

# Decolonizing South-South Cooperation: An Analytical Framework

Written by Marina Bolfarine Caixeta and Maria do Carmo Reboucas dos Santos

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## Decolonizing South-South Cooperation: An Analytical Framework

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MARINA BOLFARINE CAIXETA AND MARIA DO CARMO REBOUCAS DOS SANTOS, APR 11 2022

**This is This is a pre-print excerpt from *Decolonizing Politics and Theories from the Abya Yala*. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.**

To think South-South Cooperation (SSC) from a decolonial perspective, we intend to introduce some critical studies that originated in the Global South to question the notions of development and international cooperation. As formulated by the Modernity/Coloniality Group (which was a working group that led to the surge of decoloniality as a research area, composed by prestigious decolonial authors like Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, María Lugones, Arturo Escobar, etc.), the Latin American version of postcolonialism, there are political and epistemological proposals in our discussion. We have identified two main debates that emerge from decolonial studies: post-development and the common. We start from the assumption that Latin America and the Caribbean make important contributions in the field of SSC, which is the case in terms of technical cooperation initiatives through which countries share know-how and relevant experiences for the implementation of public policies – and of a Southern identity that allows critical reactions to the status quo of the world order. In this chapter, we intend to address epistemological contributions and practices of different social groups to highlight some important aspects of SSC to be based on a new analytical criterion.

### South-South Cooperation as a decolonial tool

South-South Cooperation is understood as an opportunity for the Global South to change the global order and innovate the International Development Cooperation (IDC) system. It represents a new trend in the twenty-first century. Since the Second World War marked a parameter of hegemonic development (Santos 2017), the Global South has emerged as an identity in politics in reaction to inequalities in the international and domestic political plans of states (Menezes and Caixeta 2021). Forged in a diverse group of countries, SSC has consolidated itself as an expression of solidarity between the peoples and governments of the South and as a strategy of economic and political autonomy, through horizontal relations and mutual strengthening.

This alliance meant the convergence of the national interests of the countries of the South in international politics and, also, the introduction of new worldviews from the periphery concerning development policies. In the present 21st century, the rise of the South was a phenomenon that manifested itself both at the political level, through SSC, and at the academic level, through the Epistemologies of the South (Caixeta 2015).

In the context of Southern Epistemologies, in Latin America, we had the decolonial turn – which promoted a liberating praxis. South-South Cooperation, according to this perspective, should be able to value different worldviews, especially those that have been silenced for a long time. Through social theories and concepts proposed from elsewhere (the Global South), an engaged knowledge is sought to update the critical tradition of Latin American thinking – offering historical reinterpretations and problematizing the issues of the continent.

It defends the epistemological, theoretical and political “decolonial option” to understand and act in a world marked by the persistence of global coloniality [overcoming the coloniality of power, knowledge and being] at different levels

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of personal and collective life' (Ballestrín 2013, 89–90).

However, the heterogeneity of what is conceived by the Global South, the crises of capitalism, and the search for the realization of national geostrategic interest places SSC under several and serious criticisms. Therefore, the principles agreed at the Bandung Conference (1955), as well as in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (PABA, 1978) – and reaffirmed in the Nairobi Declaration (2009) – are at risk of being discredited by a SSC that just replicates dominant practices. Note, for example, that SSC continues to be thought and carried out by the elites of the countries of the South, with a state-centric approach, mediated by economic interests and international political conditionality that disregards different worldviews in the initiatives proposed by new historical subjects from the Southern countries (Kabunda 2011; Chidaushe 2010; Santos and Caixeta 2018).

Conceiving SSC as an opportunity to decolonize development practices, according to Santos (2017, 272), implies,

re-discussing the role of emerging countries in search of their strategic autonomy and the role of poor countries in the pursuit of their national interests, and more than anything reconsiders the hegemonic capitalist development model. In addition, it imposes a real and effective participation of the societies of those countries in this process.

Only as a means of collective autonomy, as proposed by Escobar (2017) and when inspired by its foundational postulates, can SSC be a mechanism to promote the decolonial turn (Surasky, 2013) and to reform and innovate towards new practices, new narratives, and new actors (Muñoz 2016).

A new emancipatory social imagery should be able to produce more just societies. According to Villoro (1998), power and value are equally important, as justice should be a value for seizing power and a goal. Otherwise, if power is pursued as the only goal, there is domination, violence, and injustice. Counterpower, in this sense, shall be necessary, since it is conceived as peoples' power, against domination and exploration and acts on behalf of the common good.

Thus, we propose to inquire about the ways in which SSC can benefit from Latin American and Caribbean experiences hitherto silenced, both theoretical and social practices, such as proposals on post-development (alternative to development) and the realization of communal life. We assume that Latin America and the Caribbean have always reacted to the unique model of hegemonic development in their experience as a peripheral region in the world-system (Wallerstein 2000).

In this regard, authors and peoples of the region have been proposing new concepts, political slogans, and analytical categories, which we believe offer the potential to guide the practice of SSC. This is the case of the *Quilombismo* of the Black population in Brazil, the *Buen Vivir* of the Andean Indians, the Life Projects in Colombian experiments, and the Zapatismo of the Mexican region of Chiapas. In addition to others, we believe they put these two notions in perspective and justify this debate. For subordinate groups, living with the fact of domination and enduring in the midst of it necessarily entails both resistance and novelty and innovation (Escobar 2017, 35–41) (Our translation).

Therefore, we present this debate as follows: in the first part, we present post-development as a potential transformative framework to rethink development as an objective of public policies and, consequently, of SSC; in the second, we deal with the common as a means of redefining the practice of SSC, and in the third, we mapped out some theoretical elaborations and political struggles in the region. In the end, we present contributions to an analytical framework in order to rethink SSC as an international mechanism that can change IDC practices and challenge the current world order.

## South-South Cooperation in post-development

Post-development in recent decades has become a field of study. From the critique of hegemonic development as a discourse of power, the perspective of post-development can be understood as the need to decentralize development as a characteristic of societies and countries to question the fundamental discourses for promoting development – the ideas of growth, progress, and modernity – and weaving a fabric with transformative initiatives of

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an alternative, plural, and autonomous nature. The idea of *fabricas* has been widely mentioned in the field of post-development, alluding to a collective, creative construction, based on popular and community wisdom, such as Miñoso, Correal and Muñoz (2014). Svampa (2017) considers that the views of post-development are constituted by a diversity of currents with decolonizing ambitions, which propose to dismantle and disable the instruments of power, myths and imaginary that are the basis of the current model of development.

The most recent literature on the subject, present in the book *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*, inscribes post-development in the practical and epistemic-political field that implies a wide cross-cultural compilation of concrete concepts, worldviews, and practices from around the world, challenging the modernist ontology of universalism in favor of a multiplicity of possible worlds (Kothari et al 2019). Far from being a recipe to exit hegemonic development, or what they will call inadequate development, the authors rather recognize the diversity of people's views on planetary well-being and their skills in protecting it. They seek to ground human activities in the rhythms and frames of nature, respecting the interconnected materiality of everything that lives. This indispensable knowledge needs to be held safely in the commons, not privatized, or commodified for sale (Kothari et al 2019).

In a previous work (Santos and Caixeta 2018), we already indicated the power of the post-development to inspire new alliances and practices for SSC. In order to contribute to emancipatory processes that incorporate and recognize more supportive values and more community principles, we treat cooperation between peoples (and nations) as something more advanced in relation to cooperation between countries and governments. As Escobar (2017) proposes, we are witnessing a civilizational transition that brings three different models of cooperation: development assistance, that of traditional cooperation, in which the World Bank and conventional NGOs are involved; cooperation as/for social justice, eminently based on the promotion and achievement of human rights and environmental sustainability with a strong role for different groups in society, such as OXFAM; and cooperation for autonomy or solidarity cooperation linked to post-development proposals for which the binarism of we and the others in the North and South give way to alliances and collective action networks. In the latter, public policies would be proposed from the community level, rather than planned at the state level.

In this framework, we expect that SSC, based on the ideas of the Global South, will be able to achieve and constitute a cooperation for autonomy and solidarity. In doing so, from Escobar (2017) we bring Table 2.1, which highlights the meaning of each model of cooperation and the reference for development to be promoted; the direction of the intervention initiative processes; and the forms of relationship between parties that cooperate, as well as the degree of reciprocity between them (vertical/horizontal). We conceive these three models of cooperation as a continuum with the aim of challenging the cooperation of the countries and peoples of the Global South.

SSC hosts the potential for a solidarity cooperation type, considering its principles of solidarity, respect and horizontality and its objective of contributing to the promotion of international peace, common prosperity, and well-being of all, as per the Final Communiqué of the Afro-Asian Conference – also known as the Bandung Conference (1955). Thus, as an international mechanism at the service of post-development, it would take place through collective processing between autonomous social groups or societies, based on plural and innovative realities, knowledge, and experiences, against forms of domination, dependence, subjugation, and exploitation. Surasky (2013) argues that SSC can be a decolonial instrument. From what the Global South identity represents, it can become the possibility of subverting the modern-capitalist-colonial civilization based on the phenomena of globalization and development. 'Today we see that, as part of SSC's own discourse, visions of the South on what we call development are beginning to emerge that could well be read as attempts to respond to this call' (Surasky 2013, 8).

In this regard, recovering what was hidden or denied by colonization allows us to rethink these hegemonic conceptions, from a perspective located on the periphery of the international system and from the living experiences with marginality. Therefore, it is important to challenge SSC from the discussion on post-development. Albeit in a propaedeutic way, it is claimed for this new cooperative mechanism the rescue of alternative experiences and knowledge regarding global well-being, both introducing new technical knowledge to be exchanged and new actors participating in cooperative activities.

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A starting point for seeking an approach between SSC and post-development, would be to think of them from the connection between two sides, that is, to consider the principles of SSC at the same time as the different social struggles and longings for well-being coming from the social groups that inhabit and identify themselves with the Global South.

Although nuanced by interests of national gains, the SSC's principles express a humanist guideline of the alliance of the countries of the South. They constitute a line of political action guided by solidarity, reciprocity, and horizontality, underlying the practice of countries in various areas, whether in the political, economic, or social scope (Santos 2017). As a principle, the solidarity since Bandung, from a post-developmental matrix, revitalizes its potential as a political category with the strength to bring together practices and theories. In this way we can count on an SSC founded on multiple rationalities and that strengthens autonomy, knowledge, and the sense of the common.

## **The common in South-South Cooperation**

Suggesting a debate that proposes to combine SSC with the notion of the common, means to think of post-development in countries (nations) as a global common. South-South Cooperation as a proposal to reform the International Development Cooperation system (IDC) aims to innovate cooperative practices and, at the same time, to propose effective interventions in the realization of human well-being. This implies that there is both a challenge to rethink cooperation processes and to introduce new development conceptions.

However, at the present moment, SSC is linked to procedures (logical framework of projects), institutionalities (goals and objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs) and evaluation criteria coming from the traditional cooperation practice – the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Therefore, SSC seems to lack a greater link with its initial purposes and, therefore, reproduces what has been going on in the IDC. The commitment to the Global South identity, markedly plural, requires new references.

Thus, in light of the common, SSC is conceived as a cooperative mechanism for the rescue of alternative experiences and knowledge. To this end, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean not only reflects on the notion of the common, but also accumulates social experiences, usually within the so-called traditional societies of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples (and their diasporas) that resisted to maintain their culture and its connection with the land (territorialization) and with community principles of collective life.

As opposed to the idea of hegemony, for which the sense of the common is imposed from certain logics and lifestyles, the common is understood here as a notion to something to be constructed from the communities. In this sense, by aggregating different societies around what is common to all – common problems, interest, resources – paradoxically we can promote pluriversal politics coming from plural worlds which depend on the communities' decisions. The principle of the pluriverse brings the idea of a world in which several worlds fit, a Zapatista motto that inspired political ontology (the ontological turn) in Latin American social thought. Realities are plural and always in the making, that idea has a profound political consequence (Escobar, 2020 viii), since it relates to the how to build the common, more than to decide the common is.

Based on Latin American thought, Torres-Galarza (2018) proposes to move from common sense to the sense of the common notion. He explains that for Gramsci, common sense has historical, ideological, and political characteristics, as there are elements of human experience and its ability to observe or perceive reality without intermediation. For this reason, the common can acquire a conservative or emancipatory sense in the world order depending on the social position of those who define or use it and how they define or use it. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, the sense of the common must be discussed based on its attempt to gain autonomy and authenticity in the world order.

Therefore, overcoming a global common sense that naturalizes domination and neutralizes the possibilities of being free, Torres-Galarza (2018) suggests that it is important to understand the sense of the common as a force to create a new reality that is more potent and more satisfying for humanity. Considering this, one must break with the common

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imposed by capitalism, and that attributed the meaning of human existence to the market and consumption as something common in globalization. So, we must generate the sense of the common in a common sense, this time attributed by the Latin American perspective,

We speak of a common sense of the commons, of conscience and will about the new – not determined only by the past but acting in the present with a vision of the future. This is a sense of the common that determines us as communities, as cultures and as peoples, with ways of life and relationships between human beings and nature. It is a sense of the common about the power of the commons. [...] It is about contesting the logic of the market from culture and community, contesting the meaning of having from being. (Torres-Galarza 2018, 11) (Our translation).

Such a proposal is convergent with the political project of the common by Dardot and Laval (2015). In a vast genealogy, in temporal terms (but not in spatial terms since Latin American literature on the subject was not considered by the French authors) political proposals instrumentalize the common in the view of the 21<sup>st</sup> century revolution. The common would be a new political reason to replace the neoliberal reason, which is aligned with the decolonial turn that claims the recognition of the colonial difference and the persistence of coloniality among the peoples of the South in the modern-capitalist-world-system.

Aiming at building the sense of the common according to Dardot and Laval (2015) would follow these propositions: (1) the common must be the foundation and orientation for action in favor of the common good; (2) it must guide the collective's deliberative activities in a participatory and inclusive space; (3) it brings together all groups of society around a social political obligation in co-activity and co-obligation, against the idea of belonging (national, ethical, human); (4) as part of a process to achieve a common good elected by society as a whole – it is not, therefore, an object, not even an end, but the means; (5) as a social category, it is opposed to the legal and economic category that distinguish certain goods by their characteristics or intrinsic properties, as in 'common good' or 'common heritage of humanity' that have logics adverse to the common interest; (6) as a collective practice of collectivizing, it allows communities to further decide the common character of things, knowledge and practical experiences; (7) as a practical way of governing, it institutionalizes common goods and purposes of population groups in order to make it live and exist; (8) operates both in the social sphere and in the sphere of public policy, besides it is not incompatible with private and public interests, but it must be prioritized in relation to them (in other words, the common seeks that public policies do not harm people for prioritizing private interests); (9) as a political principle, it preaches the democracy of the commons as a space to deal with public affairs and socioeconomic exchanges in a federative logic, and (10) as a social principle, it refuses social relations from the premise of the inappropriate (of what should be reserved for common use) and definition of the social destination.

Thus, one could extract from the notion of the common ideas to recreate reality with authenticity, rooted in the community(ies) to which, from which and with which collective actions are given meaning. Always from the bottom-up, the scope of the initiatives must be designed and decided as a way of making and conceiving politics in plural contexts. In this regard, what is common would come to question SSC as a mechanism for the renewal of the IDC system.

In order to put SSC to the test of this conceptual-theoretical framework, we ask: How can SSC serve to achieve the common at the global level? How can it support the construction of a sense of the common in the various contexts in which it is practiced? To enable the instrumentalization of the common by SSC, also considering the post-development framework, we propose to think of it from three constitutive elements: its objective (the well-being for all), its process (total horizontality in reciprocity) and its principle (solidarity and otherness). Figure 2.1 outlines this proposal.<sup>37</sup>

In line with what Dardot and Laval (2015) signaled, one wonders in the context of the unifying globalization of European universalism, whether there are still social forces, alternative models, or modes of social organization that would allow us to think of an alternative scenario to that of capitalism. To guide this reflection, we will present some social experiences from the Latin American and Caribbean region from which we can extract potent categories, which have both a practical-political as well as an academic-conceptual character.

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## Latin American social experiences

The notions of common and post-development built from the Latin American context mobilize both practical and theoretical cases. It should be noted that they should not be restricted only to the rural, Indigenous or Black groups described here, but extended to any and all initiatives that seek social well-being from their peripheral and marginal condition or situation.

Supported by Escobar (2017), we defend the leadership of those who, without an ancestral mandate of living together as a community, as is the case of native-Indigenous and *Quilombola* peoples, live displaced in liberal and modern worlds that exclude and marginalize them, as migrants, internal and external, who inhabit the periphery of large cities. These social groups belong to the age of disconnection and demand recommonalization and reterritorialization. Thus, we believe that authenticity and creativity can be rescued to imagine new territories of existence and new ways of being and living in favor of an alternative world.

### *Quilombismo*

Based on the cultural experience, historical time, and praxis of the Black community, the *Quilombismo* proposed by Abdias Nascimento questions the bases of the Brazilian development model and its racial devices that exclude Blacks from the benefits of development, elaborates a theoretical-practical proposal of a social, political, and economic transformation and articulates a logic of the communal inspired by quilombos. The word *Quilombo* originally refers to a place where runaway Blacks took shelter, even in the period of slavery. But since the 1920s, this word has taken on new political meanings of resistance. Nascimento, though, is the one responsible for the perception and initial registration of *Quilombismo* as an 'emerging concept of the historical-cultural process of the Afro-Brazilian population' (Santos and Santos 2020).

The basic purpose of *Quilombismo* is to promote human happiness, based on a free, just, egalitarian, and sovereign society, through the implantation of a community-based cooperative economy, the collective use of land and production goods, harmonious coexistence with nature and balanced with all forms of existence (Nascimento 1980). Through a manifesto, Nascimento establishes principles and purposes that guide *Quilombismo* such as, for example, a community-based cooperative economy with sharing of results of collective work, and with land and factories considered national property for collective use and management; and, in the field of the environment, a human existence designed in a relational and harmonious way with nature in all its manifestations.

With the demand for a knowledge and experience that is historically and culturally referenced in the quilombos, Nascimento also gives us the password to think about new forms of life and social organization based on an ancestral key. For him, 'the rescue of our memory means rescuing ourselves from oblivion, from nothingness, from negation, and reaffirming our presence in pan-African history and in the universal reality of human beings' (Nascimento 2019, 309). Therefore, *Quilombismo* was born from the effort to register concepts and experiences of the Black Brazilian population – going back to slavery and the colonial period, with its history of struggles, resistances, reinvention and experiences of autonomy.

Thus, from the idea of the quilombos, the community is part of a whole – which is why as a political platform recognizes the need to think about building alternatives to development based on an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-sexist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and anti-land-ownership model. *Quilombismo* also prefigures a vision of society, rather than prescribing a model to be followed. Although it is inspired by the organization of what was *Quilombo dos Palmares* in Brazil, it is neither a return to a past that no longer exists – even though that past is essential for the construction of this proposal – nor an essentialist view of life in quilombos.

Contemporary *quilombos* have their contours marked by heterogeneity – the result of historical resistance processes. Thus, as a political principle, they form another contribution to help think about new forms of social organization, respect for difference, well-being and happiness, as alternatives to the hegemonic model of development. As a decolonizing perspective, in line with the ideas of post-development, they present new horizons of civilizational possibility, based on a communal and relational life with nature and ancestry.

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## *Buen Vivir*

The concept of *Buen Vivir* has always existed in the social organizations of the peoples of the Americas. It gained political and academic centrality in the 1990s by means of 'alterworldist' movements that proposed another possible world. This came in the midst of criticisms of the failure of the idea of progress embedded in the hegemonic capitalist development model and the environmental crisis due to the commodification of multiple spheres of nature.

There are at least three approaches to *Buen Vivir*. First, a generic use associated with advertising purposes. A second focuses on alternatives to development – still in the field of modernity and often based on the claims of leftist traditions. Finally, a third approach comes as a critique of development by elaborating alternatives that are both post-capitalist and post-socialist, located beyond the matrix of modernity (Gudynas 2014, 136).

The most well-known expressions of *Buen Vivir* refer to the proposals of the peoples of Ecuador and Bolivia, respectively, *sumak kawsay* in *Kichwa* and *suma qamaña* in *Aymara*, have become normative references. Hence, it was incorporated into state speeches and started to guide national development plans. After the first moment of euphoria, its real implementation in these countries started to be questioned as a simulation and the *Buen Vivir* paradigm itself lost social credibility. In addition, some academics consider it essentialist, without practical applicability and restricted to a philosophical idea (Sólon 2019, 22).

The idea of *Buen Vivir* intertwines multiple ontologies and diverse types of well-being that adopt different formulations in each social and environmental circumstance in which it finds itself. It is a common platform based on the practice of interculturality that aims for the future to build alternatives to development (Gudynas 2011). *Buen Vivir* launches the challenge of living with multipolarity and learning to interrelate, being more concerned with well-being (the essence of the person) than with well-living (the condition of the person) (Solon 2019).

Recent studies continue to bet on this proposal as a possible platform for building changes. The essence of *Buen Vivir* remains and can reorient imaginary alternative systemic practices around the world, as a current development model (Acosta 2014; Gudynas 2014; Santos and Caixeta 2018; Santos 2018; Sólon 2019). It is not a purely Andean political-cultural project, as it is influenced by critical currents in Western thought and aims to influence global debates on development. Discussions about what form it could take in modern urban contexts and in other parts of the world, such as Europe, are gradually advancing (Escobar 2017).

With the potential to reorient alternative systemic forms in the field of post-development, there is an ethic of overcoming statism, valuing the local and the community, protecting nature, recognizing and respecting interculturality and plurality, intent on depatriarchalization with the idea of *Pachamama* and guaranteeing real democracy (Sólon 2019).

## *Life Projects*

The Life Projects were thought, from the ontological turn, as a theoretical landmark of the region. It is noted in it the valuation of the pluriverse and the relationality existing between living and non-living beings (the interbeing). It is a Latin American methodology for the transition design with a view to the realization of different desires and life plans.

Instead of the production of knowledge (epistemology) and certain knowledge connected to a particular society (episteme), the ideas of different social groups about the types of entities that they consider to exist in the real world are valued. Thus, it defends the right to territory, and its emphasis is on the worlds and ways of building that world, both in the practices of power present in this collective creative process and in studies on interrelationships in the world, including conflicts between different worldviews.

The initiative Life Projects Network proposed by Marcos Blaser brings together a variety of experiences in the Americas that seek to promote practices in favor of the good life, coming from different places, historical trajectories and conceptions about reality. Created to oppose national development projects (with political orientations from the right or from the left), it aims to promote the exchange between different initiatives and shows that the good life is

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possible beyond the current developmentalist vision.

The practical exercise involving Colombian intellectual Arturo Escobar and his team in the Cauca River valley in Colombia is part of this initiative. This is a response to the exhaustion of the development model in force since 1950. The agro-industrial complex based on large investments with the participation of the World Bank whose model came from the United States (Tennessee Valley Authority) for sugarcane and livestock plantations, the Cauca Regional Autonomous Corporation (CVC) caused great ecological devastation, massive displacement of peasants and Afro-descendant communities to the periphery of Cali – the second largest in urban Latin America, after Salvador in Bahia-Brazil, whose population is more than 50% Black. Thus, the project sought to promote the autonomy of Afro-descendant communities in the region, especially activists in the Black Communities Process (PCN).

This exercise was dedicated to re-imagining the region as a bastion of agroecological production of organic fruits, vegetables, grain and exotic plants, in a multicultural format by small and medium-sized agricultural producers through a decentralized functional network of peoples and cities. It was a life project developed for the resident population, in a social and territorial reconfiguration of great proportions, which involved different social groups.

Thus, more than thinking and proposing models of development projects, Escobar (2017) concludes, based on this experience, that creating transition projects (drawing) means coordinating plural interests. There are, therefore, two crucial tasks: assembling a co-design team and creating a design space where collaborative design work advances. In a kind of laboratory, these spaces built the construction of a world view and outlined what is expected to be projected in reality. These projects take place through conversations organized for coordinated action in sub-regions – such as that in the city of the valley (Cali).

Life projects, as a possibility of real imagination, evolve from both the continuous generation of contexts, capable of feeding the idea of a transition, and from concrete projects aimed at developing certain aspects of design for social innovation. To guide such an attempt, Escobar (2017) proposes some objectives and activities in the form of a political-ontological declaration in favor of the pluriverse, a landmark that considers other development paradigms and the sustainability of life, that call us to think and act with the heart and mind (*co-razonar*), as a way of ‘thinking-feeling with the Earth’ (*sentirpensar con la Tierra*) inspired in Zapatism (Escobar 2014).

## *Zapatismo*

One of the most well-known and important characteristics left by Zapatismo as a social movement is autonomy, a key concept of ontological political practice. As an ethnic-territorial movement, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) started a process of constituting one of the most important experiences of contemporary Indigenous autonomy. ‘No other insurgent movement would elicit such continental and global solidarity, nor would it have such an impact on the emerging contentious subjectivity.’ (Svampa 2016, 332) According to Escobar (2014), autonomy refers to the creation of conditions that allow changing the norms of a world from within (changing traditions traditionally) and not based on the knowledge and intermediation of external specialists.

In this regard, the Zapatistas and their experience of self-government, denial of (national) politics that comes from above and collective decision-making, asking questions, show how autonomy in political practice implies the condition of being communal. In the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, 2005, the EZLN establishes ‘this method of autonomous government [...] comes from several centuries of Indigenous resistance and from the Zapatista’s own experience. It is the self-governance of communities’ (Escobar 2014, 129).

Another Zapatista contribution is the political principle of ‘lead by obeying’. Instead of seeking to seize power, it seeks to build a different political practice with a view to the organization of society. Unlike the conception of politics as a specialized activity, lead by obeying determines the bidirectional relationship between authority and command. In it, the relationship between autonomy and power takes horizontal characteristics, since popular wills are debated through assemblies, and vertical ones, which presupposes a command given by the authorities that presupposes the obedience of all (Resende and Castilho 2018).



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In an act of global resistance to the neoliberal model, the Zapatista struggle can be highlighted. As Aguirres-Rojas (2017) demonstrates, it has attracted a lot of interest for its antecedents, strategies and transnational dimensions in defending the location or localization of politics. According to Svampa (2016, 336), after 20 years of insurgency, *Zapatismo* opened the snails to the world through the initiative *escuelita de la libertad* to which people from the five continents make a community stay with a view to show from within the Zapatista experience regarding daily living and collective work.

In this sense, there are many convergences in *Quilombismo*, *Buen Vivir*, Life Projects and *Zapatismo* in terms of the categories they mobilize to propose political alternatives to the development model and the political organization for cooperation. Table 2 below brings together the four proposals mentioned, their ideas and the categories of interest to later fit them into the proposed analytical framework.

It can be said that all initiatives mentioned here, of political-theoretical nature, despite having been developed under the inspiration of very specific cultural practices, acquire regional and global importance due to their potential of anti-systemic struggles. They collaborate to detach academic debates on post-development and the common to serve as a guide to political mechanisms such as SSC, contributing to make it an alternative practice. In line with what Escobar (2014; 2017) proposes, we can rethink SSC as an ontological design for the transition to a new civilizing phase.

## Proposals for an analytical framework for South-South Cooperation

The peoples that inhabit the geopolitical space that we now know as Latin America and the Caribbean, from colonial invasions to the present day, design and practice forms of existence based on ancestral epistemological and ontological structures. They were anchored in the sense of relationality, community spirit, solidarity, harmony with nature and pluriversity.

Although these forms have been belittled and dismissed as backward, traditional and essentialist by theorists and practitioners of modern development, they are precursors to the criticism made today against modernity. They denounce the failure of their hegemonic development model and point out the imperative of a new civilizing parameter based on the common in the face of global problems – the threat of climate change phenomena, the burning of vast proportions of native vegetation, hurricanes and the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Especially considering an analytical framework to rethink SSC, a research agenda is suggested based on the notions of post-development and the common. As Dussel (2018) explains, universal civilization has evolved due to cooperation in technical terms but keeping the diverse cultural ethos of peoples. So, we consider SSC as this mechanism at the global level that serves as a potential to reify international cooperation principles, processes and purposes.

As for the principle of SSC, a moment when solidarity is evidenced, we would have as criteria: the SSC initiatives (1) that socialize knowledge (techniques and experiences), (2) that move from an idea of appropriation-possession to an appropriation-destiny of communities, (3) which are able to put in common the object of cooperation to all subjects and collectives, as being part of the space-time in which they intervene. To this end, ancestry, the interbeing between living and non-living beings (harmony / balance) and the pluriverse can be mobilized as key categories.

As for the process or means of implementing SSC, a moment when horizontality should be intermediating relations during cooperation activities, the analytical criteria for SSC initiatives would be: (1) it is conceived as a 'policy of the common' between the local and global levels; (2) it develops through democratic practices; (3) it connects the global to the local levels in the midst of a political and social federalism (decentralized governments), that is, it seeks to decide together on the common ones. For that, the categories that could be mobilized would be the autonomy of the subjects and communities to imagine their own reality and design the projects, interculturality and otherness / alterity in which the difference is respected and do not turn into inequality.

As for the purpose of SSC, a moment in which it seeks to achieve well-being on a global scale, the following criteria

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are suggested: (1) SSC as a mechanism that builds a sense of co-activity and co-obligation between subjects guided by the right to post-development; (2) the ability of SSC to connect the global plan (intercultural human rights agendas and standards) to the place where needs, imaginary and demands are; (3) SSC serves to establish the well-being of all as a global common or as a way of acting in common, a collective construct. We conclude by suggesting to considering the following categories and concepts in the South-South Cooperation as an authentic Southern discussion: alternatives to development; accomplishment of the communal; transformation of societies and world order; transition towards other paradigms (speeches in transition); territoriality (right to territory and reconfiguration of territories).

*Figures and tables referred to can be viewed in the free-to-download ebook version.*

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