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Revista de Estudios Sociales

Critical Thoughts on Ecosocial Devastation:
Latin American Perspectives

Guest Editors

Lina Álvarez, Andrea Lehner, Nicolas Lema
(Universidad de los Andes, Colombia)

Submission of articles
January 10th to February 10th, 2024



The *Revista de Estudios Sociales (RES)* of Universidad de los Andes (Colombia) kindly invites the academic community to submit articles for a special issue on the topic of
“Critical Thoughts on Ecosocial Devastation: Latin American Perspectives”.

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The articles should be submitted between
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Submissions will be accepted in either **English, Spanish, or Portuguese**, and should follow the editorial and stylistic guidelines of *RES*.

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Overview

The current ecological and climate crisis has plunged the future of humanity and countless living species into uncertainty. The (neo)colonial, industrial, and capitalist civilization is wreaking havoc on our planet, casting doubt on our ability to ensure the vital conditions we rely on for present-day living. Among the causes of this crisis lies the production of dualistic knowledge, which, within the framework of modernity, has created the notion that human beings are detached from the rest of nature/Earth, while Earth is perceived as an external dimension devoid of rationality, subject to manipulation based on human designs. As a result, the social sciences are now being called upon to restructure their theoretical and methodological foundations, aiming to reexamine the relationship between the social and the “natural” in a fresh and innovative manner. We could even argue that recent decades have witnessed an *ecological turn* in both the social sciences and humanities.

However, while the opening of these disciplinary fields to problems that were previously considered the exclusive domain of the natural sciences is important for addressing the current socio-ecological devastation, many approaches have been criticized. Disciplines such as political ecology, environmental history, and political philosophy have been accused of overlooking or sometimes abstracting from the historical-material conditions in which they are embedded, and of reproducing certain logics they seek to transcend. In this regard, environmental thought, typically situated in or produced from the global north



and actively articulated since the 1960s and 1970s (Carson 2000 [1962]; White 1967; Nash 1989; Hardin 1968; Meadows *et al.* 1974 [1972]; Commoner 1971; Ehrlich 1972; Naess 1973; Worster 1985 [1977]), has undergone transformations and faced criticism from multiple perspectives. These critiques have shifted the focus of analysis towards extractivism, coloniality, and patriarchy, among other issues. They have highlighted the ways in which gender and racialization are geohistorically intertwined with the domination of nature and have provided innovative conceptual tools to explain the causes of socio-ecological devastation.

In this context, the distinctive feature of Latin American critical perspectives lies in their groundedness in the region's social struggles. These perspectives develop knowledge that is deeply engaged with the transformation of environmental injustices, going beyond the confines of academia and disciplinary approaches. They recognize the transformative potential of people's resistances and reexistences, acknowledging them as fully-fledged epistemic and political agents. As such, there is a pressing need to think from and alongside these communities (Martínez Alier 2004). Moreover, the Latin American critical perspective is characterized by a rejection of neutrality and a deliberate unveiling of its own positionality. This position emerges from a diverse and intricate geohistory, shaped by a multiplicity of worlds, rooted in the "catastrophic trauma of conquest and integration into a subordinated and colonial position within the international system" (Alimonda 2017, 41). It is from this Latin American specificity and the plurality of its peoples and geographies that critical ecosocial thinking interrogates the logics of ecosocial devastation at regional, national, and international scales, while proposing feasible alternatives that have existed in Latin America's past and present.

In this special issue, our focus will be on analyzing the contributions that Latin American thought has made or could make to the socio-ecological problems that currently afflict us. Latin American thought stands out for its epistemic-ecological disruptiveness, which reflects its ability to transform the very way we speak, know, and feel the relationship between humans and more-than-human entities (Alimonda, Toro Pérez, and Martín 2017). Latin American critical perspectives advocate for relational and ecological approaches to knowledge construction, while also revealing the presence of cosmocentric political, economic, historical, and artistic practices that challenge anthropocentric forms, modern dualism, and instrumental reason. These ideologies are responsible for the problematic division between humans and non-humans. The contextual nature of Latin American thought, coupled with its emphasis on relationality as an epistemological principle, fosters productive dialogues with intellectual traditions from various regions (such as Europe, India, or Africa). It enables Latin American perspectives to respond to global eco-social issues in a situated yet impactful manner. At the same time, the theoretical rigor and transformative potential of the Latin American perspective have led authors from the global north to draw on these perspectives to develop sophisticated critical theories and to complexify, for example, understandings of the Capitalocene (Moore 2015 and 2016) or theories of environmental justice (Álvarez and Coolsaet 2020; Rodríguez and Inturias 2018).

Thus, we find that Latin American perspectives engage in dialogue with political ecology and with certain currents of thought produced mainly in the global north, and, by approaching them from the perspective of indigenous and Afro-American ways of life, they make important shifts and propose novel approaches,



such as *political ontology* (Blaser 2009; Escobar 2014; De la Cadena 2015) or Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 2010). Latin American thought critically examines the reach and advantages of the growth economy, offering alternative approaches to development and regenerative economies. This has led to the emergence of concepts like post-extractivism (Svampa and Viale 2014; Gudynas 2015) and theories of post-development (Kothari et al. 2019). These include ideas of good living, such as *buen vivir*, *sumak kawsay*, or *vivir sabroso* (Quiceno Toro 2016), which displace discussions on food security in favor of food sovereignty. From a philosophical standpoint, Latin American thought engages with European critical theory, drawing from thinkers like Marx and authors of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer, Adorno, or Benjamin. It examines these theories through the perspectives of peasant, indigenous, and Afro-American ways of life, and proposes alternative understandings of the commons (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2017; Tzul-Tzul 2016) and communism (Mariátegui 2007). Central to this perspective is the regeneration of symbolic and material conditions for human and more-than-human life, as well as the relationship with the Earth. Furthermore, Latin American thought highlights the contributions of feminist thinkers who have provided a refined conceptual toolbox. They explore the sensing-thinking body in a relational manner through the notion of *earth-body-territory* (Cabnal 2019), they conceptualize the multiple violences of the colonial-capitalist order from the perspective of *terricide* (Millán 2020), and they analyze the political uses of femininity and masculinity to understand their role in reproducing patriarchy in relation to the domination of nature (Svampa 2015). These contributions transcend the gendered and individualistic understandings that these terms may have in certain feminisms of the global north (Segato 2015; Rivera Cusicanqui 2018).

We look forward to receiving contributions that explore how Latin American critical perspectives contribute to the ecological shift. To fully grasp the complexity of the socio-ecological crisis and the resulting responses, we eagerly invite theoretical texts that offer conceptual analysis or critical discussions of theoretical proposals. We also welcome empirical analyses, including field research or qualitative/quantitative methodologies, among others. Contributions can be organized around the following thematic axes, without being limited exclusively to them:

1. The utility of diverse non-canonical knowledge traditions in Latin America for addressing the global socio-ecological crisis.
2. Proposals emerging from Latin America within anti/post/decolonial studies, feminist perspectives, and artistic/aesthetic practices as pathways to addressing the socio-ecological crisis.
3. Critical Latin American studies on socio-environmental conflicts, conservation, and environmental preservation in specific territories, conducted through empirical methodologies involving fieldwork and/or engagement with communities.
4. Comparative analysis of contemporary critical approaches from Latin America in the fields of political theory and social theory in response to the challenges posed by the ecological crisis within the realm of social sciences.



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