development and why we need to rethink them.

The Nahuas are the bigger indigenous group in México. Nahuas are currently extended through 12 states in México and are more than 1.5 million of individuals (Museo Nacional de Antropología, n.d.). This indigenous group was the dominant civilization in Mesoamérica by the time of the invasion of Spain, and is composed of smaller indigenous groups that share one common language, which is Náhuatl.

Development discussion

The debate of what is development and how to achieve it has been present in the last few decades. Currently the international measure of development that is more accepted is the human development index (HDI). It is considered by different authors from the Abya Yala that this measure and other attempts to rethink development aren't adequate to different societies and different realities and have been imposed from "developed" to "developing" countries, and the HDI doesn't consider the realities of marginalized groups such as indigenous groups, afrolatinxs, and other minorities, that is why this research is relevant and important (Caffentzis & Federici, 2015; Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL)/Fondo para el Desarrollo de los & Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe (FILAC), 2020; Díaz Gómez, 2001; Moreschi, 2013; Ojeda Medina & Villareal Villamar, 2020).

It is worth noting that Abya Yala is a term created by the Guna/Puna indigenous group, which is in what is now Panamá and it can means "land in maturity" and is used by several indigenous groups and decolonial authors to refer to Latin America (Del Valle, 2015).

The current idea of how the socioeconomic system and how development is conceived hasn't solved the problems of inequality, poverty, environment

destruction, violence, low levels of health, education, and social and political participation. The COVID-19 pandemic didn't only show that the health systems in several countries are not inclusive and not equal, especially in countries where the health system is privatized; it also exacerbated issues like food insecurity, workers' rights violations, lack of social security, police violence, unequal education opportunities, marginalization of people with disabilities, to mention a few (Fisher & Bubola, 2020; Márquez Duarte, 2020b).

Development was initially considered a synonym of economic growth, using the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as the indicator of development. This generated economic reductionism in the analysis of development (Boisier, 2004). Considering development only in macroeconomic terms is extremely limited because it doesn't explain what individuals do with their income and doesn't actually show the acquisition power of families.

Currently, one of the conceptions of development mostly used internationally is the one of "human development". This is defined as the set of opportunities that each individual requires to achieve the wellbeing that they consider valuable (UNDP, 2016). Operatively this approach to development considers three dimensions: income, health and education. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) adopted this conception to measure development internationally, that as discussed previously have its flaws, especially not considering differentiated realities such as the indigenous groups realities in the Abya Yala.

The three dimensions included in this conception of development are necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of wellbeing (which I will discuss in the next paragraphs); however, they are not sufficient. This idea of development and wellbeing was posed by Amartya Sen. For Sen (1993), each individual decides its own path to the development they want to pursue, in order to achieve a well-being level that they consider adequate. Thus, it is impossible to talk about individuals choosing their own path to development if we don't talk about democracy and participation in public decisions. On the other hand, it is important to consider a differentiated collective path to development for oppressed groups, such as indigenous groups, racial minorities, people with disabilities, etc.

A different approach is the "democratic development", which refers to the process of constitution of politically active citizens and to the amplification of participation in public issues (Rivas, 1996). Moreover, participatory instruments are considered essential to achieve this kind of development, as well as democratic consolidation (Dagnino et al., 2006). This approach can be used to complement the human development index, because it includes what the index lacks, which is the democratic development dimension.

Regarding this issue, Galtung (1971) argued that democracy can be seen as the condition for exercising effective control over periphery. Additionally, liberal democracy is the condition for global elites to control the oppressed, because average citizens are not directly included in the decision-making process, which is dominated by the political elites. A more inclusive democratic system would be a participatory democracy (Barber, 2003; Pateman, 1970), in which the citizens participate directly in public decisions, by instruments such as referendum, plebiscite, citizen polls, citizen assemblies, etc.

Other conceptions that are relevant to discuss are decolonial ideas from the Abya Yala, such as sentipensar land, which could be translated into "feel-think" as an indivisible conception to rethink how we relate and interact with life in our world: animals, plants, rivers, forests, jungles, mountains, etc. Escobar (2016) presents this conception based in the experiences and ontologies of indigenous communities that live by the rivers in what is now Colombia. Sentipensar land and nature part from a differentiated ontology and a cosmovision that is against a capitalist, profiteering and western vision of the world; while a western vision conceives land and nature as a resource to control, exploit and sell, sentipensar understands that all beings in the world complement each other and are necessary to maintain life, that is why balance is needed. These ideas have also been poised by other indigenous ontologies of groups in the Amazonas in Brazil with the conception of "perspectivism" presented by Viveiros de Castro (1998), where animals and humans have the same type of soul, the only thing that changes is our skin that is considered as a clothing, but both are the same being, so they should live in respectful coexistence.

Another relevant decolonial conception from the Abya Yala is Buen Vivir (Gudynas, 2016, p. 7), which could be translated into "living well". This

conception comes from the Quichua and Aymara idea of Sumak Kawsay, which can be translated into a "good and integral life" and "good coexistence", respectively, thus the term refers to a good life with coexistence of everyone in a balanced way in community (Cabnal, 2010, p. 17). Buen Vivir bases in an harmonic and respectful coexistence with nature in a biocentric approach, being opposite to a western anthropocentric one, which wrongfully thinks that nature is something that should be privatized and exploited; this conception also recognizes that there are different ways of having a good life and there is no universal conception, thus, it recognizes the diversity of saberes and ontologies (Gudynas, 2016). Other decolonial wellbeing conception from the Abya Yala is the idea of Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich of the Rarámuri indigenous groups in northern México, which can be translated into "living in the right path". This conception refers to living well with happiness and harmonic coexistence with not only the physical world but also the spiritual and social world, which according to the Rarámuri it requires endurance; it is also about self-determination and equality to decide on their own wellbeing idea for their community (Loera-González, 2016; Loera-Gonzalez, 2014)

With all these conceptions of development and wellbeing analyzed, the crucial question appears: What conception of development can we learn from Nahuas to have an alternative to the western conception of development from the Abya Yala?

Most of the development conceptions analyzed concern mainly economic aspects, even conceptions like human development, have income as a central part, thus, following a western, and to some extent, colonialist conception of development, imposed from the "developed world" to the "developing world" or "third world". It is then necessary to conceive decolonial ways of thinking development for the Abya Yala, from the Abya Yala as the conceptions that have been discussed earlier.

Decoloniality and Interculturality

Decoloniality and Interculturality are theoretical and methodological approaches that surge from the oppressed groups of the Abya Yala as a form of resistance and

challenge to western colonial oppression; both are horizontal knowledge creating processes, instead of a rigid hierarchical vertical process common in the dominant western colonial approaches. Furthermore, decolonial and qualitative studies challenge the dominant quantitative universalistic fallacy that ignores the contextual knowledge of research and imposes a false universality in different realities. As several authors have shown, universalistic approaches of development reach flawed conclusions that are viewed only from a narrow western perspective (Bell, 1992; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2007; Merry & Wood, 2015; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992; Sartori, 1970; Szanton, 2004).

Another important element of my research approach is the conception of saberes, which are the thought of groups composed of decolonial knowledge, experiences, ancient philosophies and in relation with all life in the world through a coherent world view. Due to that and to the marginalization that saberes have suffered by hands of western knowledge and science (Pérez Ruiz & Argueta Villamar, 2011), saberes have to be differentiated from western knowledge. Saberes is a horizontal conception, that is built by different members of the oppressed groups in which they surge in a dialectical and more inclusive way.

Decoloniality explains different forms of colonial oppression and challenges them, like coloniality of power, coloniality of knowing, coloniality of being and coloniality of mother nature. Coloniality of power refers to the structure imposed by the western colonialism in which a hierarchization based on race and ethnic groups dominates the institutions and is perpetuated by the State. Coloniality of knowing refers to the western forms of science and knowledge imposed in the "Global South" that marginalized any other forms of science and saberes that don't comply with western terms. Coloniality of being refers to the dehumanization of all people that are different than the image of the western colonial "modernity" imposed and considers them inferior, which is clearly linked with the coloniality of power. Finally, the coloniality of mother nature refers to the ethno- and anthropocentric idea that western colonialism imposed, where humans as considering superior, appropriate, destroy and privatize all life in the planet (animals, plants, oceans, rivers, mountains, forests, jungles, etc.) (Cajigas-Rotundo, 2007; Delgado & Rist, 2016; Ferrão Candau, 2010; C. Walsh, 2007, 2008; C. E. Walsh, 2013).

Decoloniality then can be understood as a process of humanization and liberation of the individuals and societies (in both level), where the objective is to fight to reach the emancipation of the multiple forms of western colonial oppression (Dussel, 1973; Freire, 1970; C. E. Walsh, 2013, p. 54).

Another crucial element for decoloniality is the decolonization of knowledge. Decolonizing knowledge implies epistemic disobedience, which is the process of delinking from the so-called "universal" and "objective" knowledge. This decolonial alternative, parts from the idea that the caring, preservation and regeneration of saberes and indigenous ways of life is more important than capitalist production. It can also be argued that it implies an alternative movement, where the market epistemology and the globalization project of universalizing the capitalist modernity are challenged (Escobar, 2004; Mignolo, 2009, pp. 160, 161).

On the other hand interculturality refers to the process of reaching a cross-cultural understanding and way of life, parting from an equality of conditions to advance to a dialogue of saberes to build really intercultural societies and realities, where cooperation and solidarity guide the way of life, in order to reach this interculturality has promoted our own thought from the experiences, realities, saberes and oppressions suffered in the Abya Yala, as the Zapatistas have argued, to reach a world where all the worlds have a place (Aguirre Rojas, 2018; Castro-Gómez, 2007; Delgado & Rist, 2016; Pérez Ruiz & Argueta Villamar, 2011).

Nahuas cosmovision and saberes

The first aspect to discuss is Nahuas cosmovision. Cosmovision encompasses not only worldview which refers to cognitive and existential aspects of a society to understand the order of existence (Bell, 1992, p. 26). It also encompasses cosmogony (origin of creation and cosmos), cosmography (composition of the universe and existence), cosmology (what keeps the balance in cosmos) and the goal of humanity's existence (Florescano, 2000).

The first idea of Nahuas cosmovision is pantheism. Pantheism is the idea that reality and divinity are the same thing, the divine is engrained in all-things in existence: in daily life, in nature, in the cosmos (León Portilla, 2006). A clear

indicator of pantheism in Nahuas is the conception of their creator god Ometéotl; the source of all life. They believed that Ometéotl sustains the nature and the cosmos, that it is connected with everyone and everything, this idea for Nahuas was named i-tlalamanca, where Ometéotl is described as omnipresent. Moreover, Ometéotl is a dual god, both mother and father (Omecihuatl and Ometecuhtli, respectively) and from it the four tezcatlipocas are born (which have been considered as manifestations, as children or as energies of Ometéotl): Quetzalcóatl, Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca and Yayauhqui/Xipe Totec (Gutiérrez & Rico, 1996, p. 23; León Portilla, 2006, p. 9,10).

Nahuas were deeply concerned with preserving nature and having a collective sense of development and survival. Since in their cosmovision everything is connected, and their gods are part of every living being, the purpose of life for them was to coexist with all living beings. This thought is also suggested by Ometéotl's essence.

Moreover, Nahuas considered the prevalence of collective sense against individual sense. For Nahuas individual salvation could only happen with the salvation of their society and of the cosmos as a whole, this is ingrained in their cosmovision, where sacrifice is a central thought for them; it was even believed that Quetzalcóatl (who was their main deity through a long period) sacrificed itself to give life to the 5th humanity by going to Mictlán (the underworld or the realm of death) to get the bones necessary to give life to the 5th humanity, along with his own blood. An example of this collective sense is seen in the conceptions of chikualistli and ueuetlaitoli, which refer to union, strength and following the advice from the elderly (which were considered the sages of the community), which imply their collective sense of survival (León Portilla, 2006; Paz, 1950, p. 45; Santiago, 2017, pp. 4, 5).

As mentioned before, I analyze the saberes of the process of "taking face" and the saberes of the Tonalámatl. Regarding "taking face", for Nahuas, saberes is what constituted knowledge, which was composed of what we understand in our brain and what we feel in our hearts. Their sages (wise people that acted as life teachers) were named tlamatinimeh. The tlamatinimeh developed a process that can be considered as a cognitive spectrum that allowed Nahuas to understand what they thought, felt and perceived; which they used to socialize these saberes. For

Nahuas, all human thinking had to be rooted in a sensible soil. The Tlamatinimeh described knowledge with the following analogy: "[knowledge] ascends from the deepest of the individual onto the intellectual spheres, as sage ascends from the roots onto the corolla of flowers" (León Portilla, 2006, p. 90).

The idea of "taking face" is crucial to understand Nahuas conception of knowledge. For Nahuas, real saberes had both the rational aspect and the sensible soil, as argued before. They considered that valuable knowledge made them "take face" or "develop face". "Face" for Nahuas can be understood as personality. The face that each individual show is the base of interactions and knowledge for Nahuas.

The terms that Nahuas use related to knowledge have an etymological root that supports their meaning. For example, te-ix-tlamachtianih comes from ix- which means face, and from te- which refers to interaction with others, then te-ix-tlamachtianih means "who enriches or communicates somethings to others faces", referring specifically to wisdom and knowledge. Other terms that complement the previous term are te-ix-cuitianih and te-ix-tomani, which mean "who makes others take face" and "who makes the others develop face", respectively, which implies the role of teacher and even psychologist of the tlamatinimeh (León Portilla, 2006, pp. 111–112).

Moreover, according to contemporary Nahua societies, wisdom and knowledge are articulated in an inseparable process of being, thinking, doing, and knowing all existence (cosmos), in order to adequately live-be in life (for them life was experienced through living and being) which is the goal of knowledge. These saberes are composed by the relations between humans-nature-cosmos, where rituals are used in knowledge building and the adequate formation of moral to live and be right/straight (living a moral life). To live a moral life implied a transformation of "faces molded by words" to form a face (Rÿser, 2015; Santiago, 2017, p. 3).

On the other hand, it is relevant to analyze the saberes of the Tonalámatl. For Nahuas, the Tonalli/Tonalámatl calendar influenced political, social and economic decisions, due to the divinatory attributes that it had. For Nahuas this wasn't only a calendar; it was considered a cosmogram to interpret the material

world and predict some aspects of the future, on the other hand it were used to know if the future was going to be positive or negative in order to be prepared (López Austin, 1973, p. 97; Sugiyama, 2010). The Tonalámatl was interpreted by the Tonalpouhqui, which means "the counter of days", who where a kind of divinatory that told the parents of the new born what the future could hold for the baby, depending on the day, month and year of the birth (Gutiérrez & Rico, 1996, p. 22).

Nahuas believed that the signs of the Tonalli influenced health and life expectancy of every individual; depending on the day a child was born, he/she could have a healthy life or a fragile life, could be invulnerable to magic attacks, etc. Since every sign was represented by a being, these characteristics were related with the being related to the sign (López Austin, 1988, p. 349). Following the knowledge obtained from the Tonalámatl, Nahuas conceived their future possibilities and parents prepared their newborns for the possible destinies they would face and tried to change some aspects of what the future held for them, by practicing self-consciousness determination and discipline (León Portilla, 2006).

Methodology

The present study is an exploratory, qualitative study composed of bibliographical and historical research of ancient and more contemporary sources of Nahuas cosmovision and thinking, as well as approaches to decoloniality and critical interculturality. An extensive research of both academic and historical sources in Spanish and English has been conducted to understand and analyze Nahuas saberes. Moreover, my knowledge of the Náhuatl language has helped to use the adequate writing of the Náhuatl words used, considering nonetheless, that there are different variants of the Náhuatl language and my knowledge is based on the classic and the Huasteca Náhuatl variants.

It is worth noting that this is the first stage of the research and future steps are to conduct ethnographic work in Nahua communities of the Zongolica region of the mountains of Veracruz (southern state of México).

Rethinking development

Summarizing the arguments I presented, western thought of development revolves heavily around the economic dimension (income, profiting, economic domination). In contrast, Nahuas present an alternative way of thinking development or even that speaks to an alternative goal of life, which could be other than development. Their cosmovision and saberes regarding pantheism, sacrifice and agency to change our predestined realities shed light on a conception of development that doesn't revolve around an economic dimension, but rather in a collective existence idea, where the survival and wellbeing of each individual is linked with the preservation of all life in the world. In this conception, issues like environmental and social sustainability, achieving equality (not only economically but also socially) and democratic development (linked with the idea of free choice) would be more central to development as a whole. Nahuas ideas are also supported by the decolonial indigenous conceptions discussed before, such as sumak kawsay, sentipensar, etc.

The pantheistic conception of Nahuas discussed in the paper shows that they were and are deeply concerned with preserving nature and having a collective sense of development. Since everything is connected in their cosmovision, and their gods are part of every living being, the purpose of life for them would be to coexist in balance with all living beings. Moreover, this idea brings awareness regarding profiting; profiting at the expense of natural resources and exploitation is oppressive and unsustainable.

On the other hand, the saberes of Tonalámatl lead to the idea of having the capability of changing our "destiny", which is related to the critical and decolonial idea of emancipation, where by developing a critical consciousness, individuals can rebel against the oppression they suffer and advance to emancipate into freedom in a non-oppressive and more inclusive path (Freire, 1970; Márquez Duarte, 2019, 2020a; Santos, 2011).

Having an alternative conception of development, incorporating the conceptions of indigenous groups such as collectivity, solidarity and self-determination could

be the key to let societies reach the wellbeing that they decide is adequate for them with social justice (González Casanova, 2006; Quijano, 1993).

According to the Nahuas cosmovision ideas I propose to rethink development, to have a real freedom of development, to have an alternative way of achieving it, not imposed by the "developed world". I specifically propose an alternative path to development, from and for the Abya Yala, based on the Nahuas ideas discussed, as well as basing in the decolonial indigenous perspectives from the Abya Yala discussed, especially with the conceptions of sentipensar and sumak kawsay regarding coexistence with nature and with the Rarámuri conception of Gara wachi inaropo nai gawich regarding self-determination and decision capabilities, considering five dimensions: health, environment, economics, education and political decision. The environment and political decision dimensions (with a participatory democracy approach) that aren't considered in the conventional development conceptions ensure an alternative path to development, not centered in income or a dominant economic conception, but in a more inclusive and emancipatory path to development that is not entirely ethnocentric. However, it's worth noting that my proposal to conceive development is just one of many alternative ways that can be taken to achieve development, and following a decolonial stance, it shouldn't be applied generically to different societies. Rather, it should be modified and adapted in the terms that each society decides that is better to achieve their own idea of development, and thus, to reach their desired wellbeing. Moreover, I consider that these five dimensions are equally important to achieve wellbeing, so they should be considered equally to measure development, and thus, to formulate laws, public policies and social programs to achieve development.

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MARISTELLA SVAMPA[1]

The eco-territorial turn in Latin America: a conversation with Maristella Svampa[2]

[00:00] Thank you for being with us. The first question is, tell us a little bit about the actual situation of the eco-territorial and eco-social conflicts in Latin America. And, related to it, what is its relevance in the global context in times of fake news, in times of new populisms that arise everywhere in the world.

[00:22] Well… First of all, it has to be said that there has been an expansion of socio-territorial, socioenvironmental and eco-territorial conflicts in Latin America. And there is a phase of exacerbation of the extractivism within the conservative and neo-liberal framework, that is expanding in the whole region, or at least an important part of the region. In continuity with the previous phase, but an exacerbation phase that can be seen very clearly with the expansion of the energy frontier with fracking, offshore fields, oil sands, with the emergence of territorial crimes (01:00) linked for example to illegal mining, and also the biggest repression that we can witness is against environmental activists. [01:12] Let us not forget that Latin America, is the place in the world where the most environmental activists are assassinated per year. In 2016 and 2017, approx. 200 activists were assassinated in the world, of which 60% in Latin America. [01:28] This is a very worrying phase, in which, what we experience is a retraction, a setback, in terms of democracy. This heated moment of human rights violations goes hand in hand with an increasing repression.

[1] This is a translated interview conducted by Johannes Waldmüeller, from the original video available here.

[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/3/31/the-eco-territorial-turn-in-latin-america-a-conversation-with-maristella-svampa

[01:43] Secondly, with respect to the global situation, well, I read it more with a socioecological lens. We have entered a new era, the Anthropocene, in which humankind has taken a role of global reach and geological relevance, right? And the extractivism and neo-extractivism are an expression of the Anthropocene, of this socioecological crisis of global scale. And I think that in these times of a turn to Rightist politics in terms of discourse, it's good to keep in mind that this new political grammar supports the ecoterritorial fights, which aim at a fairer society, at a different relation between humans and nature, that is a new environmental rationale and also a new process of democratization of decision-making. [02:35] And I think that these new concepts of horizons are related to a new political order, and these open up toward a new type of society.

[02:45] And, in this context, what is the role of, in your opinion, traditional academia, in terms of teaching and researching?

[02:51] Well, let's see, there are a lot of things to say. First of all, with respect to ecoterritorial conflicts, there is an expert knowledge, independent from the hegemonic vision, from corporations' power, and also from the state discourse, that has spread in Latin America and has therefore being accompanying these fights. There is a dialogue of knowledge in which we participate as intellectuals coming from academia, which implies on one side the construction of the problematic through an interdisciplinary lens, because these are very complex problems. [03:28] Secondly, this implies a connection, a link, a respect towards local and ancestral knowledges. However, this a minority line in what is the varied world of academia, and especially the mainstream in which the hegemonic vision predominates and where, furthermore, there is no openness to debating development models. In this line, I think that our function, as public function intellectuals, is to put these demands on the agenda, these big social debates and try to give visibility to these fights and these new horizons that are being outlined behind these fights. [04:12] This is a very asymmetric fight, not only in the fields where these fights evolve, but also in academia. And, yet, the hegemonic knowledge has a great capacity to deactivate criticism stemming from intellectuals who challenge these models of development. In Argentina, clearly, it's seen when it comes to criticizing the agribusiness, or the soy model that is the heart of the economy, then all the powers join forces in order to disqualify those scientists or intellectuals that challenge it.

[04:52] Thank you very much.

No, please, thank you.

Key Concepts (excerpts taken from: "The 'Commodities Consensus' and Valuation Languages in Latin America" by Maristella Svampa, available on http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2015/4/22/the-commodities-consensus-and-valuation-languages-in-latin-america-1

EXTRACTIVISM AND NEOEXTRACTIVISM

Extractivism, in a nutshell, refers to postcolonial national economies heavily based on export-oriented resource extraction by the use of foreign capital and know-how. Neoextractivism entails a reinforced extractivist model, yet under a scheme of governmentally controlled re-centralization and nationalization of these industries or resources, higher export taxes and the establishment of "compensatory" politics through increased social and infrastructural spending.

Amongst all the extractive activities, the most controversial today in Latin America is large-scale metal mining. Indeed, there is no country in Latin America with large-scale mining projects that does not have social conflicts — that bring communities into conflict with both mining companies, on one side, and governments, on the other — associated with them: Mexico, several Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama), Ecuador, Peru, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. According to OCMAL, there are currently 184 active conflicts, five of them cross-border, involving 253 affected communities across the region. This context of social unrest contributes directly or indirectly to the judicialization of social-environmental struggles and to the violation of human rights that in several cases, including Peru, Panama and Mexico, have ended in the murder of activists.

COMMODITIES CONSENSUS

The expression 'commodities consensus' has not only an economic but also a political-ideological connotation. It alludes to the idea that there is an agreement — tacit, although with the passing of the years ever more explicit — on the irrevocable or irresistible nature of the contemporary extractivist dynamic. This is particularly so considering the concurrence of the increasing global demand for primary goods and the current wealth levels, amplified by the 'eldoradista' vision of Latin America as a place with abundant natural resources par excellence.The confirmation of Latin America as an 'adaptive economy' in relation to the different accumulation cycles, and thus the acceptance of the place of the region in the world's division of labour, is located at the core of both the Washington Consensus and the commodities consensus. This remains the case regardless of the industrializing and emancipatory rhetoric of progressive governments in the region asserting the economic autonomy and national sovereignty or the construction of a political Latin American space. In the name of 'comparative advantages' or the pure subordination to the global geopolitical order, depending on the case, progressive and conservative governments alike tend to accept the 'destiny' of the 'commodities consensus'. Svampa is therefore interested in highlighting that, despite the differences in the political regimes existing today, the 'consensus' on the irresistible character of the extractivist approach ends up working as a historical horizon or threshold annulling the possibility of a debate on alternatives. The acceptance — tacit or explicit — of such a 'consensus' contributes to consolidating a new ideology of scepticism or resignation that strengthens, on its limits, the 'sensibility and rationality' of a progressive capitalism, imposing the idea that there are no alternatives to the current style of extractivist development. Consequently, every critical discourse or radical opposition is ultimately perceived as anti-modern, a negation of progress or simply in irrationality and ecological fundamentalism.

ECO-TERRITORIAL TURN

In this context, the explosion of socio-environmental conflicts has corresponded to what Enrique Leff named "The environmentalisation of the indigenous and

peasant struggles and the emergence of a Latin American environmental thought". Within this social grid we can also find new environmental social movements, rural and urban (in small and medium-sized localities), which have a multi-class composition and are characterized by assembly-like types of governance and an increasing demand for autonomy. At the same time, some environmentalist NGOs — particularly small organizations that combine lobbying activities with a social movement logic, and cultural collectives, including those of intellectuals and experts, women and young people — play a significant role and accompany the actions of organizations and social movements. These actors should not be considered as 'external allies' but as stakeholders within this organizational and social grid.

In this context, what is particularly novel is the articulation amongst the different stakeholders (indigenous-peasant movements, socio-environmental movements, environmental NGOs, intellectual and expert networks, cultural collectives) which translates into a dialogue of knowledge and disciplines. This fosters the emergence of an expert-knowledge independent from mainstream, dominant discourses and the valuation of local knowledge, many of which have peasant-indigenous roots. These valuation languages of territoriality have promoted the approval of laws, even of legal frameworks, oriented toward the construction of new environmental institutional frameworks opposing the current extractivist public policies.

In general terms, and beyond specific differences (depending largely on the local and national contexts), the dynamics of socio-environmental struggles in Latin America have taken what we have called an 'eco-territorial turn'. This entails a common language that illustrates the cross-over between the communitarian-indigenous matrix, defense of territory and environmentalist discourse: the commons, food sovereignty, environmental justice and buen vivir are some of the terms that express this productive engagement.

In sum, what Svampa calls an eco-territorial turn refers to the expansion rights as well as a societal dispute as to what could or should be understood as 'true development' or 'alternative development', 'weak or strong sustainability'. At the same time, it puts concepts such as sovereignty, democracy and human rights at the centre of the debate: in effect, be it in a language of the defence of the territory

and the commons, of human rights, of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, of the rights of nature or 'buen vivir', the demand of the communities is inscribed in the horizon of a radical democracy. This includes the democratization of collective decision-making and, indeed, the rights of peoples to say 'no' to projects that strongly affect the quality of life of the most vulnerable sectors of the population and compromise the livelihood of future generations.

ANGUS MCNELLY[1]

Introduction to Special Issue: Critical Perspectives on Covid19 in Latin America[2]

In late-2019 in the Chinese city of Wuhan, a new deadly pathogen reared its ugly head. In the first quarter of 2020, this novel coronavirus spread around the globe, leaving death and destruction in its wake. What was initially considered a domestic problem in China became a global crisis as the virus reached the developed world. Hundreds of deaths in the northern Italian province of Lombardy during the months of March and April provoked panic amongst western political leaders (Malm, 2020: 18; Usuelli, 2020). COVID-19, as this new disease came to be known, arrived in Latin America in late-February, with the first registered case in São Paulo, Brazil. By late-July, the region had the most cases of any region in the world (Gideon, 2020: 4). By April 2021, spurred on the appearance of new variants—particularly the P.1 variant first detected in the Amazonian city of Manaus (Taylor, 2021)—Latin America had been hit by its third wave of the pandemic, registering more than 57 million cases and 1.3 million deaths since the start of the pandemic (Pan American Health Organization, 2021). In the space of little over a year, COVID-19 became a global zeitgeist, casting a shadow over virtually all areas of social, economic and political life.

In this introduction to Alternautas' Special Issue on Critical Perspectives on COVID-19 in Latin America, I set the scene, providing the backdrop to the contributions of the articles in the rest of the issue. I trace the global reverberations of COVID-19 and explore how they played out in Latin America. I then turn to

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[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/critical-perspectives-on-covid19-in-latin-america

the articles of the issue in turn, exploring the novel facets of the pandemic in Latin America to which they draw our gaze.

A Global Pandemic

COVID-19 is a global pandemic, and its course in Latin America cannot be understood outside global historical trends or the geopolitical and geoeconomics, reactions provoked by the disease. The past forty years has seen the growing interconnectedness of the world, as production spread across the globe through vast transcontinental production networks. In the face of stagnant wages and historically low economic growth in the global North—what Robert Brenner (2006) calls the Long Downturn—from the 1970s onwards, capital increasingly forced firms to enter a footrace with competitors and the clock, with profits squeezed out of every second saved. These features of the neoliberal period of capitalism created the ideal conditions for contagion, both of deadly diseases and economic shocks. As a result, whilst it took the black death a decade to travel the length of the silk road in the Middle Ages, COVID-19 had spread from ground zero in Wuhan, China, to seventy-two countries in a matter of months, travelling along the infrastructural pathways and corridors cut out by global circuits of capital (Moody, 2020).

Political Economists Sara Stevano, Tobias Franz, Yannis Dafermos and Elisa Van Waeyenberge (2021) argue that COVID-19 provides a 'magnifying glass', illuminating the contradictions of the neoliberal form of capitalism underpinning the growing interconnectedness of globalised production outlined above. These authors remind us that 'Despite the significant transformations of globalised contemporary capitalism through financialisation and technological progress, the COVID-19 crisis is a stark reminder that the kernel of human activity is intrinsically material and embedded in the socio-economic and biophysical basis of production and reproduction' (Stevano et al., 2021: 2).

The Covid-19 pandemic is part of a broader confluence of multiple, intertwined crises that have emerged out of the dominant modes of development. The virus itself was born on the (artificial) boundary between human society and nature, from the contradictory ways that capitalist social formations dominate animal species to feed themselves. Indeed, the major disease outbreaks of recent years

have all been traced to either agroindustrial meat production (Swine flu, H1N1) or the expansion of extractive activities deep into the last remaining great forests (Ebola, HIV-Aids) (Davis, 2012). Under the COVID-19 magnifying glass, the separation of society from nature in post-enlightenment thought and the promethean logic underpinning the political forms of capitalist modernity are shown to be illusionary. We may be social creatures, but we are creatures nevertheless, living in wider ecosystems, dependent on, and vulnerable to, the cycles and rhythms of the natural world. This leads to vital questions around the political ecological dimensions and effects of modes of development and their associated practices of extraction from, and destruction of, nature.

COVID-19 also revealed the extent of state power as governments stepped onto a war footing (Malm, 2020). Apparently sacred civil liberties lauded in western liberal democracies were curtailed as entire populations were instructed to stay home to stop the spread of the virus. In order to prevent complete economic collapse, government after government in high-income countries rewrote the economic rule book. Central Banks mobilised gargantuan sums to underwrite corporate debt and the livelihoods of the general population, either through furlough schemes designed to keep people in work (as was the case across much of Europe) or through universal cash transfer programmes (as was the case in the United States). In many cases, rent payments were frozen and evictions prohibited. Whole private enterprises were placed under the tutelage of the state, as the Spanish nationalised its private healthcare providers to help tackle the pandemic and the British and Italian governments stepped in to rescue ailing transport carriers—railways franchises in the case of the former, the airline Alitalia in the case of the latter (Malm, 2020: 10). The US Federal Reserve opened its liquidity taps on a scale not seen since the 2008 crisis (see Tooze, 2018), once again becoming the global lender of last resort (Bahaj and Reis, 2020a). The full power of the state was set to work to confront the pandemic, and despite decades of scholars declaring the withering of the state in the face of globalisation, the state was shown to be capable of mounting a massive coordinated response across many spheres of society in many countries across the globe.

However, the pandemic played out over existing inequalities, and not all states and citizens were able to respond in the same manner. As the International Monetary Fund (IMF) notes in its latest Fiscal Monitor report,

‘The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and poverty and has demonstrated the importance of social safety nets. It has also laid bare inequalities in access to basic services—health care, quality education, and digital infrastructure—which, in turn, may cause income gaps to persist generation’ (IMF, 2021: xii).

On the one hand, many poorer countries, including many in Latin America, could not mount the same response as high-income countries or mobilise seemingly endless resources, with some countries, such as Sudan and Zambia, actually decreasing their fiscal deficits during the pandemic (Stevano et al., 2021: 7). Developing countries do not have the same access to credit markets or ability to raise fiscal resources quickly (IMF, 2021: xi), a result of the subordinate integration into the global market. Credit lines were not extended to everyone by the US Federal Reserve, and beyond the capitalist North Atlantic core (plus Japan), the only middle-income countries included were Brazil, Mexico and South Korea, with African countries excluded altogether (Bahaj and Reis, 2020b). Moreover, countries in the global South found themselves at the hard edge of the wedge in financial markets, as capital fled contexts perceived as ‘high risk’ in what the IMF labelled ‘the largest capital outflow ever recorded’ (cited in Laskaridis, 2021: 10). Countries dependent on natural resource exports were hit particularly hard (see, for instance, Hanieh, 2020), as capital abandoned its fixed investments and half-finished infrastructure projects in the face of the pandemic, the start of which also coincided with a major disruption in energy markets. In 2016, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia signed an agreement in 2016, limiting global oil production to keep prices within a fixed range. This accord not only provided North American shale gas firms fertile conditions in which to flourish, but also consolidated a fracking boom in Argentina. The agreement’s collapse in March 2020 sent oil prices through the floor, with the US benchmark, West Texas Intermediate, briefly in the red for the first time in history during April 2020 (Hanieh, 2020: 2). This toxic cocktail of a global pandemic and jumpy global commodity markets led to a round of sovereign credit downgrades, further constraining the access to credit for countries that need it most and sparking fears of a new round of defaults by countries in the global South (Laskaridis, 2021: 10–11). Several authors have noted how the current debt architecture is not fit for purpose (see, for example, Laskaridis, 2021; Stubbs et

al., 2020), and how it is already restricting the fiscal space available to some countries at a time when the need to maintain public spending is paramount.

On the other hand, responses to the pandemic have increased inequalities within countries. In his Report to the Human Rights council, Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston (2020: 9) called the pandemic 'a pandemic of poverty', highlighting how many of the world's poor simple could not follow the favoured advice of the public health community: 'stay home, socially distance, wash hands, and see a doctor in case of fever'. The Federal Reserve's actions in the US largely targeted the corporate world, continuing 'the politically driven upward redistribution of wealth' overseen by both the Democrats and the Republicans in recent years (Brenner, 2020: 22). Lockdowns across the global forced people into the confines of their home, deepening the centrality of households and the gendered division of labour within households in capitalism (Stevano, Mezzadri, et al., 2021). Large-scale social distancing measures shut down swathes of the economy, including the sectors predominantly employing women. Certain jobs were re-cast as essential for the minimum functioning of the economy and to confront the pandemic. All of a sudden, long-undervalued care jobs were recognised as socially necessary, whilst the high-flying lawyers, bankers and other well-paid professionals were forced to work from home. However, these essential jobs were disproportionately done by women and people of colour, increasing the exposure of these groups to the disease, with deadly effects (Raval, 2021; Wenham et al., 2020; Wenham, Smith and Morgan, 2020). Moreover, in a cruel twist of fate, instead of improving the social and economic status of essential workers, the category of 'essential' has exacerbated the reproduction of exploitation and precarity that marks these workers as disposable, even as they are recognised as indispensable (Stevano, Ali and Jamieson, 2020).

In short, the pandemic has played out over, and in many cases intensified, the contours of existing class, gender and racial inequalities. Nowhere is this more evident than the current vaccine rollout. Across the western world, vaccines were developed using public money, with public research institutes and universities at the centre of this monumental scientific endeavour (Safi, 2021). Scientific development went into overdrive, with the time between getting a vaccine from the design stage through the regulator slashed. However, following the suggestion

of Bill Gates, exclusive rights to vaccine manufacturing was given to a handful of pharmaceutical companies based in the West, preventing developing countries from manufacturing their own vaccines domestically following the formula developed using public money (Cullinan, 2021). This created what activists have called a 'vaccine apartheid' as high-income countries scrambled to buy up the (limited) available vaccine supply and place themselves at the front of the inoculation queue. Part of the problem is that intellectual property rights for drugs are enforced by the 1995 international trade law, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). India and South Africa launched a petition to suspend the TRIPS Agreement for the duration of the pandemic, a proposal that was voted down by high-income countries who had already secured their vaccine supply. As of the end of March 2021, 30 countries had still not received a single dose of vaccine, hanging their hopes on the UN-backed COVAX programme (Glenza, 2021). However, COVAX is a charity and not a solution to the global vaccine rollout. Erin Hannah and her colleagues (2021) go as far as calling COVAX a smokescreen to cover up vaccine nationalism. In a sense, the vaccine rollout acts as a metonym for the pandemic as a whole, which on the surface promises to challenge the maladies of the current neoliberal period, but in fact ends up reproducing and intensifying the massive inequalities across regions, nations and intersecting axes of oppression, namely class, gender and race. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Latin America.

COVID-19 in Latin America

As explained above, Latin America has been hit particularly hard by the global pandemic, with countries unable to implement adequate policy responses to stop the spread of the virus and their underfunded and fragmented healthcare systems incapable of taking the strain caused by the virus. Despite some of the longest and harshest lockdown measures in the world in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, governments have proved unable to stop the spread of the virus. In fact, some of these countries were the hardest hit in the region in per capita terms, despite the virtually non-existent measures implemented in two of the region's largest countries, Brazil and Mexico (Gideon, 2020: 4). I will explore some of the reasons for this in more detail below.

Latin American healthcare systems are woefully underfunded and have suffered because of attempts to bring in private healthcare providers. Average public health expenditure across Latin America sits at 3.7 percent of GDP, well below the OECD average of 6.5 percent, stymying public health responses to COVID-19 in the region (Lavinas, 2021: 3). Because of this, Latin American countries suffer from limited capacity in healthcare systems, experiencing shortages in ICU beds, ventilators, treatments drugs and medical personnel (Almeida, 2020). Writing in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), Lauren Paremoer and colleagues (2021) argue that increasing public health budgets to 5 percent of GDP is essential for building a fairer and more sustainable post-COVID world.

Paremoer and her colleagues also stress the importance of public initiatives above outsourcing healthcare services to for-profit providers, something that has constrained the public health responses in Latin America. Several authors have noted how Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)—one particularly prevalent form of outsourcing in the region—have led to fragmented healthcare systems ultimately unable to confront the exigencies of a global pandemic (Almeida, 2020; Benítez et al., 2020). For example, Camila Gianella, Jasmine Gideon and María José Romero, (2020: 9) show how, in the Peruvian case, 'the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, and even intensified, pre-existing weaknesses of the Peruvian health system… which have undermined the government's ability to respond to the health crisis effectively and protect the most vulnerable'.

Beyond the public health response to the pandemic in Latin America, things are little better. Since 2013, many of the economic gains achieved by left-wing governments in the region, known collectively as the pink tide—GDP growth, raises in the minimum and average wages, falling poverty, inequality and informality—have been undone. This has only been compounded by the pandemic. According to data presented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC, 2021), the Latin American and Caribbean region experienced the worst crisis on historical record during 2020, with the 7.7 percent drop in GDP and 20 percent fall in investment growth the harshest anywhere in the developing world. 2.7 million private firms shut, whilst the ranks of the unemployed swelled to 44.1 million people, many of whom would have been forced back into virus hotspots to undertake increasingly informalised types of work. Poverty levels exploded, from 30.3 percent of the region's

population to 33.7 percent in under a year, whilst extreme poverty grew by 8 million people over the same period. Such was the size of the shock to Latin American economies that GDP per capita levels were set back a decade, undermining recent poverty reduction efforts. Confronted by this context, ECLAC (2020: 18) has called for Latin American countries to strengthen the welfare State to avoid another lost decade.

Extractivism remains the dominant form of capital accumulation in the region, with the economic damage from the pandemic exacerbated by shocks to global energy markets outlined above. Tobias Franz (2020) argue that the seven commodity-producing economies in Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru) are facing a 'switching crisis', as capital abandons its investments in the region, leaving behind half-built and/or now-defunct infrastructure projects. These seven countries, contends Franz (2020: 8), are currently 'facing a triple crisis: capital inflows suddenly stopped and even reversed, commodity prices massively decreased due to the fall in demand (particularly for oil) and local currencies drastically devalued'. Given the high level of dependence on extractivism in the region—labelled the 'commodities consensus' by Maristella Svampa (2013)—the economic outlook for Latin America does not look good, with many countries also at risk of defaulting on their sovereign debt (ECLAC, 2021). And this is to say nothing of the country home to the region's largest petroleum reserves. Venezuela has been in a deep economic and political crisis since the fall of oil prices in 2014 and a humanitarian crisis since the implementation of US sanctions in 2017. Venezuelan migrants flows are increasing the stresses and strains placed on social and healthcare services by the pandemic, worsening the informality experienced by migrants and further limiting their access to healthcare (Zambrano-Barragán et al., 2021). In addition, migrants are among the populations most impacted by the heightened Covid-19 crisis across the region. Border closures and changes to migration policy across Latin America countries have interrupted migrants' movement, leaving thousands without inadequate health care and stranded across the region, forcing some to return to danger and poverty from which they were trying to escape (Borjoquez et al. 2021).

The informal economy continues to be a source of livelihoods for much of Latin America, with 'large sections of the region's population are living in chronic

financial insecurity and are highly vulnerable to loss of labour income' (ECLAC, 2020: 4). The International Labour Organisation (2020: 48) estimates that in 2019, 53 per cent of all Latin American workers were employed informally. Persistent informality has forced individuals to carry the social and economic burden of the pandemic in the place of the state, which has proved either unwilling (as is the case in Brazil and Mexico) or unable (as is the case in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, the list goes on) to confront the pandemic in any meaningful systematic sense. In Chile, Magdalena Gil and Eduardo Undurraga (2020: 31) note that although 'people seem to understand the risk associated with COVID-19 and claim to be willing to comply with sanitary measures… the effectiveness of pandemic mitigation strategies depends not only on the willingness of the population to comply with them, but also on their ability to do so'.

Informality makes lockdowns nigh on impossible, pitting populations against public health officials. The region's informalised working-classes often find themselves between the Scylla of risking infection by going out to work and the Charybdis of staying at home and slowly starving to death. Moreover, the high instances of informal housing, with its poor sanitation and high population densities, make Latin American cities perfect breeding grounds for coronavirus. Informal workers and city residents (who are usually one and the same) are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of the pandemic, with the informalisation of both the labour market and access to housing and other social services leading to deteriorating livelihoods and social inclusion (Zapata and Prieto Rosas, 2020).

The gendered outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America have been stark. Women already performed between 22 and 42 hours of unpaid domestic and care work per week before the crisis, with society-wide lockdown measures only increasing their reproductive workload. Over 70 percent of healthcare workers in the region are women, who disproportionately find themselves on the frontline of fighting the virus (United Nations, 2020: 14). Furthermore, an unintended consequence of lockdown measures to stop the spread of the virus has been a spike in domestic violence, already a problem for one of regions worst affected by another pandemic, that of gendered violence. Call traffic on emergency helplines for women in Chile and Mexico jumped by more than 50 percent during lockdowns, suggesting an intensification of gendered violence in

the region. Likewise, the reported disappearance of over 500 women in Peru during periods of lockdown shines a light on how widespread this phenomenon is in the region (Gideon, 2020: 5). This galvanised a response from, amongst others, local government and non-governmental organisations, which responded to the pandemic-related increased reports of domestic violence by expanding hotlines service with online resources and creating local networks to guarantee safe and rapid access to the appropriate support (Lima, 2020).

Finally, indigenous people are thought to be particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus, so much so that some are worried that the pandemic could spell the end for the regions more vulnerable groups (see, for example, Griffin, 2021). Across Latin America, indigenous people continue to be forced off their land as the agricultural and extractive frontiers eat into the Amazon rainforest. In Brazil, loggers and ranchers, emboldened by the government of Jair Bolsonaro, became increasingly belligerent in 2019, murdering indigenous leaders and accelerating dispossession. As the pandemic hit, the healthcare system of Manaus, the Brazilian city in the middle of the Amazon, collapsed in the face of the virus, a sign of the dangers that indigenous communities are confronted by. This is to say nothing of the millions of indigenous people who find themselves in informal settlements in the peripheries of Latin America's cities, dependent on the market of the informal economy to survive.

In short, the COVID-19 pandemic has manifested in Latin America as a multidimensional crisis cutting across all spheres of life. It has intensified existing crises of extractivism and its attendant political forms. It has illuminated the abandonment of entire populations under neoliberalism, when people were forced off the land and into the cities, and out of the factories and into informal work. And it has revealed the morbid outcomes of extreme racial and gender inequalities, as certain populations are marked as disposable bodies.

Contribution of the Special Issue

Whilst the above contextualisation of the pandemic is essential for any analysis of the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America, this special issue moves beyond the overview presented above to interrogate the current conjuncture from a wide range of different angles. Some of the authors explore how the pandemic

has intersected with existing inequalities of race and gender, shining light on the particular ways different groups have been affected in different contexts. Others place the scientific and medical expertise at the heart of the global response to the pandemic in its social context, underscoring the contingent character of knowledge. They also assess the new forms of politics forged in the fires of COVID hell and the embryonic political horizons that have burst forth under such intense heat and pressure. With this Special Issue, Alternautas hopes not only to offer fine-grained analyses of the view of the pandemic in Latin America from below, but also to point towards the opportunities for 'doing something different' that have long sat centre stage in Latin American debates over development.

The first couple of articles in the special issue address indigenous peoples and gender in Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maria Paula Andrade highlights how indigenous people have developed strategies of active citizenship in Brazil to confront the pandemic. Andrade assesses how indigenous groups have bundled discourses around the spread of COVID-19 together with their opposition to the extension of the extractive frontier into their territories, strengthening democratic values in the country and successfully using different juridical and political routes to shape the policy decisions of different layers of the Brazilian state.

In her contribution, María Belén Villegas Plá explains how 'socioeconomic and health crises are not gender blind', outlining in turn the gendered dimensions of increases in poverty, rising unemployment, and cuts to social provisions disproportionately used by women and children. Through exploring the gendered effects of fiscal policy, Villegas Plá forcefully argues against further austerity measures and for the need to think progressively about new gendered revenue and expenditure schemes.

Starting from misinformation on social media around the pandemic response of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Carolina Sotério takes a different tact. She traces the emergence of science as the basis for truth in post-enlightenment European philosophy to understand the world of fake news on Twitter. Sotério draws our attention to the importance of how knowledge circulates and the mechanisms through which public perceptions on how knowledge is produced can provoke different discourses around science at particular moments. She uses this discussion as an entry point to dissect the attacks on the WHO made by some

sections of Brazilian society, in the process offering possible future antidotes to the dissemination of fake news on social media.

In his contribution, Geoff Goodwin underscores how existing water inequalities have enabled the spread of the pandemic, preventing the most marginalised groups in society from following one of the most basic yet effective preventative measures: handwashing. Goodwin traces historical processes coproducing potable water systems in Ecuador through the Andean practice of communal labour, mingas. In doing so, Goodwin draws our attention to the unevenness of access to clean water due to the packwork public, private and communal systems of provision and to the ingenuity and strength of water associations. Goodwin argues that the pandemic has opened up new opportunities for co-produced communal water services, offering them as alternatives to privatised or centralised services that could map out a route to universal coverage of clean drinking water in Ecuador sometime in the near future.

Finally, César J. Pérez-Lizasuain offers a revolutionary re-reading of the tragedy of Oedipus, highlighting the need to look beyond the return to normality at the end of the pandemic and take a risk in order to usher in a new post-pandemic world. He underlines how types of 'unsaid dispositifs' obscure the production and reproduction of power, allowing for the status quo to endure. For this reason, the possibility of 'going back to normal' offered by actors in political institutions the world over should be rejected: returning to normality, he stresses, means returning to the precarity and austerity lived by working-class Latin Americans, of accepting the racial and gendered axes of oppression analysed by other contributors. In making this argument, Pérez-Lizasuain draws our attention to the new horizons of possibility opened by the pandemic, making the case for urgent political action.

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MARÍA BELÉN VILLEGAS PLÁ[1]

Fiscal adjustment and gender inequalities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: what is the "new normal" about?[2]

During the last decade, Latin America has been coping with a new scenario characterized by a reborn of fiscal adjustment discourses. By 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened this policy orientation that seems to stand as central to the response to the economic crisis.

This paper argued that fiscal adjustments catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted gender gaps, making women poorer in terms of incomes and time. Expenditure cuts triggered by constraints in fiscal revenues have a disproportionate effect on women and children. Women are more dependent on social policies because they are over-represented in poverty rates, informal work, and lower-income sectors. Likewise, women are employed in sectors that have been severely affected by the health and economic crisis.

In addition, women still spend more than three times on unpaid domestic and care work as men. The pandemic has exacerbated the care burden on families. Therefore, in this context, when social and care services are reduced, women have

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[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/fiscal-adjustment-and-gender-inequalities-in-the-face-of-the-covid-19-pandemic

to bear the brunt of the lack of services by increasing the time they spend on unpaid work.

The paper goes as follows. First, the reasons for the resurgence of discourses aimed at fiscal austerity are described. Then, the paper goes into more detail on the effects of these policies on gender equality. Finally, it concludes with possible fiscal scenarios for gender equality in Latin America.

The path that brought us here: explaining the changing trends in social protection

During the 1990s, the hegemonic thinking of the Washington Consensus finished laying the foundation of the neoliberalism in developing countries. Neoliberal ideas became popular in Latin America in the 1990s, triggered by hyperinflation, political instability, and the generalized economic crisis of the 1980s (Tussie, 2011: 318). The milestone of the neoliberalism in that region was the so-called Washington Consensus (Williamson 1994)[3].

Some of the typical policies implemented throughout Latin America in this context included trade liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, cuts in social spending, fiscal austerity, amongst others.

However, the economic and political context of Latin America changed significantly with the new millennium. After a twenty-five year decline starting in the 1980s, commodity prices grew in the 2000s (Erten and Ocampo, 2013). The increase in China's demand, the speculative movements linked to excess liquidity and the lack of solid and tangible financial assets, led to a price increase of commodities (mainly metals and agriculture) since 2002 and especially since the USA crisis in 2008 (Idem). Likewise, foreign debt levels as a percentage of GDP halved from almost 40% in 1999 to 19% in 2011, and foreign direct investment

[3] The reference to "consensus" meant that this list was premised on the ideas shared at the time by power circles in Washington and international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, besides several of think tanks and influential economists. The recommendations identified by economist John Williamson in 1989 were in concrete: 1) fiscal discipline; 2) redirecting public expenditure; 3) tax reform; 4) financial liberalization; 5) adoption of a single, competitive exchange rate; 6) trade liberalization; 7) elimination of barriers to foreign direct investment; 8) privatization of state owned enterprises; 9) deregulation of market entry and competition; and 10) secure property rights.

levels more than doubled in the same period from US$72 billion in 2000 to US$153 billion in 2011 (CEPALSTAT, 2018). Increasing commodity prices led to improved account balances and promoted large foreign capital inflows. As a consequence, real exchange rates appreciated but countries were able to reach a sizeable accumulation of foreign reserves and a marked reduction in foreign indebtedness (Bacha & Fishlow, 2011: 395).

At the same time, at the beginning of the new century, the political scenario of Latin America had changed after the arrival of the center-left and left political parties to the governments, in the majority of cases for the first time. In 1998 Hugo Chávez was elected president of Venezuela. Later, ex-metalworker and Workers' Party (PT) leader Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva became president of one of the biggest countries in the world (2003). "Lula" was followed by left Peronist Néstor Kirchner in Argentina (2003); Tabaré Vázquez of the leftist Broad Front (FA) in Uruguay (2004); coca growers' union leader with Aymara heritage Evo Morales (2005), a socialist and former prisoner of the dictatorship Michael Bachelet (2006) and left economist Rafael Correa (2006). Later, incumbent leaders or its parties were subsequently reelected in most countries, including ex-political prisoner Dilma Rousseff (2011) in Brazil, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2011) in Argentina, and former guerrilla leader José "Pepe" Mujica (2010) in Uruguay.

Thus, based on an extractivist model sustained by the high price of commodities, the Latin American governments displaced the discourse of fiscal austerity from the 1990s. Instead, the pink tide increased public spending and especially public social spending (Gómez Sabaini et al., 2017).

In this context, left-wing governments implemented a variety of social programs to cover the most vulnerable people in a variety of areas such as health, education, labor, and social security. As a consequence, in 2012, thanks to the increase in labor salaries and to a large extent due to the increase in public social expenditure (Gómez Sabaini et al., 2017), the Gini coefficient was lower than 0.5 for the first time while the poverty (28%) and extreme poverty rates (11%) were reduced dramatically (ECLAC, 2019). In fact, just before the pandemic hit, 30.8% of the population lived in poverty in comparison with 45.4% registered in 2002 (ECLAC, 2020 c).

However, it should be noted that even though poverty and unemployment rates improved for society as a whole, including women, gender gaps remained stable. For example, the increase in women's labor participation contributed to the decrease in the proportion of women without their own income compared to the values of the late 1990s. However, in 2017 this proportion still reached a regional average of 29.4%, while for men the figure was 10.7% (CEPALSTAT, 2018).

By 2013, the economic scenario started to change. Indeed, many of the conditions that produced a sharp bounce back in developing countries after 2010 are no longer present anymore or a good deal weaker. There was a considerable decrease in China's demand and the monetary and trade policies of the USA, which drove US dollar value, contributed to downward price pressure on commodities (Erten and Ocampo, 2013).

Economic changes led to a gradual shift in the political role of public spending and the idea of austerity. As a consequence, austerity has become the "new normal." Politically, that "new normal" associated with expenditure cuts, the new ways of privatization, and the increase in public-private partnership alliances; have had three major discursive drivers in Latin American countries.

On the one hand, fear of corruption and misuse of public money has paved the way for the growth of these trends. Recent political trends in a large number of developing countries, particularly in Latin America, have further contributed to this discourse. In particular, the cases of corruption that have been blamed for much of Latin America's pink tide have revitalized the need to move towards "efficiency" and "transparency" supposedly provided by the private sector. Indeed, while between 2003 and 2012 most Latin American countries were under leftist government, by 2019, former presidents of Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia had been accused and tried for corruption and the rest of them lost the government largely because they were accused of bad spending or at best inefficient spending of the public budget.

The new governments that emerged from these crises were characterized by a clear shift to the political right. Having strongly criticized the spending policies of progressive governments, the new right-wing governments elected in the region privileged a discourse of austerity.

On the other hand, the decrease in public income due to the financial restrictions of recent years caused by changes in the global economy has had very significant impacts on the Latin American countries. Also, most developing countries are experiencing a rising debt servicing costs since 2012, and they are already coping a wall of repayments due on foreign currency denominated public debt over this year and the next (UNCTAD, 2020). The impact of the pandemic on developing countries includes a dramatic reversal of capital outflows, triggering large currency depreciations (UNCTAD, 2020). In countries that already had high foreign debt levels, the recent outflows are putting enormous pressure on their debt sustainability by undermining future access to refinancing while driving up their value in foreign currency (Idem).

In addition, Latin American countries have seen an increased penetration of their markets by non-resident investors, foreign banks, and other financial institutions, as well as allowing their own residents to invest more freely abroad. The process of Financing for Development (FfD) was introduced as a shift from the traditional mechanism of overseas aid (Official Development Assistance or ODA), to a greater emphasis on the use of finance made available through private sector investment. The private sector has been alleged to be more suitable than the public sector so this would seem to be a better policy in the current context.

In this line, public-private partnerships have increased their penetration in developing countries in the last decades. At the outset, these models were based on public work concessions for highway construction; they were then extended to railroads, ports, hospitals, prisons and public buildings, amongst many others. What is interesting to note here is that these processes have intensified with the economic slowdown and the growing debt associated with the covid19 pandemic (Villegas, 2020).

Finally, the spread of COVID-19 has represented not just a public health crisis, but also an economic crisis. By 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean countries are experiencing its worst economic crisis in a century, with an estimated contraction of its regional gross domestic product (GDP) of -9.1% (ECLAC, 2020 b: 91).

While developed economies have greater fiscal space to finance stimulus packages that are necessary in the current context, developing countries have seen

their fiscal space shrink even further than it used to be because of falling fiscal revenues. Thus, developing countries are coping with a lack of revenues together with alarming rate of unemployment and increasing rates of poverty (UNCTAD, 2020). In this context, austerity measures have been gained a momentum in most Latin American countries, probably more than ever before.

How this new trend is affecting gender inequality?

First, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, large numbers of women continued to be excluded from the labour market. Before the pandemic, more than half of the 126 million women in Latin America worked in informal conditions. This means that they had no labor rights, no social protection, and that they work in conditions of constant instability (ECLAC-UNWOMEN, 2020 d: 11).

The coronavirus pandemic could push about 49 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. Before the crisis, women were already overrepresented among the unemployed and amongst the population with the highest levels of poverty (ECLAC-UN WOMEN, 2020 a). Given the structural inequality that put women under more poverty risk, most of them are trapped in the locked in the so-called poverty trap (See Kabeer, 2011).

Women's global labour force participation rate declined over recent decades from 50.3 per cent in 2005 to an estimated 47.2 per cent in 2019 resulting in a gender gap in the participation rate of around 27 percentage points (ILO, 2020).

According to the latest ECLAC-ILO data, there will be 21 million unemployed women in 2020, 8 million more than in 2019. More than half of employed women are in sectors severely impacted by the crisis, estimated at 9.1 by 2020 in the region (ECLAC, 2020 a). For instance, almost 60% of workers in accommodation and food activities in Latin America and 61% in the Caribbean are women (ECLAC, 2020 a: 39).

Second, lockdown measures are especially affecting domestic workers, which remain a highly feminized sector. In fact, 80 per cent of all domestic workers are women (ILO, 2020). At present, domestic workers often face very low wages, excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse (ILO, 2020 b).

Third, women are on the front lines of the pandemic, but they are employed in worse jobs and with less favorable working conditions than men. Around 70% of health sector workers worldwide are women making them thereby more exposed to the pandemic. Figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that in Latin America 86 per cent of nurses are female and only 14 per cent are male. Also, on average women in the health sector earn 28 per cent less than men (Boniol et al., 2019).

Fourth, expenditure cuts triggered by constrains in fiscal revenues have a disproportionate effect on women and children (See for instance Ortiz & Cummins, 2013). Women tend to be more dependent on social policies because they undertake a big part of childcare and usually have lower salaries as well as less stable labor trajectories. As consequence, the lack of child care services affects women in a much deeper way than men. In Latin America, women still spend more than three times on unpaid domestic and care work as men. These differences are even greater for lower-income women who spend an average of 46 hours per week in unpaid work (ECLAC-UNWOMEN, 2020 d).

Likewise, when social services such as health, child education, and care services are cut, women have to bear the brunt of the lack of services by increasing the time they spend on unpaid work. In addition, it should be noticed that there is a close relationship between time spent on unpaid work and other non-monetary deprivation. For example, in households without clean water, the negative health effects and opportunity costs of spending time carrying water particularly affect women, who are often the main careers (ECLACUNWOMEN, 2020 d).

In addition, there are certain characteristics relating to the city's infrastructure (paved roads, basic infrastructure) and transport that can affect everyone, but which affect women most (Villegas, 2020). Women are the ones who depend most on public transport and non-motorised means (bicycle and walking) and who generally move around with packages, purchases, cars and children, so the negative effects of these barriers are more noticeable for them. Similarly, dependent people are also among those who are most affected (CEPAL, 2017).

Also, the pandemic has triggered a shift of public resources toward the public health emergency, which could put women in a more risky situation regarding

sexual, reproductive and maternal rights, especially where health systems' resources are highly constrained.

Finally, lockdown situations exacerbate women lack of rights by increasing risks of violence, exploitation, abuse or harassment against women due to high barriers when attempting to leave the household or even calling the emergency hotlines in the presence of their abusers.

From the "new normal" towards a more social justice future

Socioeconomic and health crises are not gender blinded. The paradigm of austerity that seems to have risen strongly in recent years will increase gender inequalities even more than before. Since regional fiscal constraint is a fact, it seems necessary to think about new gendered revenue and expenditure schemes towards a more just model of society.

One question that emerges in this context refers to how far could Latin American states implement social recovery policies? That is, how will these countries mitigate poverty, unemployment, and inequalities in an unprecedented economic crisis? Of course, these are questions that imbricate strong power struggles between powerful economic and social sectors, but also mobilizations and protests from the sectors from below.

Currently, that region is experiencing an intense process of political struggle in the middle of an unprecedented health situation. Chile has just approved a constitutional reform after an intense process of social mobilization during 2019. Bolivia witnessed strong confrontations after the coup to the government of Evo Morales in 2019. Brazil is subject to intense mobilizations for social, economic, and environmental rights that demand justice and action from the government of Jair Bolsonaro. In Uruguay, after 15 years, the political right won the elections by 20,000 votes and is aspiring to modify the social protection system in that country. In Peru, there is once again a political crisis, and Venezuela continues a path of intense political, economic, and social crisis that began several years ago. In Colombia, the mobilizations occurred in 2019 against the government have reached high levels of confrontation.

Even though it is true that work must be done to improve the equity of public income and expenditure, this is even truer in the case of goods that guarantee basic rights. In that line, some options must be closed. We should not accept solutions like those of the 2008 economic crisis in developed countries that benefited the wealthiest sectors while were promoting austerity plans that included cuts in public spending with regressive effects (Oxfam, 2016: 9). Instead, we should value life, care, and those policies that promote equality in all its forms.

The progressive orientation of public spending of some social policies implemented during the pink tide contributed to improving the living conditions of the population, but it was not enough. These policies did not close the gender gaps, even though those governments had substantially higher tax revenues than our countries would have in the following years (Gomez Sabaini et al., 2017).

This implies thinking differently not only about expenditure but also about fiscal revenues. Latin America and the Caribbean need to increase their tax revenues. It should be noted that the region's collection levels average 23.1% of GDP, compared to 34.3% for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (ECLAC, 2020 b). Furthermore, it is central to avoid illicit financial flows that undermine the necessary incomes to create and maintain solid public services. In fact, elusion and evasion reached 6.3% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 (ECLAC, 2019 b).

In addition, measures related to a more progressive tax system from a gender perspective become central. This implies having more progressive and less indirect tax-focused structures that tend to put more pressure on women's backs (Stotsky, 1997).

We need to highlight the priorities related to daily tasks linked to the support of life and reproduction, which has been historically neglected within the framework of capitalism/patriarchy. In this line, an allocation of expenditure could be a possible solution to review priorities, deciding which public services should be promoted, and how this affects inequalities.

If we want to have a more just society, the future of our region must be feminist, and no policy of fiscal austerity will ever be compatible with that.

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MARIA PAULA ANDRADE[1]

Saving the Mother of Brazil: Indigenous Peoples and Active Citizenship amid COVID-19[2]

The fight of indigenous peoples in Brazil for adequate health treatments and protection during the COVID-19 pandemic represents a critical pushback on the Brazilian state's attempts to limit social participation in political decisions (Lima, 2019; *APIB,* 2020b). The national and international support that the Brazilian indigenous population has sought to have their rights met, while the country hit the third position among the highest COVID-19 cases in the world in September 2020, is an evidence of their active pursuit toward direct participation in public policy (*APIB,* 2020b). In creating spaces of mobilization to demand healthcare from the government and strategies for the protection of their communities, indigenous peoples demonstrate their deep awareness over their constitutional, human, and citizenship rights (*APIB,* 2020b; *APOINME,* 2020). During the pandemic, they have utilized this knowledge to advance their demands for the upholding of their rights to differential treatment, to expose the government in its shortcomings and violations of its responsibilities, and to pressure the Brazilian state into holding accountability of its (in)actions (A*PIB*, 2020b, 2020d). This paper examines the exercise of active citizenship among indigenous peoples in Brazil as they developed strategies to cope with the threats of COVID-19 and with their struggles with the Brazilian government. It seeks to understand how their commitment to active citizenship contributes to the strengthening of democratic

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values in Brazil as they utilize social and political spaces to shape state decisions and guarantee their self-determination.

Indigenous challenges for access to adequate health assistance during the pandemic result from former president Michel Temer and current president Jair Bolsonaro's political maneuvers to disempower participatory democracy (Lima, 2019). Participatory democracy relates to citizen participation in policy-making through policy councils, conferences or public hearings, for example, which have begun to suffer dismantling by the federal government(Lima, 2019).The importance of participatory democracy lies in the opportunity it provides for underrepresented groups to voice their concerns, and improve the quality of state decisions. It relates to the relevance of citizenship, contestation and social participation as markers of democracy and of more accountable governments (Lima, 2019). In this case, the actions of indigenous organizations in Brazil to defend their health rights have been intrinsically connected with the markers of participatory democracy: from lawsuits to social mobilization, from strategies of combat and control of COVID-19 in their communities to reporting of state violations, they have shaped the maintenance and strengthening of democratic values (*Ministério Público Federal*, 2020; Landau, 2020). Ultimately, indigenous peoples seek to defend "the mother of Brazil [who] is indigenous, although the country is prouder of its European father who treats it like a bastard child (…)(*Xapuri Socioambiental,* 2020*)*."

This article draws on the literature of public health in Latin America and Brazil to examine the role of health in the indigenous' pursuit of their acquired rights, and their attempts to shape the terms of, and decisions in official health assistance amid COVID-19 (Chalhoub, 1996; Cueto and Palmer, 2015; Sowell, 2015; Westphal *et al.*, 2007; Hochman, 2011; Gibson, 2019). Through the analysis of newspaper articles, reports from indigenous organizations, legislative decisions, constitutional and health rights, this paper seeks to answer the following question: how do the strategies indigenous peoples have developed to pressure the Brazilian government into fulfilling its constitutional responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate their exercise of active citizenship and contribution to the strengthening of democracy? I argue that they do so by demanding both the federal government to hold accountability for its omission

and detrimental attitudes during this health crisis while also demanding direct participation in state decisions regarding indigenous health.

Methodology

The use of the term citizenship requires a closer examination. Citizenship in Latin America has been at the core of indigenous mobilization, especially when it has created exclusion by restricting national membership to a particular national group (Yashar, 2005). The attribution of citizenship in the region is often granted by the state through one's birth within territorial boundaries, tied to ideas of civic inclusion, equality, fraternity and freedom, while entailing rights and responsibilities between citizenry and the state (Yashar, 2005). Yet, indigenous populations have challenged statist terms of inclusion concerning their impact on indigenous self-determination, namely, their political autonomy over their natural resources, territories and cultures as a basic human right (Yashar, 2005; Bodley, 2014).

To understand how Brazilian indigenous peoples have done so during the COVID-19 pandemic, I make use of the term "active citizenship" to refer to forms of civic engagement which go beyond statist citizenship, meaning, citizenship that sees the state as the only source of legitimate citizenship rights (Miraftab and Wills, 2005; Souza and Souza, 2020). Indeed, ethnic movements in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Southern Europe during the early 2000s contested prevailing notions of nation-states as legitimate sources of definition and extension of democratic citizenship and responsibilities (Yashar, 2005). Active citizenship thus concerns the popular pursuit of civil, social, political, and economic rights, which can take place outside official spaces (such as courtrooms) to be performed, as indigenous peoples have shown, in the streets, on the internet, in their villages, and abroad (Miraftab and Wills, 2005; *APIB,* 2020a, 2020b)[3]. Indigenous civic involvement thereby does not mean indigenous acceptance of nation-state paradigms of belonging, but the very tension of rights to self-determination that indigenous populations never relinquished despite how state

[3] Actors in this process also create their own spaces for communication to attract constituents to their cause. For more, see Miraftab and Wills (2005).

laws have framed their national presence (Million, 2013; Holder and Corntassel, 2002)[4].

Indigenous pursuit of resources to combat and control of COVID-19 among their peoples are predicated on their right for differential treatment under the Brazilian state (Hale, 2004; Sartori Junior and Leivas, 2017)[5]. Differential treatment was a victory of indigenous movements during the elaboration of the 1988 constitution defined in the article 231 of the constitution:

To indigenous peoples it is acknowledged their social organization, habits, languages, beliefs and traditions, as well as their original rights over the lands they have traditionally occupied. It is under the responsibility of the Union to demarcate them, protect them and make their possessions respected (*Senado Federal*, 1988).

Article 231 also contributed to the development of a subsystem of indigenous health under the national public health system, which stipulated the following:

It is mandatory to consider the local realities and the specificities of indigenous cultures and the approach to be adopted toward the care of indigenous health through a differential and global model, contemplating aspects of health assistance, sanitation, nutrition, housing, the environment, land demarcation, sanitary education and institutional integration (*Presidência da República: Casa Civil*, 1999).

[4] Their challenges to liberal paradigms of belonging also include how their view of collective rights for claims making has challenged liberal understandings of individual rights found in the "Draft Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" in the 1980s. For more, see Cindy L. Holder and Jeff J. Corntassel (2002).

[5] The acquisition of indigenous rights at the global and national levels reflected transformations in human rights and international law since the 1980s that came to incorporate the right to differentiation into their norms. Indigenous peoples played a key role in these changes, particularly as they began to advocate for multiculturalism. This term however has become controversial in the literature because scholars have claimed the idea of multiculturalism as an emancipatory and counter-hegemonic project has been appropriated by neoliberalism, which has stipulated the benefits indigenous peoples can have access to and those they cannot. For more, see Charles R. Hale (2004) and Dailor Sartori Junior and Paulo Gilberto Cogo Leivas (2017).

Indigenous peoples were also granted participation in the groups of formulation, evaluation, and monitoring of health policies from the local to the national levels (*Presidência da República: Casa Civil*, 1999)[6]. Both territory and health rights are not only intertwined as markers of indigenous differential treatment, but also in the fight against COVID-19.

In what concerns indigenous health, their demands for governmental action amid the pandemic have prioritized two fronts: immediate access to health assistance in accordance with their cultures and traditions; and the end of the invasion of their territories by unauthorized individuals and private enterprises (*Emergência Indígena*, 2020). This is because these individuals not only work as potential vectors of the disease, but also destroy the environment and violate indigenous cultural and spiritual relationships with it (Maracá, 2020, 3:20). This article thus focuses on these two sources of conflict through national and some regional initiatives undertaken to curtail the threats that COVID-19 has posed to their communities, especially considering that from the approximately 818,000 indigenous peoples in the country, more than 30,000 had already contracted the virus by September 2020 (Fellet, 2020b).

Demanding the Fulfillment of Rights, Pushing for Greater Political Participation

As SARS-Cov-19 reached indigenous territories, the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil's (APIB) detailed mobilization front against the pandemic represents their national grassroots campaigning to shape the processes and decisions towards state health assistance (*Emergência Indígena*, 2020). Created in 2005, APIB has been the national center for regional indigenous organizations. It has sought to strengthen both the unity among different native peoples throughout Brazil, and strategies for mobilization against violence and threats to indigenous rights (*APIB*, 2020)[7]. Because of the pandemic in 2020, APIB

[6] The "global trend" regarding indigenous rights stemmed from the rise of social movements activism in the 1980s in which indigenous peoples worldwide pursued international relations and alliances to empower their communities locally. It occurred because such movements were not strong domestically. For more see Alison Brysk (1996).

[7] APIB is currently represented in all Brazilian states through seven regional organizations. For more, see "Quem Somos," APIB Oficial.

launched the "Indigenous Emergency" campaign, which has demonstrated that the indigenous immediate problems with both exposure to COVID-19 and adequate health services reflect greater challenges to the fulfillment of their citizenship rights and their pursuit of self-determination (*APIB*, 2020a). These include adequate provision of health services, and constitutional rights to their homeland - which have been constantly violated by clandestine mining and logging groups inside their territories (Fellet, 2020b). In seeking national and international support, indigenous peoples have created spaces for popular political participation that seek to pressure the state into complying with its responsibilities.

The "Indigenous Emergency" campaign has served the broader purpose of taking action against the growing lack of state accountability toward indigenous rights. The campaign homepage, also available in English and Spanish, declares it "proposes general strategies for the elaboration of regional and local plans of action" in a collaborative manner among civil society, indigenous and non-indigenous partnering organizations against the pandemic (*APIB*, 2020h). Their "Plan to Stand Against COVID-19" is divided into three axes: comprehensive and differential healthcare to control the spread of Covid-19, legal and political actions, and health communication and information (*APIB*, 2020f). All the planned axes seek to curtail the constant violation of indigenous rights− which has complicated their already vulnerable condition to the pandemic (*Recomendação no. 11/2020*, 2020).

To ascertain the commitment of indigenous peoples to directly intervene in official health policies, the campaign has promoted indigenous narrative about COVID-19 prevention and control among their communities. It has done so by establishing protocols of action that both indigenous organizations and the state should implement together to prevent catastrophic consequences to native lives (*APIB*, 2020f). Indeed, due to their advocacy, the Federal Public Ministry released a Recommendation (n. 11/2020 MPF) in 2020 acknowledging the greater vulnerability of indigenous peoples to respiratory diseases, and requesting local active protection of their health and their rights by local, regional and national governance to prevent the risk of genocide (R*ecomendação no. 11/2020,* 2020). APIB's plan against COVID-19 not only corroborated the ministerial recommendation but also emphasized the importance of indigenous presence in

governmental decisions "on a permanent and continuous basis" so that the state can act in accordance with the cultural particularities of their communities (*APIB*, 2020f). The campaign also details the duties of APIB during the pandemic. These include, for instance, supporting the purchase of personal protective equipment to health teams in indigenous communities; working with international organizations, such as the UN and the Inter-American System, to strengthen the defense of human rights of indigenous peoples; and developing educational content regarding the indigenous reality amid the pandemic to foster solidarity to their cause (*APIB,* 2020f). The development of this R$100 mi plan in itself demonstrates how indigenous peoples have sought to shape the terms of debates and decisions about indigenous healthcare under the state (*APIB,* 2020f). Consequently, their commitment to active citizenship seeks to increase governmental accountability over constitutional violations of their citizenship rights that have been exacerbating health risks among their populations.

Demanding Guaranteed Rights to Health

Protecting their rights means seeking their own methods of data collection about COVID-19 in their communities while dealing with challenges of an underfunded public health system. The immediate challenges the pandemic has caused among indigenous peoples involve the difficulties in access to accurate data on COVID-19's impact in native individuals both within and without indigenous lands, and the inaction of the government in promoting effective strategies of prevention and health assistance (*APIB,* 2020e). This is a reflection of budgetary cuts that have taken place in multiple federal agencies responsible for indigenous rights. They comprise a 37% cut for 2020 demarcation and land protection programs from the National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples (Funai) and a 16% deduction on funds in 2019 for the Special Office for Indigenous Health (Sesai) (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*, 2020a; Leitão, 2019). Funai is the indigenist office of the Brazilian state in charge of identifying, delimiting, demarcating, and regularizing the registration of lands traditionally occupied by indigenous peoples, critical responsibilities not only for the maintenance of indigenous rights but also, as will be discussed later, for the prevention of COVID-19 (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*, n.d.a). Attempting to alleviate the consequences of decreased investments and their social impact during the pandemic, APIB and

regional organizations have defended "the relevance and validation of mechanisms of community-based and participatory monitoring on the spread of COVID-19 in [our] territories (*APIB*, 2020e)."

Problems with arbitrary and flawed classificatory methods about indigenous victims of COVID-19 in official data have led indigenous organizations to implement alternative strategies for gathering information on their own, which has served to promote their demands for self-determination and for the improvement of health services. According to different regional indigenous organizations, the Special Office for Indigenous Health (Sesai) has fallen short on its monitoring of indigenous individuals contaminated with COVID-19 (*APIB*, 2020e). For instance, it became clear for the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (Coiab) that Sesai "was not promoting assistance, neither keeping records of indigenous people who live in urban centers or in lands that are yet to be ratified", namely, lands that need to have their geographical boundaries set with approval from a presidential decree (*Fundação Nacional do Índio*, n.d.b). Because of these flaws, APIB has disclosed that each affiliated regional organization has developed their own method of data collection, such as the development of apps for registration of cases, which is critical for the elaboration of emergency strategies that serve indigenous populations (*APIB*, 2020e). Further, governmental indigenous organizations have been accused of institutional racism in situations in which native individuals were classified as *pardos* (mixed- race) when they sought public healthcare in urban spaces (*APIB*, 2020e). This reality raises questions about the dynamics of identity politics and the impact of the state in social groups as it delimits social categories while conveying visibility through its delimitation for individuals to claim particular rights (Arruti, 1997).

Misclassifying indigenous individuals by other racial categories however contributes with inaccuracies in identification, which can promote erasures that affect their guaranteed rights and enforce historical exclusion(Farias, 2020; *APIB*, 2020e). This is particularly serious considering that indigenous peoples are supposed to receive differentiated health treatment (*Presidência da República*, 1999; *APIB*, 2020e). In May, 2020, a project of law was created to make mandatory the use of ethnic-racial classifications from the national institute of statistics (IBGE) on the data of COVID-19 victims to improve the accuracy of

information about the vulnerability of particular groups to the pandemic (*Câmara dos Deputados,* 2020)[8]. To guarantee accuracy, indigenous peoples continue to track cases among themselves. According to their estimates, in March 2021, over 50,000 indigenous individuals had contracted COVID-19 within 163 peoples (*APIB,* 2020a).

Indigenous peoples' pinpointing of exact areas in need of investment against COVID-19 represent both their struggle to see hard earned health rights fulfilled, and their commitment to the expansion of their voices in governmental decisions. First, in noticing governmental shortcomings they demonstrate their awareness of state health obligations, such as Sesai's goal "to develop projects toward the integral attention to indigenous health and health education (…) while observing traditional indigenous practices (*Ministério da Saúde*, 2017)." The creation of Sesai in 2010 was a victory from indigenous advocacy towards a national implementation of health services that respect "the cultural specificities and the epidemiological profile of each people (*Ministério da Saúde*, 2017)." Yet, during the current presidency, Sesai suffered threats of dissolution. In 2019, the then minister of health, Luiz Henrique Mandetta, proposed a project that would turn Sesai (a national office) into a responsibility of individual states and municipalities, meaning that it would become dependent upon the already strained budget of local governments (Guimarães, 2013; Ramos, 2020). After thousands of indigenous people went to the streets of the country to protest, Mandetta decided to maintain Sesai, which is responsible for 765,000 people from 305 ethnicities (*Diario do Nordeste*, 2019). Amid COVID-19, APIB has taken stock of the immediate problems that are currently violating their health rights, which include challenges with access to fresh water necessary for hygiene; lack of fluvial, air and land transportation for urgent cases, and the risk indigenous peoples have been exposed to when going to urban centers to receive the federal government relief fund (*APIB*, 2020g). Concurrently, they have filed lawsuits that seek governmental compliance with established healthcare protocols, such as the need for sanitary barriers, to protect indigenous peoples from contamination (*Ministério Público Federal,* 2020).

[8] The official classifications from IBGE are white, black, pardo, indigenous and yellow. For more information, see Câmara dos Deputados (2020).

Bringing attention to necessary protocols in health assistance also demonstrate their push for greater participation in healthcare decisions. Their plan to combat COVID-19 addresses the need for governmental enforcement of sanitary protocols among health providers when in contact with indigenous peoples, and adequate assistance to native individuals under the state-based indigenous health services (*APIB*, 2020g). These concerns were founded in the absence of well-structured state plans of action which, in an interview given to the French radio station RFI, APIB leader Kretã Kaingang claimed to come from a lack of commitment from the Brazilian state with indigenous peoples (Capuchinho, 2020). President Bolsonaro's vetoing of twenty-two critical paragraphs from the project of law (PL) no. 1142/2020 on the protections of indigenous health during the pandemic provided a strong example of Kaingang's concerns (*Presidência da República*, 2020). Even though the PL was eventually approved (after lawmakers, members of the federal human rights commission and the UN representative to Brazil acted upon the matter) some of the vetoed items were fundamental for their compliance with WHO sanitary guidelines (*WHO*, 2020). These encompassed, for instance, "universal access to potable water" and "distribution with no charge of hygienic, cleaning and disinfection materials to villages or indigenous communities officially ratified or not, including in urban centers (*Presidência da República*, 2020)." Because of the slow responses in governmental action during the COVID-19 crisis, regional organizations have sought solidarity to address some of the most pressing issues within their communities.

The absence of greater action from governmental agencies to protect indigenous health has unjustly pressured varied organizations to enact their own plans of control and prevention towards COVID-19. For instance, health initiatives from Coiab, and the Articulation of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations from the Northeast, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo (APOINME) originated from the "inexpressive [healthcare] contributions from governmental institutions, such as Funai and Sesai, whose missions involve the implementation of our rights (*APOINME*, 2020)." Considered one of the main mediators between the indigenous populations in the northern states and the federal government, Coiab's emergency plan has prioritized improved communication among the

communities it represents[9], administration of emergency and primary care, provision of food, and promotion of indigenous healing. To increase access to information about the coronavirus, Coiab has also partnered with national and international groups to create educational podcasts, pamphlets and posters in indigenous languages focusing on preventive measures against COVID-19 (*COIAB*, 2020)[10]. Further, it has invested in the purchase and distribution of oxygen tanks, generators, masks, food and medication. Their efforts have contributed with other initiatives to support about eighty thousand indigenous individuals from thirty different peoples by September 2020 (*APIB*, 2020e). Similarly, Apoinme has established its own partnerships with universities, social movements, indigenous and non-indigenous organizations to monitor the spread of COVID-19, develop sanitary barriers and provide subsistence to indigenous in need (*APIB*, 2020e)[11]. About forty-thousand individuals have received food support from Apoinme, whereas those responsible for the monitoring of sanitary barriers were given face shields, thermometers and oximeters (*APIB*, 2020e). Notwithstanding all of these immediate health assistance efforts, ultimately COVID-19 prevention and control are intrinsically dependent upon the maintenance of their territorial rights.

"The Territory is Sacred[12]" COVID-19 in Indigenous Lands

Fighting against COVID-19 has been directly associated with native claims to sovereignty over their territories. In particular, the invasion of indigenous lands has caused threats to both the environment and their health. Peoples who live voluntarily isolated, such as the Pirititis in the northern state of Roraima, for instance, have faced increased health threats to the growing presence of clandestine miners near their land and their population of one-hundred

[9] Coiab oversees native peoples in the states of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Maranhão, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia and Tocantins. For more see, Emergência Indígena, 51.
[10] Partners include the Federal University of Roraima's Insikiran Institute, which focuses on the education and professionalization of indigenous peoples in Roraima through a multicultural perspective; Roraima's Indigenous Council (CIR) and the US-based non-profit Nia Tero. For more, see COIAB (2020).
[11] Apoinme represents the states of Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Espírito Santo, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Sergipe.
[12] "Ancestralidade," Maracá Documentary, video, 3:20.

individuals (*APIB*, 2020e). Meanwhile, in the southeastern region of the state of Pará, the invasion of demarcated indigenous land by clandestine miners, loggers and land grabbers have exponentially affected the rise of COVID-19 infection among the Karipuna, Yanomami and Kayapó peoples (*Desmatamento e Covid-19 explodem em Terras Indígenas Mais Invadidas da Amazônia*, 2020). The sanitary districts responsible for these populations have registered, respectively, an infection growth of 355%, 215% and 138% by the coronavirus among them between July 7 and August 29, 2020 (*Instituto Socioambiental*, 2020).

In taking legal and social measures to deal with the threats these invasions have caused to their lives, indigenous peoples have created opportunities for political attention to their demands as they pressured the Brazilian state to take measures against these violations to their rights. For example, to demand protection during the pandemic and governmental action against illegal loggers and miners, the Kayapós blocked a key Brazilian grain road in August, 2020 in the state of Pará (Landau, 2020). Concurrently, APIB filed a lawsuit through the Brazilian supreme court to demand the federal government to adopt an emergency plan of COVID-19 control in indigenous territories (Vilarino, 2020). An injunction was also requested and received the support of six political parties for the implementation of immediate measures of protection, including the creation of sanitary barriers and the removal of clandestine individuals from indigenous territories. APIB also published the "Complicity in Destruction" report to seek national and international support for their territorial entitlements in October 2020 (*APIB*, 2020a).

The combating against COVID-19 has led indigenous populations to find and report direct sources of illicit land exploitation in the Amazon basin to increase visibility of the parts involved and thereby strengthen the possibilities for accountability of their actions. Along with the Amazon Watch (a transnational nonprofit organization headquartered in the United States that aims to protect the rainforest and indigenous rights) APIB has utilized the "Complicity in Destruction"[13] report to present to "the great actors of the global market"

[13] "Complicity in Destruction" was based on studies realized by Profundo, a non-profit Dutch institution which focuses on sustainability and social justice, and De Olho nos Ruralistas, a news outlet whose mission involves following the agribusiness decisions and its consequences in Brazil. For more, see APIB (2020a).

information about how their investments are contributing to "the destruction of the largest tropical forest on the planet" (*O Financiamento da Destruição*, 2020; *The Amazon: A Global Treasure*, n.d.). Based on studies conducted by non-profit organizations in Brazil and Holland, the report claims that three sectors of private investments have caused most conflicts with indigenous peoples: agrobusiness, electricity, and mining (*APIB*, 2020a). Besides the risk of contamination by COVID-19, issues with clandestine exploitation of native lands include deforestation, pollution of rivers that are critically important as both food and water resources for native populations, and the threat of relocation based on the potential infeasibility of living in environmentally exhausted territories (*APIB*, 2020a). Brazilian companies that indigenous groups have accused of contributing to these problems include Vale, the second largest producer of iron ore and nickel in the world; JBS, the largest producer of beef in the world; and Cosan/Raizen, specialized in sugarcane and ethanol productions. Private investments in the Amazon basin often come from international banks and corporations from places including the United States, France, Germany, China and Japan (*APIB*, 2020a). The exploitation of indigenous lands has greatly increased since 2019, a consequence of the current neoliberal government of president Jair Bolsonaro who believes that "idle" native reserves jeopardize the country's economic development (Verdélio, 2019). The growth of mining and the agribusiness activities have provoked problems, especially during the pandemic.

In exposing mining companies and investors' potential fault over the contamination of indigenous peoples to COVID-19, they attempt to curtail illicit mining activities in the Amazon basin and pressure the Brazilian government to guarantee indigenous sovereignty over their territories. A study developed by the Federal University of Minas Gerais and the Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA) has classified the Yanomamis as the most vulnerable group in the country to the pandemic due to the presence of clandestine miners in their land (Fellet, 2020a). Located near the Brazilian frontier with Venezuela and crossing the states of Amazonas and Roraima, the Yanomami population could be reduced by almost 7% because of the presence of about 20,000 miners in their lands (Fellet, 2020a). According to the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), the nearly 27,400 Yanomami and Ye'kwana inhabitants of the Yanomami land (about the size of Portugal) are running the risk of genocide "with complicity of the Brazilian state" if it does not expel those miners from their lands and improve medical assistance

to their 334 villages (Fellet, 2020a). Even though the area received demarcation in 1992, miners' activities have remained because of gold reserves.

Through a similar attempt to call national and international attention over the impact of the agribusiness in the spread of COVID-19, indigenous peoples have sought to shape public policy to benefit their rights. For example, in June 2020, indigenous employees in slaughterhouses and meat packing plants located near indigenous villages were infected by COVID-19 while working in the Southern and Mid-Western regions of Brazil (*APIB,* 2020e). Similar circumstances led to the transmission of the coronavirus to individuals in the Indigenous Reservation of Dourados in Mato Grosso do Sul as indigenous employees of slaughterhouses contracted the disease at work and became vectors to communities such as the Oco'y in Paraná and the Xapecó in Santa Catarina. From the 850 inhabitants of the Oco'y village, eighty-eight were contaminated and their shaman succumbed to it (Kateivas, 2020; Foscaches and Klein, 2020). Such events led APIB to reinforce the status of vulnerability of indigenous individuals with the Public Ministry of Labor (MPT) and the Public Federal Ministry (MPF) so that indigenous laborers could be exempted from work without compromising their salaries (*APIB*, 2020e). COVID-19 threats near their lands have thus become a critical part of indigenous struggles to enforce their territorial rights.

The threats the pandemic has caused among indigenous populations have made them seek alliances, legal and social strategies to have their demarcation rights fulfilled. Even though the constitution of 1988 had stipulated the demarcation of all indigenous land by the year 1993, so far, from 1,290 indigenous lands in Brazil only 408 have been demarcated (*APIB*, 2020e). 287 of them are under the process of demarcation, and other sixty-seven have other terminologies based on how they were acquired (for instance, if by a third-party donation or dispossession by the federal government) (*APIB,*, 2020d; *Fundação Nacional do Índio*, n.d.a.). Meanwhile, 528 territories have received no official recognition despite the claims of the native peoples who inhabit them (*APIB*, 2020e). The demarcation process has become even slower during the past two presidencies. Whereas former president Michel Temer ratified only one indigenous land during his two-and-a-half year term, president Bolsonaro has explicitly said that "as long as I am the president there will be no demarcation of indigenous land" (Verdélio,

2019). The deliberate dismissal of constitutional rights represents a neoliberal agenda that only reinforces the importance of active citizenship for their maintenance. Concurrently, indigenous peoples continue their battles through court, through the internet and through the networks of support they have forged or seek to forge with other minority groups and the rest of the Brazilian citizenry (*Revista Novo Tempo*, 2020; *APIB,* 2020d).

Conclusion

Brazilian experience with the pandemic resembles challenges aboriginal and indigenous communities have been facing throughout the world. For example, the Waorani in Ecuador, the Navajo in the United States, or the Congress of Aboriginal People of Canada, have also taken measures to claim their rights against discriminatory and/or neglected indigenous health measures in their countries amid COVID-19 (Godin, 2020; Cardona, 2020). The extensive measures indigenous peoples in Brazil had to go through to find alternative solutions against COVID-19 though raise important reflections about not only the neoliberal challenges they are having to face under the current presidency, but also their praxis of active citizenship for the maintenance and fulfilment of their guaranteed rights. Notwithstanding the power imbalances between them and the federal government, in demanding the acknowledgment of health and territorial entitlements they have pushed back on growing attempts of weakening spaces for civic involvement; have exposed governmental shortcomings in health assistance; and have secured some victories in the acknowledgment of their rights, including support from the supreme court to include them as a priority for vaccination (Miotto, 2021). In trying to directly shape decisions in official healthcare and to protect their territories, indigenous peoples have displayed critical exercises of rights claiming which strengthen and shape Brazilian democratic experiences with civic participation and contestation for the improvement of state decisions.

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CAROLINA SOTÉRIO[1]

The provisional nature of science evidenced in times of pandemic[2]

Trust in science has been problematic over the years. The roots of the problem, in turn, are deep. For a long time, it was believed that the primary obstacle would center on the need for greater provision of scientific information to the non-specialist audience. However, this is a deficit view of the public "understanding" of science and technology, which disregards the associated historical, social and political contexts (Lewenstein 2003). The Digital Age has made this issue even more evident, as scientific information is everyday more rapidly accessible online.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, global efforts mobilized to share information about this unprecedented scenario, bringing science to the spotlight. Consequently, the population followed every new discovery on-demand, from public policy to vaccine development challenges. This panorama puts the science trust *in check* again: social media gave voice not only to scientists, but also to any user to express their frustrations on this provisional moment, highlighting what was already known by academics: knowledge is constantly changing.

Public decisions on Covid-19 taken by the World Health Organization (WHO) evolved alongside scientific evidence and inspired several governments to do the same, so, for each new published research, the institutions had to change their previous strategies. Even though "going back" on decisions can represent an advance in evidence-based policies, the expression has been pejoratively used on the Internet to discredit science. With this in mind, this manuscript contributes to

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[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/6/16/the-provisional-nature-of-science-evidenced-in-times-of-pandemic

the studies about the "public trust in science" in risk communication, with emphasis on the discursive relations present in the public response to the evidence-based policies about Covid-19, illustrating the presence of a deterministic view of science. The investigation occurred through the search for the "voltou atrás" ("went back") keyword in Portuguese on Twitter. The Discourse Analysis from the French School was used to analyze the tweets, registering a frame of this particular moment from the Brazilian perspective.

A brief historical-philosophical overview

Science has not always been the same as it is known today. A range of events and contributions over time demonstrate how a scenario of constant change has always been present in its development. It is worth mentioning that different cultures significantly contributed to the construction of knowledge, such as the mathematics studied by the Arabs, the wisdom about natural products dominated by the Brazilian indigenous peoples or even the paper fabrication by the Chinese. However, specific historical and political factors contributed to the generalization of a philosophy that established the current models, vocabularies and techniques (Chaui 2000).

Looking back in the past, mythology narratives about the gods tried to answer questions that plagued the human mind, including the origin of the world. The ascendancy of things, people and qualities based on mythological figures revealed the idea of genealogy and, in that context, proposed an explanation for what was known. It was the pre-Socratic philosophers who started to present explanations that were not based on the supernatural, among them Thales of Miletus (624-558 BC), who bet on a world formed from water, and Leucipo (500-430 BC) and Democritus (460-370 BC) with atomic theory. Aristotle (384-322 BC), in turn, was a pioneer in declaring that observation and logical reasoning should be combined in the study of the natural world, elaborating the oldest systematic treatise on the nature of scientific research in the West and defending logic as an instrument of knowledge (Chaui 2000; Rosa 2012; Andersen and Hepburn 2020).

The medieval period was influenced by these contributions (Scholastic Philosophy, VIII-XIV century) and, thus, the concept of dispute arose: a form to expose philosophical ideas through the presentation of a thesis to be refuted or

defended with arguments based on recognized authorities (whether the bible, religious leaders or the philosophical ideas themselves), revealing the principle of authority. In general, Philosophy covered periods such as the Renaissance (XIV-XVI), in which theory and practice were fostered with maritime discoveries, also allowing the development of a great critical social sense; Modern Philosophy (XVII-XVIII), which evidenced classical rationalism; and the Enlightenment, supported by the powers of reason. In the XVI-XVIII period the Scientific Revolution was established, representing both an advance in the knowledge of certain areas and a reflection on the method by which it was obtained (Chaui 2000; Andersen and Hepburn 2020). At this time, figures such as Newton, Copernicus and Lavoisier made contributions so significant that they established paradigms, that is, model solutions widely accepted by a community (Kuhn 1998). The Copernican Revolution, for example, overthrew the prevailing idea of a geocentric planetary system by proving mathematically the existence of a heliocentric system. This particular event revolutionized the plurality of areas and thoughts from astronomy to religion, contributing to scientific progress (*Idem* 1985).

All this movement involved science for commercial purposes, as it happened in the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), and culminated in the first journalistic coverage of science by means of its universal expositions (Moraes and Carneiro 2018; Sanjad 2017). These, at first, praised the scientific wonders without a deep consideration for the social and environmental impacts. Subsequently, episodes such as the discovery of the dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) pesticide side effects broadened society's critical view of science and boosted movements like the environmentalist (Rensberger 2009). In this sense, 20th century Philosophy questioned the validity of methods, results, conclusions and scientific limitations (Chaui 2000).

Even the concept of "scientific" is a longstanding discussion. For philosopher Karl Popper, every scientific idea should be subjected to a test to refute it (instead of confirming it), a principle he named as *falsifiability*. Thereby, science would approach the deductive method, in which "systems of theories are subjected to tests, deducing statements of less universality" (Popper 1959, 49). Thus, science would be composed of theories from tests that failed to refute them, proving quality. However, factors such as the probability of events, the existence of

theoretical entities and other non-falsifiable principles revealed problems with Popper's principle (Ladyman 2002).

For example, in the scope of historical sciences, it would be unlikely to carry out controlled experiments that reproduce conditions such as the origin of the universe or Planet Earth, in order to attest or discard hypotheses that would explain, among other things, the Big Bang and the dinosaurs' extinction. In these cases, the investigations start from a set of hypotheses that search for evidence capable of pointing, in the light of knowledge, the most probable explanations, bringing to light the methodological differences between some areas that prevent the establishment of a strictly unique protocol for all of them (Cleland 2001).

Modern science then emerges from a moment when new senses appear, and a series of episodes help to break with the deterministic — a concept in which some scientific statements would be immutable — and mechanistic view (Pêcheux and Fichant *apud* Martins 2009). However, the contemporary discourse in the communication of science to the public often seems to have the opposite effect, attributing decisive characteristics to science content, "as a sorting activity between true and false statements" (Pêcheux 1995, 197). Therefore, an image of science has been produced which is synonymous with absolute truths and which opposes, imaginary, what would be false.

Recently, discussion is set on a "post-truth" scenario, defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" by the Oxford Dictionaries (2016), which also nominated it the "Word of The Year" in 2016. This eclipsing of truths also mobilizes a complex philosophical discussion on the "truth" understanding itself (McIntyre 2018). In addition to the theory of truth, it is hereupon important to also investigate the conditions in which "post-truths" are disseminated.

Several events are related to the term's popularization, especially in politics. A direct connection is currently established between the word and episodes such as Donald Trump's election in the United States and the Brexit vote for the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union. In these cases, lots of subverted truths were disseminated through social media and influenced public decisions.

However, these events do not originate from “post-truth” *per se*, but rather reflect its results (McIntyre 2018).

Under this umbrella is "fake news" which can be understood as fabricated information in a deliberately false way. The activity was not necessarily born with the Internet, but social media has been the main stage of its spread (Lazer *et al.* 2018; McIntyre 2018). The strategy was employed in 2018 during Bolsonaro's presidential election in Brazil in order to defeat the opposition. The campaign was marked by attacks on journalists, political candidates and defense of conservatism, all massively propagated through WhatsApp and Facebook (Almeida 2019). A research revealed that 89.7% of Bolsonaro voters believed in “fake news” (AVAAZ and IDEIA Big Data 2018). Indeed, in the midst of so much information available online, the filter between facts and what is deliberately false often depends on the Internet user (McIntyre 2018).

Science is in the middle of this arena as well, especially in an unprecedented pandemic scenario. With the advancement of technology, the refutation of hypotheses has been occurring at an accelerated pace, mainly due to the demand for effective treatments, data monitoring and information sharing.

Covid-19 provisional scenario

The pandemic scenario is evolving rapidly. The first officially identified patient with the disease occurred in Wuhan (China) on December 31st, 2019 (Huang *et al.* 2020). On February 26th, 2020, the Ministry of Health officially communicated the first case of Covid-19 in Brazilian territory (Brazil 2020). After 48 hours, researchers at the University of São Paulo, in partnership with the University of Oxford, had already sequenced the genome of the new Coronavirus and released the data internationally, a record time compared with the world performance (Girardi 2020).

On March 16th, researchers at Imperial College London published a statistical model on the university's website with predictions about the disease in some countries, highlighting the United States and Great Britain. The estimate of deaths in a scenario without mitigation measures was catastrophic: 2.2 million and 510,000, respectively (Ferguson *et al.* 2020). On March 26th, the data were

updated in the face of changing scenarios, including Brazil: for a population of 212,559,409 inhabitants, the worst scenario (without mitigation measures) would have 1,152,283 deaths; the best (with early suppression), 44,212 (Walker *et al.* 2020).

The constant information updating also occurred in the search for treatments and vaccines, as the need for rapid development has significantly changed the usual scenario: while other vaccines can take decades to develop, Pfizer and BioNTech pharmaceuticals had received the first vaccine approval in December, after only 10 months[3]. All this effort counted on previous knowledge and international cooperation across financing systems, clinical trials, infrastructure, public policy, etc. (Lurie *et al.* 2020; BBC 2020). Chloroquine (antimalarial) and its derivative (hydroxychloroquine) were hypotheses endorsed in political speeches, particularly by presidents Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, but without promising results (Desideri 2020). A May 22nd article in The Lancet, a prestigious journal, published a survey of 96,032 patients and concluded that, in addition to not showing significant results against the disease, these drugs increased the risk of death. Twelve days later, the study was criticized for data problems (The Lancet Editors 2020).

This situation reveals a demand for results and information that happen at different times: the time of science and the time of science journalism. As we observe researchers studying this unprecedented scenario in an accelerated way, we see communication professionals strive to disseminate the information urgently. And in this scenario circulates a discourse which "is not a sum of speeches: science plus journalism equals public communication of science and technology (S + J = PCST). It is a specific articulation with particular effects, which are produced by the injunction to its mode of circulation" (Orlandi 2001, 22-23).

[3] Russia registered the first vaccine to fight Covid-19, Sputnik V, in August 2021. However, clinical trials were incomplete at that time.

It is worth remembering that, in the current social formation guided by neoliberalism policy[4] (Cano 2012), there is great demand for immediate solutions and productivity, which is also reflected in the reality of the pandemic. The so-called "Information Society", which emerged to name the post-industrial world and a paradigm shift, revealed technical, economic, cultural, legal, psychological and philosophical challenges in its construction (Werthein 2000). This pace of on-demand information, in turn, reveals numerous associated problems that are reflected in the coverage of the current pandemic. As noted, the current scenario of uncertainties has even contributed to a lack of rigor in the review of certain studies.

All this lack of information has caused anguish in part of the population that questions the Internet about issues such when the disease will peak, when the pandemic will end, the delay in producing a vaccine and even the validity of direct attacks on the credibility of scientists and communicators. The biologist Atila Iamarino, an icon in the dissemination of accurate pandemic information in Brazil, received harsh criticism when updating the Imperial College London data in his videos, which reached record viewing, despite his warning that these were *predictions* (Iamarino 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). Due to the growing attack on the scientific disseminator, the hashtag #ObrigadoAtila (#ThankYouAtila) was mobilized on Twitter on August 1st as a social defense, culminating in the first position of the Trending Topics Brazil (Trendinalia 2020).

Considering these events and the importance of social media in the dissemination of information on Covid-19, the discourses produced on the subject on Twitter was analyzed due a series of social engagement around the topic on the platform, as follows.

[4] According to Cano (2012), the policy of neoliberalism comprises a "modern" way of arguing in favor of reducing State participation in the market economy and increasing deregulation (such as labor, social security, etc.) by means of privatization policies and structural reforms of a liberalizing nature. Endorsed mainly by the technological advances of the III Industrial Revolution, it reinforces the capitalist nature of adopting faster and less costly solutions, leading to precarious employment relationships and the weakening of social policies, among other perverse consequences. Here, I use the term to refer to the current neoliberalist discourse, especially present in Brazil.

Analyzing Tweets

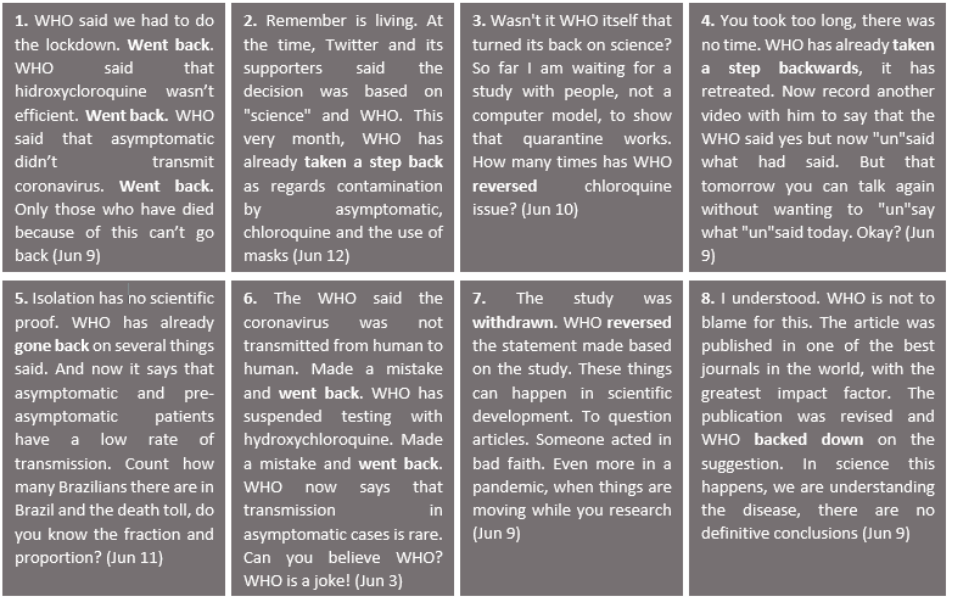
The search started with the assumption of "provisional science", whose selection of comments on Twitter took place through the keyword "voltou atrás" ("went back" and its derivatives, in English), inserted in the website search field. The statement choice came after a qualitative observation of similar terms recurrence in the social media, mainly after the release of reports from the Imperial College. The subject gained even more attention when political demonstrations were dedicated to attacking public figures who communicated accurate information about the pandemic, supported by the "change in attitude" in the face of the new data. "Backing out" has become commonplace in an unprecedented situation, as new information about Covid-19 emerges every day. As such, the search was limited to comments made in the first half of 2020, the initial period of the pandemic, in which many positions have changed due to the lack of knowledge about it.

Twitter was chosen because it is the stage for great discussions, in addition to allowing the use of hashtags, search engines often linked to organized movements, whose mentions in large quantities gain prominence in the network itself, a way to rank the most commented subjects by location. Furthermore, the site favors direct interaction between anonymous users[5], public figures and organizations, facilitating almost instantaneous content monitoring performed by individual users. Twitter, which has about 340 million active users worldwide, is the sixth most accessed platform in Brazil (DataReportal 2020).

Since the social media is dynamic and updates its pages frequently, the comments presented here do not belong to a single thread, but rather to several conversations that occurred in parallel on the website, connected by the keyword. (Figure 1).

[5] "Anonymous" here means a public profile not verified by Twitter, that is, the common user (who is not a public figure or represents an organization).

Figure 1. Set of comments transcribed from Twitter about the new Coronavirus and the provisional nature of science (preserved anonymity).



These comment authors do not have verified profiles. They are sometimes conversations (in response to profiles that are also anonymous), public posts that dialogue with news or are not directed at a particular profile. Of these, some reject the change in positions (1-6) while others try to contextualize the provisional nature of science (7-8).

Most comments coincide with a specific date: WHO's June 9th statement on the misconception that asymptomatic transmission of the virus would be rare. That same month also marked the retraction of The Lancet article on chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine and the emergence of scientific evidence to support the widespread use of masks by healthy people, both previously not recommended by the institution (WHO 2020).

When analyzing the comments in greater depth, we find that the possible meanings of these comments exceed the 280 characters of Twitter, and refer to the interdiscourse, that is, "something speaks before, elsewhere and independently" (Pêcheux 1995, 99) and that returns on the basis of the sayable. It

is “the set of sayings already said and forgotten that determine what we say, sustaining the very possibility of saying” (Orlandi 2008, 59). Thus, the discourses of social networks dialogue, in a certain instance, contains a vision of science that has already been established. Therefore, “The meaning of a word, of an expression, of a proposition, etc., does not 'exist in itself' (that is, in its transparent relationship with the literalness of the signifier), but, on the contrary, it is determined by the ideological positions that are at stake in the socio-historical process in which words, expressions and propositions are produced (that is, reproduced)” (Pêcheux 1995, 160). This sense, according to the author, is present in the metaphor relations, which can be identified by the effects of substitution, paraphrases, synonyms.

Thus, on the one hand, the comments reveal an antonym relation between WHO and science, which denies the organization's institutional position. Observing comment 2 “this very month WHO has taken a step back as regards contamination by asymptomatic people, chloroquine and the use of masks”. Firstly: In such a short time, WHO changed its position regarding contamination by asymptomatic, chloroquine and the use of masks. Secondly: WHO is not sure! And, thirdly: WHO is not science! This way of denying resumes, by referring to interdiscourse, the deterministic view of a science that does not allow itself to “go back”: WHO is not sure (A); Science is sure (B); Therefore, WHO cannot be science ($A \neq B$). To say, then, that WHO does not base itself on science in its decisions – due to the change of positions – is to place science on a level of absolute truth, which corroborates with a deterministic view still present in contemporary times (Martins 2009). This memory of unchanging science is present in these discourses produced in the current social and historical conditions surrounding science in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Still, the comment calls for fatality. The mention of the number of deaths was used as the effects of a “not-science”. Observing the premises of comment 1 “WHO (...) went back. Only those who have died because of this cannot go back”, relations also apply: WHO made a decision ($A \Rightarrow B$); The decision caused deaths ($B \Rightarrow C$); WHO caused deaths ($A \Rightarrow C$). In these speeches, "going back" implies being wrong and, consequently, assuming dire consequences.

Other times, the institution and science are treated as synonymous. Observing comment 6 “WHO said that the coronavirus was not transmitted from human to human. They made a mistake and went back. (...) Can you believe WHO? WHO is a joke!”, In the criticism of WHO there is also an implicit criticism of science, once the organization’s actions were based on scientific evidence. So, when new studies overturned previous hypotheses, which proved to be common in the face of an unknown disease, the WHO also reversed, in order to maintain a position consistent with the scientific literature. In this line of reasoning, scientific provisionality is assumed, but this is placed as a factor of discredit. Rephrasing it: “can you believe in science? Science is a joke!”.

It cannot be claimed that the speeches are not “scientific” to some extent. Even in positions that question trust in WHO and, subsequently, in science, there is a foundation in studies, organizations, concepts, among others, as arguments. However, the identified deterministic view of science contributes to the denial of its provisional character, which is mistaken and does not support the claims that “going back” is unscientific. On the contrary, provisionality supports scientific progress in the face of new research.

The numerical predictions that have been made are *predictions*. Estimating values in a scenario never before seen is an exercise in uncertainty, but one that becomes necessary to guide competent institutions in their decisions. However, it is essential to understand that the associated political debate directly affects the pandemic data, since measures such as social distancing have been shown to be effective against the disease transmission in a scenario without a vaccine (Nouvellet *et al.* 2020); notably, these measures depend on public policies to be effectively implemented. In Brazil, the president called Covid-19 a “little flu” during an official announcement, an attitude that minimized WHO’s social distancing recommendation. According to McIntyre (2018), science denialism in this “post-truth” arena can lead to perverse consequences: when a private individual denies a fact, he faces the problem; but when a leader does, the results are catastrophic.

Another aspect that correlates with the constantly changing scenarios is the fact that the race for knowledge sharing has boosted access to studies not yet peer-reviewed (preprints). Although these promote a debate, visibility and

dissemination of scientific content at first hand, there are concerns that must be considered, since the information review process is not complete (Spinak 2016). However, even in the case of studies that have been screened by specialists, about 27% of the errors that cause papers to be rejected from scientific journals are related to problematic data, according to a study conducted with publications in the field of chemistry and materials science (Coudert 2019).

Yet, just as the way of producing new knowledge has evolved over time, knowledge itself has also evolved. Science tends to bring many more questions than answers and is far from proposing definitive solutions, building on previous hypotheses to reach new perspectives. Scientific knowledge is put in check all the time and the refutation of hypotheses is part of its development process. However, even the scientific method has its limitations and investigations of different natures may require different methodologies. Most experimental scientists focus on one main hypothesis and on avoiding false refutations or corroborations in relation to the factors that may influence the results obtained (Cleland 2001).

Finally, it is necessary to consider language in its functioning in relation to exteriority, since it is not only at the base of all knowledge production, but also in the mediation of our relationship with the world, with objects and with others. "Language is the fabric of memory, that is, its essential mode of existence" (Courtine 1994, 5). This consideration makes it possible to observe the way in which scientific discourse is produced in our society.

Final considerations

The information demand in the Covid-19 pandemic is growing and is facilitated by the Digital Age. Popular frustration with the constant scenarios' change and the inaccuracy about certain preventive measures or possible treatments is a debate topic on social media, but also historical in the course of a new knowledge development. In this sense, this manuscript intended to understand the public response to the evidence-based policies on Covid-19 through the linguistic relations present in online speeches.

The study's findings evidenced a deterministic view of science present in different discourses formulated by nonexperts on Twitter, specifically commenting on

WHO's position. Initially, "science" and "WHO" were mentioned in the opposite sense (antonym relation): according to a science that never goes back, the position of WHO going back was unscientific. In this case, many speeches put the fatality of the disease as one of the effects of this non-scientific positioning. In another sense, the words were used as synonyms: if WHO was reversing its decisions, which would be scientific, then science would not be reliable. Still, there were users who tried to respond to these comments, placing the provisional nature of science as necessary for scientific progress.

Among the reasons that favor the appearance of such comments is the contemporary scenario of "post-truths", in which deliberately false information is disseminated, mainly in the political sphere. Indeed, the comments used “subverted truths” when quoting studies to discredit science. Evidently, the pressure for answers affected the research peer-review process and must be considered for a scientific exercise aware of its social implications.

Also, this study was limited to Twitter and situated in Brazil, but other contributions can be made on different platforms, languages and perspectives, in order to verify how these discourse relations are maintained or altered in other contexts, since the communication about the Covid-19 was carried out differently around the world, and historical, social, cultural and political factors are intrinsically connected to the study problem. The science trust subject is complex and must be studied considering the conditions in which the senses are formulated and circulate.

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CÉSAR J. PÉREZ-LIZASUAIN [1]

Oedipus before COVID-19: An essay on the corporatization of political sovereignty and openings in the pandemic[2]

Alas, the pains I bear are numberless— my people now all sick with plague, our minds can find no weapons to serve as our defense.

Our city dies—we've lost count of all the dead.

The Chorus in *Oedipus Rex*, **Sophocles**

-The calm has been felt.
-The tranquility is alive.
-Peace is ours.
-The country returns to normality.
-At six is the curfew.
-To protect citizen rights.
-The traitor is in jail.
-The one who tried to hijack power.
- Triumph of law, moderation, and order[3].

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[1] César J. Pérez Lizasuain is a sociologist of law, professor at the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras and author of the book "Rebelión, no-derecho y poder estudiantil: la huelga de 2010 en la Universidad de Puerto Rico" [Rebellion, Disorder and Student Power: The 2010 Strike at the University of Puerto Rico].

[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/7/7/oedipus-before-covid-19-an-essay-on-the-corporatization-of-political-sovereignty-and-openings-in-the-pandemic

[3] Translated by the author. The original version is written in Spanish as follows: "-La calma se ha hecho sentir. -La tranquilidad está viva. -La paz es nuestra. -El país regresa a la normalidad. -A las seis es el toque de queda. -Para proteger los derechos ciudadanos. -En la cárcel está la traidora. -La que intentara secuestrar el poder. -Triunfo de la ley, la mesura y el orden".

Thebes before the plague: the right of succession of sovereignty

Just as in the tragedy of Oedipus, who witnessed his political power stagger due to the terrible plague which shook Thebes, the COVID-19 pandemic questions some of the tenets of political sovereignty and those who sustain it. This explains the diverse reaction of some international leaders when they attempt to frame the battle against the pandemic in terms of the nation-state: *we are at war* – we are told – *against an invisible enemy*. The chants of the *ancien régime* of sovereignty, that of the armies and the epic wars, attempt to cover up with absurd sounds something which they evidently cannot control by merely strengthening their borders or declaring war. In any case, in addition to the virus, it is the states which cannot contain the visible cracks of the capitalist world-system before the pandemic. In Thebes, the oracles alerted Oedipus about the origin of the plague: it was a curse caused by the unpunished crime provoked by the death of King Laius, the predecessor of Oedipus. Oedipus, witnessing how the plague-induced suffering threatened his position as sovereign, swore to himself that he would investigate, find out the whereabouts and identity of the murderer, and expel him from Thebes.

I was always attracted by the role of oracles in the story. I picture them as attorneys, in their offices and with enormous gowns. For whom can an oracle be an attorney? Does the all-powerful destiny require defenders? I think that the oracle, beyond the divine aura accompanying the title, is in truth a guardian; but not of kings or individual thrones or families or even the Law. The oracle is, in any case, a guardian watching after the preservation of the eternal order of sovereignty and the ruling class exerting it; a type of attorney for the right of succession of sovereignty, understood as a political, normative and class entity. As we know, Oedipus loses his place as sovereign when he discovers that the unpunished murderer is himself. But let us not fool ourselves with this tragic and predictable outcome, as in the end, the will of sovereignty is done: the person guilty for the murder of Laius was found, judged, sentenced and expelled from the kingdom. The circle is closed: sovereignty has prevailed, and the right of

succession has done its job. We are back to normality: “Triunfo de la ley, la mesura y el orden” *(The triumph of law, moderation, and order)*.

The untold or *unsaid dispositif*

> *[…] the "perfect crime" does not consist in killing the victim or the witnesses (that adds new crimes to the first one and aggravates the difficulty of effacing everything), but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency (insanity) of the testimony. You neutralize the addressor, the addressee, and the sense of the testimony; then everything is as if there were no referent (no damages).*
>
> *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, **Jean-François Lyotard**

In times when neoliberal reason prevails a large part of the world, systemic contradictions break out which, although previously existent, begin to appear without a façade due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, neoliberal sovereignty, in Puerto Rico as well as in the United States, has responded by telling us: salvation and responsibility for ending the virus is individual, wash your hands, forget public health expenses and social security, disregard the firing of nurses and doctors, let your old people die, ignore scientific knowledge and structural solutions, and focus on the corporative bailout to reopen the economy. In Puerto Rico, both the colonial as well as the imperial government, after Hurricane Maria and currently during the pandemic, have been determined to manipulate scientific and epidemiological knowledge to minimize the media impact that the number of victims would likely have on the collective psyche. A curious version of biopolitics. But as Michel Foucault stated, power apparatuses can have several forms: a law, an institution, a discourse, knowledge, etcetera. But he also stated that a power apparatus can be something “untold”, a type of *unsaid dispositif*. How and why can an untold political relationship be articulated?

The *unsaid dispositif* is not an isolated element. The untold is part of an apparatus combining practices and discourses which tries to legitimize precisely that which cannot be said. This is what we know: there are at least 4,645 deaths caused by Hurricane Maria which were not acknowledged by institutions. At this precise moment, we also know that diverse social sectors and scientists have warned about the dire lack of tests to diagnose COVID-19, and which should be administered both to the symptomatic as well as the asymptomatic population. We know that, without massive testing, epidemiological predictions are imprecise and significantly alter the perception of the current state of the rate of infection. The untold, that is to say, the systematic "invisibilization" of thousands of sick, discarded bodies as *collateral damage*, is accompanied by a discourse on "normality" which attempts to legitimize that the decisive criterion during the pandemic be circumscribed to an economic reason. It is not a coincidence that the Amazon behemoth is minimizing the amount of positive COVID-19 cases within its crowded warehouses. For example, as recently as February 12, 2021 the American newspaper The New York Times reported that the governor of the state of New York, Andrew M. Cuomo, is facing allegations that his government covered up the scope of the death toll in the state's nursing homes due to coronavirus.

This being the case both Puerto Rican institutions (or what remains of that) and Western governments in general, increasingly behave like Amazon. And this is the political crux of COVID-19: this time, the *shock* serves not just to advance neoliberal positions, as documented exhaustively by journalist Naomi Klein, but is rather a double assault: 1) By means of the culmination of the ***real subsumption*** of the government institutions and of scientific knowledge – such as medicine – under the dictate of the economic reason or what we may characterize as a type of **corporatization**[4] or **corporatized sovereignty**; and 2) The *unsaid* also refers to the cultural and historical domains. It is therefore a robbery which attempts to reformulate and radicalize a subjectivity already provided by neoliberal reason by means of an operation which reinstalls a sort of social Darwinism; the *economic man* (*homo economicus*) is not just the subject of opportunities; he is also the most

[4] In this case, we may identify the corporatization of medical knowledge by means of an operation which reserves some of the elements of its early modern development, as described by Foucault: the current displacement of a social medicine in favor of an individualized medical practice.

adapted (or resilient) to survive a scenario where both the *state of exception* and precariousness are constitutive of the normal situation.

Kairos, post-pandemic openings and possibilities

But we are not in a normal situation nor times. And "normality" as a discourse erupts as a device that intends to legitimize the prevailing social order prior the pandemic: that is the neoliberal normative order. Precariousness, austerity, and inequality seems all of the sudden desirable when Western governments and corporations lobby and call for "going back to normality" or "going back to work" without guarantees of any kind: by not providing the safety net of public health systems, or by not breaking the logic of patents that privatize medical knowledge and technologies (to that end, the COVAX[5] initiative falls short[6]), or even by no guaranteeing free and accessible vaccination for all. But of course, yearning for this supposed return to normality precisely requires the legitimization of the current *state of vulnerability* caused by neoliberal policies (privatization of public assets, job insecurity, environmental extractivism, among others). Indeed, "normality" means the reestablishment of the state of exception.

But a question remains: Will we be the same at the end of the pandemic? Let's not be unwary, modern medicine (as a power device) was born in part due to a diversity of techniques and technologies that were put into practice during pandemics similar to COVID-19, significantly altering epistemic and cultural patterns of modern Western society. What, if any, will be the subject that emerges from this pandemic?

During the last year, many writings and analyses have circulated. Two of them are noteworthy: those written by Slavoj Žižek and Byung-Chul Han. The former understands the contradictions inherent to the capitalist world-system as open veins in the pandemic: the unsalvageable contradiction which exists between the capitalist political economy and life. Žižek portends, in this sense, that the virus

[5] COVAX stands for the "COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility" supported by WHO and public-private partnerships. The initiative intends to coordinate the research, production, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines around the world.

[6] See Santos Rutschman, A. (2021). The Intellectual Property of COVID-19. Forthcoming in Outsmarting Pandemics, Kirley E. & Porter, D. (Eds.) (2021). Saint Louis University Legal Studies Research Paper Series 2020-28.

reveals the ideological bias protecting capitalism and maintaining it as a hegemonic rationality. Given this situation, the Slovenian philosopher proposes a type of post-Soviet communism which protects the *Common* and which strengthens or reestablishes, as might be the case, public institutions in charge of remediating social inequality and administering the common good of collective corporal sanity: that is, public health. The second philosopher dares to portend an overturning of the current multipolar world in which the international eye will be fixed on Asia. Han maintains that Asia, after facing the pandemic with relative success, will offer what the rest of the Western world currently demands: greater safety and complex digital tracking systems. As Edward Snowden has recently warned , it would be a matter of accepting or even desire greater levels of *mass surveillance*, and of consenting to authoritarian practices executed by the bourgeois state.

Recently, a meme was circulating in social media in which the position of both philosophers was illustrated along with the following question: *which of the two do you think is right?* If I may be allowed to try an incomplete and generic answer: none. Placing both positions in a meme, one in front of the other, does not necessarily entail a dilemma which forces us to choose a side. The meme only expresses an *opening*. Both poles, contradictorily complementary, must be articulated to express a ***kairos***: a moment of aperture in time, which itself alters the conjunction of present possibilities. Effectively, overcoming the pandemic necessarily requires articulating, from the here and now, inherently anti-capitalist practices which encourage cooperation and solidarity. For example, just as I write these lines, the government of Spain has approved a decree to make a *Universal Basic Income* (UBI) viable, while the government of Cuba sends a contingent of doctors to Italy. Both steps seek to face the contradictions inherent to a regime of inequality interposing corporate sovereignty of free market above life itself, and of millions of sick bodies.

"The pandemic should shock people [...] to [the] recognition of the need to cure ailing societies of the neoliberal plague, then on to more radical reconstruction directed to the roots of contemporary disorder," suggests the good Chomsky. The problem with this statement is the focused on a deterministic premise: the "pandemic should shock people" as a moral cause with the effect of "recognition of the need to cure ailing societies of the neoliberal plague." Certainly, the virus does not lead us in a deterministic manner to cross the gap of a kairos which brings with it another complementary contradiction: rupture and creation. This risky gap, as rightly pointed out by Han, may only be crossed by means of the corporeal and

passional action of the human being. Paraphrasing Alain Badiou in his book entitled *The True Life*: the moment we live in presents the prevailing need of changing the world, but that requires an explicit willingness to do it – that is to say, a *subject of change* (understanding that as the subject willing to explore the full possibility of a *good life*, common and collectively; to do so, risks must be taken (aka, *revolution*).

In this sense, we must surpass Oedipus and understand that the origin of the plague is not divine, but mundane; as mundane as COVID-19 itself. In any case, we must play the role of a rebellious Oedipus to renege with all our strengths the *script* which the oracle of corporate and neoliberal reason has in store for us: that is to break with the abstract suggestion, that *unsaid dispositif*, which attempts to present the very mundane sovereignty of commodity and capitalism as an eternal and inexhaustible order.

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GEOFF GOODWIN[1]

Communal struggles for water through coproduction: Pandemic experiences in Highland Ecuador in historical perspective[2]

Introduction[3]

Covid-19 has exposed acute water inequalities within and between countries. Handwashing is widely seen as one of the most effective measures for preventing the spread of the virus. Yet more than two billion people lack sufficient access to clean water to carry out this basic task. Hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers also lack reliable access to irrigation water, making them extremely

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[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/7/28/communal-struggles-for-water-through-coproduction-pandemic-experiences-in-highland-ecuador-in-historical-perspective

[3] This essay draws on interviews with representatives of community water associations, social movements, political parties, local governments, state bureaucracies and non-governmental organisations. 58 semi-structured interviews and extended discussions were conducted between 2015 and 2019 and a further 30 shorter interviews were conducted between February and April 2021. The bulk of these interviews were undertaken in the highland region of Ecuador, but some interviews and visits were also conducted in the coastal region. Most of the community water associations included in this research are located in rural and peri-urban areas. The essay also draws on extensive legal and newspaper archive materials, participation in public and communal meetings, personal observations, informal conversations, and fieldnotes. I am extremely grateful to everyone who participated in this research and to Ximena Caiza for superb research assistance during the pandemic. Funds secured through RIIF at the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics have supported this research since 2015. Thanks also to two Alternautas referees for their insightful comments on an earlier draft and to Johannes Waldmuller and Emilie Dupuits for encouraging me to write this essay. I am solely responsible for all opinions, errors, and omissions.

vulnerable to seasonal and climatic changes in water supply. The crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated water inequalities as economic activity has collapsed, government revenues have plunged, and poverty has soared.

In this context, approaches to water services that create space for water users to secure collective control of local water supplies take on renewed importance. Coproduction allows room for this. Supplying water through coproduction involves water users and associations taking collective responsibility for the delivery of water services while receiving support from various other actors, including local governments, state bureaucracies, social movements, and non-governmental organizations (McMillan et al, 2014; Moretto et al, 2018; Goodwin, 2019). Coproduction therefore differs to public and private water services and to public-private partnerships, which are contract based and explicitly orientated towards profit-making[4]. Water delivered through coproduction can support multiple daily activities, including drinking, cleaning, washing, cooking, and irrigation. Yet coproduction is not simply about supplying water. New political subjects, relations, and institutions emerge through the process, generating political tensions and opportunities at multiple scales (Mitlin, 2008; Goodwin, 2019; Dupuits, 2021). Coproduction also provides a basis for the exchange and production of knowledge and tensions can also emerge around this aspect of the process (Llano-Arias, 2015). Hence, coproduction is intrinsically political.

I will demonstrate this by sketching the history of coproduced water services in highland Ecuador and illustrating the political changes and struggles that have occurred through this process. I will then briefly discuss the initial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on community water associations, the protagonists in coproduced water services in Ecuador.

A potted history of coproduced water services in Ecuador

Neoliberalism is generally seen as the starting point for the coproduction of public goods and services in the Global South (Joshi and Moore, 2004). However,

[4] For further insight into the coproduction of public goods and services in the Global South, see Joshi and Moore (2004), Mitlin (2008), Mitlin and Bartlett (2018), Moretto et al (2018), and Goodwin (2019.)

coproduction has longer historical roots in Latin America, and these diverse histories are central to understanding contemporary political dynamics in the region (Goodwin, 2019). The history of coproduced water services in Ecuador shows coproduction can provide a basis for alternative approaches to water services based on communal relations and practices and create a platform to transform the wider legal and bureaucratic framework that regulates water at multiple scales. Yet coproduction is also a contested process and political struggles have occurred around various dimensions in Ecuador, especially the autonomy of water associations and the authority of the state.

In this section, I will outline the history of coproduced water services in highland Ecuador in three phases: i) the development of the state water bureaucracy and the increase of community organizing in the 1960s and 1970s ii) the implementation of structural adjustment and neoliberal reforms and the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and international development agencies in the 1980s and 1990s and iii) the strengthening of the state and the resistance of community water associations in the 2000s and 2010s[5].

Coproduced water services started to spread in Ecuador in the 1960s and 1970s as civilian and military governments introduced a series of reforms that reconfigured water relations and institutions. The *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Obras Sanitarias* was formed in 1965 to deliver drinking water and sanitation to rural and urban communities, replacing the *Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Salud Publica*, which was established in the 1940s and part funded by the United States government. Shortly afterwards, the *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Recursos Hídráulicos* was established to regulate water on a national scale (Armijos, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2015). Meanwhile, tax reforms, overseas loans, and oil revenues gave the state greater capacity to invest in water infrastructure and services, especially in the 1970s. Drinking water systems were constructed and extended in towns and cities across the highlands, while public investment was increased in drinking and irrigation systems in rural areas. However, the coverage of potable and irrigation systems remained limited and community mobilization was required to overcome water scarcity and expand water services. The

[5] The analysis presented in this and the following section draws heavily on Goodwin (2019) – refer to this article for more empirical detail and theoretical discussion. See also Goodwin (2021b).

transformation of the agrarian political economy, particularly the gradual collapse of the traditional hacienda complex, created greater room for autonomous community organizing in rural areas (Goodwin, 2017, 2021ab). Meanwhile, the informal settlements that emerged on the fringes of rapidly expanding towns and cities provided fertile terrain for organizing through water. Water legislation introduced during this period lent additional support to communal organization, especially the *Ley de Aguas* (1972) and *Ley de Juntas Administradoras de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado* (1979).

Coproduced water services spread as rural and peri-urban communities increasingly interacted with state and non-state actors to improve access to water[6]. Relations and actors varied from case to case, but a general pattern started to emerge which remains broadly intact today: community members contributed labour, finance and local knowledge, while state agencies, local governments, non-governmental organisations, and development agencies provided raw materials, machinery, and technical knowledge.

Community members generally formed associations to manage water and deliver services over the long run, often integrating several communities into a single association. Sometimes, however, water services were organised through existing rather than newly established organizations[7]. The burden of delivering water services has been too great for some associations, which have collapsed under the strain, and many others have experienced significant operational problems. Nonetheless, community water associations have performed a crucial role in supply water to low-income families and small-scale farmers in the highland region since the 1960s and 1970s.

The basic pattern of coproduced water services established during this period remained in place in the 1980s and 1990s. However, coproduction dynamics

[6] For examples of coproduction in the local and national press from the 1960s and 1970s, see, for example, 'Misión Andina dará servicio de agua a 20.000 campesinos', December 13 1968, El Comercio, p. 20 and 'Familias aportan con 300 sucres para construcción de un sistema de agua potable', June 17 1972, El Espectador, pp. 1-6.

[7] In this essay, I use the term 'community water association' to capture the broad range of water user organisations indicated above, which in Ecuador, are usually called juntas del agua or sistemas comunitarios del agua. This includes organisations that manage drinking and irrigation water. The number of members integrated into community water associations ranges from less than 50 to more than 10,000 and each association has its own history and characteristics.

shifted as right-wing and centre-left civilian governments implemented structural adjustment and neoliberal reforms, slashed public spending, and reorganised state water bureaucracies. Water associations proliferated as state support for drinking and irrigation water systems declined and state-operated irrigation systems were transferred to farmers to manage (FRH, 2011; Andolina, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2013)[8]. With limited access to public funds, communities and associations increasingly turned to multilateral organizations, overseas development agencies, and non-governmental organizations to help construct or improve water systems. Community members continued to take collective responsibility for the day-to-day delivering of water services over the long run. However, this diverse set of national and international actors made important contributions, including finance, materials, machinery, and technical knowledge (Hoogesteger, 2014, 2015, 2016; Dupuits, 2019, 2021; Goodwin, 2019, 2021b).

The state was not absent from this process. Water legislation, though only loosely enforced, continued to support the establishment of water associations, while state water bureaucracies, however enfeebled, continued to regulate water use and distribution at multiple scales (Pacari, 1998; Cremers et al, 2005; Hoogesteger et al, 2017). Moreover, state agencies and local governments continued to work directly with rural and peri-urban communities to construct and develop water systems, and public water companies also contributed in some cases. Yet the composition of actors involved in coproduction changed in the 1980s and 1990s, with the state making fewer contributions and non-state actors taking a more prominent role (Goodwin, 2019).

Coproduction dynamics shifted again in the 2000s and 2010s when Rafael Correa came to power and initiated the so-called *revolución ciudadana* - a state-centric capitalist political project, which broke with the neoliberal orthodoxy (Becker, 2012; Martínez Novo, 2014)[9]. Public spending on water infrastructure and

[8] For examples of coproduction in the local and national press from the 1980s and 1990s see, for example, 'Abastecimiento de agua de consumo de inauguró en Miraflores Cochapamba', August 4 1981, El Espectador, p. 7, 'Minga para dotar de agua a comunidades de Salcedo', July 2 1982, El Comercio, p. B-10, and 'Agua potable para tres comunidades campesinas', June 11 1988, El Comercio, p. A-8.

[9] For examples of coproduction in the local and national press from the 2000s and 2010s, see, for instance, 'Con iniciativa logran mejor acceso al agua', August 26 2017, El Universo and 'Las Nieves y La Chonta mejorarán sistema de agua', December 21 2018, El Tiempo.

services increased, albeit from a very low base, and the 2008 constitution was introduced, which included important declarations on water, including proscribing privatization, entrusting water management to the state and community, promoting public-community alliances to deliver water services, and declaring water as a human right. Following the introduction of the new constitution and a protracted political struggle, a comprehensive new water law - *Ley Orgánica de Recursos Hídricos, Usos y Aprovechamiento del Agua* (2014) – was promulgated, which replaced existing water legislation and laid the legal foundations for a new water regime (Goodwin, 2019).

By entrusting water management to the state and community and promoting public-community alliances to deliver water services, the new regime effectively formalized coproduced water services, integrating water associations, local governments and state agencies into a legal and bureaucratic framework, while leaving the precise contributions and roles of the various actors involved largely undefined and open to negotiation (Joshi and Moore, 2004). The constitution and law reflected the history of coproduction and incorporated some of the historical demands of community water associations and social movements. However, the state was given a central role in the new regime and decision-making was concentrated in new water bureaucracies - *Secretaría Nacional de Agua* (SENAGUA) and the *Agencia de Regulación y Control de Agua* (ARCA). This threatened the autonomy of community water associations and generated political tensions and struggles. The next section briefly discusses these struggles.

Coproduction politics during the *revolución ciudadana*

Coproduction reconfigures state-society relations and creates new political subjects, relations, and institutions. In doing so, it generates political struggles and opportunities at multiple scales. The reason for this lies partly in its tendency to promote engagement *with* and autonomy *from* the state (Goodwin, 2019).

The form, quantity, and frequency of contributions to coproduction mediate this relationship (Goodwin, 2019). Here, the active role community water associations have performed in developing and maintaining potable and irrigation water systems and delivering water services in highland Ecuador has been crucial. The

general process – as outlined above – involves members of water associations contributing labour, finance, and knowledge to the construction, maintenance, and management of water systems. Thus, most associations have made significant contributions over the long-run, which has given them a strong sense of collective ownership and control.

Labour contributions have been especially important. In the highland region, the bulk of the labour community members have contributed to the construction and maintenance of water systems is organised through the Andean collective labour practice, the *minga* (Boelens and Doornbos, 2001; Armijos, 2013). Labour contributed through *mingas* is not remunerated in cash, but food, drink and festivities are frequently provided. Water rights are often established and maintained through participation in *mingas*, and the practice, though certainly not free of conflict and dispute, underpins communal relations (Vos and Boelens, 2015; Hidalgo et al, 2017). In addition to collective labour contributed through *mingas*, members also voluntarily contribute labour to the management of water systems and some water associations also recruit members as waged operators, engineers, and administrators.

Struggles over the construction and implementation of the new water regime during the *revolución ciudadana* illustrate the political salience of this aspect of coproduction (Goodwin, 2019). The series of new regulations that the regime imposed on water associations was one of the main sources of tension. Faced with greater state regulation and control, water associations and social movements resisted, drawing attention to how community water systems were constructed historically.

Yaku Pérez Guartambel, the leader of a coalition of community water systems in the southern highlands and the then president of the highland indigenous movement, Ecuarunari, made this point forcefully:

> *Was it the Correa government or the Secretary of Water or the hundreds and thousands of mingueros who organized through water to construct community systems?*[10]

[10] 'Cuestionan instructivo sobre los sistemas comunitarios de agua', July 06 2016, El Mercurio, p. 3-A.

Although Pérez downplays the historical contributions of state agencies, local governments, and non-governmental organisations to this process, there is substantial evidence to support his claim that *mingueros* have performed a vital role in developing water systems and infrastructure in the highland region. Several examples are documented in the literature. For instance, Boelens and Doornbos (2001) explain how indigenous communities in Ceceles, Chimborazo laboured collectively to construct a new irrigation canal platform in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, Hidalgo et al (2017) illustrate the importance of *mingas* in the construction and maintenance of irrigation networks in Tabacundo, Pichincha. The centrality of *mingas* was also stressed throughout my fieldwork in the highlands. For example, the president of a small water association in Palmira, Chimborazo explained how its members recently constructed a new irrigation system:

> *We used our own labour power…we organized a minga with the participation of men, women and children…to build the system. We carried gravel, sand and cement on our backs and sometimes on animals…this process lasted three years, all of it based on participation in the minga.*[11]

National and local newspaper archives provide additional evidence. For instance, *El Comercio* reports in the early 1970s:

> *Five hundred and twenty-nine kilometres of irrigation channels and eighty-three kilometres of access routes have been constructed in the country through the unpaid system of communitarian work called the minga.*[12]

These sources highlight the considerable collective labour power that communities and associations have invested into water systems and hydraulic infrastructure across generations. Through these physical endeavours, new subjectivities, practices and relations have been formed, which have generated a strong sense of collective ownership and control. The day-to-day collective

[11] Interview: President, Junta de Riego Palmira, Palmira, August 22 2017.
[12] '529 kms de canales de riego construidos mediante mingas', February 28 1972, El Comercio, pp. 1 and 12.

running of water services and participation in community assemblies have added to this.

Together, these factors have generated a strong basis for collective autonomy (Armijos, 2013; Dinerstein, 2015; Goodwin, 2019, 2021b). The practice and meaning of autonomy vary between community water associations. In some cases, it is a rejection of state power and authority, which complicates but does not preclude coproduction. In others, it is better understood as a response to state neglect and incompetence. Regardless of its specific origins and forms, autonomy provides water associations with the capacity to take decisions over various aspects of water management and services, including water distribution, organizational structures, water tariffs, and infrastructure. The *minga* supports this by enabling associations to construct and maintain infrastructure, reduce reliance on the state, and strengthen communal relations and collective water rights. However, it is not a precondition for autonomy and some associations, especially in the coastal region, operate with a high level of operational autonomy without using the practice.

Community water association autonomy is gradational, with some associations having greater autonomous capacity than others, and scalar, insofar as it operates at different levels, with some associations integrating smaller organizations, which retain a relatively high degree of autonomous control over water at the community level. In these cases, autonomy is negotiated within the association as well as between the association and the state. While collective autonomy underpins water services, as indicated above, it certainly cannot be reduced to this domain. The practice has enabled communities and associations to carve out space for the control of land and water, develop alternative political practices and relations, and renegotiate their relationship with the state (Armijos, 2013; Goodwin, 2021b). Thus, autonomy is a heterogenous and multifaceted political practice, which reconfigures power and authority and creates new political subjects and relations.

Historical changes in the composition of actors involved in coproduction has had a significant bearing on community water associations autonomy. Increased participation of overseas development agencies, multilateral institutions and non-government organizations in the 1980s and 1990s reduced the reliance of water

associations on the state and increased space for them to develop autonomous capacity. With cash-strapped state agencies and local governments contributing less funding, materials and technical knowledge, water associations reduced their engagement with the state and strengthened their ties with non-state actors. These interactions sometimes threatened collective autonomy as overseas development agencies, multilateral institutions and non-governmental organizations attempted to impose neoliberal practices, norms, and structures on water associations (Andolina, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2015; Dupuits, 2019, 2021). Nonetheless, at the aggregate level, the shift in the composition of coproduction in the 1980s and 1990s generally supported community water association autonomy (Goodwin, 2019, 2021b). When the Correa governments attempted to increase state control of water in the 2000s and 2010s, they were met with staunch resistance from community water associations, which sought to protect the autonomous spaces they had constructed during earlier phases of coproduction.

The end of Rafael Correa's decade in power started a new phase of coproduction politics as his successor, Lenín Moreno, set about dismantling the *revolución ciudadana* and steering policies back towards the neoliberal orthodoxy. This included slashing public spending and restructuring the state. The US$ 4.2 billion agreement that the Moreno government agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in early 2019 gave further impetus to this process and promised a prolonged period of austerity. In efforts to build bridges with water associations and indigenous movements, Moreno recruited prominent indigenous leaders into SENAGUA, which momentarily created opportunities for some water associations to protect their autonomy and strengthen alliances within the state. However, the brutal state repression of protests against the Moreno government in late 2019 saw indigenous bureaucrats resign as indigenous-state relations once again deteriorated (Ponce et al, 2020).

With the prospect of meaningful state support dwindling, water associations started the 2020s even more reliant on autonomous practices and relations to deliver water services and overcome water scarcity.

Coproduced water services during the Covid-19 pandemic

The IMF-sponsored austerity politics of the Moreno administration and the failure of the Correa governments to tackle structural problems and inequalities left Ecuador ill-equipped to manage the Covid-19 pandemic.

The virus spread rapidly in Guayaquil in March 2020, overwhelming the city and its fragile public health system, before spreading throughout the country in the following months. The Moreno government closed the country's borders, introduced a national lockdown, and imposed public health regulations to prevent the spread of the virus. However, infection rates remained relatively high in 2020, before spiking again in early 2021 as new variants of the virus arrived in the country, and the Moreno government's highly circumscribed vaccination programme failed to reach a significant proportion of the population. The size of the informal economy, lack of state support, and scale of poverty and inequality contributed to the spread of the virus as most Ecuadorians were left with little choice but to continue working, despite the health risks. The collapse of economic activity, the dismissal of public and private sector workers, and the liberalisation of the labour market have increased precarity: incomes have plunged, poverty has soared, and inequality has deepened (Jara et al, 2021; McBurney et al, 2021).

Water has taken on renewed importance in this context, and coproduced water services have performed a vital role in supplying water to low-income households and small-scale farmers during the pandemic. However, community water associations, the lynchpins of coproduced water services, have experienced significant challenges and undergone important changes as a result of the pandemic. Here, I will briefly discuss four issues, drawing on 30 interviews conducted with representatives of water associations between February and April 2021[13]. The following preliminary analysis only offers a brief glimpse into a complex and evolving situation.

The first issue relates to the use and distribution of water. Water use increased during the opening wave of the pandemic as community members spent more time at home and used more water for cooking, cleaning, washing, and irrigation.

[13] Ximena Caiza conducted these interviews remotely in Ecuador. I am indebted to Ximena for her excellent research and analysis and to everyone who participated in this research at the most testing of times.

Unemployment and migration added further pressure as some members of rural communities who lived in towns and cities returned home during the pandemic. Some organizations reported brief water shortages because of these changes, but most expressed relief at having reliable access to drinking and irrigation water. Hence, the pandemic appears to have revalorised the importance of water, which might create a platform for water associations to build on in the wake of the pandemic.

The second issue concerns the diverse infrastructures managed by community water associations. *Mingas*, as noted above, are fundamental to the construction and maintenance of hydraulic infrastructure in the Andes. However, the social distancing rules introduced to restrict the spread of Covid-19 have limited the use of this practice and forced water associations to use alternatives. In some cases, this has involved hiring machinery and labourers to complete work usually undertaken through *mingas* or organising smaller socially-distanced groups to undertake emergency repairs. The eruption of Sangay, a towering volcano perched on the eastern fringes of the Andes, presented further infrastructural challenges to some water associations, which undertook emergency works after volcanic ash contaminated their water systems in early 2021. The suspension of payment for the water services provided by water associations during the opening wave of the pandemic and the costs associated with the lack of *mingas* have left many associations with fewer funds to invest in infrastructure. Some smaller water associations also reported shortages in the chemicals used to treat drinking water, which impacted water quality during the pandemic.

The third issue involves the diverse collective autonomous practices and relations that underpin community water associations. In addition to restricting *mingas*, social distancing rules have also limited community assembly meetings, which are important spaces for airing grievances, resolving conflicts, and collective decision-making. Social media and digital platforms have been used to help plug the gap left by the lack of meetings. However, some association members lack reliable access to the internet and mobile phones, which appears to have left them at the margin of decision making. Despite these challenges, many water associations have strengthened relations of solidarity and reciprocity during the pandemic (Córdoba, 2021). Continuity in water services has been assured regardless of the ability of members to pay tariffs and charges for extra water use

have been waived[14]. Tackling the complex organisational challenges presented by the pandemic has also created opportunities to strengthen communal relations and share and extend knowledge.

The fourth issue concerns the relations community water associations have formed with external actors through coproduction. Previously established relations with local and regional governments have been important for some water associations during the pandemic. Yet access to government resources has been uneven, with larger associations that incorporate multiple communities generally better placed to communicate and negotiate with the state. More generally, state support has been complicated by the failure of the central government to transfer funds to local and regional governments during the pandemic. The incorporation of *Secretaría Nacional del Agua* into the *Ministerio del Ambiente* and aggressive budget and staff cuts have further reduced space for cooperation. However, several water associations have drawn on support from non-governmental organisations, including *Ayuda en Acción*, *Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio* (FEPP) and *Central Ecuatoriana de Servicios Agrícolas* (CESA). Hence, relations and practices formed through coproduction have supported many water associations during the pandemic, even if the IMF-sponsored austerity politics of the Moreno government have limited state support at this crucial time.

Concluding remarks

Coproduction has created space for water users to take collective control of local water supplies in Ecuador. This historical process, which started to gather pace in the 1960s and 1970s, has seen community water associations develop varying degrees and forms of collective autonomy, allowing them to deliver water services over the long run, with periodic support from various state and non-state actors. Collective autonomous practices and relations have enabled water associations to continue to supply drinking and irrigation water during the Covid-19 pandemic and, in doing so, protect the health and livelihoods of their members and strengthen communal relations. However, water associations have had to shoulder

[14] Roca-Servat et al (2020) report similar findings in their insightful analysis of acueductos comunitarios in Colombia during the Covid-19 pandemic. See also Córdoba et al (2021).

the costs of dealing with the fallout from the pandemic, which has left them with less funds to invest in infrastructure and services. The short-term prospects of securing significant external support to overcome these challenges are limited. The government of the newly elected right-wing president of Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso, is set to extend the IMF-sponsored liberal austerity policies of his predecessor, Lenín Moreno, which will place definite limits on state support in the near-term. He is also likely to promote the privatisation of water sources and services, which might threaten coproduction. Meanwhile, overseas development agencies and international non-governmental organisations have scaled back operations in Ecuador in recent years and have also experienced significant budget cuts. The pandemic might lead to the rejuvenation and proliferation of these actors. However, in the short-term, at least, the future of coproduced water services will rest even more squarely on the collective autonomous practices and relations of community water associations. History suggests that these factors will weigh heavily on water politics in Ecuador as the country transitions toward its post-pandemic future(s).

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GEOFF GOODWIN[1]

Luchas comunales por el agua a través de la coproducción: Experiencias pandémicas en la Sierra de Ecuador con una perspectiva histórica[2]

Introducción[3]

La pandemia de Covid-19 puso de manifiesto las graves desigualdades en el acceso al agua dentro de los países y también entre países. Una de las medidas más eficaces para prevenir la propagación del virus es el lavado de manos. Sin embargo, más de dos mil millones de personas carecen de acceso suficiente al

[1] Traducido por Fernando Rouaux.

[2] This article was originally published in http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2021/7/28/luchas-comunales-por-el-agua-a-travs-de-la-coproduccin-experiencias-pandmicas-en-la-sierra-de-ecuador-con-una-perspectiva-histrica

[3] Este ensayo está basado en entrevistas llevadas a cabo con representantes de juntas del agua, movimientos sociales, partidos políticos, gobiernos locales, burocracias estatales y organizaciones no gubernamentales. Se realizaron 58 entrevistas semiestructuradas y discusiones extendidas entre 2015 y 2019 y otras 30 entrevistas más breves entre febrero y abril de 2021. La mayor parte de estas entrevistas se realizaron en la Sierra de Ecuador, pero también algunas entrevistas y visitas se llevaron a cabo en la región costera. La mayoría de las juntas del agua incluidas en esta investigación están ubicadas en áreas rurales y periurbanas. El ensayo también se basa en abundante material legal y archivos de periódicos, participación en reuniones públicas y comunales, observaciones personales, conversaciones informales y notas de campo. Estoy sumamente agradecido con todas las personas que participaron en este trabajo y con Ximena Caiza por su excelente asistencia en la investigación durante la pandemia. Los fondos obtenidos a través de los RIIF (Research Infastructure Investment Funds [Fondos de Inversión en Investigación sobre Infraestructura] en el Departamento de Desarrollo Internacional del London School of Economics han apoyado esta investigación desde 2015. Gracias también a dos de los revisores de *Alternautas* por sus perspicaces comentarios sobre un borrador anterior, y a Johannes Waldmuller y Emilie Dupuits por alentarme a escribir este ensayo. Yo soy el único responsable de todas las opiniones, errores y omisiones.

agua potable para llevar a cabo esta tarea básica. Cientos de millones de pequeños agricultores también carecen de un acceso seguro al agua de riego, lo que los vuelve extremadamente vulnerables a los cambios climáticos y estacionales del suministro. La crisis desencadenada por la pandemia de Covid-19 ha exacerbado las desigualdades en el acceso al agua, a medida que la actividad económica se ha derrumbado, los ingresos del gobierno se desplomaron y los niveles de pobreza se dispararon.

En este contexto, las estrategias de provisión de agua que generan un espacio para que los usuarios tomen el control colectivo de los suministros locales adquieren una renovada importancia. La coproducción ofrece una oportunidad en este sentido. El suministro de agua a través de la coproducción implica que los usuarios y las juntas del agua asuman la responsabilidad colectiva de la prestación del servicio mientras reciben el apoyo de varios otros actores, incluidos los gobiernos locales, las burocracias estatales, los movimientos sociales y las organizaciones no gubernamentales (McMillan et ál., 2014; Moretto et ál., 2018; Goodwin, 2019). La coproducción, por tanto, se diferencia de los servicios de agua públicos y privados y de las asociaciones público-privadas basadas en contratos y están explícitamente orientadas a la obtención de ganancias.[4] El agua suministrada a través de la coproducción puede sustentar múltiples actividades cotidianas, como beber, limpiar, lavar, cocinar e irrigar. Sin embargo, la coproducción no se trata simplemente del suministro de agua. A través de este proceso surgen nuevos sujetos, relaciones e instituciones políticas, generando tensiones políticas y también oportunidades a diversas escalas (Mitlin, 2008; Goodwin, 2019; Dupuits, 2021). La coproducción proporciona además una plataforma para el intercambio y la producción del conocimiento y pueden surgir tensiones también en torno a este aspecto del proceso (Llano-Arias, 2015). Por lo tanto, la coproducción es intrínsecamente política.

Demostraré esto esbozando la historia de la coproducción de los servicios de agua en la Sierra de Ecuador e ilustrando los cambios políticos y las luchas que han ocurrido a través de este proceso. Luego, analizaré brevemente el impacto

[4] Para obtener más información sobre la coproducción de bienes y servicios públicos en el Sur Global, ver Joshi y Moore (2004), Mitlin (2008), Mitlin y Bartlett (2018), Moretto et ál. (2018) y Goodwin (2019).

inicial de la pandemia de Covid-19, centrándome en las juntas del agua, actoras principales en la coproducción de los servicios de agua en Ecuador.

Una breve historia de la coproducción de los servicios hídricos en Ecuador

El neoliberalismo se considera generalmente el punto de partida para la coproducción de bienes y servicios públicos en el Sur Global (Joshi y Moore, 2004). Sin embargo, la coproducción tiene raíces históricas más antiguas en América Latina, y la diversidad de las historias es fundamental para comprender la dinámica política contemporánea en la región (Goodwin, 2019). La historia de la coproducción de los servicios de agua en Ecuador muestra que ésta puede servir de base para estrategias alternativas en los servicios hídricos basadas en relaciones y prácticas comunales y crear una plataforma para transformar el marco legal y burocrático más amplio que regula el agua a diferentes escalas. La coproducción es también, sin embargo, un proceso en disputa, y en Ecuador se han producido luchas políticas en torno a varias de sus dimensiones, especialmente en cuanto a la autonomía de las juntas del agua y la autoridad del Estado.

En esta sección esbozaré la historia de la coproducción de los servicios de agua en la Sierra en tres fases: i) el desarrollo de la burocracia estatal del agua y el aumento de la organización comunitaria en las décadas de 1960 y 1970; ii) la implementación del ajuste estructural y las reformas neoliberales, y la proliferación de organizaciones no gubernamentales y agencias de desarrollo internacional en las décadas de 1980 y 1990; y iii) el fortalecimiento del Estado y la resistencia de las juntas del agua en las décadas de 2000 y 2010.[5]

La coproducción de los servicios de agua comenzó a extenderse en Ecuador en las décadas de 1960 y 1970, cuando los gobiernos civiles y militares introdujeron una serie de reformas que reconfiguraron las relaciones e instituciones relacionadas con el agua. El Instituto Ecuatoriano de Obras Sanitarias fue creado en 1965 para suministrar agua potable y saneamiento a las

[5] El análisis presentado en esta sección y las siguientes se basa fundamentalmente en Goodwin (2019) – ver este artículo para más detalles empíricos y una discusión teórica. Ver también Goodwin (2021b).

comunidades rurales y urbanas, reemplazando al Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Salud Pública, establecido en la década de 1940 y financiado en parte por el gobierno de Estados Unidos. Poco tiempo después se creó el Instituto Ecuatoriano de Recursos Hidráulicos para regular el agua a nivel nacional (Armijos, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2015). Mientras tanto, las reformas fiscales, los préstamos del exterior y los ingresos del petróleo le dieron mayor capacidad al Estado para invertir en infraestructura y servicios de agua, especialmente en la década de 1970. Se construyeron y ampliaron sistemas de agua potable en pueblos y ciudades de la Sierra, mientras que se incrementó la inversión pública en sistemas de agua potable y riego en las zonas rurales. Sin embargo, la cobertura de dichos sistemas continuó siendo limitada y fue necesaria la movilización de la comunidad para superar la escasez de agua y ampliar el servicio. La transformación de la economía política agraria, en particular el colapso gradual del complejo tradicional de haciendas, generó un mayor espacio para la organización de las comunidades autónomas en las zonas rurales (Goodwin, 2017, 2021a, 2021b). Mientras tanto, los asentamientos informales que surgieron al margen de pueblos y ciudades en rápida expansión proporcionaron un terreno fértil para la organización a través del agua. La legislación sobre aguas introducida durante este período otorgó un apoyo adicional a la organización comunal, especialmente la Ley de Aguas (1972) y la Ley de Juntas Administradoras de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado (1979).

La coproducción de los servicios de agua se fue extendiendo a medida que las comunidades rurales y periurbanas interactuaban cada vez más con actores estatales y no estatales para mejorar el acceso.[6] Las relaciones y los actores variaron en cada caso, pero comenzó a surgir un patrón general que permanece prácticamente intacto en la actualidad: los miembros de la comunidad contribuyen con trabajo, dinero y conocimiento local, mientras que las agencias estatales, los gobiernos locales, las organizaciones no gubernamentales y las agencias de desarrollo proporcionan materias primas, maquinaria y conocimientos técnicos.

[6] Para más ejemplos de coproducción en la prensa local y nacional de los años 1960 y 1970, ver, por ejemplo, “Misión Andina dará servicio de agua a 20.000 campesinos”, 13 de diciembre de 1968, *El Comercio*, p. 20 y “Familias aportan con 300 sucres para construcción de un sistema de agua potable”, 17 de junio de 1972, *El Espectador*, pp. 1-6.

Los miembros de la comunidad generalmente formaban juntas para administrar el agua y brindar servicios a largo plazo, a menudo integrando a varias comunidades en una sola junta administradora. A veces, sin embargo, los servicios de agua se constituían a través de organizaciones ya existentes en lugar de organizaciones nuevas.[7] La carga de la prestación de servicios de agua fue demasiado pesada para algunas juntas, que se derrumbaron bajo una excesiva presión, y muchas otras experimentaron problemas operativos importantes. No obstante, las juntas del agua desempeñaron un papel fundamental en el suministro a familias de bajos ingresos y pequeños agricultores en la región de la Sierra desde las décadas de 1960 y 1970.

El patrón básico establecido en la coproducción de los servicios de agua durante este período se mantuvo en los años ochenta y noventa. Sin embargo, la dinámica de la coproducción fue cambiando a medida que los gobiernos civiles tanto de derecha como de centroizquierda implementaron ajustes estructurales y reformas neoliberales, recortaron el gasto público y reorganizaron las burocracias estatales del agua. Las juntas del agua proliferaron a medida que el apoyo estatal a los sistemas de agua potable y riego fue disminuyendo y los sistemas de riego operados por el Estado se fueron transfiriendo a los agricultores para su manejo (FRH, 2011; Andolina, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2013).[8] Con limitado acceso a fondos públicos, las comunidades y las juntas recurrieron cada vez más a la ayuda de organizaciones multilaterales, agencias de desarrollo extranjeras y organizaciones no gubernamentales para construir o mejorar los sistemas hídricos. Los miembros de la comunidad continuaron asumiendo la responsabilidad colectiva de la prestación diaria de los servicios de agua en el largo plazo. Sin embargo, este conjunto diverso de actores nacionales e internacionales hizo importantes contribuciones, incluyendo capital, materiales, maquinaria y conocimiento

[7] Las juntas del agua, o sistemas comunitarios del agua, son organizaciones que gestionan el agua potable y de riego. El número de miembros que integran las juntas del agua oscila entre menos de 50 y más de 10.000 y cada junta tiene su propia historia y características.

[8] Para otros ejemplos de coproducción en la prensa local y nacional de las décadas de 1980 y 1990 ver, por ejemplo, "Abastecimiento de agua de consumo se inauguró en Miraflores Cochapamba", 4 de agosto de 1981, *El Espectador*, p. 7, "Minga para dotar de agua a comunidades de Salcedo", 2 de julio de 1982, *El Comercio*, p. B-10, y "Agua potable para tres comunidades campesinas", 11 de junio de 1988, *El Comercio*, p. A-8.

técnico (Hoogesteger, 2014, 2015, 2016; Dupuits, 2019, 2021; Goodwin, 2019, 2021b).

El Estado no estuvo ausente en este proceso. La legislación sobre el agua, aunque no se aplicaba de manera rigurosa, continuó apoyando el establecimiento de juntas del agua, mientras que las burocracias estatales, aunque debilitadas, continuaron regulando su uso y distribución a varios niveles (Pacari, 1998; Cremers et ál., 2005; Hoogesteger et ál., 2017). Además, las agencias estatales y los gobiernos locales continuaron trabajando directamente con las comunidades rurales y periurbanas para construir y desarrollar sistemas hídricos y, en algunos casos, las empresas públicas de agua también colaboraron. Sin embargo, la composición de los actores involucrados en la coproducción cambió en las décadas de 1980 y 1990, con el Estado contribuyendo menos y los actores no estatales asumiendo un papel más prominente (Goodwin, 2019).

La dinámica de la coproducción volvió a cambiar en las décadas de 2000 y 2010 cuando Rafael Correa llegó al poder e inició la llamada revolución ciudadana, un proyecto político capitalista centrado en el Estado que rompió con la ortodoxia neoliberal (Becker, 2012; Martínez Novo, 2014).[9] El gasto público en infraestructura y servicios de agua aumentó, aunque partiendo desde una base muy baja, y se introdujo la Constitución de 2008 que incluía importantes declaraciones sobre el agua, como la prohibición de la privatización, la atribución de la gestión del agua al Estado y la comunidad, la promoción de alianzas público-comunitarias para prestar servicios, y la declaración del agua como un derecho humano. Tras la introducción de la nueva Constitución y una prolongada lucha política, se promulgó una nueva ley integral de aguas, la Ley Orgánica de Recursos Hídricos, Usos y Aprovechamiento del Agua (2014), que reemplazó la legislación de aguas vigente y sentó las bases legales para un nuevo régimen hídrico (Goodwin, 2019).

Al confiar la gestión del agua al Estado y la comunidad y promover alianzas público-comunitarias para la prestación de servicios, el nuevo régimen formalizó efectivamente la coproducción de los servicios hídricos, integrando juntas del

[9] Para más ejemplos de coproducción en la prensa local y nacional de los años 2000 y 2010, ver, por ejemplo, “Con iniciativa logran mejor acceso al agua”, 26 de agosto de 2017, *El Universo* y “Las Nieves y La Chonta mejorarán sistema de agua”, 21 de diciembre de 2018, *El Tiempo*.

agua, gobiernos locales y agencias estatales en un marco legal y burocrático, dejando a la vez en gran parte indefinidas y abiertas a negociación las contribuciones precisas y los roles de los diversos actores involucrados (Joshi y Moore, 2004). La Constitución y la ley reflejaron la historia de la coproducción e incorporaron algunas de las demandas históricas de las juntas del agua y los movimientos sociales. Sin embargo, el nuevo régimen le otorgó al Estado un papel central y la toma de decisiones se concentró en las nuevas burocracias del agua: la Secretaría Nacional de Agua (SENAGUA) y la Agencia de Regulación y Control de Agua (ARCA). Esto amenazó la autonomía de las juntas del agua y generó tensiones y luchas políticas. La siguiente sección analiza brevemente estas luchas.

Políticas de coproducción durante la revolución ciudadana

La coproducción reconfigura las relaciones entre Estado y sociedad y crea nuevos sujetos políticos, relaciones e instituciones. En el proceso genera luchas y oportunidades políticas a diferentes escalas. La razón de esto radica en parte en la tendencia de la coproducción a promover tanto la participación el compromiso con el Estado como la autonomía del mismo (Goodwin, 2019).

La forma, cantidad y frecuencia de las contribuciones a la coproducción median esta relación (Goodwin, 2019). En este sentido, el activo papel que han desempeñado las juntas del agua en el desarrollo y mantenimiento de los sistemas de agua potable y riego y en la prestación del servicio en la Sierra de Ecuador ha sido crucial. El proceso general, tal y como se describió anteriormente, implica que los miembros de las juntas del agua contribuyan con mano de obra, financiamiento y conocimientos para la construcción, el mantenimiento y la gestión. Por lo tanto, la mayoría de las juntas han hecho contribuciones significativas en el largo plazo, lo que les ha dado un fuerte sentimiento de propiedad y control colectivo.

Las contribuciones laborales fueron especialmente importantes. En la región de la Sierra, el grueso de los miembros de la comunidad laboral que contribuyeron a la construcción y el mantenimiento de los sistemas de agua se organiza a través de una práctica andina de trabajo colectivo, la minga (Boelens y Doornbos, 2001;

Armijos, 2013). El trabajo aportado a través de las mingas no se remunera en efectivo, pero a menudo se proporcionan alimentos, bebidas y festividades. Los derechos de agua suelen establecerse y mantenerse mediante la participación en mingas, y la práctica, aunque ciertamente no está exenta de conflictos y disputas, apuntala las relaciones comunales (Vos y Boelens, 2015; Hidalgo et ál., 2017). Además de la mano de obra colectiva aportada a través de las mingas, los miembros también contribuyen voluntariamente a la gestión de los sistemas hídricos y algunas juntas del agua también reclutan miembros como operadores, ingenieros y administradores asalariados.

Las luchas por la construcción e implementación del nuevo régimen de agua durante la revolución ciudadana ilustran la relevancia política de este aspecto de la coproducción (Goodwin, 2019). La serie de nuevas regulaciones que el régimen impuso a las juntas del agua fue una de las principales fuentes de tensión. Ante una mayor regulación y control estatal, las juntas del agua y los movimientos sociales resistieron, llamando la atención sobre cómo se construyeron históricamente los sistemas comunitarios de agua.

Yaku Pérez Guartambel, líder de una coalición de sistemas comunitarios de agua en la Sierra sur y el entonces presidente del movimiento indígena de la Sierra, Ecuarunari, expresó con fuerza este punto:

> *¿La pregunta es si fue el gobierno de Correa o fue la Senagua o fueron miles o centenares de mingueros que se organizaron a través del agua para construir sistemas comunitarios?*[10]

Aunque Pérez minimiza las contribuciones históricas de las agencias estatales, los gobiernos locales y las organizaciones no gubernamentales en este proceso, existe evidencia sustancial que respalda su afirmación de que los mingueros han desempeñado un papel vital en el desarrollo de los sistemas de agua y la infraestructura en la región de la Sierra. Varios ejemplos están documentados en la literatura. Por ejemplo, Boelens y Doornbos (2001) explican cómo las comunidades indígenas de Ceceles, Chimborazo, trabajaron colectivamente para construir una nueva plataforma de canal de riego a principios de los años noventa.

[10] "Cuestionan instructivo sobre los sistemas comunitarios de agua", 6 de julio de 2016, *El Mercurio*, p. 3-A.

Por su parte, Hidalgo et ál. (2017) ilustran la importancia de las mingas en la construcción y el mantenimiento de redes de riego en Tabacundo, Pichincha. La centralidad de las mingas también se destacó a lo largo de mi trabajo de campo en la Sierra. Por ejemplo, el presidente de una pequeña junta del agua en Palmira, Chimborazo, explicó cómo sus miembros construyeron recientemente un nuevo sistema de riego:

> *(...) nosotros empleamos nuestra mano de obra, y nuestra fuerza de trabajo (...) nosotros hacemos una plataforma, una minga, con la participación de hombres, mujeres, jóvenes (...) para implementar el sistema, con ripio, arena y cemento, nosotros trasladamos en espalda, y a su vez en animales (...) así duró ese proceso de trabajo hace tres años, todo base a minga y participación.*[11]

Los archivos de periódicos nacionales y locales brindan evidencia adicional. Por ejemplo, *El Comercio* informa a principios de la década de 1970:

> *Quinientos veintinueve kilómetros de canales de riego y 82,5 kilómetros de vías de acceso correspondiente se han construido en el país mediante el sistema de trabajo comunitario gratuito denominado minga.*[12]

Estas fuentes destacan la considerable fuerza de trabajo colectivo que las comunidades y las juntas han invertido en los sistemas de agua e infraestructura hídrica a lo largo de generaciones. A través de estos esfuerzos físicos se han formado nuevas subjetividades, prácticas y relaciones que han generado un fuerte sentido de propiedad y control colectivo. A esto se suma la operación colectiva cotidiana de los servicios de agua y la participación en asambleas comunitarias.

En conjunto, estos factores han generado una base sólida para la autonomía colectiva (Armijos, 2013; Dinerstein, 2015; Goodwin, 2019, 2021b). La práctica y el significado de la autonomía varían entre las distintas juntas del agua. En algunos casos, es un rechazo al poder y la autoridad del Estado, lo que complica

[11] Entrevista: Presidente, Junta de Riego Palmira, Palmira, 22 de agosto de 2017.
[12] "529 kms de canales de riego construidos mediante mingas", 28 de febrero de 1972, *El Comercio*, pp. 1 y 12.

pero no impide la coproducción. En otros, se entiende mejor como una respuesta a la negligencia e incompetencia del Estado. Independientemente de sus orígenes y formas específicas, la autonomía proporciona a las juntas del agua la capacidad de tomar decisiones sobre varios aspectos de la gestión y los servicios, como su distribución, sus estructuras organizativas, tarifas e infraestructura. La minga contribuye a esto al permitir que las juntas construyan y mantengan la infraestructura, reduzcan la dependencia del Estado y fortalezcan las relaciones comunales y los derechos colectivos al agua. Sin embargo, la minga no es una condición previa para la autonomía, y algunas juntas, especialmente en la Región Costa, funcionan con un alto nivel de autonomía operativa sin utilizarla.

La autonomía de los sistemas comunitarios del agua presenta distintos grados, ya que algunas juntas tienen mayor capacidad autónoma que otras, y opera a distintas escalas, ya que actúa a distintos niveles, donde algunas juntas más pequeñas mantienen un grado relativamente alto de control autónomo sobre el agua a nivel comunitario. En estos casos, la autonomía se negocia tanto dentro de la junta como entre ésta y el Estado. Si bien la autonomía colectiva sostiene a los servicios de agua, como se ha indicado anteriormente, sin duda no puede reducirse a este ámbito. La práctica ha permitido a las comunidades y las juntas crear espacios para el control de la tierra y el agua, desarrollar prácticas y relaciones políticas alternativas y renegociar su relación con el Estado (Armijos, 2013; Goodwin, 2021b). Así, la autonomía es una práctica política heterogénea y multifacética, que reconfigura el poder y la autoridad y crea nuevos sujetos y relaciones políticas.

Los cambios históricos en la composición de los actores que participan en la coproducción han tenido una influencia significativa en la autonomía de los sistemas comunitarios de agua. En los años ochenta y noventa, la mayor participación de agencias de desarrollo extranjeras, instituciones multilaterales y organizaciones no gubernamentales redujo la dependencia de las juntas del agua con el Estado y aumentó el espacio para que desarrollen capacidad autónoma. Con las agencias estatales afrontando problemas de liquidez y los gobiernos locales aportando menos financiamiento, materiales y conocimiento técnico, las juntas del agua redujeron su interacción con el Estado y fortalecieron sus vínculos con los actores no estatales. En ocasiones, estas interacciones amenazaron la autonomía colectiva, ya que las agencias de desarrollo extranjeras, las

instituciones multilaterales y las organizaciones no gubernamentales intentaron imponer prácticas, normas y estructuras neoliberales a las juntas del agua (Andolina, 2012; Hoogesteger, 2015; Dupuits, 2019, 2021). No obstante, en su conjunto, el cambio en la composición de la coproducción en las décadas de 1980 y 1990 generalmente favoreció a la autonomía de las juntas del agua (Goodwin, 2019, 2021b). Cuando el gobierno de Correa intentó aumentar el control estatal del agua en las décadas de 2000 y 2010, se encontró con una firme resistencia de las juntas del agua, que buscaban proteger los espacios autónomos que habían construido durante las fases anteriores de coproducción.

El fin de la década de Rafael Correa en el poder inició una nueva fase en la política de coproducción cuando su sucesor, Lenín Moreno, se dispuso a desmantelar la revolución ciudadana y dirigir las políticas hacia la ortodoxia neoliberal. Esto incluyó un recorte drástico del gasto público y la reestructuración del Estado. El acuerdo de 4.200 millones de dólares que el gobierno de Moreno acordó con el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI) a principios de 2019 dio un nuevo impulso a este proceso y sentó las bases para un largo período de austeridad. En un esfuerzo por construir puentes con las juntas del agua y los movimientos indígenas, Moreno reclutó a líderes indígenas prominentes en SENAGUA, lo que momentáneamente creó oportunidades para que algunas juntas del agua protegieran su autonomía y fortalecieran alianzas dentro del Estado. Sin embargo, la brutal represión estatal de las protestas contra el gobierno de Moreno a fines de 2019 hizo que los burócratas indígenas renunciaran, y las relaciones entre los pueblos indígenas y el Estado se deterioraron una vez más (Ponce et ál., 2020).

Con la perspectiva de una disminución del significativo apoyo estatal, las juntas del agua comenzaron la década de 2020 dependiendo aún más de las prácticas y relaciones autónomas para brindar los servicios hídricos y superar la escasez de agua.

La coproducción en los servicios hídricos durante la pandemia Covid-19

La política de austeridad de la administración de Moreno impulsada por el FMI y el fracaso del gobierno de Correa para abordar los problemas estructurales dejaron a Ecuador mal preparado para manejar la pandemia de Covid-19.

El virus se propagó rápidamente en Guayaquil en marzo de 2020, abrumando a la ciudad y su frágil sistema de salud pública, para luego extenderse por todo el país en los meses siguientes. El gobierno de Moreno cerró las fronteras, introdujo restricciones en la circulación en todo el país e impuso medidas de salud pública para impedir la propagación del virus. Sin embargo, la tasa de infección se mantuvo relativamente alta en 2020, volvió a aumentar a principios de 2021 cuando llegaron nuevas variantes del virus al país, y el muy limitado programa de vacunación del gobierno de Moreno no logró llegar a una proporción significativa de la población. La magnitud de la economía informal, la falta de apoyo estatal y los altos niveles de pobreza y desigualdad contribuyeron a la propagación del virus, ya que la mayoría de los ecuatorianos no tenían más remedio que seguir trabajando, a pesar de los riesgos para su salud. El colapso de la actividad económica, el despido de trabajadores del sector público y privado y la liberalización del mercado laboral aumentaron la precariedad: los ingresos se desplomaron, la pobreza se disparó y la desigualdad se profundizó (Jara et ál., 2021; McBurney et ál., 2021).

En este contexto, el agua adquirió renovada importancia, y la coproducción desempeñó un papel vital en el suministro de los servicios hídricos a los hogares de bajos ingresos y a los pequeños agricultores durante la pandemia. Sin embargo, las juntas del agua, ejes de la coproducción de estos servicios, enfrentaron graves desafíos y sufrieron cambios importantes como resultado de la pandemia. En el presente trabajo analizaré brevemente cuatro temas, basándome en 30 entrevistas llevadas a cabo con representantes de juntas del agua entre febrero y abril de 2021.[13] Este análisis preliminar solo ofrece una mirada general a una situación compleja y en constante evolución.

El primer tema se relaciona con el uso y la distribución del agua. El consumo de agua aumentó durante la ola inicial de la pandemia a medida que los miembros de la comunidad pasaban más tiempo en casa y usaban más agua para cocinar, limpiar, lavar y regar. El desempleo y la migración sumaron más presión sobre el sistema ya que algunos miembros de las comunidades rurales que vivían en

[13] Ximena Caiza llevó a cabo estas entrevistas de forma remota en Ecuador. Estoy en deuda con Ximena por su excelente investigación y análisis y a todas las personas que participaron en esta investigación en estos tiempos difíciles.

pueblos y ciudades regresaron a sus hogares durante la pandemia. Algunas organizaciones informaron breves períodos de escasez de agua debido a estos cambios, pero la mayoría expresó su alivio por tener un acceso seguro al agua potable y de riego. Por lo tanto, la pandemia parece haber revalorizado la importancia del agua, lo que podría crear una base sobre la cual las juntas del agua pueden seguir desarrollándose.

El segundo tema se refiere a las diversas infraestructuras gestionadas por las juntas del agua. Las mingas, como se señaló anteriormente, son fundamentales para la construcción y mantenimiento de la infraestructura hidráulica en los Andes. Sin embargo, las reglas de distanciamiento social impuestas para restringir la propagación de Covid-19 han limitado el uso de esta práctica y han obligado a las juntas del agua a utilizar alternativas. En algunos casos, esto ha implicado la contratación de maquinaria y trabajadores para completar el trabajo generalmente realizado a través de mingas o la organización de grupos más pequeños y socialmente distanciados para realizar reparaciones de emergencia. La erupción del Sangay, un volcán imponente encaramado en la franja oriental de los Andes, presentó más desafíos de infraestructura para algunas juntas del agua, que emprendieron obras de emergencia después de que la ceniza volcánica contaminara sus sistemas de agua a principios de 2021. La suspensión de los pagos por los servicios prestados por las juntas del agua durante la ola inicial de la pandemia y los costos asociados con la falta de mingas dejaron a muchas juntas con menos fondos para invertir en infraestructura. Algunas más pequeñas también informaron escasez de los productos químicos utilizados para tratar el agua potable, lo que afectó la calidad del agua durante la pandemia.

El tercer tema se trata de las diversas prácticas y relaciones colectivas y autónomas que apuntalan los sistemas comunitarios de agua. Además de restringir las mingas, las reglas de distanciamiento social también limitaron las asambleas comunitarias, que son espacios importantes para expresar quejas, resolver conflictos y tomar decisiones colectivas. Para ayudar a cerrar la brecha dejada por la falta de reuniones se utilizaron las redes sociales y las plataformas digitales. Sin embargo, algunos miembros de las juntas carecen de acceso confiable a internet y teléfonos celulares, lo que parece haberlos dejado al margen de la toma de decisiones. A pesar de estos desafíos, muchas juntas del agua han fortalecido sus relaciones de solidaridad y reciprocidad durante la pandemia (Córdoba, 2021). Se

aseguró la continuidad en los servicios independientemente de la capacidad de los miembros para pagar las tarifas y se suspendieron los cargos por el uso adicional del agua.[14] Tener que enfrentar los complejos desafíos organizativos que presenta la pandemia también generó oportunidades para fortalecer las relaciones comunales y ampliar y compartir los saberes.

El cuarto tema se refiere a las relaciones que las juntas del agua han establecido con actores externos a través de la coproducción. Las relaciones establecidas previamente con los gobiernos locales y regionales fueron importantes para algunas juntas del agua durante la pandemia. Sin embargo, el acceso a los recursos gubernamentales ha sido desigual, y las juntas más grandes que abarcan varias comunidades, se encontraron generalmente en mejores condiciones para comunicarse y negociar con el Estado. En general, el apoyo estatal se ha visto complicado por la falta de transferencia de fondos del gobierno central hacia los gobiernos locales y regionales durante la pandemia. La incorporación de la Secretaría Nacional del Agua al Ministerio del Ambiente y los agresivos recortes presupuestarios y de personal redujeron aún más el espacio para la cooperación. Sin embargo, varias juntas del agua contaron con el apoyo de organizaciones no gubernamentales, como Ayuda en Acción, Fondo Ecuatoriano Populorum Progressio (FEPP) y Central Ecuatoriana de Servicios Agrícolas (CESA). Por lo tanto, las relaciones y prácticas formadas a través de la coproducción ayudaron a sostener a muchas juntas del agua durante la pandemia, aun cuando las políticas de austeridad del gobierno de Moreno patrocinadas por el FMI restringen el apoyo estatal en este momento crucial.

Observaciones finales

La coproducción ha creado un espacio para que los usuarios del agua tomen el control colectivo de los suministros locales en Ecuador. Este proceso histórico, que comenzó a acelerarse en las décadas de 1960 y 1970, ha sido testigo del desarrollo de los sistemas comunitarios de agua en sus diversos grados y formas de autonomía colectiva, lo que les ha permitido prestar servicios hídricos a largo

[14] Roca-Servat et ál. (2020) informan de resultados similares en su agudo análisis de los acueductos comunitarios en Colombia durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Véase también Córdoba et ál. (2021).

plazo, con el apoyo periódico de diversos actores estatales y no estatales. Las prácticas y relaciones de autonomía colectiva han permitido a las juntas del agua seguir suministrando agua potable y de riego durante la pandemia de Covid-19 y, con ello, proteger la salud y los medios de vida de sus miembros y reforzar las relaciones comunitarias. Sin embargo, han tenido que asumir los costos de las consecuencias de la pandemia, lo que las dejó con menos fondos para invertir en infraestructuras y servicios. En el corto plazo, las perspectivas de conseguir un apoyo externo significativo para superar estos retos son limitadas. El gobierno del recién elegido presidente de derechas de Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso, está dispuesto a ampliar las políticas de su predecesor Lenín Moreno de austeridad liberal, auspiciadas por el FMI, lo que le pondrá límites definitivos al apoyo estatal en el corto plazo. También es probable que promueva la privatización de las fuentes y servicios de agua, lo que podría amenazar la coproducción. Mientras tanto, las agencias de desarrollo y las organizaciones internacionales no gubernamentales han reducido sus operaciones en Ecuador en los últimos años y también han experimentado importantes recortes presupuestarios. La pandemia podría provocar la renovación y la proliferación de estos actores. Sin embargo, al menos en el corto plazo, el futuro de la coproducción de los servicios de agua dependerá aún más de las prácticas y relaciones de autonomía colectiva de las juntas del agua. La historia sugiere que estos factores tendrán un gran peso en la política del agua en Ecuador a medida que el país transite hacia su(s) futuro(s) post-pandemia(s).

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FRANCISCO HIDALGO[1]

In the face of the pandemic: The potential of rurality and peasant agriculture[2]

At the beginning of July 2020, in Ecuador, as in most of the countries of the region, started loosening emergency lockdown restrictions designed to tackle COVID-19 pandemic. In Ecuador, the governmental discourse drew upon the illustrative figure of colours in the traffic lights: high-risk zones depicted as *red*; the *colour yellow* to denote control over the pandemic and *green* delineating lower risk zones.

At the time of writing, most of the country was considered "yellow", meaning that the pandemic is under control. As of July 4 2020, the official government records registered 61,135 positive cases and 4,719 fatalities from a total 162,000 COVID tests. Most of the cases of infection and deaths caused by COVID-19 occurred in urban centres such as Guayaquil, Quito, Manta-Portoviejo, which accounted for 60% of the registered cases. The newspaper El Comercio showed the relationship between the average age and infected people was as follows: 58% of the cases were people between 20 and 49 years of age, 22% in the population between 50 to 64 years, with a higher incidence in men, 55%, while women accounted for 45% (El Comercio 04/07/2020).

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Ending Restrictions

Initially, Ecuador was one of the countries with the highest incidence of COVID-19 in Latin America but with the progressive expansion of the pandemic in the region, other countries such as Brazil, Peru and Chile overtook Ecuador in terms of incidences of COVID per 100,000 people, whilst United States became the country where the virus spread the most.

The end of the lockdown period had numerous risks already pointed out by some analysts. Risks related to tensions on the productive and economic structures were much higher than those related to adequate health conditions. Health experts also pointed out the risks of "a second wave of contagion" which could severely affect poor and marginalised sectors in the big cities, which could in turn spread the disease to rural areas, where the number of cases was relatively low.

In the Ecuadorian case, an additional factor that worsened the situation was the opportunistic imposition of neoliberal economic and political measures by the government in the name of responding to the crisis. The government's previous attempt to implement these neoliberal policies pre-pandemic sparked an indigenous-popular uprising in October 2019 that forced the government to back down.

In order to tackle the health crisis and its attendant economic effects, the government introduced measures such the expansion of labour flexibility, the dismissal of employees from both public and private companies the downsizing of the state through privatisation. As result, the so called "new normal" was nothing less than the return to normalcy, albeit with stronger impacts on the working classes. In order to analyse the impacts of this "new normal", this article examines the challenges of food issues at the moment when Ecuador ended lockdown restrictions.

The Contribution of Food Producers

Between March and June 2020, the health crisis and the state of emergency followed by the total closure of national borders put food production at the centre of national public attention, since national food production is mainly supplied by peasant and family farming.

Then, as seldom before, the crucial link between the reproduction of life and agriculture became apparent for all to see. In this moment, agriculture could not be reduced to a simple economic reading and framed as "production for the national market". The importance of food production goes beyond recognising that it "serves the national market"; it is a central pillar of the reproduction of life that affects all the population, even majoritarian social groups. It is not only about "satisfying domestic demand" – an abstract the quantitative measure – although its persistence and potential questions the predominant organisation of agricultural production.

The time has come for the elites, who elaborate and implement public policies, to recognise the paramount role that peasant and family agriculture plays in capitalism today. During the state of emergency and border closures, the Ecuadorian experience showed the capacity of this sector to supply food to the majority of the national population, revealing an alternative to the globalised, industrialised model of food production that came to prominence during the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Moreover, statements from official spokespersons [3] point out that there were signs that the demand of products such as rice, citrus fruits, vegetables, bananas, dairy products and eggs improved when supplied by peasant and family agrarian production, which also increased self-sufficiency of communities in rural areas. It should also be noted that there were urban-marginal sectors that suffered from food shortages. However, these were linked to the structural conditions of poor distribution and state failure in food distribution for poor neighbourhoods rather than production per se.

The significance of peasant and family farming, including indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the national food production can be seen in the following graph (Graph No. 1).[4] The graph shows the size of the productive units dedicated to transitory crops that are key for the national consumption: rice, hard maize, soft maize, potatoes, vegetables, cereals, among others. Moreover, the graph clearly shows that most of the products from the transitory crops are

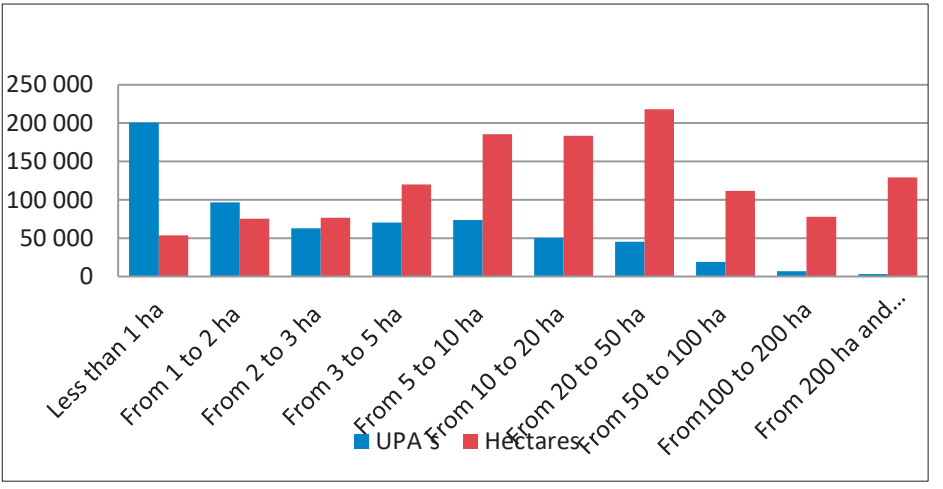
[3] Available at El Comercio, https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/emergencia- incidio-precios-productos-ecuador.html

[4] Graphic 1. Source: Espac 2017. Graphic processing: María Jose Quishpe y Eliana Anangonó – Sipae.

cultivated in peasant's productive units (those smaller than 5 hectares), that correspond to 431,048 Productive units and cover a total of 326,077 hectares. Along the same line, the Productive family units (those between 5 and 20 hectares) build an important segment in the agrarian production and correspond to 124,212 production units covering a total of 368,698 hectares.

There are also large landholdings in the production of transitional crops, especially on the Coastal region (Pacific) mainly rice and hard maize. However, big capital is not found in these sectors, but is concentrated in agro-exportation products such as bananas, flowers and shrimp. Ecuadorian peasant and familiar agriculture make a determinant contribution to supply food for both population in the countryside and urban areas, particularly those with low-income sectors.

Chart N. 1 Size of productive units and transitional crops



Recovering the Food Sovereignty Horizon

It is necessary to ask whether the advent of a "new normality" will place peasant and family agriculture once again on a marginal level, without visibility, or whether it will be considered in the design of national strategies and governmental plans to promote human wellbeing for the national population.

The health emergency and global confinement also challenged the neoliberal paradigm and the rationale of "comparative advantages" in agriculture, especially, when considering the agricultural production patterns that boost national economies. The "comparative advantages" for the tropical countries have become a leading argument of the neoliberal policies and the development discourses; nevertheless, the assumed advantages have led rather to subtle impositions resulting in an asymmetrical distribution of agricultural production at the global level, with particularly egregious effects in the Global South countries. Even if not clearly expressed from the beginning in neoliberal thought, comparative advantages was used to justify the shift towards large-scale agro-industrial production of bananas, palm oil, shrimp, flowers among other things for export, side-lining the food security and nutritional needs of the domestic population.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminates how this pre-eminence of agro-export makes national development fragile, leading to an underutilized agricultural and aquaculture sector capable of the feeding of the national population, affecting the reproduction of life in the country and the city. Both the state and social organisations need to learn lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and question in depth to what extent "comparative advantages" and "insertion" to world market provide the right or wrong answers to the challenges of the current situation.

The threatening circumstances that emerged from the health and environmental crisis arising from COVID-19 as well as inequality made clear that national agriculture should be reframed in order to response and cope accordingly to nutrition issues. The crisis scenarios have created the conditions for a change in the understanding and way of thinking on food and agriculture. New horizons are now opening that anchor food sovereignty as central to realising good living-Sumac Kawsay.

Food Assistance During the National Emergency

I argue that peasant and family food production network was a decisive factor mitigating further impacts that the pandemic could have produced during lockdown and the state of emergency. I suggest that a second crucial factor was food assistance programmes led by both the government and private

conglomerates, although there were also several noteworthy initiatives formed outside the central spaces of power.

Regarding food assistance, both state monetary subsidies, as well as specific food provision programmes have helped confront the crisis. Private conglomerates initiatives have provided assistance both for health care, by building health centres, as well as for food supplies. Food assistance initiatives ranged from assistance from the national state, local and provincial governments and large private chains, and donations from banks and private companies, church and church-related entities to alternative initiatives from NGOs and farmers' organisations and urban and rural agro-ecological entrepreneurships.

The national government initially implemented two policies in order to address the food situation crisis. Firstly, it rolled out financial compensation in form of a coupon was given to families in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty. Secondly, the government enacted a food kits programme "Giving a hand without giving the hand", which was supported through agreements with the agro-industry, as well as the "Canasta Solidaria" (solidarity basket) and "Agrotienda Ecuador" (Agri-store Ecuador)[5] programmes. Province and municipal governments have also contributed with food assistance by implementing sources that involved more directly family producers and local peasants. A well- known case was the "Quito Solidario" programme. The municipality of Quito has also created the programme "Ayuda a un abuelito" (Help a grandparent) and the prefecture of Azuay, the "Canasta Popular" programme.

Although the participation of large private conglomerates in some programmes helped to confront the critical situation, they have seized this opportunity to enhance their public image. The consortia was built within a network including different sectors such as banking, agribusiness and hypermarkets that operated in close relation, linking their common interests to achieve an impact at regional level. On the one hand, in Guayaquil, the former mayor Jaime Nebot acted through

[5] Agrotienda Ecuador" articulates state and peasant producers. See: https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/entrega-canastas-agropecuarias-emergencia-covid19.html#cxrecs_s

the “Private Emergency Committee” and, on the other, in Quito, through the “Fondo por Todos” which was supported by the former mayor Roque Sevilla. Additionally, some banking groups have been working together both by the front led by Banco Pichincha-Diners (Fidel Egas & Cia.), as well as by the front led by Banco de Guayaquil (Guillermo Lasso & Cia.).

It is not only the state and private organisations that have dealt with to the crisis, but mainly key initiatives from social organisations have played a significant role. The Peasant Brigades in Solidarity for Food Sovereignty in which the Federation of Peasant Organisations and the Conference on food sovereignty[6] are two such key actors. The Exhibition Network of Pichincha, which brings together agroecological collective groups, as well as further initiatives of non-governmental organisations such as “Urban-Rural bond in times of pandemic” have also provided important support. Additionally, alternative communication channels in social networks have highlighted the importance to call for peasant economy as a central topic of the debate in times of health crisis[7].

Fragility of Hyper-Urbanism and the Potential of Rural Areas during the Pandemic

While the effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had shown great impacts in urban areas, especially in large cities, rural areas seem to have been comparatively less affected. The big cities, particularly, those which have experienced an accelerated growth in the last two decades have experienced intense fragility, itself a result of the concentration of power in the hands of private actors and the state, as well as the ideology of progress.

Quito is a good example of this acceleration process, becoming the most populated city in Ecuador in 2018, overtaking Guayaquil in the process. The urban expansion in both Quito and Guayaquil with more than three million inhabitants

[6] With the union of the countryside and the city we will get out of the crisis. See: https://rebelion.org/-
with-union-of-countryside-and-city-we-will-get-out-of-the-crisis/

[7] Regarding alternative initiatives from NGOs and the promotion of an alternative debate See Earth Monitoring: https://www.monitoreodelatierra.com/single-post/2020/06/ 17/Acciones-emprendidas-por-los-miembros-de-la-Estrategia-Nacional-de-Involucramiento -Ecuador-%E2%80%93-ENI-a-prop%C3%B3sito-de-la-Pandemia-por-COVID-19-y-elsector-rural

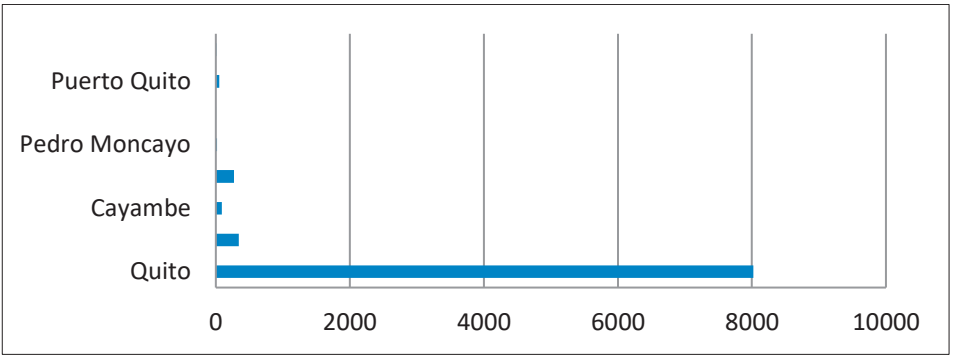
each one has led to marginality and lack of services instead of wellbeing for the migrant population. Big cities are currently the most evident example of inequality *model* that has been imposed on Ecuador: poor neighbourhoods with high population density, lacking health services, housing shortages, labour marginalisation, all those aspects that make these environments highly vulnerable to the pandemic turning urban population's life much more fragile.

This fragility should lead us to reconsider the importance of preserving rural life and to implement public policies in order to stop the emigration dynamics from the countryside to the cities, as well as to strengthen a long-term perspective of life preservation. The following chart shows the development in both urban and rural areas presented in the official report dated 4 July of July 4, 2020, issued by the National Government: "Situación Nacional por COVID-19 - report No. 128"[8]. It presents the situation in the province of Pichincha[9], at the moment the second focus of spread of the coronavirus, with 17% of the total number of cases registered in Ecuador. The chart clearly shows the concentration of Covid-19 cases in Quito, over 8,000 registered, most of them in working-class neighbourhoods in the south, centre and north of the cities: Chillogallo, Guamaní, Belisario Quevedo, Cotocollao, Calderón. By contrast, in the rural areas of the province covid cases are lower or even very few, as in the Sierra Norte in the canton of Pedro Moncayo or in the north-western area in the canton of western area, the canton of San Miguel de los Bancos.

[8] Available at https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/balance-muertes-contagioscovid19-ecuador.htm

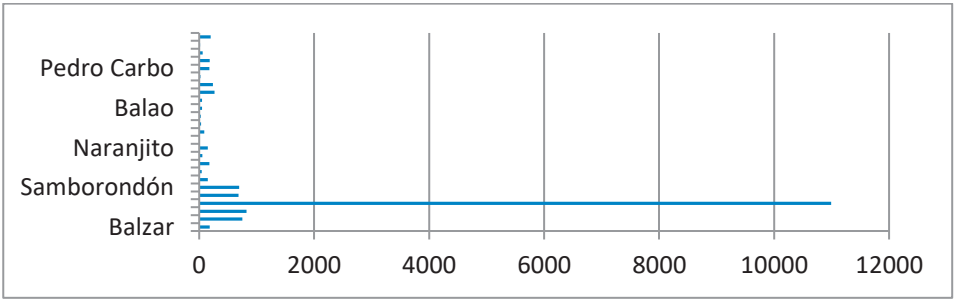
[9] For this and the following graphs the source is report 128, dated 04/07/2020 from the Ministry of Public Health. Ministry of Public Health.

Chart N. 2 Covid-19 cases confirmed in the province of Pichincha



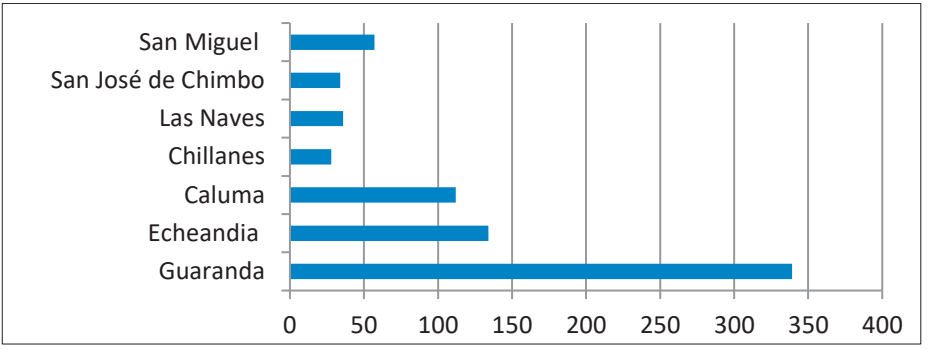
The following chart shows the Guayas province, where 29% of the of the cases registered at the national level were concentrated and which had a massive outbreak of coronavirus during April and May 2020. The chart clearly confirms the predominance of Guayaquil as a greatest agglomeration with a total of 11,200 registered cases. When considering the spread of epidemic cases in surrounding cities such as Durán, Daule, Samborondón, the poor urban environments are hotspots of the epidemic's spread. As in Quito, the spread of the disease became more acute in the working-class neighbourhoods which is also linked to the lack of health and sanitation services.

Chart N. 3 Covid-19 cases confirmed in the Province of Guayas



The registered COVID-19 cases in traditionally rural provinces such as Nobol, Santa Lucía, Palestina, Santa Lucía, Palestina, to mention just some, are lower than those in urban environments. The following chart shows the cases registered in the province of Bolívar (chart N. 5), located in the central highlands of Ecuador.

Chart N. 4. Covid-19 confirmed cases in the Province of Bolivar



The chart above shows that, in the seven cantons that comprise the province Bolivar, 740 COVID-19 cases were registered, with approximately half of them concentrated in the provincial capital, the city of Guaranda with 340 cases, while the rural cantons had a relatively low COVID-19 registration rate, with four registering less than 50 cases per canton.

When comparing the registered cases, an entire rural province has registered solely 720 case, which is less than the cases of a single urban parish in a big city in the canton Guayaquil with 5,020 registered cases. Similarly, the infection record for the parish of Chillogallo in the metropolitan district of Quito reported 686[10] while the development of three rural provinces average between 20 and 60 cases.

[10] La parroquia urbana de Guayaquil con mayores contagios, consultado en: diario El Universo https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2020/06/06/nota/7864245/coronavirus-parroquia-tarqui-guayaquil-quito

The above data grouping the presented charts show that in geographical predominantly rural regions, the impact of the pandemic is considerably significantly less than in urban-dominated regions. I would argue that this points to the characteristic of rural areas – particularly the dispersion of the population and direct contact with nature – being increasingly crucial for the sustainability of life.

Final remarks

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic – which as of mid-July 2020 had recorded 12,691,000 infections and 565,300 deaths worldwide and 3,326,000 infected and 143,350 deaths in Latin America – has driven academics, politicians, doctors, and humanity in general to evaluate and rethink the paths of global development which have been largely marked by global capitalist hegemony.

There is a consensus that the crisis exacerbated by the spread of the pandemic has its roots in important historical challenges that involved the whole humankind. Among the multiple considerations how to deal with the challenging circumstances of the pandemic, the Ecuadorian experiences show that peasant and family farming significantly contributes to mitigate the global warming, to consolidate rural territories and to preserve life. The evolution of the health crisis and confinement, in its various phases, in Ecuador is a good example of how peasant and family farming become a potential for rural regions. Consequently, it is necessary to re-evaluate key approaches such as food sovereignty and the development of productive diversity, equity and dispersal of power.

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