The Future of Revolutions: New Thinking Radical Social Transformation in the Global North and South

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**Abstract**

The revolutions of the 21st century will not resemble those of the twentieth, and that could be a very good thing. It is likely that those who will have the most chance of successfully transforming the world in the direction of positive radical social change (i.e. less unequal societies, with more political participation and less violence, and a maximum attack on the climate crisis) will do so through the creative elaboration of more horizontalist, less violent kinds of coalitions/networks/alliances as their vehicles for coming to power. This chapter briefly surveys relatively recent or current movements that trend in this direction, such as the Zapatistas, global justice movement, Arab Spring, Occupy, and the global climate justice movement, and make the argument that what is needed to transform global societies is the emergence of new kinds of parties that come out of and are more tightly coupled with diverse social movements than in the past, so that they are at once more accountable to the social forces that comprise them, and broader, more global, and more inclusive than either parties or movements have been in the past. The essay then takes up such recent experiments as Podemos in Spain and others as the first signs of new ways of making change along these lines. Using the United States as a case, I briefly speculate on how a future scenario of this type might unfold. The second half of the chapter explores new ways of thinking about and designing social relations that are emerging in both the global North (degrowth, ecosocialism) and global South (*buen vivir*, the rights of nature) as allied visions in the making for a global transition away from capitalism toward a better future for the people of the world, economically, politically, culturally, and ecologically. In this way, these are the seeds of hope that we must plant and nourish.

**Key words**: buen vivir, ecosocialism, degrowth, Transition Towns, radical social transformation

**Introduction: The Present Moment**

If we’re going to think about how we transition our society into where there’s less ecological destruction, more happiness, if we had more creativity, we could have less consumerism. If we had more imagination, we could have less capitalism (Drew Dellinger, interviewed by Hopkins, 2018, July 17).

The world today needs help. If being assailed by the cruel inequalities of neoliberal capitalism, the violence of militarism, and the widespread lack of confidence in existing political options were not enough, we now must reckon with the effects of climate change, forever altering the very foundations of life. Facing this situation requires us to be activists as well as scholars, to engage in public conversations beyond the academic audiences we have primarily addressed up till now. The present is perilous, while the future looms on the unsteady horizon of a *catastrophic convergence* of economic, political, cultural, and environmental crises.1 With all of this in mind, I will try to bring this volume to a close that is not a closure but rather an opening onto some of the emergent possibilities for radical social transformation2 that stand between us and the abyss.

The global economy structures life in both North and South within the contradictions of the neoliberal capitalist world order that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Harvey, 2005). This meant privatization of both the state and commons, cuts in the social services that had provided a safety net for at least some, and the compulsion for profits and continual growth that allowed corporations to cut wages and benefits to the minimum necessary to sustain a workforce (and sometimes even lower than that). Gross inequalities within nations and between the North and South have only deepened as wealth and income have skewed upwards into a vanishingly small elite, while a growing number of people struggle for survival, separated by a global middle class that has seen its fortunes fluctuate from rising conditions in a few of the most dynamic economies and stagnation or deterioration in much of the rest of the world.

Under the neoliberal hammer, populations everywhere are losing faith in political systems and parties that seem powerless to shield them from its effects, let alone support improvements in social well-being. The rise of rightwing populism in much of the North and the extreme ideology of Donald Trump’s America First messaging are evidence of this, polarizing societies into unpalatable choices along the political spectrum. In the South, the hopeful projects of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa and the Pink Tide left of center governments in Latin America have for the most part foundered, and a similar swing toward a populism of the right in democracies has joined existing authoritarian rulers to stifle optimism about change.

A corresponding culture of violence has overtaken many parts of the world, from the most intimate interpersonal relations and in our communities to the militarism of governments, led by the United States, whose national budget privileges military spending at the expense of social programs, education, and a decent health system. This prioritization of funds has activated wars, interventions, and an arms trade that have produced death, displacement, and multiple harms for many, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Syria and Yemen, touching off unprecedented migrations of people within countries and beyond borders, in turn driving the rise of the right across Europe and in the U.S.

To this triple crisis we must now add a wild card in the form of the climate emergency that has already struck vulnerable populations with deadly force and threatens future generations with life conditions that will be immeasurably harder than in the present. In conjunction with the drive of capitalism for endless growth on a planet with finite resources, societies marked by growing violence, and a reduction of political space in which to cultivate alternatives, the climate crisis puts us on an unforgiving timeline to effect the deep social transformation that is called for.

The question becomes: what might we do to counter all of this, each in our local and national locations, and with humanity’s continued existence at stake globally? This essay will try to discern possibilities arising from the new social movements in this century, new concepts and visions of the future, and the potential for a new kind of politics as we move forward into an uncertain future threatened from all sides.

**How do today’s movements for radical social change differ from those of the twentieth century?**

One vantage point is to draw a balance sheet of projects of deep social transformation across the past one hundred years. The great social revolutions of the twentieth century in Mexico, Russia, China, Cuba, and Nicaragua and the parallel anti-colonial revolutions from Vietnam to Algeria, Angola, and Mozambique were all made through armed uprisings that were hierarchically organized and, in most cases, led by a single figure or small group of revolutionary leaders, always male and often drawn from educationally privileged backgrounds. These movements articulated and drew on powerful and multiple political cultures of opposition that mobilized broad coalitions that crossed class (and often gender and ethnic) lines to unseat unpopular rulers and challenge the foreign powers that supported them (Foran, 2005). Their political cultures were inspired by nationalism, democracy, and/or socialism and promised a new world to those who had fought under their banner.

Once in power, however, these broad coalitions tended to fragment as their constituent parts each sought their own goals, and the military and political leaders that had held them together often fashioned political systems that eliminated their former allies in the name of revolutionary unity. Even in Iran, the major case where a social revolution was made through non-violent means in the twentieth century, a single faction led by a religious leader emerged and repressed many of those who had brought the revolution about. And in Nicaragua, the one revolutionary government that retained free and fair democratic institutions, the revolution was reversed as external intervention by the U.S. enabled internal counter-revolutionaries to come to power. In this way, the actions of the post-revolutionary governments dashed the dreams of many of the social sectors that had made them possible.

This is not to deny that gains were made in many places after these revolutions. Conditions of life improved almost everywhere for large majorities of people who became more literate, lived longer and healthier lives, and in some cases experienced new opportunities for social advancement under the new regimes. But the combination of one-party rule or a façade of democratic options and the limited room to maneuver in an increasingly global economy severely limited the possibilities for sustained, deeper social transformation.

By the end of the century, the revolutionary impetus had been blunted in every case: the Soviet Union no longer existed and the Sandinistas had fallen from power in Nicaragua, China had opened its economy to the world (as had Vietnam), Cuba endured but with a stricken economy under one-party rule, Mexico and Iran had effective one-party systems despite formally democratic institutions, and Angola, Algeria, and Mozambique suffered from the economic vicissitudes of the global economy.

It appears that the age of revolutionary movements of this type has ended, and prospects for a new wave along their lines look increasingly slim. It is likely that those who will have the most chance of successfully transforming the world in the direction of positive radical social change (that is, for less unequal societies, with more political participation and less violence, and a maximum mobilization around the climate crisis) will do so through the creative elaboration of more horizontalist, participatory, and non-violent kinds of coalitions/networks/alliances as their preferred vehicles for coming to power. They are also opening new paths to power (or sometimes questioning the goal of state power). We may think of these features as constituting new political cultures of *creation* as well as opposition, motivating participants with a vision of a world remade along radically transformational lines, and they are attempting to match their means with these ends as they proceed toward those visions (Foran, 2014).

Thus, the Zapatistas have sought local indigenous sovereignty in Chiapas rather than state power in all of Mexico and have governed themselves in deeply participatory ways for over two decades (Conant, 2010; Zapatista Army of National Liberation [EZLN], 2002). Their political culture has drawn on indigenous methods of self-governance based on communal and egalitarian economic practices, with an anti-capitalist orientation that has inspired other movements around the world (Gunderson, 2013).

Chief among these has been the global justice (or alter-globalization) movement that emerged in the 1990s to challenge corporate power in the global economy and advocate environmental and labor goals in an alternative vision that took aim at global rather than national targets (Pleyers, 2010). Its most striking victory took place in Seattle in late 1999, when a diverse coalition of actors shut down the meetings of the World Trade Organization, a key institution of neoliberal capitalism. Subsequent mass demonstrations brought their vision to meetings of the G-8 economies and other international gatherings, until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 directed much of the global justice movement’s energy into anti-war organizing. But the persistence of the World Social Forum, a gathering of alternative and inclusive visions for the future, has continued to attract a new generation from around the world to elaborate political cultures of creation based on alternative economic and political institutions (D. Solnit, 2004).

Meanwhile, another path, this time oriented to taking power emerged late in the 1990s, that of electoral victories by left parties, especially in such Latin American cases as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, whose socialist governments were joined by a surge of others in Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Nicaragua, and elsewhere, constituting what became known as the Pink Tide for their political orientations on a spectrum to the left of center (Dangl, 2010; Ellner, 2014; Prevost, Oliva Campos, & Vanden, 2012). Venezuela under Hugo Chávez from 1998 until his death in 2013, Ecuador under president Rafael Correa from 2007 to 2017, and Evo Morales who has been the president of Bolivia since 2005 each tried to define a “socialism for the twenty-first century” that would be democratic, “plurinational” in its inclusion of indigenous populations (a majority in Bolivia), and based on an ecological dimension. As Morales put it, the goals of democracy, socialism, and ecological awareness must come together: “To live in community and equality…. It is an economic model based on solidarity, reciprocity, community, and consensus. Because, for us, democracy is a consensus…. And beyond that, [it means] respecting Mother Earth, the Pacha Mama” (quoted in Dieterich, 2006).

In all three countries, poverty was reduced, new forms of public participation were established, and education, health, and sometimes housing saw dramatic improvements. But ten to fifteen years later, these gains are under threat due to economic downturns such as the price of oil for Venezuela, the rightward turn of the government in Ecuador, and the contradictions of Bolivia’s economic model, which has depended on continued exports of fossil fuels and minerals to fund its social programs (Solón, 2016). This has been further eroded by Morales’s quest for multiple terms in office, which has lost him some of his social base. The path toward twenty-first century socialism seems to have stalled in its center and is in retreat across Latin America (Gonzalez, 2018).

The year 2011 saw another set of innovative strategies for social transformation in the form of mass demonstrations and encampments in the Occupy movements in Spain, the United States, and elsewhere, and the Arab Spring which overthrew dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and challenged governments from Morocco to Bahrein. The Occupy movement originated in Spain, with massive occupations of public space to discuss a wide range of issues in the first half of 2011, and arose in the fall in the United States, starting with Occupy Wall Street before spreading to many other cities and towns. In Spain, one outcome was the creation of a new political party, Podemos (Declós, 2015; Flesher Fominaya, Forthcoming). In the United States, a new generation of young people became active, defining their generation’s concerns and seeking and establishing creative forms of self-governance (Blumenkranz et al., 2011; van Gelder and the staff of YES! Magazine, 2011). Occupied spaces were shut down by a concerted use of police force at the end of the year, with violence in New York and Oakland, but the ideas they espoused have been carried forward, as in the Occupy Sandy relief efforts after a hurricane struck New York in 2012, and under other names since then (Schneider, 2012). Meanwhile, strong social movements have continued to spring up, such as Black Lives Matter in 2014 against police violence, and the Standing Rock fight against a pipeline that threatened indigenous ways of life in North Dakota and attracted thousands of indigenous people and non-indigenous allies in 2016, only to be ultimately stopped and with state violence and legal decisions. The election of Donald Trump also further spurred movements of women, people of color, and climate activists after 2016, even as his government has tried to reverse gains among all these groups through an ugly rhetoric and destructive policy changes.

The Arab Spring brought down the long-standing dictatorships of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia (Marzouki, 2011) and challenged the governments in Syria (which devolved into a bloody civil war), Bahrain, Morocco, and elsewhere. In Libya, where the demonstrators were repressed violently, a civil war broke out, and with U.S. intervention ended in the death of long-standing ruler Muammar Qhaddafi. In both Tunisia and Egypt democratic elections were held, continuing in Tunisia to this day, but reversed in Egypt when the army toppled the elected government of Mohammed Morsi in mid-2013. In all of these cases, mass demonstrations brought unarmed people into the streets, with outcomes varying by the governments’ responses and international factors (Achcar, 2012; Amir-Arjomand, 2015; Anderson, 2011, April 2, 2012; Dabashi, 2012; Gelvin, 2012; Goldstone, 2011; Kamrava, 2014; Khalil, 2011).

These movements have collectively changed the pathways, nature, and goals of struggles for radical social transformation in profound and innovative ways. But very few of them have maintained their initial momentum. We might ask: what could connect these initiatives, and lead to more lasting success?

**An opportunity to change everything? The climate crisis and the intersection of movements**

The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, titled “Global Warming of 1.5o Celsius” (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2018) offers a sobering analysis of the state of the climate that underlines this threat not as more important than others, but as the one which requires immediate and lasting attention. The global economy runs on burning fossil fuels, and their greenhouse gas emissions over the past century and a half have already raised global temperatures by more than one degree Celsius, leading to intensely stronger storms, droughts, floods, wildfires, and heatwaves. Moreover, the victims of a changing climate have been overwhelmingly those with the fewest resources to prepare for or recover from these events, and they are among the populations least responsible for altering the climate: inhabitants of small island states and vulnerable shorelines, farmers, women, young people, ethnic minorities, and those fighting to make ends meet, whether in urban areas or the countryside. Most of those affected so far have been in the global South, in places like the Philippines, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Africa south of the Sahara (Nigeria, Chad, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, and South Sudan), among Pacific and Indian Ocean islanders, and in the Caribbean (Pantsios, 2014).

The task now is to slow the rate of increase in global temperature to the minimum possible, because worse is coming no matter what we do. The IPCC report showed that at 1.5 degrees, all the effects are significantly greater than today, and at 2 degrees we will be in even more dangerous territory, with the possibility of tipping points into runaway climate change (due to loss of ice cover, melting glaciers and ice, releases of methane from permafrost and the ocean floor, and changes in ocean circulation, among the most dangerous). Yet the pledges made by the nations of the world at the 2015 climate summit in Paris, even if all met (itself a distant possibility), would warm the planet by more than 3 degrees, making life unlivable for billions of people. If emissions as usual continue (and they have increased yearly rather than stabilized, let alone decrease) changes of this magnitude and worse are guaranteed.

The report advocated deep emissions cuts of the size that no high-emitting or fossil fuel producing nation will contemplate: “Pathways limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems (high confidence). These systems transitions are unprecedented in terms of scale, but not necessarily in terms of speed, and imply deep emissions reductions in all sectors, a wide portfolio of mitigation options and a significant upscaling of investments in those options (medium confidence)” (IPCC 2018, p. 21). Nor did the Paris Agreement provide even the low-end amount of $100 billion annually in unconditional support to the global South to help reduce emissions there even as they require improved conditions of life for large numbers of their inhabitants.

What could change this equation for the better? The only answer to this question would seem to be a global climate justice movement, or network of such movements, that can force governments to do so, or actually change who holds power in radically more democratic, egalitarian, and ecologically sound ways. In other words, this would require a movement of massive size and inclusivity in all parts of the globe.

At present, the network of climate justice organizations, while growing each year in numbers and actions, is far from having the capacity to do this. But activists in all types of social justice movements have increasingly called for an intersectional approach that connects and strengthens all of them. The obstacles to be overcome include, among others, the whiteness and lack of inclusion of many of the climate movements in the global North, the lack of resources they possess everywhere, and the inevitable resistance of the world’s most powerful corporations, banks, and political elites, backed in the end by their control of the police and military.

How to connect the many strands of the global climate and social justice movements in ways that build momentum with each other for radical transformation to at least confront these obstacles in such an intersectional way is one of the most pressing political questions of the day.

**Emerging alternatives, North and South**

These increasingly interwoven movements will need inspiring visions of the kinds of society they want to attract people to fight for. And these will necessarily be specific to the diverse social contexts in which they find themselves. Of the many alternative visions that are emerging around the world today, four seem to me sufficiently prominent to be at least part of this visioning project. I have chosen these particular ones because they are among the alternatives that recognize the scope of our global crises and propose alternatives, however challenging they would be to implement. And both of these things are important: having alternatives that are adequate to the task, and for which we could at least imagine a path to getting there.

One of these, the Transition Town movement, is already making change on the local level, particularly in the global North (for key references see Alloun and Alexander, 2014; Giangrande, 2018; Hopkins, 2018; Trainer, 2018; van Hook, 2017). This idea originated in a permaculture course that Rob Hopkins taught in Kinsale, Ireland, in 2005, where the class project was to design an “energy descent action plan” for the community, one that would make it possible to meet their needs with less energy and little use of fossil fuels. The concern at the time was the idea of “peak oil,” that the world was depleting fossil fuels and would soon be past the point where half of the known reserves were used, and with rising demand, prices would go up and up and up.

As it turned out, the fracking boom and the development of other extreme oil technologies like deep-water drilling, Arctic drilling, and the tar sands altered that forecast, but the idea is partly validated because we have now reached the point where conventional oil is probably past its peak, even as demand continues to rise – and this rising demand, of course, is a primary factor driving the climate crisis. Meanwhile, Hopkins was invited to the English village of Totnes, in Devon, and the community there decided to see what they could do. And it turned out that they could do a lot – grow more food in community gardens, create cooperatives, start their own local currency, and a host of other projects.

The basic idea in Transition is that of “localization,” or perhaps “relocalization,” which means providing as much of the food, energy, services (including the care professions, health, and education), and economic activity as possible with the resources in the local area, which could be a street, a neighborhood, a town or a city, or a group of places in the same region or natural ecosystem. Another key concept is “resilience,” which refers both to greater self-sufficiency within the community, and the building and sharing of the skills and resources needed as the climate changes the conditions of life on the planet.

Over time, a network of such projects grew up, and the basic ideas were made widely available in a series of handbooks and stories about what worked and what didn’t (Hopkins, 2008; Hopkins, Thomas, & Transition Network, 2016). There are today Transition initiatives in more than 50 countries. In the US, there are more than 150 such initiatives. Attending the first US Transition Town National Gathering in the summer of 2017, one of the things I heard was how hard it sometimes is to keep a group going after it has started. Activists also referred to “Inner Transition” as the process of cultivating one’s own resilience in this work, and one of the hallmarks of a successful transition initiative is that it involves community celebrations alongside the hard work of transition. It should be stressed that each initiative looks different, as it grows out of local concerns, who shows up, and what they decide to do. Importantly, there are countless local alternatives all over the world that don’t call themselves by the name of Transition but that move along some of the same pathways.

One of the concepts underlying Transition Towns (and buen vivir, discussed below) is that of “the commons,” the sector of the economy and of social life that is neither privately nor publicly owned (Aguiton and Beltrán, 2017). The original commons in feudal England consisted of land that everyone could graze their sheep on and forests which were open to people to get firewood and food. The rise of capitalism led to privatization of these commons and added to the large landholdings of the rural elite. Today, the concept is coming back. We see examples of it in the on-line project of Wikipedia, in the freely available articles and books published under the Creative Commons, and in the transfer of technology and software on the web for free. These examples are expanding into cooperative ventures in services and production in many parts of the world (Bollier, 2018; Hopkins and Bauwens, 2018).

Another idea that has emerged in the global North is that of “degrowth.” This concept addresses the excessive carbon footprint of the societies of the global North, on the premise that people could have good qualities of life without constant economic growth and resource depletion by making major cuts in certain economic activities, and curbing the wastefulness that consumer culture and lifestyles endorse (this section builds on this literature, including Bliss, 2018; D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2015; Escobar, 2015; Kallis, 2017; Mastini, 2018; Rutherford, 2017; Schwartzman, 2012).

One such sector, especially prominent in the United States, is the military, which absorbs more than a trillion dollars a year and produces nothing of social value (the argument that it makes the United States safe can be countered in numerous ways, including that maintaining a small part of its nuclear arsenal would deter invasions from any quarter). Such a change in U.S. foreign policy would reduce wars abroad and allow societies to find their own ways and eliminating the export of arms to foreign countries would reduce military spending and shrink militaries abroad as well. This principle could be applied to other arms producing nations in the North, including the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. Other powers such as Russia and China might follow suit, with much the same effect. A massive reduction in global resource use and greenhouse gas emissions would follow, helping on the climate change front while reducing the likelihood and human costs of wars.

A major objection would be the loss of jobs, both in the military itself and in the arms industries and their allied activities in steel-making, electronic components, and the fossil fuel industry. But repurposing the millions of men and women in the militaries of the world could create the labor force necessary for the transition to a post-fossil fuel world, while industries that made arms could be converted into the production of renewable energy, public transportation infrastructure, and retrofitting of houses and businesses.

The fossil fuel industry is also a prime candidate for degrowth, if the political will existed. The massive subsidies that the governments of the world, again led by the U.S., lavish on the main drivers of global warming (Abraham, 2017), if redirected to renewable energy production and research and development could hasten the global transition in energy, heating and cooling, and transportation that is required in the next two decades, while creating safer and cleaner jobs for the workers displaced. The stranglehold which the industry has on politicians in the global North would also be broken, leading to a more democratic space to enact projects for change.

Large industrial agriculture is another area for degrowth, combined with a transition to less meat in diets in the North. The use of pesticides and fertilizers, the waste produced by grazing animals, and the land and water use associated with these activities could all be reduced enormously, freeing land for edible crops and improving health as well. And agriculture built around smaller farms, more organic methods of production, and permaculture principles would feature jobs and feed the world in a healthier manner. The 15-18 percent of greenhouse gas production that comes from agriculture could be cut, perhaps drastically (Bailey, Froggatt, & Wellesley, 2014).

The degrowth principle could be applied to many other sectors of the economies of the North, including advertising and the technology sector. Less products produced for rapid obsolescence, less disposable items made with plastic and shipped great distances, more ecologically appropriate processes in making necessities like clothing, housing, and transportation would reduce resource depletion and pollution, enhance the general health of societies, and lead to further cuts in emissions. Technology could be redirected to less damaging ends and help solve the many obstacles in the way of truly green energy, transportation, and housing.

Sectors that could grow with more funds and better policy would include all the caring services, health care, and education. These investments would boost the quality of people’s lives, provide meaningful jobs, and create a population prepared to innovate more and consume less. Public transportation and urban redesign would help relocalize economic and social life and divert resources from wasteful personal travel in cars (going electric will not necessarily result in less emissions unless the transportation sector is redesigned to make public and lower impact travel to work and recreation the better choice) and the high ecological costs of aviation, shipping, and trucking. There is much room for creative planning, ecologically sound economic activity, and more meaningful jobs that opens by starting from the principles of degrowing the economy.

The global South figures prominently in imagining more just and earth-friendly societies. One of the most exciting principles for this is that of *buen vivir*/*vivir bien*, a translation of Andean indigenous principles such as *sumaq qamaña* (Aymara) and *sumak kawsay* (Quechua). Drawing on long-standing indigenous principles which have survived under 500 years of Western occupation and its national successors in the independent states of Bolivia and Ecuador, this is based on reciprocity, co-existence in a harmonious relationship with nature, consensus decision making, and communal solidarity. Pablo Solón captures some of the subtlety of the terms in rendering them as “plentiful life,” “sweet life,” “harmonious life,” “sublime life,” “inclusive life” or “to know how to live” (Solón, 2016, 2018).

In addition to its indigenous roots, a key document in the elaboration of *buen vivir* was “The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth,” which came out of the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth held in Cochabamba, Bolivia in April 2010. This manifesto defended the principle that all living beings, human and non-human, had certain rights, among them: “*the right to life and to exist; the right to be respected; the right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions; the right to maintain its identity and integrity as a distinct, self-regulating and interrelated being; the right to water as a source of life; the right to clean air; the right to integral health; the right to be free from contamination, pollution and toxic or radioactive waste; the right to full and prompt restoration the violation of the rights recognized in this Declaration caused by human activities”* (World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2010, April 27).

The new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia enshrined the principle of *buen vivir* as an ecological model of development based on recognition of the diversity of “nations” inside a plurinational framework (Vibromancia, 2015), though they have had trouble living up to the ideal in actual practice. Meanwhile, Latin American scholars and activists have written extensively on the concept, establishing its relevance for climate justice and conceptions of political economy that go beyond capitalism.

Though reluctant to codify *buen vivir* into a program or a set of principles to apply everywhere, Solón focuses on what it might mean in the Bolivian context, worth quoting at length:

Where could our efforts have been directed? Toward ensuring that the new economy be centered precisely on the peasant and indigenous economy and small-scale local economies. Toward ensuring a real redistribution of the wealth concentrated in the hands of the financial, extractivist and agro-industrial sectors. To do this it was fundamental to go back and redistribute the property of the big landlords, to regulate private banking more effectively and gradually bring it under state ownership, to make more efficient use of the resources of the extractive industries in order to promote projects that would help us escape extractivism, and to promote the strengthening of the local and communitarian economies and small and medium business owners through strengthening their capacity for self-management and complementarity.

The true potential of countries like Bolivia is in agro-ecology, agro-forestry, the strengthening of food sovereignty based on the indigenous and peasant communities…. In the Vivir Bien framework, the objective is to generate greater resilience in the local and national economies faced with the vagaries of the crisis-ridden global economy. It is not a question of abandoning exports but of ensuring that the economy does not revolve around the export of a handful of products.

The goal is to be more sovereign, strengthening the local human communities and ecosystems of the Earth…. Without a real and effective democracy, it is not possible to advance in the self-management, self-determination and empowerment of the communities and social organizations that are essential to Vivir Bien. The exercise of democracy entails limiting the power of the powerful and the state itself…. To that extent the future of Vivir Bien largely depends on the recovery, reconstruction and empowerment of other visions that to varying degrees point toward the same objective in the different continents of the planet. Vivir Bien is possible only through complementarity with and feedback from other systemic alternatives (Solón, 2016).

The redesign of economies in both the North and the South around the principles of degrowth in the North and *buen vivir* in the South makes them allied visions for a global transition away from capitalism toward a better future for the people of the world, economically, politically, culturally, and ecologically (Escobar, 2015). In this way, these are the seeds of hope that we must plant and nourish.

How might these promising ideas for local regeneration be supplemented at the level of the state? A number of “blueprints” for a radical governmental policy of the future already exist. One perspective on this is that of ecosocialism (for a recent discussion see Löwy, 2018 and Daly, et al. 2018). Ian Angus and Simon Butler have written: “In every country, we need governments that break with the existing order, that are answerable only to working people, farmers, the poor, indigenous communities, and immigrants – in a word, to the *victims* of ecocidal capitalism, not its beneficiaries and representatives” (quoted in Angus, 2016; Angus and Butler, 2011, pp. 198-199).

They continue by suggesting some of the first measures that ecosocialist governments might take (quoted in Angus, 2016; Angus and Butler, 2011, pp. 198-199):

● Rapidly phasing out fossil fuels and biofuels, replacing them with clean energy sources such as wind, geothermal, wave, and above all, solar power;

● Actively supporting farmers to convert to ecological agriculture; defending local food production and distribution; working actively to restore soil fertility while eliminating factory farms and polluting agribusinesses;

● Introducing free and efficient public transport networks, and implementing urban planning policies that radically reduce the need for private trucks and cars;

● Restructuring existing extraction, production and distribution systems to eliminate waste, planned obsolescence, pollution, and manipulative advertising, placing industries under public control when necessary, and providing full retraining to all affected workers and communities;

● Retrofitting existing homes and buildings for energy efficiency, and establishing strict guidelines for green architecture in all new structures;

● Ceasing all military operations at home and elsewhere; transforming the armed forces into voluntary teams charged with restoring ecosystems and assisting the victims of floods, rising oceans and other environmental disasters;

● Ensuring universal availability of high quality health services, including birth control and abortion;

● Launching extensive reforestation, carbon farming and biodiversity programs.

Other basic socialist points include eradicating the exploitation of labor, abolishing sweatshops, ending class domination and its wealth and income inequality, as well as racism and the oppression of women. Each of us will have their own list, and mine would add free lifelong education to the above, along with some kind of guaranteed income or provision of basic needs such as food and shelter. Undoubtedly, many conversations lie ahead in which such lists are compared and synthesized into the powerful manifesto that we may one day craft.

**How do we get there?** **Notes for transformative practices of social transformation**

What is the potential of the transition, degrowth, and buen vivir ideas, visions, and alternatives? Are they viable models? Do they help us think our way through the capitalism-socialism binary? That is, the difficulty of reforming the capitalist economy and the state to the degree and with the speed we need that to happen on the one hand, and the seeming utopianism of a socialist or anti-capitalist revolution on the other. Is some form of democratic ecosocialism possible?

My own best idea is that what is needed to transform global societies is the emergence of new kinds of social justice-oriented parties that come out of and are more tightly coupled with diverse social movements than in the past, so that they are at once more accountable to the social forces that comprise them, and broader.3 We have caught glimpses of these social movement-driven parties in the long experience of Kerala, India with left-wing governments (Franke and Chasin, 1994), the more recent rise of Podemos in Spain out of the Indignados movement (Flesher Fominaya, Forthcoming), or the experiment in left-green rule in Iceland after the Saucepan Revolution overthrew the conservative party of the bankers that brought on the crash of 2008 there (Chataigne, 2009; Júlíusson and Helgason, 2013; R. Solnit, 2008; Wade and Sigurgeirsdottir, 2010). But what we seek is a new *kind* of party, not just another party, one that would be both more global in its ecological vision and more empowering of the local in its domestic policy than parties or movements have been in the past. The role of transition towns in this scenario would be to create local spaces for a cooperative economy that self-governs with a profound sense of the need for resilience and transition away from fossil fuels. Buen vivir complements this from a Southern perspective that is very much in line with its Northern counterpart and draws on indigenous values through the lens of the multiple crises of the present. Ecosocialism might be a national-level goal for a new kind of party.

How to build from these local alternatives to a participatory confederation on the scope of a nation without sacrificing their autonomy would be one question such new parties would have to engage. How to integrate local cooperatives into regional and national level economies based on degrowth would be another. Working together with and supporting like-minded governments on the global scale would be required to coordinate action on the climate crisis. The best guarantee that such parties could work toward all these ends would be the autonomy of the social movements and economic cooperatives that enabled their rise to a position of power to confront the entrenched political and economic elites and international institutions that set the rules of the game today.

These are huge questions, made visible by the joint contributions of the new movements for radical transformation of the twenty-first century. Seeking answers to them is a worthy task for engaged scholars and activists.

The world that is coming can take innumerable forms. We cannot map it because we cannot see it. Knowing what we want is a crucial step but knowing that what we design will emerge only in the process of going towards it is a useful check on thinking in the old ways about how to transform the present into the future.

Will we get what we want? The world will warm, and there is no escaping the fact of the Anthropocene that we have landed ourselves and future generations in. So, what we can get is circumscribed by the transgression of planetary boundaries, an inexorable constraint on any better future. But within those hard terms lies a range along which humanity will strive to place itself as far in the direction of living differently as possible. What seems impossible today might become otherwise, if we are wise enough to let our actions and imaginations emerge together.

**Notes**

1 This text is forthcoming in *The Routledge Handbook of Transformative Global Studies*, edited by S. A. Hamed Hosseini, Barry K. Gills, and James Goodman. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Jawad Moustakbal, who has proposed this term, and sharpened the thinking that informs the political analysis of this essay through conversations we have had in Morocco. I would also like to thank Seyed Abdolhamed Hosseini Faradonbeh for asking astute questions on the first draft of this chapter, which has greatly benefited from trying to address them. All errors of fact or interpretation that remain should be blamed on Jawad and Abdolhamed, needless to say!

2 I here define “radical social transformation” as change in the direction of more equality and participation brought about by the actions of many people. Compare Theda Skocpol’s classic definition of social revolution as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures … accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below” (Skocpol, 1979, p. 4).

3 “Social justice-oriented” is used here to distinguish the new type of party advocated n this essay from the recent rise of fake alternatives such as (far) right populist ones. This issue needs deep thought on a number of levels to address such questions as: 1) why is right-wing populism rising to power in Europe the United States, Brazil, the Philippines, and India, among other places? 2) How might new kinds of justice-oriented parties gain equivalent traction? 3) how could they win elections, everywhere? 4) what are some of the key strategies, slogans, programs, etc. that would make all these things possible?

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