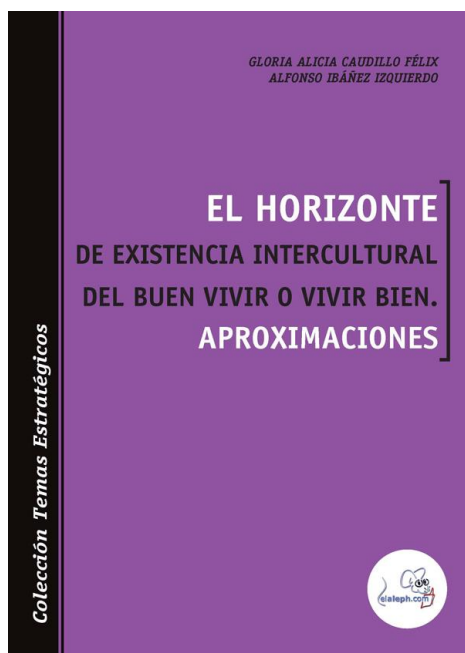

Presentation of the book
EL HORIZONTE DE EXISTENCIA INTERCULTURAL DEL BUEN VIVIR O VIVIR BIEN. APROXIMACIONES.
Gloria Caudillo Félix y Alfonso Ibáñez Izquierdo.
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Silvano Barba Auditorium, CUCSH, 11 May 2016.



“I would like to thank the authors for inviting me to share my thoughts on the book presented today. Alfonso is no longer with us but –like many of the great writers who no longer are– he will forever be in our thoughts, among other reasons, thanks to the intellectual legacy he has left behind. Those of us who were lucky enough to have met him personally and to have been his colleague and friend –in my case for more than 20 years– will forever value his modesty, intellectual openness, ongoing engagement with subordinates; his perspective as a liberal thinker, distant from any kind of dogmatism and sectarianism, and his rebuff and rebellion towards red tape”.

A part of his work can now be found in the online journal *Contextualizaciones Latinoamericanas*, of which he himself was director for a brief period.

In the "Introduction", the authors make it clear that they agreed to remove the authorship of each one of the chapters because –I quote– "we want to make a joint contribution, even though individual styles expose us and our differences that set us apart..." (p.18). For this reason, and from today onwards, I will not refer to any of them on an individual basis.

Many believe that today's structural power system –underpinned by the over-exploitation and exclusion of humans, and the deterioration of nature– is driving us towards a dead end, a future without hope, plummeting into the abyss. This is how our authors see it, claiming that "the society of wealth and squandering, which is not universal, is leading us along its unbridled path towards a dead end, towards self-destruction and the dismantling of life." (Ibáñez, p.25).

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Everything indicates that this fate –which is being forged day after day– is already a present reality; and that attempting to halt and abandon the death train on which we are all aboard –including the VIPs who are travelling in first class protected by their guards and laws– and redirecting it, will take unfathomable individual and collective efforts. This is due to, among others, the fact that those who at present benefit from this state of affairs do everything in their power to prevent change.

Capitalism is, among other things, a system of power focused on individuals, organisations and institutions to insulate egoism by means of dispossession. At present, in times of global interconnection, amidst widely expanding neoliberal imperialism, the drive towards endless accumulation has adopted frankly sociopathic characteristics since its negative consequences on nature and human lives prevail at a global level. Neoliberalism is the pinnacle of this tendency; its symptoms alert us about the presence of a crisis of civilisation due to the fact that the ruling class –triumphant in this class struggle– have fully imposed their order.

Faced with a global crisis of civilisation, a book like the one presented today, which discusses possible alternatives –some already in place– to address this disaster, is undoubtedly essential. Who doesn't put out their hand in the hope of finding another one to be saved when they are about to fall over the cliff? In saying that, it is also clear that the crisis is exacerbated by the indifference expressed by many –perhaps the majority– who appear unwilling to change their consumption habits and disregard, ignore or underestimate the scale of the problems we face.

The authors believe that joining an intercultural philosophy first and foremost implies an "ethical-political choice to emancipate oppressed, marginalised or excluded cultures" (Ibáñez, p. 25) "...committing to cultural diversity not only means rejecting the sought end of history, but also proclaiming that other futures are possible with the participation of different cultures in a spirit of solidarity" (Idem). To this end, I refer to a quote from Boaventura de Sousa that states "we are facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions".² Following the train of thought by the Portuguese sociologist, fundamental issues raised by modernity, such as freedom, equality and fraternity, prevail among us; however, modern theories, such as liberalism and Marxism, no longer prove useful to resolve them. Liberalism is not vested in resolving the issue of inequality (in fact it relies on it) and classic Marxism disregards the significance it could have for social change, for example, in indigenous communities (pre-modernity) and their notions about the relationship with nature.

Thus, the authors of *El horizonte de existencia intercultural del buen vivir o vivir bien Aproximaciones*, suggest "breaking free from the colonial habits that we have internalised from our historical past in an attempt to rediscover ourselves and tackle hegemonic civilisation (Ibáñez, p. 29); and they value "the importance of recognising

² *Descolonizar el saber, reinventar el poder*. Montevideo: Trilce, 2010.

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the polycentric alternative of civilisation that could emerge from the alliance of large or small cultures that are interconnected on account of a multiple, open and power-free dialogue” (Ibáñez, p. 31).

All of which compels us to focus on the South.

The authors from this part of the world demonstrate that at present there are "cultures standing up to colonisation" (Caudillo, p.37), which "fight daily against the siege of multinationals in their communities" (Caudillo, p.39), which has made them into "guardians of nature" (Idem). It is not about marginal expressions, their extensive mobilisations have overthrown presidents and have managed to incorporate "their demands and proposals to build plurinational states that represent them, as well as their cultural values expressed in the alternative of "Living Well", of "Good Living" (Caudillo, p.40).

The authors suggest that "in light of modern impasses with expanding and multifaceted pathologies, we can **still** resort to the stock of humanity's old-age wisdom that has been developing through various societies and cultures" (Ibáñez. p. 51). In other words, pre-modern solutions.

Meanwhile, I pause at the word '**still**'...as it is worth pointing out that faced with the relentless progress of the social and natural holocaust that we experience today, time is of the essence. This view was also expressed by Edgardo Lander, for whom what is at stake is not whether capitalism may or may not be recovered, but instead whether "human life on the planet can survive capitalism and its model of endless growth/destruction" (Lander. 2011: 141).³ Fidel Castro stressed that the risk of a nuclear catastrophe caused by the estimated presence of some 30,000 nuclear missiles is by no means a minor issue. Its dismantling is extremely urgent in all senses of the word. Ana Esther Ceseña believes that the crisis of civilisation facing capitalism does not necessarily imply that it needs to be overcome, but rather highlights the possibility that it will lead us all to disaster before it gains momentum (Ceseña. 2010: 33).⁴ In this vein, Lander considers that the development and progress model currently underway has discovered its purpose and is close "to making life on planet Earth impossible" (Lander. 2010: 159).⁵ The Venezuelan sociologist warns that

Today we discover that the production system, logic and knowledge pattern have led the current phase of capitalism to a status clearly dubbed as a metamorphosis stage of the

³ "Los límites del planeta y la crisis civilizatoria". In: *Economía y Ciencias Sociales*, Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales, Vol. 17, núm. 1, enero-abril, pp. 141-166.

⁴ "Pensar el futuro y la vida de otra manera". In: León, I. (coord.). *Buen vivir y cambios civilizatorios*. Quito: fedaeps, pp. 33-52.

⁵ "Crisis civilizatoria: el tiempo se agota." En: León, I. (coord.). *Buen vivir y cambios civilizatorios*. Quito: fedaeps, pp. 159,179.

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cancer of capitalism...(ibid., p. 162). (...) For the first time we can seriously consider that time ceased to be an infinitely disposable resource for the future, in such a way that what we do not achieve now we will achieve tomorrow or the day after, and what we do not manage to do in one generation they will do in other generations (ibid., p. 163). (...) The problem –he highlights– is that we face the predicament that the destruction processes are rapidly progressing, presenting us with the double task of halting this monster whilst developing other options (ibid., p. 179).

Alfonso and Gloria firmly declare that "another world is possible", "so long as we imagine and conceive it, capable of fighting persistently to achieve it, and thus redesigning another history of Earth (Ibáñez, p. 52).

This context leads to the need to clarify living well or "good living"...it is "a contribution to the whole world which is impelled towards re-establishing human existence" (Ibáñez, p. 54).

They are adamant that "The concept of "Good Living" or "Living Well", which is translated from the Quechua "Sumak Kawsay" and from the Aymara "Suma Qamaña", and which has also been adopted by the Indigenous Central American leaders of the Balu Wala concept of the Kuna language of Panama, is currently at the forefront of Latin American debate and is a contribution from indigenous communities from the around the world" (Caudillo, p.69). Good Living "is offered to the West and the whole world in order to build a fair, equal and plural structure that is balanced between men and women and between humankind and nature. "A world of life as opposed to the world of death of the capitalist regime" is offered (Caudillo, p.94).

It makes it clear that "in light of climate change and the environmental catastrophes that hound us, there is no doubt that we should listen to the "cries of the Earth", radically modifying our connection with nature. Instead of lords and rulers, perhaps we should consider ourselves as carers, gardeners or guardians of nature and the cosmic harmony" (Ibáñez, p.57).

In the face of all of this, "we should unlearn and relearn, in the context of an intense intercultural dialogue that invites us to the "heroic creation" of a "trans-modern historical project.

Gloria and Alfonso remind us that "In the 1980s the main demand of indigenous communities was possession of the land, in the 1990s the autonomy and collective rights and in (the) first decade of the 21st century, it is the Good Living or the Living Well..." (Caudillo, p.70).

The authors point out that Good Living and Living Well are not the same; in fact, they deal with opposing ideas.

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They claim that the concept comes about as an alternative to the capitalist system and has sparked intercultural dialogue between western and indigenous critical thinkers who share their main characteristics and possibilities.

Colonial capitalist rationality, in its anthropocentric approach, justifies and legitimises the domineering exercise of nature, shaping an ecocidal and predatory civilisation model of nature transformed into a mere commodity, as it gives precedence to interest of capital over the interest of life.

[...] And while the good living or living well "may be regarded as a "retrospective utopia", contrary to western modernity or post-modernity, it is in turn a "prospective utopia" because it provides alternatives for the majority of inhabitants on this planet" (Ibáñez, p.110).

"This is where it is worth noting that the Good Living or Living Well does not condense a totally elaborate and finished proposal, which is indisputable in order to achieve a new hegemony. On the contrary, this constantly evolving notion is responsive to other contributions; it does not have a single and monocultural view to repeat the same as always and that would go against the indigenous principles of relationality and complementarity" (Ibáñez, p. 111).

The last chapter addresses "the proposal of plurinationality, considered from the perspective of Andean indigenous peoples, who from the 1980s have been using the concept of nation in the case of Bolivia and of nationality in Ecuador to refer to their communities, and subsequently propose the concept of plurinationality fixed to the later proposal of a Plurinational State." (Caudillo, p.121).

We are reminded that "in Ecuador, the National Council for Coordinating Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONACNIE) was established in 1980 and in 1986 the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) was founded" (Caudillo, p.121)...In Bolivia, the plurinationality proposal emerged from the Tiwanaku Manifest drawn up by several Quechua and Aymara peasant organisations in July 1973...(Caudillo, p.124).

Thus, this book calls us to recognise that within the scope of the current civilisation pattern there is no solution for the critical issues we face, both regarding the way we communicate with one another, as well as the way we interact with nature. An alternative civilisation requires another type of relationship to be established with nature, which we are a part of. Social justice and harmony with nature are essential to achieve integrated development. By sacrificing them we are weakening our progress and well-being. What kind of development can we refer to when individuals are not equipped with the possibilities to unleash their potential, often inhibited and uprooted in one fell swoop by misery, inequality, oppression and the drought of opportunities?

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What kind of progress can we parade when it is not sustainable in political, social, economic and environmental terms?

Those who signed the "Final Declaration of the World People's Conference on Climate Change" (22 April 2010, Cochabamba, Bolivia) recognised that:

“Humanity confronts a great dilemma: to continue on the path of capitalism, degradation, and death, or to choose the path of harmony with nature and respect for life. It is imperative that we forge a new system that restores harmony with nature and among human beings. And in order for there to be balance with nature, there must first be equity among human beings" (People's Agreement of Cochabamba. 2010: 2).

The book by Alfonso and Gloria is affiliated with this second concern, provides elements for thought and consolidates this new system that re-establishes harmony with nature and human beings©