Pluriversal Politics

Arturo Escobar

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and the Possible*

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Cover art: Angie Vanessita, *Derechos de la Naturaleza*,
digital image, 2015.

To all those groups engaged in the defense of the pluriverse, particularly to Native peoples worldwide for their historical cosmologies of intimacy with the Earth; to all the women who resist masculinist modes of living, for nurturing relational worlds of care in everyday life; to the Palestinian people, for their tenacious struggle against occupation and their determined resistance against colonialist one-worldism; and to the Earth itself—soil, plant, animal, water, air, spirit—in reverence and trust.

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Most of these essays were written in the manner of the Latin American style of *ensayo*. Ensayos reflect salient intellectual-political debates of the moment. This does not mean that they deal with fleeting or inconsequential matters. On the contrary, at acute conjunctures such as the past two decades, often characterized in terms of a turn to the left from 1998 to 2015, followed by a vengeful return to the right in recent years, the essay form provides avenues to infuse the debates of the moment with new energy, orientation, or contents. These debates might refer to long-standing preoccupations, such as Latin American identities; the questions of development and modernity; the continent's insertion into global divisions of labor; or that always recurring question in intellectual-political debates, namely, the relation between theory and practice, or praxis. The ensayos might also help bring to light emerging concepts, such as pluriversality, autonomy, communality, and civilizational transitions, the main notions with which this volume deals. Essays of this sort are often free-flowing and as such are exempted from following rigorous academic convention, even if they might be implicitly or explicitly infused with scholarly considerations, as is the case with the chapters that follow. By presenting these texts to an academic audience in the English-speaking world, I ask readers to exercise a measure of epistemic pluralism.[1]

Taken as a whole, the essays convey the following proposition: that realities are plural and always in the making, and that this has profound political consequences. The very concept of world, as in the World Social Forum slogan "Another world is possible," has become more radically pluralized, none the less by social movements mobilizing against large-scale extractive operations in defense of their territories as veritable worlds where life is lived according to principles that differ significantly from those of the global juggernaut unleashed on them. If worlds are multiple, then the possible must also be multiple. This insight crystallized for me one day with the phrase that served as the title for the Spanish edition of this book, *another possible is possible*. Simply put, as I state in the introduction, another world is possible because another real and another possible are possible. That other world is a world where many worlds fit, or the pluriverse. By breaking with conventional premises of the real and the possible, the essays locate politics at this very level.

More than proscriptive, predictive, normative, or even diagnostic, the texts that follow are meant to provide a political horizon in the sense of offering tools for thinking about what to do in the face of the multipronged planetary crisis. They are meant to open paths for personal and collective action in this conjuncture. At the same time, it is important to clarify that the suggested paths are not the only conceivable ones regarding the ongoing devastation, seemingly without end in sight, brought about by predatory global capitalism and its generalized mode of expulsion (Sassen 2014). I specify the contours of such a political horizon only broadly, in terms of a set of axes and principles for personal and collective action (listed at the end of chapter 1), which are far from being a road map to follow. Even more, here and there I insist that each person, group, or community has to find its own way to engage with these axes, such as the relocalization of activities, the recommunalization of social life, and the depatriarchalization and decolonization of existence, in ways appropriate to their own location.

While the volume is indeed a collection of essays, it is also more than that. Its productivity should not be gauged primarily in terms of a more or less cogent theoretical framing, to be developed and expounded throughout the various chapters, as would be the case with a standard academic or modernist text (even if some theoretical coherence is present, especially in relation to the field of political ontology). Rather, the book should be assessed by the extent to which it succeeds in opening up the collective imagination to the idea that a certain kind of politics, an ontological politics toward the pluriverse, is indeed gaining ground in many world settings today. Its value and objective, then, are more prefigurative or annunciatory, if you wish. As the anthropologist Charles Hale put it, the book's main function "is not to analyze compelling problems, develop new theory, or offer a proscriptive program for what is to be done, but rather, to convince the reader to open his or her mind/emotion ontologically, to soak in the energy of so many others in distinct realms who have done so, and especially, to take inspiration from those who are putting those alternatives into practice."[2] Even if I am talking about a proposal to rethink politics for and from Latin America, grounded at its margins, the call *to imagine possibility differently* should resonate with all those who question the hegemonic possible, within which a world of many worlds is impossible. By reflecting on the tools and concepts being developed by social movements and activist-intellectuals south of the border, I hope to suggest other ways to think about the possible and the real and to resist the hegemonic operation positing one world, one real, and one possible, while making visible the myriad instances that this operation considers "nothing" or "impossible."

Multiple Reals and Possibles as a Description
of the Current Conjuncture

I am interested, in the spirit of cultural studies, in telling a better story in relation to the current conjuncture. As Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg, the most adept practitioners of conjuncturalism, say, the articulation of the conjuncture requires a certain level of abstraction, aimed at making visible sites for effective political intervention. Such analyses are necessarily situated and contested, which explains why past conjunctural analyses, whether in the Marxist or non-Marxist traditions, have often been found to be wrong, flawed, or insufficient. The level of abstraction has to navigate between identifying the salient features of the moment (e.g., environmental crisis, skyrocketing inequality, heightened racism and xenophobia), on the one hand, and their relation to the *longue durée* of the epoch (e.g., heteropatriarchy, capitalism, coloniality, modernity, racism, Western civilization, or what have you), on the other. Given the complexity, contingency, and instability of any social context, the task is daunting. I do not pretend to have done any better in the pages that follow, beyond pointing at a set of concepts, arising from a number of social movements, on the one hand, and from academic trends around what has been called the ontological turn, on the other, that help us better to understand today's context. Grossberg refers to this feature of cultural analysis as "radical contextuality" (Grossberg, 2010, 2018, 2019).

The larger context for the essays is what in the tradition of Gramsci and Hall is called an organic crisis, a relatively rare occurrence. I refer to it as planetary crisis, civilizational crisis, or a crisis of climate, energy, poverty and inequality, and meaning. By adding meaning, I want to direct our attention to aspects of the crisis that have to deal with a host of formerly unaccented aspects, including ways of being, knowing, and doing (ontology); spirituality; identities; and culture, emotions, and desires. Conjunctural analysis would investigate the particular forces and sites of tension, antagonism, and contradictions at which this type of crisis manifests itself, and how they are, and might be, variously articulated by diverse political forces, whether of the Right, the Left, or emergent ones. It would also illuminate the spaces within which a counterhegemonic struggle might emerge. The most accomplished climate justice activists, such as Vandana Shiva, Naomi Klein, Patrick Bond, Nnimmo Bassey, and Joan Martínez-Alier, couch the climate crisis in similar ways, perhaps best exemplified by Klein's motto (2014) "This changes everything." In doing so, they articulate climate change as a crisis of global capitalism. Sometimes I extend Klein's title to imply that "everything needs to change," echo-

ing a parallel, but somewhat distinct, collective effort at rearticulating global warming not only as a capitalist crisis but also as a crisis within modernity, that is, as related to a particular ontology or mode of being in the world.

I hope to have shown that, faced with a genuine crisis of our modes of existence in the world, we can credibly constitute the conjuncture as a struggle over a new reality, what might be called the pluriverse, and over the designs for the pluriverse (Escobar 2018). I situate my reading of the conjuncture within a set of dominant diagrams that go beyond capitalism and that in the parlance of Latin American critical theory today are referred to as the heteropatriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system. This system structures our historical ontology as modern subjects. My main source of inspiration comes from activists of social movements who can be construed as problematizing such ontology as they mobilize in defense of their territories, worlds, and modes of existing. I draw chiefly from some Afro-Colombian and indigenous movements from the Colombian southwest. Their statements, and those by activists from similar movements, constitute the main archive of this volume's essays.

As in previous works, however (e.g., Escobar 2008, 2014b, 2018), I set this archive in conversation with academic trends focused on similar questions. I also show the limitations of contemporary social theory to advance our understanding of the crisis as a crisis of a particular civilizational model, coupled with recent attempts at moving beyond this impasse. The latter is the epistemic dimension of the argument, treated at some length in several of the chapters (e.g., chapters 3, 4, 5). Shifting the episteme of the modern social sciences, which I argue is deeply indebted to ontological dualisms, toward a post-Enlightenment configuration of knowledge forms should be one of the goals of academic cultural politics on a pluriversal register. Finally, I discuss how the active critical stance by movement activists summons us, personally and collectively, into a politics and ethics of interdependence and care as the paths for ushering in worlds and knowledges otherwise less shaped by axes of domination.

Some Tensions and Open Questions

In thinking about providing a context for English-speaking readers, I decided to focus on the relevance of pluriversal politics in Latin America from two vantage points: its relation to more established and well-known forms of politics, and the possibility of such politics taking place beyond Latin America, particularly in the United States.[3] I will explore these questions by thinking about the tensions between what, as a shorthand, I will call modernist and

ontological politics, or universal and pluriversal politics. I should make clear from the outset that I side decidedly with the kinds of politics that defend a deeply relational understanding of life, particularly through the reweaving of the communal basis of social life, as opposed to the objectifying understanding of life, prevalent in patriarchal capitalist modern settings, as made up of separate, albeit interacting, entities and actions. While the former nondualist ontologies are at times resistant to heteropatriarchal and racist colonial capitalism, the latter have gone along, historically, with systems of domination based on hierarchy, control, violence, and war (e.g., Escobar 2018; Maturana and Verden-Zöller 1993, 2008; Segato 2016; von Werlhof 2011, 2015). In Latin America, the dominant strategies of doing away with, or at least neutralizing, difference (despite their violence) have not done away with the multiplicity of ways of worlding. This multiplicity finds expression today in the inability of established modern categories to define fully what is at stake in social struggles and conflicts. This is why the reemergence of multiple worlds in Latin America and the Caribbean makes the region a particularly fertile ground for articulating and advancing pluriversal proposals in both scholarly and activist worlds.

Let me introduce the notion of radical relationality. It refers to the fact that all entities that make up the world are so deeply interrelated that they have no intrinsic, separate existence by themselves. Modern epistemology grants entities a separate existence, thanks to the foundational premises of the separation between subject and object, mind and body, nature and humanity, reason and emotion, facts and values, us and them, and so forth. Ontological politics destabilize these dualisms. In both activist and scholarly domains, the challenge to the modernist separation between humans and nonhumans occupies an especially relevant place. The field of political ontology actually focuses on the analysis of environmental conflicts as ontological conflicts involving contrasting configurations of the human/nonhuman relation. As Marisol de la Cadena (2015) and Mario Blaser (2010, 2013; de la Cadena and Blaser 2018) have shown, much in indigenous worlds does not abide by the divide between humans and nonhumans, even if the divide is also present in many of their practices. The question thus arises of how to understand worlds that clearly live partly outside the separation between nature and humanity but also live with it, ignore it, are affected by it, use it strategically, and reject it—all at the same time. That they thus defend mountains or lakes against large-scale mining on the basis that they are "sentient beings" or "sacred entities" (our modern translation) calls for an ontological perspective that avoids translating them into "beliefs" concerning mere objects or independently existing things (see chapter 1; Escobar 2018).

For ease of exposition, allow me to distinguish between ontological politics proper, namely, those forms of politics that explicitly or implicitly draw on radical relationality, and modernist politics, which take for granted the ontology of separation. I should stress, however, that strictly speaking all forms of politics are ontological in that they all involve an ontological dimension: they have implications for what counts as real, for modes of existence, and for adjudicating ethical or nonethical action.[4] All forms of politics are relational, yet differently so. I sometimes use a heuristic to distinguish between "weak relationality" and "strong relationality." In the former, characteristic of modernist politics, entities are first assumed to be ontologically separate; then they are reunited through some sort of connection, such as a "network," but even when this is done, it is clear that the entities, now found to be related, preexist the connection. More importantly, modernist forms of politics stem from ontologies that are deeply embedded in the negation of the full humanity of multiple others and the nonhuman, and this has to be taken seriously into account when considering them as strategies for action. In radical ontological politics, by contrast, there are no intrinsically existing entities to be found, since nothing preexists the relations that constitute it; in other words, reality is relational through and through. Throughout the book, the reader will find ample instances of such nondualist ontologies and their corresponding pluriversal forms of politics.

I would like here first to examine the relations between pluriversal politics, on the one hand, and modernist forms of politics intended to effect progressive social change, on the other; following from that is a second issue, that of the relation between pluriversal politics and the Left. Together, these two issues raise a key question: do moderns have a role in ontological politics toward the pluriverse, on their own or alongside those explicitly advancing such politics? A third persistent question concerns the viability of ontological politics in actually existing communities. How prevalent and effective is this sort of relational and pluriversal politics, especially when compared with more established political strategies? Hereafter, I rehearse two contrasting answers to these questions. While the first set envisions the possibility of effective bridges between the various kinds of politics, the second, largely drawn from a trend in African American radical thought known as Afro-pessimism, is skeptical of such a possibility. My hope is that my comments will help readers to articulate their own sense of the relation between pluriversal and modernist politics.

On the Possibility of Articulating Ontological
and Modernist Forms of Politics

Can modernist politics contribute to fostering a pluriversal politics? This seems to be a key issue related to ontological politics, and it takes several forms, all of them important. Can modernist forms of politics aimed at fostering radical social change (say, in relation to heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism) be effective in resisting social injustices, potentially in tandem with pluriversal forms of politics? Or are they necessarily at odds? Do not the very people engaging in pluriversal ontological politics, such as those defending communal and autonomous worlds, also participate in modernist politics, for example, vis-à-vis the state? Can we moderns play a role in the politics of the pluriverse? While I do provide some partial answers to these questions in this volume, and in other recent books (2014b, 2018), given their recurrence, I would like to offer some brief additional comments. I do not think there is a way to settle this dispute once and for all; it will remain an open question.

Ontological Politics as Pluriversal Politics

Let me start with a straightforward statement: I believe multiple ways exist for those of us who operate on the basis of modernist politics to contribute to pluriversal politics even if not embracing ontological politics explicitly—for instance, modernist struggles for economic democratization, for depatriarchalization and the end of racism and homophobia, for environmental justice, and academic critiques. A substantial amount of resistance to injustices and inequities fits the bill. That said, it is also important to recognize that many modernist forms of politics are counterproductive in relation to pluriversal politics; they reproduce and strengthen, rather than undermine, the modernist ontology of separation from which they stem. This is especially the case with liberal forms.

Adapting a broad typology of forms of politics drawn from the field of international development (explained in chapter 6), I would propose a three-layered characterization to sort out and evaluate the field of political strategies.

The first layer comprises political strategies and designs conducted *in the name of progress and the improvement of people's conditions*; these are the standard biopolitical liberal forms of design and politics, such as those by most neo-liberal governments, the World Bank, and mainstream NGOs. They take for granted the dominant world (in terms of markets, individual actions, productivity, competitiveness, the need for economic growth, etc.); taken as a whole,

they can only reinforce the universals of modernity and their accompanying capitalist institutions with their strategies of domination, control, violence, and war; they are inimical to pluriversal politics.

The second layer comprises political strategies and designs *for social justice*: this is the kind of politics practiced with the intention of fostering greater social justice and environmental sustainability; it embraces human rights (including gender, sexual, and ethnic diversity), environmental justice, the reduction of inequality, direct alliances with social movements, and so forth. Some progressive development NGOs, such as Oxfam, and a number of social movements, might serve as a paradigm for this second trajectory. In principle, these forms of politics may contribute to pluriversal politics, especially if they are pushed toward the third trajectory.

The third option would be pluriversal politics proper, or political strategies and designs *for pluriversal transitions*. Those practicing this option would engage in ontological politics from the perspective of radical interdependence. In doing so, they would go beyond the binary of modernist and pluriversal politics, engaging all forms of politics in the same, though diverse, movement for civilizational transitions through meshworks of autonomous collectives and communities from both the Global North and the Global South.[5] No readily available models exist for this third kind of politics, although it is the subject of active experimentation by many social struggles at present. How these kinds of politics might initiate rhizomatic expansions from below, effectively relativizing modernity's universal ontology and the imaginary of one world that it actively produces, is an open question in contemporary social theory and activist debates.

Let me underscore that many activists and groups move in and out of the three types of politics just outlined. Even highly politicized social movements, such as those by ethnic, peasant, and urban marginal groups, engage in actions and critiques that can easily be qualified as modernist—for instance, in their critiques of inequality, corruption, and dispossession in the name of rights, culture, access to land and public services, and so forth. Readers will recognize such instances in the statements by some of the Afro-descendant and indigenous actors featured in the various chapters. In this way, their practice could be described as modernist, Left, and pluriversal at the same time. At their best, they engage in the interplay of politics from the perspective of their autonomy and through collective decision-making processes. I do not want to suggest, however, that all resistance by these groups is explicitly ontological or pluriversal.

Those committed to one or another form of leftist politics and alternative modernity can usefully consider the following questions, among others: What habitual forms of knowing, being, and doing does a given strategy contrib-

ute to challenge, destabilize, or transform? For instance, does the strategy or practice in question help us in the journey of deindividualization and toward recommunalization? Does it contribute to bringing about more local forms of economy that might, in turn, provide elements for designing the infrastructures needed for a responsible ethics of interexistence and the deep acceptance of radical difference? Does it make us more responsive to the notions of multiple reals and a world where many worlds fit? Does this shift encourage us to entertain other notions of the possible, significantly different from those on offer by capitalism, the state, the media, and most expert institutions? To what extent do our efforts to depatriarchalize and decolonize society move along the lines of liberating the Earth and weaving the pluriverse effectively with others, human and not?

The fact is that we all live within the Earth as pluriverse; we weave the pluriverse together with every existing being through our daily practices. We are all summoned to the task of repairing the Earth and the pluriverse, one stitch at a time, one design at a time, one loop at a time, so to speak (Escobar 2018). Some of our stitches and loops will likely contribute to the web of relations that sustain life, others less so or not at all. Our collective weaving of *a place*, including a form of habitation, is a major part of it. We are summoned by place into entanglements with each other and with nonhumans, whether in conflict or cooperation or both, as all of us, willy-nilly, live in coexistence with multiple others through intricate relations that define our very way of being, even if most often we imagine those relations as weak links from which we can easily disassociate ourselves. As the geographers Soren Larsen and Jay Johnson (2017) put it in their work on the contested nature of places and landscapes in which Native and non-Native peoples coexist, this confers on place a political and spiritual dimension, which I believe can and needs to be struggled over in urban territories as well (Escobar 2019).

This agency of place and the pluriverse—that they call us into coexistence with others—suggests that pluriversal politics itself involves an entanglement of forms, inhabiting a spectrum from the radically relational to the modernist liberal, and that we are all, ineluctably, part of it. Seen this way, the seemingly firm boundaries between the Global North and the Global South, and between what might be considered modern or not, weaken significantly and, eventually, begin to dissolve. Succinctly put, the struggle to reinhabit the pluriverse is everyone's. As we will learn from the Nasa indigenous movement in Colombia (chapter 3), we are all thrust into the liberation of Mother Earth from whichever place and position we happen to occupy, for as long as Earth is enslaved, as the Nasa argue, so are all living beings.

Pluriversal Politics and the Left

A second important question is that of the relation between ontological politics and the Left. The election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela in December 1998 inaugurated a period of progressive governments in the continent that lasted until about 2015, when a turn to the right again manifested in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, among others. According to the United Nations, the progressive governments accomplished noticeable reductions in poverty and modest reductions in inequality. However, their policies were based on utterly conventional development strategies, modernizing to their core, organized around the extraction of natural resources. For some observers, despite the reported accomplishments, these experiences demonstrated the limitations of achieving significant transformations within any modernizing Left framework (see Escobar 2010 for a review).

It might be the case, however, that taken as a whole, modernist-leftist policies create less inimical conditions for pluriversal politics than neoliberal right-wing regimes, which, in Latin America at least, are often bent on brutally crushing any form of dissent and resistance. Mexico and Colombia are, sadly, notorious cases in this regard. Pluriversal and leftist politics could be mutually enabling, though this convergence cannot be taken for granted, as exemplified by the repression of environmentalist and indigenous organizations in Ecuador and Bolivia under their respective Left governments. It is also the case that in their practice many social movements blur the boundaries between counterhegemonic and ontological politics. Drawing on Audre Lorde's (1984) well-known provocation ("The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"), one might say that counterhegemonic politics use the master's tools to push radical demands forward, to the system's breaking point, if possible. This might involve modernist practices such as claiming rights, using legal instruments (such as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, ILO 169, which has been used adroitly by indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, albeit with mixed results), negotiating political rights with the state, and so on. Strategies of this sort make counterhegemonic use of hegemonic tools with varying degrees of effectiveness (Santos 2007).[6]

For these strategies to move along the lines of pluriversal politics, nevertheless, they must take on an explicitly political ontological character. In the spirit of Lorde's revolutionary imperative, this would imply, as maintained by some black and Latina/o scholars, broadening the parameters of change so as to articulate their anticapitalistic and antiracist stance with languages and strategies that push beyond the dominant ontologies. From this perspective, it

should be clear that principles of struggle such as autonomy, territory, communality, and care cannot easily be accommodated within actually existing Left discourses; while much can be done to advance these causes through counterhegemonic strategies, they also require an explicit ontological framing that advances the principles of interdependence and relationality.[7]

Pluriversal Politics in Actually Existing Communities

I deal in passing in these essays with the criticisms about the plausibility of pluriversal politics, particularly as compared with better-known Left strategies. These critiques are addressed to perspectives that are perceived as too localist and not infrequently take the form of charges of romanticism (see, e.g., Gibson-Graham 2002, for a countercritique). Emotions run high in these exchanges. I will not rehearse my responses here (see chapter 1; Escobar 2014a, 2018), but I would like to add some elements from the perspective of the previous discussion. Let me start by rearticulating the question, or rather questions: Is pluriversal politics a workable horizon for action? Is the construction of autonomous spaces from below sufficient to even make a dent in the global capitalist system of domination? We speak about recommunalization as essential to pluriversal politics, but are not communal logics central to the subordination of women and youth? Do the struggles in question really embody other principles of being, knowing, and doing, as ontological politics claims? Or, on the contrary, are they not mired in internal conflict and contradiction, thus too vulnerable to external threats and repression to have a chance of success? Are they not often reinscribed into modernist frameworks by their all-too-powerful adversaries, particularly the intolerant heteropatriarchal and economistic norms of capital and the state? Are not the territories of difference and the ZADs (*zones à défendre*, or zones to defend) liable to being reoccupied materially and ontologically by the powers that be?[8]

At the heart of these questions are the criteria for assessing the effectivity of diverse forms of politics and resistance. Thinking in terms of articulations, alliances, convergences, bridge building among systemic alternatives, and rhizomic and meshwork processes of connection among antisystemic movements is but a starting point. Positing the possibility of articulations among transformative alternatives, however, is essential for conveying the idea that, at times at least, they might be able to make a dent in the structures of devastation and oppression. This kind of thinking—along with a critical reassessment of well-known notions of rescaling, the nature of structural change, global/local binaries, and so forth—is crucial so that antisystemic alternatives are not dismissed

as unviable, ineffective, place-specific, small, unrealistic, or noncredible alternatives to what exist. Ideas and movements aiming toward the convergence of alternatives endeavor to drive this point across.

The geographers Gibson-Graham have exposed the capitalocentric and globalocentric nature of a great deal of the critique of place-based alternatives. Most of these critics, whether Marxists or poststructuralists, they suggest, "do not see *themselves* as powerfully constituted by globalization. The realists see *the world* as taken over by global capitalism, the new Empire. The deconstructionists see *a dominant discourse* of globalization that is setting the political and policy agenda. In different ways, they both stand outside globalization, and see it 'as it is'—yet the power of globalization seems to have colonized their political imaginations" (2002, 34, 35). As I explain in chapter 1, this modernist and masculinist political thinking, which ineluctably disempowers the local and place based by locating the decisive power to change things in the global, depends on the ontological assumption of the existence of a one-world world, one real, and one possible. I am not saying that all those who adhere to modernist leftist politics fall into this globalocentric trap; very often, they also endorse progressive politics of place. I am suggesting, however, that the very question of the political effectiveness of a given movement or strategy is laden with discursive operations and emotional attachments that need to be made explicit as part of the process of making up our minds about it.

Moving toward the realization of multiple reals/possibles is the best antidote against globalocentric thinking; it enables us to consider the power of the place based and of local becoming in new forms, perhaps envisioning what Gibson-Graham imaginatively called a homeopathic politics, that of healing multiple locals through communal economies and logics connecting with each other into diffuse, constitutive, and sustaining forms of translocal meshworked power. Telling this story is perhaps not as thrilling as recounting the saga of the great capitalist machine and its potential overthrow, but it is one to which more and more groups seem committed. As Gibson-Graham put it, "The judgment that size and extensiveness are coincident with power is not simply a rational calculation in our view but also a discursive choice and emotional commitment. . . . Communities can be constituted around difference, across places, with openness to others as a central ethics. . . . New forms of community are to be constructed through cultivating the communal capacities of individuals and groups and, even more importantly, cultivating the self as a communal subject" (2002, 51, 52). In the last instance, it is a matter of cultivating ourselves as theorists and practitioners of multiple possibles, even as we alternate between diverse types of strategy. What practices of resubjectivation

are needed for actively and effectively desiring nonpatriarchal, noncapitalist, and deeply relational modes of being, knowing, and doing? In other words, we need to disidentify ourselves actively with capitalism, masculinism, colonial, and racist practices and with the ontologies of separation that are an integral part of most, if not all, forms of oppression in the world today.

One might call this disidentification, following the Mexican feminist sociologist Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2017), a *politics in the feminine*: one centered on the reproduction of life as a whole, along the care–conservation axis, in tandem with the social reappropriation of collectively produced goods (postcapitalism), and beyond the masculinist canons of the political linked to capital accumulation and the state. Or one might speak of it, with the Argentinean anthropologist Rita Segato (2016), as a politics that ends the "minoritization" of women that has accompanied the decommunalization (radical individuation) of modern worlds, in favor of a recommunalizing autonomous politics that reclaims the "ontological fullness" of women's worlds. For Segato, patriarchal masculinist ontologies, with their foundational binary matrix, not only represent "the first and permanent pedagogy of expropriation of value and its subsequent domination" (2016, 16) but continue to be at the basis of most forms of violence and predatory accumulation. They can only result in a "pedagogy of cruelty" functional to the deepening of dispossession. This ontological mandate has to be dismantled by building on the relational and communal practices that still inhabit, albeit in fragmentary and contradictory ways, many Afro-Latin American, indigenous, peasant, and urban marginal worlds. Let us listen to Segato's conclusion before broaching the notion of a radical rupture from the metaphysical structure of modernity (2016, 106):

> We need to remake our ways of living, to reconstruct the strong links existing in communities with the help of the "technologies of sociability" commanded by women in their domains; these locally rooted practices are embedded in the dense symbolic fabric of an alternative cosmos, dysfunctional to capital, and proper of the *pueblos* (peoples) in their political journey that have allowed them to survive throughout five hundred years of continued conquest. We need to advance this politics day by day, outside the state: to reweave the communal fabric as to restore the political character of domesticity proper of the communal. . . . *To choose the relational path is to opt for the historical project of being community. . . .* It means to endow relationality and the communal forms of happiness with a grammar of value and resistance capable of counteracting the powerful developmentalist, exploitative, and productivist rhetoric of things with its al-

leged meritocracy. *La estrategia a partir de ahora es femenina* [the strategy, from now on, is a feminine one] (my emphasis).

This is a feminist and radical relational politics I fully endorse.

On the Need for a Radical Rupture and Its Political Implications

We need to consider another position as we try to make up our minds about the strategies into which we might want to put our best energies and ideas. It can be stated in a number of forms. What do we do if we arrive at the conclusion that everything that surrounds us—institutions, governments, religions, academies, even the innermost aspects of our beings—has been so thoroughly colonized by modernity as to make any counterhegemonic use of modernist tools practically inoperative and counterproductive? If, confronted with the history of horrors visited on the pluriverse by the heteropatriarchal capitalist colonial/racist world system, one realizes that not much, perhaps nothing, of what the modern/colonial world has to offer is of value for the urgent task of reconstruction, repair, and resurgence of all, and particularly subaltern, worlds? Would these growing realizations—seriously entertained by some, albeit perhaps not too many, critics, in different parts of the world—not lead us to conclude that the time for a radical rupture and departure from those dominant worlds has arrived? This would seem to me a perfectly valid inference, even if it might make the question of praxis even more intractable. And it is the conclusion arrived at by a number of African American writers.

Before we go there, let me return to Bob Marley.[9] Let us listen to the following powerful statement on ontological politics from his 1979 song "Babylon System," which Marley sings in the perfect rhythm of Jamaican reggae:[10]

> We refuse to be
> What you wanted us to be
> We are what we are
> That's the way it's going to be.

One could find many layers of meaning in just this statement; it is indeed about identity, but not only; it is an unambiguous refusal of the ontological imperative to be in a particular way, a way that for black peoples all over the world involves at the least widespread misrecognition, oftentimes outright denial of their being, and not infrequently lethal forms of nonrelation, as in repeated police killings and mass incarceration. One can also read in these lyrics a call to everybody, black and nonblack, to refuse to be what "they" want us to

be—*they* being the Babylon system, in Marley variously a synonym for Western civilization, capitalism, intractable racism, and unbridled globalization: "Babylon system is the vampire, yea! / Suckin' the children day by day, yeah! / Me say de Babylon system is the vampire, falling empire / Suckin' the blood of the sufferers, yeah!" It would not be far-fetched to suggest that it is also about whether one—we all—can join in the singing and feel a profound identification with those in dire need of disidentifying with "de system" as a matter of survival. For have all of us not, too, been "trodding in the winepress much too long"? Are we not part of the system he decries and condemns: "Building church and university, wooh, yeah! / Deceiving the people continually, yeah! / Me say them graduatin' thieves and murderers / Look out now they suckin' the blood of the sufferers, Yea! . . . Rebel, rebel!" Can we not be, too, part of the active forces compelled to "tell the children the truth," part of this truth being that "You can't educate I / For no equal opportunity / Talkin' 'bout my freedom / People freedom and liberty!"?

The Jamaican political theorist Anthony Bogues (2003) has written about Bob Marley in his book about black heretics and prophets as exemplary radical intellectuals who, operating in the interstices of modernity, have drawn not so much on the privileged critical resources offered by modern critical theory as on the "dread history" excavated from the practices of Caribbean subaltern resistance and worldviews (181). Such history contains "a profound radical ontological claim" that is critical, utopian, and redemptive. It constitutes grounds for a project of "becoming human, not white nor imitative of the colonial, but overturning white/European normativity" (13), precisely as in Marley's refusal to be "what you wanted us to be." For Bogues, heretics and prophets of this sort perform a crucial symbolic displacement; drawing on the Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter, he argues that they contribute to "the creation of counterworld ideologies in the context where the black is a *nothing*" (176).[11] Needless to say, race is central to this politics, as Marley also reminds us: "Until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war, me say war."[12]

The notion of the black person as nothing underlies the "metaphysical infrastructure" of Western modernity, as the influential black intellectual Nahum Chandler aptly calls it (2014). It discloses the impossibility for the black person of achieving ontological fullness as a human within any dominant onto-epistemic social and political order. It is inherent in the very declaration that "black lives matter." A common starting point is the virulent and seemingly endless violence against black peoples in general and young black males in particular. The writer Jesmyn Ward (2013) courageously describes the