Utopia: A Possible View from Latin America

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Abstract

This essay explores one possible interpretation on how Latin American intellectuals and activists use the concept of utopia. The first part of the essay provides a sketch of how European and US scholars, particularly those following Ernst Bloch, have articulated utopia. The section ends with a pessimistic reading of utopia due to the institutional power of settler colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy. In the second section of the essay, the author begins by using some of the work of Jose Boaventura de Sousa Santos to explore Quijano's coloniality of power. In the process the author demonstrates how much of European thought around utopia assumes knowledge as an un-positioned, un-located, neutral, and universalistic position. So utopia, as articulated by European thinkers, becomes part of the violent history and epistemology that invented America and can be said to be tainted with this original sin. In response, Latin American scholars and activists turn to concepts that emerge from struggles of resistance against Eurocentric thought and practices, like *sumac kaway*, *pachamama*, or the Zapatista struggles to restore utopia as part of the struggle for *el buen vivir*. This approach helps disentangle ourselves from the projects of modernity and permits a collective mode of thinking that is produced and thought from difference, towards liberation. So Latin American activists and scholars, like others from the Global South, are endeavoring to reevaluate utopia by going beyond European thought and restoring value to the struggles of communities whose heritage have been erased, especially native communities that have resisted coloniality.

Keywords: Latin America, utopia, buen vivir, decoloniality, Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Several years ago, I wrote how Mexican Americans in Los Angeles high schools and Mexican students in 1968 sought to challenge their institutional imaginaries that denied them hope (Soldatenko, "The Mexican"; Soldatenko, "Mexico '68"). Their struggle for change, even though repressed, inspired my optimism for future possibilities. Now, as the day-to-day practices that uphold "normal" social and political practices of settler colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy persist in the US, my faith in transformation is more distant – despair has replaced hope. Making this more disturbing is that the tools developed by many resistance movements in the Global North since the 1930s have been domesticated

and turned against those who hope. Thus, my question is: is it still possible to have hope and anticipate justice today? Can we still think/talk/write/act about a better world and *el buen vivir*/good living?

To that end, I endeavor here to examine the meaning of utopia as developed by European intellectuals and its rearticulation in the Global South, especially through the works of Latin American scholars and activists. Following Boaventura de Sousa Santos, I use the concept of the Global South and Latin America "as a metaphor for the global, systemic, and unjust human suffering caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy and for the resistance against the causes of such suffering" (*Epistemologies* 222-23). It seems that among many European progressive thinkers there is a deep and permanent frustration with their experience of hope. In contrast, Latin American thinkers and activists have also long engaged with lost or interrupted struggles yet retained their yearning to one day achieve *el buen vivir*. How can we understand this dichotomy? How do some Latin American activists and scholars continue to struggle for a better world at the time of "[t]he rise of Brexit, Trumpism, the Le Pen's Front National, Netanyahuism, Italians First, Bolsonaroan Brazil," and many other expressions of nativism (Chan and Ventura 1)?[2] This essay will explore Latin American thinkers' and activists' expectations.

The first part of this paper begins with an examination of the concept of utopia. Much has been written about utopia and it has also been used in a good deal of fiction. I will touch on some of this literature in order to articulate some working meaning of utopia. Working from Western Marxism, especially Ernst Bloch and his interpreters, I trace the idea of utopia as the possibility of hope during a time of oppression. For Bloch, this utopic moment is a critique of the present and an expression of promise. I will sketch this out in the first section of the essay. In the second section, I explore what happens to the idea of utopia when situated in Latin America and how it is reshaped through the lens of the "coloniality of power." Coloniality of power, a concept developed by Aníbal Quijano, identifies the racial, political, cultural, intellectual, and social hierarchical orders imposed by European colonialism in Latin America and, at the same time, constructing "modernity," "America," "Europe" and the "Other." All things European became a universal cultural model at the expense of natives' modes of knowing and producing knowledge (Walsh, "Shifting" 224). Through the maturing of coloniality of power as a concept, utopia as initially articulated loses its universalism,

acknowledges its roots in European intellectual projects, and can become part of the critique of modernity and the possibility of a non-Eurocentric and critical dialogue with alterity.[3] As Quijano reminds us, "[t]he colonizers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning" ("Coloniality"169), the goal is to move beyond these categories. For this reason, the second section of this essay plays with utopia as articulated in Latin America.

Utopia, Initial Steps[4]

The concept of utopia has a long history in European thought, making any definition incomplete. From medieval Christian thought to contemporary discussions of dystopia, utopia has been used in many fashions (Manuel and Manuel 4; Sargent 10-32). These multiple functions and long history have laden utopia with a wide variety of meanings. For this reason, Frank and Fritzie Manuel write that utopia is "shrouded in ambiguity" and, therefore "acquires plural meanings" (5). Miguel Abensour adjoins that Thomas More's usage suggests a playfulness to utopia -- as a place where everything is good, a place of bliss, and nowhere ("Persistent" 406). Therefore, we should not impose any rigid definition of utopia. My preferred solution is to follow Russell Jacoby's usage: "Utopia here refers not only to a vision of a future society, but a vision pure and simple, an ability, perhaps willingness, to use expansive concepts to see reality and its possibility" (105). Utopia becomes present when individuals challenge official life formulating community and laying claim to other possible albeit temporary worlds, and when praxis engages in changing the world (Benzaquén, 149-150). Thus, utopia manifests itself as a faculty when alienated people participate in unhindered dialogue, debate, and activity, fostering a temporary but unstable unity resulting in a provisional but genuine democracy. Utopia becomes possible when people subvert the day-to-day practices that uphold normal social and political operations. For this reason, utopia is unique, unreproducible, and momentary.

There is a tendency to think of utopia as fantasy and unrealistic. This results from the structures that society constructs around us. Cesar Gilabert writes that in order to understand utopia, we need to recognize that societies create imaginary relations in order to comprehend and control real conditions: He continues

> [t]o maintain the conditions necessary for its reproduction, society constructs sets of images, representations, symbols, and signs that individuals then use to communicate, define their goals and possibilities, values, and hopes; it can almost be said that this production of imagination, in the final analysis, corresponds to what has been called the structure or base of society" (my translation) (9-10).

We might add, following Peter McLaren's discussion on schooling, that society implants a "ritual rhythm" in our nervous system:

> We are ontogenetically constituted by ritual and cosmologically informed by it as well. All of us are under ritual's sway; absolutely none of us stands outside of ritual's symbolic jurisdiction. In fact, humanity has no option against ritual. (34)

Ritual or the imaginary is reinforced by an activist state in its defense of society's economic, political, social, psychological, and ideological structures. This institutional imaginary (Castoriadis), however, can be challenged by alternative imaginaries that are typically framed as wishful and unrealistic.

How can what is stamped as unreal and seemingly fanciful become possible and thereby challenge patterns and rituals that are fundamental to our lives? Ernst Bloch's concept of "not yet" can help us respond to this query. The not yet is a hope based on possible futures that lie dormant in the remnants of the past (possibility, tendency, and latency) (Thompson, "Religion" 91); hope is drawn from a sea of possibilities that human needs articulate through living (Giroux and McLaren 146). Hope is an expression of what is really possible based on the contradictions of everyday living (Levy 176). Utopia is, therefore, as real as any presently unfolding possibility since it is grounded in the multi-possibilities of the past. Levitas writes "For Bloch, reality is essentially unfinished and concrete utopia is important precisely because it is a possible future (or a range of possible futures) located within the real" (72).[5] For this reason, interpreters of Bloch write about "remembering the future." This is possible because "reality" is not what it is but includes what is becoming and what might become. Utopia is then a process that begins with a critique of existing reality by revealing the unresolvable contradictions in capital.[6]

As a result, Bloch suggests, the world is not a finished product but is in a constant state of becoming of which utopia is but one possibility (Levitas 70). Levy points out that Bloch shifted epistemology from "become" to "becoming," focusing on the not yet (180). For Bloch, the not yet is an inarticulate future that arises from a multifarious reality that needs hope's anticipatory subjectivity. Hope, more than just an emotion, is a direct cognitive act grounded in the very being of humanity (Levitas 66; Mendes-Flohr 640). For Bloch, the not yet, like "concrete utopia," flows from a willful thinking that interacts with reality (Grollis 236) Or as Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren write, reality "is engaged as both a subjective and objective experience, and due to its unfinished nature it is seen as something that is always in a state of becoming" (146). Hope illuminates the possibilities of the present and informs us that there is an alternative (Mendes-Flohr 641). Human activity chooses which possible futures may become real. It is a "praxis-oriented category characterized by "militant optimism" (Levitas 17-18).

Utopia is, therefore, not some abstract, fanciful thinking about the future. Since hope permeates everyday consciousness, it is human action that draws out these unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, and abortive hopes buried in reality. This "surplus" provides future possibilities (Kellner). Thus, different futures depend on tapping this repository of possibilities. For Stephen Bronner, "[t]he future is thus no mechanical elaboration of the present" nor does it emerge in some linear fashion from the past (168). Thus, hope depends on the degree of consciousness generated in the present that flows from a critique of reality. For Bloch the Not Yet is embodied in a principle of hope, not merely as a blind optimism but as an educated hope (*docta spes*) based in the human desire for a better life" (Thompson, "Ernst Bloch and the Spirituality" 442). Nevertheless, as Adorno and Horkheimer remind us, the present retains the possibility of an intensification of barbarism (Benzaquén 154).

Consequently, utopian possibilities begin with the subjects' critical awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of reality. Or, as Bloch writes, "hope is in the darkness itself" (Qtd. by Grollios 234). The subject recognizes reality as both the static world we accept as normal and the realm of forgotten and lost futures. This second world is rarely visualized since our acceptance of static reality buries it in the realm of impossibilities and madness. Only a critical consciousness (coming from hope) is capable of breaking reality's mystification and allowing the subject to recognize these future possibilities. This critical consciousness arises as part of

the achievement of the movement toward the fullness of humanity through communication, resulting in solidarity and community (Giroux and McLaren 149). Thompson notes, for Bloch, the dialectical movement of history and nature is that of a processual dynamic driven by contingent events whose future can only be guessed ("Ernst Bloch and the Spirituality" 446; "Ernst Bloch and the Dialectics of Contingency", 292; Abensour, "Persistent" 409).

For Horkheimer, the only real possible choice, recalling Bloch's not yet, is to accept that the time for utopia is always now: "Present talk of inadequate conditions is a cover for the tolerance of oppression. For the revolutionary, conditions have always been ripe" (11). Horkheimer proposes that the first step in resistance is "to keep oneself from being deceived any longer" (19). Yet one must remember that revolution is not continuous with the past; it does not follow already existing trends or historical laws – nor is it necessary (Benzaquén 157). Utopia is the time/place when self-deceit is recognized and laughed away or, as Bloch recalls, when we escape the "giveness" of the "thought patterns of commodities" (qtd. by Grollis, 220). In "remembering the future," Marcuse suggests opening the space for real and universal tolerance. The ability to determine one's own life, together with the capability of being free with others, creates a society in which man is no longer enslaved by institutions ("Repressive Tolerance" 87; López Sáenz 87). This radical change must reach people's "biological dimension" to create a new sensibility. Here, the imagination, drawing on not yet, becomes the grinding force in the reconstitution of reality. Only then, can second nature be recognized for what it is —rationalization of the status quo.

Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the power of the institutional imaginary to replace hope with tolerance. Marcuse argues that in contemporary capitalist society, "[t]olerance toward what is radically evil now appears as good because it serves the coherence of the whole on the road to affluence or more affluence" ("Repressive Tolerance" 83). We come to accept things as they are, as the only way they can be ("Repressive Tolerance" 85). The choice becomes the practice of legitimizing the system. Castoriadis submits that politics becomes technique and bureaucratic manipulation (71) -- the administered society (Grollios 219). In another essay, Marcuse adds that once a specific morality is firmly established as a norm of social behavior, like McLaren's ritual rhythm, it becomes second nature to manage our "voluntary servitude" (*An Essay* 13). For this reason, the institutional imaginary denies hope and utopia. The second nature that comes from capitalism and the authoritarian state

burdens us with its inescapable regulations and rituals. In the process, utopia is maligned because no one really can or wants to visualize possibilities (Horkheimer 18). Hope is brushed aside and replaced by continuous discussions about the necessary or proper conditions for change. Today, the barriers of institutions (formal and informal) blind us to the possibility of fundamental change. Instead, we accept public policy and statistical surveys as the form of popular voice guiding change. Vasilis Grollios underscores that "it is our daily activity, our social doing, that is the true cause of our role as ghosts of capital" (214).

A Personal Interlude as Transition

When I first wrote about utopia, I was strongly influenced by Levitas's reading of Bloch about how concrete utopia is where human will and social process meet, where people make history, if not under conditions of their own choosing (19). For this reason, I thought that hope became possible when a community began to come to consciousness about the contradictions of their lives and see themselves and act as members of a community. I accepted that the utopic moment was when the ideal society of self-governing communities practicing direct democracy would disrupt the institutional imaginary: "the reorganization and reorientation of society by means of autonomous action of individuals" (Castoriadis 77). But the institutional imagery and its state apparatus crushed and ridiculed this moment. Therefore, I face a predicament – my loss of hope over the years. My pessimism is rooted in the failures of the various social and political movements of the post-US World War II era. For me, the incorporation of the Chicana(o) and Latina(o) movements into acceptable political options and Chicana(o)and Latina(o) Studies finding its space in the academy together with the negative impact of Marxism-Leninism on developing socialism made my expectation increasingly fanciful.

And yet, Abensour reminds me that one cannot allow catastrophe to nullify utopia: "For from catastrophe itself arises a new utopian summation, the "never again" that immediately expresses, beyond the banality of the formulation, the exigency of utopia, as if catastrophe had *a contrario* revealed the necessity of utopia" ("Persistent" 419). "The persistence of utopia" describes the impulse toward freedom and justice: "Despite all its failures, disavowals, and defeats, this impulse is reborn in history, reappears, makes itself felt in the blackest catastrophe, resists as if catastrophe itself called forth new summations

(Abensour, "Persistent" 407). Thompson notes that the unfolding of failure may be a precondition for something new and better ("Ernst Bloch and the Dialectics" 296).[7] Therefore, for those of us who are experiencing the neoliberal order in its splendor (de Sousa Santos *The End* 244), if we are to hope, it needs to be conjoined to disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. As Abensour warns us, this is not a triumphant persistent utopia but it is forever inscribed by the wounds of the past – a hope that is intimately bound to disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. I believe that the tension between hope and despair is necessary for our endeavor to explore utopic thinking in Latin America.

Utopia in Latin America

Let us turn to examine how decolonial Latin American scholars and activists regard hope and how they begin to construct what Abensour has called a new utopic spirit that permits blending hope with disappointment, disillusionment, and despair. My use of Latin American scholars and activists is limited. I rely heavily on thinkers and advocates who share assumptions proposed by Quijano's coloniality of power – "theorists that in refracting modernity through the lens of coloniality engage in a questioning of the spatial and temporal origins of modernity, thus unfreezing the radical potential for thinking from difference" (Escobar 180). It is a perspective that is critical of both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms, colonialism, and nationalism (Grosfoguel "The Epistemic" 212).[8] Much more work is needed to integrate other regional thinkers from the rest of the Global South, such as Aimé Césaire and Édouard Glissant (Kelley, "Introduction", *Freedom*; Ashcroft).[9]

Two reasons reinforce my belief that activists and scholars in Latin America offer a way to reframe utopia. First, we must appreciate that utopia was a product of Eurocentric thought. We cannot avoid the link between Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and the construction of America (O'Gorman, Dussel). More's imagination as his epistemology, like European colonizing societies, was rooted in Christian humanism, Greek thought, and notions of the "discovered" lands and their people (Cave; Fernández Buey 73-78). Christian Marouby writes,

> What is really at stake is not an empirical truth, but the validity of an epistemological model, a model according to which the savage must be represented as the opposite of civilized humanity, in a state of undifferentiated nature, beneath culture, precisely because it is on this

> representation of the savage that utopian colonialism relies for its theoretical justification (151).

Utopia and most other such texts assume knowledge as an un-positioned, un-located, neutral, and universalistic position (Grosfogel, "Colonial Difference" 208). Therefore utopia, as articulated by European thinkers, is part of the violent history and epistemology that invented America and can be said to be tainted with this original sin (Quijano, "Coloniality").[10] Susan Bruce notes, "Utopia might be argued "speak" the colonial discourse of the early sixteenth century" (25) – or what Christian Marouby terms utopian colonialism. Along these lines, Ávila Santamaría quotes Carlos Fuentes: "The invention of America is the invention of utopia: Europe desired a utopia, they found, named it, and, in the end, destroyed it" (108; my translation).

Second, utopia as formulated by Bloch and others is tied to European history and memory. If utopia reflects a specific class-historical standpoint (Jameson 47), it also mirrors a particular geographic and historical setting. We need to ask ourselves: what are the limitations that the not yet and its possible futures have when it rests on a particular dormant past? If "[r]eality holds within itself the anticipation of a possible future," Levy argues (177) then it is a reality that is tied to particular unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, and abortive hopes that flows from the experiences of the Global North. So, how do we translate the complexity and ambiguity of that reality to have meaning in Latin America? We need to reassess that particular past, memory, and heritage by centering it on fulguration, irruption, and redemption -- recalling Benjamin, to "brush history against the grain."[11] De Sousa Santos reminds us: "we need to reinvent the past as negativity, as a product of human initiative" (*Epistemologies*, 89) not on any abstract idea of progress. This will allow us to examine Europe's dream not as an all-embracing hope but as one of many hopes. As Abensour argues, "only a thought of utopia that does violence to itself, that includes the critique of utopia, acquires the hardness necessary to destroy the myths that ruin utopia" ("Persistent" 415). Therefore, memory (*anagnorisis)*, aside from being more than looking back, has also to be reaching out beyond a European horizon for it to be a process of transformation (Ashcroft 71).[12]

Let me begin with the concept "epistemological decolonization" (Quijano, "Coloniality" 176-78) -- to speak from the subaltern side of the "colonial difference" (Grosfogel, "Colonial Difference" 209) – to imagine a way to rearticulate utopia outside its

Eurocentric constraints. In the preface to *Epistemologies of the South,* de Sousa Santos[13] argues that three ideas underlie his text: comprehension of the world exceeds Western understanding of the world, global social justice demands global cognitive justice, and emancipatory transformations may follow other grammars and scripts others than those developed by Western-centric critical theory (*Epistemologies* viii, 133).[14] De Sousa Santos "proposes a *teoria povera*, a rearguard theory based on the experiences of large, marginalized minorities and majorities that struggle against unjustly imposed marginality and inferiority, with the purpose of strengthening their resistance" (*Epistemologies* ix). By beginning with this epistemological decolonization, we can then make sense of utopia in the Latin American setting.

In the struggle for *buen vivir*, de Sousa Santos continues, there is an "abyssal line" that separates the seductive from the scary, the no longer from the not yet, the Global North (capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, and satellite oppressions) from the Global South (the return of the humiliated and degraded – not as victims, but as victimized).[15] De Sousa Santos suggests that our limitations to rally for *buen vivir* is that we think/write/act from this side of the line, ignoring the transformative progressive practices occurring outside Europe or North America that are culturally/linguistically outside Eurocentric critical theory and left politics (*Epistemologies* 41). Yet, he does believe/anticipates there is a way for him and us to create new possibilities (democracy-without-end) based on the breaking of dogmas, the mission of rearguard theory, and the diversity of the world – a "tragic optimism" (*Epistemologies* x) – accepting the immense diversity of oppositional ideas and practices present. Quijano believes that Latin America "is beginning to constitute itself through new social practices of reciprocity, solidarity, equity, and democracy" ("Modernity" 155). This is not the America of modernity then but of resistance, liberation, and decoloniality (Ávila Santamaría 134), a point where human activity and utopian expectation come together.

The construction of America was an *epistemicide* – "[m]odern humanity is not conceivable without modern subhumanity" (de Sousa Santos *Epistemologies* 123). Modern Western thought privileges particular forms of thought and rejects all others as popular, lay, plebian, or Indigenous expressions not of knowledge but beliefs, opinions, intuitions, and subjective understanding – those on the other side of the abyssal line (*Epistemologies* 119). De Sousa Santos proposes an epistemological diversity based on the incompleteness of all knowledges and the ensuing dialogues and debates – as he underscores, this does not entail

accepting relativism or forming some mirror image between epistemologies of North and South. The issue is to erase the power hierarchies between epistemologies of the North and South (de Sousa Santos *The End* 7). Or as he writes in *Epistemologies of the South,*

> [t]he point is not to ascribe the same validity to every kind of knowledge but rather to allow for a pragmatic discussion among alternatives, valid criteria without immediately disqualifying whatever does not fit the epistemological canon of modern science (190).

Furthermore, knowledge diversity is not limited to content or interventions, but to the "ways in which it is formulated, expressed, and communicated" (*Epistemologies* 209). This allows us to acknowledge concepts that emerge from struggles of resistance against Eurocentric thought, and practices, like *ubuntu*, *sumac kaway*, *pachamama*, *chachawarmi*, *swaraj*, *ahimsa* (*The End* 9) or the Zapatista struggles.[16] For this reason, the history of the relations among different knowledges is central. As de Sousa Santos notes "[t]he crucial difference between abyssal and nonabyssal exclusion is that only the former is premised upon the idea that the victim or target suffers from an ontological *capitis diminution* for not being fully human, rather a fatally degraded sort of human being" (*The End* 23). Oppositional and alternative knowledges erupt in moments of action or reflection, points of risks and challenges, and therefore have distinct identities and articulations resulting from the needs and objectives of social struggle (*The End* 54, 118). But, as de Sousa Santos argues in *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, the depth of the separation of epistemologies of the South and North cannot be underestimated.

Thus, de Sousa Santos introduces "postabyssal thinking" -- a radical break of Western ways of thinking that flows from epistemologies of the Global South. Relying on forms of knowledge that does not reduce reality to what exists: "an expanded conception of realism that includes suppressed, silenced, or marginalized realities, as well as emergent and imagined realities" (*Epistemologies* 157).[17] Postabyssal thinking, like other epistemologies of the Global South, is rooted in social movements and organizations that wish to strengthen the struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy. This postabyssal is always co-knowledge emerging by knowing-with; de Sousa Santos calls this epistemic *minga*, a Quechua word that refers to voluntary, collective, and communitarian projects of social usefulness (*The End* 161).

Yet there needs to be some form of "intercultural translation," de Sousa Santos continues, that permits interventions among knowledges, especially Western and non-Western practices, as well among differing non-Western conceptions.[18] This collective intellectual and political project would promote "pluriversality": "A kind of thinking that promotes decolonization, creolization, or mestizajes through intercultural translation … In a world still dominated by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, postabyssal thinking and authority … point to a utopian horizon" (*The End* 8, 137). This result, as Raymond Rocco writes, from new strategies of political inclusion and rights claims that are rooted in the associational strategies and practices characterized by relations of trust, reciprocity, and mutual exchange, and that are developed within the sites of civil society in response to the effects of globalization and restructuring. (103)

Lived experiences that move us away from passivity, repression, isolation, inhibition, conformity, and submission emerge from collective action (Ávila Santamaría 69-70).[19]
Arturo Escobar underscores that European and Euro-American theorists seem unwilling to accept that the only way to transcend modernity is by accepting the colonial difference (186). He borrows Dussel's notion of "transmodernity" that "signals the possibility of a non-eurocentric and critical dialogue with alterity, one that fully enables "the negation of the negation" to which the subaltern others have been subjected, and one that does not see critical discourse as intrinsically European" (Escobar 195). As Walter Mignolo writes, transmodernity would be the overall orientation of decolonizing and of delinking[20] projects; an orientation toward pluriversality as universal project leading toward a world in which many worlds will co-exist (*Local Histories* 499) – avoiding a fetishized ill-defined liberal multicultural pluralism (Jacoby 33-55).

How do we reassess utopia through a decolonial lens? The possibility for hope may arise from Catherine Walsh's proposal "to make that lived an integral part of the learnings, unlearnings, and relearnings that decoloniality in/as praxis necessitates and commands" ("Decolonial Learnings" 604); to weave connections among the situated strategies and expressions of struggle, resistance, and re-existence that reflects the lives of communities historically subalternized by race, gender, class, and geopolitical location leading to distinct ways of knowing, being, and living (605, 607).[21] This approach helps disentangle ourselves from the projects of modernity and permits "a collective mode of thinking that is produced

and thought from difference, towards liberation" ("'Other' Knowledges" 12, 15). As examples, one can turn to various Indigenous struggles in the Americas – the Zapatistas' "*mandar obedeciendo*" in Mexico,[22] Bolivia's *Taller de Historia Oral Andina* use of Ayllu democracy (Mignolo, "The Zapatistas's") or the practices of Confederation of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador (Walsh "Life and nature"; Ávila Santamaría) – a multiplicity of expressions/practices of hope. I believe that these and many other cases, following Emmanuel Levinas, exhibit an ethics that preserves otherness as well as the paradox of the encounter – proximity and separation (Abensour, "Utopía" 7) and introduces nature with rights (Ávila Santamaría 271-90).[23] James Ordner adds that, "Bloch suggests that nature may contain a hidden subjectivity of its own that is working itself out through natural processes … Bloch believed nature deserved utmost respect as the only "real" site for working out any practical conceptualization of utopia" (54-55). Here we could put Bloch in conversation with *pachamama*[24] and *sumac kaway*[25] as one way to rearticulate utopia.

So what can we draw from *pachamama* and *sumac kaway* when exploring Latin American thinking on utopia? Ávila Santamaría notes, in his introduction, that *pachamama*, *sumac kaway*, and *suma qamaña* have elements to construct an Andean utopia (7); a possible door and road to transformation and emancipation, especially in light of climate and ecological disaster (209) -- as a utopia of this moment in time. Walsh points us in the direction of a conceptual model conceived and thought from the perspective of Abya Yala cosmology and philosophy that allows the construction of radically distinct social imaginaries, conditions, relations of power, and knowledge ("'Other' Knowledges" 11). The use of a "*pensamiento propio*" or indigenous thought, a different critical thought, has in recent years become a visible component in the struggles of Indigenous as well as African and Asian descent groups in the region. It is a consciousness that derives from the lived experience of colonial histories (453) and millenary struggles ("Shifting" 230-31). This "localization" disrupts, contests, and challenges Western modernity, rationality, and its nomos ("Life and nature" 94). Walsh adds,

> [t]o begin to "think thought" from "other" places and with intellectuals for whom the point of departure is not the academy but political-epistemic projects of decoloniality, might open paths that enable shifts in the geopolitics of critical knowledge as well as the building of a shared praxis of a very different kind" ("Shifting" 235).

In another essay, she calls this the "otherwise" ("Decolonial Learnings" 606) or "constructions and constellations taking form and force in the margins or exteriority" ("Life and nature" 95). She advances an "epistemic interculturality" that enables

> work towards the relating of knowledges within and from difference, a relating that requires an epistemic transformation in our very understanding of knowledge, philosophy and thought, and the continental rationalities that underlie this thinking. It is a relating that is based on the belief that western knowledge and continental thought are, in and of themselves, insufficient. (. "'Other' Knowledges" 17).

Thus, these localizations/practices can embody a form of thought and praxis that allows us to reconsider utopia – always remembering its ephemeral nature.

Latin American activists and scholars, like others from the Global South, are endeavoring to reevaluate utopia by going beyond European thought and restoring value to the struggles of communities whose heritage has been erased, especially native communities that have resisted coloniality. Chancosa, a native leader, states "*sumak kawsay* is not a closed process, exclusionary; it cannot be so because it is based on principles of inclusion and equity" (Ávila Santamaría 300). It is these utopic visions that could help us overcome the coloniality of power, of being, of knowledge, and of nature by permitting us to enter dialogue with other knowledges and emancipatory practices without doing the work of capital and fetishizing social forms (Grollis 67). As Walsh concludes to learn-unlearn-relearn, is to think and act

> not from the totality but from the pieces that make it and the cracks that break it; to sense, perceive, and grasp the light and life that appear despite the solidity of the (system's) wall, and to think of my own work, including in the university, as not just within the cracks but part of the crack-making…[to understand that] the cracks [are] not as solution but as strategy, process, and practice, and as a radically different way to think about the intersections of worlds. (607)[26]

The strategies that work toward utopia cannot be seen as singular or universal but as multiple acts (crack-making, if you wish) that simultaneously challenge the status quo, resurrect the not

yet (now writ large thanks to transmodernity and interculturality), and are always ready for disappointment.

However, it is important to note that there are potential traps and limitations to these practices that underscore that catastrophe is not far from this reevaluation of utopia. Walsh, for instance, warns that modernity/coloniality can accommodate these learnings, unlearning and relearning, re-imbedding them in Western epistemologies ("Decolonial Learnings" 607). In a 2015 essay, Walsh writes that certain Andean social movements opened new paths, reflected in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions (97); this shift proposed a two-front strategy (outside the state and inside government) as exemplified by the *Pachakutik* movement -- attempting Ávila Santamaría's "*constitucionalismo del oprimido*." Yet Walsh expressed concern about possible cooptation by neoliberal policies and Western logic. Dussel supplements that "Indigenous activism [*indigenismo*] is an exceedingly ambiguous phrase, and it has been used historically to integrate Indigenous populations into the mestizo world or into the official world of national entities" (Gómez 22). Fernando Coronil highlighted that the Latin American left is caught in a "crisis of futurity" – a tension between radical political imaginaries and accommodations with neoliberalism (Coronil et al., 5).[27] I think we can see the constitutionalist use of *sumac kawsay* as an example of the liberal state development vision – for the state and government, *buen vivir* becomes an ideology for a model of development based on extractive export such as oil (Ávila Santamaría 291-97). Current Latin American "progressive government" turn toward the left often accepts an unresolvable contradiction – to use state power to implement social programs to alleviate the worst consequences of neoliberalism while accepting the long-term imposition of capitalist accumulation" (Luisetti, Pickles, Kaiser, 46; Rocco, 65-68).

Conclusion

I do not suggest that what these Latin American activists and intellectuals have presented are possible futures that we can imitate. Our particular conditions and histories limit any particular applicability of what native activists in Ecuador, Bolivia, or Mexico have articulated and accomplished. Nor is what I presented as the only way to think about decoloniality. This is not another search for a better set of abstract universals but rather part of building relationality (Walsh and Mignolo 1). As Walsh writes

> it connects and brings together in relation – as both pluri- and interversals – local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives, and struggles against the modern/colonial order and for an *otherwise* (3).

The goal, as Walsh writes, is to think *with* the peoples, subjects, knowledges, and thought that confront, transgress, and undo modernity/coloniality (17-18). Many of us are engaged in the endeavor of building *el buen vivir*. But we do not know how to share/translate/interpret our different struggles, and often the institutional imagery, as it protects modernity/coloniality, guides us to create hierarchies of oppressions. Only in disclosing our disappointments, disillusionments, and despairs can we encounter the exigency of utopia. But as De Sousa Santos has written in multiple places, to "share" is no easy task.

Simultaneously, experiences in Latin America have taught us that capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism do not easily surrender. The institutional imaginary restrains our dreams for the *buen vivir*. Yet the unceasing resistance and re-existence by communities in Latin America underscore that the construction of utopias continues – a place and time where and when hope simultaneously comprehends and disappointments. They/We continue to struggle to enact dreams urging "us to improvise and invent, and recognizes the imagination [the marvelous] as our most powerful weapon" (Kelley *Freedom* 159) even in times of setbacks.[28] I think we can take the praxis and theorizing of *pachamama* and *sumac kawsay* or the Zapatista's "*mandar obedeciendo*" as expressions of Bloch's "the darkness of the lived moment" in which the truth of the situation cannot be discerned at that point but only in retrospect (Thompson, "Ernst Bloch and the Dialectics" 293). As he writes in an earlier essay,

> [t]he lived instant that is shrouded in darkness, the one we live but do not recognize, contains within it the prospect of a de-alienated universe, but only if we also comprehend both the real existing possibilities within it as well as the potentialities which might emerge from it (Thompson, "What Is" 35).

The new spirit of utopia allows a plurality of values, open to other utopic projects, one that is animated by the imaginations of the marginal, flowing from collective participation (debates and discussions), and the refusal to separate theory and praxis. But always remains out of reach, easily absorbed by "reality," and temporary. "Although the final destination may not be

clear, the sense of direction is toward justice, equality, freedom, diversity, and social and ecological harmony. The Left has no map, but it has a compass" (Coronil 154).

Notes

[1] The author would like to thank Raymond Rocco, Rafael Chabran, and Gabriel Soldatenko for taking time to read and comment on this essay.

[2] We should add that the expansion of capitalism impedes the ability to sustain hope (Ávila Santamaría, 171). Benzaquén writes "[t]he formation and expansion of capitalism repressed the utopian possibility in reason; it turned reason into unreason, survival into self-destruction, and utopia into myth" (Benzaquén 153).

[3] This is not a rejection of universals but recognition that what often has been portrayed as universal comes from the Western experience.

[4] In this section I borrow from my earlier essays.

[5] Thompson writes Bloch uses concrete utopia as "a growing together of tendencies and latencies within the relationship between material reality and human intervention which are always full with potential but which cannot be realised because the material conditions for their realisation is not yet complete" ("Religion") – the conceptual expression of the ontology of the not yet being ("Ernst Bloch and the Dialectics" 300).

[6] Another way to think about remembering is to trace the tension between *anamnesis* (recollection) and *anagnorisis* (recognition) as articulated in the works of Benjamin, Marcuse, and Adorno (Stewart, 27). Bloch focuses on *anagnorisis* as a way to understand memory as being more than a simple correspondence between past and present by the ability to wonder into the future by way of the past and present (Ordner, 41).

[7] Joe Davidson adds that Bloch by not looking at "hope's underside" seems to preclude the failure of hope (421). But Davidson is not giving up on Bloch. Rather he suggests that "Bloch's philosophy of hope cannot be fully understood without an account of disappointment" (Davidson, 423).

[8] For an overview of coloniality of power see essays in *Review* 25:3 (2002).

[9] See essays in *Utopian Studies* 30:1 (2019) and Ashcroft on world literature.

[10] As Quijano reminds us, coloniality of power was conceived, together with America and Western Europe, with the social category of "race" as the key element of the social classification of colonized and colonizers (171). Mignolo follows up "[t]hus, racism and the coloniality of being are one and the same cognitive operation entrenched at the philosophical level in the colonial matrix of power" (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 480). This gives historical depth and logical consistency to Fanon's notion of the *damné s*.

[11] It is clear that Bloch had a more intricate understanding of the past than I am writing here. Siebers notes that "heritage" is much more complicated that just passing on and accepting what went before. Rather heritage is only possible "to the extent that an unfinished, unrealized kernel in the past is understood and taken up in light of a possible fulfillment or redemption" (62). Thus the past carries a desire. Another way to sees this from the perspective of Latin America is how Glissant proposes a view of the past that projects into the future, "a prophetic vision of the past" (Ashcroft 72).

[12] At the same time, as Grosfogel reminds us the Global North's utopian thinking is in crisis; it cannot break out of abstract universals that characterize Eurocentric thinking ("Colonial Difference" 222). In fact, Mendieta points out that utopia have become the discourse of the status quo (226) that allows him to note Jürgen Habermas's discussion of the "exhaustion of utopian energies" in the present period or Étienne Balibar's narrowing of the concept of utopia (231; Johnson; Balibar). De Sousa Santos writes that "[t]he radical acknowledgement of said impossibility is all that is left from the radicalism of Western modernity" (*Epistemologies* 5).

[13] Often many of the intellectuals we use have been found wanting. I think we all need to converse about the relationship of the individual, the ideas that are produced, and our reading of their ideas.

[14] I have left to the side much of the methodological apparatus that de Sousa Santos developed in his *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicid*, such as epistemology of blindness, epistemology of seeing, sociology of absences, sociology of emergences, and ecologies of knowledges.

[15] This is not a presentation of binaries, but a rhetorical devise to highlight difference.

[16] Grosfoguel warns that knowledge produced from below is <u>not</u> an epistemic subaltern knowledge just because it comes from the Global South ("The Epistemic" 213).

[17] De Sousa Santos refers to this as "artisanal paths for artisanal futures" (*The End* 1). An artisanal knowledge proper to indigenous peoples and peasants, giving rise to new and complex epistemology blending oral and written texts (59). A knowledge that is mobilized not only on the basis of reasons, concepts, thoughts, analyses, and arguments but also by emotions, affections, and feelings (97). This will allow us to follow de

Sousa Santos to reinvent the past so that we can think social transformation and emancipation (*Epistemologies* 74). For more on postabyssal thinking see *The End* 143- 83.

[18] De Sousa Santos warns that intercultural translation can become a colonial kind of work as well (*Epistemologies* 227).

[19] For Rocco and Maldonado-Torres, the first task is to hear from the subaltern that will lead to unlearn imperial privileges (145, 306).

[20] We might borrow Mignolo's interpretation of Quijano's idea of *desprenderse* (delinking): Mignolo develops that "[d]e-linking then shall be understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality, that is, to pluri-versality as a universal project" (a delinking from the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality" (*Local Histories* 463).

[21] This resonates with Ashcroft's understanding of "postcolonial utopianism."

[22] There is a wide literature on the Zapatista struggle and meaning of Zapatismo. Luisetti, Pickles, Kaiser explores how "*mandar obedeciendo*" challenges the union of representative democracy and neoliberal global capitalism (48) and opens a possible alternative -- oppositional autonomy (power from below) from sovereignty ("*mandato-obedecer*"). We could explore Zapatismo through Rocco's mechanism of "mutuality" (203- 05).

[23] For Abensour, Bloch shares with Levinas, a view of utopia that, like the Other escapes ontology and "fully becomes what it is, a thought or form of thought that is "otherwise than knowing" ("Persistent" 410). Dussel, according to Escobar, adds that Levinas's notion of exteriority arises from thinking of the Other from an ethical and epistemological perspective; the Other becomes the original source of an ethical discourse vis a vis a hegemonic totality (Escobar 186).

[24] *La pachamama* is the name given to the Andean goddess that represents the earth. Many indigenous communities base their concerns on the environment on these beliefs. Critical Latin American thought uses *pachamama* to understand the relation between nature and humanity leading to the notion of the "rights of the land" and find expression in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador (Ávila Santamaría 245- 90).

[25] *Sumak* (or *sumac*) *kawsay* is a neologism, developed from two Quechua words, which are used by political movements to balance an alternative form of development with the need to see humanity as a collective sustaining ethical values -- the *buen vivir* (Ávila Santamaría, 290-333). Ávila Santamaría points out the many disputes over the meaning and application of *sumac kaway* (305- 33).

[26] While I do not think that Walsh is in conversation with folks that follow Open Marxism, I think they share a vision of "cracks." As Grollis, following the work of John Holloway, writes: "revolution is the opening of cracks, it is the letting of the negation of an irrational rationality burst out of us, it is the revolution in everyday living" (258).

[27] Coronil "was fascinated by the search for a utopian project grounded in this world, by how struggles for alternative futures always take place under conditions that can then themselves give rise to as yet unimagined possibilities" (Coronil et al. 1).

[28] Robin Kelley reminds us that Suzanne Césaire wanted her readers to embrace "the domain of the strange, the marvelous and the fantastic" ("Introduction" 15) so that the Césaires could theorized the domain of the marvelous (14, 16).

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